



Turn The Tide

Developing understanding and effective responses to domestic abuse in the Christian faith community

Key findings

Overall key messages

The more **DA is brought in to the open**, acknowledged and taught about, the more effectively it is responded to by the faith community

The necessity of partnership work between faith, statutory and other agencies.

Background and study

Previous studies have shown that **domestic abuse (DA) happens in the Christian faith context**, as in other contexts.

This study was conducted in **2021** by University of Chester in partnership with Restored and Broken Rites.



There were **192** respondents from Christian faith community.



This online survey **focused on a Christian faith context** and explored experiences of DA, disclosure of DA, helpful and unhelpful responses to disclosure, relevant teachings and values, and awareness of DA.

Experience and impact of abuse

The spiritual effects on those who had experienced DA included:

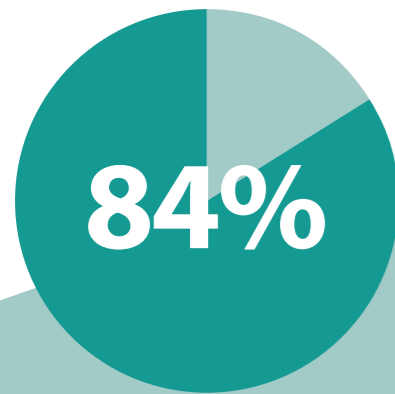
- **Negative impacts on views of the church**
- **Church attendance**
- **View of God**
- **Lost or weakened faith**

Other spiritual effects included that the relationship with God was maintained or strengthened, and that with time faith returned or was strengthened.

Of those who had experienced abuse, **the most prevalent types were** controlling/coercive (90%) and psychological/emotional abuse (94%).

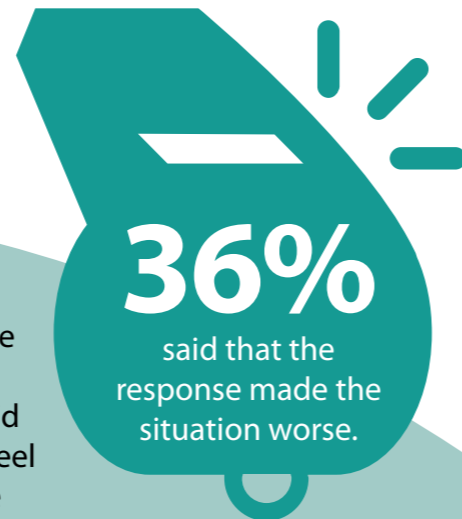
60% of those who had experienced abuse had **experienced spiritual abuse**.

Disclosure and response



The very large majority (84%) of respondents disclosed to a person with a role in the Christian faith community.

There were **helpful and unhelpful responses** from the Christian faith community to disclosures. 18% said the response helped to positively change the situation, 29% said the response did not change situation but made them feel supported. 36% said that the response made the situation worse.



Helpful aspects of responses to disclosure included a supportive response (including practical support), believing the disclosure and identification of the experience as abuse.

Unhelpful aspects of responses to disclosure included being ignored, isolated and judged, a lack of effective response and intervention, not being believed, being blamed, and supporting the perpetrator.



71% of those who **disclosed to a person** in the Christian faith community were not referred for support.

For those who had experienced psychological/emotional abuse and had disclosed, the longer ago the person reached out, the more likely that the response was unhelpful. This suggests that progress is being made and that responses are becoming more helpful.

Reasons for reaching out to someone in the Christian faith community about experiences of DA included for help, support or prayer, an existing relationship with the individual, and a positive perception of how the individual would respond.

Reasons for not reaching out to someone in the Christian faith community about experiences of DA included expecting the response to be negative, and the experience was not identified by themselves as abuse at the time.



Teachings, values and awareness



In cases where there was abuse, 71% of abusers used Christian teachings to support/excuse the abuse, **whether or not they were Christian themselves**

Christian teachings which **may contribute to DA** included submission of wives, male headship, teaching on divorce, and teaching on marriage.



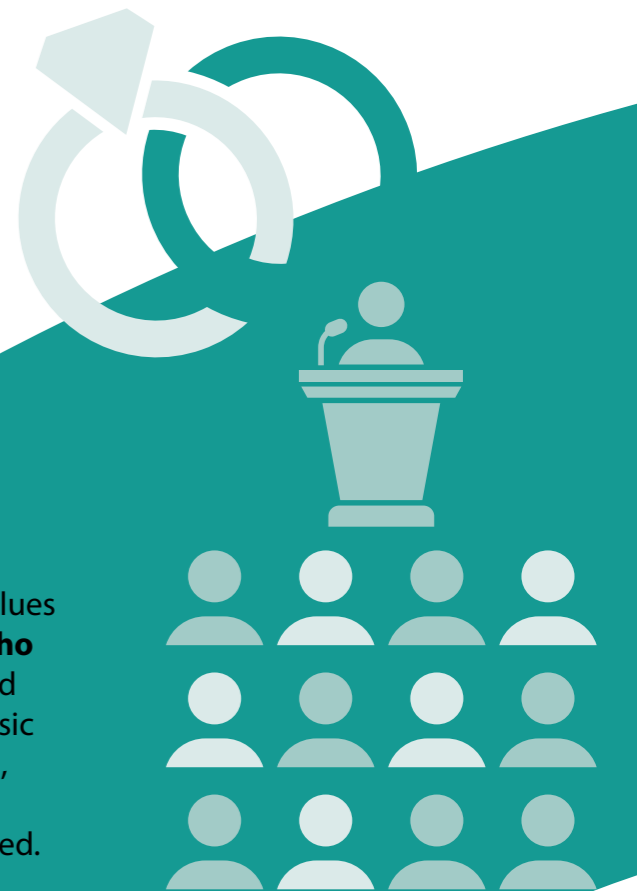
Teachings used by perpetrators to support or excuse abuse (including as means to prevent leaving) included using scripture to justify abuse, submission of wives, and divorce.



Christian teaching or values that **may help those who experience DA** included love, equality, the intrinsic value of each individual, and God's care for the vulnerable and oppressed.



63% were aware of DA being **discussed in private conversations** regularly or sometimes



Less than half of respondents had heard about DA in sermons, prayers or church meetings

Help and support

When asked about their **awareness of the actions of the church in response to DA:**

More than 1 in 3 people said there was nothing helpful or they were not aware of anything helpful.



In terms of helpful actions of the church, about **1 in 3 people** said that there was personal or practical support,

around **1 in 6** said speaking about DA in the church, and around **1 in 6** said safeguarding.

Those who had experienced DA suggested supportive actions that the church could take. These included:



Turn The Tide



Talk about DA in faith communities



Understand what DA is



Respond effectively to those who experience DA



No tolerance of DA



Teach and preach about key passages relevant to DA



Hear the stories of those who experience DA



Equip faith communities, through training, policy and practice



Take a pro-active approach to addressing DA because this has an impact



Interaction between faith contexts and other organisations and agencies who work in DA or related areas



Develop safe cultures and spaces



Enable individuals to identify abuse if they experience it

When using this information please reference this document as follows:

Oakley & Wright (2023) Developing understanding and effective responses to domestic abuse in the Christian faith community.

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