

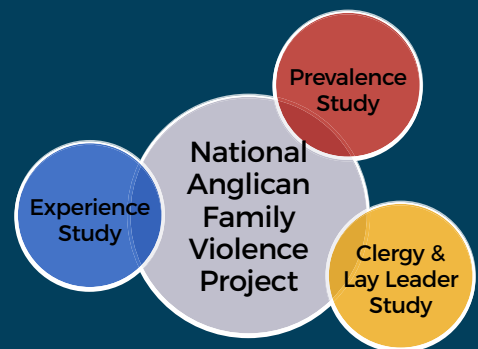


National Anglican Family Violence Project (NAFVP)

# National Anglican Family Violence Research Report

April 2021

NCLS Research



Commissioned by the  
Anglican Church of Australia



**Warning:** This report addresses intimate partner violence (domestic abuse) and contains examples of the types of violence that people have experienced.

The authors of this report offer our thanks to:

- The Anglican Church of Australia General Synod's Family Violence Working Group, chaired by Reverend Tracy Lauersen and the Project Steering Group
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# 1 Foreword



## Anglican Church of Australia

### General Synod Family Violence Working Group

Australia has an intimate partner violence (IPV) problem. Many of us would be familiar with the widely reported findings that on average in Australia, one woman each week is murdered by a current or former intimate partner. Research tells us that 1 in 3 Australian women report having experienced physical or sexual violence from the age of 15.<sup>1</sup> Tragically, violence is often at the hands of a current or former partner and it is gendered, with significantly more women experiencing violence and its impacts than men.

We also know that IPV (a subset of family violence) is experienced in different ways by different communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities report different levels of prevalence and different drivers of violence. Disabled people, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities report different rates and experiences of violence.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence reported in 2016 that faith communities were vital settings for influencing attitudes and providing leadership in relation to family violence.<sup>2</sup> However, the role that our churches are able to play was limited until now by a lack of current Australian data on how women and men in *church communities* experience violence. In order to understand the nature and prevalence of IPV in our church communities so that we can contribute to overcoming this scourge, our 2017 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia resolved to investigate its prevalence and nature in our own church population.<sup>3</sup> Following the Synod motion, our Standing Committee established the Family Violence Working Group, with one of its objectives being to investigate, and if possible to commission, a research study into the nature and prevalence of family violence within the Australian Anglican Church population.

This report of the National Anglican Family Violence Project highlights the results of that objective and subsequent research. It provides valuable information about the nature and prevalence of IPV in Anglican church communities. The key findings of this research tell us that there is a significant IPV problem within the Australian Anglican Church population. This is tragic, it is confronting and it is lamentable. But knowing about it, including gaining insight into the nature of the problem as it occurs in communities of faith, we can now respond appropriately to prevent and address it.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/quick-facts/> quoting Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2017. Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2016, ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS.

<sup>2</sup> <http://rcfv.archive.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/Reports/Final/RCFV-Vol-V.pdf>, p32ff.

<sup>3</sup> R50/17 Domestic Violence Longitudinal Study

Thank you to the many Anglicans who participated in this study, particularly those who have experienced IPV and its ongoing effects. We are very grateful for your willingness to share. Thank you to the members of our working group: the Right Reverend Genieve Blackwell, the Reverend Scott Holmes, Ms Ruth Holt, the Reverend Sandy Grant and Dr Karin Sowada. All of whose hard work has been invaluable in progressing the project. Thank you to Dr Ruth Powell and Dr Miriam Pepper, researchers at NCLS Research who conducted the research - for enabling us to understand the prevalence and nature of IPV amongst Anglicans, and thank you to the members of our Anglican Church of Australia Standing Committee.

The Standing Committee of the Anglican Church of Australia has received the reports of the project and endorsed 10 commitments for prevention and response. They are focused on cultural change, education, training, and support. These can be accessed on the General Synod webpage: [www.anglican.org.au](http://www.anglican.org.au).

The Family Violence Working Group will continue to consult with Dioceses and work on bringing further recommendations arising from their work and the National Family Violence Project research to the 18th General Synod of the Church.



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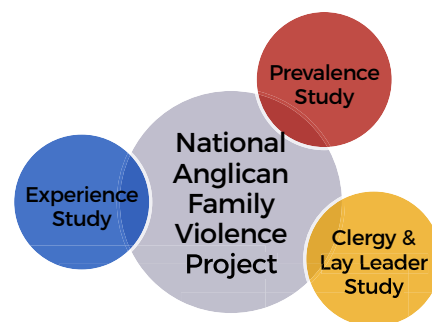
# 2 Executive Summary



This report provides an overview of results from three studies that make up the National Anglican Family Violence Project (NAFVP), undertaken between 2019 and early 2021. The aim of this research project is to investigate the nature and prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) among those with a connection to the Anglican Church of Australia.

Full results from across this project are presented in detailed reports for each study:

- NAFVP Prevalence Study Report,
- NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leaders Study Report, and
- NAFVP Experience Study Report.



**Table:** Study research questions, method and samples

The Studies	The Research Questions	The Method and Samples
<p>Prevalence Study</p>	How prevalent is intimate partner violence among Australians who identify as Anglican?	Online survey of over 2,000 males and females, aged 18+, (December 2019). Three samples were used for analysis. Results for a sample of the general public (n=1146) were compared with Australians who identified as Anglican (n=825). A larger sample of Anglicans (n=1382) was used to compare those who attended church regularly with those who didn't.
<p>Clergy &amp; Lay Leader Study</p>	What are the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding intimate partner violence among Anglican clergy and lay leaders?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Focus groups</b> in two dioceses</li> <li>2. <b>Online survey</b> sent to Anglican parishes</li> </ol> <p>The final number of survey respondents was 827, from 358 parishes, consisting of 383 clergy respondents and 444 lay respondents.</p>
<p>Experience Study</p>	What is the nature of experiences of intimate partner violence for those with a connection with Anglican churches?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Scoping Survey:</b> 305 respondents matched criterion. Some 81% had IPV experience</li> <li>2. <b>Face to face interviews:</b> 179 people had direct experience with 86 open to interview. 20 people were selected for in-depth face to face interviews.</li> </ol>

## **NAFVP Prevalence Study Key Findings**

1. The prevalence of intimate partner violence among Anglicans was the same or higher than in the wider Australian community.
2. The prevalence of intimate partner violence among church-attending Anglicans was the same or higher than among other Anglicans.
3. The prevalence of intimate partner violence was higher among women than men.
4. Most Anglican victims of domestic violence did not seek help from Anglican churches.

## **NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study Key Findings**

### *Attitudes and knowledge*

5. Clergy views on gender roles within marriage and the family varied strongly by church tradition.
6. Clergy and lay leaders were well informed about the breadth of domestic violence.
7. Clergy and lay leaders understood that it is more often men than women who commit domestic violence.
8. Clergy and lay leaders were sensitive to the wide array of factors that may contribute to domestic violence.
9. Clergy and lay leaders were aware of the widespread nature of the problem of domestic violence in Australia, but less aware of its prevalence in church communities.
10. Most clergy believed that Scripture is misused by the abuser in Christian families.

### *Practices in local churches*

11. Churches have a role in education about domestic violence.
12. Most clergy had been aware of victims of abuse in their churches and had dealt with specific domestic violence situations as part of their ministry.
13. Dealing with domestic violence situations resulted in some negative impacts for most clergy.
14. Two thirds of clergy had not collaborated with clergy/leaders from other churches in relation to domestic violence.

### *Equipped for response*

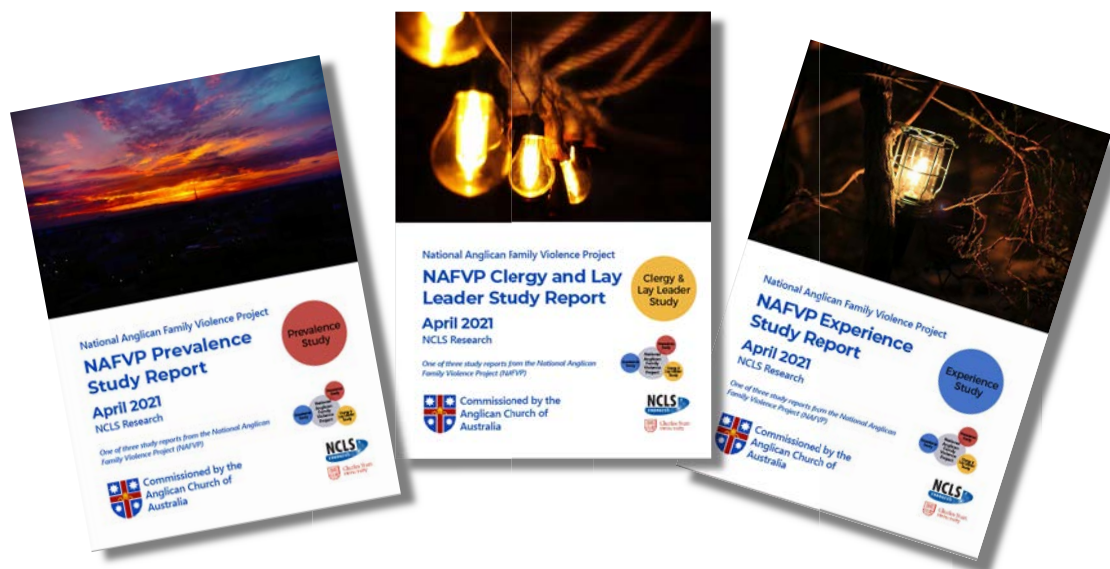
15. Clergy confidence in their personal capacity to respond to domestic violence was low to moderate.
16. Although few leadership teams had been trained, there was moderate confidence in the churches' readiness to respond.
17. A minority of clergy felt very familiar with support services or very confident to refer people to them.
18. Familiarity with diocesan resources was moderate and ratings of diocesan support were evenly spread from excellent to very poor.
19. Views by clergy of the role of the bishop when a clergyperson was a victim or abuser were to be pastoral, to carry out disciplinary procedures and to seek involvement of services outside the church.

## NAFVP Experience Study Key Findings

20. Faith and church both assist and hinder those who are experiencing domestic violence.
21. Although unintended, Christian teachings sometimes contribute to and potentially amplify situations of domestic violence.
22. Perpetrators' misuse Christian teachings and positional power.
23. Christian teaching that addresses IPV can also empower victim-survivors to begin a process of change.
24. When churches acknowledge that domestic violence happens it can help victim-survivors.
25. Churches who have built awareness of domestic violence are more able to respond when victim-survivors are ready.
26. Trusted relationships in churches reduce isolation for victim-survivors.
27. Specialist domestic violence services and health professionals have a central role.
28. At their best, churches play a role in fulfilling the following needs after separation as a contribution to rebuilding and recovering life: to be safe, to have material provision, to be in relationships of care, empathy and acceptance, to have an identity, to make a contribution, to have a spiritual life and relationship with God.

Full results from across this project are presented in detailed reports for each study:

- NAFVP Prevalence Study Report,
- NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leaders Study Report, and
- NAFVP Experience Study Report.





# 3 Introduction: light drives out darkness

The Family Violence Working Group of the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA), convened by Reverend Tracy Lauersen, was formed by the Anglican General Synod Standing Committee to address matters related to family violence. One of the roles of the Family Violence Working Group is to: “a) investigate a professionally designed, independent research study into the nature and prevalence of family violence within the Australian Anglican Church population...”<sup>1</sup>

To address the research task, the ACA engaged NCLS Research to undertake the National Anglican Family Violence Project. Project researchers are Dr Ruth Powell and Dr Miriam Pepper with research assistance from Tracy McEwan, and support from a wide range of Australian and international expert consultants.

The aims of the National Anglican Family Violence Project (NAFVP) are to provide a research foundation to inform the work of the Family Violence Working Group to:

1. help the Anglican General Synod understand the nature and prevalence of intimate partner violence (recognising it as a significant part of family violence) among those with a connection to the Anglican Church, and
2. equip the General Synod respond through policy and practice in ways that foster safer family environments.

The NAFVP started in 2019 and was completed in early 2021. Different perspectives are framed in three studies:

- **Prevalence Study:** How prevalent is intimate partner violence among Australians who identify as Anglican?
- **Clergy and Lay Leader Study:** What are the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding intimate partner violence among Anglican clergy and lay leaders?
- **Experience Study:** What is the nature of experiences of intimate partner violence for those with a connection with Anglican churches?

While this report offers an overview, each of the three studies in this project has their own full Study Report, which will contain details of the methodology, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, and results, including all statistical testing. The detailed study reports are titled: NAFVP Prevalence Study Report, NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leaders Study Report and NAFVP Experience Study Report. In addition, the NCLS Research team will seek permission to write up the material from the project in other ways, with the aim of integrating this research with wider research on family violence and religion across the world.

<sup>1</sup><https://anglican.org.au/our-work/family-violence/>

<sup>2</sup>The Prevalence Study does include a general public sample for comparison purposes.



# 4 Methodology



## 4.1 Definitions

There are no generally agreed or accepted standards for defining what constitutes violence. Terms related to violence within families include domestic abuse, domestic violence, family violence and intimate partner violence. The term 'domestic violence' has been commonly used in the community and is typically used in surveys of social attitudes. The terms family violence and intimate partner violence are now commonly used in policy and research. The term 'domestic abuse' is becoming more widespread as it may be more effective in highlighting that violence is not limited only to acts of physical violence.

**Defining intimate partner violence (IPV):** In this project, IPV is defined as violence between partners who are or were in a married or de facto relationship or a dating relationship. IPV is a subset of family violence, which refers to violence between family members, such as intimate partners, parents and children, siblings and extended family members (AIHW, 2018). IPV is defined by the World Health Organisation as: "behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours" (WHO 2010, p.10) and similarly the Australian National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey as: "any behaviour by a man or a woman within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm to those in the relationship" (ABS 2018). Typically, one partner tries to exert power and control over the other, usually through fear (AIHW 2018).

Behaviour toward the victim can include the following (AIHW 2018):

- Physical violence: slaps, hits, punches, being pushed down stairs or across a room, choking and burns, as well as the use of knives, firearms and other weapons.
- Sexual violence: rape, sexual abuse, unwanted sexual advances or harassment, being forced to watch or engage in pornography, sexual coercion, having sexual intercourse out of fear of what a partner might do.
- Psychological and emotional abuse: intimidation, belittling, humiliation, and the effects of financial, social and other non-physical forms of abuse. This may also include "gaslighting", where the abuser attempts to make the victim doubt their perceptions, thoughts and sanity (Gleeson, 2018). Spiritual abuse is a form of psychological and emotional abuse that is specific to religious/spiritual contexts (Oakley et al., 2018).
- Coercive control: isolating victims from family and friends, controlling access to finances, monitoring their movements, restricting access to information and assistance.
- Threats of violence: against the victim, children and others who are important to the victim.

This is not an exhaustive list of all possible behaviours that may constitute IPV.

In summary, IPV:

- Is a subset of a broader concept known as “family violence”, which concerns violence between family members.
- Is between intimate partners: those who are or were in a married or de facto relationship or a dating relationship.
- Is multi-faceted: Physical violence is only one type of violence. Violence can be expressed in various ways – including physical, sexual, psychological, social, emotional, financial, and spiritual.
- Is about individual acts and sustained patterns: It is not only individual violent acts, but also patterns of sustained violence wherein a person tries to intimidate and control their partner or former partner.
- Is used synonymously in this project with the terms “domestic violence” and “domestic abuse”.

**Limits of project scope:** This project had to have some limits in its scope in order to conduct meaningful and effective research. So, the project does not address:

- Violence between people who are not intimate partners
- The abuse of children (anyone under 18 years of age)
- The abuse of elders
- Violence within specific minority groups, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- People who do not have a current or historic link to the Anglican Church<sup>2</sup>

#### This project **DOES** cover:

- Violence within the context of an intimate partnership. i.e. marriage, de facto relationship
- Men and women
- People 18 years and over
- People who have a current or historic link to the Anglican Church

#### This project **DOES NOT** cover:

- Any violence beyond intimate partner violence
- Child abuse
- Elder abuse
- People who do not have a current or historic link to the Anglican Church

## 4.2 Ethical conduct and trauma-informed research practices

The research has been undertaken in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2018) and with the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee of Charles Sturt University. Measures undertaken to ensure the ethical conduct of the research included peer review of study design and instruments, fully informing all potential participants about the studies, and recruiting them independent of the Anglican Church. Only participants who had given their full and informed consent to take part were included in the study. Every effort was made to ensure confidentiality with all data made anonymous or de-identified in all outputs.

<sup>2</sup>The Prevalence Study does include a general public sample for comparison purposes.

Further, researchers were trained in trauma-informed approaches to research. This involved being aware of the widespread and lasting impacts of trauma and recognizing the signs and symptoms of trauma in all of those involved in the research study (both participants and researchers). Giving a sense of agency to participants at all points of the process was critical. Measures were put in place to protect the safety of participants and researchers and to encourage self-care. Care for participants' wellbeing was upheld at all times and participant distress protocols were developed for the research. Information about national and local support services was provided to all participants.

## 4.3 Method and instruments

The National Anglican Family Violence Project comprised three studies undertaken between 2019 and early 2021:

- Prevalence Study: Prevalence of IPV among Australians who identify as Anglican.
- Clergy and Lay Leader Study: Attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding IPV among Anglican clergy and lay leaders.
- Experience Study: The nature of experiences of IPV for those with a connection with Anglican churches.

### 4.3.1 Prevalence Study Method

A wide variety of methods are used to collect information on the prevalence of intimate partner violence (ABS, 2013). When making comparisons of prevalence across studies and across populations, it is important that a consistent methodology is used. In order to ensure that estimates of the prevalence of IPV among Anglicans could be compared with estimates among the Australian population, this study involved collection of data for two samples by means of an online survey conducted in December 2019: a sample of Australians who identify as Anglican, and a sample of the general public. The Online Research Unit (ORU) hosted the survey and provided the samples. ORU describes itself as Australia's leading online data collection agency and meets ISO 20252 & ISO 26362 standards for both market research and panel work.

The participants in this study were over 2,000 males and females, aged 18+. We obtained the respondents from the Australian Consumer Panel (350,000 members), administered by the Online Research Unit (ORU), supplemented with individuals from a panel administered by Pureprofile in order to achieve sufficient Anglican respondents. Standalone quotas were set for age, gender and location, derived from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing, with additional soft quotas set for education.

Results are presented for three samples: general Public, Anglican and all Anglicans. Details for how these samples were constructed are given in Prevalence Study Report Appendix A. In brief:

- The general public sample (n=1,146) was constructed by taking a random sample from all Anglicans and combining it with the non-Anglicans (ORU respondents only).
- The Anglican sample (n=825) comprised all Anglicans minus the Anglicans included in the general public sample (ORU respondents only).
- The all Anglican sample (n=1,382) comprised all Anglicans who completed the survey (ORU and Pureprofile respondents). This sample was used for comparisons between church-attending Anglicans and those who do not attend church regularly. In this report, Pureprofile respondents are only included in the all Anglican sample results (see Prevalence Study Appendix A for details).

Prevalence Survey Instrument: The survey included questions on:

- Demographics (e.g., age, gender, education, marital status, household structure)
- Religious or spiritual practices, beliefs, experiences and identity
- Theological tradition (e.g., liberal, evangelical, Anglo-Catholic) – Anglicans only
- Prevalence of IPV (physical, sexual, psychological, financial, spiritual) since age 16 and frequency in last 12 months
- Attitude to approachability of churches for help in response to an experience of IPV
- Effect of IPV on religious service attendance – Anglicans only
- Experience of approaching churches for help – Anglicans only.

To measure IPV we used an established multidimensional scale of ‘IPV victimisation’. The 15-item short form of the Composite Abuse Scale (CAS-SF), (Ford-Gilboe et al., 2016) is an instrument which lists specific acts in several domains and includes physical, sexual, financial and psychological violence. Permission was given by the authors for use of the CASR-SF. We also included a small number of spiritual abuse items in our study, which is appropriate for our study context (the Anglican Church). Five spiritual abuse items were sourced from Aune and Barnes (2018) and one was designed specifically for this study. Sample items are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Composite Abuse Scale (CAS-SF) items and spiritual abuse items

<b>Physical violence</b>
Blamed me for causing their violent behaviour
Shook, pushed, grabbed or threw me
Used or threatened to use a knife/gun/other weapon
Threatened to harm or kill me or someone else close to me
Choked me
Hit me with a fist or object, kicked or bit me
Confined or locked me in a room or other space
<b>Sexual violence</b>
Made me perform sex acts that I did not want to perform
Forced or tried to force me to have sex
<b>Harassment</b>
Followed me or hung around outside my home
Harassed me by phone, text, email or using social media
<b>Other acts of intimate partner violence</b>
Tried to convince others I am crazy/turn them against me
Told me I was crazy, stupid or not good enough
Kept me from seeing or talking to my family or friends
Kept me from having access to a job/money/resources
<b>Spiritual abuse</b>
Verbally abused or mocked my religious beliefs or faith
Threatened to disclose confidences
Stopped me going to my place of worship/practising my faith
Made me take part in religious practices
Tried to force certain religious beliefs on me
Used religion to abuse me in some other way

Source: Ford-Gilboe et al., 2016 for CAS-SF items and Aune & Barnes (2018) for some spiritual abuse items.

## 4.3.2 Clergy and Lay Leader Study Method

The Clergy and Lay Leader Study focuses on the attitudes and practices regarding IPV among Anglican clergy and local church leaders. It used a mixed methods approach with two phases:

- Phase 1: Focus groups of Anglican clergy in the Diocese of Sydney, NSW (metropolitan) in December 2019 and the Diocese of Southern Queensland (metropolitan and regional) in February 2020 (two groups in total). Clergy participants who responded to a general invitation were particularly invested in the topic, which significant and direct experience with ministering to both victim survivors and perpetrators. Data assisted with design of an online survey.
- Phase 2: An online survey of approximately 30 minutes duration was promoted to parishes across Australia from May to August 2020, with a request for all clergy plus interested lay leaders to participate. The final number of respondents was 827, from 387 parishes, consisting of
  - 383 clergy respondents, two-thirds of whom were rectors, vicars or senior ministers, from 304 parishes, and
  - 444 lay respondents, a quarter of whom were wardens and a fifth of whom were other parish councillors, from 201 parishes.

*Clergy and Lay Leader Instrument:* The survey included questions on:

- Perception of the prevalence and seriousness of family violence in the churches
- Views about what constitutes family violence and what causes it
- Views about the role of clergy and other church leaders in addressing family violence
- Actions currently taken by clergy and other leaders to respond to family violence
- Awareness of and familiarity with policies, frameworks, training, services and other resources to help churches to respond to family violence
- Evaluation of how equipped clergy and leaders feel to address family violence.

Responses from lay leaders were generally similar to the views of clergy. Details are not included in this report, but are in the Clergy and Lay Leader Study Report.

## 4.3.3 Experience Study Method

The Experience Study focuses on the nature of experiences of those who have been personally impacted by IPV and who have, or previously had, a connection with the Anglican Church. It uses a mixed methods approach with two phases: an initial online scoping survey, launched in September 2020 followed by individual in-depth qualitative face to face interviews which were completed in February 2021.

*Phase 1 Scoping Survey:* By 21 January 2021, there were 305 respondents in total who matched the criterion for the survey. Some 81% had a personal experience of IPV, including 58% indicated that they had experienced violence from an intimate partner and 46% who had supported somebody else in that situation. Most respondents were highly connected to the Anglican Church. The large majority (89%) were attending church services at least monthly at the time they completed the survey (77% at least weekly). Some 74% participated either in small prayer, discussion or Bible study groups; in fellowships, clubs, social or other groups; or in both. Close to half (46% were in a ministry role), primarily a lay role (33%).

*Experience Scoping Survey Instrument:* The scoping survey collected information on:

- Demographics (e.g., age, gender, education, marital status, household structure)
- Religious or spiritual practices, beliefs, experiences and identity
- Previous and ongoing connection with Anglican churches
- Personal experiences of IPV
- Attitudes towards IPV
- Experience of approaching church leaders or other congregants for assistance
- Current circumstances with regard to experiences of IPV to assess if the person is in a stable housing situation and has access to support.

*Phase 2 Interviews:* Of the 179 individuals who indicated that they had experienced violence from an intimate partner, 86 (close to half) were interested to be interviewed. Around 20 people were selected from across Australia for face-to-face in-depth interviews spanning a diversity of experiences of and views about the Anglican Church in relation to IPV (e.g., positive, negative, mixed experiences) and a diversity of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Due to changing COVID restrictions on travel, interviews were conducted in person for people located in Greater Sydney, Blue Mountains, Illawarra and Hunter regions in NSW. Other interviews were conducted using Zoom video conference software with full end to end encryption. Interviews were transcribed, with all identifying features removed to ensure anonymity. These interview texts were coded and analysed using NVivo software.

## 4.4 Limitations of research methodology: non-probability samples

All research projects will have limitations of some type and it is important to identify known limitations clearly prior to reviewing the results. The three surveys undertaken for this project provide results which offer much insight. Using statistical terminology, a limitation of these studies is that they each use non-probability samples. Probability sampling means that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected and therefore a random sample will be statistically representative of the whole population.

The Prevalence Study methodology was a non-probability survey utilising samples drawn from online panels. The reason for this approach was that the Family Violence Working Group who commissioned this research wished to compare prevalence between church-attending Anglicans, others who identify as Anglican, and the Australian population. There were no existing data that would have enabled this analysis, and the expense involved in collecting new data from a probability sample of the size required (given the low incidence of church-attending Anglicans) is prohibitive. An alternative approach might have been to survey members of random samples of churches. However, NCLS Research's three decades of experience of conducting research with Australian churches suggested that this approach would have been unwise for a study in contemporary Australia – recruitment challenges, low survey returns and biased samples were highly likely. This was also the experience of UK-based work on domestic abuse which attempted such an approach (Aune & Barnes, 2018).

It is our view that the online panel provider we selected, ORU, is the best of its kind in Australia. ORU meets ISO 20252 and ISO 26362 standards for market research and panel work and the majority of its 350,000 panellists (53%) have been recruited to the panel via offline methods. Pureprofile also has ISO 20252 accreditation. However, because it utilises non-probability samples, it is not possible to

claim that the whole population or all Anglicans are represented. In general, all online panels have some level of bias as they only contain people who have opted in and therefore cannot guarantee that every Australian has an equal chance of being selected (e.g., those without internet are excluded). Notwithstanding the inherent limitations, online panels are widely used for research, including this study, and we believe they represented the most viable option available to meet the stated goals of the study. Counter measures that we implemented to address potential biases were to set demographic quotas on recruitment and to weight the data in line with Australian and Anglican population characteristics.

Non-probability samples were also used for the other two studies as they relied on people to choose to take part. The Clergy and Lay Leader Study was promoted directly to Anglican churches across Australia, with participation requested by all clergy and by lay leaders with an interest in the topic. The Experience Study Scoping Survey was promoted through a wide range of Anglican networks. All surveys were opt-in and with full disclosure of study aims. Significant care should also be taken in comparing the results from these surveys with other surveys, due to differences in method.

See each of the Study Reports for further detailed discussion about methodology.



# 5 NAFVP Prevalence Study

## The prevalence of domestic violence among people who identify as Anglican

### Prevalence Study

How prevalent is domestic and family violence among people who identify as Anglican? In this part we cover:

- The prevalence of domestic violence: general public and Anglican populations
- Church attendance and domestic violence
- The link between gender and experience of domestic violence.
- The approachability of Anglican churches.

## 5.1 The prevalence of domestic violence: general public and Anglican populations

What is the prevalence of IPV among people who identify as Anglican and how does this compare with prevalence in the Australian community?

It can be difficult to accurately record the extent of intimate partner violence in a population. Such incidents frequently occur behind closed doors and are often concealed by, and denied by, their perpetrators and sometimes by their victims. The capacity of data sources to measure the prevalence of violence depends on victims' perception of what constitutes this violence, victims' willingness to disclose/report the incident, and how the incident is disclosed/reported (ABS, 2018).

An aim of the Prevalence Study was to collect up-to-date information on how common or widespread domestic violence was, as reported by comparable samples of all Australians and people who identified as Anglican.

We present responses from a number of perspectives.

- How many people agree that they have been in a violent relationship with any partner?
- How many people have experienced specific acts of violence in their adult lifetime (since age 16)?
- How many people have experienced specific acts of violence in the past 12 months?

**“The church is the microcosm of society”**

“Why would we assume that it's any different when we stand in the pulpit and look at people that there's not a huge chunk of them who are hurting and are peddling really hard under the water to cover up the fact that they've got bruises or they've gone without a meal or whatever, whatever. We can't assume that's not happening...if the church is the microcosm of society...And we are dopey if we ignore it.”

Clergyperson in focus group

As an initial measure of IPV prevalence, respondents were asked the following question:  
*Have you ever been in a violent relationship with any partner? (Yes, No)*

Perception of what constitutes violence is one of the challenges of assessing prevalence. This question is included here because it provides insight into peoples' own perceptions of having been in violent relationships. While this question does not focus on the experience of specific actions and does not address whether respondents perceived themselves to be a victim, further investigation found that nearly all respondents who claimed to have been in a violent relationship, also reported having experienced specific acts of violence. Furthermore, around 8 in ten of those who reported having been in a violent relationship also reported having been afraid of a partner. Differences in the results between the various measures of IPV will highlight the importance of framing when seeking to understand the extent of IPV in a population.

Questions about specific acts was based on an established multidimensional scale of 'IPV victimisation'. The questions were as follows:  
*We would like to know if you experienced any of the actions listed below from any current or former partner or partners. If it ever happened to you, please tell us how often it usually happened in the past 12 months. Has this ever happened to you? (Yes, No)*  
*How often did it happen in the past 12 months? (Not in the past 12 months, Once, A few times, Monthly, Weekly, Daily/almost daily).*

The prevalence results are based on those who indicated that they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (since age 16).

**People who identify as having been in a violent relationship with any partner:** When asked the direct question "Have you ever been in a violent relationship with any partner?" some 22% of Anglicans who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship said "yes". This compares to 15% for the equivalent group of the general Australian public.

**People who have experienced specific acts of violence during adult lifetime:** We asked whether respondents had experienced specific acts during their adult life, which represented multiple dimensions of intimate partner violence, including psychological, physical, sexual and financial abuse. (See Table 1).

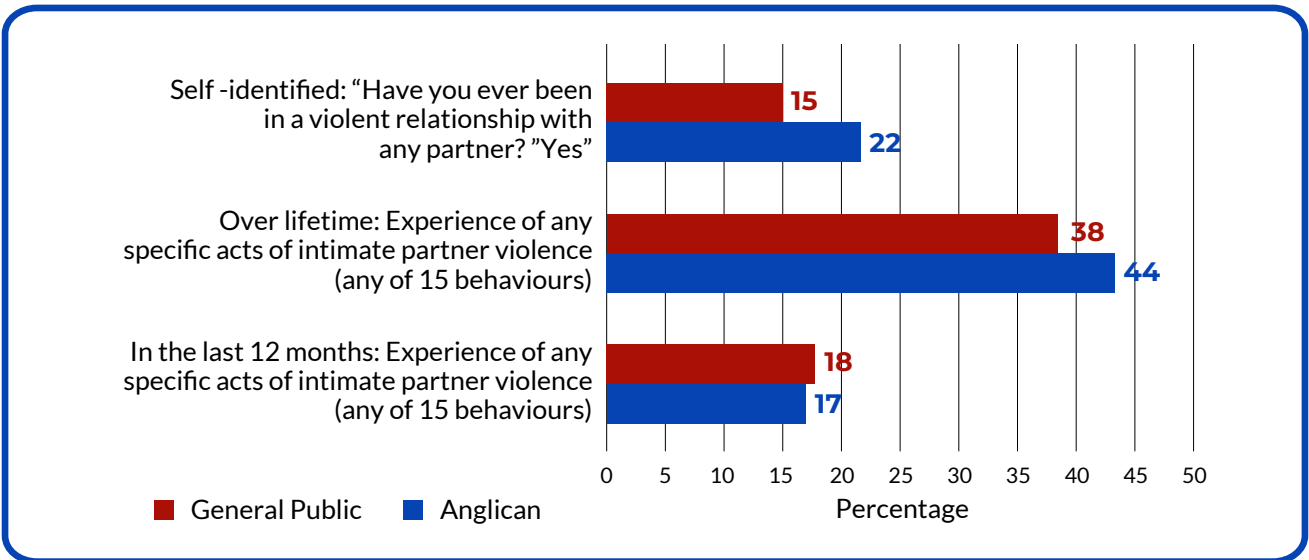
When presented with specific instances of violence, higher proportions of respondents in the general public and among Anglicans agreed that these actions had happened to them during their adult lifetime. In the general population, the prevalence of IPV overall across their adult lifetime was 38% of those who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship. Among those who identified as Anglican it was 44% (see Figure 1).

Some 10% of the general public sample, and 10% of Anglicans, also reported having experienced spiritual abuse at some point in their adult life.

**People who have experienced specific acts of violence in the past 12 months:** The survey was conducted in December 2019, so respondents were being asked to report on their experiences over 2019. In the 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study, the prevalence of IPV in the previous 12 months was 18% in the general public sample, and 17% in the Anglican sample.

Some 5% of the general public sample, and 4% of Anglicans, also reported having experienced spiritual abuse in the previous 12 months. Further detail on instances in the 12-month time frame are in the full Prevalence Study report.

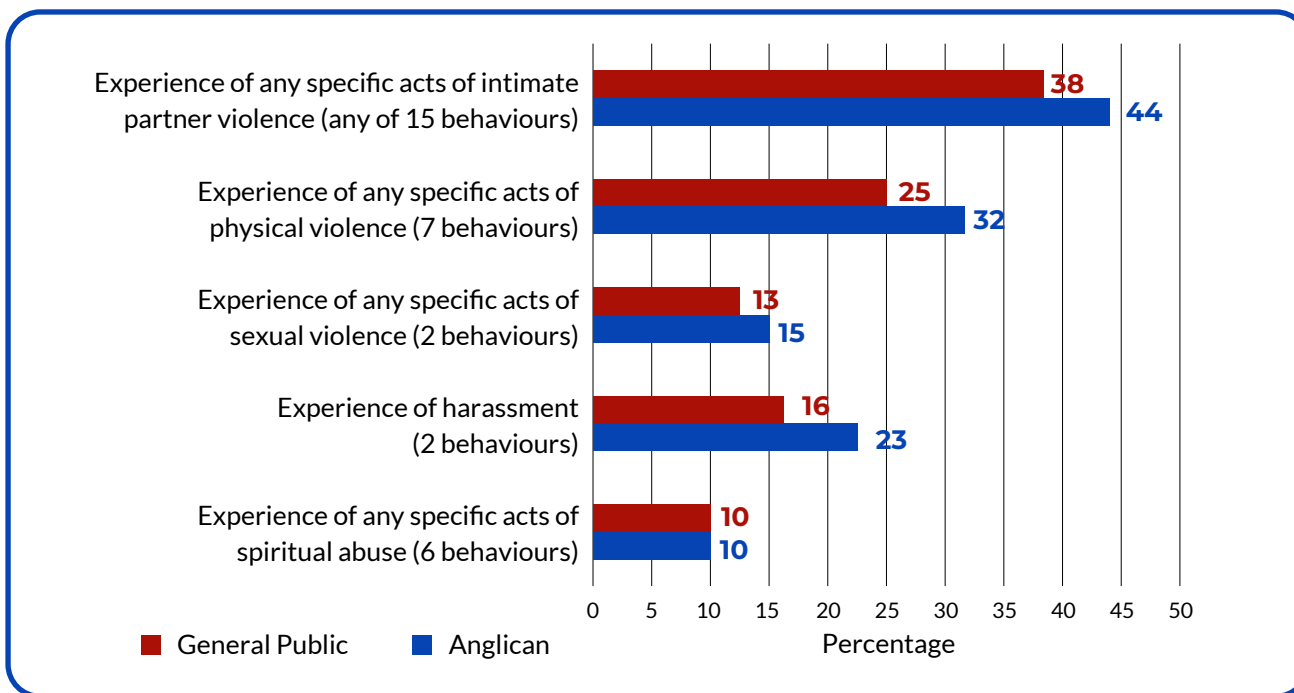
**Figure 1:** Three measures of prevalence of IPV: general public & Anglican samples



Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study. A global item asked respondents to self-identify as having been in a violent relationship. A series of individual acts were listed using items from the Composite Abuse Scale Short Form (CAS-SF), with additional items about spiritual abuse (not shown in chart). Percentages are based on those who indicated they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (general population n = 949; Anglican n = 765).

Figure 2 presents further results with regard to lifetime prevalence by combining items from the 15 questions into different types of violence. The additional factor of spiritual abuse was assessed using six behaviours.

**Figure 2: Lifetime prevalence of IPV and spiritual abuse: general public and Anglican samples**



Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study. Items are from the Composite Abuse Scale Short Form (CAS-SF), with additional items about spiritual abuse. Percentages are based on those who indicated they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (general population n = 949; Anglican n = 765).

**Key finding:**

The prevalence of intimate partner violence among Anglicans was the same or higher than in the wider Australian community. Different measures of prevalence of domestic violence across different domains, including physical, sexual, financial, psychological and spiritual abuse, were at the same level or higher among Anglicans when compared to the wider Australian community.

(When asked 'To what extent do you think intimate partner violence is a problem in your churches?')

"We've struggled to know how to answer that question because of the hiddenness... there's a great facade behind much of things and an orderliness. We've got a highly educated and usually pretty well moneyed, but financially stressed group...

I don't think there's a high prevalence of physical violence. But we're more and more aware of certain elements of financial, psychological, and certainly, in some cases, spiritual.... Someone needs to speak for us to know it - unless you know families really well... it's there, but we're having difficulty finding it or seeing it"

Clergyperson in focus group

## 5.2 Church attendance and domestic violence

What is the prevalence of IPV among church-attending Anglicans, and how does this compare with Anglicans who do not attend regularly?

**Defining church attendance:** We distinguish “church-attending Anglicans” and “Anglicans who do not attend regularly” as Anglicans who indicated that they attended religious services at least several times a year versus those who attended less often. Church attenders comprised 26% of all Anglicans in the Prevalence Study. This broader definition was chosen, rather than “at least monthly” church attendance, in order to achieve a reasonable number of cases of church attenders for analysis and to reduce vulnerability to weighting fluctuations. Results for when church-attending is defined as “at least monthly” are provided in an additional study working paper. While percentages change when a different definition is used, the overall patterns of the two analyses are similar.<sup>3</sup>

**In violent relationship (self-identified):** When asked the direct question “Have you ever been in a violent relationship with any partner?” some 27% of church-attending Anglicans who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship said “yes”. This compares to 21% of other Anglicans (see Figure 3). This was not a statistically significant difference.

**Composite Abuse Scale over a lifetime:** In terms of the CASR-SF, the lifetime prevalence of IPV overall did not differ significantly between church-attending Anglicans and other Anglicans (47% and 44% respectively).

**Composite Abuse Scale in past 12 months:** The 12-month prevalence of IPV was higher for church-attending Anglicans than for other Anglicans (28% and 16% respectively). Possible reasons for this significant difference when considering a 12-month time frame are not obvious. It is possible that respondents were more sensitised in naming acts of abuse in the context of greater engagement with the purpose of the survey.

**Spiritual abuse over a lifetime:** Some 25% of church-attending Anglicans reported having experienced spiritual abuse at some point in their adult life, compared with 6% of other Anglicans.

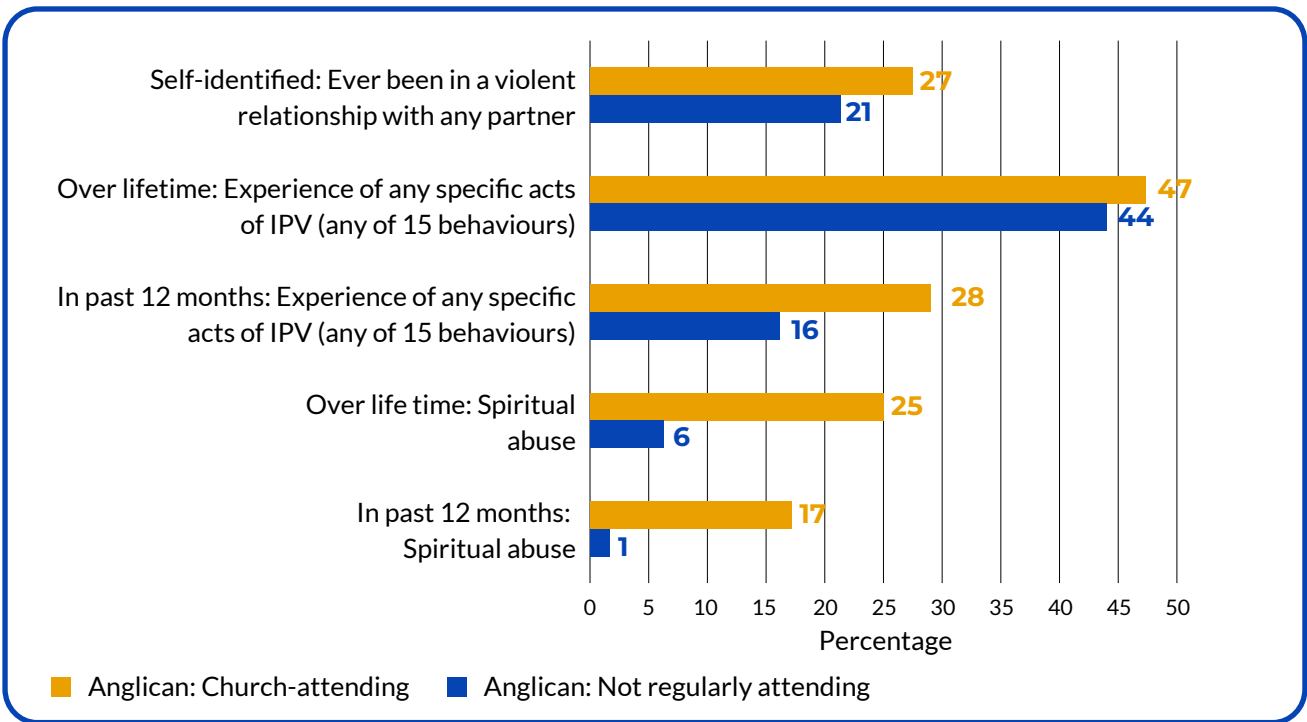
**Spiritual abuse in past 12 months:** Some 17% of church-attending Anglicans reported having experienced spiritual abuse in the previous 12 months, compared with 1% of other Anglicans.

See the Prevalence Study Report for further details, including gender differences.

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<sup>3</sup>See Prevalence Study Appendix G for further notes.

**Figure 3: Experience of violence in the all Anglican sample by church attendance**



Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study. Percentages are based on those who indicated they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (all Anglican n = 1,287).  
 NB. Differences between attendance types for self-identified and lifetime measures were not statistically significantly different.

**Key finding:**  
 The prevalence of intimate partner violence among church-attending Anglicans was the same or higher than among other Anglicans.

### 5.3 Gender and domestic violence

In the Prevalence Study, in both the general public and Anglican samples, women were significantly more likely than men to report having been in a violent relationship and having experienced IPV in their lifetime. (See Figure 4).

**In violent relationship (self-identified):** Some 30% of women in the Anglican sample of women identified as having been in a violent relationship versus 21% of women in the general public sample. However, men did not differ between samples (12% Anglican men, 9% general public men).

In both the general public and Anglican samples, women were more likely than men to identify as having been in a violent relationship.

**Composite Abuse Scale over a lifetime:** Using the CASR-SF respondents identified whether they had ever experienced specific acts which represented multiple dimensions of IPV over their lifetime. Anglican women were significantly more likely to have experienced IPV overall than women in the general public sample (52% vs 44%). Anglican men did not differ from men in the general public sample (31% vs 33%).

In both the general public and Anglican samples, women were more likely than men to report IPV.

Table 2 shows lifetime prevalence of IPV, along with subscales and spiritual abuse in the general public and Anglican samples by gender.

**Composite Abuse Scale past 12 months:** The NAFVP Prevalence Study was conducted in December 2019. When asked about their experience of specific instances of violence within the 12 months prior to this, the proportions were similar for Anglican women and women in the general public were also similar (18% vs 17%), as were men in both samples (15% vs 19%). Women and men did not differ within the samples – a result that was surprising and does not align with all other findings about the gendered nature of violence. (See Prevalence Study Report for details).

**Spiritual abuse over a lifetime:** The proportion who reported experiencing spiritual abuse at some point in their adult life was similar among both women (11%) and men (10%) in the general public sample, but differed for Anglican women (13%) and Anglican men (6%).

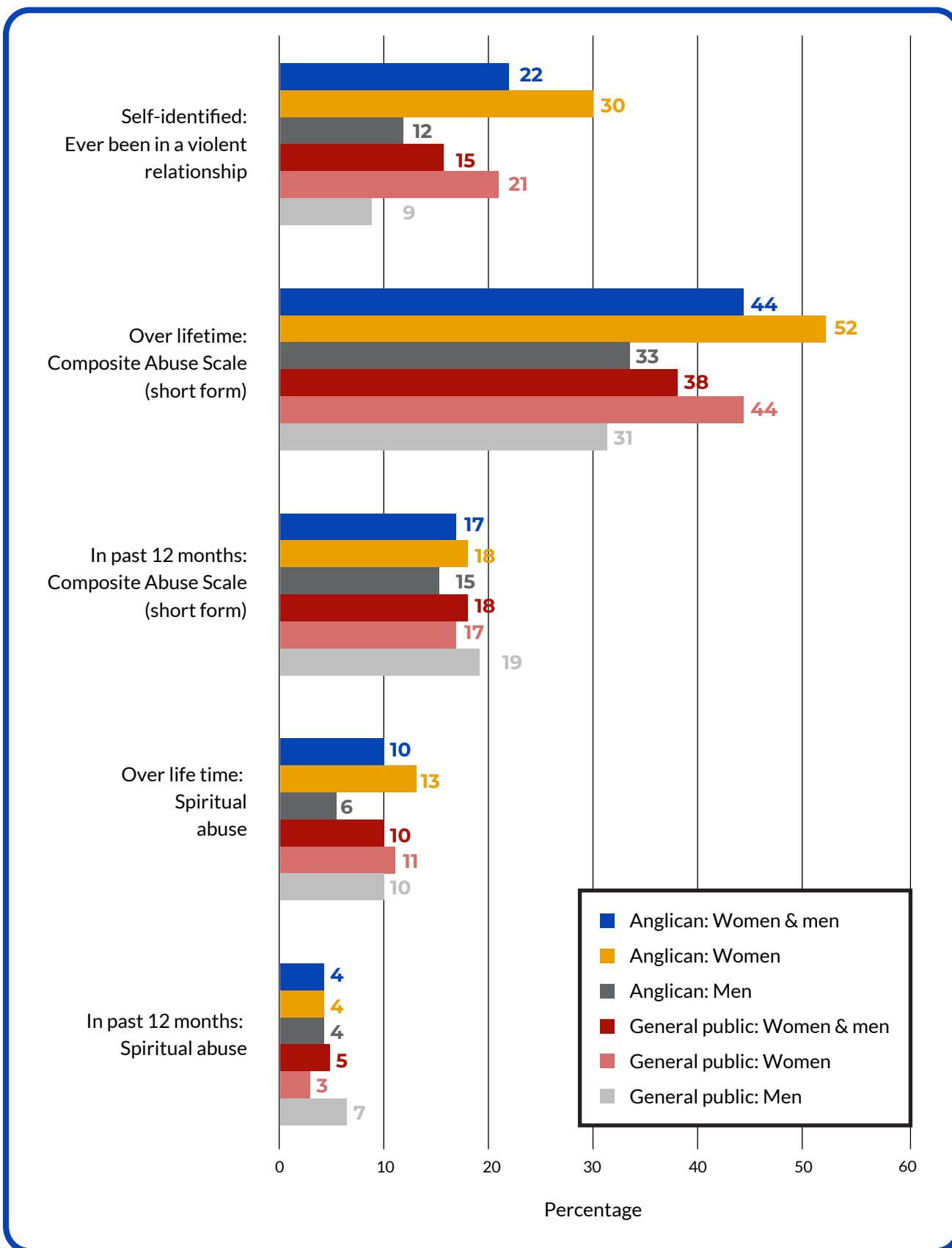
**Spiritual abuse in past 12 months:** Anglican women (4%) did not differ from general public women (3%), and the same was the case for men (4% Anglican men, 7% general public men).

More men than women in the general public sample reported spiritual abuse in the previous 12 months.

Gender differences among church-attending Anglicans and irregular attenders are detailed in the Prevalence Study report. In brief, church-attending women were more likely to report intimate partner violence in most instances. Findings about the past 12 months were, again, an exception to the general patterns.



**Figure 4:** Experience of violence in the general public and Anglican samples by gender



Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study. Percentages are based on those who indicated they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (general public n = 949; Anglican n = 765).

**Table 2:** Lifetime prevalence of IPV and spiritual abuse victimisation in the general public and Anglican samples by gender

	General Public			Anglican		
	Female %	Male %	Total %	Female %	Male %	Total %
IPV – any (15 behaviours)	44	31	38	52	33	44
Physical violence – any (7 behaviours)	31	19	25	39	23	32
Sexual violence – any (2 behaviours)	18	7	13	23	5	15
Harassment – any (2 behaviours)	20	12	16	30	15	23
Spiritual abuse – any (6 behaviours)	11	10	10	13	6	10

Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study. Items are from the Composite Abuse Scale Short Form (CAS-SF), with additional items about spiritual abuse. Percentages are based on those who indicated they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (general population n = 949; Anglican n = 765).

**Other findings re gender:** The Experience Study forms another part of the NAFVP. In the Experience Study Scoping Survey respondents who had experienced violence from an intimate partner were also much more likely to be women. Some 77% of respondents were female and among those who had experienced violence from a partner, 89% were female<sup>4</sup>.

**Key finding:**

In the Prevalence survey, women were much more likely than men to have experienced intimate partner violence, both in the Australian public and among Anglicans, and among both frequent and non-frequent attenders, with the exception of reports from the past 12 months.

## 5.4 Approachability of churches by those who need help

Do people with experiences of IPV and also identify as Anglican feel that they can approach Anglican churches for help? The Prevalence Study provides insight into whether Australians who identify as Anglican felt they would approach the church for help. The population samples showed a difference between the general public, all Anglicans and frequently-attending Anglicans.

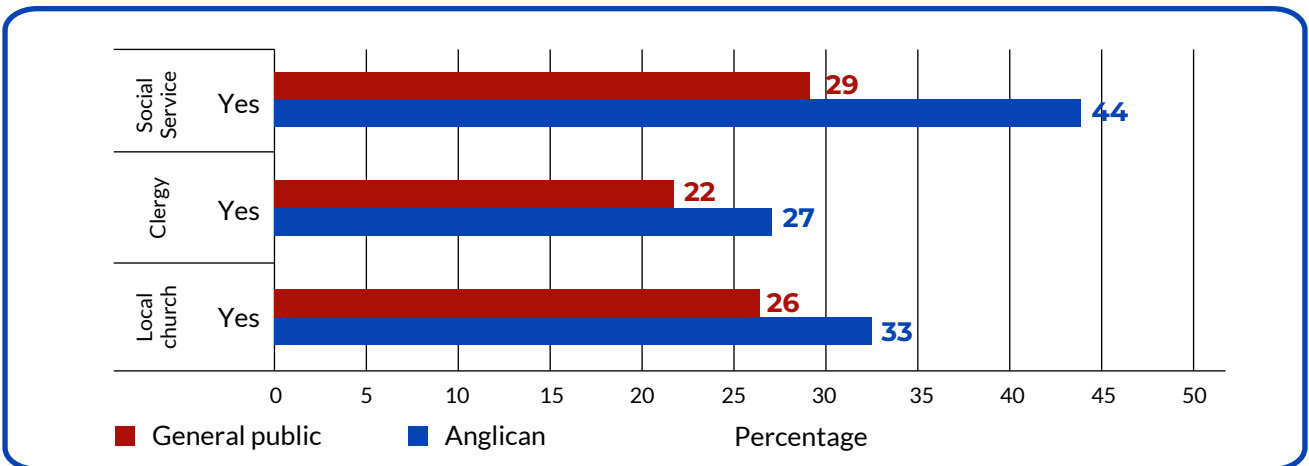
- Only three in ten of the general public and four in ten Anglicans would approach church sources for assistance in relation to IPV.
- Just over half of frequently-attending Anglicans would approach church sources for assistance.
- Church-based social services were the most likely sources of help.

<sup>4</sup>Those willing to contribute to the Experience Study Scoping Survey were also highly educated: 47% had a postgraduate qualification, while 27% held a bachelor degree or equivalent. The large majority (86%) of respondents were Australian-born, with a further 10% born in countries where English is the main language spoken. The age range was from 20 to 84, with a mean age of 52 years.

Respondents were asked whether they would go to a church-based social service, a member of the clergy, and a local church for help if they or someone they knew were experiencing violence from a partner.

A minority of Anglicans and members of the general public felt that they could approach these three sources of potential help.

**Figure 5:** Proportion who agree church is approachable for help in response to an experience of family violence: general public and Anglican samples



Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study (general public n = 1,146; Anglican n = 825).

Anglicans were more likely than the general public sample to feel they could approach a church-based social service (e.g., Anglicare) than members of the general public (44% vs 29%), less likely to indicate that they wouldn't approach a clergy person (44% vs 54%) and that they wouldn't approach a local church (35% vs 50%). As shown in Table 3, around a quarter to a third of respondents were unsure.

Women differed from men in approaching social services, but not in approaching clergy or local churches. Within both the Anglican and general public samples, men were less likely than women to indicate that they would approach social services. (See Prevalence Study Report for details).

**Table 3:** Approachability of churches in the general public and Anglican samples

		General Public %	Anglican %
Social service	Yes	29	44
	No	44	26
	Unsure	28	30
Clergy	Yes	22	27
	No	54	44
	Unsure	24	30
Local church	Yes	26	33
	No	50	36
	Unsure	24	32

Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study (general public n = 1,146; Anglican n = 825).

When the impact of church attendance was considered, a majority of frequently-attending Anglicans (five or six in 10) would approach all three sources for help, compared with a minority of other Anglicans. (See Table 4).

Female and male Anglicans differed in their responses on approach a social service. Two-thirds of frequently-attending women would approach a church-based social service, compared with half of frequently-attending men. (See Prevalence Study Report for details).

**Table 4:** Approachability of churches among all Anglicans by frequency of attendance

		All Anglicans		
		Attendance		
		Infrequent %	Frequent %	Total %
Social service	Yes	40	58	42
	No	26	25	26
	Unsure	34	17	32
Clergy	Yes	21	52	26
	No	43	31	42
	Unsure	35	17	33
Local church	Yes	27	58	32
	No	37	24	35
	Unsure	36	18	33

Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study (Anglican n = 825).

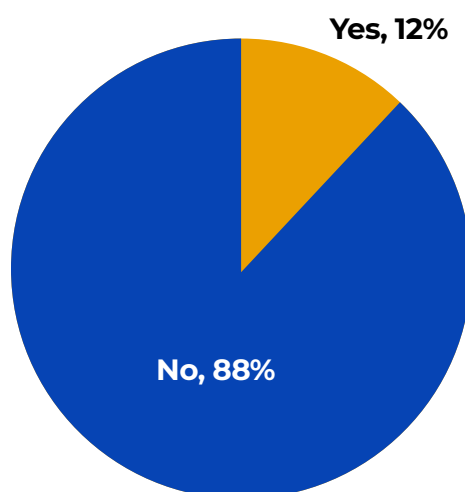
## 5.5 Approaches made to Anglican churches

Who has actually approached an Anglican church for help? Two of the studies explored this question. First, the Prevalence Study provides insight into whether Australians who identify as Anglican have approached the church for help. Second, the Experience Study Scoping Survey provides insight into the views of people who mostly have very active connections with Anglican churches and who mostly have had a personal experience of IPV.

### 5.5.1 Approaches made to Anglican churches: Prevalence Study results

The results from the Prevalence Study found that most Anglicans did not seek help from a church when they had been in a violent relationship with an intimate partner. Respondents in the Prevalence Study were asked whether they had “ever been in a violent relationship with any partner”. Those who indicated yes (23% of Anglicans who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship) were asked whether their experience of being in a violent relationship had ever affected their frequency of attendance at religious services. More than 72% indicated that there had been no effect, 8% that they started to attend more often, and 12% that they started to attend less often. They were also asked whether they had ever sought help from an Anglican church as a result of their experience. Most people – 88% – had not sought help.

**Figure 6:** Anglicans in violent relationship who sought help from an Anglican church



Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study (Anglican Anglicans who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship and reported they had been in a violent relationship  $n = 293$ ).

**Outcome from approach:** Among those who have approached churches, to what extent have they found responses from churches to be helpful, harmful or both? Findings showed that

- Those who did seek help most commonly approached clergy and staff.
- Most who approached a church for help reported that the response either helped to change the situation or that they felt supported.

Those who had sought help from an Anglican church (a very small number of people) were asked:

- From whom they sought this help. Most commonly, they sought help from a clergy person (50%), followed by a staff worker (34%), and other person in leadership (32%).
- Their experience of the response they had received on the most recent time they had approached an Anglican church for help. Half (51%) reported that the response helped to positively change the situation, a further 23% that while the response did not change the situation, they felt supported. The response did not make a difference for 22% of respondents, while for 4% the situation was made worse.

**Table 5:** Experiences of Anglicans who seek help from churches

	Anglicans
<b>Ever been in a violent relationship</b>	
Yes	23%
No	77%
Total n (those who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship)	1,287
<b>Effect of experience of attendance</b>	
Started to attend more often	8%
Started to attend less often	12%
No effect on attendance	72%
Unsure	7%
Prefer not to answer	2%
Total n (those who had ever been in a violent relationship)	293
<b>Sought help from an Anglican church</b>	
Yes	12%
No	88%
Total n (those who had ever been in a violent relationship)	293
<b>Sought help from...</b>	
Clergy	50%
Staff worker	43%
Person in leadership (not clergy/staff)	32%
Church member (not leader)	19%
Somebody else	9%
Total n (those who had sought help from an Anglican church)	35
<b>Response received from Anglican church...</b>	
Helped to positively change the situation	51%
Did not change the situation but felt supported	23%
Did not make any difference	22%
Made things worse	4%
Total n (those who had sought help from an Anglican church)	35

Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study (Anglican n = 825).

## 5.5.2 Approaches made to Anglican churches: Experience Scoping Survey results

As noted earlier, most participants in the Experience Study Scoping Survey were actively involved in their local churches, often in a range of ways.

**Those who sought help from their local church:** Only half (54%) of respondents who had experienced violence from an intimate partner had approached an Anglican church for help, even though our respondents were mostly highly connected to a church. Of these: some 87% sought help from clergy, 16% from another staff worker, 35% from another person in leadership, 30% from a regular church member, and 6% from somebody else.

**Those who considered seeking help but did not:** Some 15% of respondents to the Experience Survey who had experienced violence from an intimate partner and who hadn't sought help from an Anglican church said they had considered doing so. Among those respondents, the most common contributing factors in not seeking help were that:

- they were too embarrassed or ashamed,
- they felt it was wrong to talk negatively about their partner at church,
- they felt that it was their duty to make the relationship work,
- they blamed themselves for their partner's behaviour, and
- they didn't know the signs that they were experiencing were IPV.

Most commonly, Experience Survey respondents reported that the help offered from churches was emotional support/listening ear (70%), followed by prayer (59%). Practical help was offered to 32% of respondents, and information about other organisations who could help to 24%.

On the most recent occasion that respondents had approached an Anglican church for help, the response they received helped to positively change the situation for 33%, while for 31% the response didn't change the situation but helped them to feel supported. It did not make any difference to the situation or the respondent's feelings for 16% of respondents. It made things worse for 20% of respondents. Some respondents left their church because of their experience.

### **Key finding:**

Most Anglican victims of domestic violence did not seek help from Anglican churches. The small group who did seek help most commonly approached clergy and most reported that it either positively changed their situation, or helped them to feel supported.

### **“Let’s bring it into the light”**

“None of us want to face up to it, none of us want to think this is happening, but it is. And I know, from our experience as a church, that we know that it is. And so, (being a clergy) is a platform where I can actually say ‘let's bring it into the light’.”

Clergyperson in focus group



# 6 NAFVP Clergy & Lay Leader Study: knowledge, practices & being equipped



## Clergy & Lay Leader Study

All Anglican parishes were sent invitations for their leaders to take part in the clergy and lay leader survey, and responses were received from approximately a quarter of Anglican parishes. The final number of survey respondents was 827, from 358 parishes, consisting of 383 clergy respondents and 444 lay respondents. Results are likely to be biased towards clergy and lay leaders with a stronger awareness of and interest in the topic than may be the case across Australian Anglican parishes as a whole.

## 6.1 Attitudes and knowledge among clergy and lay leaders regarding domestic violence

One research question for this study was “What attitudes and knowledge do Anglican clergy and lay local church leaders have regarding domestic violence?” In this part we review results on:

- Attitudes to marriage and roles in the family
- Knowledge about what constitutes domestic violence
- Knowledge about who commits domestic violence
- Views about factors associated with domestic violence.

We then turn to attitudes regarding domestic violence and the churches. Some reflections about the role that clergy have in education about domestic violence are also included. Results for lay leaders are similar and more details about lay leaders responses are included in the Clergy and Lay Leader Study Report.

In summary, results showed that Anglican clergy and lay leaders had high levels of awareness of what constitutes domestic violence and of the gendered pattern of domestic violence perpetration. There was sensitivity to a wide array of factors that might contribute to the use of domestic violence against a partner.

## 6.2 Attitudes about marriage and roles in the family

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements (response options were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree):

Marriage is a sacred covenant that is always important to preserve.

The husband is the head of the wife (as Christ is the head of the church), and the wife should submit to the husband.

There should be no gender restrictions on the roles men and women can fulfill in the church, home, and society.

Women prefer a man to be in charge of the relationship.

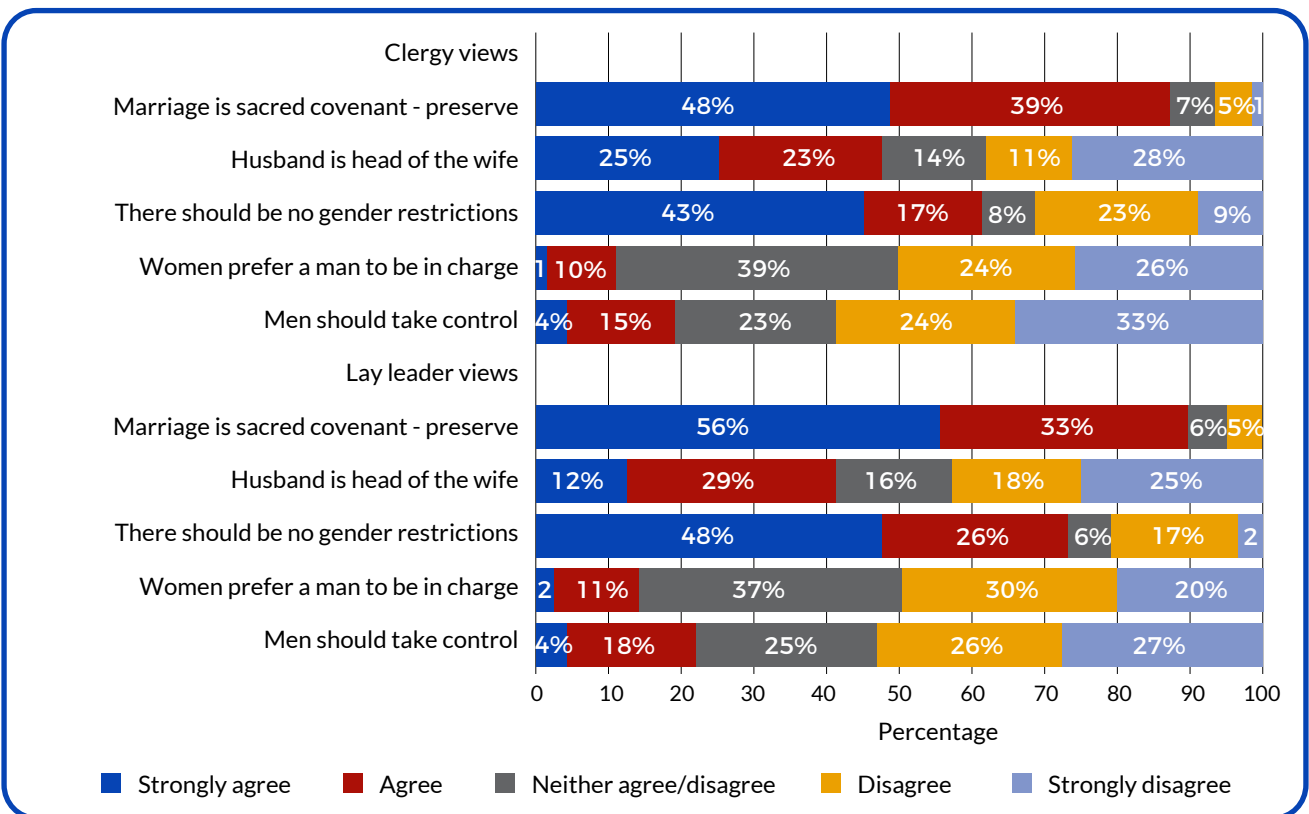
Men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household.

Results are shown in Figure 7. Nine in ten (87%) of clergy agreed that “marriage is a sacred covenant which is always important to preserve” (48% strongly agree, 39% agree). Lay leaders were similarly strong in their endorsement of the statement (89%).

Just under half (47%) of clergy agreed that “the husband is the head of the wife (as Christ is the head of the church), and the wife should submit to the husband”, with slightly fewer lay leaders agreeing (41%). The majority of leaders agreed that “There should be no gender restrictions on the roles men and women can fulfill in the church, home, and society” (60% of clergy, 74% of lay leaders).

Around half of leaders disagreed with the notion that “women prefer a man to be in charge of the relationship” (51% of clergy, 50% of lay leaders). Nearly four in ten chose to neither agree nor disagree to this statement. A majority of leaders disagreed with the notion that “men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household” (57% of clergy, 53% of lay leaders). Around a quarter chose to neither agree nor disagree.

**Figure 7:** Views re roles in marriage and family: Anglican clergy and lay leaders



Source: 2020 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383; lay leader n = 444)

**Church tradition differences:** Clergy who identified as Anglo-Catholic were somewhat less likely to endorse the statement that “marriage is a sacred covenant which is always important to preserve” (78%) whereas those from evangelical and reformed traditions were more likely to do so (96%).

The differences were stronger regarding matters of roles for men and women. Some 76% of evangelical and 91% of reformed clergy agreed with the statement concerning headship, compared with just 9% of Anglo-Catholic clergy. Six in 10 Anglo-Catholic clergy disagreed.

Some 38% of evangelical clergy and 16% of reformed clergy thought there should be no gender restrictions on the roles that women could take in the church, home and society, compared with 93% of Anglo-Catholic clergy.

The differences were not quite as marked for the statement “Men should take control in relationships and be the head of the household” (31% agreement among evangelicals, 36% reformed, and 6% Anglo-Catholic. Approximately a third of evangelical and reformed clergy disagreed with this latter statement, compared with 84% of Anglo-Catholics.

### **Key finding:**

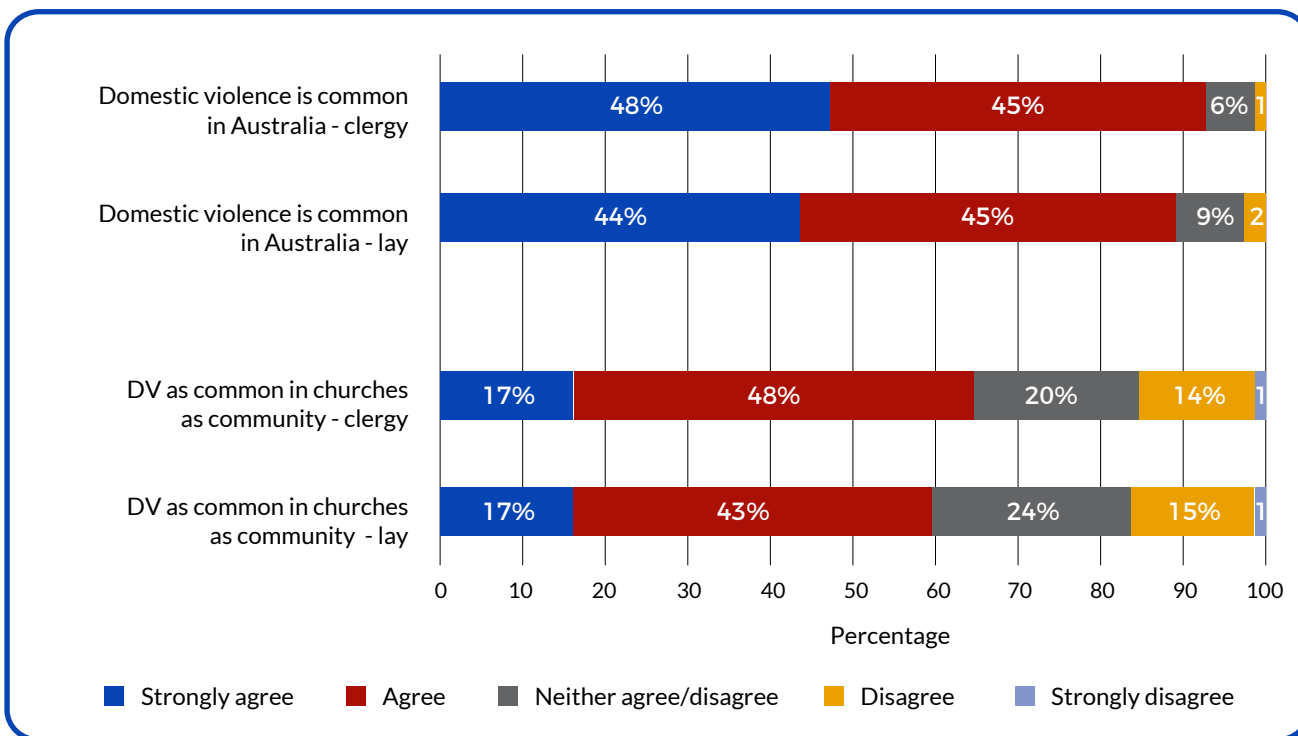
Clergy views on gender roles within marriage and the family varied strongly by tradition. Most clergy, across church traditions, agreed with the statement that “marriage is a sacred covenant which is important to preserve”. However, church tradition plays a strong role with regard to views on gender roles within marriage and the family with key differences between Anglo-Catholic clergy and clergy from evangelical and reformed traditions.

## **6.2.1 Attitudes regarding domestic violence and the churches**

Clergy and lay leaders were asked whether or not they agreed with the following statements:  
Domestic violence is common in Australia.  
Domestic violence is just as common in churches as it is in the wider community.

While most Anglican clergy (93%) and lay leaders (89%) agreed that domestic violence is common in Australia, fewer respondents clergy believed that it is as common in the churches as it is in the wider community although a majority still did so (63% of clergy, 60% of lay leaders, Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Views regarding factors in domestic violence: Anglican clergy and lay leaders**



Source: 2020 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383; lay leader n = 444)

**Responses from the Experience Study Scoping Survey:** To provide a different perspective, those with their own experience of domestic violence were also asked for their views in the Experience Study Scoping Survey. Similar to clergy, nine in ten (93%) respondents agreed that domestic violence is common in Australia. However, in contrast with clergy, a higher proportion of this group – eight in ten – agreed that this issue is just as common in churches.

A view that domestic violence is less common in churches is challenged by the available evidence from the NAFVP Prevalence Study which found that people who experience domestic violence were part of Anglican Church communities in similar or higher proportions than the wider community. Domestic violence is a significant and widespread issue both for the Australian community and for Anglicans, among both frequent and non-frequent attenders. (See NAFVP Prevalence Study for details).

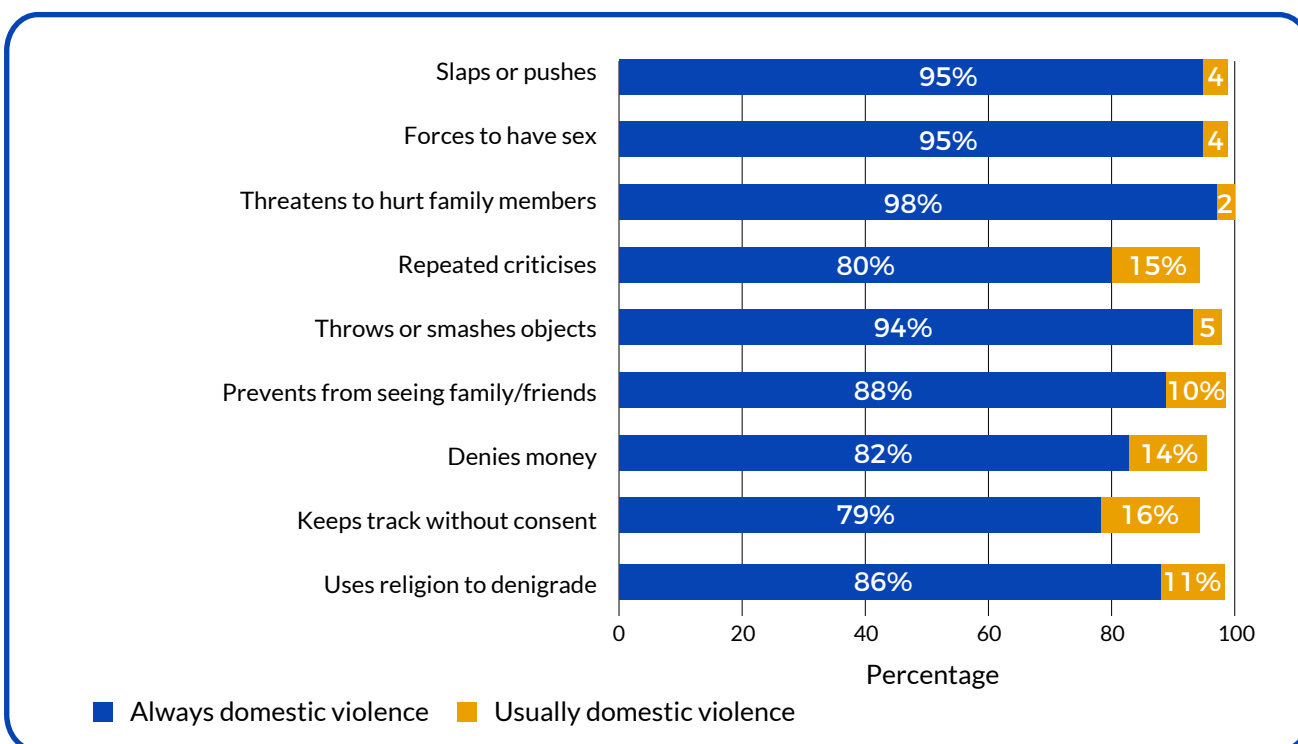
**Key finding:**  
 Clergy and lay leaders were aware of the widespread nature of the problem of domestic violence in Australia, but less aware of its prevalence in church communities. Nine in ten clergy and lay leaders agreed that domestic violence is common in Australia, around six in ten agreed that domestic violence is just as common in churches.

## 6.2.2 Knowledge among clergy about what constitutes domestic violence

In the Clergy and Lay Leader Study, respondents were asked to indicate which of the listed behaviours was domestic violence. The large majority of clergy indicated that each of the listed behaviours was always domestic violence, and at least nine in 10 regarded each factor as always or usually domestic violence.

Some of the listed factors were drawn from survey questions in the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS, Webster et al., 2018). In general, Anglican clergy in our study were more likely than all Australians in the NCAS study to view all examples as domestic violence.<sup>5</sup> It is important to acknowledge, however, that our Clergy and Lay Leader Study would have been likely to attract respondents with an interest in the topic. Further, over the last four years domestic violence has had an increasingly high profile in the Australian media, which may have improved general knowledge and understanding. Future waves of the NCAS way well indicate an increased awareness.

**Figure 9:** Clergy views on what is regarded as domestic violence



Source: 2020 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383). Response options were 'Yes, always domestic violence', 'Yes, usually domestic violence', 'Yes, sometimes domestic violence', 'No, not domestic violence'.

### Key finding:

Clergy and lay leaders were well informed about breadth of domestic violence. Almost all survey participants understood that domestic violence was more than physical and sexual violence but also included psychological abuse and controlling behaviours.

<sup>5</sup>Where items are drawn from the NCAS, these results are compared to results from other surveys in the Clergy and Lay Leader Study Report.

## 6.2.3 Knowledge about who commits domestic violence: Anglican clergy

Anglican clergy were asked: “Do you think that it is mainly men, mainly women or both men and women that commit acts of domestic violence?”

More than nine in ten clergy (93%) thought that it is more often men than women who commit domestic violence. This view aligns with wider evidence from various sources that confirm that it is mainly men, or men more often, who commit acts of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup>

### Key finding:

Clergy and lay leaders understood that it is more often men than women who commit domestic violence.

### “These behaviours are not ok”

“I think most of the people at our church would probably still think about domestic abuse in terms of physical harm...what I can contribute in these capacities to say publicly, to say it is much broader than that. And ‘these are the behaviours, which are symptomatic, are not okay. They’re not biblical. If that’s the situation you’re in, we want you to get help, we will listen’.

Clergyperson in focus group

## 6.2.4 General factors associated with domestic violence

Clergy were asked their views on which factors may lead some people to use domestic violence towards their partners. Some of the listed factors were drawn from survey questions in the National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS). Other themes emerged from the clergy focus groups and two questions were framed specifically ask about religious factors in domestic violence in Christian families.

Participants were asked if they thought they were factors a lot of the time, some of the time, rarely or not at all.

The most common factors that more than half of all Anglican clergy associated with domestic violence a lot of the time are:

- One partner wanting to control or dominate the other partner (84%)
- Having an alcohol problem (56%), and
- Having a narcissistic personality (53%).

Other factors are shown in Figure 10. Results for lay leaders were similar.<sup>7</sup>

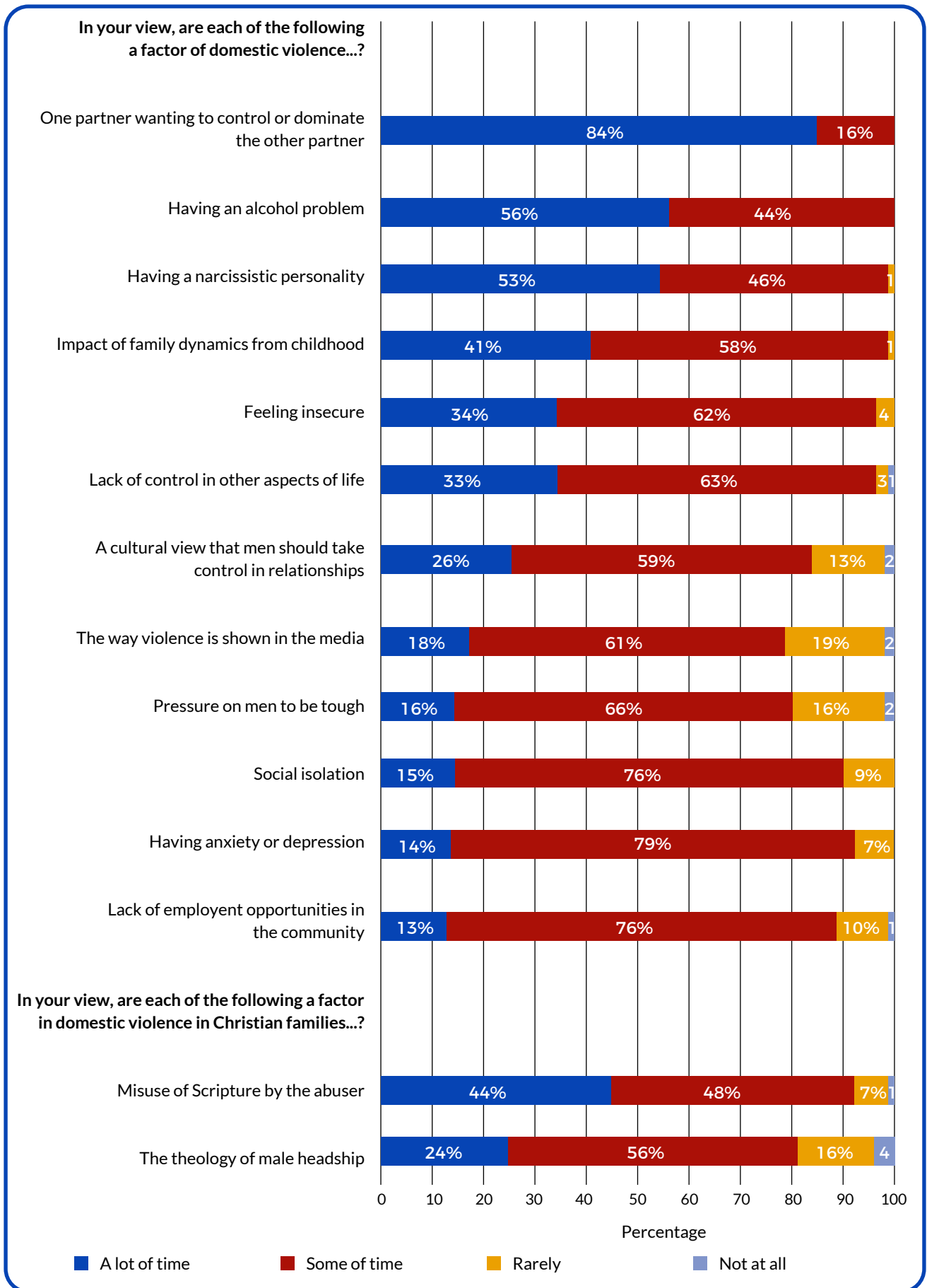
### Key finding:

Clergy and lay leaders were sensitive to the wide array of factors that may contribute to domestic violence. Factors considered by a majority of church leaders to be present a lot of the time were one partner wanting to dominate or control the other, having an alcohol problem, and having a narcissistic personality. In addition, a wide array of other factors were acknowledged.

<sup>6</sup>ABS, 2018; Webster, et al. 2018.

<sup>7</sup>Details are in the Clergy and Lay Leader Study Report.

**Figure 10: Views regarding factors in domestic violence: Anglican clergy**



Source: 2020 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383).

## 6.2.5 Religious factors in Christian families associated with domestic violence

Two questions tested views on the role of the following religious factors in domestic violence in Christian families:

- Misuse of Scripture by the abuser.
- A theology of male headship.

Around nine in ten clergy identified misuse of Scripture by the abuser as a factor in domestic violence in Christian families at least some of the time. This was made up of 44% of clergy who believed that it was a factor a lot of the time, and an additional 48% who believed it was a factor some of the time.

Eight in ten clergy identified the theology of male headship as a factor in domestic violence in Christian families. Around a quarter of clergy (24%) felt that the theology of male headship in the context of Christian families was a factor a lot of the time and a further 56% felt it was a factor some of the time. An analysis of differences by church tradition found that the theology of male headship was seen as a factor at least some of the time for seven in ten evangelicals and nine in ten Anglo-Catholics.

### **Key finding:**

Most clergy believed that Scripture is misused by the abuser in Christian families. Misuse of Scripture by the abuser was considered to be implicated at least some of the time by nine in ten clergy. The theology of male headship was seen as a factor at least some of the time for eight in ten clergy (seven in ten evangelicals, nine in ten Anglo-Catholics).

## 6.3 Practices in local church contexts

What practices are clergy and lay leaders engaging with in their local church contexts? The survey explored practices undertaken both by individual leaders and by their churches more generally. Actions may be undertaken to build a proactive culture around domestic violence prevention and response, or in relation to specific domestic violence situations.

In this part we explore whether study participants think the Anglican Church has been helpful in raising awareness. Further, have clergy and churches been approachable for those who need help? The views of clergy and lay leaders are presented alongside those with experience of intimate partner violence (IPV).



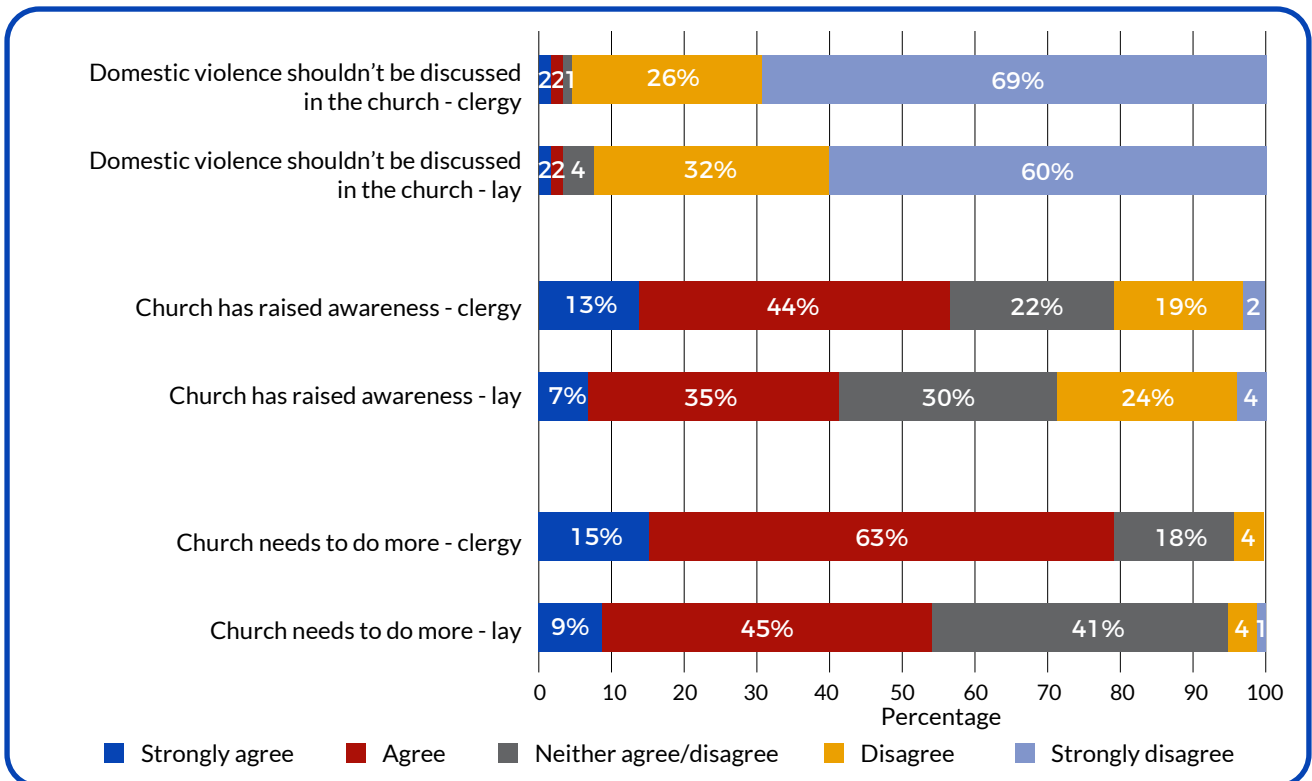
## 6.3.1 Raising awareness in local churches about domestic violence

Most agree domestic violence should be discussed in church: When asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the negatively worded statement “Domestic violence is a topic that should not be discussed in church”, more than nine in ten respondents across the Clergy and Lay Leader Study and the Experience Study Scoping Survey disagreed (95% of clergy and 91% of Experience Study Scoping Survey respondents). That is, most held the view that domestic violence should be discussed in church.

Raising awareness of domestic violence in churches: Despite the strong affirmation that raising awareness is appropriate, there was a gap between intention and action. Some 57% of clergy agreed that their church has taken steps to raise awareness (13% strongly agree, 44% agree), compared with 41% of lay leaders. In the Experience Survey, around half (49%) of respondents agreed steps had been taken to raise awareness in their churches.

There was strong support for further awareness raising efforts, with eight out of ten clergy (78%) agreeing that their church needs to do more to raise awareness of domestic violence (vs 54% of lay leaders). Lay leaders were much more likely than clergy to be non-committal, with 41% choosing ‘neither agree nor disagree’. The strongest support for the suggestion that the church needs to do more came from the Experience Study Scoping Survey. Of the nine in ten (86%) who agreed that the church needs to do more, 51% strongly agreed.

**Figure 11:** Raising awareness of domestic violence: clergy and lay leaders



Source: 2020 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383, lay n = 444).

**Key finding:**

There was widespread agreement among clergy and lay leaders that domestic violence is an issue that should be discussed in church and that local churches should do more to raise awareness of domestic violence.

### 6.3.2 Clergy experience of domestic violence situations as part of ministry

Most clergy have direct experience of individuals in specific domestic violence situations as part of their ministry. Three quarters of clergy had been aware of people in their churches who were victims of domestic violence, and approximately half were aware of perpetrators. Given the gendered experience of domestic violence, it is unsurprising that most clergy felt that having women on the pastoral team equips a church to better respond to domestic violence.

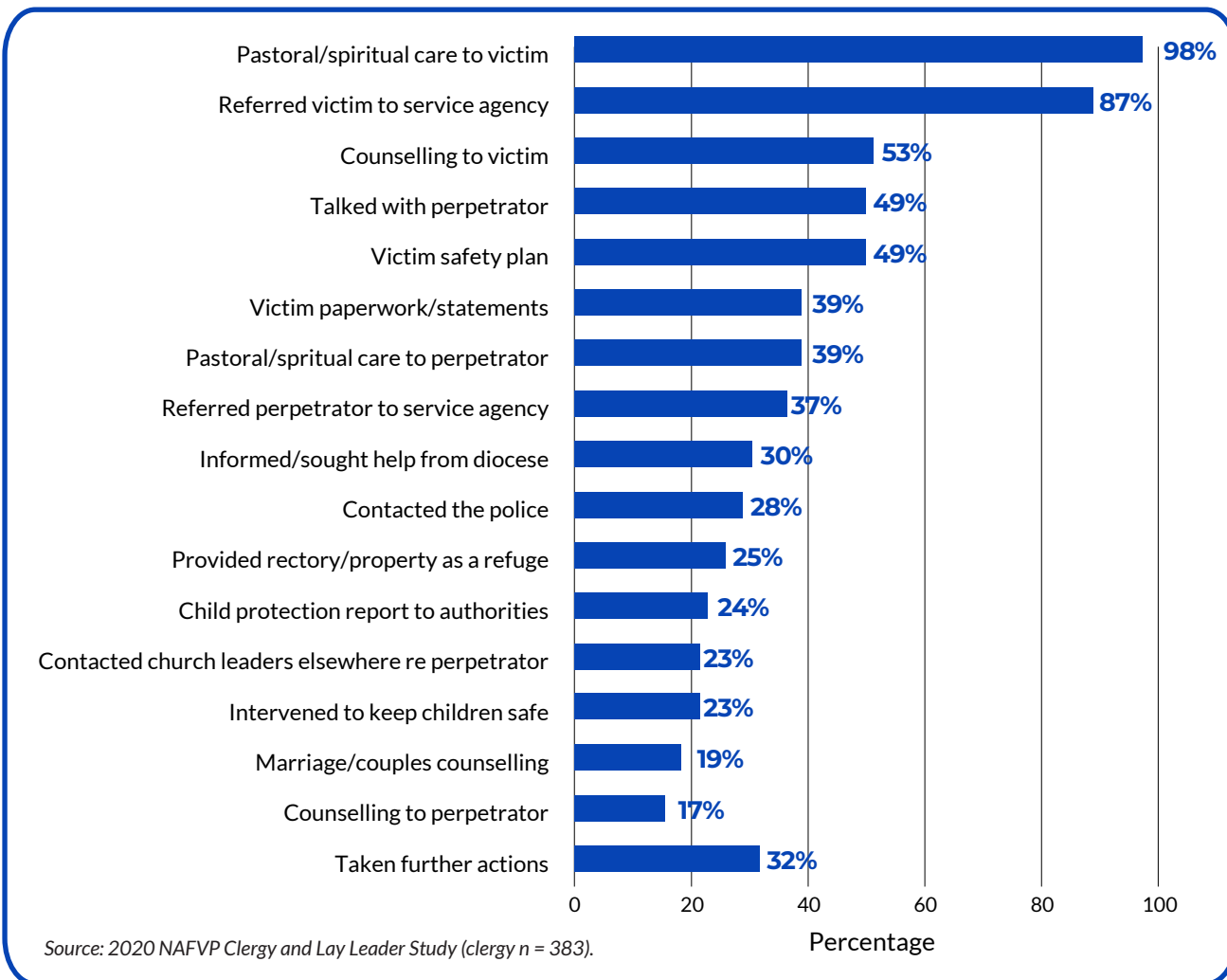
When asked about clergy responsibilities when ministering to someone who has been abused by their partner, three in ten clergy agreed that clergy should provide couples counselling. Although not typical, these actions and views are concerning as victims of domestic violence, and services that support them, maintain that couples counselling is ineffective and unsafe as it fails to address the unequal power in an abusive relationship and can place the victim at increased risk.

**Actions taken in specific situations:** Most clergy surveyed had dealt with specific domestic violence situations as part of their ministry. The most common action, used by almost all clergy, was to provide pastoral and spiritual care to the victim, followed by referring the victim to support services. Around half of clergy offered counselling to the victim, talked to the perpetrator and assisted with a safety plan. More interventionist actions such as contacting the police, providing the rectory as a refuge, or intervening to keep children safe were undertaken by a quarter of clergy. (See Figure 12.)

**Key finding:**

Most Anglican clergy had been aware of victims of abuse in their churches. The most common action by clergy was to provide pastoral and spiritual care to the victim, followed by referring the victim to support services.

**Figure 12: Actions taken by clergy when dealing with specific domestic violence situations**



**An educational role:** Churches can have a role in education about domestic violence. Among the participants in our Experience study were people whose church had helped them to realise that they were experiencing domestic violence and that this wasn't acceptable. A sermon, or talking with their minister/pastor, helped provide a framework and language for their understanding. (See Experience Study.) In this Clergy and Lay Leader study, around seven in ten clergy reported that their church prayed for victims of domestic violence in the previous 12 months. A minority of clergy (20% to 45%) reported often or sometimes talking about domestic violence in public settings, including preaching.

According to clergy, other actions by churches, such as display of posters and leaflets, donations of money or goods or working with local organisations, occurred in around a third to half of churches. Fewer lay leaders reported these actions in their churches.

**Key finding:**

Churches have a role in education about domestic violence. Around seven in ten clergy reported that their church prayed for victims of domestic violence in the previous 12 months. A minority of clergy reported often or sometimes talking about domestic violence in public settings, including preaching. According to clergy, other actions by churches, such as display of posters and leaflets, donations of money or goods or working with local organisations, occurred in around a third to half of churches.

**Table 6:** Examples of clergy and lay leader actions

Type of action	Quotes from open text responses in Clergy and Lay Leader Survey
<p>Pastoral and general support</p>	<p><i>“Acted more as a support by listening to the victim and supporting their decision to report to police and professional assistance.”</i></p> <p><i>“Acted normally with the perpetrator. The victimised person often doesn't leave (due to shame &amp; dissolution of marriage), therefore I keep the door open by saying that there is no judgement and that I'm always there to support if she would like to try again. Involved one other person on the pastoral care team to offer support.”</i></p> <p><i>“My wife and I have mentored other church leaders involved in other situations. In those cases we have prepped a victim on having a plan should they decide to leave.”</i></p>
<p>Intervened or supported an intervention against perpetrator</p>	<p><i>“Asked the male perpetrator to leave the house so that the wife (victim) and children could be safe. This was done with the victim's permission and was successfully carried out.”</i></p> <p><i>“Arranged an ongoing support relationship for a female victim with a mature couple at church. Arranged for victim to be taken to police station and supported as she spoke with police. Arranged for the victim to stay with a church family as needed. Made it clear to perpetrator that domestic violence not tolerated at our church, at which point he become abusive of me too.”</i></p> <p><i>“Have been present to intervene as a wife tells her husband he's not welcome home, sought and funded accommodation for him at that time, engaged in multiple steps to seek repentance of the perpetrator (without success).”</i></p>
<p>Referral to support services</p>	<p><i>“I have driven a family to the police station to report. I beg people to talk to their GP and police every time.”</i></p> <p><i>“The Rectory was a kind of 'safe house' and I would phone a Women's Refuge and they would call to collect the person”</i></p>
<p>Provided refuge in home or housed victim</p>	<p><i>“Provided my residence as a safe refuge, provided financial assistance and helped obtain accommodation, helped them shift their furniture etc”</i></p>

<p><b>Offered financial or material assistance</b></p>	<p><i>“Provided practical assistance for the victim (e.g., meals, help with looking after kids etc)”</i></p> <p><i>“Provided food bank supplies. Provided transport to church services. Helped arrange temporary accommodation.”</i></p> <p><i>“Offered financial support from church community fund for housing if necessary (offer was not taken up).”</i></p>
<p><b>Supported engagement with police and legal services</b></p>	<p><i>“Help write victim impact statements and help write compensation claims.”</i></p> <p><i>“Instituted a Restraining Order”.</i></p> <p><i>“Writing reports/character references for court appearances.”</i></p> <p><i>“Attended family law court with victims”</i></p> <p><i>“Accompanied the victim to court. Assisted the perpetrator with Centrelink forms to sort out their separated status.”</i></p> <p><i>Acted as “cultural interpreter” between the DV legal service and the victim (ensuring understanding, rephrasing, checking for understanding, etc).”</i></p>
<p><b>Raised matter with church structures, senior ministers, or designated safety structures within the diocese</b></p>	<p><i>“Notified diocese of a perpetrator in ministry role.”</i></p> <p><i>“Organised safe housing, counselled through removal of the situation, informed and sought advice from Senior Minister.”</i></p> <p><i>“Engaged the Diocesan Safe Ministry Unit.”</i></p>
<p><b>Set up a support options for victim or family members</b></p>	<p><i>“Involved an appropriate parishioner to support the victim until external support was available.”</i></p> <p><i>“Had accountability people and support people in our church family.”</i></p>

Source: Clergy and Lay Leader Survey – samples from open text responses

**Personal impact on church leaders:** Dealing with domestic violence situations resulted in some negative impacts for most clergy, with fatigue being particularly common. Four in ten said they had experienced manipulation from a perpetrator of domestic violence. Domestic violence situations may be protracted and complex, and especially if both perpetrator and victim are a part of the same church. The impacts on clergy may be considerable. This survey question was a first foray into these matters.

**Key finding:**

Among those who have dealt with domestic violence situations in ministry, the majority of church leaders identified a negative personal impact, such as fatigue and manipulation.

**Collaboration with others:** Collaboration with clergy and leaders from other churches in relation to domestic violence was atypical. This survey question was non-specific and it is unclear what clergy were reporting on here. It could be as diverse as collaboration on educational programs, seeking information and advice from others, and perhaps even passing on information about particular domestic violence situations – although the latter may be restricted due to confidentiality requirements and considerations. Three in ten had made contact with the diocese (informed or sought help) in relation to a specific domestic violence situation. Further investigations could look at other specific ways that clergy might have connected with other clergy and church leaders beyond their parish. Appropriate collaboration with colleagues may be a useful source of support in a difficult area of ministry.

**Key finding:**

Two thirds of clergy had not collaborated with clergy/leaders from other churches in relation to domestic violence

**“Be ready for a marathon”**

“We need to be ready for a marathon, not a sprint - to use that metaphor. These are often long-term patterns of abuse, that are playing themselves out and, such that, the victim will act in ways that are inexplicable to him or her like they can't even explain it themselves... And some of these guys are, you know, yeah, they'll fight to the death. They will know when they're losing, they've just got to win... And the victim needs to know too... Just say "don't lose heart" Putting hope before someone like that is just crucial. That's one of the best things you can do.”

(Clergy participant in focus group)

## 6.4 How equipped are clergy and lay leaders to respond?

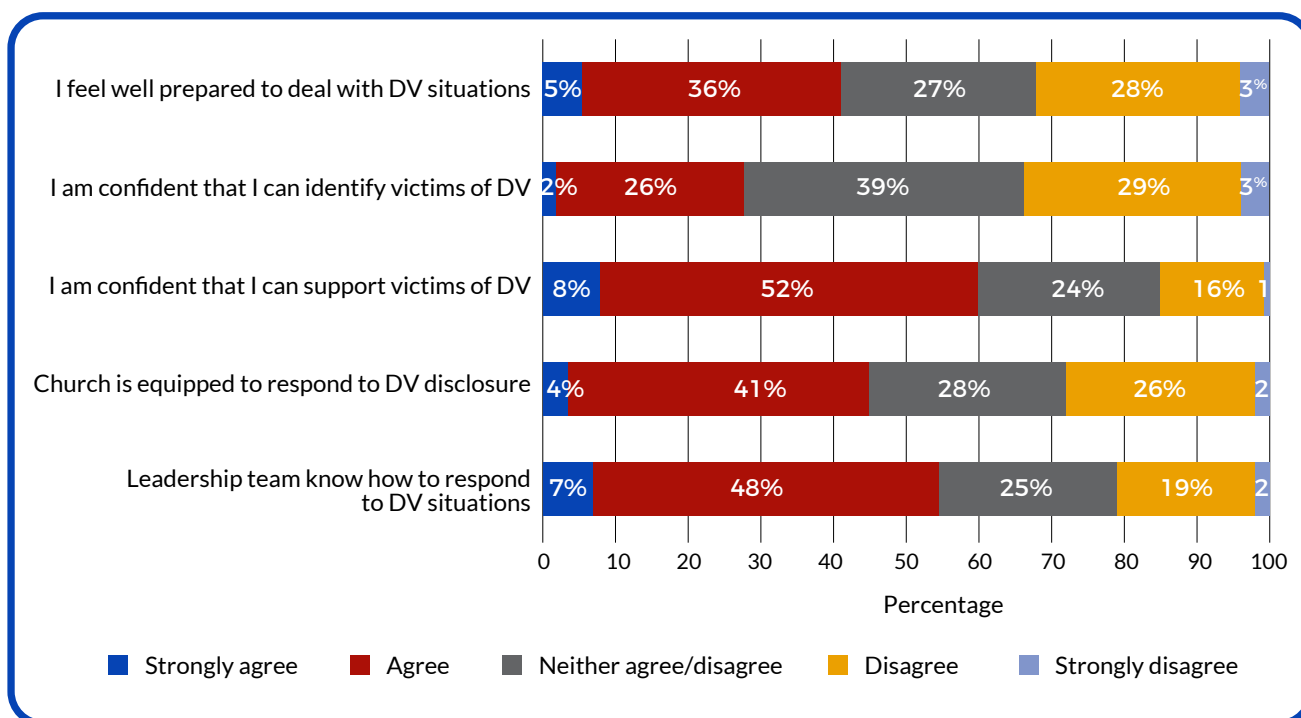
**Confidence in personal readiness to respond:** Our respondents were, on the whole, knowledgeable about domestic violence in general terms, and most of the clergy had responded to specific domestic violence situations. A majority of clergy had received specific training. However, confidence in their personal capacity to respond to domestic violence was low to moderate. Confidence was only a little higher among clergy who had been trained. This survey did not ask clergy to specify the content of the training that they had received nor to evaluate that training, but the present results suggest that in general, the training might not have improved the practical skills of the clergy.

**Confidence in church’s readiness to respond:** Although few leadership teams had been trained, there was moderate confidence in the churches’ readiness to respond.

Few leadership teams had received training and a minority of lay respondents had been trained and their confidence was relatively low. However, clergy respondents were a little more likely to agree that their team knew how to respond to domestic violence situations than they themselves did personally. This might reflect an increased confidence in a group of people rather than relying on a single person.

The Experience Study points to the value of better equipping those with pastoral care and small group leadership responsibilities. Participants in our interview study who felt they had been well-supported by their church often said that the pastoral support that they received from small groups in the church, such as Bible studies, was important to them, alongside other forms of help from clergy. (See Experience Study.) This indicates the value in a wider team-based approach in responding to domestic violence.

**Figure 13:** Levels of preparedness and confidence: views of clergy



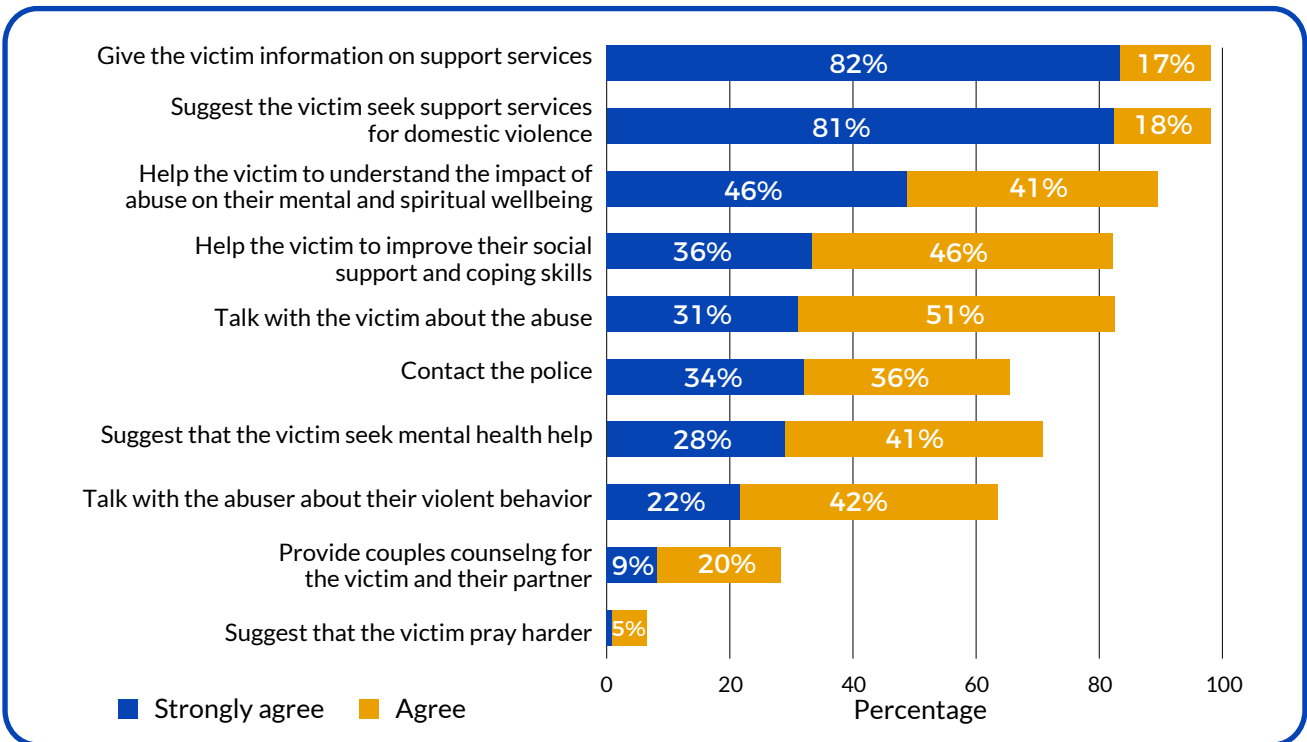
Source: 2020 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383).

**Key finding:**

Although, on the whole, clergy reported being knowledgeable, experienced and trained in domestic violence situations, their confidence in their personal capacity to respond to domestic violence was low to moderate. Although few leadership teams had been trained, there was moderate confidence in the churches’ readiness to respond.

**Clergy responsibilities:** Almost all clergy felt that it was their responsibility when ministering to a victim of domestic violence to help them to access support services, and most who had dealt with domestic violence situations had done so. Yet, a minority felt very confident to make these referrals.

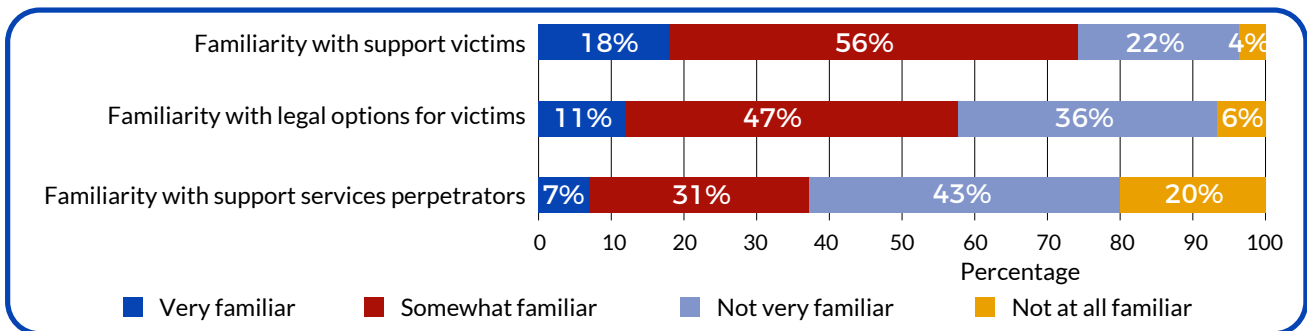
**Figure 14:** Clergy responsibilities when ministering to victim of abuse: views of clergy



Source: 20s20 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383).

**Familiarity with support services:** Fewer than two in ten clergy claimed to be very familiar with support services or legal options for either victims or perpetrators. However, when considering those who claimed to be somewhat familiar, three-quarters were familiar with support services for victims (74%); six in ten (58%) with legal options and a smaller four in ten with services for perpetrators.

**Figure 15:** Clergy familiarity with support services



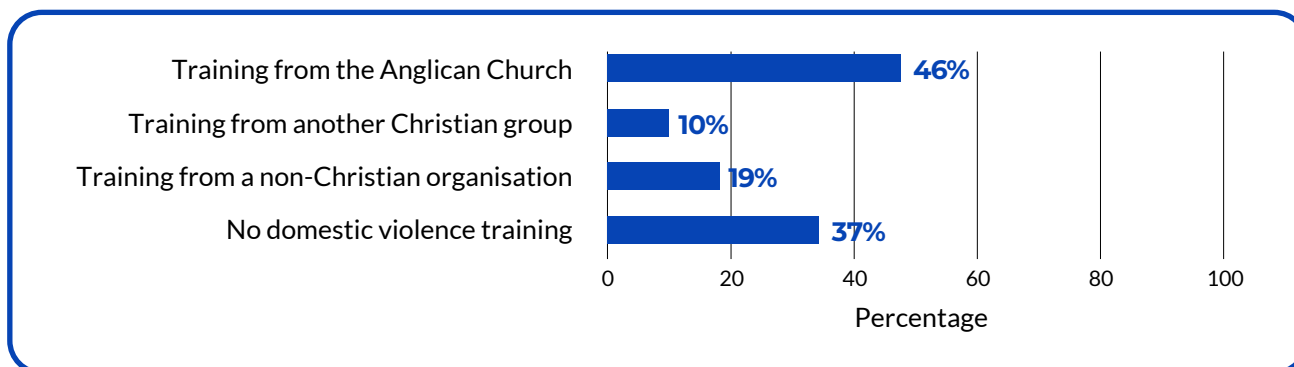
Source: 2020 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383).

**Resources, training and diocesan support:** There are a range of resources (e.g., documents, training, support) which are available from a range of sources to assist churches to respond to domestic violence. Only a third (29%) of clergy were familiar with resources from their diocese. A further four in ten (41%) were somewhat familiar and the remaining three in ten were not familiar. There were even lower levels of familiarity with resources provided by other groups. (See Clergy and Lay Leader Report for detail).



When asked if they had received training specifically to help them to respond to domestic and family violence, some 46% said they had received training from the Anglican Church, 10% had training from another Christian group, 19% from a non-Christian organisation. Some 37% of all clergy have received no training.

**Figure 16:** Sources of domestic violence training for clergy

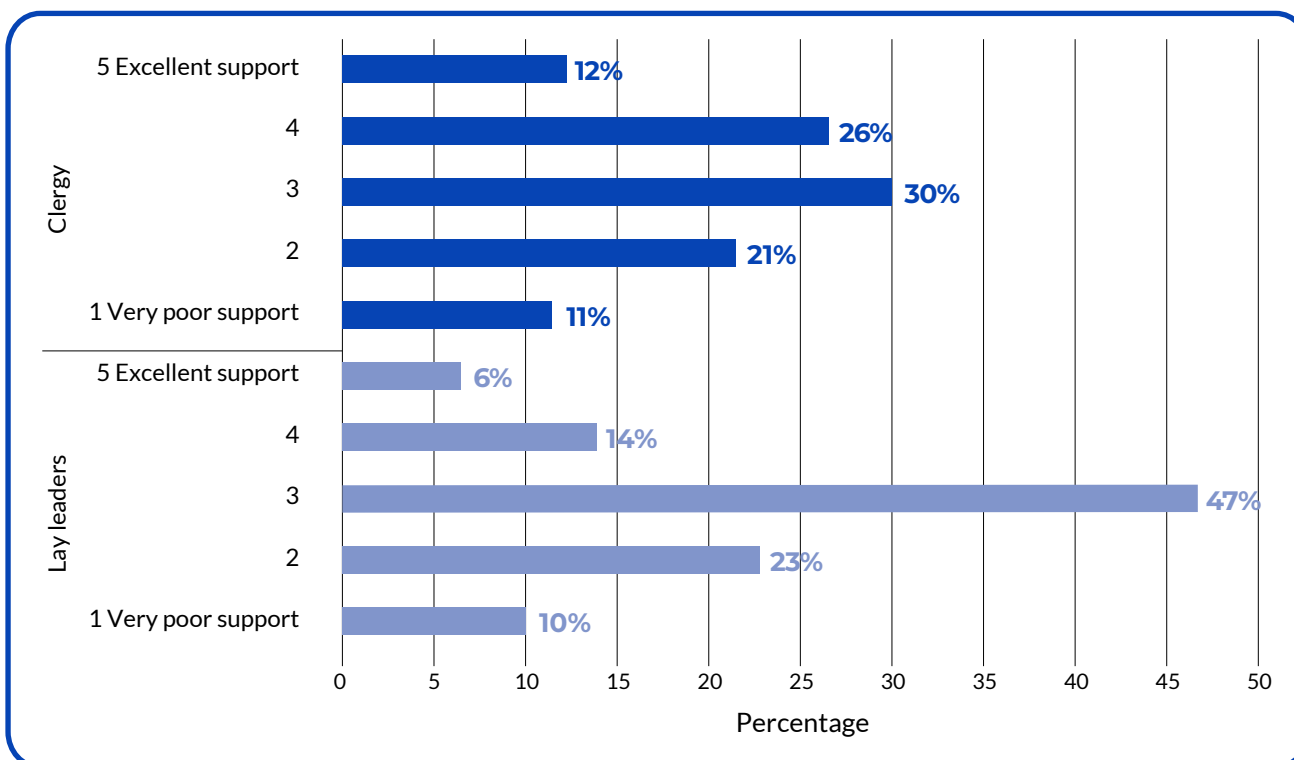


Source: 2020 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383).

**Evaluation of support received from diocese:** On a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent), respondents were asked to evaluate the support that their church receives from the diocese to help the church to respond to domestic violence.

Around four in ten clergy (38%) were positive about the support received from the diocese, three in ten positioned themselves in the middle of the scale and 32% were less positive in their rating. Details are shown in Figure 17, along with the results for lay leaders, who were less likely to express a clear opinion one way or the other.

**Figure 17:** Rating of diocesan support to church: clergy and lay leaders



Source: 2020 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study (clergy n = 383; lay n = 444).

### **Key finding:**

Familiarity with resources (e.g., documents, training, support) from the diocese was moderate, while familiarity with resources from other parts of the Anglican church or from other Christian groups was lower. Ratings of diocesan support for churches to respond to domestic violence was fairly evenly spread from excellent support to very poor support.

**Views about the role of the bishop:** Clergy and lay leaders were asked to give their opinion, in their own words, about what the role of the bishop should be in two situations: where a clergy person is a victim of domestic violence, and where a clergyperson is a perpetrator of domestic violence. An open text format of question can be used to gauge what is top of mind for people on a given topic. Nearly 750 respondents wrote a comment about their views on the role of the bishop in these circumstances. These responses were grouped to assess the most commonly expressed views.

When a clergyperson is a victim of domestic violence, the most views most commonly expressed were first, that the bishop should provide pastoral support, and second, that they should seek the involvement of organisations and services specifically designed to deal with such situations. In cases where a clergyperson is a perpetrator of domestic violence, the views most commonly expressed were that, first, the bishop should carry out discipline accordance with church procedures, and second, that they should seek the involvement of organisations and services outside of the church. (See Clergy and Lay Leader Report for detail).

### **Key finding:**

Views most commonly expressed about the role of the bishop when a clergyperson is a victim was to provide pastoral support, and when a clergyperson is a perpetrator, to carry out discipline accordance with church procedures. In both cases, the second most common response was that the bishop should seek the involvement of organisations and services outside of the church. These responses were taken from an open text format and represent what came first to mind.

# 7 NAFVP Experience Study: Hearing from those with experiences of IPV



## Experience Study

The research question for the NAFVP Experience Study was “What is the nature of experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) for those with a connection with Anglican churches?”

An initial Scoping Survey was promoted in various ways over four months (September 2020 to January 2021) and 305 respondents matched the criterion, with some 81% having had direct experience of intimate partner violence. A second phase involved face to face interviews. Some 179 people had direct experience with 86 being open to interview. Twenty people (19 women and one man) were selected for in-depth face to face interviews.

When people in abusive relationships are part of Anglican Church communities, their church interactions can be overwhelmingly positive or overwhelmingly negative. However, our research suggests that it is common for churches to play a dynamic and nuanced part. The full NAFVP Experience Study report is over 100 pages long. It is based on the analysis of survey responses from over 300 people and more than 400 pages of transcripts from 20 in-depth interviews with 19 women and one man from across Australia who had been in abusive relationships and also had a connection with an Anglican church. It contains many direct quotes from participants which indicate complex and nuanced journeys.

In this overview, we have also included a small selection of quotes from our interview participants. Each separate paragraph represents a different person speaking.

Anyone can experience domestic violence. It affects people from all backgrounds and walks of life. Violent relationships are characterised by a breadth of abusive behaviour and patterns of control and intimidation over time. One participant expressed this reality in this way:

*So the women (who have experienced), intimate partner violence, are well educated, lawyers, teachers, psychologists and power dressers, people that are drop-dead gorgeous women, women that are 50 kilos overweight, everything in between, gorgeous women, intelligent women, funny women, confident women, they're in domestic violence situations. So please don't dismiss her and also please don't think "I would never let that happen to me, I would never let that happen to my daughter". ... (Among) gay couples, intimate partner violence is just as prevalent, so no reason why it wouldn't be, male couples, female couples, whatever. Again, there's no rhyme nor reason to who can be the abusive person and who might not. The women or the men that are getting abused - you can't pick it.*

After presenting examples of the breadth and dynamics of intimate partner violence, this summary highlights a few key findings about:

- The role of the church within the dynamics of the abusive relationship, supporting people towards change or hindering them from it and as they rebuild and recover life.
- Participants recommendations for both church communities and church leaders.

## 7.1 The breadth and dynamics of violence

*IPV is “behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours” (WHO 2010, p.10).*

The interviewees in this study were often quite understated in their descriptions of the types of violence that they had been subjected to. However, their explicit and wide-ranging experiences do underline the reality that all abuse are forms of violence, and that violence is more than physical actions.

While there are various frameworks to describe types of violence or abuse, here we use an Australian framework prepared by BaptistCare, who provide descriptions of seven types of violence: physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, social, financial and spiritual (Baptistcare n.d.). We include a few selected quotes that come directly from survivors, organised under these seven headings, to underline the breadth of what is truly violent and harmful behaviour. See Table 7).

**Warning:** This section contains graphic descriptions of violence.

**Table 7:** Types of violence with personal examples from interview participants

Type of violence	In their words
<p><b>Physical Abuse</b></p> <p>Physical abuse includes directly assaulting the body; using weapons; driving dangerously; destructing property; abusing pets in front of family members; assaulting children; locking the victim out of the house; and depriving sleep.</p>	<p><i>He used to get triggered by small things ... For example, if I didn't cook dinner, he used to hit me. If I didn't clean the house, he used to hit me. And I never understood why that happened. In my family, that never used to happen ... Because those days, I had to call in sick all the time because I would be bruised all over ... That was next level violence ... Yes, it was tough. Those days were tough because I would end up with pain and aches in my body.</i></p>
<p><b>Sexual Abuse</b></p> <p>Any form of forced sex or sexual degradation, such as sexual activity without consent; causing pain during sex; coercive sex without protection against pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease; making the victim perform sexual acts unwillingly; criticising, or using sexually degrading insults.</p>	<p><i>Later ... the sexual violence started ... He came and physically picked me up out of the shower and took me to the bedroom and lay me on the bed and pinned my arms down and had sex with me. I didn't know that saying no was okay sort of thing. I mean had said no, but I didn't know that keeping on saying no or fighting off your husband or whatever, but I couldn't because he was so strong, I couldn't do anything to stop him. That pretty much continued for the rest of the marriage.</i></p>

<p><b>Emotional Abuse</b></p> <p>Blaming the victim for all problems in the relationship; constantly comparing the victim with others to undermine self-esteem and self-worth; sporadic sulking; withdrawing all interest and engagement (for example, days or weeks of silence).</p>	<p><i>He was spiralling into some sort of meltdown – break down. He would go off. He would leave for a couple of days. I didn’t know where he’d gone. And blame me for whatever was going on ... He would just disappear. He would just go. “Well, I’m going.” I didn’t know what was going on. I was completely freaked out by those episodes.</i></p> <p><i>He was just – I look back on it now and I see very clearly what it was, it was psychological emotional manipulation, he was very manipulative and very – always right, never apologise, everything was my fault all the time, I was a terrible person, I never supported him well enough and I just felt terrible. I just felt like the worst wife in the history of the world and didn’t know what to do.</i></p>
<p><b>Verbal Abuse</b></p> <p>Continual put-downs and humiliation, either privately or publicly, with attacks following clear themes that focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image, and capacity as a parent and spouse.</p>	<p><i>There was obviously ... verbal abuse. A lot of just belittling, when I got friends, a lot of cutting me down in front of friends. You know, quite humiliating. Making comments about the toilet, stuff like that, like really sordid sort of “funny” comments. A lot of gaslighting, a lot of setting himself up as being in control of, even just things like whether I was just allowed to go to sleep, whether I was allowed to read while he watched the television.</i></p> <p><i>It was mainly psychological mental abuse and torture. He started to wake me up in the night and keep me up in the night to have long discussions about whatever I’d done wrong next.</i></p>
<p><b>Social Abuse</b></p> <p>Systematic isolation from family and friends through techniques such as ongoing rudeness to family and friends; moving to locations where the victim knows nobody; and forbidding or physically preventing the victim from going out and meeting people – in effect, imprisonment</p>	<p><i>A [friend] would say to me, do you want to have a coffee, or do you want to go and have a coffee, so we’d make a date and then I would say to him, I’m going to have a coffee with such-and-such. He’d ... kick up a stink ... he’d chuck a tantrum. I’d just be like, well it’s not worth it, so I’d cancel, and I did it all the time and I’d cancel at the last minute or friends that he approved of.</i></p> <p><i>Probably the worse things were the threats and the intimidation where he would just follow me around the house. He couldn’t trust me alone in a room in the house. He had to know which room I was in, what I was doing all the time, and if he wanted to tell me something - and he often wanted to tell me something – he would just follow me around and yell his side of the argument until I just said, “yeah, okay, I agree with you” or I just begged him to go away so much. I remember ... he would lock me in rooms, he would barricade the front door or stand in front</i></p>

	<p>of the front door ... “No, you’ve got to sit down, you’re going to listen to me.” ... It was just soul destroying because I just thought I have no voice and I have no freedom. I just do what he wants because if I don’t, it’s much worse.</p>
<p><b>Economic Abuse</b></p> <p>Having complete control of all monies; granting no access to bank accounts; providing only an inadequate ‘allowance’; using any wages earned by the victim for household expenses; excessive expenditure and accumulation of debt left for victims to repay.<sup>8</sup></p>	<p><i>For all of our married life he had controlled the money. I earned it, but he managed it and he gave me access to it. Even my phone, my personal mobile phone wasn’t in my name, it was in his. I didn’t know how to pay a bill because he wouldn’t let me; he managed all of that. I had no idea about our finances, I wouldn’t have known how to access our money. I didn’t know passwords or anything like that ... He was happy for me to earn the money, but in terms of anything that would actually involve me having any autonomy or independence, no, that wasn’t done ... even if I wanted to spend money, I needed to ask him and provide receipts and things like that.</i></p> <p><i>I wasn’t expecting to be ripped off over [large amount of money] a month! And he was pulling money not only from my account, but also from ... the children’s accounts, he robbed my parents ... because he went to them with cap in hand saying how destitute we were ... he left me in excess of [large amount of money] in consumer debt, at 30 per cent interest, and obviously it was accumulating daily, because of the amount of money that he had been withdrawing from credit cards.</i></p>
<p><b>Spiritual Abuse</b></p> <p>Denying access to ceremonies, land, or family; preventing religious observance; forcing victims to do things against their beliefs; denigration of cultural background; using religious teachings or cultural tradition as a reason for violence.</p>	<p><i>I started to wonder about that and think, is there somebody else, is there something going on here that I don’t know about, it was thrown back in my face. You know, “you call yourself a Christian, I thought you trusted me, and as a Christian you are supposed to forgive me”. And so, you know, he was smart enough to throw a few well-known scriptures at me, when we had an altercation, and I didn’t have a response.</i></p> <p><i>Everything else he could control because he was the dispenser of that wisdom. So, my prayer life was stupid ... Going to church I shouldn’t need ... There was a lot of spiritual abuse happening which I’m only really just this year working through the consequences of. You know, “your faith is infantile”, things like that ... And again, I believed him ... So yeah, it was all very much wrapped up in that spiritual abuse. It’s been the thing that’s taken me the longest to work through. And it’s sort of the last wound to reveal itself I suppose.</i></p>

Source for definition of types: “More than skin deep” website. <https://morethanskindeep.org.au/recognise/>.

<sup>8</sup>Based on the interview evidence, we have extended the description of economic abuse to include excessive expenditure and accumulation of debt left for victims to repay.



## 7.1.1 “Coercive control”: the dynamics of abusive behaviours

Fundamental to the dynamics in abusive behaviour is the misuse of power and control. Typically, one partner tries to exert power and control over the other, usually through fear (AIHW 2018). The term ‘coercive control’ has gained increased traction in Australia, with the support of the speciality family violence sector. It draws attention to the fact that an incident in isolation may seem insignificant, but when viewed in a context of a pattern of ongoing violence, its significance is more impactful. While isolated events or actions can be explained away, or perhaps seen in terms of a struggling or ‘bad’ marriage, the idea of coercive control captures the ongoing nature of domestic violence, which can pervade all of life and refers to the full breadth of abusive behaviours including physical, sexual, psychological, and more. It includes isolating victims from family and friends, controlling access to finances, monitoring their movements, restricting access to information and assistance (AIHW 2018). It impacts on victims’ independence, wellbeing and safety and is the most common risk factor leading up to an intimate partner homicide (Snell, 2020).

*“I think a big part of that was also then isolating me. I mean it ticked every box for DV quite early. The isolation, the gaslighting, monitoring phone calls. ...He was monitoring my emails. He would “borrow” my laptop. He was very much controlling who I saw and who I didn’t. There was financial abuse. There was obviously physical and mental and verbal abuse...”*

*“Confidence, intelligence, position in society, does not make you immune to psychological or emotional abuse because you get groomed. Then once you’re in the midst of it, your confidence is so rocked that who you thought you were, is no longer who you think you are and it just makes it worse. He just is able to control even more.”*

**Cycles of violence:** A common way that some participants described their experience of intimate partner violence was as a cycle. There were periods when the situation was less or not abusive, but then things would deteriorate again. This cyclic dynamic was one of a range of factors that kept victims ‘trapped’ in their situation.

*“Domestic violence is - it’s a cycle. it’s not a straight line....  
Because you are trapped inside this cycle.”*

*“You kind of just keep going and it’s one foot in front of the other and you do what’s necessary to hold it together and keep the peace and smooth things over. And then, typically in the cycle of violence of course, it cycles and cycles up and it cycles down, and you’d have a few bad times, and then he’d come home with a very nice piece of jewellery and you’d think it’s not all bad, is it?”*

## 7.2 About the role of the church

In our analysis of the role of the church, we applied a range of conceptual tools outlined briefly below:

- Trajectories of experience of intimate partner violence and the importance of “key moments”: All our participants had physically separated from their partners, however there was no simple trajectory from one point to another in any of the relationships. Our analysis attended to the role of the church in participants’ experiences of life in an (often hidden) abusive relationship. We then examined the role of church in relation to ‘key moments’, by which we mean a crucial instant of clarity for a victim-survivor in the course of IPV where there is an opening and opportunity for change. Next, we explored the role of the church during and after participants’ separation from their abusive partners.
- Churches as cultures and places of relationship: When looking at the church and its role in our participants’ experiences of IPV, we thought about churches in two ways: as cultures (that is, the shared beliefs, customs and behaviours of a particular group of people) and as places of or spaces for relationship.
- Human needs: Participants’ needs were key to understanding how churches helped and hindered. This was the primary concept used to analyse the role of the church in rebuilding and recovering life when participants separated from their partners and beyond.

Participant experiences pointed to the different roles that churches can play during different phases of an abusive relationship. Church leaders and the church community play a role:

- within the dynamic of ongoing abusive relationships,
- in supporting people in abusive relationships to make choices and act on them and/or in impeding them from enacting change, and
- in helping or hindering them to rebuild and recover life.

### 7.2.1 The role of the church: religious teaching and social norms

Faith and church can both assist and hinder victims of domestic violence. Christian faith and being part of a church community can both assist and hinder people living in situations of intimate partner violence. Social and religious norms shape how people think they ought to behave within a local church context and also how they actually behave. This impacts on expectations and interactions with clergy as well as among church attenders.

Although unintended, Christian teachings sometimes contribute to and potentially amplify situations of domestic violence. Our analysis revealed that teachings related to marriage, gender and forgiveness may be reinforced by church leaders in ways that extend the cycle of IPV and create a situation of harm for people in abusive relationships. When assertions about how partners in intimate relationships should relate to one another, were understood as absolute norms for behaviour, free from context – whether taught by church leaders or internalised by those experiencing IPV in this way – the cycle of abuse was extended. Participants recounted feelings of self-doubt, self-blame, entrapment and shame that they directly attributed to certain discourses about intimate relationships. It was common for participants to say that their sense of obligation to uphold marriage vows was a contributing factor to persisting in an abusive relationship.



Examples of what was experienced as harmful within the context of abusive relationships are:

- Marriage is a lifelong commitment and a covenant that cannot be broken in any circumstances
- Being the “perfect wife”
- A man has control in a marriage and a wife must submit to her husband
- Being faithful involves suffering and total self-giving
- Forgiveness must be unconditional.

*I think what was hard was battling that inner Anglican that said marriage is forever and you don't get divorced. And I'd been brought up to love and obey, submit, I was a perfect Anglican wife. I'd been brought up to believe that men were the head of the household and what they said went, not to question anything like that, just to pray hard and keep the kitchen clean and keep the children's faces clean and tidy.*

*I was feeling like I was a hopeless Christian wife. I was feeling complete guilt and starting to believe a lot of the things that he was saying that it was my problem, and I wasn't doing enough ... I kind of just thought, well, I need to work harder, I need to read my Bible more, I need to be a more submissive wife. I need to try and have more open, honest conversations with him, which just led to more abuse.*

**Perpetrators' misuse Christian teachings and positional power:** Participants shared examples of how perpetrators made claims about Christian teachings and used their power in relation to church structures to control and extend the cycle of abuse. In some cases, participants said that their abusive partners used obligations around the sanctity of marriage, the headship of the husband, and the imperative to forgive to control them. In the words of two clergy wives:

*My ex really set himself up as God in my world. He created God for me in his own image, really. So that God was basically, and I mean obviously not literally, but it was basically a 50-50 whether God would, you know, backhand me or reach out in love.*

*He told me for years there's no grounds for separation or divorce and if one partner in the marriage is not honouring their vows, that is not an excuse for the other person to leave, they just have to be godly, be godly, love them more. I just hated it, I was so angry with God that I had this biblical prerogative to stay in this situation and rejoice somehow and I just was so resentful.*

**General teachings in churches can create a harmful environment:** Sermons, seminars and discussions in church communities about norms for marriage that are understood to place the wife in a subservient relationship to the husband can create a harmful environment for women in situations of domestic violence.

*...But when you've sat in church week in, week out, for however many years and there's lots of focus on relationship and the marriage relationship and obedience in that relationship and I'm not sure whether it was – it certainly always felt like obedience in terms of servitude, as opposed to an honouring, obedience in an honouring sense. I wonder what impact that has now on women who are in abusive relationships and where that mindset is.*

## 7.2.2 The role of the church: a culture of awareness and readiness to respond

**Christian teaching that addresses IPV can also empower victim-survivors to begin a process of change.** At key moments - or crucial instants or occasions in the cycle of abusive relationships - where people have an opportunity to make choices and act on them, clergy and church leaders can offer alternate perspectives that empower victim-survivors to begin a process of change.

Among participants were people whose church had helped them to realise that they were experiencing domestic violence and that this wasn't acceptable. A sermon, or talking with their minister/pastor, helped provide a framework and language for their understanding. Harmful discourses around marriage were countered by religious leaders, or sometimes by means of participants' own reading or listening. Discourses that participants described as liberating included:

- Marriage is a covenant between two parties and requires two parties to uphold it
- The partners in a marriage are equal and there is no place for one partner controlling the other
- God is merciful and loving and would support a partner leaving their abusive relationship.
- God doesn't want vulnerable people to suffer.

Here are some examples of the ways that participants expressed these ideas.

- Marriage is a covenant between two parties and requires two parties to uphold it

*Having that very candid conversation with the priest who identified what I was going through was domestic and family violence, financial and emotional abuse, every other time I'd sort of looked at it, there was only ever things about the sanctity of marriage and family, and keeping the family unit together ... However, as well-meaning as that is, the big difference that she made was she informed me that "hey, your marriage covenant has already been broken. You know, you're working over and above trying to rekindle whatever there was or hold onto whatever there is, but it's been irrevocably broken and some years ago. I mean if he has strayed, and if he has been abusing you emotionally and financially for all these years, where's the trust? Where's the love? Where's all of these things that feed into the covenant and sanctity of marriage and family? They've gone. They've long since left". And I was just like, huh? I thought I had to forgive, you know, 70 times 7, and all this stuff! And you turn the other cheek, and you press on, he hasn't hit you, he hasn't sexually abused you, you've got to take the good with the bad. You said you would take him for richer or for poorer, you made that vow. Well the fact that you've been poorer for all these years, you know, that's your lot in life.*

*That was my attitude. And it was such a revelation when she was like, “uh-uh-uh-uh-uh. Let’s look at these vows, let’s look at marriage at what’s involved there, and that covenant has well and truly been broken and for many years. So what are you hanging on to?” And I had to agree – I don’t know. A fantasy, basically. And as difficult as that was, and as confronting as it was, that’s what I needed.*

- The partners in a marriage are equal and there is no place for one partner controlling the other

*I’d had a conversation with our minister at one point and he said, “no I don’t think that’s what the Bible says at all, I don’t think God would oblige you to remain in that situation. There’s clearly a power issue in this marriage and there’s no place for that in a Christian marriage. There is at least some abuse going on in your home and that’s done a lot of damage to you and you don’t have to stay with that, you shouldn’t be feelings scared in your own home. There’s no place for control, you should be equal”. I left with his support and I stayed separated from him with the senior minister’s support.*

- God is merciful and loving and would support a partner leaving their abusive relationship.

*It sounds outrageous, but [leaving] hadn’t been a viable option. Mum had been making these suggestions and had made a plan and was like, “Call the police if you need.” And I’m saying, “Oh, I don’t think we need to call the police. It’s not that bad”, it’s not whatever. But when [my minister] said it, it was probably that it was someone outside of my family and it was someone who, after talking for 30 minutes, could say “no, this isn’t okay, this is all bad and you need out”. And then also, I think possibly that the spiritual kind of input, in that he was saying this is okay, God sees, and this is perfectly acceptable. I was like, that makes perfect sense*

- God doesn’t want vulnerable people to suffer

*It’s hard, because the stuff [in my spiritual life] that helped me also helped me stay [with my husband]. So I see it in a different light now, so like – it was interesting, this is what made me realise I could separate and remember, I didn’t intend to leave. I asked him to leave and it’s only then because he called the pastor and then the pastor, I spoke to him and the pastor encouraged me to leave ... But there was a growing sense in me that year, last year, of like there’s actually a lot of sin in my family and what had gotten me through everything was like I was suffering for Christ ... Suddenly this year I had this growing sense, on my own, reading, that wasn’t suffering for Christ at all, I was suffering for someone else’s sin ...*

Participants commented that Christian teachings about marriage and gender need to be communicated in ways that actively addresses the potential for and the reality of abuse in intimate relationships. Participants stated that it needs to be clearly and consistently affirmed that:

- “God does not require you to live in a relationship that is physically, emotionally, psychologically damaging for you”.
- “There is a really, really, really clear distinction between ... a marriage that God intends and ... a marriage that you do not have to stay in. ... God’s character is one of compassion and love, and he does not want to see you crumbling and hurting every day and he does not say that it’s a sin to walk away”.
- “Women aren’t an extension of their husbands ... they are human beings in their own right. They’re not objects, women are not objects”.

**When churches acknowledge that domestic violence happens it can help victims.** Giving visibility to the reality of intimate partner violence and acknowledgement of abusive relationships in church communities can support people living in situations of intimate partner violence.

**Churches who have built awareness of domestic violence are more able to respond when victims are ready.** People in abusive relationships can be better equipped to seize key moments for change if they know where to access to a scaffold of multi-faceted support.

### 7.2.3 The role of the church: ongoing trusted and caring relationships

At its best the church community can provide a vital set of relationships, independent of the perpetrator, that can sustain victim-survivors across the trajectory of their experience.

**Dynamics of church relationships can inhibit disclosure.** Some participants spoke of reasons for not disclosing or remaining hidden, including a fear of not being believed by the church community, a lack of confidence or the threats associated with being exposed.

*I was trying to hide everything from them ... I feel like domestic violence survivors would make amazing spies, because we are so good at flying under the radar, at staying hidden, at ... I’m a terrible liar but I’m very good at being dishonest by omission. And that’s something I’ve had to really face about myself ... in that space it was this odd sort of mix of the default was to remain hidden. The terror was exposure, in terms of the threat to make my name mud at church.*

Some also described the stark contrast between the ‘public face’ of their abuser in the context of the church community and what was happening in private.

*[My ex-husband] he presented a very charming face at church and it would switch off literally as soon as we walked in the door at home ... I don’t think it was people’s natural tendency to assume that he’d been doing anything wrong at home. In fact, I’ve had a couple of people tell me, “oh I just thought you were being unreasonable”.*

*I was trapped in a cycle of someone who was very charming in public and then in private was just a nightmare to live with...Everyone else was saying, "What a wonderful [person] he was", and I just thought, "What a rotten husband and father he is".*

**Trusted relationships in churches reduce isolation for victims.** While a person remains within the context of an abusive relationship, church relationships characterised by care and trust can reduce social isolation and provide support for people living in situations of IPV.

Trusted relationships within church communities support people to make choices and act on them by enabling meaningful, ongoing support and disclosures at key moments.

*It was my Bible study leader and then the Bible study of really beautiful, supportive women that I found myself in who just constantly built me up and kept saying to me that this is not something that you should have to deal with, and God doesn't think of you this way, he thinks of you this way. Just pointing me back to those truths that I needed to hear.*

**Specialist domestic violence services and health professionals have a central role.** Specialist domestic violence support services and health professionals – sometimes in conjunction with church – play a central role in helping participants find safety and improve their overall well-being.

*The parenting line people that I talked to; they were very helpful but one particular guy I was saying basically – this was towards when I was at the end of my tether. [I said] He stopped me from seeing my friends. He has hit me a couple of times, he's done this, he's done this and the guy on the other end said to me, "you know these are just really controlling abusive behaviours?" I went, oh. Well because I had said to this guy, "I just want to know what I can do to make it stop, to make it better".*

*He said, "you're not going to be able to" and gave me the numbers for Relationships Australia and Centacare. I ended up ringing Centacare and getting into one of their self-help groups and never looked back, really.*

## 7.2.4 The role of church: ongoing support to rebuild and recover life

In this study, at the time of their interview, all participants had physically separated from their abusive partners. As participants shared their stories, it emerged that however a separation came about and wherever it is up to, the impact of trauma continues. The church has a role in rebuilding and recovering life after people have physically separated from their abusive partners. Analysis revealed that church can play a role in fulfilling the following needs after separation.

**To be safe:** The church can be a place of safety and healing after separation. In cases where both partners have been part of a church community, there is no single solution about who remains connected. If a perpetrator remains in the community, the church needs to be equipped to hold the abuser to account and to keep the abused partner (and other people) safe.

*I remember [a minister's] wife saying to me the most important thing is to preserve his ministry, ... I was like, no, it's not, it's not the most important thing at all. That's not more important than me and me being safe ... Those things come first before any of that. I didn't say anything like that to her at the time, I was just so shocked and didn't even know how to respond ... the [ministry staff]. I wish that they'd all been a bit more educated. I think they tried to be really supportive and again, that was really hit and miss. Sometimes they did and said helpful things and other times they did a lot more harm ... The [ministry wives], yeah, really hit and miss as well. I remember one of them saying, "oh we all go through rough patches". No, abuse isn't a rough patch, it's not. It's intolerable and it shouldn't be played down as an ebb and flow or an up and down in a marriage, it's just not acceptable. I remember [a minister's] wife saying, "oh would you consider having him home?" I just about had a panic attack. She asked me at [an event] with [a lot of] people around us. No, actually, the thought terrifies me of having him home again.*

**To be materially provided for:** After separation victim-survivors may need material support including individualised support services and day-to-day help with finances, food, housing and accessing specialist domestic violence support services such as counselling and legal aid.

*I just really hope that [the study] changes things in the future that maybe someone else will be helped and maybe if someone comes to a clergy they don't just say, "We'll pray with him once a week and that will change everything". Because I think in the situation you actually just need really practical help, down to earth people who just say, "Here's \$100, get on a (train) and go".*

*I'd never lived on my own, I'd never owned a car, I'd never ... I had, I'd done all those things, but in my head I hadn't ... What would have been super useful is if they'd said here's a voucher. I had \$700, which I'd managed to scrimp. I was lucky that I found a social housing place that enabled me, because I was a DV survivor ... Just practical help, you know...there were times in those first few months ...I had to use food vouchers ... just practical help, like, you know, no one asked me, and I certainly was not in the headspace ... But being asked would have made all the difference.*

**To be in relationships of care, empathy and acceptance:** After separation connections and relationships inside church characterised by empathy, care and trust were essential for a participant's well-being after separation.

*[My female minister] was so helpful. And we prayed quite regularly...she gave me a whole stack of literature on forgiveness, not only forgiveness of the other party, she said, to be honest, I know you want to basically kill him. But you can't. And you mustn't. And here's a little, basically, guidebook to help you manage those emotions and get past that. And she said, once you've actually started to forgive them, then you're going to have to start on the really hard stuff, which is to forgive yourself...You've already donated way too much time and way too much of your life to that particular man, and that situation now, you need to do so some hard yards. But you are going to come through the other end.*



**To have their own identity:** From our analysis we established that after separation churches can support victim-survivors as they re-establish their own identity by (1) not identifying the victim-survivor by their experience or marriage status; (2) allowing victim-survivor space and time to re-establish her self-identity. Some participants moved in order to have a fresh start free from the threat of an ex-partner controlling the narrative about who they were.

Some participants described how they felt “dumb”, “crazy”, “a freak” or “stupid” for being involved in an abusive relationship and no longer wished to be defined by it. A few participants recounted how they felt judged in their church communities by their marital status or appearance after separation.

*So, separating ... and it leading to divorce, as a Christian, I lost so many friends. I was really harshly judged by the church ... I had protected my husband, because you think that's what you should do, by not telling the full picture to anyone. Nobody knew. People knew little bits and pieces according to where they were in my life ... You present this kind of, you know, we're okay, we're happy. But living through one divorce in the church, where people harshly judged you ... what kind of a Christian is she?*

One participant described how not being able to establish her own identity has become a type of abuse - a continuation of the cycle of her abusive relationship.

*I think I'm kind of just resigning myself to the fact that I think I'm going to have to live with this abuse for the rest of my life. I'm just going to have to live with it, because I can't do anything to change it and I'll always be seen a certain way and I'll always be treated from the way these people see me. Yeah. And so [ex-partner] is still abusing me by taking my identity and continuing to take my identity and having me isolated and that sort of stuff is a continuous thing. And it's such a great loss to me. That's kind of like my deepest pain.*

**To make a contribution:** To make a contribution – to be offering, helping to produce or achieve something – was frequently a significant need for participants after separation. Many participants spoke about how they used their own experiences of IPV to support other victim-survivors. A key aspect of this was talking about their own experiences.

*I talk about [my experience of IPV] a lot. I talk about it a lot at appropriate times, I don't go into Woolworths and say, excuse me, would you like to hear? But I do talk about it when I have the opportunity because it's such a subject that's so hidden that I would like to be able to model talking about it. ...there's often been a point where I've been able to say, oh yeah, my husband kicked me out of home, my kids were [young], that was a really hard time. I want to say I'm not afraid to talk about this.*

Several participants were now active in supporting others through experiences of domestic violence and in raising awareness, both through formal church organisations and informal relationships. After separation, many participants went on to make significant contributions to the church through lay and ordained ministry. Other participants found purpose, meaning and belonging when they joined new church communities after separation.

*I only intended to go a couple of times. And I kept going. I really found that I guess [the minister] is probably one in a thousand. So, I am involved there ... I am involved actually in quite a lot of ways at the moment and have increasingly. We have a ... service booklet that I do the work on that ... I'm on the reading roster ... I've been on a committee ... And [my minister] asked me to go [on council] for next year so there you go.*

**To have a spiritual life, relationship with God:** Our analysis showed that, after separation, church was a place that facilitated transcendent experiences and healing for some participants, where they could grow in their understanding of and connection with God through and beyond their experiences of abuse. Key people in church, especially clergy, were central in this journey. One participant recounted the importance of the connection she has built with the minister in her new parish and how to her surprise, being part of worship was healing for her.

*Now that I'm in an Anglo-Catholic parish...I actually do see worship is a place of healing. It is. You come there and you cannot do it by yourself. You just don't have the heart or the will. I find healing is taking place through worship of which I'm a tiny bit but there. And that may not be for everyone. I don't know. All I know is, it is for me and I'm a dyed-in-the-wool evangelical.*

Another participant, who was baptised into a community which she sought out during her abusive relationship, said how much life had changed since she was baptized.

*What I have experienced is from the day of my baptism, my life has changed drastically. From the day of my baptism, everything had changed so drastically and I feel like that's God telling me that I have planned for you and you should be faithful in me ... my life has changed and it changed in a good way and every day is a grateful day for me.*

However, often when participants were not adequately supported by their church community during their experiences of IPV their involvement with church remains fraught.

*I think for a very, very long time I was very angry with God particularly I felt that I wasn't nurtured. Basically, I just felt like I was sort of left to hang out and dry, whereas [my ex-partner] was taken in by all the men at the church and, "Oh poor you, your wife suddenly left you, you had no idea that was happening ... It's just a shame that men like that don't come with a warning ... it did take me a long time to sort of even go back to church ... I'm connected but I'm a fringe dweller.*

Several participants from more conservative religious backgrounds remarked they had greater empathy for others who were on the margins of the church. For example, they had moved away from "legalistic" views about same-sex relationships.

*I just really hope that I can draw people to Jesus despite all this. I'm certainly not the poster child. But neither was Esther, neither was Rahab, neither was David, neither was Noah. I think there is still too much in the church of – regardless of what the Bible says and the people in the Bible that are – absolutely stuffed up their lives, but tried to follow God, the church is still so – you present as this*



*character, of this marriage, as these relationships. And you feel like you don't fit in. And God has brought a lot of gay people into my life in the last couple of years ... I know they feel similarly, completely on the outer of the church. And whether or not God would condone their lifestyle or – he says to come exactly as you are, and the church needs to love people exactly as they are and let God deal with the other stuff.*

Many participants shared how their faith had sustained them through their abuse. Some expressed a sense of continued assurance and security in their faith throughout their experiences. Others conveyed how they had wrestled or struggled with their faith.

A number of participants talked about how clergy or others in their church who they looked to for spiritual guidance helped them to transcend their experience of abuse through forgiveness. This was very different from entrapment in a dynamic of ongoing abuse and forgiveness while living with an abusive partner. It was about being freed from the abuse and being able to move on.

In summary, the influence of church leaders and the whole church community relates to how they:

- present and reinforce religious teachings,
- create a culture of general awareness and readiness to respond when abusive relationships are present in a church context,
- provide ongoing trusted and caring relationships across the full trajectory of a person's experience.
- offer various types of support to help those with an experience of violence to meet their needs for safety, material security, relationship, spirituality and identity; including referral to specialist domestic violence support services and health professionals.

## 7.3 Participant recommendations for the Anglican Church

Participants were invited to share insights from their experience of abusive relationships. From this material, their recommendations for Anglican church communities and for church leaders have been summarised below.

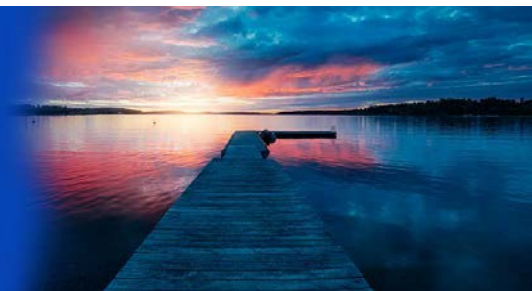
### 7.3.1 Participant recommendations for church communities

- Acknowledge it happens. The hidden nature of IPV in churches adds to shame and disconnection.
- Have visible IPV resources in church. These help to educate the community of the signs of abuse and let victim-survivors know how and where to get support.
- Use many different methods to inform and empower, including: sermons, seminars, pre-marriage preparation courses and direct conversations.
- Do not allow discomfort to deter from raising the issue.
- Be alert, aware of the signs and ask questions about needs on a regular basis. Provide safe spaces.
- Keep connections in place.
- Address self-doubt: have key trusted people to affirm their sense of reality.
- Know about processes and support service options for key moments.
- Don't make assumptions about what help is needed in individual circumstances. Ask questions in key moments of crisis about what support and resources victim-survivors require.

### 7.3.2 Participant recommendations for church leaders

- Provide IPV training for clergy, lay leaders and congregations.
- Ensure that professional standards and regular reviews for clergy include an IPV dimension.
- Provide pastoral workers to work with perpetrators and address their behaviours.
- Ensure that all processes and procedures are informed by victim-survivor input.
- Develop a scaffold of key people and services where leaders and congregation members can obtain information about how to offer assistance in situations of crisis (including IPV).
- Develop and make widely available easy to access pamphlets and booklets on IPV in a Christian context.
- Offer Christian teaching on marriage and gender that addresses the potential for and the reality of abuse in intimate relationships.

# 8 Conclusion



This research report gives an overview of results from the three studies which comprise the National Anglican Family Violence Project.

- NAFVP Prevalence Study: How prevalent is intimate partner violence among Australians who identify as Anglican?
- NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study: What are the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding intimate partner violence among Anglican clergy and lay leaders?
- NAFVP Experience Study: What is the nature of experiences of intimate partner violence for those with a connection with Anglican churches?

The NAFVP Prevalence Study has confirmed that intimate partner violence is a significant and widespread issue. Results from this study conducted in December 2019 indicated that for those who identify as Anglican, prevalence of domestic violence is either at the same level or higher than in the wider Australian community. The prevalence of intimate partner violence among both frequent and non-frequent Anglican church attenders underlines once again that this is a matter that cannot be avoided in ministry.

This research confirms that experiences of intimate partner violence are linked to gender. Both women and men were included as respondents - unlike other studies which only focus on violence against women. However, in all analyses conducted, we found clear differences in the experiences and responses of women and men. Women are much more likely to be victim-survivors of intimate partner violence.

The Prevalence Study results, supported by additional findings from the Experience Study survey, found that most Anglican victims of domestic violence do not seek help from Anglican churches. The small group who did seek help most commonly approached clergy and most reported that it either positively changed their situation, or helped them to feel supported.

The results of the Clergy and Lay Leader Study indicated that Anglican clergy and laity had a perception (or hope) that those who gather as part of the faith community are less likely to have experienced intimate partner violence. However, this was not the experience of the Anglican samples who took part in the Prevalence Study, who reported experiencing IPV at similar levels as the general public sample. The fact that most clergy reported having dealt with domestic violence situations also confirms the importance of the focus of the Anglican Church of Australia on having up-to-date policy and practices.

The Anglican clergy who took part in the NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study demonstrated a strong foundation of knowledge about the multi-faceted and gendered nature of domestic violence. There was sensitivity to a wide array of factors that might contribute to the use of domestic violence against a partner, including the misuse of Scripture by abusers in Christian families. They also indicated high levels of commitment to engaging it within the context of church life.

However, Anglican churches face a challenge presented by the gap between good intention and action. There was widespread agreement that churches should raise awareness of domestic violence. Yet, other than praying for victims of domestic violence, less than half of all churches had taken any actions to raise awareness. At the same time, most Anglican clergy had dealt with specific domestic violence situations as part of their ministry, most commonly providing pastoral and spiritual care to the victim, and referring the victim to support services. Most clergy recounted ongoing negative personal impact from this ministry.

On the whole, clergy reported being knowledgeable, experienced and trained in domestic violence situations. However, confidence in their personal capacity to respond to domestic violence was low to moderate. Confidence was only a little higher among clergy who had been trained. While only a minority of clergy felt very familiar with support services, around three-quarters felt they were somewhat familiar.

More than six in ten clergy had received training and familiarity with resources (e.g., documents, training, support) from the diocese was moderate. Ratings of diocesan support for churches to respond to domestic violence was fairly evenly spread from excellent support to very poor support.

The NAFVP Experience Study involved a survey and in-depth interviews with people who have experienced violence from an intimate partner and who have, or had, a connection to the Anglican Church. With great courage, they shared both positive and negative experiences of the church and their insights are critical to achieving the aims of this project.

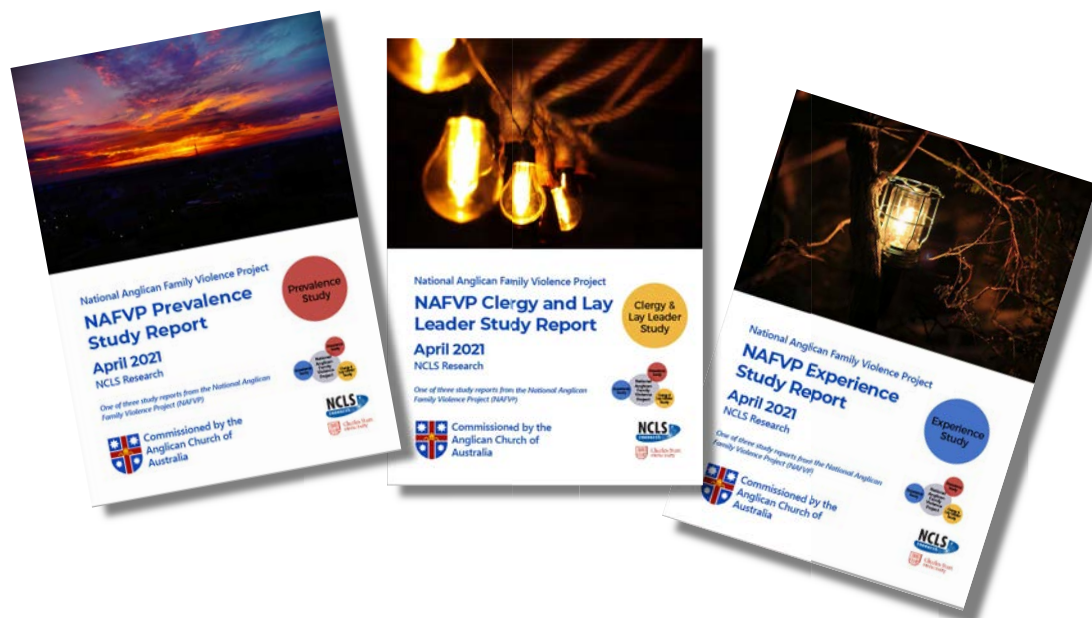
When people in abusive relationships are part of church communities, the research findings suggest that it is common for churches to play a dynamic and varied part. The influence of church leaders and the whole church community relates to how they present and reinforce religious teachings. Some teachings can either unintentionally amplify situations of domestic violence – whether taught by church leaders, internalised by victim-survivors, or co-opted by abusers. Conversely, Christian teachings, particularly from clergy, can empower victim-survivors to extricate themselves from abusive relationships. Churches who have built awareness of domestic violence are more able to respond when victims are ready.

At its best the church community can provide a vital set of ongoing trusted and caring relationships, independent of the perpetrator, that can sustain victim-survivors. When genuine trusted relationships exist, they reduce isolation and provide support to make choices and act at key moments. Specialist domestic violence support services and health professionals – sometimes in conjunction with church - play a central role in helping participants find safety and improve their overall well-being.

The church can play a role of ongoing support to rebuild and recover life, paying attention to diverse needs including: to be safe, to be materially provided for, to be in relationships of care, empathy and acceptance, to have an identity, to make a contribution and to have a spiritual life and relationship with God.

Full results from across this project are presented in detailed reports for each study:

- NAFVP Prevalence Study Report,
- NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leaders Study Report, and
- NAFVP Experience Study Report.



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NB: Full reference lists for each of the studies are in the Study Reports.

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## **Photos**

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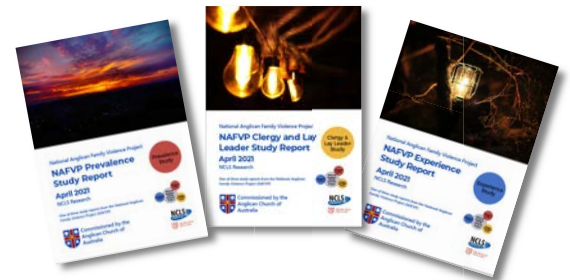




This report provides an overview of results from three studies that make up the National Anglican Family Violence Project (NAFVP), undertaken between 2019 and early 2021. The aim of this research project is to investigate the nature and prevalence of intimate partner violence among those with a connection to the Anglican Church of Australia.

Full results from across this project are presented in detailed reports for each study:

- NAFVP Prevalence Study Report,
- NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leaders Study Report, and
- NAFVP Experience Study Report.



# National Anglican Family Violence Project



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