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In Churches Too:

**Church Responses to Domestic Abuse –
A case study of Cumbria**



Dr Kristin Aune (Coventry University) & **Dr Rebecca Barnes** (University of Leicester)

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For enquiries, email
churchresearch.tpsr@coventry.ac.uk

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Executive Summary

WHY THIS RESEARCH?

Research on domestic abuse and churches' responses to it exists in North America, but not in the UK, except for a few small-scale studies on particular denominations or expressions of Christianity. Restored and Churches Together in Cumbria (CTiC) deliver training on domestic abuse and advocate for policy change, but need evidence of the scale of the problem to enable them to respond appropriately. This research provides much-needed evidence on domestic abuse at local-level, focusing on the county of Cumbria in north-west England.

AIMS

The research aimed to identify:

- The rates of domestic abuse amongst male/female churchgoers;
- The nature, dynamics and impacts of domestic abuse for churchgoers;
- The levels of awareness of, and attitudes held by, church members and church leaders, relating to the occurrence of domestic abuse in their congregations;
- How churches currently respond to domestic abuse; and
- Churchgoers' experiences of seeking support and guidance in relation to domestic abuse.

METHODS

We designed a survey and made it available on paper and online. We selected a random sample of 230 churches and invited their leaders to advertise it to their congregations. 129 churches agreed to do so. We also advertised the survey via local Christian networks and media. We received 438 usable responses, which we analysed via SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Three-quarters of the sample were female. Participants were predominantly White British and

older people were over-represented (68.8% were aged 60 and over), making this survey a valuable source of data on older people's perceptions and experiences of domestic abuse. Almost half of the sample attended Anglican churches, followed by Methodist (22.2%), Roman Catholic (12.9%) and many other denominations. Participants were predominantly regular churchgoers, and over half were involved in the ministry of their church.

FINDINGS

What is the extent of domestic abuse among churchgoers?

Domestic abuse is not a hypothetical issue: there are survey respondents who are experiencing systematic abuse of different kinds on at least a weekly basis. One in four ($n=109$) of the sample had experienced at least one abusive behaviour in their current relationship; this includes 12 women who have experienced between 10-20 different abusive behaviours and six women who are currently in relationships where they fear for their lives. More broadly, 42.2% of the whole sample had experienced at least one of the abusive behaviours we asked about in a current or previous relationship. These figures are not likely to be representative of all churchgoers in Cumbria or elsewhere, and caution is needed when interpreting these findings without further contextual information about the motives, dynamics and impacts of abusive behaviour.

These headline figures revealed little difference between women's and men's reporting. However, people aged 60 years and over were less likely than under 60s to say that they had experienced abusive behaviours.

When those who reported experiencing at least one abusive behaviour were asked directly whether they had ever experienced domestic abuse, 57.4% of women and 16.7% of men said that they had, showing a substantial gender difference. This difference may be because men are less likely to see abusive behaviours as abuse or to self-identify as being abused. However, it is perhaps more likely reflects the lower severity, frequency and lesser impacts of the abusive behaviours that men typically reported experiencing (see below). Most experiences of abuse were long-term: half had been abused for ten years or more.

What are the nature, dynamics and impacts of abuse among churchgoers?

Emotional abuse was the most commonly experienced form of abuse. Most commonly this occurred once or twice ever, but for more than one in ten this is/was occurring at least weekly. Similar proportions of men and women had experienced physical abuse at least once, whereas sexual, financial and spiritual abuse were reported by a much higher proportion of women: women were four times more likely to have experienced sexual abuse at least once.

Gender differences are clear in the nature, dynamics and impacts of abuse: women experience abuse that is more frequent, more severe and has more serious impacts.

Impacts of domestic abuse include diminished self-esteem, depression, feeling trapped and withdrawing from family and friends. Impacts which concerned serious risk to the victim/survivor or their children were disproportionately reported by women.

How do churchgoers view domestic abuse in their congregations? What is their level of awareness of it and what are their attitudes to it?

Churchgoers in this study were much more aware of domestic abuse outside the church than within it. While 71.3% were aware of it in their community, only 37.6% thought it was a problem in their church. This is concerning, as the notion that domestic abuse happens in the community but not in the church is false. The low awareness of the problem is mirrored by the finding that only around two in seven churchgoers thought their church was equipped to deal with disclosures of domestic abuse.

How churches currently respond to domestic abuse

A large number of people, when asked to write about the role of the church in responding to domestic abuse, said that their church did very little, attributing this to their church being small, elderly and rural, or to a culture of silence. Some said the church did some work, with displaying information about helplines, praying and individual pastoral support being good examples of this. A small number said their church was very active, working with local domestic abuse charities, for instance.

There is an appetite for the church to become a place where those subjected to abuse can find support. The large majority of people thought that the church should be a place where domestic abuse is discussed and two-thirds thought the church should do more to raise awareness of the problem. This gives church leaders a strong mandate to address this issue more proactively.



What are churchgoers' experiences of seeking support and guidance in relation to domestic abuse?

Those who had sought help for domestic abuse were more likely to have done so outside the church. Reasons for not seeking help at church were that they were not involved in a church at the time, feeling too embarrassed or ashamed, feeling that it was their duty to make the relationship work, and not knowing or trusting anyone at church well enough.

One in six men and one in four women who answered this question had sought support from a church. In just over half of cases, the response received was supportive, and primarily took the form of emotional support/a listening ear. However, there were also examples of dangerous practice and disclosures of domestic abuse being minimised or silenced.

Just over half of the sample were aware of local or national domestic abuse services outside church. Those who had completed the domestic abuse awareness training delivered by CTiC and LetGo were more likely to know where to signpost victims/survivors to. Over half of those who had sought help for domestic abuse had used services outside the church, most commonly friends and family, health professionals, police, counsellors and domestic abuse services. Some had received positive responses which had resulted in the victim/survivor being empowered to leave their abuser. Others received negative responses which jeopardised their safety or colluded with the abuser.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of these findings, churches should:

Recognise that abuse happens in churches too, to a significant proportion of people, that abuse takes many forms, and that congregations include both perpetrators and victims/survivors.

Respond by teaching that domestic abuse is wrong, supporting those who disclose being abused, and ensuring that church leaders and one domestic abuse 'champion' in each congregation is trained.

Refer victims and perpetrators to sources of help beyond, as well as within, the church, follow safeguarding procedures and work with secular domestic abuse services.

Record all disclosures of domestic abuse both from the perpetrator and the victim/survivor of abuse.

Introduction

‘there is ample evidence that religious faith and domestic violence are co-mingled’

(Nason-Clark 2009, p.389)

The current cross-government definition of domestic abuse is:

‘Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. It can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional’

(Home Office 2013)

Different terms – ‘domestic abuse’, ‘domestic violence’ and ‘intimate partner violence’ – are used to refer to violence and abuse in adult intimate relationships.

‘Domestic abuse’ is our preferred term, underlining that this is not restricted to physical violence but also includes psychological/emotional abuse, coercive control, financial abuse, sexual abuse and/or spiritual abuse.

Domestic abuse in the UK

In England and Wales, an estimated 26% of women and 15% of men have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16. In the last year alone, an estimated 7.5% of women (1.2 million) and 4.3% of men (713,000) experienced domestic abuse (ONS 2018a). An unquantifiable number of survivors do not report abuse due to shame, self-blame, fear and lack of recognition of abusive behaviours, so the real scale of domestic abuse is likely to be higher. The most serious, systematic domestic abuse is predominantly perpetrated by men towards women in intimate relationships. Whilst this statement is contested by some (e.g. Archer 2000), there is a wealth of empirical evidence which indicates the scale of male violence against women:

- Of the domestic abuse incidents that are sufficiently serious to be considered criminal offences, 71% are experienced by women (Walby, Towers & Francis 2014)
- Over a six-year period, male perpetrators committed more severe acts, had a higher number of recorded incidents and engaged more in controlling behaviours than female perpetrators (Hester 2013)
- Women are five times more likely than men to report having been sexually assaulted by a partner in the last 12 months (ONS 2018a)
- 50% of female homicide victims were killed by a current or ex-partner compared to 3% of male homicide victims (ONS 2018b)

Important steps have been made towards recognising and responding to domestic abuse. National policies (e.g. the *Call to End Violence Against Women and Girls*; Home Office 2011) have established the need to prevent domestic abuse, protect survivors and their children and hold perpetrators accountable. The *Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004* offers legal protection to all victims of domestic abuse, regardless of gender and sexuality, and more recent legal developments have introduced measures designed to enable victims and their children to remain in their home (Domestic Violence Protection Orders; see Kelly et al. 2013). The *Serious Crime Act 2015* made coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate and familial relationships a criminal offence.

Domestic abuse has been identified as a priority within statutory agencies (e.g. the police, NHS and social services). The non-statutory sector has developed specialist services not only for heterosexual women (e.g. Women's Aid, Refuge) but also for male survivors (e.g. Men's Advice Line, Mankind Initiative), minority ethnic groups (e.g. Imkaan) and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survivors (e.g. Galop). These developments reflect a growing awareness that there needs to be a diverse and intersectional response to domestic abuse which accounts for the combined impacts of cultural background, socio-economic status, disability, age and other identities and circumstances (Crenshaw 1991; Nixon & Humphreys 2010). However, little attention has been paid to Christian survivors of domestic abuse.

Whilst responses to domestic abuse demonstrate significant progress over the last four decades, the future of domestic abuse service provision is uncertain: a regime of austerity and sweeping public sector spending cuts since 2010 have jeopardised the capacity of statutory and non-statutory agencies to respond to victims/survivors and their children (Sanders-McDonagh, Neville & Nolas 2016). Between 2010 and 2012 local authority funding of domestic abuse services reduced by nearly a third, disproportionately impacting smaller and specialist third sector agencies (e.g. services for black and minority ethnic women) (Towers & Walby 2012). In 2015/16 one in four refuge referrals was declined due to lack of capacity (Women's Aid Federation of England 2017). Austerity and welfare reforms disproportionately impact women and children (Fawcett Society 2012), making it difficult for women to leave men who are abusing them.

Domestic abuse and the UK church – the need for research

The Church is the UK's biggest institution with a presence in 50,000 communities (Brierley 2014), and Christianity remains the biggest faith group with 59.3% of the population identifying with it and 5.4 million attending church at least monthly (Office for National Statistics 2012; Brierley 2014). With statutory and non-statutory service provision in flux, the church could play an important role in responding to domestic abuse.

So how does Christian belief affect domestic violence? Does having faith and/or belonging to a religious community protect against domestic abuse and aid recovery, as some American research (Shannon-Lewy & Dull 2005; Gillum, Sullivan & Bybee 2006) indicates? Or does it heighten the risk of experiencing it, for instance through religious teachings encouraging victims not to leave abusive marriages (Nason-Clark 2004; Levitt & Ware 2006; Knickmeyer, Levitt & Horne 2010)? In North America, studies over the last two decades have uncovered the hidden problem of domestic abuse in Christian families and churches. This next section reviews academic literature on the core aims of our project, which were to identify:

- The rates of domestic abuse amongst male/female churchgoers;
- The nature, dynamics and impacts of domestic abuse for churchgoers;
- The levels of awareness of, and attitudes held by, church members and church leaders, relating to the occurrence of domestic abuse in their congregations;
- How churches currently respond to domestic abuse; and
- Churchgoers' experiences of seeking support and guidance in relation to domestic abuse.

Literature review

Domestic violence and the church: the knowledge base so far

The vast majority of published research on domestic violence and the church is from North America. Most is from the USA, but the pioneering Religion and Violence Research Team established in 1992 at the University of New Brunswick, Canada, has conducted a series of studies on domestic violence and faith and played a major role in shaping the research field.

What is the extent of, and rates of, domestic abuse among churchgoers? Do churchgoers experience more or less domestic abuse than non-churchgoers?

Regular churchgoing may be a protective factor against physical forms of domestic abuse. Large-scale surveys by Ellison and Anderson (2001; Ellison et al. 2007) suggest that regular attendees are less likely to report perpetrating violence than non-attendees, although it is difficult to assess whether some are under-reporting because they know it is not socially acceptable. In contrast, Drumm, Popescu and Riggs (2009) find similar rates of abuse, albeit in a smaller sample of Seventh Day Adventists in the USA. Other non-physical forms of abuse should also be counted, Knickmeyer, Levitt and Horne (2010) argue. When all forms of domestic abuse are included, the evidence (e.g. Wang et al. 2009) suggests that there is not a significant difference in rates of abuse when churchgoers are compared with non-churchgoers. While Wang et al. and Ellison et al.'s research suggests that churchgoing is a protective factor against violence, Wang et al. (2009, p.232) point out that it may instead be that abuse victims are prevented from attending church by abusive spouses or shy away due to injuries or fear.

Existing literature does not show theological differences or denomination to be a significant factor in rates of domestic abuse among churchgoers, although these differences may affect the nature, dynamics and impact of abuse, as the next section discusses. US literature finds higher rates of domestic violence in Christian communities amongst immigrants and African Americans (Choi, Elkins & Disney 2016) and younger people (Ellison et al. 2007).

What are the nature, dynamics and impact of domestic abuse among churchgoers? What role does Christian faith play in the experiences of those who are abused or who abuse?

Christianity shapes the nature, dynamics and impacts of domestic violence. Religion pervades victims' experience of abuse, from how they feel about it to the practicalities of how they seek help (Nason-Clark 2009). Religion can help or hinder victims' journey to recovery. As Yick (2008, p.1289) summarises:

'The studies that have been done in the area of spirituality or religion and domestic violence show that domestic violence victims harness religious and spiritual resources to cope and find meaning, yet religion and spirituality can overtly and covertly promote abuse.'

Negatively, Christian teachings can be used to reinforce patriarchal marital roles (male leadership/control and female submission). The Christian women Knickmeyer et al. interviewed said their husbands used conservative Christian ideals of female submission 'as a license to abuse' (Knickmeyer, Levitt & Horne 2010, p.102), compelling their wives to submit to their control because they said the Bible required it. Christian teachings can also be used to pressure women to forgive too quickly or to see abuse as their 'cross to bear' (Nason-Clark 2004 p.304), and to discourage women from leaving violent husbands. Conservative theologies and teachings have a particularly negative impact and may make it harder for women to seek help outside, as conservative churches often distrust secular agencies (Nash, Faulkner & Abell. 2011). Barriers to women challenging abuse also include religious prohibitions concerning divorce.

Positively, spiritual practices such as prayer and Bible reading and give women strength to challenge their abuse, leave abusive husbands and partners and rebuild their lives (Anderson, Renner & Danis 2012; Drumm et al. 2014).

How do churchgoers view domestic abuse in their congregations? What is their level of awareness of it and what are their attitudes towards it?

There is very little research on churchgoers' attitudes to domestic violence. What exists is qualitative and based on focus groups. This lack of research is surprising since churches, especially their leaders, are called upon for help by domestic violence victims (Bent-Goodley & Fowler 2006; Asay 2011). More research is needed on churchgoers' awareness of and attitudes to domestic abuse. The few studies that exist reveal some awareness of the problem of domestic abuse and a belief that churches could play a role in addressing it.

Asking about churchgoers' attitudes to domestic abuse – how they think about it – is different from asking about their response to it – what they do about it (if anything). The next section addresses what churches do about domestic abuse.

How do churches currently respond to domestic abuse?

Nason-Clark (1996) summarises from her research with 500 clergy and church women in Canadian evangelical churches that churches address violence against women in churches in two ways: 1) informal women's support networks (58% of women in the focus groups had supported an abuse victim); and 2) clergy counselling for victims (most have done so). Clergy recognised their need for training (less than one in ten felt well equipped to respond to domestic abuse). Churches must develop partnerships with secular organisations, she argues, but there are obstacles, as secular and Christian organisations can view the issue very differently. Feminists see 'wife abuse' as a big problem from which women must escape, but evangelical clergy often see it as a problem of 'family violence' to be resolved within the family so that the marriage can be restored.

As churches reflect more on domestic violence, they are unsure whether to see it as 'embedded in a system of domination within the church – that is, as a structural problem', or 'as a misunderstanding of Christian doctrine'

(Haaken, Fussell & Mankowski 2007, p.113). The first reflects the feminist critique of the church as a patriarchal institution whose structures oppress women. The second reflects a traditional Christian framework – domestic violence is a sin perpetrated by individual abusers. Evidence indicates that churches more often see it as individual sin and a misunderstanding of Christian doctrine.

Clergy arguably play the most significant role in responding to domestic abuse (Levitt & Ware 2006), acting as 'first responders' (Harr & Yancey 2014 p.149). Christian women often see the church as their first port of call (Nason-Clark 2009 p.383), and it is clergy to whom victims tend to go. Of 1,000 battered women in the general American population surveyed by Bowker (1988, cited in Weaver, Larson & Stapleton 2001), one in three reported receiving help from church leaders, with clergy counselling one in ten of their abusive husbands. Ensuring that clergy respond appropriately is crucial.

There is little evidence of domestic abuse being addressed in a systematic or public manner by churches. Clergy do give support to abuse victims when the victim seeks them out, but this support is not always helpful. Clergy often want to support victims well, but as they are not sufficiently educated about domestic violence, they do not realise the danger it holds for women's physical safety. Some clergy do not realise that when a husband is physically abusive, advising reconciliation may endanger a wife's physical safety, even her life (Miles 2011; Choi 2015). Better training for clergy is vital to enable them to help victims and challenge abusive behaviours – including those which may be happening within their churches.

How can churches respond better to domestic abuse?

There are important signs of progress and good practice in church responses to domestic abuse. Cooper-White (2011) outlines how from the late 1970s – a decade or so later than in wider society – the Christian community took up the challenge of responding to domestic violence. Pioneering centres and training programmes, such as the Faith Trust Institute led by Marie Fortune, educated clergy and clergy-in-training in how to respond pastorally. Christian books on domestic violence appeared, providing pastoral and theological resources for religious leaders and churchgoers, addressing issues such as whether and how domestic violence victims can forgive their abusers, and religious teaching about divorce or female submission in marriage. Mainline Protestant churches were quicker to respond to the issue than evangelicals, the most conservative of whom continue to publish marriage advice literature that ignores the problem. Teaching about domestic abuse in theological colleges has become more commonplace, and domestic abuse became a priority for the World Council of Churches in the 1990s.

One noteworthy training initiative is The Rave Project (www.raveproject.org), a result of the Nason-Clark's Religion and Violence Team's research. It launched in 2007 as an e-learning training project for religious leaders, professionals working on domestic violence and victims/survivors in North America. For clergy it provides 'bite-sized' teaching segments, video clips and information about local shelters to refer women to; for victims it showcases stories to help them identify signs of abuse and information such as safety plans and how to get a restraining order; for social workers it educates them about the role of faith in domestic violence (Fisher-Townsend, Holtmann & McMullin 2009).

These national-level responses do not necessarily translate into good pastoral responses at local church level. Yet pioneering work has been done that can inspire churches to galvanise their members to respond to this critical pastoral issue, as we will discuss shortly in the context of the UK.

Domestic abuse and the UK church

What little research exists on domestic violence and the UK Christian Church indicates that domestic abuse is prevalent in churches: a Methodist Church survey from 2002 found that 17% of Methodist leaders and lay workers had been victims of domestic violence, and that one in four female respondents and one in nine male respondents had experienced domestic violence (personally) from a partner as an adult (Radford & Cappel 2002). A 2012 non-academic survey of Evangelical Alliance members that showed that 10% of married people had experienced physical violence or abuse from a spouse (Evangelical Alliance 2012). However, these surveys use restricted samples focused only on specific denominations or expressions of Christianity.

There have been a couple of small-scale qualitative studies of survivors' experiences of abuse (e.g. Jeffels' (2002) unpublished PhD, giving examples of the Bible being used by abusers against their victims) and Cappel's (2016) qualitative study of ministers and members of a Black-led Pentecostal church, which reveals that women do not feel the church is a safe space to disclose abuse, and some who did so experienced a negative reaction). This qualitative evidence is of value, but the lack of robust pan-denominational survey research means that we do not know the extent, nature, dynamics and impacts of domestic abuse in UK churches. This survey in Cumbria – the largest study in the UK to have focused on domestic abuse in the UK to date – makes critical steps towards addressing this gap.

Some Christian organisations have been pioneers in addressing domestic abuse in the UK. Since its foundation in 2010 Restored has been the only national-level organisation focused specifically on addressing domestic abuse in a church context. In addition to their international work as a Christian alliance working to raise awareness of violence against

1. Guidance has also been produced by the Methodist Church (2010), the Baptist Union of Great Britain (2016), the United Reformed Church (2016) and the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service for England and Wales (2016a, 2016b).

women (involving training and campaigning across the UK and internationally), they set up an online network for Christian survivors of abuse. There have been campaigns by groups such as the Mothers' Union, and several small local-level church projects on domestic violence, such as the training provided by Churches Together in Cumbria with LetGo. Some helpful pastoral and guidance literature exists (e.g. Conway 1998; Restored's 2016 church pack; FaithAction 2015; CCPAS 2016) and some church denominations have issued guidance on it, most recently the Church of England, which updated their guidance in March 2017, and the Church of Scotland, which released a new policy and implementation guidance in May 2017¹. Individual domestic abuse campaigners, trainers and authors (e.g. Storkey 2015) are also doing important work to respond to the problem.



Relation of literature review to this research project

The academic literature on domestic abuse provides a convincing rationale for this project. It shows that despite three decades of research and intervention by churches and Christian organisations, significant problems remain: churchgoers are still experiencing domestic abuse to a significant extent (broadly comparable with non-churchgoers) and while national and local level work has begun by Christian organisations to address domestic violence, it is not as extensive as is needed.

The situation in the UK, where there has been no reliable academic survey research on domestic violence and where small-scale qualitative project reveals abusive dynamics that are not dissimilar to the North American context, is even more critical. Despite the pioneering work of organisations such as Restored and CTiC, domestic abuse has a lower profile within the UK church than it appears to have in the USA or Canada. The North American situation reveals how critical academic research has been to the development of, and funding for, interventions to address domestic violence.

Our project aims, therefore, to produce original research evidence about churchgoers' experiences of domestic abuse and the state of church responses to domestic abuse, that local and national churches and organisations can use to develop and disseminate good practice in responding safely and compassionately to domestic abuse. The research is innovative, the first of its kind. Its ultimate goal is to enable churches to become more just environments where people being abused can find peace, healing and practical support, the attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate abuse are challenged to the extent that the unacceptable and domestic abuse is brought to an end.

Methodology

Survey design and pilot

A questionnaire was designed, consisting mainly of closed 'tick box' questions, with a few open questions to capture qualitative data. A few questions were taken or adapted from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), to enable comparison with national figures, but most were designed for this project. The questionnaire had six sections:

- Demographic questions (e.g. gender, age, ethnic background, marital status)
- Church involvement (e.g. denomination, frequency of church attendance, involvement in leadership)
- Attitudes to domestic abuse and perceptions of their church's response (e.g. whether domestic abuse is a problem in their church)
- Personal experiences of different physical, emotional, financial, sexual and spiritual abusive behaviours and the impacts of domestic abuse
- Experiences of seeking help for domestic abuse, for people who are survivors
- Recommendations for improving church responses and suggested research priorities

The questionnaire was piloted in a large London church to test the questions. This resulted in a few minor amendments. A report was written and given to the London church for internal distribution; findings from that study are helping the church to develop its work.

The questionnaire was available either online via Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) or as paper copies, with freepost envelopes for easy return.

Ethical considerations

Given the sensitive subject matter of this survey, we paid particular attention to ethics. The safety and wellbeing of survey participants was prioritised.

The research was guided by the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice. It was reviewed by Coventry University's Ethics Committee which was

satisfied that all necessary safeguards were put in place. Only adults (aged 18 and over) were invited to complete the survey. Participation was anonymous, protecting respondents from fear of identification: they were not asked to name themselves or their church; the survey could be done privately online, or via a hard copy returned directly to the researchers (it was not collected via church leaders to ensure that leaders did not read participants' responses). The nature of the study was made clear upfront and participants were assured that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw anytime during the survey. Participants were given information about local and national support services for domestic abuse (see Appendix 1).

Sampling and recruitment of participants

Why Cumbria?

We chose to study a single county in order to develop methods that could be expanded nationally in the future. We selected Cumbria for the research. CTiC has been pioneering in promoting the issue of domestic abuse amongst churches of all denominations, so local church leaders were likely to be receptive to promoting the survey. Additionally, domestic abuse in rural communities is less studied and often more hidden, and the church plays a more pivotal role in rural communities lacking other sources of support (Garo Derounian 2014).

We distributed the survey and recruited participants via two waves. Wave 1 involved approaching a random, representative selection of churches in Cumbria. Wave 2 opened up participation to all churchgoers in Cumbria.

Wave 1: Survey distribution via churches

To maximise the opportunity for churchgoers with diverse views and experiences to participate (to avoid the problem of 'snowball sampling' via personal networks, which produces unrepresentative data), we decided to invite the congregations of a sample of churches that we selected from CTiC's database to complete the survey. This sample was broadly representative of the denominational make-up of Cumbria generally. The sample was devised based on figures from the most recent English Church Attendance Survey in 2005 (Brierley 2006), which found 719 churches

in Cumbria regularly attended by 36,400 people, 7.4% of the Cumbrian population (i.e. an average of 51 people per church). For example, as 50.3% of Cumbria's churches were Anglican, we ensured around half the churches selected were Anglican. Appendix 1 shows how many churches were approached from each denomination and whether they agreed to participate. CTiC's database includes approximately two-thirds of Cumbrian churches, but not all. Independent evangelical, free churches and New Churches (e.g. Vineyard, Kings Church) were under-represented in their database, so we conducted additional online searches to supplement CTiC's list.

Overall, 230 churches were approached. In order to assess the impact of CTiC's domestic abuse training on those attending churches where a leader or representative had been trained,² we tried to include an equal number of trained and untrained churches within the target number of churches for each denomination³. Within the denominational groups and the trained and untrained lists, the churches approached were selected randomly to prevent any sampling bias.

The 230 churches' leaders (if the role was vacant this was someone such as a churchwarden) were contacted by email (or letter if they did not use email) with telephone follow-up. They were asked if they would be willing to tell their congregation about the survey by reading out a notice and/or putting a notice in the church's newsletter and/or email list, and were offered paper copies and freepost envelopes if they thought that this is how their congregation would prefer to participate. The notice clearly stated that **the survey was for all churchgoers, not only those who have experienced domestic abuse.**

129 churches agreed to distribute the survey. Uptake by church leaders varied. Churches most likely to agree were, in order, Church of Scotland, URC and Methodist

ecumenical partnerships, Methodist, Roman Catholic, United Reformed and Anglican; in all these groups more than 50% of churches agreed to distribute the survey (see Appendix 2 for the numbers of churches within each denomination that agreed to distribute the survey). The denominational groupings with less than 50% agreeing to distribute the survey were Baptist, Quakers, Independent/New/Pentecostal, Orthodox and Salvation Army. As the appendix shows, churches where someone had undertaken CTiC domestic abuse awareness training were around twice as likely to agree to distribute the survey (74.3% of those churches agreed, compared to 38.5% of untrained churches). There is no way of knowing whether all 129 churches who agreed to distribute the survey actually did, although a reminder was sent to those who had agreed.

Noticeably, churches which were unlikely to agree to distribute the survey were, except for the Quaker meetings and one Orthodox church, Independent and New churches, which are almost without exception evangelical. This may suggest that evangelical churches are more reluctant than other types of church to engage with the subject of domestic abuse. If this is so, it reflects findings of North American studies which show that rates of abuse in evangelical churches are at least as high as in other types of church (Wang et al. 2009), and evangelical churches are more likely to uphold teachings that are unhelpful for those experiencing domestic abuse (Wang et al. 2009; Knickmeyer, Levitt & Horne 2010; Nash, Faulkner & Abell 2011) and may inhibit victims finding support (e.g. teachings enforcing wives' submission to husbands and prohibiting divorce). Given that evangelical churches have unusually high numbers of younger members,⁴ and that many younger adults in Cumbria embarking on their first relationships and getting married attend evangelical churches, **there is a need for evangelical churches to more actively engage in addressing domestic abuse.**⁵

2. CTiC has been running this training in partnership with LetGo since 2007. 21 training days have been held. 300 individuals have been trained, representing around 200 churches in Cumbria. In this way, this project acts as an evaluation of the impact of CTiC's domestic abuse training.

3. This was not always possible: in some denominations more than half of the churches were trained; in others, fewer than half were. Where fewer than 50% were trained, the target number for the denomination was reached by including further untrained churches, and vice versa for denominations where more than 50% churches were trained.

4. Nationally, in terms of denomination, New, Pentecostal, Orthodox and Independent church attendees are the youngest. In terms of churchmanship, mainstream evangelicals and charismatic evangelicals are the youngest (Brierley 2006: 5-6-5.7).

5. However, as we did not ask churches whether they identified as evangelical, it is not possible to say whether evangelical churches in other denominations, such as the Church of England, were more or less likely to agree to distribute the survey.

Reflections on survey recruitment via churches: strengths and limitations

This technique required church leaders to be 'gatekeepers', responsible for asking administrators to add the survey details to newsletters, send it by email to their congregation and/or announce it in a Sunday service. Church leaders are often very busy. Some are responsible for several churches and some perform their role voluntarily while working in another job, so they may not have had time or interest to engage with the research. Our initial emails to church leaders drew responses only from a small number of leaders, probably those who were most concerned about domestic abuse or those who had time to reply. Telephoning them was much more successful. Each leader was telephoned up to three times (with a message left once), although this often resulted in calls to unanswered phones, (male) ministers' wives taking messages, and voicemail messages left by the researchers were often not returned. The telephone calls enabled the research team to explain what was required and answer questions, and provided an insight into the busy lives of rural church leaders. During these telephone calls, other barriers to church participation emerged: churches lacking a permanent minister (this may be particularly true for Independent churches), churches without an office (meaning no one was available to answer the phone if the minister was out), churches which were reluctant to be involved with ecumenical initiatives, and small and ageing congregations (some ministers thought the topic was not appropriate or relevant for them).

Despite some challenges, using church leaders as gatekeepers was also a strength. In rural communities, with many older people and poorer internet access, recruitment via online surveys alone excludes many potential participants. Churches' ranks are swelled by those whom domestic abuse researchers rarely hear from, and the use of paper surveys and freepost envelopes provided an accessible way for many older people to respond. Indeed, given that the government's Crime Survey for England and Wales is restricted to the under 60s⁶, making it hard to know the extent of domestic abuse among the older population, this research gives valuable data on older people's attitudes and experiences in a rural county.

Wave 2: Survey distribution via local Christian networks and media

The modest response to the first wave of recruitment, and the risk that not all churches who had agreed to distribute the survey had done so, necessitated a second phase of distribution.

A database was constructed of local (including online) Christian groups and events. Some were large organisations with dozens of local subgroups (e.g. Mothers' Union), but many were small, single groups. These included Christian bookshops, University of Cumbria Christian student societies, street pastors and a Christian bikers' group. They were approached and asked to send out a short notice to their members, and again paper copies and freepost envelopes were offered. Cumbria-based contacts involved in domestic abuse or safeguarding work, such as CTiC's Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Champions, assisted by encouraging their churches or networks to complete the survey.

The message was also sent to the remaining churches on CTiC's database, and the survey was promoted on Facebook and Twitter by the researchers and Restored. Unlike in the first wave, organisations were not asked to confirm whether they would help with the research, so it is not possible to know how many passed the message on. Several large organisations which we had hoped would support the research because of their work with women did not agree to advertise the survey, either not responding to our messages or saying that they viewed the research as conflicting with their interests (e.g. a secular women's organisation felt that they should not advertise something related to religion).

Local media contacts were also compiled. They were then sent a press release appealing for participants; subsequently, members of the team were interviewed on several local and Christian radio stations (including BBC Radio Cumbria and Premier Christian Radio) and articles appeared in several national publications (including *Church Times* and the *Methodist Recorder*).

6. The upper age limit was increased to 74 years old from April 2017, but findings based on this extended age range have not yet been published (ONS 2018a).

Overall, 60.7% of responses (266) came from the first phase and 39.3% (172) from the second. There was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of the extent of abuse experienced. There was a significant difference between those who completed the survey online (37.4% of people) versus those who did so on paper (62.6%): those who completed it online were more likely to have experienced abuse; this is partly because online completers were younger, and as we will show shortly, younger people were more likely to report that they had been abused.

Data coding and analysis

Data were exported to SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), then cleaned, coded and analysed. During this process three responses were removed: one because the participant indicated that they were not from Cumbria, and in the other two cases, most questions were not answered.

Analysis was performed on all questions in the questionnaire, and relationships were explored between respondents' attitudes to, and experiences of, domestic abuse, and their gender and age. In some areas of the analysis other variables were considered, such as whether the respondent holds a leadership position and whether their church had received CTiC's domestic abuse awareness training.

Throughout the report, when reporting on statistical significance, the 0.05 significance level (p) is used (standard in social science research), which means that we can be 95% confident that findings have not occurred by chance.

Findings

Who completed the survey?⁷

74.3% were female and 25.7% male ($n=435$ as three did not answer the question). This means that men were significantly under-represented, partly because there are fewer men in churches in the first place, especially in the older age groups; the most recent cross-denominational statistics for England indicate in 2005 that women constituted 57% of church attendees (Brierley 2006, p. 12.3). But it also seems that although the survey was explicitly targeted at both men and women, and this was emphasised in the call for participants, more men chose not to respond, perhaps thinking that domestic abuse was a 'women's issue'. The lower male response makes achieving reliable comparison figures between women and men challenging in some parts of the research.

All age groups took part (18 to 80+). The largest numbers of respondents were in the 60-69 group (28.9% of the total) and the 70-79 group (28.0%). Overall, 68.8% were aged 60 and above and only 6.7% were under 40, making this a disproportionately older sample, older than Cumbria's population, which is already older than the average in England and Wales generally (Figure 1).⁸

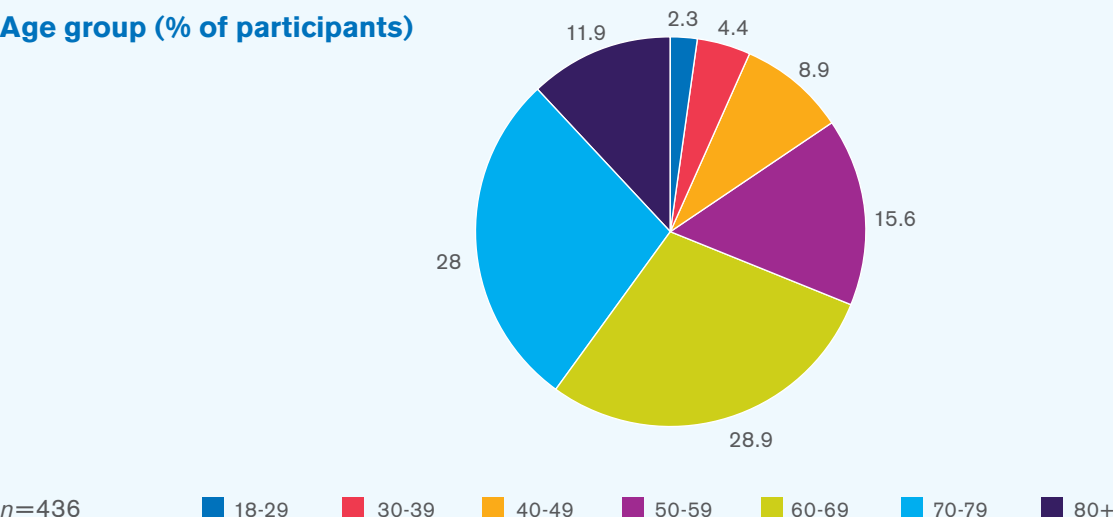
Given the spread of ages, we split the sample into two when analysing some responses, the under 60s (31.2%) and those aged 60 and over (68.8%), in order to explore differences between older and younger people's responses.

The sample was very similar to the Cumbrian profile in terms of ethnicity, being almost wholly White (97.9%, compared with 98.5% in Cumbria generally, $n=436$), with only 9 people of another ethnicity: 4 (0.9%) of mixed heritage, 1 Asian (0.2%) and 4 selecting 'other' (0.9%); these four did not offer alternative ethnic backgrounds but queried the question, e.g. 'Human – any other answer is realist'. Because there were so few non-white respondents, it is unfortunately not possible to undertake any analysis of differences by ethnic group.

More of the survey participants were married than in Cumbria's population: 68.7%. 8.4% were single, 3.2% were in a relationship but not married or civilly partnered, 0.2% were in a civil partnership, 1.4% were separated, 6.4% were divorced or had dissolved a civil partnership and 11.6% were widowed (Figure 2). This represents a much higher married proportion than in Cumbria generally, where only 50.8% were married in 2011, perhaps reflecting the emphasis that churches place on the importance of marriage and the older age profile of the sample.

Figure 1: Age breakdown of participants

Age group (% of participants)

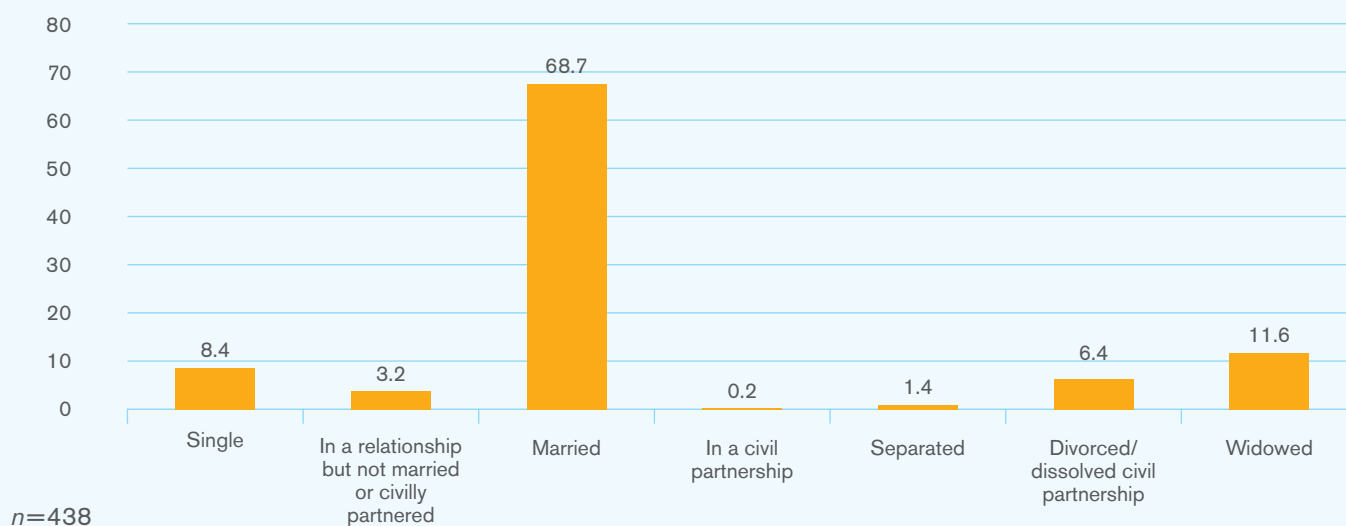


7. Findings are reported as percentages for ease of understanding, rounded up to one decimal place. We also show how many people answered a question to be transparent about how these percentages have been calculated; for example ($n=435$), where 'n' is short for 'number'.

8. Cumbria Intelligence Observatory, no date, is the source for the comparisons in this section.

Figure 2: Participants marital/relationship status

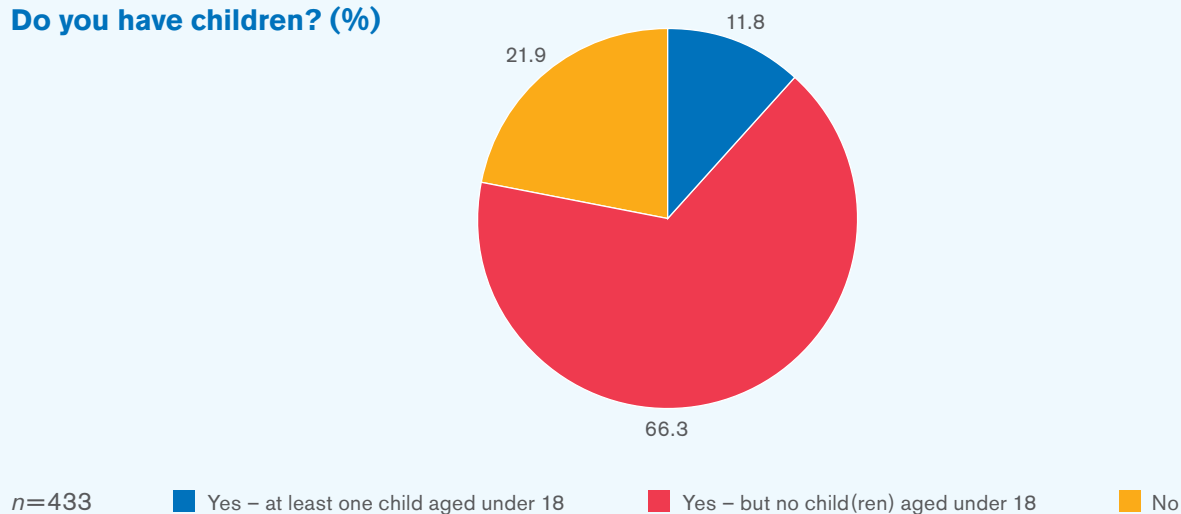
How would you describe your marital status? (%)



78.1% were parents, but most of their children were adults; only 11.8% of the sample had a child/ren under the age of 18 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The proportion of participants who have children

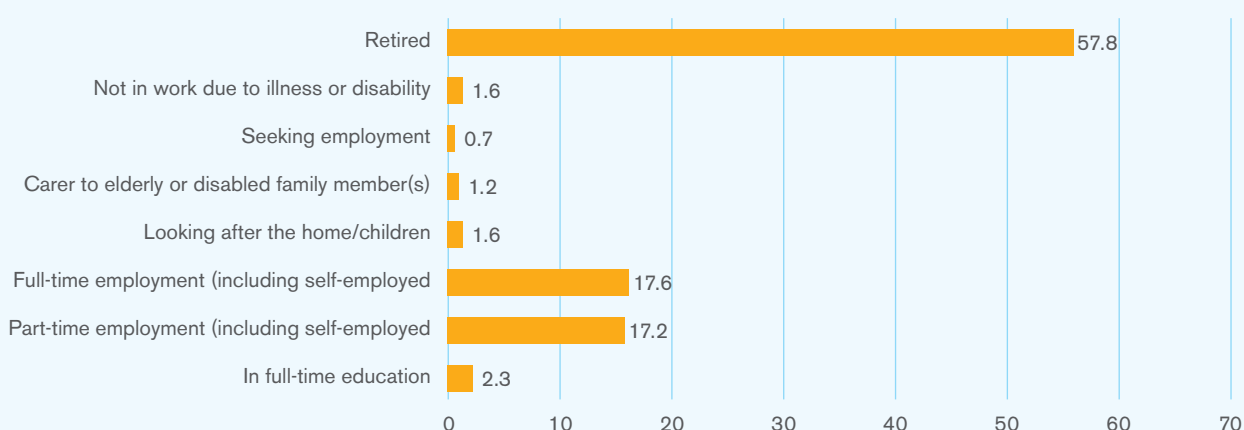
Do you have children? (%)



Occupational status was varied, with the majority being retired (57.8%), just over a third employed either full- (17.6%) or part-time (17.2%), and small numbers in full-time education (2.3%), looking after the home/children (1.6%), not in work due to illness or disability (1.6%), carers for an elderly or disabled family member (1.2%) or seeking employment (0.7%) (Figure 4). A higher proportion was retired than in the general Cumbrian population, again reflecting the disproportionately older profile of this sample.

Figure 4: Participants' occupational status

What is your occupational status? (%)



n=431

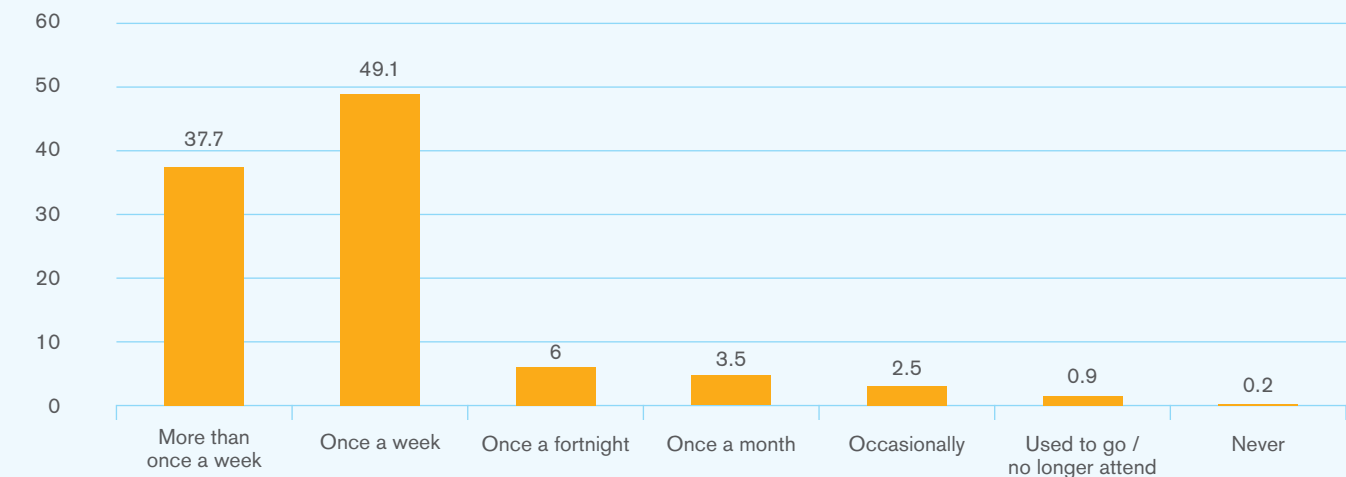
Cumbria is classified as a 'predominantly rural' county (Government Statistical Service 2017), and this was reflected in the survey results. Half (49.5%) of our respondents described where they lived as rural (hamlet or small village); 40.0% as suburban (small town or large village); and only 10.5% as urban (large town or city) (n=430).

Participants' church lives

Predictably as this was a survey of churchgoers, 97.0% identified as Christian, with only 1.2% selecting 'Agnostic', 0.5% 'no religion or belief' and 1.4% 'other' (the other six people included two Quakers and one Pagan ($n=432$)). The participants were committed churchgoers, with 86.6% attending at least once a week (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Frequency of church attendance

How often do you go to church? (%)

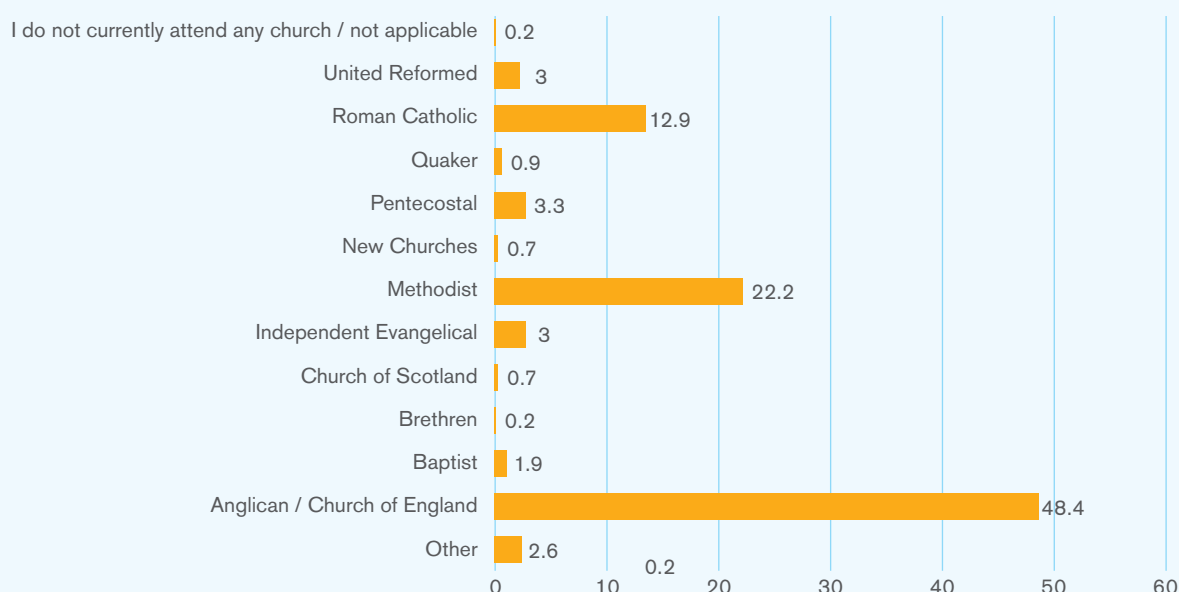


$n=432$

When asked the denomination of their church, almost half (48.4%) attended an Anglican church. The next most frequently attended denomination was Methodism (22.2%), followed by Roman Catholicism (12.9%), with all other denominations attracting below 4%; the numbers of people attending Baptist, Brethren, Church of Scotland, New Churches and Quaker meetings were each in single digits (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Denominational breakdown of participants

What is the denomination of the church you attend? (%)



The 11 who selected 'other' included four who were in an Anglican-Methodist ecumenical partnership and four who were from a Nazarene church.

As churches vary in size and the last reliable England-wide statistics come from 2005, it is not possible to accurately assess the representativeness of our sample. We can, however, suggest that, based on the 2005 denominational landscape, our survey over-represents Catholics (significantly), Methodists (slightly), and under-represents Anglicans (very slightly) and Independent and New Churches (significantly). The proportion of 2017 survey respondents versus 2005 churches are almost identical for Pentecostals, Baptists and the other smaller denominations (combined).

56.7% were involved in an aspect of church ministry (e.g. children's work, music, pastoral care, prayer and outreach, $n=430$), with 44.3% holding a leadership role ($n=433$). Men were more likely to hold a leadership role (56.3% did, compared with 40.3% of women).⁹ Leadership roles were diverse, with some, when asked to state which role(s) they

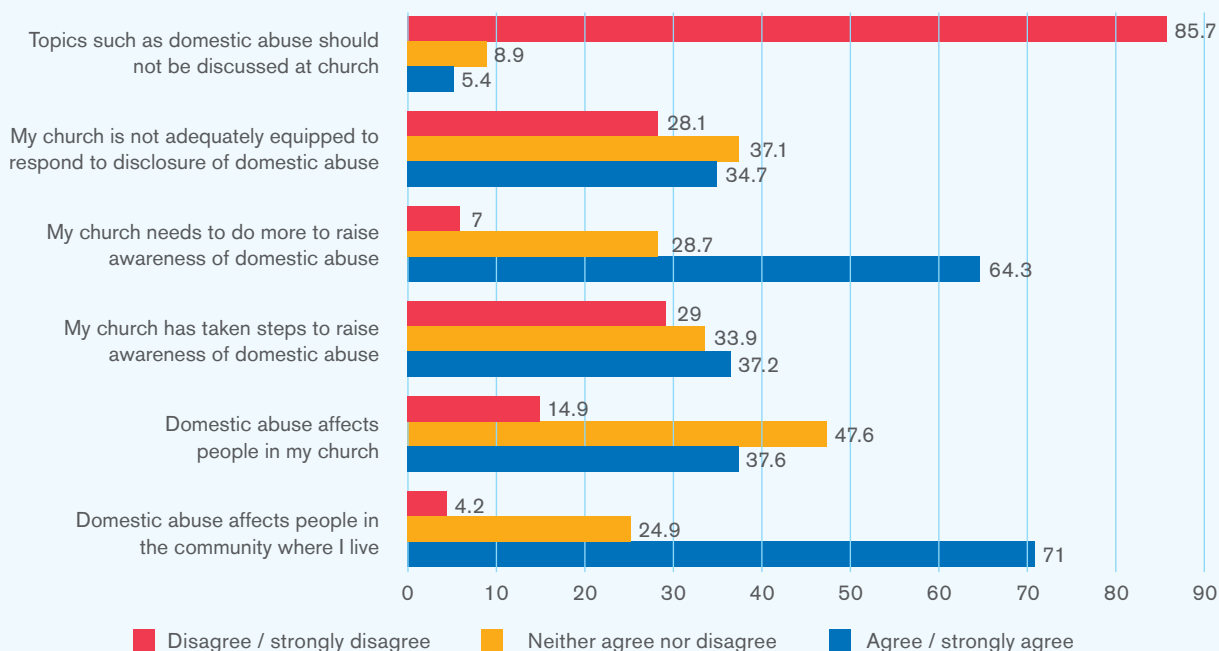
held, indicating that they were the vicar, priest, pastor or most senior minister, and others indicating lay roles such as treasurer, churchwarden, children's worker, member of Parish Church Council, distributor of communion or house group leader; many of these roles are voluntary. Over a third (39.3%) said that their role included responsibility for safeguarding or child protection ($n=405$).

Only 12% of participants had attended training on domestic abuse provided by CTiC in partnership with LetGo. A further 18.1% were aware that someone in their church had attended, and 30.6% were aware that the training existed; around four in ten (39.4%) had not attended or heard of the training. Therefore, while the majority of people were aware of the training, and around a third were in a church where at least one person had been trained, the training was not known about by a significant minority. In several places in this report, we compare the responses of those in a church that they know to have received the training, and churches that are, to the respondent's knowledge, untrained, to see if being in a trained church increases a congregation's awareness of domestic abuse.

9. $p=0.003$.

Figure 7: Attitudes to and awareness of domestic abuse

To what extent do you think the following statements are true? (%)



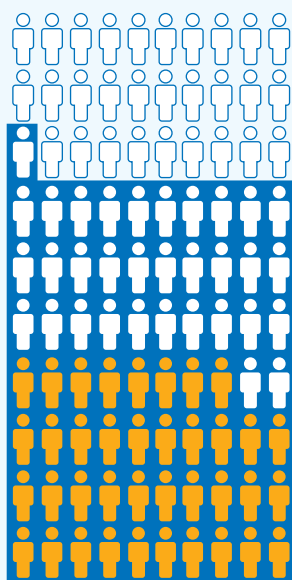
Attitudes to and awareness of domestic abuse

Attitudes to and awareness of domestic abuse were assessed by giving people statements and asking them to select 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. The chart above (Figure 7) combines 'strongly agree' with 'agree' and 'strongly disagree' with 'disagree' responses.

The two statements about whether they were aware of domestic abuse being a problem in their church or community brought contrasting results: **a clear majority (71.0%) were aware of it in their community but only around half this number (37.6%, $n=434$) thought it was a problem in their church.** This might show lack of awareness of the extent of domestic abuse amongst churchgoers, imagining Christians not to do such things, or it may be that many churches in Cumbria are small communities where people know each other so assume (potentially incorrectly) that they would know if abuse was happening.

The two statements 'My church is not adequately equipped to respond to disclosure of domestic abuse' and 'My church has taken steps to raise awareness of domestic abuse' revealed a mixed picture: similar numbers selected 'agree', 'neither agree nor disagree' and 'disagree'. When asked if they thought that their church was adequately equipped to respond to disclosure of domestic abuse, the results were split three ways: 28.1% said the church was adequately equipped, 34.7% said that it was not, and 37.1% were unsure or ambivalent.

Concerningly, **only around two in seven churchgoers consider their church to be adequately equipped to deal with a disclosure of domestic abuse.** This suggests not only that the church may not be able to deal with disclosures, but also that most churchgoers either would not trust the church enough to disclose domestic abuse themselves, or do not consider the church an appropriate source of help. Such perceptions and survivors' experiences of help-seeking are further examined later.



71.0%
were aware of
domestic abuse in
their **COMMUNITY**

BUT ONLY
37.6%
thought it was a
problem in their
CHURCH



only around
2 in 7
churchgoers
consider their church
to be adequately
equipped to deal
with a disclosure
of domestic abuse

Most people thought that churches should respond to domestic abuse:

- 85.7% disagreed that 'Topics such as domestic abuse should not be discussed in church'
- 64.3% agreed that 'My church needs to do more to raise awareness of domestic abuse'

Overall, most respondents know that domestic abuse is a problem, at least outside the church, and most think that the church should do more to tackle it, but they are not very confident that their own church is equipped for this task.

Which groups of churchgoers were more aware of the problem of domestic abuse? When asked 'Are you aware of people in your church who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, domestic abuse?' 30% said yes, 58.4% said no and 11.5% were unsure ($n=433$). Those who were more likely to know of people who had been abused were:

- Younger people (under 60s),¹⁰
- Those who had at least one child under 18,¹¹
- Those living in urban areas,¹²
- Those who held a leadership role,¹³
- Those in a church where someone had been on the CTiC domestic abuse awareness training.¹⁴

Figure 8 shows how participants categorised the abusers and victims that they were aware of.

10. 45.9% of under 60s were aware, compared to 23.2% of those aged 60 and over ($p<0.001$).

11. 48.0% of those with a child under 18 were aware, compared to 25.4% of those with adult child/ren and 36.2% of those without children ($p=0.001$).

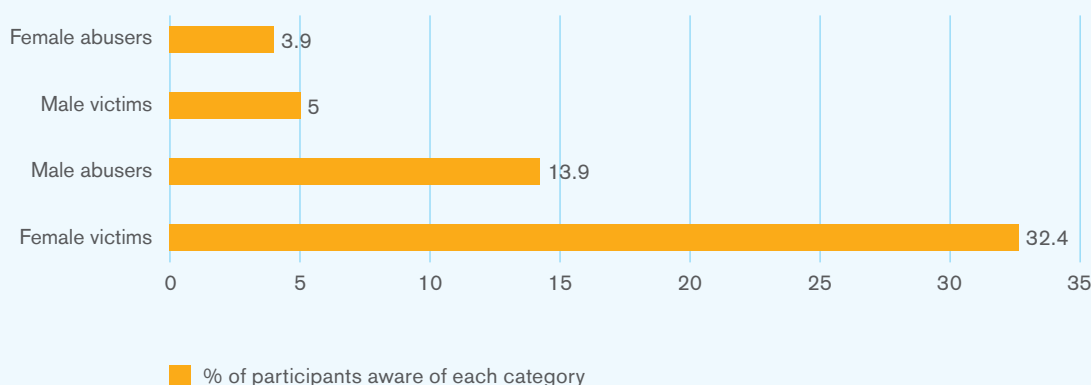
12. 43.2% of those in urban areas were aware, compared to 31.8% of those in suburban areas and 25.9% of those in rural areas ($p=0.016$).

13. 36.5% of those in a leadership role were aware, compared to 24.5% of those who were not in a leadership role ($p=0.018$).

14. 38.0% of people in trained churches were aware, compared to 26.1% of those in untrained churches ($p=0.021$). Differences for other variables were either too small to be significant (e.g. there was no significant gender difference) or statistical significance wasn't testable due to the large number of categories (e.g. denominational differences).

Figure 8: Awareness of domestic abuse – gender of victims and abusers

If you are aware of people in your church who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, domestic abuse, what are the genders of the victims and abusers in these situations?



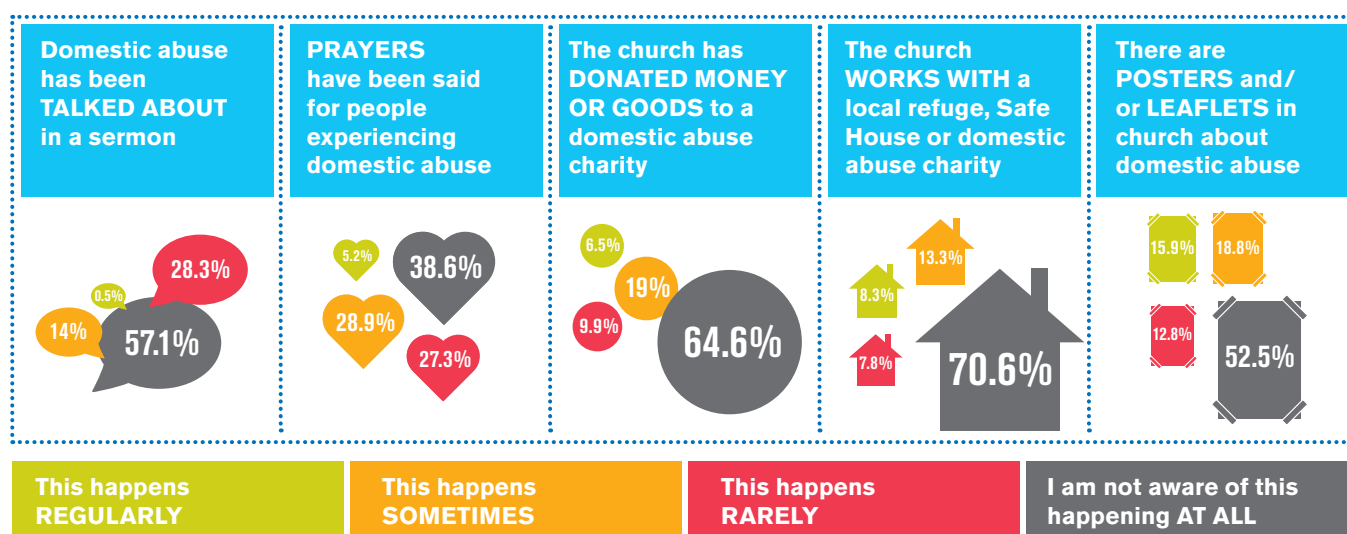
People were mostly aware of female victims (32.4%), compared to 5.0% being aware of male victims. Likewise, there was much more awareness of male abusers (13.9%) than of female abusers (3.9%). Whilst these findings are not intended to be accurate estimates of the prevalence of domestic abuse, what they do show is that **there is much greater awareness of victims than perpetrators – suggesting that perpetrators have been able to remain invisible and unchallenged in churches.**

Churches can take steps to speak out against domestic abuse (e.g. in a sermon), offer prayer support, help congregation members know how they or family and friends can seek help (displaying posters or leaflets) or give financial or practical support to local services working with victims (donating money or goods or working regularly with them). When asked how often the church had taken five specific actions to aid those suffering abuse, the most widely recognised actions were displaying posters or leaflets and saying prayers for people experiencing abuse (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Participants' awareness of their church's responses to domestic abuse¹⁵

Which of the following are you aware of in your church?

(% of people selecting each option)



For four out of five actions, more than 50% of people were unaware of this happening at all. This suggests that at most churches these actions are either rarely happening, or, if they are happening, churchgoers do not notice them. Churches are a little more likely to take part in actions within the church (preaching, praying and displaying posters) than outside it (working with or donating to domestic abuse charities). This may be because they are unaware of local domestic abuse services or there are none nearby. It also suggests that **churches could be more proactive in working alongside and supporting the work of local secular support services**, as the North American research also found.

Comments about the Church's role in responding to domestic abuse

Participants were invited to offer comments about their own church's response to domestic abuse, and 318 people did so. Participants provided insightful comments, indicating that the question of how the Church responds to domestic abuse is something that they consider important and, in some cases, have a level of personal investment in as survivors of domestic abuse. From these comments, three categories of responses emerged: those who said the church does little or nothing to address abuse (the largest group), those who said the church did something, but should do more (the middle-sized group) and those who said that the church did good work in this area (the smallest group). There were more negative than positive comments about people's own churches, echoing the view expressed in the survey by two thirds of participants that 'My church needs to do more to raise awareness of domestic abuse'.

15. $n=412-423$; the sample sizes vary as a small number of people left certain items blank.

'The church does not actively respond to domestic abuse'¹⁶

Those who said that their church did little or nothing to address domestic abuse blamed this on the church being rural, older, small or lacking a leader:

“ My church is a small chapel and so we are not equipped to do much to help but could support a domestic abuse charity (female, 80+, Methodist)

“ A rural Church of England church seems to focus on “people like us” e.g. elderly and [people who have] dementia and doesn't think domestic abuse is happening in their community (female, 40-49, Anglican)

“ Because we are not in an inner-city area, I think people believe there is not a problem (female, 60-69, Anglican)

“ We have no permanent minister, so no leadership (female, 70-79, Anglican)

A culture of silence was mentioned:

“ We are too ready to accept [a] culture of something not talked about (male, 70-79, Methodist)

“ People attending church tend to have a church face. Where I worship masks are very obvious (male, 50-59, Anglican)

One man said: 'This survey is the first attempt to address the matter to our congregation' (70-79, Roman Catholic).

Some respondents took the opportunity to tell us about negative responses that they had received from their church when they disclosed domestic abuse. For example, one woman said 'They don't believe it is a church matter. I mentioned it at church and they thought I had become “over-reliant” on them' (18-29, Pentecostal). These experiences will be considered later when we discuss experiences of help-seeking.

'The church does something to respond to domestic abuse, but aspires to do more'

Some churches are involved, participants said, in some way. Examples given of actions being taken included saying prayers, placing stickers with helpline numbers in the toilets, discussions and pastoral involvement by the leadership team, and involvement in domestic abuse-related work outside the church. People thought that the church should develop this further. Some indicated that they would like to be involved in this and learn more about the topic.

“ As a church we are constantly working on better relationships between members, between us and the community around. This builds trust needed before disclosures of abuse can be made (female, 60-69, Anglican)

“ We are in the very early stages of talking about domestic abuse, e.g. in PCC, in Bible study group (female, 60-69, Anglican)

“ Our vicar has been on the course and is keen to raise the profile (female, 60-69, Anglican)

“ We talk about domestic abuse but not in a sermon but between Elders and in session meetings. We are getting there but it takes time (male, 80+, Pentecostal)

16. When free-text comments are quoted, typographical errors have been corrected.

'The church does a lot to respond to domestic abuse'

Several encouraging examples were given of active churches, where people were working with local refuges, undertaking activism and awareness-raising and giving talks about domestic abuse.

“ I am going on the training organised by CTiC. The church ought to be involved in such issues – Jesus would have been (female, 70-79, Anglican)

“ Abuse is mentioned and our church sponsors a local hostel for domestic abuse (female, 50-59, Anglican)

“ Through Mothers' union we are observing the 16 days of Activism [against gender violence] (female, 60-69, Anglican)

“ We regularly teach about the vital importance of biblical loving relationships in and out of marriage (male, 70-79, Independent Evangelical)

“ As a Christian believer and a domestic abuse survivor I speak about the subject. Last month I addressed the annual national conference of a domestic abuse charity as a male survivor (male, 50-59, Anglican)

Themes present in the North American research are echoed here: churches are often silent about domestic abuse and do not actively respond to it, although individuals being victimised do approach clergy for help in their personal situations (Nason-Clark 2009).

Experiences of domestic abuse

At the beginning of the section of the questionnaire, we defined domestic abuse as follows:

'When we talk about domestic abuse, we are referring to harmful, violent and abusive behaviours that are used against partners/spouses in intimate relationships. This includes dating and cohabitating relationships as well as marriage. Domestic abuse includes many different acts; for example:

- Physical violence and threats
- Verbal abuse, emotional abuse, coercion and controlling behaviour
- Sexual abuse and coercion
- Financial control or exploitation
- Spiritual abuse e.g. forcing certain beliefs or religious practices on you, preventing you from practising your faith or using your religion or belief against you'

After this introduction, participants were given a list of behaviours relating to the above five categories of abuse (physical, emotional, financial, sexual and spiritual) and asked how often, if at all, they had experienced each behaviour, in their current relationship or in a previous one. While physical, emotional, financial and sexual categories are routinely used in domestic abuse research, we also added questions on 'spiritual abuse' to acknowledge abuse that has a religious character¹⁷.

It is not necessarily the case that everyone who ticks that they have experienced one or more of these behaviours is a victim/survivor of abuse. Further details would be required to understand how these behaviours were used in relationships and what their impacts were. For example, some behaviours might have been used in self-defence or with non-abusive motives (e.g. restricting access to money where a spouse/partner has a gambling addiction).

17. By 'spiritual abuse' we refer to forms of violence, abuse and control that lead to denigration, restrictions and/or manipulation regarding someone's faith or beliefs. In this research we have included spouses/partners: verbally abusing or mocking one's faith/beliefs; threatening to disclose confidences to religious leaders or fellow churchgoers; preventing one from attending church or practising their faith at home; making one take part in religious practices which they did not feel comfortable with. We recognise that 'spiritual abuse' is a contested term (CCPAS 2018; Evangelical Alliance 2018) but argue that it is important to recognise forms of abuse which can occur within intimate relationships and which are unique to people of faith.

Also, some behaviours (such as withholding a' may have been used during relationship conf' not be part of a systematic pattern of abuse Johnson's (2006) typology of intimate partner violence helps explain this. He distinguishes between *situational couple violence* and *intimate terrorism*. Situational couple violence might be part of couples' relationship dynamics (for example, where arguments or stressful situations escalate into the use of physical violence or verbal assaults). Whilst such behaviours, especially if causing physical injury or witnessed by children, should not be ignored, they might not be part of a pattern of power and control which induces fear or leaves one party feeling unable to question or negotiate with the other (Johnson, 2006).

In contrast, in relationships characterised by intimate terrorism, abused partners are entrapped, fearful – sometimes for their own lives – and feel unable to leave (Johnson, 2006). Intimate terrorist abusers impose constraints on their partners' freedom and autonomy (Stark, 2007). Physical and sexual violence may feature regularly in these relationships, and even if not, the threat of the abuser causing physical, sexual or other harm is ever-present (Williamson, 2010). Victims/survivors in these relationships often describe themselves as constantly being 'on tenterhooks' or 'walking on eggshells', and the intense threat, fear and disempowerment leaves survivors with long-lasting impacts.

Our findings make visible both situational couple violence and intimate terrorism. Both deserve attention, but require different responses; intimate terrorism will pose particular safety concerns and victims/survivors usually experience more extensive and longer-term impacts, as well as risks of post-separation violence and harassment (Ansara & Hindin 2010; Humphreys & Thiara 2003). Recognising different types of violence and abuse in relationships is critical in order to provide a sufficiently nuanced analysis, and to ensure that churchgoers receive the most appropriate support.



Overall prevalence of domestic abuse – headline figures

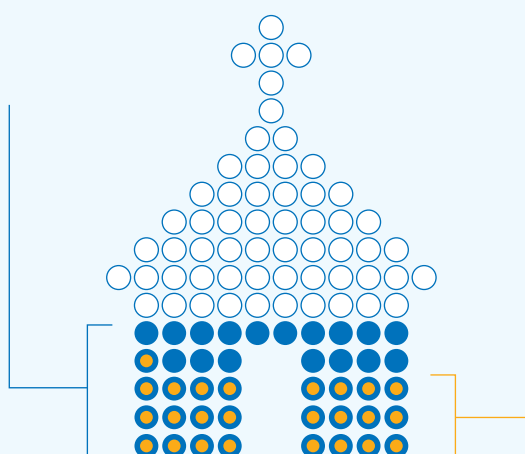
Table 1 gives a 'headline figure' of how many respondents reported experiencing any of the abusive behaviours asked about at least once ever, in any current or previous relationship.

Table 1: Overall prevalence of having experienced at least one abusive behaviour in a current and/or previous relationship, at least once ever – by gender and age

	ALL*		Female		Male		Under 60yrs		Over 60yrs	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Experienced any abuse in current and/or previous relationships, on at least one occasion	185	42.2	138	42.7	46	41.1	72	52.9	113	37.7

* These figures are based on the whole sample ($n=438$), including those who did not have any intimate relationships to report on. The decision was made to include these individuals in the calculations to replicate the national Crime Survey for England and Wales findings, which are also based on all individuals, irrespective of their relationship status.

42.2%
experienced
at least one of
the behaviours
in a **CURRENT**
and/or **PREVIOUS**
RELATIONSHIP,
on at least
one occasion



1 in 4
of the sample
have experienced
at least one of
the abusive
behaviours in a
CURRENT
RELATIONSHIP

42.2% of the whole sample reported that they had experienced at least one of the behaviours that we asked about in a current and/or previous relationship, on at least one occasion. Of these, 109 people – **one in four of the sample (24.9%, n=438)** – **have experienced at least one of the abusive behaviours in a current relationship.**

These figures need to be interpreted with caution, in line with our limited knowledge about the context in which behaviours are used and their impacts, which we discuss later. While more people experienced abuse in the past than currently, **a significant number are currently being subjected to abuse, and are worshipping in churches that they do not consider to be sufficiently equipped to support those experiencing domestic abuse.**

Overall, these figures show that **domestic abuse is undeniably happening in churches too: a substantial proportion and number of churchgoers in Cumbria are living with the consequences of domestic abuse.**

The figure of 42.2% is considerably higher than comparable figures in the Crime Survey for England and Wales, for example, where the latest figures find that 26% of women and 15% of men have experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16 years old (ONS 2018a). However, our study is different for these reasons:

1. Rather than being a random, representative sample (which would not be possible unless churchgoers in Cumbria were *forced* to complete the survey rather than simply invited to choose to), it is, despite our care to recruit participants through a random and representative selection of churches, to some degree a self-selected sample, which by its nature is more likely to attract respondents who have an interest in the research topic, perhaps because of their personal experiences.
2. As discussed previously, the sample over-represents women, older people and people living in rural areas.
3. 12% of the sample had received CTiC and LetGo's domestic violence awareness training, so this sample over-represents people with greater awareness of domestic abuse than is typical of the general population.

Because of these caveats, inevitable in research of this nature, we do not claim that domestic abuse is more common amongst churchgoers than in the general population. We suggest that it is likely to be the case that churchgoers experience as much abuse as non-churchgoers, but we cannot be sure. The key message is that **domestic abuse happens in churches too.**

Gender differences are not visible in prevalence rates but they are in nature, dynamics and impacts.

The prevalence rates for men (41.1%) and women (42.7%) were very similar, hence there was no statistically significant relationship between gender and self-reported domestic abuse experiences. Whilst this might seem surprising to some, it is not unusual for self-report surveys to find similar 'headline' figures for experiences of abusive behaviours for women and men. This relates to the points made previously about the need to more closely scrutinise the **dynamics, context and impacts of the behaviours that have been used.** As subsequent analyses will show, important gender differences exist between men's and women's experiences of the behaviours that they report experiencing, in terms of the frequency and impacts of these behaviours, in whether they define these experiences as domestic abuse, and in their help-seeking barriers and behaviours.

Age also makes a difference: **older people are less likely to report having experienced domestic abuse,** but this may reflect being less aware of domestic abuse rather than actual differences in prevalence. Those aged over 60 years old were less likely to report having experienced abuse (37.7%), compared to those under 60 years old who have the highest prevalence rate of all of the sub-groups considered here (52.9%).

Older people are less likely to report having experienced domestic abuse



Although this is in line with other research that finds younger people reporting being subjected to abuse more than older people (Ellison et al. 2007; ONS 2018a) it is not clear whether over 60s have experienced less domestic abuse, or whether they are less likely to report or recognise it. Disclosure might be lower for the older sub-group because:

1. There may be a greater sense of shame and stigma in relation to domestic abuse and therefore less willingness to share personal experiences of abuse.
2. Older people may feel a greater sense of obligation to keep personal matters such as relationship problems private. Loyalty to either a lifelong or a possibly since-deceased partner or spouse may also prevent disclosures. This was in part evidenced through those aged 60 years and over being significantly more likely to select 'It would be wrong to talk negatively about my spouse/partner to someone at church' as a reason for why they would not hypothetically seek support from church if they were experiencing domestic abuse (see later).
3. There appears to be less awareness of domestic abuse amongst those aged 60 years and over, as has already been considered.

Nature and dynamics of domestic abuse

“ ‘When I was being abused I didn’t see it as I thought abuse was only physical’ (female, 30-39)

In order to understand what the ‘headline figures’ consist of, it is important to examine what types of abuse were reported, by whom, and how frequently respondents report that they have occurred. Table 2 shows the prevalence of, and frequency with which respondents have experienced, in any current or previous relationship, the five categories of abuse asked about.

Emotional abuse was the most common form of abuse experienced by both men and women (42.3% reported experiencing at least one emotional behaviour once or more). Most often, respondents had experienced this form of abuse ‘once or twice ever’, although more than **1 in 10 (11.4%) had been emotionally abused on at least a weekly basis.**

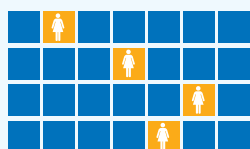
The **least common** form reported by **women** was **spiritual abuse** (21.8% of women reported experiencing spiritual abuse once or more), whereas for **men** it was **sexual abuse** (5.2% of men reported experiencing sexual abuse once or more).

Rates of prevalence for each category of abuse are **higher for women than men**

WOMEN WERE MORE THAN FOUR TIMES as likely as men to report having been SEXUALLY ABUSED once or more



No men reported being PHYSICALLY ABUSED on a weekly basis, whereas 3.2% OF WOMEN did



WOMEN WERE ALMOST FOUR TIMES as likely as men to report experiencing FINANCIAL ABUSE several times a year



WOMEN WERE MORE THAN TWICE as likely as men to report experiencing SPIRITUAL ABUSE several times a year



Table 2: Aggregate percentages for the prevalence of each abuse category, by gender*

	Women						Men						All					
	At least weekly	At least monthly	Several times a year	Once or twice ever	At least once ever**	Never	At least weekly	At least monthly	Several times a year	Once or twice ever	At least once ever**	Never	At least weekly	At least monthly	Several times a year	Once or twice ever	At least once ever**	Never
Physical abuse	3.2	2.5	6.7	14.5	26.9	73.1	0	2.0	3.1	19.4	24.5	75.5	2.3	2.3	5.7	15.9	26.3	73.7
Emotional abuse	13.0	5.8	8.7	15.2	42.6	57.4	6.3	1.0	9.4	25.0	41.7	58.3	11.4	4.5	8.8	17.6	42.3	57.7
Sexual abuse	5.4	1.9	8.6	7.8	23.7	76.3	0	2.6	1.3	1.3	5.2	94.8	4.2	2.1	6.8	6.3	19.3	80.7
Financial abuse	9.7	2.5	3.2	11.1	26.5	73.5	2.1	2.1	0	6.2	10.3	89.7	7.7	2.4	2.4	9.8	22.2	77.8
Spiritual abuse	3.2	5.4	3.2	10.0	21.8	78.2	2.0	1.0	2.0	6.1	11.1	88.9	2.9	4.2	2.9	8.9	18.8	81.2

* The percentages in this table are based on the sub-samples of 376-384 people who answered questions about these different categories of abusive behaviours – i.e., those who had been in at least one relationship. Specific behaviours within these categories are itemised later in Table 4.

** This figure is a total of all of those who indicated that they had experienced one or more behaviour in a category at least once, ranging from 'once or twice ever' to 'at least weekly'.

There are two main gender differences. First, **rates of prevalence for each category of abuse are higher for women than men**. Table 2 shows that the proportion who had 'never' experienced any abuse was higher for men in each of the five categories of abuse. This difference was most pronounced where sexual, financial and spiritual abuse were concerned, and the difference is least with emotional and physical abuse. For example:

- Women were **more than four times as likely** as men to report having been sexually abused once or more

Second, **men reported experiencing abusive behaviours at a much lower frequency**. Men rarely reported experiencing any form of abuse several times a year or more, apart from emotional abuse, where 16.7% of men reported being emotionally abused several times a year or more, including 6.3% who had experienced this at least weekly.

In contrast, **women reported experiencing all forms of abuse more frequently than men**:

- No men reported being physically abused on a weekly basis, whereas 3.2% of women did
- Women were almost **four times as likely** as men to report experiencing financial abuse several times a year
- Women were more than **twice as likely** as men to report experiencing spiritual abuse several times a year

This is not to downplay the significance of experiencing abusive behaviours occasionally, but experiencing abusive behaviours occasionally is suggestive of a pattern of situational couple violence rather than the more systematic, and often escalating, intimate terrorism discussed earlier (Johnson, 2006).

A similar analysis was performed to explore any differences between age groups. Table 3 compares those aged under 60 with those aged 60 years and over:

Table 3: Aggregate percentages for the prevalence of each abuse category, by age*

	Under 60 years						Over 60 years					
	At least once ever**	At least weekly	At least monthly	Several times a year	Once or twice ever	Never	At least once ever**	At least weekly	At least monthly	Several times a year	Once or twice ever	Never
Physical abuse	33.9	3.2	2.4	8.1	20.2	66.1	22.9	1.9	2.3	4.7	14.0	77.1
Emotional abuse	51.2	14.6	4.1	13.0	19.5	48.8	38.2	10.0	4.8	6.8	16.7	61.8
Sexual abuse	25.5	8.5	2.8	9.4	4.7	74.5	16.7	2.2	1.8	5.7	7.0	83.3
Financial abuse	27.9	9.8	4.1	3.3	10.7	72.1	19.6	6.7	1.6	2.0	9.4	80.4
Spiritual abuse	26.2	2.5	8.2	5.7	9.8	73.8	15.5	3.1	2.3	1.6	8.5	84.5

*The percentages in this table are based on the sub-samples of 374-382 people who answered questions about these different categories of abusive behaviours – i.e., people who had been in at least one relationship. Specific behaviours within these categories are itemised later in Table 4.

**This figure is a total of all of those who indicated that they had experienced one or more behaviour in a category at least once, ranging from 'once or twice ever' to 'at least weekly'.

Emotional abuse was the most common form of abuse reported by those aged under 60 and those aged 60 years and over. Again, it was most common that both under 60s and over 60s reported experiencing this 'once or twice ever'.

For all types of abuse, **rates of reporting are lower amongst those aged 60 years and over** than for those aged under 60 years old (Table 3). On average, the proportion of under 60s who reported ever experiencing each form of abuse was just over ten percentage points higher than for those aged 60 years and over.

Those aged under 60 years old were also more likely to report experiencing each form of abuse at the highest frequencies; for example:

- Under 60s were almost **four times more likely than** over 60s to report having experienced sexual abuse at least weekly.

Whilst this may reflect differences in actual levels of abuse, there may be less willingness to report sexual abuse amongst the older age group, and/or more normalisation of unwanted sexual activities. Because marital rape was only criminalised in England and Wales from 1991, many older women will have lived a significant portion of their marriage in a legal context where they had no legal right to refuse sex with their husbands.

Which abusive behaviours were reported the most?

To develop a better understanding of the nature of the abuse that many respondents reported, Table 4 gives a detailed breakdown of all of the abusive behaviours asked about for both current and previous relationships. 325-334 participants¹⁸ answered the questions for current relationships, while slightly fewer (189-212 participants) did for previous relationships, so the percentages shown for subsequent analyses represent a smaller sample than the original 438 participants.

Reporting of domestic abuse was higher for previous relationships than current relationships.

All items were reported at higher rates of prevalence in previous, rather than current, relationships (Table 4). This is not surprising: domestic abuse that is ongoing in current relationships is often under-reported due to fear and non-recognition of abuse when still in the situation. The higher reporting for previous relationships is also encouraging in showing that many respondents have managed to break free from their abusers.

Unsurprisingly, given that the category of emotional abuse was the most commonly reported, **the most frequently reported abusive behaviours are emotional ones**, namely:

- Your partner emotionally abused or controlled you in another way
- Your partner blamed you for your behaviour
- Your partner withheld affection from you as a form of punishment
- Your partner stopped you from seeing your friends or family
- Your partner repeatedly belittled you to the extent that you felt worthless
- Your partner monitored your day-to-day activities

Considering previous relationships, all of the above types of abuse were reported by **more than 1 in 4 of those who answered questions about previous relationships**. This rose to more than a third for 'Your partner emotionally abused or controlled you in another way'. In addition, **almost a fifth (19.7%) reported that 'Your partner made you do things sexually that you did not want to do, without physical force'**.

18. This is a range rather than a single number of respondents because a small number of respondents did not provide data for each of the behaviours asked about.

Table 4: Detailed breakdown of the prevalence of each behaviour

ABUSE CATEGORY	
Physical	Your partner slapped, pushed or shoved you
	Your partner punched or kicked you
	Your partner threatened you with a weapon and/or an object
	Your partner restrained you or locked you in the house
	Your partner hurt you in another physical way
Emotional	Your partner blamed you for their behaviour
	Your partner repeatedly belittled you to the extent that you felt worthless [^]
	Your partner monitored your day-to-day activities
	Your partner stopped you from seeing your friends or family [^]
	Your partner withheld affection from you as a form of punishment
	Your partner emotionally abused or controlled you in some other way
Sexual	Your partner made you do things sexually that you did not want to do, without physical force
	Your partner made you do things sexually that you did not want to do, with physical force
	Your partner sexually abused you in another way
Financial	You were not consulted about major financial decisions that affected you
	You were prevented from having your fair share of the household money [^]
	You were prevented from having access to your own or joint funds
	Your partner financially abused you in another way
Spiritual	Your partner verbally abused or mocked your beliefs or faith
	Your partner threatened to disclose confidences to other churchgoers or to your religious leaders
	Your partner stopped you going to church or practising your faith at home
	Your partner made you take part in religious practices that you did not feel comfortable with
	Your partner used your religion or belief to abuse you in some other way

*Current relationship figures are based on respondents who reported on a current relationship. Not everyone answered every item about their current relationship, hence sub-sample sizes varied from 325-334 respondents.

**Previous relationship figures are based on respondents who reported on a previous relationship. Not everyone answered every item about their previous relationship(s), hence sub-sample sizes varied from 189-212 respondents.

	ALL		WOMEN		MEN	
	% at least once in a current relationship*	% at least once in a previous relationship**	% at least once in a current relationship	% at least once in a previous relationship	% at least once in a current relationship	% at least once in a previous relationship
	12.3% (41)***	17.3% (57)	10.8% (26)	28.6% (47)	15.6% (14)	23.9% (10)
	3.7% (12)	16.2% (33)	4.2% (10)	17.6% (28)	2.2% (2)	12.0% (5)
	2.4% (8)	10.4% (21)	2.5% (6)	15.3% (24)	2.2% (2)	11.0% (4)
	2.1% (7)	12.9% (26)	2.6% (6)	15.3% (24)	0.0% (0)	4.8% (2)
	4.8% (16)	18.4% (37)	6.3% (15)	21.0% (33)	1.1% (1)	9.6% (4)
	14.1% (45)	31.0% (63)	15.2% (35)	35.6% (56)	10.1% (9)	15.8% (7)
	16.1% (52)	27.1% (76)	16.9% (39)	40.9% (64)	19.4% (12)	20.7% (12)
	12.1% (39)	26.5% (53)	10.9% (25)	28.6% (47)	14.6% (13)	23.8% (6)
	7.5% (24)	27.4% (55)	8.8% (20)	30.8% (48)	3.4% (3)	16.3% (7)
	11.5% (37)	27.8% (55)	9.1% (21)	29.5% (35)	17.2% (15)	22.7% (10)
	13.4% (43)	36.4% (75)	14.8% (34)	41.3% (66)	9.1% (8)	20.4% (9)
	5.3% (17)	19.7% (39)	7.3% (17)	23.9% (38)	0.0% (0)	6.9% (3)
	1.2% (4)	10.6% (21)	1.7% (4)	12.9% (20)	0% (0)	2.3% (1)
	1.5% (5)	14.1% (28)	1.7% (4)	16.5% (25)	1.1% (1)	6.8% (3)
	9.0% (29)	22.6% (44)	11.1% (26)	25.9% (39)	3.4% (3)	11.7% (5)
	4.0% (13)	22.4% (44)	3.8% (9)	16.7% (25)	0% (0)	4.6% (2)
	2.8% (9)	13.9% (27)	5.0% (12)	26.5% (40)	1.1% (1)	9.3% (4)
	3.7% (12)	22.1% (43)	4.7% (11)	24.5% (37)	1.2% (1)	14.4% (6)
	6.4% (21)	17.8% (35)	8.2% (19)	20.0% (30)	2.2% (2)	8.8% (4)
	2.7% (9)	6.1% (12)	2.9% (7)	5.4% (8)	2.2% (2)	8.8% (4)
	3.9% (13)	13.6% (27)	5.1% (12)	15.2% (23)	1.1% (1)	0% (0)
	2.7% (9)	3.6% (7)	3.3% (8)	4.8% (7)	1.1% (1)	0% (0)
	3.4% (11)	9.2% (18)	4.7% (11)	10.0% (15)	0% (0)	6.6% (3)

***Numbers in brackets denote number of respondents.

^This item has been taken from the questions in the Crime Survey for England & Wales, 2016/17.

Patterns of abuse

Domestic abuse is best understood not as one-off incidents, but rather as a pattern of behaviour which often takes multiple forms. In light of this, the cumulative number of abusive behaviours reported was calculated, as shown in Table 5.

109 respondents (24.9% of the original sample) reported experiencing one or more behaviours at least once in a current relationship. Of these, **28.4% reported experiencing only one abusive behaviour in their current relationship**, while the **majority reported experiencing more than one different behaviour**.

Women on average reported being subjected to a higher number of behaviours than men. The maximum number of behaviours reported by women was 20, whereas for men it was seven. On average, women who had been abused reported experiencing more behaviours than men who had been abused; 5.16 compared to 2.60. A Mann-Whitney U test found this difference to be statistically significant.¹⁹

11% of respondents (all women) have experienced between 10-20 abusive behaviours in their current relationships, while 34.2% of men and 13.8% of women reported experiencing 6-9 abusive behaviours (Table 5). Experiencing higher numbers of abusive behaviours is suggestive of the dynamic Johnson (2006) calls 'intimate terrorism'. In contrast, it is likely that experiencing one or two behaviours would reflect Johnson's (2006) 'situational couple violence', whereby violence and abuse may be more reciprocal and/or are not being used by one partner to systematically control and entrap the other.

Although fewer abusive behaviours were reported in current relationships than previous relationships, these figures are only based on current relationships. Because respondents could reflect on all of their previous relationships, if applicable, repeating this analysis for previous relationships would not have given a clear indication of the dynamics of one particular relationship. The focus on current relationships brings to the fore the fact that **high-frequency, systematic domestic abuse is currently being suffered by Cumbrian churchgoers**, and that churches have the potential to act in ways that might bring comfort, safety and hope to these victims/survivors.

Table 5: Number of different abusive behaviours experienced in current relationships

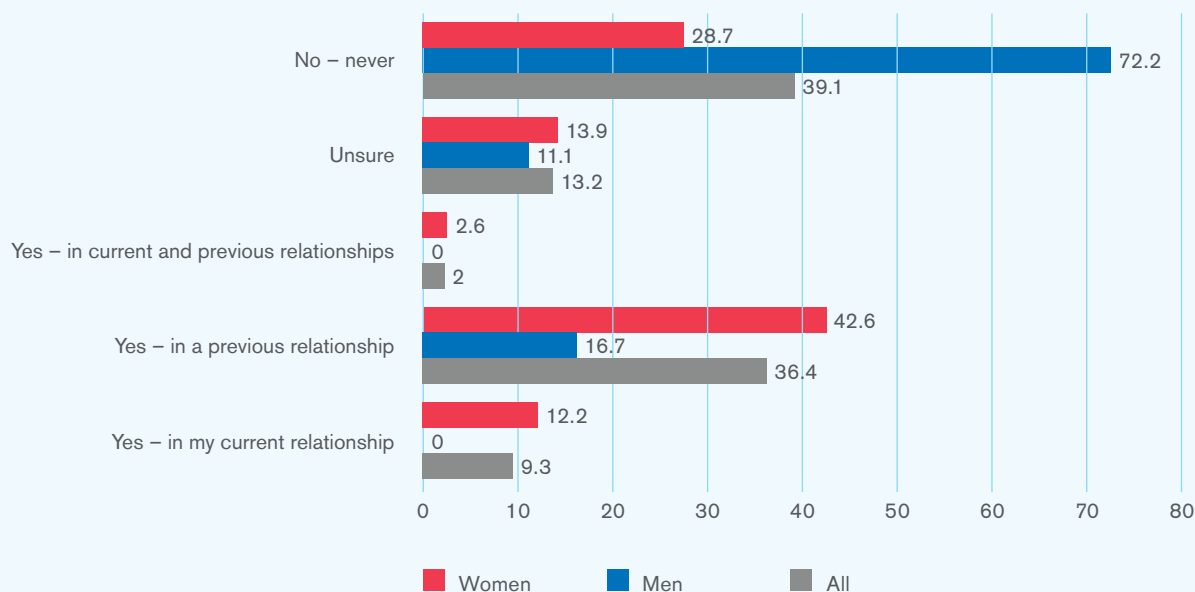
Number of different abusive behaviours experienced*	ALL (%)	ALL (n)	Female (%)	Female (n)	Male (%)	Male (n)
1	28.4%	31	21.9%	16	42.9%	15
2	19.3%	21	20.5%	15	17.1%	6
3-5	26.6%	29	24.7%	18	28.6%	11
6-9	13.8%	15	16.4%	12	34.2%	3
10-14	5.5%	6	8.2%	6	0%	0
15-20	5.5%	6	8.2%	6	0%	0

*Based on $n=109$ who reported having experienced one or more abusive behaviours in a current relationship, once or more; 73 women and 35 men.

19. $p=0.007$.

Figure 10: Participants self defining as having experienced domestic abuse

Would you consider yourself to have experienced domestic abuse? (%)

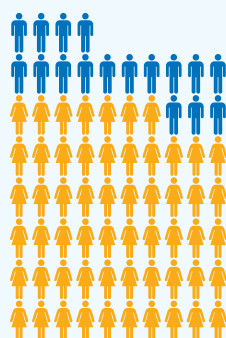


Did respondents consider themselves to be experiencing domestic abuse?

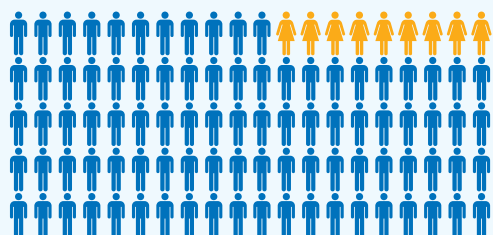
Asking whether a respondent has experienced particular behaviours in their relationship is just one measure of abuse, and has limitations. Another approach is to directly ask people whether they have experienced domestic abuse. Those who had ticked that they had experienced at least one of the behaviours in the previous section were asked whether they considered themselves to have experienced domestic abuse. Of the 151 people who answered this question (a much smaller group than the overall sample), 9.3% said yes, in their current relationship; 36.4% said yes, in their previous relationship(s); 2.0% said yes, in current and previous relationships; 13.2% said they were unsure; and 39.1% said they never had (Figure 10). This means that **more than 1 in 10 of those who answered this question recognised that they were being abused in their current relationship.**

There was a major gender difference: 57.4% of women considered themselves to have experienced domestic abuse (combining the three categories of 'yes'), **compared to only 16.7% of men**; 72.2% of men said 'no – never', compared to only 28.7% of women.²⁰ This might suggest that men are more reluctant to see themselves as victims of domestic abuse because it is incompatible with ideas about masculinity, or because they less readily recognise what domestic abuse is. Alternatively, it might be that, as discussed previously, because the abuse that men are suffering is *typically* less frequent and severe, they do not consider that the behaviours they have been subjected to can be considered 'domestic abuse'.

Experiences of domestic abuse



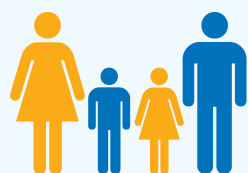
Of those who'd experienced an abusive act, **57.4% of WOMEN** considered themselves to have **EXPERIENCED DOMESTIC ABUSE** compared to only **16.7% of MEN**



90.8% of cases involve MALE PERPETRATORS and **9.2% involve FEMALE PERPETRATORS**



56.7% involve CHRISTIAN PERPETRATORS and **43.3% involve NON-CHRISTIAN PERPETRATORS**



JUST OVER HALF of cases involve families with **CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 18** living at home while the respondent was being abused

Of those who have experienced domestic abuse or were unsure, where the information was provided:

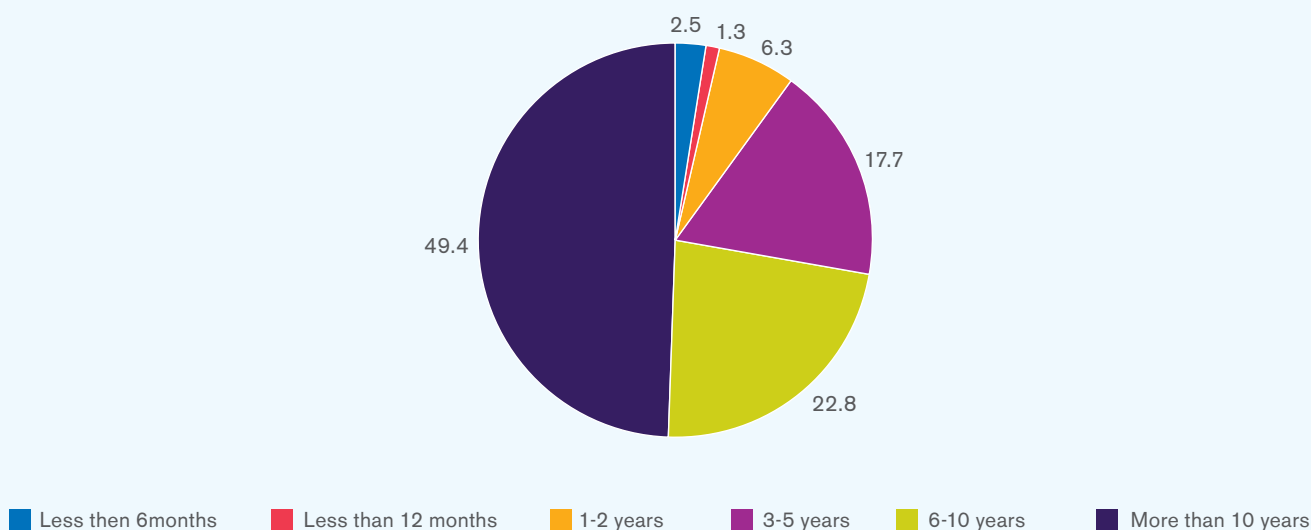
- 90.8% of cases involve **male perpetrators** and 9.2% involve **female perpetrators**
- 56.7% involve **Christian perpetrators** and 43.3% involve **non-Christian perpetrators**
- Just over half of cases involve families with **children under the age of 18 living at home** while the respondent was being abused

It is especially important to recognise that Christian men (and in a minority of cases, women) are perpetrating domestic abuse: this shows that **churches need to acknowledge, and respond appropriately to, the presence of perpetrators in their congregations.** It is not correct to attribute churchgoers' experiences of domestic abuse simply to their being in relationships with non-Christians; **in this study, the majority of perpetrators were Christian.**

When asked the length of their longest abusive relationship, half of the 79 who answered had been in an abusive relationship lasting more than 10 years (Figure 11), suggesting that people had suffered abuse for sustained periods of time.

Figure 11: Length of longest abusive relationship

If you have experienced domestic abuse or think you may have experienced domestic abuse, what was or is the length of your longest abusive relationship? (%)



Impacts of domestic abuse

“ I didn't realise until much later that I was suffering from abuse and the damage it did remains with me (female, 40-49, Anglican)

Respondents who had reported experiencing at least one of the abusive behaviours at least once, were asked to indicate the impacts upon them for the *worst* experience they had had. As Table 6 shows, the most common impact mentioned was **'My self-esteem was diminished'**; **70.8% of those who reported on current relationships and 75.3% of those who reported on previous relationships** identified this, and it was the most frequently reported impact by both women and men. Becoming depressed, feeling trapped and withdrawing from family and friends were also widely reported (Table 6).

Table 6: Impacts of domestic abuse in current and previous relationships

	Current relationships				Previous relationships			
	ALL (n)*	ALL (%) **	Female (%)	Male (%)	ALL (n)*	ALL (%)**	Female (%)	Male (%)
My self-esteem was diminished	34	70.8%	64.9%	90.9%	58	75.3%	76.6%	69.2%
I became depressed	22	45.8%	54.1%	18.2%	48	62.3%	62.5%	61.5%
I felt trapped	20	41.7%	51.4%	9.1%	55	71.4%	75.9%	53.8%
I withdrew from my family and/or friends	19	39.6%	45.9%	18.2%	35	45.5%	50.0%	23.1%
I felt anxious and scared	18	37.5%	45.9%	9.1%	43	55.8%	64.1%	15.4%
I received physical injuries, which I could take care of myself	12	25%	29.7%	9.1%	31	41.3%	45.3%	15.4%
I started to drink or increase my consumption of alcohol	11	22.9%	27.0%	9.1%	23	29.9%	29.7%	30.8%
I noticed negative effects on my child/ren's behaviour or wellbeing	9	18.8%	24.3%	0%	26	33.8%	37.5%	15.4%
I had to take time off work because of the physical or emotional effect on me	8	16.7%	21.6%	0%	19	24.7%	26.6%	15.4%
I stopped attending church	8	16.7%	18.9%	9.1%	18	23.4%	25.0%	15.4%
My faith in God was negatively affected	8	16.7%	18.9%	9.1%	18	23.4%	25.0%	15.4%
I feared for the physical safety of my child/ren	7	14.6%	18.9%	0%	16	20.8%	23.4%	7.7%
I feared for my life	6	12.5%	16.2%	0%	21	27.3%	29.7%	15.4%
I received physical injuries which I needed to seek medical assistance for	4	8.3%	10.8%	0%	13	16.9%	18.8%	7.7%

* 48 respondents (37 women and 11 men) reported impacts of abuse in current relationships, while 77 (64 women and 13 men) did for previous relationships. Three respondents reported the impacts of the abuse that they had experienced in both current and previous relationships.

**These percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents could tick multiple impacts.

Women were much more likely to report impacts related to perceived risk and fear²¹:

- 12.5% of women who were experiencing abuse in current relationships were in fear for their lives, whereas no men were
- 45.9% of women who were experiencing abuse in current relationships reported being anxious or scared, compared to 9.1% of men

It is sobering and concerning that **12.5% of women reporting on current relationships (i.e. six women) are currently in situations where they fear for their lives**. This was also reported by 29.3% of women and 15.4% of men in relation to previous relationships. Previous research has found that such fears are often not unfounded (Bowen, 2011): victims/survivors are often the best judges of what their partner/spouses are capable of and how credible their threats to harm or kill are. This means that some of the survey respondents in current abusive relationships are in high-risk situations that require urgent intervention.

Physical injuries were common for those who reported impacts, especially for women. In a minority of cases (for example, 18.8% of women and 7.7% of men reporting on previous relationships), the injuries inflicted by perpetrators required medical assistance. Thus, whilst there was some parity in men and women ever having experienced physical abuse, in addition to women experiencing physical abuse more frequently, they are also more likely to be injured.

Starting to drink or increased alcohol consumption was one of the more common impacts for both women (27.0% of those reporting on current relationships) and men (30.8% of those reporting on previous relationships). This is important not only because of the wider ramifications of excessive drinking, but also because church leaders and members may notice this kind of change in behaviour rather than the domestic abuse. Such situations demand good discernment and pastoral skills to ascertain what other needs – such as domestic abuse – may exist.

Fears and concerns about the welfare of children were also commonly reported: 14.6% and 18.8% respectively of those who had experienced abuse in current relationships report fearing for the safety of their children and noticing negative effects on their children's behaviour and/or well-being; all were women. These impacts were also reported by approximately a fifth (20.8%) and a third (33.8%) respectively of those who reported being abused in a previous relationship; this included a small number of male respondents. **Children's, youth and family workers need to be aware that changes to children's behaviour (e.g. becoming withdrawn, anxious, angry) or parenting practices could be a consequence of domestic abuse.**

Some respondents reported spiritual or religious impacts: considerable proportions of respondents (16.7% for current relationships (18.9% of women and 9.1% of men) and 23.4% for previous relationships (25.0% of women and 15.4% of men) reported that they had stopped attending church and/or that their faith in God had been negatively affected. Whilst this was not one of the most common impacts, the fact that this was a survey of churchgoers means that some people who no longer attend church and/or have lost faith would not have been captured in this research. Providing pastoral support to address the spiritual needs of these individuals is one key situation where the Church has a specific mandate to respond. **Mainstream domestic abuse agencies and churches need to engage in shared learning and partnerships, given that secular agencies are unlikely to be able to provide the faith-based aspects of support which some victims/survivors may need.**

In addition to these impacts, respondents were also invited to describe other impacts. Only a small number of respondents answered this question, mentioning other specific impacts including over-eating, not eating, feeling worthless and suicidal, being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), having nightmares or panic attacks, having a mental breakdown and experiencing difficulties with trust.

21. Even though marked gender differences can be observed, these cannot be tested for statistical significance as the sub-sample of men responding to this question is too small. The small numbers should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings; regarding current relationships, for example, one woman accounts for 2.7% while one man accounts for 9.1%.

Women typically reported experiencing a higher number of impacts of domestic abuse than men:

women reported an average of 4.5 impacts in current relationships and 5.9 impacts in previous relationships, compared to men reporting an average of 1.8 and 3.6 impacts respectively.

The findings here are important: whilst similar proportions of men and women initially reported experiencing at least one behaviour, at least once in any relationship, the impacts are different. In general, men report fewer impacts, and seldom report impacts which are indicative of high-risk, fear-inducing and entrapping domestic abuse. This could be because they perceive their partners/spouses to be less capable of inflicting harm; because the behaviours are not being used in an abusive context; or because the abuse is of a lower severity and/or frequency.

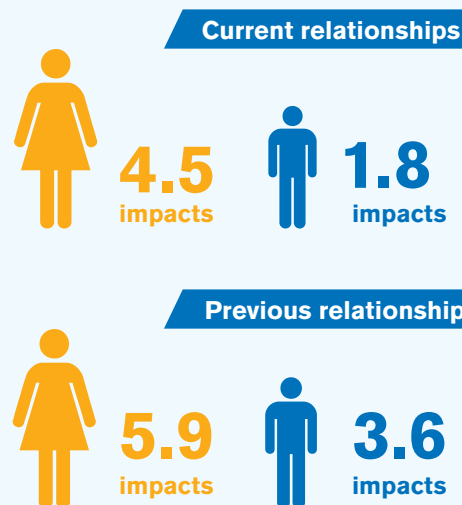
Yet, whilst less typical, it is important to highlight that there is a small minority of men reporting impacts that are consistent with severe and entrapping abuse which results in them fearing for their own lives or having concerns about their children's welfare. Churches should be careful therefore not to reproduce myths that men do not suffer domestic abuse, and also need to acknowledge some of the barriers to help-seeking for men.

Seeking help and helping others

Perceptions of the church as a source of support for family and relationship matters

All survey participants, irrespective of their previous experiences, were asked whether they saw their church as a place where people experiencing family or relationship difficulties could be supported.

Women typically reported experiencing a higher number of impacts of domestic abuse than men:



Seeking help from the church for domestic abuse:

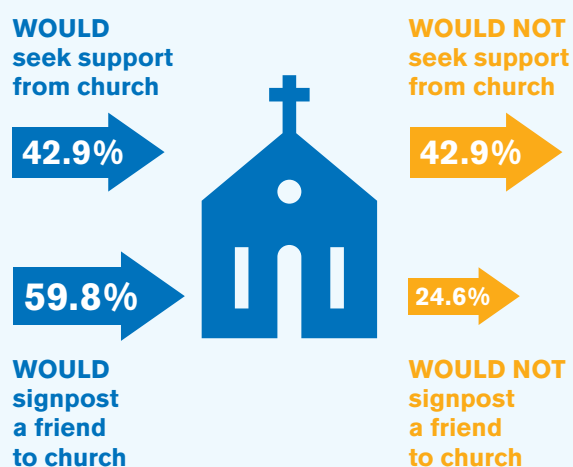


Table 7: Likelihood of participants signposting a friend to, or personally seeking help from, the church for family and relationship difficulties

	Would signpost a friend to church (very or quite likely)*	Would not signpost a friend to church (very or quite unlikely)	Would personally seek support from church (very or quite likely)	Would not personally seek support from church (very or quite unlikely)
Domestic abuse	59.8%	24.6%	42.9%	42.9%
Relationship difficulties (e.g. conflict)	62.4%	22.7%	47.8%	39.2%
Relationship/marital breakdown	64.8%	20.7%	47.3%	38.6%
Parenting problems	55.8%	23.9%	43.0%	42.3%

*All percentages in this table are based on the 428 people who answered these questions.

When faced with these hypothetical situations:

- The majority would signpost a friend to church for support in all of the situations asked about although domestic abuse was the issue they would be least likely to recommend church help for (24.6%), by a slim margin
- Fewer than 50% said that they would personally seek support for any of the issues; this figure was marginally lower for domestic abuse (42.9% would be very or quite unlikely to seek support from church for domestic abuse)
- Yet, encouragingly, the same proportion – 42.9% – considered themselves very/quite likely to seek support from church for domestic abuse (Table 7)

For all four problems, men were slightly more likely than women to say that they would be very/quite likely to signpost a friend to church or seek help themselves, but these differences were not statistically significant. **Being in a leadership position was a more important factor:** those who held a leadership position in their church (whether lay or ordained) were significantly more likely to say that they would signpost a friend to church in relation to any of the four family/relationship matters. For example, 68.6% of leaders said they would in relation to domestic abuse, compared to 52.7% of those who were not leaders.²²

22. $p=0.003$.

Reasons for unwillingness to seek support from church for domestic abuse

Those who said that they would not seek support from church for domestic abuse were asked why (Table 8).

Table 8: Reasons why respondents would not seek support from church in relation to domestic abuse, by gender and age

Reason*	ALL (n)	ALL (%)**	Women (%)	Men (%)	Under 60s (%)	Over 60s (%)
They would not have the right expertise to help	83	39.9%	42.2%	31.1%	34.7%	43.2%
I'd be worried about confidentiality and other people at church finding out	66	31.7%	32.3%	26.7%	26.7%	34.1%
I'd be too embarrassed or ashamed	55	26.4%	29.8%	13.3%	29.3%	24.2%
It would be wrong to talk negatively about my spouse/ partner to someone at church	46	22.1%	18.6%	33.3%	10.7%	28.8%
I would feel that it is my duty to make the relationship work	42	20.2%	18.6%	24.4%	14.7%	23.5%
They might make things worse	41	19.7%	20.5%	15.6%	20.0%	19.7%
There's no one that I know or trust well enough	40	19.2%	16.8%	28.9%	22.7%	17.4%
I would blame myself for my partner's behaviour	23	11.1%	13.0%	4.4%	14.7%	9.1%
My spouse/partner has a position of responsibility which would make it difficult to confide in others	19	9.1%	10.6%	4.4%	14.7%	6.1%
I wouldn't expect anyone to believe me	19	9.1%	11.2%	2.0%	12.0%	7.6%
I'd be worried that what I said might be reported to another organisation	18	8.7%	9.9%	4.4%	9.3%	8.3%
I wouldn't know the signs that I was experiencing domestic abuse	10	4.8%	3.7%	6.7%	0%	6.8%
Other	43	20.7%	19.3%	26.7%	20.0%	21.2%

* The figures in this table are based on the 208 people (161 women and 45 men; 75 aged under 60 years and 132 aged 60 years and over) who answered this question.

** These percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents could tick multiple reasons.

Overall, the most common reasons for not (hypothetically) seeking church support are:

1. Perceptions that churches do not have appropriate expertise (39.9%);
2. Concerns about confidentiality (31.7%); and
3. Feeling embarrassed or ashamed (22.1%).

Around a fifth of respondents indicated other reasons why they would not seek church support, elaborating on the options provided, indicating concerns that the abuser would find out about the disclosure or mentioning other support sources which would have greater expertise. Several respondents said that they had a position of responsibility in the church (e.g. as the church domestic abuse champion, or the vicar) which would make it difficult or impossible to confide in anyone at church. Three respondents stated that they did not think that their church would respond well; for example:

“ I would assume they would not assist
(female, 60-69 years, Anglican)

“ There is no listening (the first duty of love) and
understanding (the essence of love) in the church,
propagated from the top down
(male, 50-59 years, Anglican)

The range of reasons, and the widespread reporting of them, indicates concerns about whether churches can respond appropriately to disclosures of domestic abuse, and highlights the pervasiveness of unhelpful attitudes to domestic abuse.

Men and the over 60s felt less confident about knowing the signs that they were experiencing domestic abuse. More than a fifth of respondents would be inhibited from seeking church support because of thinking it would be wrong to talk negatively about their spouse/partner at church, while a fifth felt that it would be their responsibility to make the relationship work. In both cases, these views were more common amongst men and the over 60s. These views can lead to victims/survivors concealing their partner's behaviour because of a sense of loyalty or obligation, and taking on blame or responsibility for the partner's behaviour and the continuation of the relationship.

Awareness of domestic abuse services outside church

A little over half of respondents (55.2%) were aware of domestic abuse services outside of church that they could signpost people to; conversely, 44.8% did not have this knowledge. **Those who had attended CTiC and LetGo's domestic violence awareness training, or who attended a church where they knew that someone had been trained, were more likely to be aware of relevant services** (65.1%, compared to 51.5% of those in churches that were, to their knowledge, untrained).²³ **People living in urban areas were more likely to be aware of relevant services** (64.3%, compared to 56.8% in rural and 53.3% in suburban areas), perhaps because of their greater accessibility and volume of services in urban areas, although this difference was not statistically significant.

When asked where they would signpost people to, it was encouraging to find a good level of awareness of relevant statutory and voluntary services. Local services were frequently mentioned, most commonly LetGo, but also SafetyNet, The Bridgeway (a sexual assault referral centre), Springfield Hostel, Citizens Advice Bureau and Women's Community Matters. Some participants mentioned specialist male victims' organisations nationally such as Men's Advice Line and Mankind Initiative, while several mentioned Restored, a partner in this research. The police was the most frequently mentioned statutory service, and social services and GPs were suggested too. Marital/relationship counselling such as Relate was also suggested by several people.

Others mentioned that whilst they could not name specific services, they knew that they could find out from leaflets or posters on toilet doors in their church, underlining the importance of making visible these contact details. Encouragingly, some respondents commented that they would be retaining the briefing page of our questionnaire (which listed relevant sources of support) and were now aware of services where they had not previously been.

23. $p=0.011$.

Help-seeking for domestic abuse – within the church

Respondents who self-defined as having experienced domestic abuse were asked about their help-seeking experiences. These questions were answered by 82 women and 14 men, hence a much lower number than the original sample. The majority of women and men who had experienced domestic abuse were reporting on **help-seeking experiences from 10 years ago or more**.

This needs to be taken into consideration when analysing responses. 13 women, or 16.3% of women answering this question, were reporting on experiences of domestic abuse within the last year, whilst a further 12.5% were reporting on experiences from one to five years ago.

One in six men (16.7%) and fewer than one in four women (23.8%) who have previously sought help for domestic abuse did so from a church. Those who had sought support from a church for domestic abuse would not necessarily do so if they were experiencing domestic abuse again: 42.2% considered that they would be very or quite likely to do so, whilst 47.4% said that they would be very or quite unlikely to do so. This emphasises that **a good initial response from the church is crucial for instilling trust and confidence, as this affects the likelihood of future disclosures.**

For those who did not seek support from church when they were experiencing domestic abuse, the reasons given are presented in Table 9:

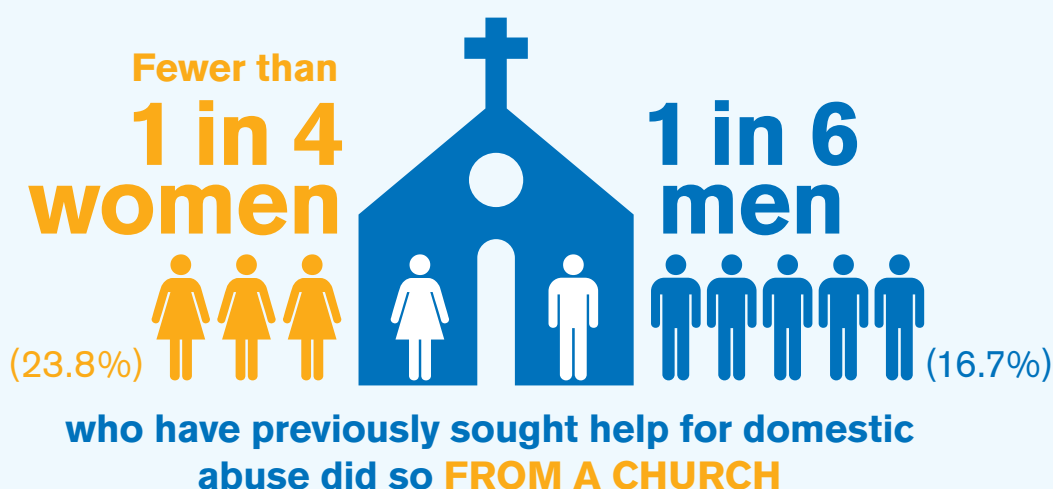


Table 9: Reasons why respondents would not seek support from church in relation to domestic abuse

Reason*	Number	%**
I was not involved with a church at the time	24	32.4%
I felt too embarrassed or ashamed	24	32.4%
I felt that it was my duty to make the relationship work	20	27.0%
There was no one that I knew or trusted well enough	19	25.7%
I blamed myself for my partner's behaviour	16	21.6%
I wasn't aware that I was experiencing domestic abuse	15	20.3%
I was worried about confidentiality and other people at church finding out	15	20.3%
I felt it was wrong to talk negatively about my spouse/partner to someone at church	14	18.9%
They might have made things worse	14	18.9%
I didn't think anyone would believe me	13	17.6%
They would not have had the right expertise to help	11	14.9%
My partner/spouse had a position of responsibility and this made it difficult to confide in others	4	5.4%
I had a position of responsibility and this made it difficult to confide in others	4	5.4%
I was worried that anything I said might be reported to another organisation	2	2.7%
Other	10	13.5%

*The figures in this table are based on the 74 people who answered this question. Due to the very small number of men answering this question, separate figures for women and men have not been provided.

**These percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents could tick multiple reasons.

The most common reasons for not seeking help at church were:

1. Not being involved with a church at the time (32.4%);
2. Feeling too embarrassed or ashamed (32.4%);
3. Feeling that it was their duty to make the relationship work (27.0%); and
4. Not knowing or trusting anyone well enough (25.7%)

Quotes from survivors also highlight these barriers:

“ I think many, like me, do not tell when they are experiencing abuse. I felt ashamed and I didn't want people to know (female, 60-69)

“ We men are very unlikely to admit that our wives are abusing us, as it makes us look pathetic in our eyes (male, 70-79)

Just over a fifth, 20.3%, did not seek support because they were not aware at the time that what they were experiencing was domestic abuse, whilst more than one in ten indicated that because either they or their spouse/partner held a leadership position, this made it difficult to confide in anyone. Although this only affected a minority of respondents, it is important to recognise that **those who are leaders or who have spouses/partners in leadership positions – especially senior leaders or clergy – face particular challenges related to confidentiality and lack of people to confide in**, both in the church and their local community, if they or their partner are well-known or respected.

Only one respondent left a comment in relation to an 'other' response. She explained that while she was receiving specialist domestic abuse support from LetGo and Victim Support, her vicar was still able to offer her prayer and spiritual support:

“ Due to my assaults the police referred me to LetGo and Victim Support. I feel in general that churches are not specifically trained in domestic abuse. Because I'm open and talk to my vicar and his wife they were able to pray with me and offer me spiritual nourishment though (female, 60-69 years)

Indeed, this kind of pastoral support was the most common type of support that respondents reported receiving from churches (Table 10). **This was followed, unfortunately, by receiving no help in three in ten cases.** Four respondents reported that the church provided mediation/ intervention with the abusive partner. This can be very dangerous and can lead to an increase in the vulnerability of the victim/survivor, either because it leads the perpetrator to find out about their partner's disclosure, or because it can lead to collusion with the perpetrator. In a few cases, practical help or signposting were reported.

Within the 'other' responses, prayer, housing and help with childcare were mentioned. In addition, one participant described his experiences as:

“ The opposite of help – rejection by some who I thought were my closest friends (male, 50-59 years)

This same respondent provided information about his minister's response to his experience of being abused by his wife:

“ The first person to clearly identify my abuser was the minister at the church where we were in attendance at the time. Unfortunately, after discussions including my wife and his wife, he referred to my wife as “the attacker”. This was accurate, but my abuser then ensured that she and I became distanced from him. Although he didn't handle it quite right, I have a lot of respect for that minister (male, 50-59 years)

This quote highlights the potential for church leaders' responses to domestic abuse to have adverse consequences, with this church leader's intervention leading to the victim/survivor being isolated from a potential source of support. Yet being affirmed as the victim in this situation, when others did not believe or support him, was vital for him.

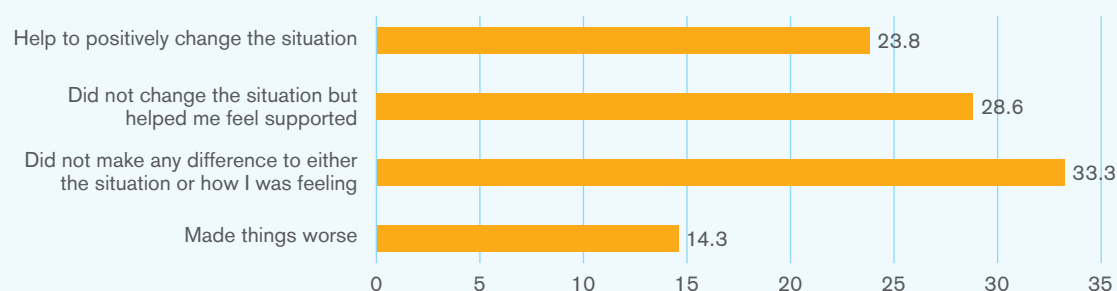
In terms of the effectiveness of the support received from church, 23.8% said that the response helped to positively change the situation; 28.6% said that it did not change the situation but helped them to feel supported; and a third (33.3%) said that it did not make a difference to either the situation or how they were feeling (Figure 12).

Table 10: Type of help received from church

Type of help	Number	%
Emotional support/listening ear	16	69.6%
They did not provide any help	7	30.4%
Mediation/intervention with the abusive partner	4	16.4%
Practical help	2	8.7%
Information about other organisations who could help	2	8.7%
Other	5	21.7%

Figure 12: Impacts of church responses on survivors' situations

Did the response you received when you sought help...(%)



In 14.3% ($n=3$) cases, respondents reported that the church's response made the situation worse. This is captured in the following quote:

“The instinct of male ministers seems to be to confront the perpetrator, (“Come on, old chap, behave a bit better won't you?”) which prompts a public denial (“She's just a silly little woman...”) and a private victimisation (“What have you been saying to the pastor, you stupid woman...?”) (female, 50-59)

Therefore, **in just over half of cases, the response of the church was experienced as being supportive**, even though it appeared to lead to substantive change in less than a quarter of cases.

The few negative responses revealed examples of bad or dangerous practice which show that commonly-reported fears of not being believed or of the situation being made worse are valid concerns:

“After 14 years of abuse, I was told by my Priest “It's a storm in a teacup.” (female, 70-79 years)

“The priest took me back to my husband (female, 60-69 years)

“After pouring out my heart (it took a long time to summon the courage) the vicar blamed me for the abuse (female, 70-79 years)

‘Other’ responses were mixed, as in the following account of being exposed to a theology of sin which led the respondent to feel that her sin was a barrier to salvation, with this experience leading to a loss of faith, in spite of receiving some helpful support:

“The language of the Church in those days really entwined around all the painful emotions I had and taught me I was a sinner and I felt I'd put myself beyond redemption. In recovery, I had a lot of very healing support from the Church but don't really have faith. Some things get so broken that it's beyond what you're able to put back together (female, 40-49 years)

Finally, these were some positive responses:

“Felt loved and accepted (female, 60-69 years)

“Because he [priest] listens and heard my confession and by just being there whenever I needed him (female, 70-79 years)

Help-seeking for domestic abuse – outside the church

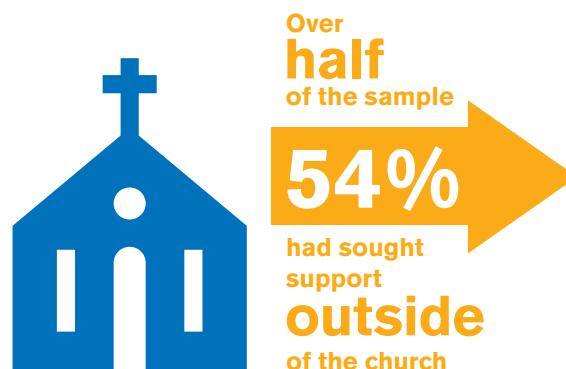
“ Getting people to admit to abuse, male or female, is a massive problem as most people will battle on for years. I myself lasted 25 years before I finally took the step of leaving after the children had grown up, my family knew nothing about it until then as I did not want to spoil their lives with my problems (male, 70-79)

Over half of the sample (54%) had sought support outside of the church; much higher than the proportion who, as discussed earlier, sought support from a church. Non-church sources of support that respondents had most commonly approached were:

- Family (36.0%);
- Friends (36.0%);
- A health professional (32.0%);
- Police (30.0%);
- Counsellor/therapist (26%);
- Solicitor (26%);
- Marriage guidance/Relate (22%);
- A domestic violence service such as LetGo (22%);
- A Christian counselling service (16%).

Since only seven men answered this question, the sub-sample size is too small to enable any meaningful gender comparison.

Respondents were asked to explain which source(s) of support were most and least useful, and why. It is important to reiterate that many were reporting help-seeking experiences from a decade or more ago, so they may not resonate with current policy and practice amongst service providers. Nonetheless, from respondents' reflections, it is possible to make good practice recommendations.



Different support services can play complementary roles, with some offering practical support such as legal advice or housing and others offering emotional support. Most helpful support sources included the following:

“ Family was the best support once they knew what was going on. I kept it quiet for a long time. They gave me the strength I needed (female, 50-59)

“ Mainstream counsellor. He explained about behaviour patterns. He gave excellent advice and help, support (female, 60-69)

“ LetGo have been very supportive and were always there to point me in the right direction and give me the advice I needed. They encouraged me to talk to the police who have also been very helpful (female, 40-49)

“ My IDVA (Independent Domestic Violence Advisor) offered great support and together with the police helped me and my children to flee from the violence (female, 40-49)

The previous quotes show that **support is vital to empowering victims/survivors to leave partners who are abusing them**. The last two quotes highlight examples of effective multi-agency working between LetGo and the police. Further, providing alternative perspectives and insights that contradict the world view that the perpetrator imposes is also essential, as the following recommendation from a survivor also captures:

“ Provide info on what is a healthy relationship because when you're in an abusive relationship it's very hard to see clearly. Provide Christian perspective on loving and taking care of ourselves as well as loving others (female, 60-69)

The least helpful responses came from sources who **did not believe the person being abused or did not take seriously his or her safety**, quite possibly abdicating their duty to protect victims:

“ The Police. The trouble was the person who was abusing me was a policeman. I didn't stand a chance got no support at all. All he used to say to me was his gang was bigger than my gang. Lost all trust in the police even to this day (female, 50-59)

“ Solicitor – had gone with my husband (mother pushed husband to 'support me'), solicitor told us that violence on our scale was not an issue and husband would get custody of children because I worked and he didn't (female, 50-59)

“ The language of all powerful God and sinners is the least helpful thing for me (female, 40-49)

“ One Relate counsellor related to my husband more than to me and believed everything he said, which prompted her to join in accusing me (female, 50-59)

“ Social worker was least helpful and she disclosed our safe address to my husband saying he had a right to know where his children were (even after police had relocated us for safety) (female, 40-49)

How can churches improve?

When asked 'Do you have any comments or suggestions regarding how churches can better support people experiencing domestic abuse?' participants gave a variety of answers. The most common response was that churches should **increase awareness and discussion of domestic abuse within the church**, either through sermons, announcements of resources during services, education via group discussions or Bible studies, advertising support services (e.g. putting up posters with helpline numbers) and via informal discussions. 'Raise awareness' and 'talk openly' were repeated many times.

“ Talk about it more openly. Acknowledge it happens in Christian families. Have leaflets around (female, 50-59, Anglican)

“ Raise the profile of it and draw attention to sources of support through displaying posters, etc. (female, 60-69, Roman Catholic)

“ Preachers can give illustrations of manipulative behaviour and say that it is never acceptable. Never try to cover it up or pretend it does not exist within the church (female, 70-79, URC)

“ Use appropriate passages in the Gospel during the homilies to refer to domestic abuse; offering mercy and pardon to abusers would make it easier for victims as they would not be seen as disloyal or troublemakers but in a situation in need of prayer (female, 70-79, Roman Catholic)

Some people saw church leaders as primarily responsible for educating their congregations – as one man (70-79, Roman Catholic) wrote 'Priests/Ministers need to talk about it to their congregation and strip away the secrecy', but others thought of it as a whole-church issue that demanded that everyone work together to raise awareness.

“ Helping ordinary members to become more aware of the issue helping them to be open to learning about it and taking about it – not focusing on a known individual but in a general sense (female, 80+, URC)

The next most common response as to how the church should respond was **doing training on domestic abuse**.

“ Provide opportunities for training – free training is even better which anyone can access (female, 60-69, Methodist)

“ More training and awareness in our churches about rural problems and domestic abuse (female, 50-59, Anglican)

Training could be undertaken by anyone, but many people thought that having one named person in the church who was trained was the most important thing, especially because of the potential that ‘well-meaning amateurs’ could do harm. CTiC’s system of cross-county Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Champions is a good example of this, although the extent of awareness of it is unclear since only a few respondents specifically mentioned it.

“ The problem should be openly discussed and one person or more people should be formally trained in dealing with domestic abuse effectively (female, 60-69, Church of Scotland)

“ Much depends on if there are enough willing volunteers of the right calibre to undertake the necessary training. Well-meaning amateurs could be worse than no-one at all (male, 60-69, Methodist)

The named person could be the minister or priest, but some thought that ministers were too busy to take part in this, and suggested that one or more ‘lay’ church members could take on the responsibility.

“ I really don’t feel ministers have any more time to dedicate to this which is why a bank of central church leaders (lay) like myself could train and then offer prayer and guidance in a totally non-judgmental way (female, 60-69, Anglican)

“ Train pastoral carers or vicar or anyone dedicated to this cause. Our diocese does offer courses or training sessions (female, 70-79, Anglican)

A few people mentioned existing training that could be attended, but most did not, instead calling for more training. This suggests that awareness of training is not high, even though six in ten people said they had heard about or attended CTiC training. The fact that training exists but people are either not aware of it or do not choose to go on it, indicates that more encouragement is needed, for example from church leaders, to prompt people to sign up for it. Training could also take place within churches, making it easier for congregation members to attend rather than having to travel.

The third group of suggestions for better supporting those experiencing abuse focused on **confidential, non-judgemental listening and support**. Churches should, one Anglican man in his 50s said, ‘Cultivate a listening and understanding culture. One that accepts and is non-judgmental.’

“ The first step is to make sure they know that help is available and they will not be judged (female, 60-69, Methodist)

“ Just be there for them, to listen and possibly signpost (female, 60-69, Quaker)

“ Much more friendship and keeping in touch, with less interference or lip smacking or any sort of condemnation or criticism. A victim I knew, who has stuck to church going through very distressing physical and mental abuse, but had very seldom been visited by her Minister (or elder) (once a year for money) – when she finally left her husband, she was told by her minister “we don’t want your sort here”! (female, 80+, Methodist)

Some pointed out that when churchgoers develop strong friendships in the church, they are more likely to have someone to trust with a disclosure of abuse:

“ Generally and basically building stronger, deeper, more trusting and open relationships between members so that disclosures can be made and support given in any difficulty (female, 60-69, Anglican)

“ Being part of a strong community means people can confide in others if they feel the trust is there, my current church sends out this message and would like to think if anyone was in this situation they would feel confident to trust us (female, 40-49, Anglican)

This resonates with the previously discussed findings that a quarter of those who did not seek support from church when they were being abused did not because there was no one that they knew or trusted well enough; and that when considering whether they would hypothetically seek help from church for domestic abuse, a disproportionate amount of men – 28.9% – would be deterred because there was no one they knew or trusted well enough.

Signposting people to sources of help was the fourth most common suggestion. Churches should be ‘Making people aware of where to go to, i.e. information leaflets’ (female, 50-59, Brethren), and ‘able to guide a victim to appropriate help’ (female, 60-69, Anglican).

Some people thought signposting was necessary because churches were not the right place to seek expert help for domestic abuse.

“ Primarily by listening non-judgementally, and then sign-posting to an appropriate agency. Addressing directly domestic violence (or indeed any other social issues) is not the ‘core business’ of faith groups (male, 60-69, Anglican)

“ Only suggest someone professionally. Not really a church matter, this is for people who are professionally trained. The church should be concentrating on religion (female, 70-79, Anglican)

“ Any support needs to be capable (qualified?) and effective. I am not aware that the church would be able to offer this (male, 50-59, Anglican)

How ‘expert’ churches should be is an issue churches should think through: as we argue later, the best solution is for church leaders and at least one nominated

person to undertake training so that they have enough knowledge to follow safeguarding procedures, offer a basic level of support to victims, and signpost to appropriate support services.

Beyond these four main suggestions were several others mentioned only a few times. **Working with other agencies**, for example refuges or domestic abuse charities, either Christian or secular, was one idea. One man (80+, Methodist) who works at an ecumenical Christian charity suggested ecumenical working as a good model, thus reinforcing the importance of partnerships such as CTiC and their steer in relation to domestic abuse. Four people said that **domestic abuse should be seen as a ‘safeguarding’ issue** and the appropriate procedures implemented:

“ The church must take responsibility for all the people who attend – with the correct people in place to ensure that people are made aware of what to do if they encounter a situation (male, 70-79, Anglican)

Domestic abuse is regarded as a safeguarding issue by several major Christian denominations, including the Methodist Church, whose work on this was pioneering, the United Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Baptist Union and the Church of England, and these churches have policies and/or guidelines relating to it.²⁴

The Church of England, for example, has had a domestic abuse safeguarding policy for at least a decade (updated in 2017). All clergy, as well as those with lay leadership roles, are expected to undertake safeguarding training every three years. All dioceses have Diocesan Safeguarding Advisors and a Bishop is responsible for Safeguarding nationally. Clergy have a duty to follow safeguarding procedures for cases of domestic abuse: assuring the victim that they are believed, offering confidentiality unless doing so would threaten the safety of someone vulnerable or a criminal offence has been committed (and if so alerting the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor), not attempting to mediate or approach the perpetrator, and outlining options available to the victim if they want to take further action.

24. Methodist Church (2010), United Reformed Church (2016), Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service for England and Wales (2016a, 2016b), Baptist Union of Great Britain (2016), Church of England (2017), Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service (2017).

There is limited evidence that awareness of such policies and practices, and of the wider support available through national and regional church offices, is filtering through to local churches.

Hopefully this will improve over time as safeguarding becomes truly embedded in local practice.

Offering prayer support was suggested by half a dozen, and two people suggested **offering counselling**. Beyond these, some other issues were mentioned that should be taken into consideration when the church was evaluating what response it should give. Gender issues were mentioned by a few, with the common theme that church gender norms might have a negative impact on victims:

“ I feel that this is an issue that should be talked about more in a church context – I think there are many churchgoing families out there where DV is a reality, but it is hidden by descriptions such as ‘wives being submissive to husbands’ – but taken out of all bounds and context (female, 30-39, Anglican)

“ By presenting domestic abuse as a non-gendered issue. At first glance information must show that that both women and men are abused (male, 50-59, Anglican)

“ More female church leaders in the Catholic Church would help women who want to talk about their experiences (female, 40-49, Roman Catholic)

Other issues included: what to do if the victim and perpetrator are members of the same church; not condemning divorce in situations of abuse; how to deal with abuse when it has been exacerbated or brought on by a perpetrator’s health condition; and the suggestion that the church could offer support for abuse victims in the wider community.

The next section presents the conclusion, summarising with overall findings, followed by setting out recommendations for how churches and other organisations can respond better to domestic abuse.

Conclusion

“ Churches need to encourage reality of life, that they are there as ‘hospitals for the broken’ and not ‘palaces for the perfect’. A place where the broken and insecure can feel safe and find healing, filled with real people and not perfect/plastic people (female survivor)

“ The fact that the church is an open door can be a blessing and a problem, a blessing as it welcomes the stranger, and a problem as it allows them somewhere to hide (female survivor)

Returning to the aims of the project, this conclusion summarises the answers to the project’s key questions.

What is the extent of domestic abuse among churchgoers?

42.2% of the whole sample reported that they had experienced at least one of the abusive behaviours that we asked about in a current and/or previous relationship, on at least one occasion. Of these, 109 people – one in four of the sample (24.9%, $n=438$) – have experienced at least one of the abusive behaviours in a current relationship. Caution is needed when interpreting these findings without further contextual information about the motives, dynamics and impacts of abusive behaviour. Johnson’s typology of intimate partner violence helps distinguish between ‘situational couple violence’ and ‘intimate terrorism’, both of which were identifiable in the findings.

These headline figures revealed little difference between women’s and men’s reporting. However, people aged 60 years and over were less likely than under 60s to say that they had experienced any of the behaviours. This may reflect under-recognition and under-reporting amongst older people, rather than lower rates of domestic abuse.

When those who reported experiencing at least one abusive behaviour were asked directly whether they had ever experienced domestic abuse, 57.4% of women and 16.7% of men said that they had, showing a substantial gender difference. Over 90% of self-defined domestic abuse involves male perpetrators; over half involves Christian perpetrators; and just over half involves situations where children under 18 were living at home when the abuse was ongoing. Most experiences of abuse were long-term: half had been abused for ten years or more.

What are the nature, dynamics and impacts of abuse among churchgoers?

Emotional abuse was the most commonly experienced form of abuse. Most commonly this had been experienced once or twice ever, but for more than one in ten this is/was occurring at least weekly. Similar proportions of men and women had experienced physical abuse at least once, whereas sexual, financial and spiritual abuse were reported by a much higher proportion of women: women were four times more likely to have experienced sexual abuse at least once, compared to men. Women reported experiencing abusive behaviours more frequently and experiencing a higher number of abusive behaviours, suggestive of the dynamic of intimate terrorism which Johnson describes.

The most frequently reported impacts of domestic abuse were diminished self-esteem, feeling depressed, feeling trapped and withdrawing from family and friends. Impacts which concerned serious risk to the victim/survivor or their children were disproportionately reported by women, and six women were currently in relationships where they feared for their lives. Women typically reported experiencing a significantly higher number of impacts compared to men.

This analysis reveals stark gender differences that are not initially evident in the headline prevalence figure that was first considered: women experience abuse that is more frequent, more severe and has more serious impacts.

How do churchgoers view domestic abuse in their congregations? What is their level of awareness of it and what are their attitudes to it?

Churchgoers in this study were much more aware of domestic abuse outside the church than within it. While 71.3% were aware of it in their community, only 37.6% thought it was a problem in their church. This is troubling, as this research has found domestic abuse is prevalent at significant levels in church communities, so it is likely to be a problem experienced by some people in most, if not all, congregations. The notion that domestic abuse happens in the community but not in the church is false. The low awareness of the problem is mirrored by the finding that only around two in seven churchgoers thought their church was equipped to deal with disclosures of domestic abuse.

How churches currently respond to domestic abuse

A large number of people, when asked to write about the role of the church in responding to domestic abuse, said that their church did very little, attributing this to their church being small, elderly and rural, or to a culture of silence. Some said the church did some work, with displaying information about helplines, praying and individual pastoral support good examples of this, and aspired to do more. A small number said their church was very active, working with local domestic abuse charities, for instance.

There is an appetite for the church to become a place where those subjected to abuse can find support. Churches could do more to connect and work with local domestic abuse charities and to condemn abuse from the pulpit. The large majority of people thought that the church should be a place where domestic abuse could be discussed and two thirds thought the church should do more to raise awareness of the problem. This gives church leaders a strong mandate to address this issue more proactively.

What are churchgoers' experiences of seeking support and guidance in relation to domestic abuse?

Those who had sought help for domestic abuse were more likely to have done so outside the church. Reasons for not seeking help at church were that they were not involved in a church at the time, feeling too embarrassed or ashamed, feeling that it was their duty to make the relationship work, and not knowing or trusting anyone at church well enough. Men and those aged over 60 were more likely to say that they would be unlikely in the future to seek support at church for domestic abuse because they could not confidently recognise the signs of domestic abuse and they thought that it would be wrong to talk negatively about their spouse/partner to someone at church.

One in six men and one in four women who answered this question had sought support from a church. In just over half of cases, the response received was supportive, and primarily took the form of emotional support/a listening ear. However, there were also examples of dangerous practice and disclosures of domestic abuse being minimised or silenced.

Just over half of the sample were aware of local or national domestic abuse services outside church. Those who had completed the domestic abuse awareness training delivered by CTiC and LetGo were more likely to know where to signpost victims/survivors to. Over half of those who had sought help for domestic abuse had used services outside of the church, most commonly friends and family, health professionals, police, counsellors/therapists and domestic abuse services. They received positive responses which had resulted in the victim/survivor being empowered to leave their abuser, and negative responses which jeopardised the safety of victims/survivors, disbelieved them or colluded with the abuser.

In conclusion, there are positive signs that the church response to domestic abuse is improving, especially in Cumbria in light of the success of the CTiC's ecumenical work to train clergy and laypeople and to better equip churches to respond to domestic abuse. However, there is still much to be done to ensure consistent, safe and pastorally sensitive responses to all victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse is not a hypothetical issue: there are survey respondents who are – right now – experiencing systematic abuse of different kinds on at least a weekly basis. One in four ($n=109$) of the sample had experienced at least one abusive behaviour in their current relationship; this includes 12 women who are have experienced between 10-20 abusive behaviours and six women who are currently in relationships where they fear for their lives. Cases such as these underline the level of urgency with which churches need to become better able to identify and respond to domestic abuse. This survey has given churchgoers in Cumbria the opportunity to share experiences which they may have seldom, perhaps never, disclosed. Positive action from churches – especially those in leadership and ministry roles – to challenge domestic abuse and open up the opportunity to be believed and supported – could bring hope to some of those survey respondents, and others too, for a future without abuse. **What is critical is that these important findings are translated into meaningful action and change: it is with this intention in mind that we end this report with the following recommendations.**



Recommendations

RECOGNISE

1) Churches should recognise that domestic abuse happens in churches too, and that a significant proportion of churchgoers, both men and women, are experiencing it, have previously experienced it, or have perpetrated abuse themselves.

2) Churches should recognise that abuse takes many forms, and may be emotional, physical, sexual, financial or spiritual. In some cases abuse can be life-threatening.

3) Churches should recognise that while some abusive behaviours occur just once, other relationships involve abuse that is frequent, systematic and severe. This 'intimate terrorism' is more likely to be experienced by women, although it can happen to men too.

4) Churches should be aware that domestic abuse affects children too. Churches need to look out for the signs that children are witnessing and experiencing domestic abuse and recognise that the impacts may be long-lasting.

RESPOND

5) Churches should do more to tackle the problem of domestic abuse, starting immediately. This is true for all denominations, and is a more urgent priority for churches or denominations who are not currently working on this issue, for example some evangelical denominations or networks.

6) Churches should give the consistent message that domestic abuse is wrong and contrary to Christian teachings. Sermons and public teaching offer potential for churchgoers to understand that Christianity offers resources that promote mutual care and respect in marriage and relationships, counteracting negative theological teaching that churchgoers may have previously received that implies that male control and abuse could be divinely-mandated. This requires preachers to engage with alternative theological interpretations of concepts such as forgiveness, reconciliation, authority, 'headship' and family.

7) Churches should respond to disclosures of abuse by following Restored's four-point plan (see Appendix 2) recognising that a good initial response from the church is crucial for instilling trust and confidence.

8) Churches should provide confidential (within the boundaries of safeguarding policies), non-judgemental listening and prayer support for anyone who discloses that they have been abused.

9) Churches should increase awareness and discussion of domestic abuse within the church, through regular teaching and training.

10) All church leaders and one other church member should undertake training on domestic abuse, with the appointed person identified publicly as the church's domestic abuse 'champion'.

Training of church leaders is the single most effective thing that can be done to improve the experiences of those who suffer domestic abuse. Training at theological college/ seminaries is one way this can be done, or via post-ordination or in-service training. Training of church members is important too, as whilst clergy have more extensive pastoral responsibilities, everyone has a role to play in responding to domestic abuse. A domestic abuse 'champion' is a member of the congregation who is trained to follow safeguarding procedures for domestic abuse and who is publicly recognised as able to support those subjected to abuse or signpost to other support sources.

REFER

11) Churches should regard domestic abuse as a safeguarding issue and the appropriate safeguarding procedures implemented. They should consult the safeguarding policies of their denomination.

12) Churches should signpost people who disclose having been subject to domestic abuse, or people who disclose that they have perpetrated abuse, to appropriate interventions beyond the church. For perpetrators, this includes perpetrator interventions such as those accredited by Respect, although these are not available in all areas.

13) Churches should reach out to and work with external agencies, including local domestic abuse support services, the police, children's and family services, health services, social services etc., recognising that tackling abuse and helping those who are abused requires a multi-agency approach.

14) Mainstream 'secular' domestic abuse services could benefit from partnership-working with churches, to help to ensure that spiritual forms of abuse and the faith needs of survivors are appropriately understood and met. Such partnerships would benefit from being coordinated by an ecumenical organisation to ensure that churches offering guidance have taken part in domestic abuse awareness training.

RECORD

15) Churches should, as a matter of course, record all disclosures of domestic abuse both from the perpetrator and the survivor of abuse.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Church responses to Wave 1

Denomination	Trained churches approached	Untrained churches approached	Total churches approached	Trained churches who agreed to distribute survey	% of trained churches approached who agreed to distribute survey	Untrained churches who agreed to distribute survey	% of untrained churches approached who agreed to distribute survey	Overall no. of churches who agreed to distribute survey	Overall % of churches approached who agreed to distribute survey	% of the 129 churches who agreed to distribute the survey who were from each denomination
Church of England	47	43	90	32	68.1%	20	46.5%	52	57.8%	40.3%
Roman Catholic	14	20	34	11	78.6%	15	75%	26	76.5%	20.2%
Methodist	24	7	31	23	95.8%	4	57.1%	27	87.1%	20.9%
URC & Methodist partnership	4	1	5	4	100%	1	100%	5	100%	3.9%
URC	8	0	8	6	75%	0	N/A	6	75%	4.7%
Church of Scotland	1	0	1	1	100%	0	N/A	1	100%	0.8%
Orthodox	0	1	1	0	N/A	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Salvation Army	1	2	3	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Quakers	3	2	5	2	66.7%	0	0%	2	40%	1.6%
Baptist	3	4	7	2	66.7%	1	25%	3	42.9%	2.3%
Independent/ New / Pentecostal	8	37	45	3	37.5%	4	10.8%	7	15.6%	5.4%
TOTALS	113	117	230	84	74.3%	45	38.5%	129	56.1%	

Appendix 2: The '4 Rs' of responding to domestic abuse (Restored 2016)



Appendix 3: Domestic abuse support services

If any of the information in this report has raised concerns about the wellbeing of yourself or others and you would like to speak with someone who can help, please contact these free and confidential services:



LetGo: An independent support and advice service for domestic abuse in Cumbria

<http://www.impacthousing.org.uk/let-go-domestic-violence-service>

LetGo North Cumbria 01228 633640
letgonorth@impacthousing.org.uk

LetGo West Cumbria 01900 842991
letgowest@impacthousing.org.uk

LetGo South Cumbria 01229 582386
letgosouth@impacthousing.org.uk



**Churches Together in Cumbria:
Faith based support in Cumbria**

Contact Rev Eleanor Hancock: 01228 527106
Eleanor.hancock@sky.com



Restored is a Christian organisation working to end violence against women. It has free resources for churches. It is not a service provider.

<http://www.restoredrelationships.org/>

Tel: 020 8943 7706

Email: info@restoredrelationships.org



National Domestic Violence hotline: This is a free and confidential service for women experiencing domestic abuse available 24 hours a day

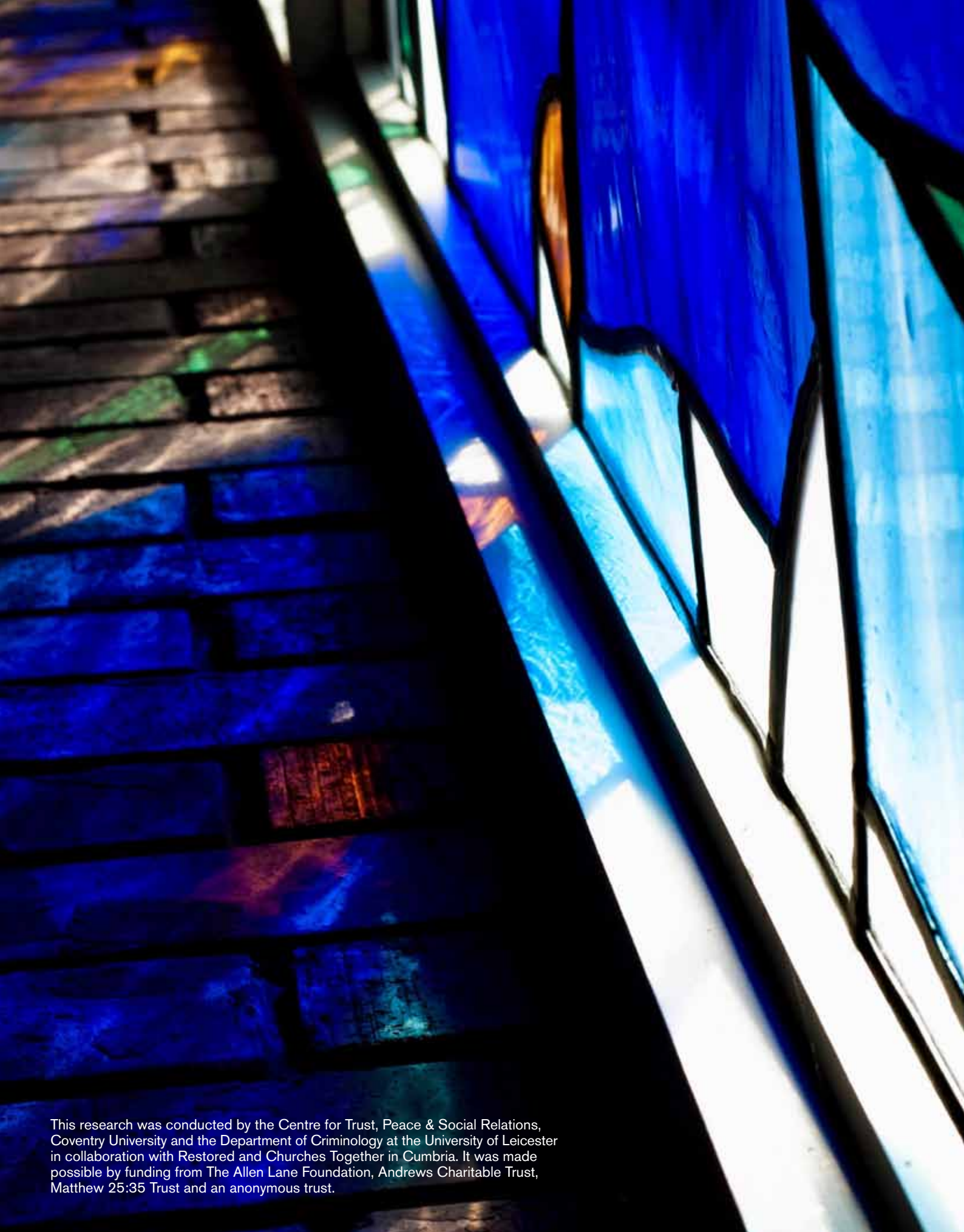
<http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk/>



Men's Advice Line: Confidential helpline for men experiencing domestic abuse from a partner or ex-partner (or from other family members)

<https://www.mensadviceline.org.uk/>

Notes



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