

Survivor's Stories: What the research tells us about survivor's experiences and needs



Based on National Anglican Family Violence Project Experience Study

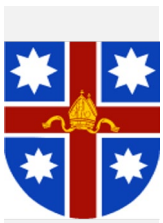
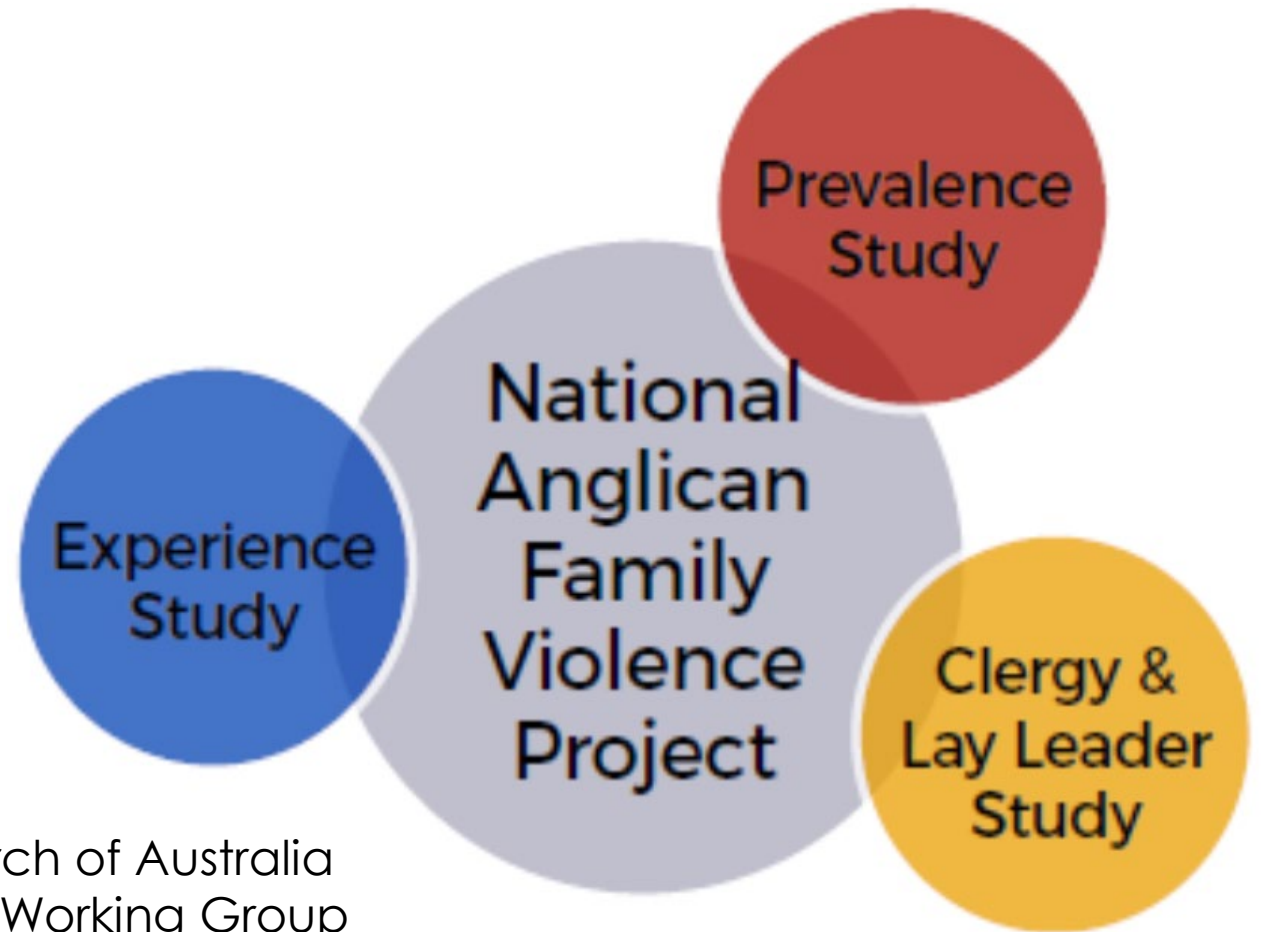
Round Table Consultation Event - Understanding domestic violence and religion: Exploring how faith-based organisations can be part of the solution, 28th October 2022

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Associate Professor, Charles Sturt University

Aims of National Family Violence Research Project

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

The aims of this research project was to help the Anglican General Synod to understand the nature and prevalence of intimate partner violence (recognising it as a significant part of family violence) among those with a connection to the Anglican Church.



Commissioned by the Anglican Church of Australia
Project oversight by Family Violence Working Group

Outputs: Main report plus 3 detailed study reports anglican.org.au/our-work/family-violence/



National Anglican Family Violence Project (NAFVP)

National Anglican Family Violence Research Report

April 2021
NCLS Research



Prevalence Study Report



National Anglican Family Violence Project

NAFVP Prevalence Study Report

April 2021
By NCLS Research

One of three study reports from the National Anglican Family Violence Project (NAFVP)



Clergy and Lay Leader Study Report



National Anglican Family Violence Project

NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study Report

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Experience Study Report



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Plus report/s for participants and future academic publications

Definitions and Scope

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is:

Defined by the World Health Organisation as *behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours.*

In this project IPV = “domestic violence” and “domestic abuse”.



Intimate partner violence (IPV) is

- A subset of “family violence”
- between intimate partners

Features of IPV

Violence is multi-faceted:

Physical, sexual, psychological, social, emotional, financial, spiritual

Violence includes:

Individual violent acts,
Patterns of sustained violence where a person tries to intimidate and control their partner.

Scope of project

- Women and men
- People 18 years and over
- People who have a current or historic link to the Anglican Church

Experience Study Participant



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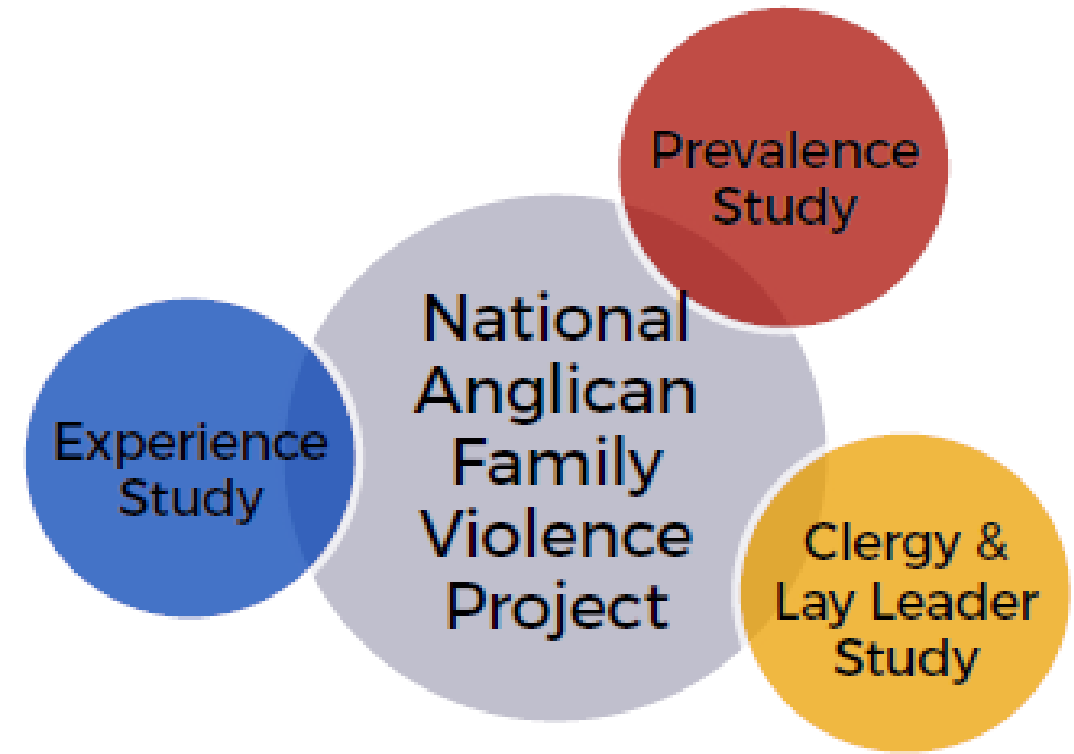
So the women (who have experienced), intimate partner violence, are well educated, lawyers, teachers, psychologists and power dressers, people that are drop-dead gorgeous women, women that are 50 kilos overweight, everything in between, gorgeous women, intelligent women, funny women, confident women, they're in domestic violence situations.

So please don't dismiss her and also please don't think "I would never let that happen to me, I would never let that happen to my daughter".

... Again, there's no rhyme nor reason to who can be the abusive person and who might not. The women or the men that are getting abused - you can't pick it.

Research method & samples for 3 studies

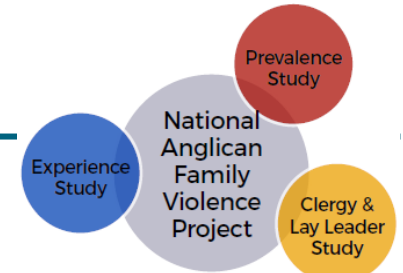
All research documents and design were peer reviewed and approved by the CSU Ethics Committee



The Studies

The Research Questions

The Method and Samples



Prevalence Study

How prevalent is intimate partner violence among Australians who identify as Anglican?

- Online survey
- Male and female, aged 18+

Two samples: Australians who identified as Anglican (n=1,212), and sample of general Australian public (n = 1,254). Non-probability samples. Not comparable to other studies.

Clergy & Lay Leader Study

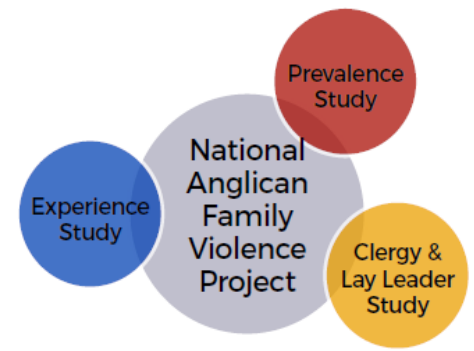
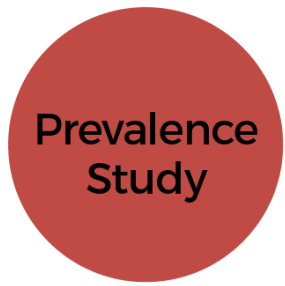
What are the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding intimate partner violence among Anglican clergy and lay leaders?

1. **Focus groups**
 2. **Online survey** sent to Anglican parishes
- Clergy responses: 383
Total participants: 827 clergy and lay leaders from 387 parishes

Experience Study

What is the nature of experiences of intimate partner violence for those with a connection with Anglican churches?

1. **Scoping Survey:** 305 respondents matched criterion. Some 81% had IPV experience
2. **Face to face interviews:** 179 people had direct experience, 86 open to interview and 20 selected. They spanned a diversity of experiences of and views about the Anglican Church in relation to IPV (e.g. positive, negative, mixed experiences) and diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.



Key Findings from the NAFVP Prevalence Study

Q. How prevalent is intimate partner violence among Australians who identify as Anglican



Key Finding

IPV: Anglican & general public

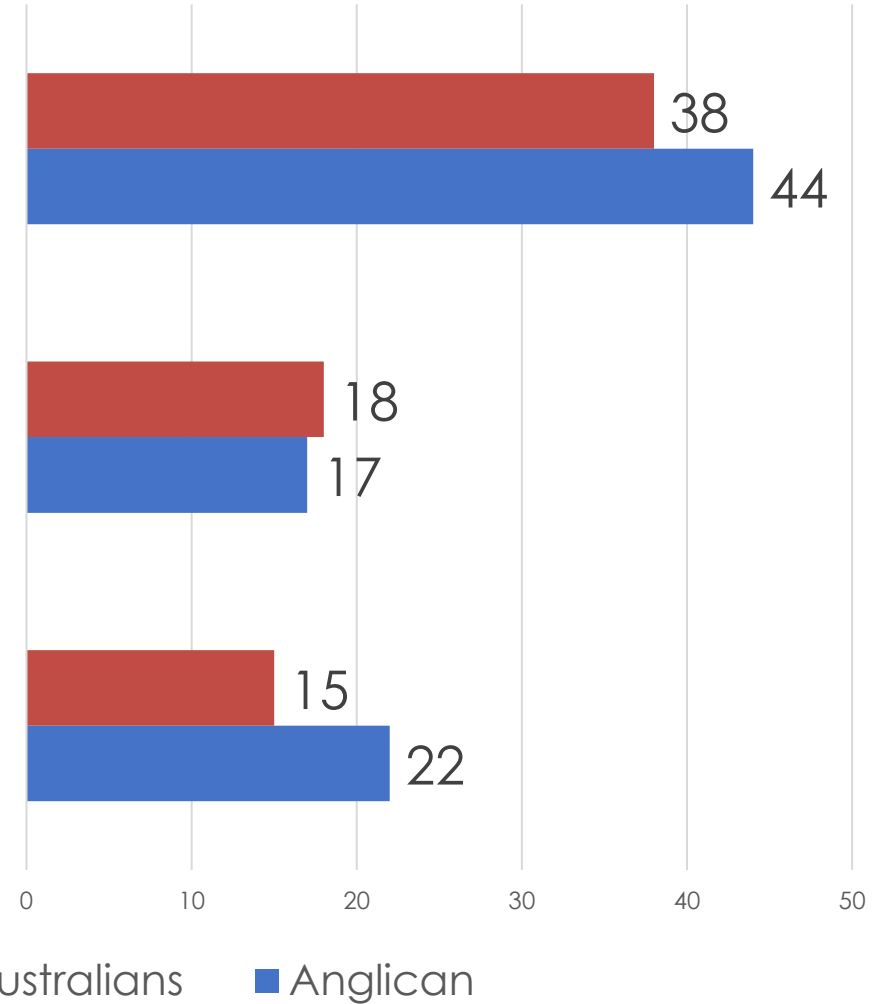
The prevalence of intimate partner violence among Anglicans was the same or higher than in the wider Australian community.

Figure: Self-reported experience of violence among those who had been in adult intimate relationship

Over lifetime: Experience of any specific acts of IPV (any of 15 behaviours)

In past 12 months: Experience of any specific acts of IPV (any of 15 behaviours)

Self-identified: "Have you ever been in a violent relationship with any partner" Yes



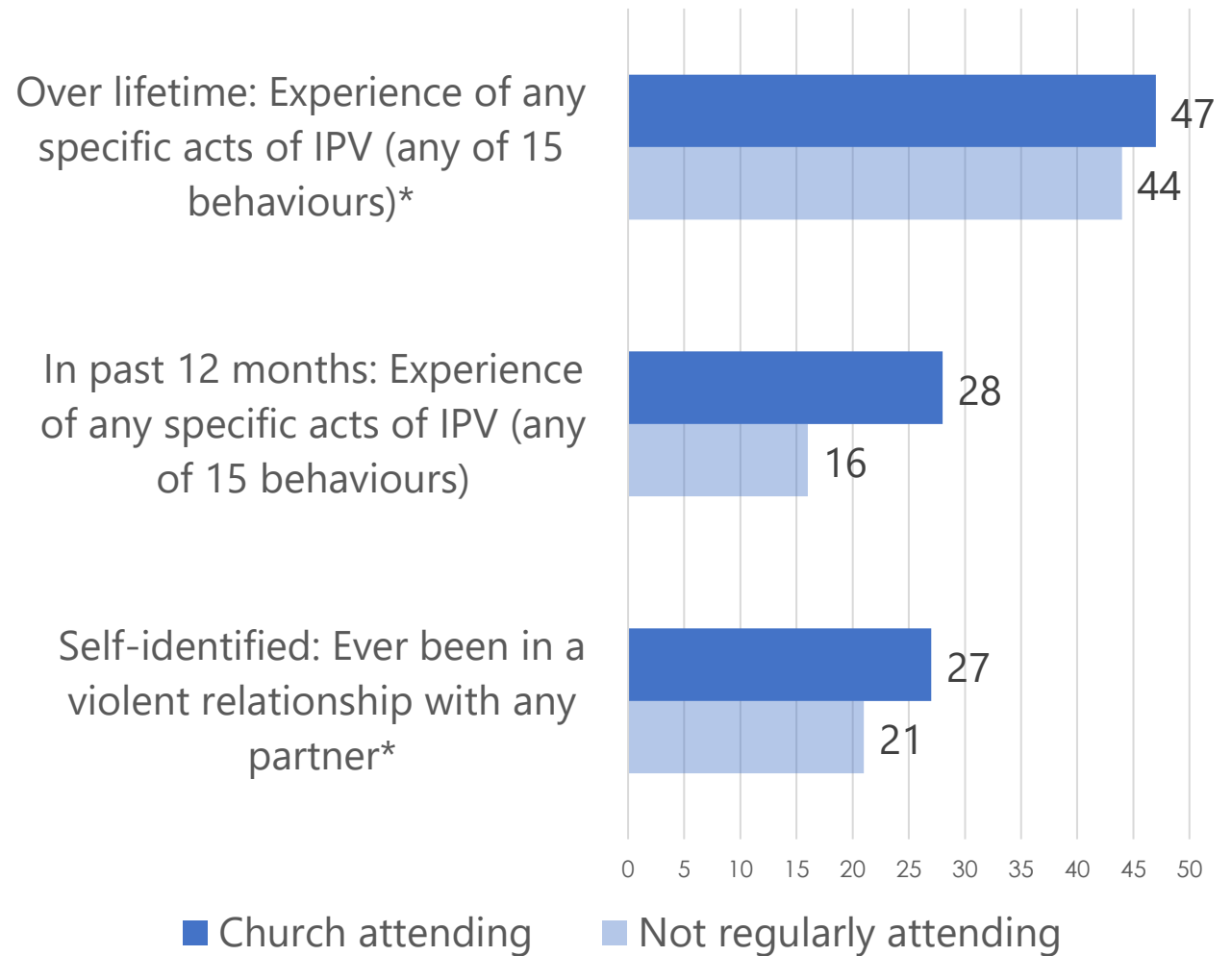
Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study. Percentages are based on those who indicated they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (all Anglican n = 1287). Composite Abuse Scale – short form was used for the first two measures.

Key Finding

IPV and church attendance

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

Figure: Experience of violence in the All Anglican sample by church attendance



Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study. Percentages are based on those who indicated they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (all Anglican n = 1287). NB. Differences between attendance types for self-identified and lifetime measures were not statistically significantly different

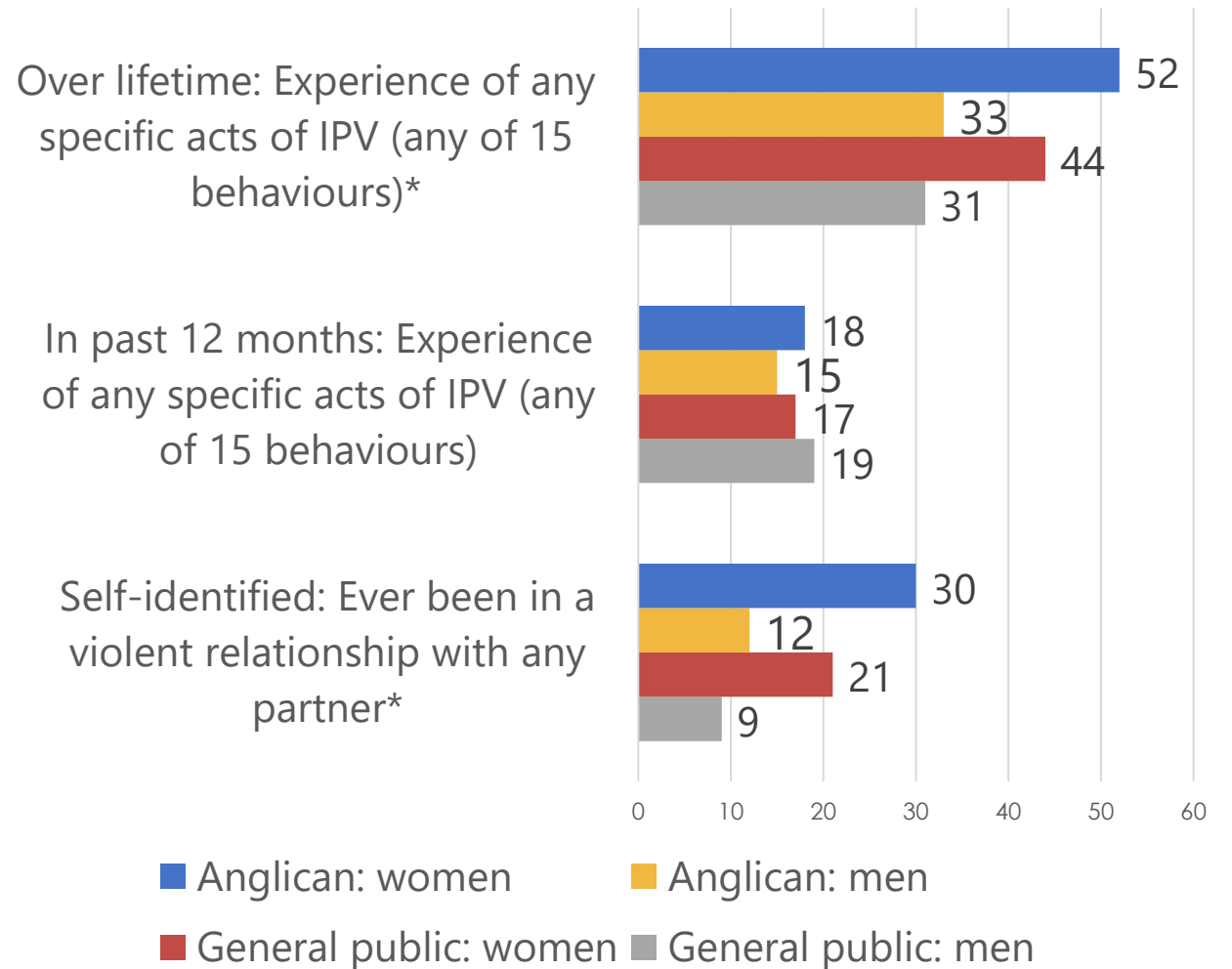
Key Finding

IPV: women and men

The prevalence of intimate partner violence was higher among women than men.

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

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



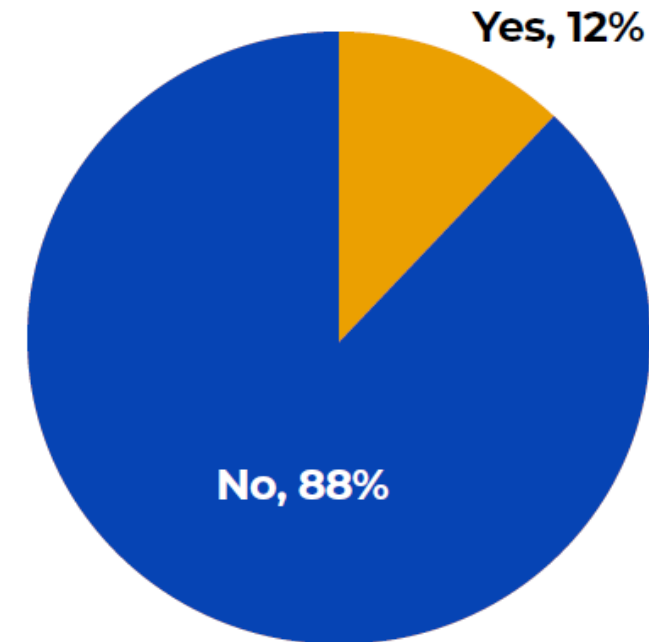
Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study. Percentages are based on those who indicated they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (general public n = 949; Anglican n = 765).

IPV: approaching churches

Most Anglican victims of domestic violence did not seek help from Anglican churches (88%)

The small group who did seek help most commonly approached clergy and most reported that it either positively changed their situation, or helped them to feel supported.

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



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

Clergyperson in focus group



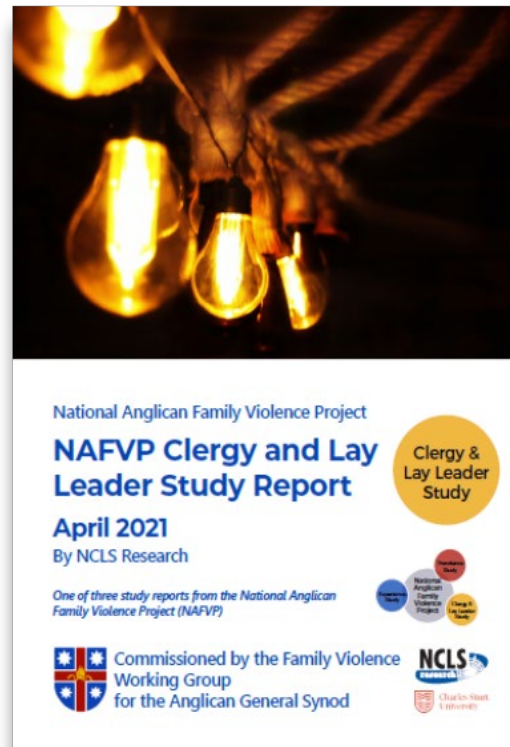
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“The church is the microcosm of society”

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

Q. What are the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding intimate partner violence among clergy?

NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study



DFV: Responses and Approaches across Churches



<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030270>



National Anglican Family Violence Project Experience study



Reports



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Prevalence Study Report



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Experience Study Report



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Research questions and aims

Q: What is the nature of experiences of IPV for those with a connection with Anglican churches?

Q: How has the Anglican Church featured in these experiences?



Aims

- To achieve a greater understanding of how Anglican churches have intersected with experiences of violence, and
- Thereby to gain a foundation to support the further development of Anglican Church policy and practice in relation to IPV.

Methodology

1. Online scoping/recruitment survey

- Widely publicised, open Sep 2020 to Jan 2021
- 305 respondents (81% had personal experience with IPV, 58% “victim-survivors”)

2. In-depth interviews

- 20 diverse participants across Australia, handpicked from the survey. Nov 2020 to Feb 2021.
- Pre-interview phone conversation
- Interviews in person, via Zoom, by phone, approx 2 hours
- Participant’s experiences of IPV, relationship with the Anglican Church, their intersection
- Trauma-informed approach, wellbeing, agency, strengths
- Recorded, transcribed, coded in Nvivo. Analytical framework developed throughout coding and analysis.

- Various forms of violence
- Early warning signs before the violence escalated
- Contrasts between violence at home and the image presented by the abusive partner in public
- Coercive controlling dynamics
- Cycles of abuse
- Participants' efforts to try and make sense of the abuse
- Impacts of the abuse on wellbeing and identity
- Ways that participants used their agency in the abusive relationship

Coercive control: the dynamics of abusive behaviours

Typically, one partner tries to exert power and control over the other, usually through fear (AIHW 2018).

"The big things like did he pin us down and try to choke us and that, yeah, but that was only once or twice and what really made us feel scared wasn't that one time, it was the daily little things. So, I guess what constitutes abuse and how it can ramp up."

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

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

Impacts of violence on wellbeing and identity

- Loss of a sense of self
- Self-doubt
- Self-blame, guilt, shame
- Anger

"I can't tell you – it's certainly not what you think a Christian life will be ... especially when you have put your faith in God ... and tried to live your life the way that He would have you live it. ... I've had to deal with all the guilt and the, have I let Him down?"

"As a result of all of that I certainly, I got very lost, and I lost all sense of myself and any hope for anything different or better in the future. I just thought, well, this is my lot in life, and I've got to just make the best of it that I can. I guess I'd describe myself in [that time] as the lights were on but nobody was home."

"Shame is a massive part, which I guess is why I say to you, pride and shame for me are two sides of the same coin. Shame is massive because particularly in my experience, optics is very big in the church, you've got to have it all together. I don't have it all together, I never have, I was just very good at looking like I did."

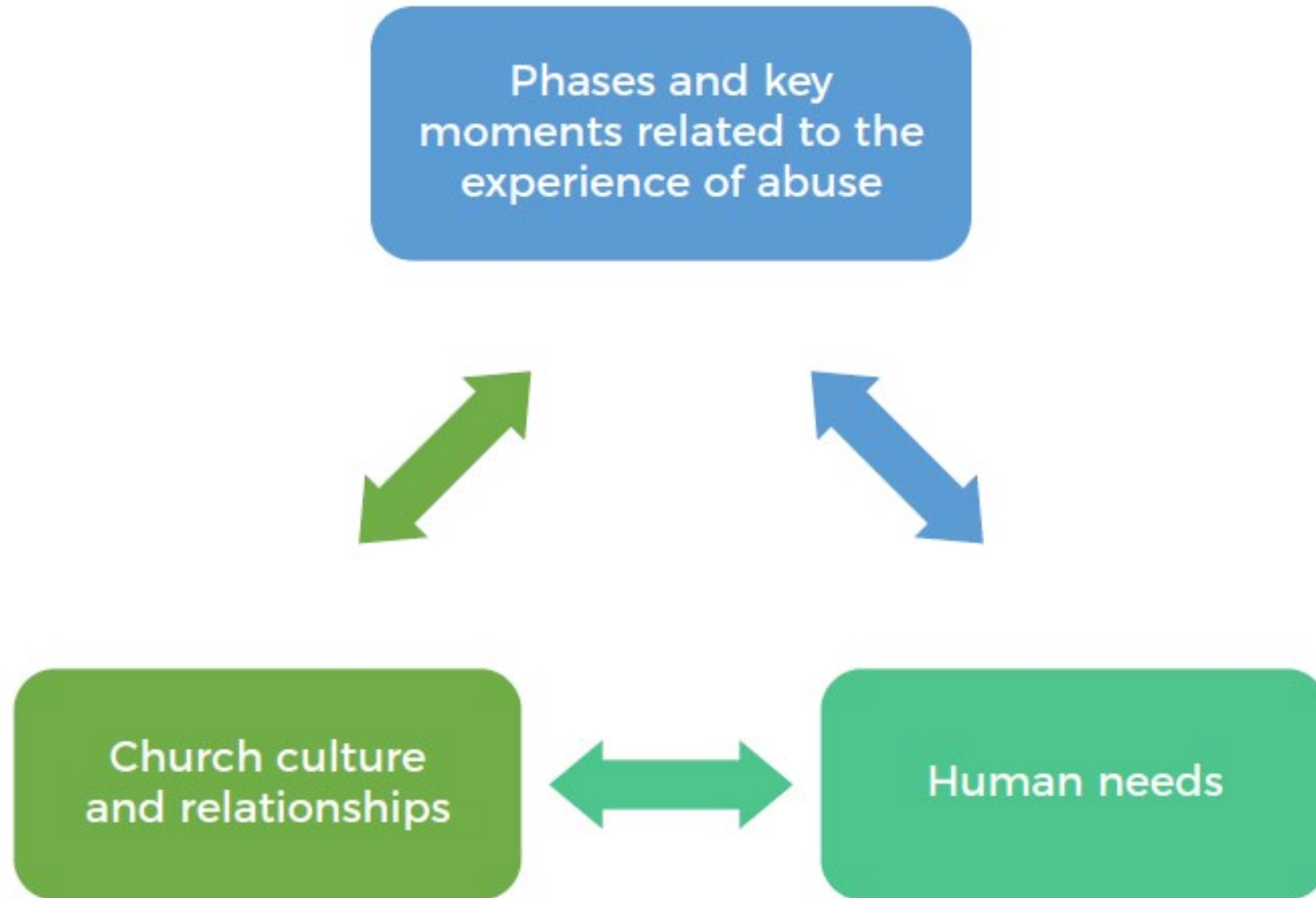
Agency in an abusive relationship

- Moments where participants were able to enact change
- Agency does not always mean liberation – it is the ability to make choices and act on them

“I became very good at manipulation, because if I want to do something or I wanted us as a family to do something, I needed him to think it was his idea. I became very good and he was narcissistic, so it wasn’t that hard. But I became very good at twisting what I wanted to be his idea, even though I’d already made a decision in my own head about what I wanted, it would generally be, what do you think about, which then made him think it was his idea and it never was.”

Experience Study Participant

Analytical framework – role of churches



Religious teachings and norms

Faith and church both assist and hinder those who are experiencing domestic violence.

Social and religious norms shape how people think they ought to behave within a local church context and also how they actually behave. This impacts on expectations and interactions with clergy as well as among churchgoers.

Although unintended, Christian teachings sometimes contribute to and potentially amplify situations of domestic violence.

Participants recounted feelings of self-doubt, self-blame, entrapment and shame that they directly attributed to certain discourses about intimate relationships.

Perpetrators misuse Christian teachings and positional power.

Participants shared examples of how perpetrators made claims about Christian teachings and used power in relation to church structures to control and extend the cycle of abuse.

Religious teachings and norms

Discourses experienced as harmful:

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

“I was brought up in a very traditional Anglican, Christian, household ... and very much a part of my upbringing. So, with that came very traditional values about the sanctity of marriage and respect for other people and, yeah, so that I guess brought about I guess some big issues for me when it came to my own marriage, and it kept me in that very unhealthy relationship”.

“I remember studies where we looked at the passages on submission and headship and I remember feeling incredibly guilty. I remember feeling like I am literally the most unbiblical wife in the world because here I am sneaking off not even telling my husband things ... but I’m trying to make my marriage work and I just felt so conflicted.”

Experience Study Participants

Religious teachings and norms

Christian teaching that addresses IPV can also empower victim-survivors to begin a process of change.

At key moments in the cycle of abusive relationships - where people have an opportunity to make choices and act on them, **clergy and church leaders have offered alternate perspectives that empower** victim-survivors to begin a process of change.

Church **helped some to realise that they were experiencing domestic violence** and that it wasn't acceptable.

A sermon, or talking with their minister, helped **provide a framework** and language for their understanding.

When clergy speak, it can carry considerable weight.

Participants commented that Christian teachings about marriage and gender need to be communicated in ways that actively addresses the potential for and the reality of abuse in intimate relationships.

Religious teachings and norms

Discourses that participants described as liberating:

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

"I'd had a conversation with our minister at one point and he said, 'no I don't think that's what the Bible says at all, I don't think God would oblige you to remain in that situation. ...There is at least some abuse going on in your home and that's done a lot of damage to you and you don't have to stay with that. You shouldn't be feeling scared in your own home.' I left with his support and I stayed separated with the [minister's] support."

"What had gotten me through everything was like I was suffering for Christ ... Suddenly I had this growing sense, on my own, reading, that wasn't suffering for Christ at all, I was suffering for someone else's sin ... how anyone could read the Bible and see how much God hates how you treat vulnerable people and think that he's not in favour of helping wives and kids ..."

The role of churches

Trusted and caring relationships

The church can provide vital relationships, independent of the perpetrator, that:

- Reduce isolation for victim-survivors
- Support people to make choices and act on them

Specialist domestic violence services and health professionals have a central role.

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

"After [the abusive] incident, I went straight to my [minister] and told her, "I want to talk with you, and this is happening. I need help. If you could pray for me, that would be a great help for me." I said that to her and then, they said, they suggested to me that this is not the right thing ... And domestic, family violence is not acceptable in Australia and there are so many helps out there and they went with me, one of the members. One of the leaders of the church, they went with me to the police station ... They showed me lots of help, 1800 RESPECT, various free and many more like that. They just text me all this support and we went together."

Trusted and caring relationships

Specialist domestic violence services and health professionals have a central role.

"The parenting line people that I talked to; they were very helpful but one particular guy I was saying basically – this was towards when I was at the end of my tether. [I said] "He stopped me from seeing my friends. He has hit me a couple of times, he's done this, he's done this" and the guy on the other end said to me, "you know these are just really controlling abusive behaviours?" I went, oh. Well because I had said to this guy, "I just want to know what I can do to make it stop, to make it better". He said, "you're not going to be able to" and gave me the numbers for Relationships Australia and Centacare. I ended up ringing Centacare and getting into one of their self-help groups and never looked back, really."

Trusted and caring relationships**The church can provide vital relationships, *independent* of the perpetrator, that:**

- Reduce isolation for victim-survivors
- Support people to make choices and act on them

Trusted people in the church might not always know what to do, but genuine concern can make a real difference.

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

"One of the leaders of the church, they went with me to the police station ... They showed me lots of help, 1800 RESPECT, various free and many more like that. They just text me all this support and we went together."

Experience Study Participants

Awareness and readiness to respond

IPV awareness is important both for church leaders and members at large.

Lack of IPV awareness or training can thwart progress for victim-survivors and limit their options.

"The first thing [the minister] did was get us into marriage counselling, which I think was probably not the right thing to do, but he didn't know. He hadn't been trained in caring for people in that scenario before. I didn't know either. Of course, I was wanting things to be better and very willing to work on them, so went off to marriage counselling, which really was just another avenue for [my ex-partner] to control the narrative and make me look unreasonable and hysterical and all the rest while he's just sick and misunderstood."

Experience Study Participants

When the abusive partner is
embedded in the church

Complexity increases, especially when the abuser holds a position of authority

The abuser might:

- Behave differently at church
- Threaten their partner if they were to disclose
- Have the ability to sully their partner's reputation

"I was trying to hide everything from them ... The terror was exposure, in terms of the threat [by my ex-partner] to make my name mud at church."

"I think having been in the same church for a long time ... I honestly did not think anyone would believe me ... because the 10 per cent that they saw of him was not what I lived with and was not my reality the rest of the time. That's honestly why I never said anything, because I did not think anyone would believe me."

Experience Study Participants

Support to rebuild and recover life

Church plays a complex role after separation

Churches can help or hinder those who experience abuse to meet various needs:

- **To be safe**
- To have material provision
- To be in relationships of care, empathy and acceptance
- To have their own identity
- **To have a spiritual life and relationship with God**
- To make a contribution.

Support to rebuild and recover life

The need to be safe

- When an abusive partner is still a part of the church community a victim-survivor's emotional and physical safety can be compromised.
- There is no single solution about who remains connected.

Support to rebuild and recover life

The need to have a spiritual life and relationship with God

After separation, church can be a place where victim-survivors grow in their understanding of and connection with God through and beyond their experiences of abuse.

"[My minister] was so helpful. And we prayed quite regularly ... she gave me a whole stack of literature on forgiveness ... (she said) 'You've already donated way too much time and way too much of your life to that particular man, and that situation now, you need to do so some hard yards. But you are going to come through the other end.' ... And it was exactly the sort of nourishment that my soul needed at that particular point in time."

Experience Study Participants

Summary of role of churches

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

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

Participant recommendations for churches



Participant recommendations for church communities

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

Participant recommendations for church leaders

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

Anglican response - 18th Session of General Synod

MEDIA RELEASE New Commission to tackle domestic violence 11 May 2022

The Anglican Church of Australia has established a new Families and Culture Commission to tackle intimate partner violence which affects some of those in its Church and broader community.

“The commission is set up to safeguard the well-being of families and to respond pastorally to victim/survivors of violence in our church communities...It will also address the drivers of violence and help inform how the Church tackles the problem at both a national and parish level, resourcing its priests and lay leaders.

“The resounding support shown by our national church synod members to establish and to resource the Commission demonstrates the churches strong resolve to be a part of the solution to this national problem and of their concern for victim/survivors of intimate partner violence,” the Primate of the Anglican Church, Archbishop Geoff Smith said.



We offer our thanks to:

- The Anglican Church of Australia General Synod's Family Violence Working Group, chaired by Reverend Tracy Lauersen, and the Project Steering Group
- The thousands of people who completed our surveys
- The clergy who took part in our focus groups
- The 20 people that we interviewed in-depth
- The Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee
- Colleagues who assisted us with advice and reviews of our work
- Heather Robinson, who provided us with chaplaincy support throughout the project
- Tracy McEwan for her assistance with the Experience Study

Thank you



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