

THE PASTORS WORDS

**AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY PERSPECTIVES
& PRACTICES REGARDING PARTNER VIOLENCE**



**RESEARCH REPORT
SEPTEMBER
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*Jacqueline Dyer, MSW, LICSW
Ph. D. Candidate*

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by Jacqueline Dyer

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Jacqueline Dyer

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Executive Summary

Overview

This report provides information from a study designed to explore the perspectives regarding, and approaches to addressing, intimate partner violence (IPV) of African American clergy. The purpose of this report is to make public and accessible the knowledge and work of clergy regarding partner violence in their churches. Non-clergy community mental health service providers (referred to hereafter as “community providers”) may not always value the work done in churches and by clergy because of philosophical differences and other possible concerns. However, when searching the literature for information on the perspectives and approaches of specifically African American clergy about partner violence, very little information was found. As a result of the lack of information about clergy perspectives and practices, some of the differences believed to exist may be based upon assumptions rather than fact. This study found that though clergy are operating from a distinctly theological perspective, many of their approaches to partner violence parallel sound clinical practices. Increasing factual information related to what may occur in churches related to addressing IPV will in turn provide better understanding of and respect for the kinds of partnerships that can be developed between African American churches and community providers. This will in turn benefit IPV victims in Protestant Christian churches.

The Centers for Disease Prevention and Control consider IPV a preventable health problem. Yet it persists in our communities, exacerbated by a variety of social ills, including poverty. Many of the factors that increase the risk for domestic violence are disproportionately present in African American communities. The African American church has played and continues to play a central role in the community, by providing support and access to services beyond its religious mandates. As such, the church is a vital natural resource to address partner violence within African American communities.

The research questions to be answered by this investigation were: a) How do the clergy define IPV; b) What are their perspectives about what is going on for the couples experiencing IPV; c) What is the role of religion for the couples; d) What are clergy viewpoints about the issues that contribute to IPV; and e) How do they address or intervene to counter partner violence in their clerical practice? The specific interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

This study is not intended to exhaustively explore clergy perspectives and approaches to IPV. Rather, it presents the perspectives of eight African American clergy in the broader northeast portion of the United States. It begins to shed light on the matter of partner violence as viewed by these ministers. The information generated may stimulate the kinds of discussions among clergy, and between clergy and community providers that may be helpful toward developing interventions that both aligns effectively with the Protestant Christian faith and counters IPV. The document is designed so that the different topics of interest can be easily accessed via the table of contents.

Findings

Pastoral counseling training and training concerns

The training of the ministers varied from experience with one course to having Master’s level mental health degrees. In discussing how their clergy training prepared them to address mental health concerns, the ministers expressed a range of responses from being satisfied to being

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dissatisfied. While some of the clergy felt their training was adequate for them to handle the issues raised in their churches, others felt more training was needed, especially for lead pastors.

Clergy perspectives regarding IPV: A theology for IPV

The views of the clergy participants generated what could be called a theology for addressing intimate partner violence. The topics discussed included the dynamics of the couple, serial adultery as an expanded definition of partner violence, separation and divorce, and emphasized loving yet firm accountability. The ministers also spoke about the ambiguity generated within church culture about addressing partner violence.

Secular roots of IPV—individual & societal

The participants identified root factors of partner violence that they had observed via their practice as clergy. The information generated here is also found in the literature that discusses risk factors for IPV. Factors identified include communication problems, self-esteem, male aggression, financial stress, substance abuse and community violence.

Counseling practices

The counseling practices of the ministers were parallel to best clinical practices. Generally the couples initiate contact. Then, needs assessments may be developed. Case management provided, counseling as needed would be provided in-house by the pastor or counseling structures in the church, or via referral to community agencies. Two notable differences stemming from faith practices were that clergy often counseled couples conjointly and included prayer in their meetings.

IPV and the pulpit

Three ministers would speak about IPV directly from the pulpit and two believe it can be addressed directly, indirectly or via other ‘pulpit-but-not-sermon’ moments. Three believed that afflicted couples might feel their confidentiality was being violated in some way by the public comments. Their concern about the impact of public commentary parallels the clinical concept of therapeutic alliance. However, while their sensitivity is notable, it could be perceived by members of the congregation as not supporting to victims or as being unwilling to deal with partner violence.

The leading of the Holy Spirit

Three ministers identified the leading of the Holy Spirit as being the greatest influence in when and how a minister addresses any given topic from the pulpit. One described this process and indicated that ministers are not prevented from planning their sermon topics. Rather, the influence of the Holy Spirit prompts the sermon and generates an alignment of the issues to be preached with the Word.

IPV and the African American church culture

Five clergy contributed to better understanding of African American church culture as related to partner violence. Several stated the theological perspective that the church is separate from the “world.” If partner violence is seen as “worldly,” then there would be collective secrecy and silence about it in church. Ministers also noted the tendency of individuals to keep things secret to maintaining good appearances.

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Clergy / church ambivalence

The theme of secrets recurred as possibly contributing to the church's ambivalence regarding 'if' and 'how' partner violence is addressed. Another issue that surfaced was the concern that leadership personally affected by IPV, especially if they are the perpetrators, cannot effectively attempt to deal with partner violence.

Church influence and issues that may confound its impact

Six ministers in some way spoke about the power of the clergy and the church. Several noted that poor leadership may limit better use of 'in-house' church resources. A tandem issue that emerged was the concern of church leaders that resources outside of the church introduced philosophies counter to church beliefs which decreased their trust in those resources.

Seeds for transformation

In addition to the concerns noted above, the clergy also identified areas where change could begin. One focal point for change is that of calling church leadership to the task of breaking church silence regarding partner violence. Another issue was that of developing partnerships and collaborations that may increase access to resources and training.

Issues related to IPV that also concerned clergy

The ministers discussed their concerns about ways in which children are impacted by the family dissolution, or who may themselves become perpetrators of violence in their teen dating relationships. Several also talked about wanting to address the issues associated with blended and common-law families and those with immigrant partners. One minister noted that homosexual church couples are requesting support regarding partner violence, and emphasized safety before theology.

Research interests

All of the ministers were asked what kind of research they would like to see occur within the African American community to impact the lives of its members positively in regards to partner violence. They discussed wanting to see research into the causes of IPV and also into issues affecting non-documented victims of IPV in the church, and wanting a better profile of healthy religious families. Regarding faith-based outreach, one clergy discussed research into building more effective partnerships. Moreover, there was an interest in research regarding change strategies in relation to IPV that focused upon church culture.

Conclusion and use of the report

For clergy, the information in the "Clergy perspectives..." and in the "Counseling practices" sections can serve as a reference guide for clergy by identifying some effective steps that align theologically to address IPV in ways that support the victim and hold the perpetrator accountable. African American clergy can access almost clinical, faith-centered approaches to addressing IPV in their church, as well as content that can inform sermons on IPV. Secular providers get information that dispels possible assumptions about regarding work on partner violence occurring in African American churches. This may promote and inform the approach to churches of some providers, because African American churches may already be working on an issue of mutual concern using similar pre-existing strategies. Through community providers churches may be able to access resources and training beyond basic counseling outreach services to address IPV in their churches.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide information from a qualitative study developed to understand the perspectives of Protestant Christian African American clergy as well as their responses to intimate partner violence (IPV). Some of the practices in their churches are compatible with best clinical practices for mental health counseling, such as starting where the client is and triaging the concerns for intervention. Many religious individuals seek help for issues of domestic violence primarily or only from their pastors (Taylor et al., 2000). Increased understanding of the strategies used by clergy regarding partner violence will in turn increase the opportunity to build effective community partnerships to the benefit of the couple needing intervention. This report is designed to be a reference tool, and is structured to facilitate easy access to information via its table of contents. The data is presented categories that may retain some conversational overlap of content. Within these pages, the reader will find both the knowledge and expertise currently present within a portion of the African American clergy community, as well as their challenge to their colleagues to provide the leadership necessary to sustain victory against IPV in their congregations. As one minister said, “*we know the problems exist and we know what are the consequences.*” The call is to break the silence and not fall back from responsibility to fight against partner violence in the African American Christian community.

Violence against women in America

The Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) identifies intimate partner violence (IPV) as a public health problem that is preventable (CDC, 2006). IPV can be defined as “one person’s abusive use of power to control another” (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006, p. 282). The behaviors may include punching, slapping, kicking, throwing things at another person, burning, stabbing, rape, isolation, psychological terror, and destruction of personal property (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006; CDC, 2006; Moore, 1999). Women significantly report being victims of partner violence more often than do men over the course of their lives, (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). There is a high correlation between the presence of IPV and financial stress in couples, more often found in connection to unemployment or underemployment in men than in women (Ellison et al., 1999). IPV is also more prevalent in communities where social inequities are present, such as poverty and poverty-linked issues like inadequate housing, poor education and substance abuse (Jalata, 2002; Jordan, 2005; Utsey et al., 2008). All of these risk factors are present in higher instances within communities of color due to the impact of racism. African Americans consistently report higher rates of male-to-female violence than Latinos and Caucasians (DOJ, 2007; Ellison et al., 1999; Field & Caetano, 2005; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

Help-seeking in African American churches

African Americans have notably higher levels of religious involvement than other groups (Chatters & Taylor, 2003; Jang & Johnson, 2004; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). African Americans seem to prefer faith-based organizations to address mental health issues (Brown, 2004; Wuthnow et al., 2004). African Americans are also more likely to primarily seek clergy assistance than are Caucasians (Brown, 2004; Taylor et al., 2000). Within their churches, African American clergy shape programs and connections to community agencies; perform the role of change agents for health-related behavior and social interaction; and provide access to community mental health services for many of their congregants (Chang et al., 1994; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Taylor et al., 2000).

Methodology

This qualitative study used a single semi-structured interview, with one follow-up meeting to review accuracy of transcription and to clarify points if needed. The time of the interview varied from approximately forty-five to ninety minutes. The sample of 8 clergy was developed through a “convenience” and “snowball” sampling process, wherein people in the acquaintance of this researcher were asked if they would participate and also if they knew of or could recommend anyone else who would sit for an interview. A conventional content analysis was used to create a description of categories and issues presented in the interviews. The categories were then refined with titles that were suggested by the comments.

Results

This research demonstrates that African American clergy are concerned with the support and maintenance of healthy marriages. Their concern seemed to motivate them to speak frankly about the issue of IPV in the African American church with an eye towards exposing what could be a festering wound, so that positive change can occur. The clergy a) have consistent ways of understanding the roots of partner violence; b) are knowledgeable about how African American church culture contributes to and mitigates partner violence; c) present perspectives and approaches to addressing IPV in their churches that may challenge conventional assumptions about what happens in African American churches and d) provides information about interventions that might be encountered by a victim of IPV in the African American church. Their theological formulations about what is transpiring with the couple both fit and diverge from clinical best practices.

Implications of this study

There are ways in which practice in the religious and social work fields generate divergent and sometimes conflicting agendas. We need to explore how to partner with the African American Protestant Christian community in ways that target the harmful issues without hurting the spiritual, and thus mental, health of the individual. This investigation adds new information to the available knowledge about clergy attitudes towards partner violence and does so through the voices of the clergy. It also highlights where African American clergy and community providers already have allied ways of thinking about and approaching IPV, and where they diverge, for developing outreach activities more conversant with existing church efforts when developing new church-agency collaborations.

Questions asked

The interview questions were designed to explore five research questions: a) How do the clergy define IPV; b) What are their perspectives about what is going on for the couples experiencing IPV; c) What is the role of religion for the couples; d) What are clergy viewpoints about the issues that contribute to IPV; and e) How do they address or intervene to counter partner violence in their clerical practice? Aside from some basic demographic oriented question, open-ended and also impromptu probing questions were asked. The significance of this study is that the interpretation of the information is not generated independently of clergy but directly from them. Though all the participants were asked the same set of questions, some clergy might have focused on or spoken at length about one part of a question and not another and so there is missing or minimal data for some of the participants regarding some of the questions. In some cases, the information from the

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different clergy fit together like the pieces of a puzzle, where each contributed to a greater understanding of the categories of information being discussed.

Responses from clergy

Presented below are the categories of information the participants discussed and are listed in the order they will be discussed in this report.. The clergy were also asked to identify topics of preference for future research that they believed would be helpful to the African American Christian community.

- demographics and denominations
- pastoral counseling training and training concerns
- prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the participants' churches
- theological perspectives regarding IPV
 - couple dynamics
 - adultery as partner violence
 - separation and divorce
- secular roots of IPV--individual, community
- counseling practices
 - accessing the support
 - triage and interventions
- IPV and the pulpit
 - addressing it directly, indirectly or mixing messages
- frequency of messages and leading of the Holy Spirit
- IPV and the African American church culture
 - clergy and church ambivalence
- homosexual IPV
- interventions
 - assessment
 - theological and general counseling perspectives
 - referrals
 - addressing from pulpit (sermons or other commentary)
- clergy power / influence
- clergy limitations
- partnering with community providers
- youth, undocumented immigrants, homosexual couples
- research interests

Study limitations

This study did not formally explore the ways in which the individual backgrounds and educational experiences of the clergy may have contributed to their perspectives and practices. It is possible that clergy perspectives and approaches may vary by region of the United States. The information generated may also be impacted by a shift in the gender balance of the participating clergy. Additionally, participants reflect predominantly those who are actively addressing this issue, because others who prefer to not acknowledge IPV in their churches could have opted out of participating in this study. Lastly, though the study was structured to generate honest responses, it is possible that the results presented reflect some responder bias.

Demographics and denomination information

Table 1 (a)

Region: Northeast USA	A	B	C	D
gender	Male	Male	male	male
pastor position	associate/asst	Senior	senior	senior
# years as a pastor	15	14	10	25
# churches pastored	1	2	1	1
# years--this church	15	8	10	25
denomination	Full Gospel Church of God (pentecostal)	Seventh Day Adventist	Baptist	Baptist
denomination intensity	conservative	conservative	moderate	liberal
church intensity	Moderate	conservative	moderate	moderate
church size--general	Large	Small	small	large
church size--approx #	5500-6000	100	30-60	2500
pastor ethnicity	West Indian, Black (Trin & Tob)	Haitian	Black man (Haitian)	African American male
% church Black / African diaspora	85	100	100	97

Table 1 (a & b) shows the descriptive demographic and denomination information for the clergy-participants; all the information provided is per self-definition of the eight participants, identified by A through H alphabetically in no relation to order of interview.

Demographics and denomination information

Table 1 (b)

Region: Northeast USA	E	F	G	H
gender	Female	Female	male	male
pastor position	Senior	Senior	senior	associate/asst
# years as a pastor	2.5	10	16	3
# churches pastored	2	3	2	1
# years--this church	2	1	12	3
denomination	AME (African Methodist Episcopal)	AME (African Methodist Episcopal)	Presbyterian	AME (African Methodist Episcopal)
denomination intensity	Moderate	liberal to moderate	conservative	moderate
church intensity	Moderate	liberal to moderate	moderate	mod to conservative
church size--general	Small	small	medium	medium
church size--approx #	69	60	300	325
pastor ethnicity	African American	African American	African American	Black male
% church Black / African diaspora	99	95	90%--no immigrants; 95% --full diaspora	97

Table 1 (a & b) shows the descriptive demographic and denomination information for the clergy-participants; all the information provided is per self-definition of the eight participants, identified by A through H alphabetically in no relation to order of interview.

Pastoral counseling training and training concerns

Two clergy had directly opposite opinions as to whether one course in pastoral counseling was adequate preparation to address the issues presented in their congregations. Two others, both of whom have professional mental health degrees, believed their training was adequate. The remaining three pastors felt that pastoral training missed components, or that a presiding minister should receive extensive mental health training.

The training that I received is able to help me to do what I'm doing. But if I was going to go up to the level where I'm going to be the senior pastor of a work, I'd definitely go further in my training. (Speaker emphases) Pastor A

Introducing me to an appropriate therapeutic counseling mode—teaching me about boundaries, giving me some exposure to some of the various ways that, ah, emotional health issues would present themselves, teaching more about knowing how to refer—[there was] nothing around sexual abuse, molestation, nothing around domestic violence, ah, nothing around intervention, ah, addictions—the recovery process. So, that's what was absent that would be critical to have, being a pastor, looking back. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor G

I feel like the pastor should know how to deal with those issues, and how to treat those people who are facing situations that they cannot figure out, and I think that's it. For me, to have a background in counseling psychology helps me to help my parishioners and to be much better in the relationship. ... And most of the time they—some religious leaders—they think that counseling means to pray with the person and to cast out whatever the person is dealing with, with prayer (sad laugh), and no it's not, it's not. Pastor B

It is possible these types of sentiments contributed to the unity in ideas generated for what would be an ideal training model for clergy to address the mental health concerns such as IPV that manifested in their congregations:

- Six clergy recommended direct academic study of more than only one course covering mental health issues, two of whom suggested senior pastor get an academic counseling degree
- Half of the participants would prefer that the academic process would include a required supervised clinical internship
- Three ministers would add discussion groups where case studies were discussed and speakers would present on different mental health (MH) issues
- Two suggested continuing education classes post-pastoral training
- One minister would include that clergy themselves get at least one year of counseling as part of training or early in their clergy practice, due to the potential for burnout that clergy can face in their vocations.

The following training topics reflect those which these ministers believe would contribute to better preparation of all clergy being trained to work effectively with their congregations and with issues that might arise:

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- Counseling and intervention techniques for such issues as molestation and sexual abuse
- Substance abuse
- Marital issues and conflict
- Domestic violence
- Children and adolescent issues
- Learning about the major MH diagnoses and symptoms such as depression or personality disorders in order to better recognize them
- Information for clergy to better understand and address the spiritual challenges of having MH issues for the individual and the family
- Overviews of theological frameworks for addressing MH issues
- Making referrals (types of issues, timing, connecting to different state and community agencies)
- Better understandings of boundaries
- Conflict resolution and mediation techniques
- Understanding liabilities and legal processes/language for court involved parishioners i.e. domestic violence laws
- Working in urban settings.

The clergy were not expecting to be trained to become professional counselors; in fact, there was a lot of discussion about partnering with community agencies. However, the clergy were concerned that the pastoral training of today's clergy should better prepare them for the breadth of issues that manifest in their congregations. This included making needed referrals in order for them to work more effectively with their congregants. These comments and similar, found in the "accountability" section, make a strong argument for enhancing the mental health training of clergy

I have seen ministers who have a background in social work or in counseling, and they, they do a better job with, with the church member, and with the community—even [if] they approach the youths, to this—to understand people. 'Cause when we see people, we don't know what is inside, and we have tendency to, to bring judgment on them because we—because we cannot do it any better than that. But if we have a background in those areas, I'm talking about social work or mental health counseling, I mean, we can do a better job. ... I told [theology faculty at a local college] that we need to have some workshops, some seminars to help clergy people, especially African American religious leaders, including myself; for them to know much better what they are doing, to be well equipped, in all the areas to make the church what the church is [supposed to be] all about, because some of them don't even know. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor B

So, I mean, the pastor has to get a good understanding. He has to get the training to say, 'well I don't know everything—I need help;' and by being [so trained], it's not going to tell him that, you know, 'you don't know anything.' ... Because all pastors' are not even, [and some] need to be trained on very sensitive issues. (Speaker emphases) Pastor C

My training took place [many] years ago, where a lot of the domestic violence problems in the church didn't even occur. So, I think the training for clergy today has to be as current as the problems that we face in the church. Pastor D

Prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the participants’ churches

The ministers identified the categories of issues they counseled to be inclusive of individual, couples and family and other general relationships, parent-child concerns, finances, employment, immigrant adjustments, various forms of abuse (i.e. physical, sexual, child, relational, emotional, substance), and spiritual direction. This information came from four of the participants, one of whom had this summary:

"Any ill that you, ill that you think a person might experience, pastors are asked about it or talked to about it or it's presented; and then you are expected to respond." Pastor F

Clergy were asked to talk about their experience with IPV since they had been clergy, whether their MH training was adequate preparation for the issues they have had to address, and what an ideal training for clergy would be. The range of experience of the clergy related to addressing IPV in their churches varied in the spectrum of experience, from “none” to “a lot.”

Table 2

Participant	Training	experience with IPV	Participant	training	experience with IPV
A	Pastoral	"I would say a lot"	E	human services related field & court systems exp	"none"
B	mental health field	some	F	pastoral	one couple
C	Pastoral	"not too many"	G	pastoral	several couples over a period of years
D	Pastoral	3-4 couples / incidents per year	H	human services related field & court system exp	7 or 8 cases over the years

Table 2 shows the training and “experience with IPV” information for the participants

Clergy perspectives regarding IPV: A theology for IPV

A majority of the clergy (five) articulated clear theological frameworks that they applied to IPV situations to help them with their decision-making process and their interaction with the individuals in the relationship. Their well-considered interpretations of biblical passages seemed both scholarly and conservative, and yet permitted an essential integration of the accountability, safety and faith needs of the afflicted couples with whom they worked. Beyond their general frame of being loving yet firm, the clergy discussed a kind of applied ‘theology of IPV’ which covered couple dynamics, expanding the definition of relational violence, separation and divorce, the role of religion for the couples and the roots of IPV.

And in some ways, both people are victims. Pastor D

It is that one is not called to stay in violence. And we should try to stop the violence while loving both persons and trying to be supportive and seeking help for both persons.

Pastor F

Again our goal is always to try to speak truth with love, call the people to reality, and then try to move them into a substantive licensed therapeutic context and position ourselves along side as spiritual support to hope we’re being pertinent. Pastor G

The ministers seemed to present a faith-based perspective of partner violence with the possible role of religion for the couple being a sub-category. Five ministers identify biblical passages that clarify the faith-position that partner violence is not acceptable behavior, and/or present their ideas regarding the role of religion in relation to partner violence. One minister stated that faith was a deterrent, especially if the individual held a leadership position in the church. A second minister said that violent couples compartmentalized their belief system; therefore religion or faith do not seem to be employed. The couple’s participation in religion or faith practice may be nominal, so a possible outcome may be that the salutary effects of faith are nullified. This researcher did not explore clergy opinion about, nor did clergy discuss, whether they thought the violence triggered compartmentalization or if some pre-existing compartmentalization facilitated the violence. As such, this matter of religious / faith dissociation may be a suitable subject matter for a future study.

A person becomes a Christian by accepting Christ as Lord—to live victoriously is another thing; as a bible believing Christian, a person who allows the Word of God to govern his life. His willingness to apply the Word of God to his life and to let the Word be the rule book that governs his life, the way he thinks, and what he does. Not everyone does this. If you love your wife like Christ loves the church, then abusiveness will not be a part of your marriage. How does Christ treat me as a part of the body? That’s what I need to look at. So I see the bible as The Law Book. If I obey the Law—Word of God—I am blessed with the peace of God. The peace gets rid of the violence. So, for the leader who abuses his wife, it disqualifies that person from leadership because it shows their level of immaturity. ... 1 Peter 3:7 is a great example of how a husband should treat his wife. Eph 5:22-31 is a passage that provides a good example of how both the husband and wife should treat each other. God believes in this ministry of reconciliation and He’s given us the ability to walk in reconciled relationships. This means we could live at peace. I can

decide to retaliate or live at peace because God has given us the tools. One of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control. Everything comes down to a decision. What are you going to do when we have disagreeable moment? What are we going to do when we have those moments? (Speaker emphases) Pastor A

[The men] forget that obedience is for both [in the relationship]. God has not given this authority to man to use violence, to treat his wife or his children with violence. And I feel like some folks—they have a misinterpretation of who God is. Because, if God is a God of love, I don't think that God will tell man to use violence to [so] treat his wife, because there is no such thing. God hates violence. ... And so you ask why does the man use violence? I feel that there is no spiritual integrity. God is not present. The Spirit of God is absent, and there is violence. And I feel that if the Spirit of God is not there, there is emptiness and the devil has a tendency to fill in the emptiness, and the result will be violence. ... Violence should not be an, eh, an instrument to resolve conflicts or problems in the relationship. ... And if you claim that you are a carrier of God, a carrier of Jesus, then violence cannot occur. For the simple reason that there is safety, there is peace, there is joy, there is happiness, with God, and there is love; love unconditionally. And if God is there, violence cannot live with God. Violence has to disappear. (Speaker emphases) Pastor B

There is a good passage in Philippians that [asks] are you ready to be a sacrifice, and are you're willing to be a good representative of Christ: "If I am being poured out as a drink offering, on the sacrifice and service of the faith, I am glad and rejoice, with you all," Philippians 2:17; and 2 Timothy 4:6 says that, "I am already being poured out as a drink offering." [Additionally,] Christians in general, are the light of the world, the salt of the world; so what kind of light or salt can you be, if you treat your partner, your spouse...your wife, as ah, object...you mistreat her. That's an important argument. Pastor C

I think the greater the emphasis we place on personal salvation and not corporate salvation or systemic evil—systemic sin—makes us then be quiet. It's their personal sin they need to get rid of, you know. The church should leave the couple [to deal with it]. But the more we look at sin as personal and systemic, or personal and community and systemic, then when sin is happening anywhere and affecting the body then we would speak to it. Pastor F

When I've talked about domestic violence [a passage I use] is Acts 12. It's where Peter is arrested and thrown in the bowels of a prison and the angel comes and shines a light and gives him some instructions. He obeys his instructions. The first level would be to throw his chains off; the second level would be to get the doors open, the third level is to be set free. And what I often try to say is that people are arrested by the phenomenon of physical abuse and they wake up and find themselves bound and imprisoned psychologically. And they literally want to get out, and they need oftentimes angels, individuals who are willing to come and to shine the light, to confront and help steer from the destructive hidden nature of where they are. Pastor G

Role of religion

I think the spiritual component is a plus, that allows people to deal more civilly with, ah, with the issues. I know some cases that would generate in violence, but...they know that it

would impact their leadership, so [it prevents] the violence from occurring. ... There is a good passage in Philippians that says that, you know, are you ready to be a sacrifice, and are you're willing to be a good representative of Christ. And that's, that's very profound. ... I think that an understanding of creation can bring a better understanding of how to treat someone dear, your wife, someone who shares the most intimate part of your life. ... Some translations [of 2 Corinthians 5:17] say we are a new creature, some say we are a new creation, 'the old has passed the new has come;' so I think that the, the Christian faith, has the power to transform the person. ... I think that being a Christian—it has an impact—has a positive impact, if he truly understands what it means to be a Christian. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor C

Whenever Christians are involved in a violent relationship, they've compartmentalized their Christianity versus their reality. So when they're discussing their problems, 'Jesus Christ' or 'faith' or 'religion' don't come into the equation at all. As a pastoral counselor, when you bring that before them, they then make reference to it, you know, the scriptures or a point that you're making. They're taken aback; it's as if, it is as if they have to change one mind set, put on another mind set to understand. When you're addressing, ah, violence or abuse, as a Christian minister, they will make no references to Jesus Christ, or spirituality at all until you bring it up. And when you bring it up, they usually have to make some kind of shift, like a mental shift to, ahm, accept scriptural references. No, they are often not able to reintegrate. (Soft speaker emphases) Pastor D

Couple dynamics

I think it's a façade. But I think it's a very religious façade. I'll be telling you everything is fine, but my wife is crying. My wife is afraid to tell you that she's crying. So Sunday morning, I'm sitting there preaching and all you've got to do is look in my—into the eyes of my wife to see if my wife is a happy woman. Pastor A

The women feel betrayed. Betrayed! Because, 'the person who should protect me—and he's the one who has committed violence.' And some folks they put fingers on the physical, but violence is not only physical, but by the way you talk to your wife—that's violence. ... The way they talk now is different than the way they used to.... Pastor B

They are partners, sexual partners; men, women who are partners in expenses, but they are not friends. I think that a man has to find a way to develop a relationship with his wife, to be friendly. And the woman should also find a way to develop a friendship with this man. 'Cause sometimes there is a sexual relationship there, but there can be—in order to prevent [violence] we have to develop some way to be friends...to treat a friend like a friend, not like a foe. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor C

But you'll see a woman either very verbal or just the opposite.... She'll be very open to talk about it—glad to talk about it finally to someone; or she'll be just the opposite. She'll be so devastated that she can't talk about it. And the man, if he's the abuser, usually he's on the defensive posture, or he's the dominant personality. He's not ashamed or afraid to display that image in the presence of church leadership. ... Usually the victim is the one who is looking for understanding from a biblical point of view. But the abuser themselves, finds it very difficult to even listen to spirituality or when they do it's because change is beginning

*to occur and, ah, therapy is taking place. (Speaker emphases)
Pastor D*

Older couples

Some folks sometimes, even if there is bad treatment in the relationship, sometimes they keep it like a secrecy. And nobody will know about it because they keep things secret. And, some folks that you see them in a relationship, what you see in the church is not what is in the house. ... But I notice that some folks who are in a relationship for a long period of time, it's not because the relationship is good. It's because they don't want anybody—nobody—they want nobody to involve [his or herself] with their private business and they keep things so secret, nobody will know. Pastor B

In the previous generation you don't see it as much, and if you did, they didn't talk about it. They won't bring it up. They won't air their family's dirty laundry. Pastor D

In this church someone has come and shared that her husband was emotionally abusive, verbally abusive, and in subsequent talks with her, there was an incident in their relationship—it's is an old married couple—of physical violence. ... [Members of the church said] never send anything to their house from the church because that adds to the dispute. That led to a subsequent—my discussion with her.... Pastor F

You find a lot of the quiet, on-going violence amongst people that are a little older, because they are older, they are not as ready to go out on their own and say, 'I'll start over,' you know, and so people just end up staying in those relationships. The relationships can be bad and then they fester, and one ends up abusing the other. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor H

Expanding the definition of relational violence

I advocate divorce for extensive infidelity and for partner violence. ... It's like dealing with a serious addiction. It's not just a decision for the person to stop, the person needs counseling. I consider it more emotional abuse. Once a person does that, he breaks the marriage covenant. Heb 13:4 says the marriage covenant is designed by God; and Mal 2:15-16 condemns violence. To recover from that, [the marriage covenant broken in this way], requires counseling; then as part of their recovery process, they should do their works over. They should get new rings and renew their vows. Pastor A

Well, there've been some cases where there's been physical abuse and emotional abuse along with adultery, and I've seen that happen over incidents. So one is strictly—one is just dominating another person in every possible way; and it's usually not just a matter of, 'this person struck me,' it's usually, 'this person struck me, this person yells and screams at me, this person tries to control my behavior, this person doesn't allow me freedom but this person takes freedom for themselves; this person has relationships outside of the home.' The issues are very, very complex. ... Although [adultery] happens more frequently now, it seems to be more devastating also, and more people are brought in to the family's problems. They're used to talking about it with more people—family members and friends, and church members are brought in to it. So it seems to be worse; and people wind up choosing sides over spouses and that's where the violence comes in. It's not a physical violence; it's a violent attack upon the relationship. (Speaker emphases) Pastor D

I include serial adultery as a part of on-going domestic violence because of the damage it does to the spouse. The kind of horrific effect it has on them in terms of the suffered damage and the fact that they find themselves, interestingly enough, very powerless to get out of that kind of relationship, in the same way that people who are in the physical violence are powerless to get out of that experience. Pastor G

Separation and divorce

The violence stems from his issues, from even before they got married. I would say that a man, a person who has that kind of anger needs extensive counseling. The progression often seems to be that their disappointment produces hurt that then produces unforgiveness, which leads to resentment then bitterness, which gives way to anger which fuels rage and results in mental unbalance or social insanity. I tell women in abusive relationships to get out. I never tell them to stay. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor A

And if two people get married, and they feel like there is a problem, that they cannot live together anymore, they have to break the rules of their marriage, yes. Pastor B

Couples will stay together after the first or second [violent] event. If there's three or more events of abuse, usually the victim is preparing to leave and they come to the minister for justification for separation or divorce. I would advocate either/or, although it's difficult to advocate divorce. It's abuse; in my opinion is grounds for divorce. I don't think God wants anyone to stay in a relationship where they're being abused—not in a covenant relationship. ... Time will pass, and either there is understanding or there's not. And if, six months down the road something could happen again, they thought they resolved it but something happens again; when it happens it's far worse. It may be the same thing, but the event is more painful because it's the second event; and usually by that time somebody—the victim—is looking to leave the relationship. (Speaker emphases)

Pastor D

And helping [a woman] and others to realize that it's not just physical abuse, it's the fact that your life is literally being threatened and one day you would be dead.... And from a spiritual standpoint, as long as you are there, you're in the way of God. So you just can't stay and pray. Pray to get out of the way. ... The suggestion, I think, that what's really being lifted from the text is that...when the relationship becomes destructive to the individual, then God grants permission—even though it broke His heart—for divorce. Now, you add that to the Pauline teaching, which permits for periods of separation even absences, where you're trying to figure it out, we get a real good [and] sound structure. Pastor G

Secular roots of IPV—individual & societal

The clergy discussed their views about what they believe contributes to the manifestation of IPV, by identifying both individual and community levels of secular and religious factors. Six of the clergy discussed a spectrum of factors from individual communication to community violence, and five addressed ambivalence in the church among individuals and in the collective culture. A total of six of the ministers contributed information on the secular roots of IPV. The discussion of church issues impacting IPV is presented later in this report in the section identified “IPV and the African American church culture.”

Communication problems

I mean, the woman could think that her way is always the best way, and this creates the problem. But if both of them would say, 'you know what? This is how we were raised, but we don't want our children to be raised this way then let us look for another way to raise our children.' That's over in the 'raising children' area, but communication is important in every area...if they'll only talk...if they'll only talk, they'll solve a lot of problems but they just would not talk. (Speaker emphases) Pastor A

When you are to about to make decisions, you must consult with each other; 'because I am the man,' doesn't mean that I should do my things my way, or on my own—and I will inform my wife.' Information is good, but that is not communication. Pastor B

Sometimes a husband and wife who are very, you know, nice with one another can have a 'dialog of death,' but if it happens all the time, and if they are not friends, [then there's] not only a 'dialog of death,' but they won't listen to one another, or just ignore that person...[and in] ignoring the need or the voice or the concern of that person, that can create problems. (Speaker emphases) Pastor C

Female esteem issues

Young women need to be educated on what [their] 'value' is about. For instance, 'value' is defined by society; and they need to understand that they have to be critical about what is sold to them as 'value,' because these women are searching for what society tells them is 'value,' they end up being abused. Self-esteem is so low. Mistreatment is often the result of low self-esteem. To correct the trend social workers need to go deeper to search the causes of the lack of esteem for self in the women and men, but predominantly in young women. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor C

Male ego / esteem issues

Yeah, because the man feels that, 'my way is always the best way.' Pastor A

There is a power struggle. ... And I always tell the men that they—you need to raise your self-esteem a certain way that—because you, you use violence. You shouldn't.' ... And for me, when a man has to use violence as a way to show that he is the boss—if you use that way to show that you are the boss, that's—you are not the boss. Pastor B

I think that, you know, ego is [a factor in] most of the cases; and the woman trying to get independent, trying to get control of her finances, and the men think that, you know, 'although you get more money, I should be the one who gets my say on whatever you want to do, I should [have input]. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor C

Male & female aggression

I don't think, I know, (with short laugh, then seriously). Men are most violent. Men are more the abusers than sisters, from what I've seen. Now if you ask me if I've ever seen, that sisters have been violent, I'd say, 'yes'. I've seen men come in and cry before me. (Speaker emphases) Pastor A

Usually when the woman is the abuser, she will confess that she is, and she'll find some way to justify it. The man's justification is usually around control. The woman's justification is usually around knowing that she's wrong, but she chooses to do it anyway. So a man will see it as a justification of his leadership or being the head of the family or, or territorial issues, or issues around possession. But, if it's the case of the woman, she'll know what she's doing, she'll know it's wrong, and she'll continue to do it without justification. (Speaker emphases) Pastor D

Now I do agree, that [men abusers are] the vast majority, but it's not always the case. (Speaker emphases) Pastor H

Money, drugs & community violence

*I've seen when the economy takes a dive, like now...we have an increase [in IPV].
Pastor A*

There's a whole 'nother subject around the issue of domestic violence and it's natural in the evolution of it—of the problem, it's that there are always financial ramifications. ...If there's some kind of separation it becomes a financial hardship for the victim just to maintain a life, so they wind up going to court to work out some kind of financial support and things like that; so things break down, very, very quickly, financially. Most people are just making it month to month as it is, so when there's a break down in the relationship through domestic violence, then there's a financial breakdown that causes hardship for a spouse and or children, at the same time. (Speaker emphases) Pastor D

It might be a problem related with him from his upbringing. So the person can be hiding some trauma that will reflect even his relationship. ... And I think that his perception of women, and what he saw when he was growing up, I mean, we often say that children repeat what they saw. So if in his upbringing, he saw that, you know, people in his surrounding beat their wife, that's, ah, normal [for him]. ... And I think that's the—you know, we, we hear so many heinous crimes, you know, Black men killing Black women, because of the way the person grew-up. Pastor C

Now it may have to do—the violence that's increasing in the community as well as in the family seems to originate with men and their anger—issues around anger. Yeah. Well, I've found that victimization around domestic violence always has its origins in childhood. You have to go back into a person's life to find out, you know, was this precipitated by drugs, was this a result of abuse in childhood or neglect of some form, or some traumatic experience that was not resolved. ... Pain, compounding with violence, compounding deteriorating values, compounding selfishness.... Pastor D

One would have to look at, economic factors, you know, if the person was out to work and that created extra stress. I would immediately ask about if there was any drug abuse in the family, drug or alcohol, and what was the relationship with their parents, did either or both; ahm, was their violence in their families, growing up, as a child. I—probably last, I would look at the, the spiritual view, because I tend to think, and I'm making an assumption, that it is the social dynamic, and chemical factors that are more influential in

creating an environment for abuse than a religious belief that, 'yes, I have a right to abuse my spouse.' Pastor F

Counseling practices

Questions about counseling practices revealed information about the protocols within the church for people to access counseling services, general and theological approaches to counseling, processes of assessment and triage, and preferred interventions including referrals. Examination of the counseling practices gave evidence of approaches that were similar or parallel to clinical approaches. Though all of the ministers helped to increase the understanding of counseling practices, the breakdown for the different sections are as follows:

- six of the clergy contributed information about accessing counseling at church
- two identified counseling approaches
- six furnished knowledge regarding assessment and triage, and interventions, such as not rushing the recovery process, beginning where the congregant is, prayer in counseling, confronting the perpetrator and addressing male privilege among other interventions.

Accessing counseling at church

First, they make contact. They call and speak to, ahm, one of the administrators—say they want to talk to one of the pastors. We mostly recommend the females talk with Woman Pastor, and the men talk with me. Sometimes the men talk with [Woman Pastor] and the females talk with me. It causes a safety level. Again, because of the reputation that I have in the church, a lot of people will, of course say, "I want to talk to [Speaker]." So male or female, they come to see me. Mostly I deal with married couples though. If it's a single, if it's a single parent, they may talk to Woman Pastor, but most of the married women talk to me. Pastor A

Actually, I, the pastor—I give counseling if the person [who] needs it in some areas—specific areas—like children who have issues and school; and the structure is basically, I am the one who gives the counseling. Some brothers and sisters in the church will go to other members, leaders of the church, elders of the church where they feel comfortable with the talk, but it's unstructured. For things like marriage, I am the one who gives counseling. ... Yeah. Like there are some specific issues, like someone has a relative problem, right, they will go to someone in the church that they feel comfortable with, and they feel they can talk to that person freely, or with that person [where] they trust that relationship. Pastor C

The scenario usually is someone comes with a concern or complaint. They'll ask first for prayer. And then they'll come back again later on and say, 'well, I was—' either accosted or attacked or 'I'm in an abusive relationship, and I'd like to talk about it.' Pastor D

There is not an organized structure. For the most part in our denomination and in this church, we do not do counseling. We provide pastoral care...this is specifically for me since I am not a licensed social worker or a licensed counselor. Pastor F

As a matter of fact there's a long term plan ultimately to bring [professionals] formally here at the end of the day so that there are therapists here; but at-the-end-of-the-day we do have therapists already here, member-therapists and they're doing the work (spoken with joy). Pastor G

So in our church, I would hear of some things, or [senior pastors] would bring me in on some things sometimes because of my background it would have a different flavor. ... [It may not be] 'couples' coming, but, at least one of the couple is coming and sort of initiating; and then we also have here, ahm, a marriage-counseling-and-engaged-couples' couple, that do [counseling]. ... And a lot of it is people coming and saying that they want to talk about stuff going on. Some of it is hearing about things that are going on and going to the individual; and a lot of times if something is going on, when you come to people they don't deny it, you know. Pastor H

Theological approach to intervening

We should, ah, be thinking about what's in the best interest of both the victim and the perpetrator; both are human beings, they both are in desperate need of help. We should always prioritize the safety of the victim first and try to deal with that; but then the perpetrator needs to be confronted—I think the church is in a good position to do it, ah, because of the spiritual and moral calling of the church, it has the relationship—and try to get the perpetrator on a course of real therapeutic healing. And I call it 'redemption.' (Speaker emphasis) Pastor G

There are folks who've—been in situations like [domestic violence]—come to me and who sat down, and of course, they were willing. The catch word there is willing. They were willing. They saw their mistakes and said we can do it better. I share with them from the scriptures, of course. I say they need to ask each other for forgiveness, and they decide to work together; and they're doing better today. Pastor A

Conjoint counseling meetings

First of all, I always ask—I cannot do counseling with one person—both people have to agree. In order to look for counseling, when one person comes, telling me things that, that are not supposed to—to—things that are not supposed to be in the relationship; they notice that those things exist in the relationship. Pastor B

I would myself, you know, come and talk to each one separately, and try now to bring them together and say that, 'how can we talk?' Pastor C

Myself or someone else will request that the partner come in, and then after that partner comes in, there could be anywhere from one meeting to three meetings after that, before there's any real action taken by the church to direct them to other services or to remove their membership, or whatever the case. ... Whatever the situation requires, but there's always meetings together; you know, one meeting or several meetings together, so you can get both sides of the story. Pastor D

I would probably say my basic logic would be to try to be able to talk to both persons; separately and then together, and I only say that because I have experienced couples who are having marital problems and, and try to encourage them to seek professional help. They both were willing to talk to me first, and so, in that case, I took that approach [of conjoint meetings]. Pastor F

Not rushing the recovery process

If you are in a situation, where you are being physically threatened, your first step, if you can't figure out anything else, is to remove yourself. So, we aren't talking about divorce right now, you gotta get out of that situation and you gotta get enough distance, and enough time for your sanity to return. And then, you begin to determine the perniciousness [destructiveness] of the person, and whether or not the person is too callous, and whether or not there is capacity to relieve that situation. Pastor G

[Counseling at our center] could range from several weeks to several years and usually in my experience it's on and off. If you can get the person in therapy, depending on where they are, they'll start some work and then they drop off, and you kind of have to wait for another crisis point to move 'em back into therapy, they gotta pick back up themselves and, you know, and you just kind of be patient. Pastor G

Beginning where the congregant is

'Cause when there is violence in a relationship, every other member in the family is affected. The kids—their behavior can show that something is wrong, and their school will show you; and I always assess by that to find out. ... And I tell folks if there is some (claps his hands for emphasis) physical abuse, you will have to make a decision, you need to be safe. 'Cause a lot of things can happen—even killing. Pastor B

Well, my whole basis for dealing with, not only domestic violence, but couples in crisis, is to—first thing you do is hear where they're at. Hear what they're saying; what each one is saying individually, what they are saying as a couple, and to sort of go from there. ... Sometimes people are saying different things. So my whole thing is to first hear what people are saying, 'cause they will tell you what they need. They may not be able to articulate, 'this is what I need.' But they'll tell you. And you'll see what their frustration is, even if they come in and seem to be on the same page about some things, you just keep listening and you'll find out people are in different places. Pastor H

Reality testing

I always tell folks that that is what they call BTN relationship—better than nothing. I said, 'you do not deserve to be treated like that—being in a relationship better than nothing. You need to have a good relationship. You have been created under God's image and you need to be treated fairly.' (Speaker emphases) Pastor B

Prayer in counseling practice

Also, given they're getting this counseling outside, I'll ask them to check with me, like after two or three months come in, talk with me, say how things are going outside; hold them accountable. So the counselor that they may be seeing may not necessarily be a Christian, or a Christian pastor. It may not be a pastor; may be just a counselor who may not be considered Christian, so it's important for them to follow up with me and pray with them. Very important for me to pray with them, hear their concerns, maybe give them some scripture, some Word. They must have the Word of God mixed in with what the counselor is giving them. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor A

Accountability and confrontation for perpetrator

[There] is no reason for someone to feel like he has to be violent in the relationship; and he should look for help, in order to make things right. ... [I call in the police] when there is partner violence. But there are some things, for instance, if the relationship—the people—they find out they cannot manage anger they need to do something. When it comes to the point that there is a physical violence, it's physical in the relationship, my authority isn't absolute. ... You [the perpetrator] have the restraining order. You don't respect the restraining order. You violate the restraining order. You will have that time where it will be difficult for you. Pastor B

It's important, I think, to use the sin language. Ah, most of the time the sin language is used in inappropriate ways. It is very much appropriate to use sin language when confronting particularly the perpetrators of these acts, ah, and sin language in helping the victims understand the sin that's done to them. Pastor G

Addressing male privilege

I feel like some folks they, quote-end-quote, they use biblical texts to show you that God has given the power to men to do everything. 'Wife should be obedient.' And they see the men as having the power. Has nothing to do—they forget, when they take the texts, from Corinthians, when Paul said that to man to love his wife and that for women to be submissive to—to be obedient to the husband. And they forget that obedience is for both of us. We should be obedient to each other. We should be faithful to each other; to better listen. Pastor B

The man in the church has a good understanding of, ah, based on the bible teaching to give, but unfortunately, you can find men who claim to be Christians, still misbehaving or still mistreating their wife. ... Christian men can be encouraged to teach other Christian, other men, you know, how to treat their other partners, and they have to live, you know, they have the walk—they have to walk the talk. They have to show by example. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor C

I work with the men and I make a lot of comments on a fairly regular basis that make it very clear that it's unacceptable behavior and that men—under no circumstances, ever—and that men are not men if they are involved in any form of abuse. Pastor G

Case management and advocacy

If there is anything where someone has been pushed, shoved, smacked, and it's brought to the attention of the church, you know, there's discussion. ... The first occurrence is investigated with great seriousness, and if there is found to be domestic violence at all, it's addressed with the same weight and intent as the law itself. Like, I have no problem saying to a victim of domestic violence, 'do you want to go to the police, do you want to file a restraining order, do you want to take out a complaint?' And if so, we will assist that person in doing that—even if it is against another member. (Speaker emphases) Pastor D

Referrals

Those that require extensive work, then, we send them outside. We refer; it is a referral to [Local] Christian Counseling Center or to [Local Mental Health/Substance Abuse Organization]. Pastor A

I would refer them to someone who is more capable...to professionals who would treat, as clinicians, the issue going on. ... [Pastoral counseling] would work for a certain time, but after that these people need, you know, special counselors. marriage counselors, people who have clinical experience. Pastor B

There are a lot of issues that, you know, I mean, in our communities, the pastor is the legal consult, the mental health, the psychological—but there are things they cannot do. ... There are cases that you have to say, 'well, there are things I cannot do,'—you have to refer to a professional. Pastor C

Three visits, just to do some initial assessment work with them. ... I would hear what they have to say and certainly make the necessary referrals. But I wouldn't give a generic philosophy, ah, for everyone who came. ... Definitely, I would definitely refer out for counseling—on-going counseling. I think that makes sense to do it outside of the church. Pastor E

Now, I try to quickly refer out ...and I lay the spiritual context for it; but as quickly as I can get someone in a therapeutic setting, that's what we're gonna do. And if I were to spend any time, really try—I would try to persuade you, you know, to go to a therapeutic setting. ... But there was a time when the average person who came to me for counseling, was resistant to going to—because of this stigma that's attached to formal therapeutic contact and mental health issues. And so I made the decision that I would work with people alone, two or three times before I would recommend them...but my goal was to work with people long enough to get them to a point that they'd go to formal settings, and ah, to ultimately build a community where going to a formal setting was the same as going—reaching out for formal counseling was as easy as reaching out for prayer and so that's the journey over which we've come. Now because I have help and resources, I usually sit with someone one time, 'cause I think I still like the notion of people having access to their pastor, and generally, I make an assessment and get that to referral. Pastor G

I'm not qualified, very few of us are qualified, to do some things. We are qualified to listen. And we're qualified maybe, to make some judgments regarding, you know, some every day things, but sometimes people need counseling. Sometimes people need some professional help in that area. And so when that happens, we refer out. Pastor H

IPV and the pulpit

Though all the clergy discussed whether to speak about IPV using direct or indirect language in sermons, the opinions spread across the range of possibilities. Three clergy preferred direct sermons addressing IPV from the pulpit, and three others did not think IPV should be directly named from the pulpit. Clergy who prefer not to speak directly identify concerns that reflect the clinical concepts of therapeutic alliance, confidentiality and maintaining a safe environment for their congregants. The remaining two ministers seemed to believe both approaches could be used or preferred speaking about it from the pulpit but not in the sermons. Though all of the clergy had some idea of how they would like to address partner violence, when it came to identifying a frequency for such sermons, there was no consistent response. In general, frequencies ranged from once a month to every couple of years. Three ministers stated that any sermon on IPV would be determined by “the leading of the Holy Spirit,” one of whom clarified how that might work.

Direct sermons

In my preaching I always address the issue of domestic violence. In my church sometimes, we have a 'Weekend of Family Life' where the issue is addressed. We invite outside speakers to come to mention about domestic violence. And, I am a member of this coalition, where the issue of violence is addressed. ... And if domestic violence is an issue, that's something that needs to be addressed from the pulpit in order to help family members who are dealing with it, understand how to get rid of it, or to prevent people who are getting married not to be involved because it would not be good for them. That's the way I see it; and we have to—as leaders we have to—it's a must to address the issue on the pulpit. It is OK. It should be addressed directly; because it is in [the church]. People are dealing with it. And those people are not people from outside of the church; they are people inside the church. That means the only way to help them is to address it from the pulpit. (Speaker emphases) Pastor B

Yeah, I would feel very comfortable about that. ... I've probably talked about all the issues, but I don't think I've specifically done that one. I've talked about violence, though, but I haven't specifically talked about domestic violence. ... I'm not too much of an indirect person, so I couldn't tell you what it looks like indirectly (with some humor), but I think I'd definitely be more direct. I think you confuse people, you know, when you beat around the bush, you need to be direct with people...so I—that's not my style. (Speaker emphases) Pastor E

The notion that God in the beginning of time, makes the decision to be in relationship with us; and He realizes that the cost of that decision means that it's going to cost Him His son. And so I ask the question, 'why would God make that kind of decision?' Either God is crazy, or God is a glutton for pain and punishment. But God knows something about us that we don't know ourselves. ... And I say that God made a decision that we were worth it when He decided to enter a process that would cause Him to give up His Son. Therefore, if God made the decision that I was so important, that you are so important as a female, that He was going to die on the cross to give you eternal life, then that says, why would you let someone beat you up? Why would you let someone abuse you? Why would you think so little of yourself, when God thinks so much of you? So that's the kind of way that we work those messages in a sermon. (Speaker emphases) Pastor G

Indirect sermons

I would not go into great details. I think I would be reluctant to do it; I personally would be reluctant to do it. Because I do not want people that would be in the congregation, who know that I know of their stuff, to feel that I'm putting off on them. That for my—that's my primary reason. I want them to feel safe—everybody—to feel safe. So therefore, there may be people within the con—among the congregants out there who know that situation and...parents know that they've come to me; and if I stand there and say something, you exactly know what's going to go on over there. So I prefer not to. ... Indirectly. Yes. I would come from a good scriptural standpoint; 'Let's look at some of the things that God is...,' so I'd pick some things that God is, and I'd list it in there with a bunch of different things. You see what I'm saying? So I wouldn't just say 'this thing,' I'd just jump with a bunch of stuff in there and that would be one of the things. ... I name it, yes. But it has to be supported with the Word of God. There has to be a scripture in there that says it. ... Malachi chapter 2, verse 15; the Lord says, 'I hate when a man covers himself with violence.' (Speaker emphases) Pastor A

I will address these things thematically in my sermons if I am dealing with relationships of some kind, which is often. Sometimes it is necessary to talk about it in announcements, pastoral announcement, and let people know that services are available; or just to talk about and try to return to family values, civil morays, ahm, as if there's something that's been lost and we're trying to get it back. Pastor D

Definitely. Yes. I think that it should be [preached about]. As pastor I wouldn't come and say, 'today I'm going to preach about domestic violence,' but, ah, I preach on the subject. I can go and touch on things that you see in a relationship. ... Who is your neighbor, is your wife your neighbor? So, that's the way I would approach it. I wouldn't say, talk about—to me—it would not be good to talk about, ah, to talk about 'domestic violence.' ... The Woman at the Well; [Jesus] goes and says, 'give me some water. Can you go call your husband?' And she says that, 'I have no husband.' You know, one point leads to another one. And He says that, 'why don't you have a husband, and the one that you have now, is he yours?' I mean, you put that person in confidence, because when you say to someone, you know... 'you are a sinner,' it—too much—it puts a block between you and me. It is better for me to go with an approach, a soft approach, than tell you exactly what I will do. That's how—Jesus Christ used parables. Parables are a good way to, to explain something that's very solid—very strong. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor C

Mixed approaches

I believe the bible stands firm against partner violence, any kind of violence on another human being and so therefore if we are going theologically, then we should be putting [it] in our preaching or work with others in the church. ... It's probably not happening in the sermon. ... One, there is the belief too, that the sermon time is when you are lifting up the Word. Now, mistreatment of others is in the Word. But people would tend to say you would deal with that individual and not necessarily do a sermon on partner violence. But I think, I would say, that probably in more sermons it is hit at in an indirect way in the sense of always talking about how you treat your neighbor. So that's an indirect and a back way. But that happens. And I tend to think that happens in some form or another every Sunday. [In] most Black Protestant churches there is a time in the sermon where there are

the pastor's words; and pastors have that freedom in any kinda number of ways to give an affirmation. And the affirmation can in terms of an ill in society and how we are against that ill in affirming God's Law and the ability to grow and change, and that can happen at any time in the service. It can come out of the pastor's response after there has been a song that was sung that touched people, touched the congregation. So we have a number of ways and times to interject. And so it can be done in the sermon and also outside of the sermon in the context of the worship service. Pastor F

We don't run from it. We confront it when it's there. But, ahm...it's like sex in the church, you know; you talk about it, you can preach about it. It's not on the forefront, you know, of your agenda every week...there are some churches where you can't even bring up something like that. You can bring that stuff up here. But every other sermon, you know, isn't about violence...we let people know this is a safe place to deal with whatever issues you have. ... I'm saying that—yeah, people have mentioned it in sermons—I have never heard a whole sermon about domestic violence. ... I've heard it worked into sermons, and I've worked it into sermons myself. You know, about abusing people, about domestic violence, about—but, I mean, that hasn't been the topic of the sermon. ... I think you do 'em both ways [directly and indirectly]; I have no problems talking about domestic violence, but then you may give examples people can grab on to. OK, so after you open up the topic, the—one sub-heading of that might be 'how you treat your wife,' or 'how do you end an argument,' you know, or 'what happens when something goes down in your house that you don't like?' [So] I don't think you have to skirt the issue at all. I think you call it what it is, it is what it is; and then you give some examples... I wouldn't certainly be afraid to say the words domestic violence, and I'm not afraid to give an example of what it looks like when you treat your wife well and what it looks like when you don't, you know. (Speaker emphases) Pastor H

Frequency of IPV from the pulpit

I would [preach about IPV as often] as the Lord leads me to; within my message, definitely I would say as the Lord leads me. Pastor A

I feel like it should be twice a month you talk about it, even if you don't have a message, per se, on domestic violence, but in your pulpit, it should be mentioned.

Pastor B

But I won't say that I will preach specifically on domestic violence once a month. If I know there is a problem of violence, domestic violence, I will come to that person, and try to see how we can figure out—figure it out. And also, I would say that sometimes the pastor maybe the last person to know, about [any] domestic violence. Pastor C

12 times a year, probably. Probably at least one time a month, somewhere I think it's two; the way a man ought to treat a woman, the way a woman ought to carry herself, the way parents are to take care of their children, and so on. Pastor D

I've probably talked about all the issues, but I don't think I've specifically done that one. I've talked about violence, though, but I haven't specifically talked about domestic violence. ... For me, as the Holy Spirit leads, and also we have to take into consideration—also I know in preparing my sermons—I take into consideration what's happening around me,

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what's going on in the world, ah, what are the larger issues, so that comes into play also, yeah, or either—you know, if it's domestic violence month, I think I'd be very comfortable in developing something around that. (Speaker emphases) Pastor E

I don't think there's a number; I think pastors have the opportunity to do things as they provide a greater impact on the congregation. And the key is to what extent is the pastor concerned about that issue—or concerned about other related issues. Pastor F

I think probably—and I feel convicted as I think about it—probably should preach specifically, at least once, if not once a year, once every couple of years on the subject of domestic violence, and I haven't done it in 4 or 5 years since I did that series, ahm, but I think that a pastor should regularly—I would say as the Spirit Leads—as regularly as we talk about any other sin that directly affects the people that we serve in a major kind of way, ah, we should talk about domestic violence in the same kind of way. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor G

Probably no more or no less than other topics that come up...depending on what that minister is into and what his passion is—you'll hear it more. Pastor H

The leading of the Holy Spirit

Three clergy non-specifically imply that the sermon topics are the minister's decision, and two others stated that it is the minister's passion for any given topic which influenced those choices. Taken together, then, five of the eight clergy seem to say that the decision of the minister is a key influence on what topic is preached in a sermon. Three of the ministers talked about the leading of the Holy Spirit, one of whom clarified the interaction between the “the leading of the Holy Spirit” and the minister's volition.

I think you need to be aware that the Holy Spirit doesn't put you in a tube, that you don't connect with worldly issues; 'cause I think what we get from the Holy Spirit is certainly connected with what's happening in the world. ... The Holy Spirit isn't like this little tunnel that won't allow you to talk about anything that's social or anything else [it's a] kind of coming together of that. You might get a message from the Holy Spirit that you need to talk about domestic violence because there are several people in your congregation who're involved in that, so, you know, you go to the Word, ah, the Holy Spirit leads you to the Word that will help bring that out, bring that message out. (Speaker emphases) Pastor E

IPV and African American church culture

The presence of IPV in the church can almost be described as an entity viewed with distaste, but with which there remains a relationship of sorts, rife with ambivalence, fear and avoidance. Six of the eight ministers also talked about the ways in which the church's concern with appearance leads to prejudgment about what issues are expected and acknowledged in church, and whether those issues are discussed publicly. As such, IPV may be given the status of matters that engender an air

of distaste, and as with all distasteful things it should be kept hidden. The religious factors identified for keeping up appearances seem to deal with wanting to avoid shame, and the fear of failing to maintain their good reputations. For example, if you don't want anyone to think less of you, remain silent. The discussions in this and the following sections about ambivalence and church influence identify several issues of concern to the clergy regarding church culture.

General

*But I think a problem with the church also is that it's sanitized. The church sanitizes its own culture; so certain things do not come up, because they are assumed that they would not come up—that they would not occur among Christian people. (Speaker emphases)
Pastor D*

*Even though we talk, you know, about the world and the church, I think people who are very active in church really see themselves as being very separate from the world and what's going on out there especially around issues like this and more serious issues, those secretive kind of issues. ... I'd sum it up by saying what's different, ah, in the church; I think the secrecy might be heightened a bit, because of how we operate. (Speaker emphases)
Pastor E*

*I think that there are Black churches where the culture could potentially foster domestic violence, and I think that there are Black churches, as in all churches and communities today, where the culture can discourage domestic violence. I think that, ah, you know, some Black church culture emphasizes man as a the head—not so much as a spiritual head, but as the final political authority—in the home, and they say it in the kind of way as to reinforce, ahm...the thinking in that male figure that he has the right to discipline his wife. ... [Eph 5] says, 'men since you are the head, you have to be this kind of head. You gotta be the head the way Christ was the head. How was Christ the head? Well Christ submitted Himself; He permitted himself to be crucified.' So what I teach is—what [Paul]'s really saying is—'men, spiritual headship means that you lead by submitting first...you give up ground that's not rightfully yours, first. So he, in that context, he has the power and all the rights first, in that context, and then you make it safe for her to follow your lead, and what you get is mutual submission. And, so the first person to become vulnerable and unsafe in the relationship is the man; and that's spiritual leadership (speaker emphases).
Pastor G*

*Church used to be on the front burner as far as what happens in the community. People would go and people would sort of find out the church's stance on things and then line up with that. ... It's great to preach healing and stuff, but there were sick people back in John and Jesus' time, and He didn't heal everybody, you know, and, ahm...people were sick, you know. So it's not that people don't get sick or that people trusted the Lord to heal them, you know. Well, if you get sick, in some circles, they say you have a lack of faith. I don't know why. In the bible it talks about, you know, people being sick; it talks about, ahm, Jesus saying himself, 'in this world you're gonna have trouble.' That's what trouble looks like, you know. And so, if I only preach the fact that Jesus wants us to be healthy, wealthy, you know, then what happens when a person gets sick and that? ... Sometimes the Lord blesses you and heals you, sometimes you don't get healed (speaker emphasis).
Pastor H*

Fear and appearances

I call it 'the secret sin of the church' because of fear; fear from the victim. The victim is reluctant to share about what they're experiencing, number one, because of the fact that they've got to go back home and live with that person. That's one. Two—fear of, 'I do not want to expose my husband for people to think that we ain't got our family together,' 'I don't want to expose my husband before leadership,' fear of—'my family is all together, and people look at my family.' ... The sisters come to church. They wear their hat over their faces. They have blue eyes, but they cover it down with their hair. And they can't tell anybody because the pastor says they're supposed to be submitted to their husbands. (Speaker emphases) Pastor A

People are embarrassed that their families are falling apart. (Pastor H)

*Sometimes the woman won't bring it forward because the guy might be someone that's an officer [or in some other lead] role in the church and she's often protects him because she doesn't want to spoil his reputation, quote-unquote. (Speaker emphases)
Pastor E*

Clergy / church ambivalence

Several ministers acknowledged the issue of silence in the church regarding IPV and suggest there are issues that the leadership and church members don't want to see, so they become "secrets." Clergy seem to suggest two possible reasons for partner violence in the church being kept as a secret. One possibility, identified by three clergy, is the belief that the church does not distinguish itself from "the world" regarding the issue of IPV. Another is that church leaders, themselves, are not immune to the presence of violence in their own marriages.

Secrets

I think—I think pastors, especially pastors in the African American community need to be more aware of what's taking place among their congregants. I, I think, I wonder if that's the right word—maybe they are not only trying to hide from it; or they, or they are trying to ignore the fact that it goes on in their churches. ... I believe that pastors need to really make a conscious effort to deal with those secret sins in their churches. I think that they don't want to see it, and therefore they fail to address it. Pastor A

Because some women have problems, church should be able to help them; and not telling them to remain in the relationship even when there is violence. I would feel so guilty to ask somebody to remain in a relationship because of church issues and afterwards to hear the person is killed by the husband. Now this is a great issue for me. I always look for how many people have been killed (claps hands for emphasis). ... Yes, the church is silent, and that's unfortunate; and I feel like the silence of the church is a way [of] killing; that they are not dealing with people's issue 'on the head.' Pastor B

I said that that's probably one of the more secretive [issues]—around the violence between partners in the church—whether it's pastors and their wives, ahm, females they know and their husbands; those kinds of things [are kept secret]. Pastor E

Silence—the church is not different

I think the church is quiet about it; the church doesn't talk about it. And I think the church takes its clue from society; society doesn't talk about it, so there's no difference between the church and the general society. ... The same rules apply between Christians and non-Christians when it comes to domestic violence; it's just not talked about period. And I don't think being a Christian would make one talk about it more. (Speaker emphases)

Pastor E

For the perpetrator of the violence I don't think there is anything in scripture that says 'yes you have a right to do it.' There is a silence in the church about it, and maybe then there is a theological reason for the silence—to overlook it [IPV] or to be quiet about it; and even when others know they don't say anything. ... But I mean there are scriptures that suggest that when someone in the body has erred that you go to them and help them, or you call the elders to pray with them and that suggests then that if one is praying with someone that one has also talked to them; so it would suggest, there, that we shouldn't just be quiet when we see something happening. The same way, I think, in the larger society, the idea of not getting involved; you also have that parallel in the church sometimes, until things get really bad and then we [say something]. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor F

So the notion of silence to it [is] in the larger society, so clearly it's going to be present in the church. Pastor G

I think, in general, minus a few churches that we know about, you know, I think that there's a silence about many of the issues of the day that affect people. And I think you do the people a disservice, because people look to get their marching orders from, especially Black people that are involved in church.... I think you do the people a disservice when you don't speak or devise/develop a policy, and a point of view about the issues of the day. Why don't they? Oh, I just think they're not in the habit of doing it. Those aren't pleasant topics. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor H

IPV among church leadership

How can you go and—let's say, the case of someone who is a Sunday school teacher, husband or wife. If you fight in your marital setting, and how can you go and teach someone. ... Yes, if you want to go and evangelize someone, ah, you know the bible says that if you cannot be in charge of your own household, how can you preach—you have to preach by example. How can you tell someone about his marriage or house...you cannot come to somebody with the Good News and are not wise; so are you wise with your wife?

Pastor C

[Clergy] have to have given thought to, "what'll I do if it's one of my officers who's the perpetrator? Am I willing then to confront it head on, and what does that mean?" And I say the officer—not that if it's happening to the spouse of an officer it's more important than if it's happening to a member—but when it's happening in leadership, then the implications and issues you have to deal with are more than if it's happening with a parishioner for whom the victim or the perpetrator are; if none of them are officers in the church, then there, there aren't the political issues that you have to deal with [as when someone's in leadership]. So, I'm just saying the pastor then [has] to be ready to deal

with it, if you're going to even put it out there just saying, 'this is the awareness of it.'
Pastor F

[Also] you gotta make sure you're walking right, before you can speak on it. [You] gotta make sure that, you know, that you're not throwing stones at somebody—and they have the right to pick 'em up and throw 'em back at you. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor H

Church influence and issues that may confound its impact

Five of the clergy provided insight into the power of the pastor and the influence of the church in the African American community. Several also identified two issues that may confound the positive impact of church or minister influence and those are leadership limitations and resource preferences. This information about clergy and church limitations, in addition to the tendency of church leadership to prefer to utilize church resources first or only, was generated organically since the interview questions did not specifically target these topics.

Clergy / church influence

It's that senior pastor, or the overseer of the work. yes, he has to make the change. ... It's the senior pastor, who has the strongest influence—who is called, 'The Father of the Work'—that has the strongest influence. (Speaker emphases) Pastor A

Because most of the time you find people having difficulties and the first person they will come to is the pastor. ... Wherever we go in the church, the church is the reflection of the leader's philosophic conception. Pastor B

The trust that the parishioners have in their pastor is a powerful tool in his/her hand to influence their lives. The pastor has a lot of power. Pastor C

I really saw the vision of the church being the hospital. OK, reaching out more to people who don't necessarily fit the profile of what we've seen as being the churched people. They may not have the same dress, and may not look the same way, and you know that they're into all kinds of different things. But that's who we need to also be addressing. (Speaker emphases) Pastor E

And truly when it comes from the pastor, it has a lot more effect than if [from] a member of the congregation; and you have a social—human service commission in the church or something that dealt with the health needs—that person standing up and saying 'we're having a workshop on abuse in the family' or whatever. Yes, that's good. But if that pastor stands up and says 'this is important' and makes a connection to scripture or as a calling of God, then it sends a much stronger message. ... But given that, you're correct that for the most part in the Black church everything starts with the pastor. I mean, the need may come up through the membership, but you have to have the pastors, not just 'OK,' but their interest in that issue for things to happen in the Black church. Pastor F

Clergy / church limitations

Some people are already trained in the church, but they don't utilize their expertise; because [of] the leader...many people get threatened. They don't use—they don't even want to use their training. It doesn't mean that every minister should have expertise in this area, but I feel like if you have people who are well skilled, you need to use them. Pastor B

And even in the church sometimes the pastor—we get someone who goes to school, like, you know, this person goes and gets a degree in education or in psychology or theology, it becomes a threat to the pastor sometimes, for some pastors. Pastor C

By the time that we [clergy] see it, you know, especially being in the church, by the time we see it; it's been going on for a long time. Pastor H

Church resources first

*[Some] people are good in caring for the soul and we need this kind of person in the church, and [to be] a right hand to the pastor, and because in the church we have so many ministries we can develop. ... The problem is, in some ways some pastors think, 'if I don't trust this person's faith' or 'if that person is lying' or '[the] thinking is contrary to mine, so therefore, I'm not going to let that person come to my church.' ... That's why I say it would be much better if that person was a person in the church. So if the person was part of the church the person can bring the change. I know a person now who is part of her church; she is bringing a lot of change in her church because she is part of the church; but she understands the culture of the church she wants to transform it. (Speaker emphasis)
Pastor C*

Some churches have counseling ministries that are created within the church itself. That's what I'm referring to now. Usually, those ministries are linked in this way that the people who serve in those ministries, usually work with a health organization of some kind, and that linkage is developed through their representative who happens to be a member of the church and an employer or employee of a health facility of some kind. ... There are so many things, so many activities, as well as so many problems being addressed in the context of a congregation. Some people are already trained in the church, but they don't utilize their expertise; because [of] the leader...many people get threatened. They don't use—they don't even want to use their training. It doesn't mean that every minister should have expertise in this area, but I feel like if you have people who are well skilled, you need to use them. Pastor B

Well in this church there is a counseling center, a bona fide counseling center that hires social workers to give service, who work here now, at that time we didn't; back then we had a network of counselors that we referred to. The center is...a relationship we have with [Community Agency]; they staff it and they also have interns here that they supervise, and they coordinate. As a matter of fact there's a long term plan ultimately to bring them formally here at the end of the day so that there are therapists here; but at the end of the day we do have therapists already here, member-therapists, and they're doing the work (spoken with joy). And, ah, we're just making steps recently to formalize it and we almost have this accomplished. ... Actually it ended up that we all got talking together, but that's

the point, we all had to sit down together—but partly was my own interest in this thing. (Speaker emphases) Pastor G

Seeds for transformation

Six of the clergy identified key issues toward changing the trends noted above. They discussed accountability and very clearly stated that the leadership and the church have to change. They state that it is the leaders who must speak up to stop church silence regarding IPV. The ministers also talked about issues that obstruct partnerships between church and secular providers for both ministries and the providers. Their concerns for clergy included being overlooked by community providers in development of interventions. Conversely, several clergy acknowledged that they themselves don't always have or make time to participate in the outreach efforts of community providers. And although there is a preference of clergy and the church to seek utilization of resources in the church first, the ministers recognize the need for partnerships with community providers and the resulting variety of resources those collaborations may generate.

Clergy / church accountability

*If we as leaders don't give the congregants the opportunity to feel safe when we share, then we silence them. From the way that they share the Gospel, the way they communicate the Gospel; by how we share, how we teach the Word, how we teach the scriptures. Pastors have influence over their congregants. ... Those of us in leadership have got to set our face like flint, and speak about sin as God does. If God calls something 'black,' we should not call it 'gray.' (Speaker emphasis)
Pastor A*

Church is the only institution that can bring heaven to the community; and you cannot be silent in this area. Church has to break the silence. What stops the church from breaking the silence? Our leaders are not well trained to break the silence. ... If the leader does not break the silence, nobody else will be able to break it. And that is why training should be in place, to help ministers who don't have the skills, in those areas for them to break the silence. ... One thing I would like to mention is we must see things differently. In the past, there are problems that were not addressed from the pulpit because nobody knew that those problems existed. But now we know the problems exist and we know what are the consequences of it. And a step of healing—we can do prevention and heal people who are sick, and prevent people from getting sick—is we must address them; and church should do a revolution in order to help people. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor B

And the church, by virtue, is like a hospital. People come to the hospital to get care.... So, I mean, we have to continue the dialog, to continue to talk about it. We have to put the bible into practice; we have to make it viable. Pastor C

*I think that [in] the church we are so close. It's OK for us to talk about stuff happening out in the community, but [we need] to then say it's happening right here. It means too, then, that we have to be open to say, "And we haven't done anything about it." And that's and indictment that clergy and officers and church members don't want to admit.
Pastor F*

I think the pastor of the church has a lot to do by speaking into that silence. ... Think about it. Talk about it. Recognize it. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor G

You know...you're going to step on toes... And we have to be bold. I think we're not bold in the Lord. We're not the kind of people sometimes that take a stand and stand to it, right or wrong, popular or not popular, you know; and if it's not popular, those not popular topics, they don't get preached about as much. And I think that you're getting 'partial' gospel in a lot of situations. Pastor H

Partnering with community providers

(Initially) I don't know any. (Then) There's not a stronger [agency] connection. From where I stand, there's not a stronger connection, but all the pastors use there. But there's no direct relationship between [Our Church organization] and [Local Christian Counseling Center]. There's none really but the pastors have a connection with them, so if we need to talk with anybody from there, we just call them. ... Well, first of all, [a church-agency connection] needs to be relational; a relationship between the pastors and [community agencies]. The primary venue for that I would say is [a community minister meeting].... I believe that as these groups come in and make—and they do, come in from time to time—to make the clergy aware of the resources that are available, ahm, out there; and they are willing these different organizations, they will come in to these larger gatherings...and they make presentations, and they'll also hand out resources that are available for the churches; and if anyone from the—if any of the pastors would like for these representatives from these organizations to come in, and to speak to the people [at their church], then they are wide open, so the community is wide open. I see the community and these organizations that are there [at these meetings]; they are willing to work with the clergy. They are more willing to work with the clergy; I see them more coming in to work with the clergy, than the clergy going [to the agencies]. I don't know, I don't know if it's the fact that, ahm, some of the clergy may be fearing, 'well, we don't really have a—see that [IPV] as a major problem.' Again, most of those churches are much smaller than [ours]. So therefore, they may not see the need [to connect with agencies]. (Speaker emphases) Pastor A

Church is inside of the community. Church is a part of the community. That's the reason that in order to do outreach, the first option of the church is to go to the community. Pastor B

We can, we can talk, and by sometimes inviting the pastors to meetings about—and sometimes inviting, it's not only inviting, you come to that person and say, 'you know what? I'm, ah' (pausing then), that person will comment—there's a lot of change that can happen. It's a long process. Pastor C

Mental health organizations, in my opinion, reach out all the time to develop these partnerships. They reach out frequently. A church is a world within itself. ... You don't expect the health agency or the health management facility to have a biblical basis at all; most of them do not for the sake of their own funding. They don't. So that's a main stumbling block in developing stronger linkages and better bridges. You don't expect [religion oriented community agencies], but you can expect that from the individual you talk to who may work for a health facility or a hospital or something like that—and by chance they may be a member of your church. (Speaker emphases) Pastor D

Probably the time available for the pastor to connect with those groups, yeah, I think that would certainly make a difference. Ah, collaborating outside the church, I still think that that relates to the pastor's availability of time, ahm, their priorities, their interests, those kinds of things. A large number of us, especially those who have smaller churches, are bi-vocational—working a full time job and doing the pastorate. A large number of pastors do that so we may not have that time to connect with resources like this. When my predecessor was pastor, she had move to [Our Town] and had retired from her job, so she connected with that domestic violence group and that was kind of a hot button for her. So a certain interest and time, all that plays into how you collaborate; and it's different collaborating, I think, in [Our Town] verses collaborating in [Nearby City].

Pastor E

Professional providers inviting clergy to small, short term, concise meetings; in the sense that pastors are overlooked, nobody has the time—I mean everybody is busy, but we pastors tend to think that we are busy and busier. So, you know the one or two hour blocks of time where you come in and really are concise with pastors and getting them something that is easily transferable to their situation—in a two hour setting, give me 20 minutes, video that bip-bip-bip puts the issue, and then saying to me 'alright, these are the resources in the community, so that if you are'—a quick list of how to be alert to the violence. And then things that we can easily put in our bulletin with a space where the church name can easily be added to it, so that it says we approve of this, and then can easily be mass produced through [church].

Pastor F

I think Black pastors and community health centers and, ah, hospitals and the larger programmatic structures that provide support to people who are either victims or perpetrators have to sit down. They actually have to start talking. They have to show up in the same room sometimes. ... I don't think there is—there's not a regional approach to making this happen—there's not a national strategy, or state strategy to bring pastors together with—or church staff together with...therapeutic programs. (Speaker emphases)

Pastor G

I think, well, obviously, communication—before there's an incident. I think, ah, it's important for people to get together to decide how they're gonna handle certain situations. ... You maybe have lunch for some of the providers, like Agency A or Agency B or someone from Agency B. You get everyone to the table and you sort of do a roundtable, you know, 'this is—this is what we're seeing, you know, as we go on the ground with the folks, and this is—what can you do,' and...and when we see this, what should we do. What should the procedures be?' ... You know, by getting together with folks and setting it up ahead of time. Everybody has needs, and everybody, you know—it's important to listen to what the need of the provider is too, as well as tell them what you need. ... A lot of times those people are already on your side. They're there, you know. They know about the needs, and are trying to provide for them. So it's really communicating this to realize the fact that you are on a team. 'Cause a lot of time doing this work, you tend to feel you are out there by yourself and nobody, you know, nobody quite understands it... It's almost like an adversarial-type relationship, why—it's like, 'so you don't really care?' 'Well, I do care, but there are some restrictions over here...we can't take everybody here

because of the guidelines that we use, ' you know—and so it's really to understand the fact that you're all [as providers] in the same boat.... (Speaker emphasis) Pastor H

Issues related to IPV that also concerned clergy

Several issues surfaced in relation to IPV that concerned the clergy. Two discussed the ways in which “spill-over” from IPV could impact children because the violence fragments the family. Three discussed IPV existing within the population of dating adolescents, and two talked about the issue of IPV in blended families, in common-law or cohabitating couples. One minister was concerned about the victims who are trapped in violent relationships because of their status as undocumented immigrants. Another discussed experience with addressing violence between homosexual partners, noting the prioritizations of concerns was the same as for heterosexual couples—safety was tantamount.

Youth—financial spill over

Family in trouble; it's very sad, you know. So, the next generation is helpless. They're the young ones. ... I talked to the parents, they're having financial problems. They filed bankruptcy. So, you know, you have—that problem spills over. So who are the victims? The children. Pastor A

If there is domestic violence taking place in a relationship, then because both people work outside of the home in most cases, and if there's some kind of separation it becomes a financial hardship for the victim just to maintain a life, so they wind up going to court to work out some kind of financial support and things like that; so things breakdown, very, very quickly, financially. Most people are just making it month to month as it is, so when there's a break down in the relationship through domestic violence, then there's a financial breakdown that causes hardship for a spouse and or children, at the same time. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor D

Youth—IPV

But also the way the young men treat the young women, in the street we can see it now...and we find that young [males think] that, girls—you can get as many as you want. And, it's—it's, ahm, a recipe for violence. So they can beat them up but [females] they're gonna stay because they need a man. Pastor C

Although education around sexually transmitted diseases is very active, definitions of what act is a sex act, is changing drastically by people outside of the church. Things that were considered sex before are not considered sex now. So you find, if you gather young people together in a given social context, church or not, and ask them about oral sex or anal sex and so forth, they would give you definitions of those things, or they would give you their views of those things that are far more soft and far more passive and casual than they used to be. Also, relationships, in terms of violence, you know, and any abuse of various forms, like pushing or shoving or yelling or throwing things, or whether the person has been attacked in any way, you know, or issues around rape and so forth, like that, those things are not as—they're approached among the younger generation far more casually than they used to be. (Speaker emphases) Pastor D

And all of a sudden violence happens, or it's been happening and it comes to light. If it's happening in how they are dating one another as 16 year olds, then we would really need more help in how to identify, yeah identify, and then respond to it; which means, then, a discussion with young people and their parents. And with the increase in violence among our young people, and with videos and the whole rap piece—rapping, where women are often degraded—then one might think that it creates, ahm, fertile ground for partner violence; and so that probably means it's happening more but it may not be termed as partner violence. Pastor F

Blended families, common-law relationships & immigrants

Blended family means when one person is in a relationship with another person who has children that do not belong to the person that they're in the relationship with, and therefore the way that they want the children to be raised, the person that they're in the relationship with may not necessarily agree with that person; and that creates severe problems in the relationship. As a matter, marriages have failed because of this; I've seen it happen, I've spoken to many, many couples that have. (Speaker emphases) Pastor A

Common-law relationship is where a man and woman live together and have some kids; and there's abuse in there and, ahm, especially if one of the party is not legal in this country. Very important issue, ahm, they're not legal so, therefore, the abuser is using his leverage on the person saying, 'you can't call the police, because you know you're not straight.' That's something that I'd like to really see how to address; and sometimes working on that I, I have no answers, but that's something I'd like to really see addressed. ... Because we have to keep in mind that this woman has children and this man is the sole provider—so there you have a catch-22. Pastor A

[It's] truly in an immigrant population who come, you know, let's say, come and the woman comes here and she, she was, you know, dependent on her husband, you know, when they first come here, or when they had arrived and the woman...goes to get her degree; let's say in her case family nursing. The woman comes and gets a degree in nursing which, is more rewarding than what the husband is getting from his job—rewarding, I mean, in terms of economic value, financially—so now that would create a tension, cause the man would feel like, ah, 'my wife is getting more than me,' and ah, 'she has control of the money.' ... In some cultures the person will accept the mistreatment because that's the way it is, the wife has to listen to her husband and that's it. She has to stay and, you know, sometimes she—the parents will say, you know, 'it's your problem you have to deal with it; we don't want to interfere.' (Speaker emphases) Pastor C

IPV and homosexual relationships in the church

And I should say that I that while most of the violence we've dealt with is in the heterosexual context certainly some homosexual contexts have surfaced; in the last six months. And so these days churches are all over the map with theology, but we're on the conservative side of that question...and ah, we separate [the two issues]. So, a first piece is the same thing—gotta get out of harms way, gotta get income, gotta think about it—and then spiritually is the question about morality/sexuality, that's a different question.... Pastor G

Research interests

The ministers identified a number of concerns for possible future research connected to partner violence and related issues that they believe may impact the climate in the church towards the goal of reducing or preventing IPV. They were interested in research to enhance knowledge of almost all of the issues discussed previously in this report, especially as relates to the religious populations, including the cause of partner violence. Also important to the clergy is research coming out of the African American church that is reported back to the church; a sentiment reflected by Pastor E, “most things are just kind of a Euro-centric kind of perspective, and people don’t identify with that. I mean, it could easily bring on a real sense of denial that, you know, that happens to them...you know developing something specifically for churches for African Americans.” (*speaker emphasis*)

Non-documented victims of IPV in the church

How do we deal with these people that are here in this country, that are not straight, or not legal...and they have children, they have family—especially if one decide to be part of a church—in a church, how do we deal with that? (Speaker emphasis) Pastor A

Healthy religious families

And what kind of cushion should they take and model to have a healthy family life, and that’s what I would be looking for; find resources, research, for healthy families—now what does that mean—healthy families? How can a family be healthy? Pastor B

Faith-based programming

That’s worth some research being done to see where...the hospital or the social service agency or the local clinic could allow programming that has a biblical basis; at least as it pertains to families of a particular church. That’s not being done. (Speaker emphasis) Pastor D

Partnering with churches

Continue to explore how churches enter partnership with community organizations formally or informally, ah, how churches, and there are, how do you improve on that. Pastor G

Transforming church culture

People are seeing more partner violence among teenagers, in the young people, than we did in the past. And if that’s the case, then we as churches, we have to think about and talk about it differently than we were thinking of married couples. Pastor F

I think a lot more work needs to be done around how to confront and help perpetrators and what’s necessary in taking a church culture and transforming a church culture into a kind of culture that makes asking for therapeutic help as relates to domestic violence, equal to asking for prayer as relates to domestic violence or anything else—and the kind of culture that in and of itself begins to reverse some of the reality of domestic violence. I think culture can reinforce certain tendencies and patterns and culture can begin to dismantle certain tendencies. (Speaker emphases) Pastor G

Causes of IPV

How you can follow up, you know, the path of a young man [who] becomes a violent—a violent man? Pastor C

What seeds the ground, when you're now on a path that ends up leading to intimate partner violence? ... Some things have been going on for years, all of a sudden, you know, after twelve years things start going this way. What's changed? Did anything change? Or did it just get to be that there were things all along the way—did one person finally get to the point where they say, 'I can't take any of this anymore'? Pastor H

Conclusion

This study begins to dispel the possible misconceptions of clergy practice in cases of IPV in African American churches, and provides greater understanding of the complicated terrain encountered by clergy attempting to successfully address IPV in their churches. One outcome of this study is the knowledge of the ministers' perspectives. They recognize tendencies and behavior patterns that can be potentially dangerous in relation to IPV in the church. Their honest discussion unflinchingly identifies the ambivalence present in individual and collective church culture that helps or hinders the ways IPV is addressed. The ministers had a lot to say about the relationship of the African American church to partner violence. The ministers fairly comprehend the invasive nature of IPV in the family regardless of the family structure, and how children are affected both as a result of parental violence and because as they grow they may replicate their own violent childhoods in their later relationships.

One would expect parallels of issues that are in “the world” to be in the church, but it is interesting that three clergy stated that there is no difference between the church and “the world.” Acknowledging that there is no difference then calls into question the effectiveness of how the church addresses the issue of IPV present in its pews and offices. It also raises the question of whether there should be a difference between the church and the surrounding society. If the answer to that question is “yes,” then the obvious question is what should that difference look like? Various groups of people have opinions toward an answer, but it seems the clergy challenge themselves regarding this issue as related to IPV. As such, the best strategies for change also seem to come from the ministers. Pastor H (p. 39) says that ministers “have to be bold” and do the unpopular work that might “step on toes.” Pastor B seems to agree; “I am telling you now it's a revolution because church people should not be in this domestic violence issue; they should be a carrier of peace.” It remains to be seen how this revolution manifests in the daily interactions of church attendees. Moreover, what does it mean to be accountable as ‘a peace-carrier’ in the church, so that the result in church culture is that of transformation? The ministers recognized that it will take the courage of the leaders to facilitate that transformation, which may begin with putting an end the silence and ambivalence regarding IPV in the church.

Another outcome of this study is information about the ways clergy address partner violence in their churches and from their pulpits, and the concerns that affect those approaches. Prior to this report, there was not much research information generated about the perspectives and approaches of

African American clergy regarding IPV in their churches. As such, this report sheds light on those processes. The information generated in the “counseling practices” section (p. 24) seems to indicate that some ministers implemented what can be viewed as a logical series of steps similar to a clinical approach for individuals in the crisis of IPV. It is not clear if the approaches identified above are implemented uniformly in all pastoral care interventions; but when they are utilized, these interventions are similar to best practice clinical interventions. Therefore, they are recommended as good steps for clergy to use, who would like a clear progression of intervention practices that may help a church member in need.

It can be easy for formally trained clinicians to dismiss the experience-based skills that many clergy are able to provide their members. Not all of the clergy have this expertise, however, it seems to stem from direct experience addressing the matter in their churches over time. The results of this study also demonstrate that the clergy recognize the benefit of broader community collaboration. It also shows that there have been “missed cues” from both clergy and secular providers that may get in the way of better partnerships. One pastor stated that clergy are sometimes overlooked by secular providers. African Americans are between 12 and 13% of the United States population (*U. S. Census, 2000*), and approximately two thirds of that population are impacted by historically African American churches (*U. S. Religious landscape survey, 2008*). Considering the resource potential of the church in the African American community, overlooking African America clergy and not including their voices in the discussions about addressing IPV in the African American community is not an affront, but a tragedy. Greater knowledge of clergy work in this area effectively demystifies it. It also reduces assumptions that secular community service providers may have previously held when considering the kind of intervention encountered by their religious clients in churches. As community mental health providers apply a strengths-based approach to interactions with clergy and churches in the African American community the result will be stronger service collaborations.

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APPENDIX

If you would like further information concerning this report, or to receive a copy of the Questionnaire used in the survey please contact:

Jacqueline Dyer, MSW, LICSW
Ph. D. Candidate,
BC Graduate School of SW

Lynn, Massachusetts

unitylane@gmail.com
Tel: 781.842.1822

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