

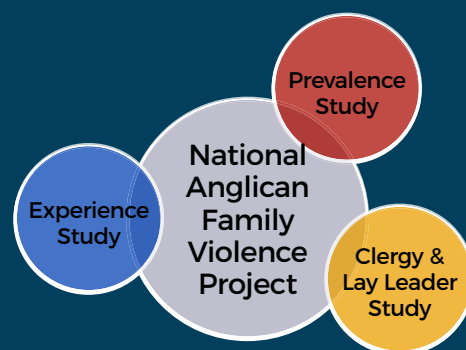


National Anglican Family Violence Project (NAFVP)

# National Anglican Family Violence Research Report Top Line Results

April 2021

NCLS Research



Commissioned by the  
Anglican Church of Australia



# National Anglican Family Violence Project (NAFVP)

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

## National Anglican Family Violence Research Report: Top Line Results

The authors of this report offer our thanks to:

- The Anglican Church of Australia General Synod's Family Violence Working Group, chaired by Reverend Tracy Lauersen and the Project Steering Group
- The Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee
- Colleagues who assisted us with advice and reviews of our work for this study
- Tracy McEwan for her contribution to the analysis and writing for the Experience Study
- Respondents in all studies for the time and effort to participate, and in particular
- Respondents who have their own direct experience of intimate partner violence who drew on their strength and courage to share for the sake of others.

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**Citation:** Powell, R. & Pepper, M. (2021). *National Anglican Family Violence Research Report: Top Line Results*. NCLS Research Report. NCLS Research.

These top line results are drawn from the following research report:

Powell, R. & Pepper, M. (2021). *National Anglican Family Violence Research Report for the Anglican Church of Australia*. NCLS Research Report. NCLS Research.

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# 1 Foreword



## Anglican Church of Australia

### General Synod Family Violence Working Group

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

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

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

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

Thank you to the many Anglicans who participated in this study, particularly those who have experienced IPV and its ongoing effects. We are very grateful for your willingness to share. Thank you to the members of our working group: the Right Reverend Genieve Blackwell, the Reverend Scott Holmes, Ms Ruth Holt, the Reverend Sandy Grant and Dr Karin Sowada. All of whose hard work has

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

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

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

been invaluable in progressing the project. Thank you to Dr Ruth Powell and Dr Miriam Pepper, researchers at NCLS Research who conducted the research - for enabling us to understand the prevalence and nature of IPV amongst Anglicans, and thank you to the members of our Anglican Church of Australia Standing Committee.

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

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

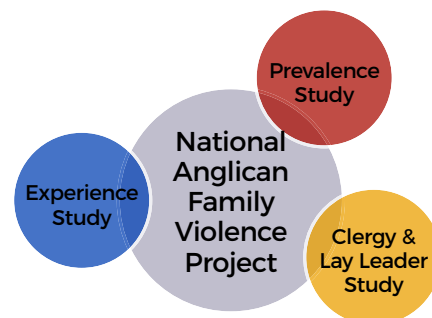


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# 2 Executive Summary



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



## 2.1 NAFVP Prevalence Study

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

The study was an online survey of over 2,000 males and females, aged 18+, conducted in December 2019. The Online Research Unit hosted the survey and provided the respondents. Results for a sample of the general public (n=1146) were compared with Australians who identified as Anglican (n=825). A larger sample of Anglicans (n=1382) was used to compare those who attended church regularly with those who didn't. These were non-probability samples from online panels so representativeness to the wider population cannot be claimed.

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

## 2.2 NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study

What are the attitudes and practices regarding IPV among Anglican clergy and local church leaders?

All Anglican parishes were sent invitations for their leaders to take part in the Clergy and Lay Leader Survey, and responses were received from approximately a quarter of Anglican parishes. The final number of survey respondents was 827, from 358 parishes, consisting of 383 clergy respondents and 444 lay respondents.

### *Attitudes and knowledge*

1. Clergy views on gender roles within marriage and the family varied strongly by church tradition.
2. Clergy and lay leaders were well informed about the breadth of domestic violence.
3. Clergy and lay leaders understood that it is more often men than women who commit domestic violence.

4. Clergy and lay leaders were sensitive to the wide array of factors that may contribute to domestic violence.
5. Clergy and lay leaders were aware of the widespread nature of the problem of domestic violence in Australia, but less aware of its prevalence in church communities.
6. Most clergy believed that Scripture is misused by the abuser in Christian families.

#### *Practices in local churches*

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

#### *Equipped for response*

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

## 2.3 NAFVP Experience Study

What is the nature of experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) for those with a connection with Anglican churches? How has the Anglican Church featured in these experiences.

This study involved two phases. Some 305 respondents took part in a scoping survey and some 81% had IPV experience. The second phase involved face to face interviews. Of the 179 people who had direct experience, 86 were open to interview and 20 were selected. They spanned a diversity of experiences of and views about the Anglican Church in relation to IPV (e.g. positive, negative, mixed experiences) and diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.

16. Faith and church both assist and hinder those who are experiencing domestic violence.
17. Although unintended, Christian teachings sometimes contribute to and potentially amplify situations of domestic violence.
18. Perpetrators' misuse Christian teachings and positional power.
19. Christian teaching that addresses IPV can also empower victim-survivors to begin a process of change.
20. When churches acknowledge that domestic violence happens it can help victim-survivors.
21. Churches who have built awareness of domestic violence are more able to respond when victim-survivors are ready.

22. Trusted relationships in churches reduce isolation for victim-survivors.
23. Specialist domestic violence services and health professionals have a central role.
24. At their best, churches play a role in fulfilling the following needs after separation as a contribution to rebuilding and recovering life: to be safe, to have material provision, to be in relationships of care, empathy and acceptance, to have an identity, to make a contribution, to have a spiritual life and relationship with God.

Full results from across this project are presented in the main research report and three detailed reports for each study, which will be made available in coming months:

- *National Anglican Family Violence Research Report: for the Anglican Church of Australia.* (Powell & Pepper, 2021)
- *NAFVP Prevalence Study Report: The prevalence of intimate partner violence among Australians who identify as Anglican* (Pepper & Powell, 2021).
- *NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leader Study Report: Anglican clergy and lay leader attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and practices regarding intimate partner violence* (Powell & Pepper, 2021).
- *NAFVP Experience Study Report: The nature of experiences of family violence for those with a connection with Anglican churches* (Pepper, Powell & McEwan, 2021).



# 3 Definitions & scope



## 3.1 Definitions

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

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

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

In summary, IPV:

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

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

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

## 3.2 Ethical conduct and trauma-informed practices

The research has been undertaken in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC, 2018) and with the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee of Charles Sturt University. Only participants who had given their full and informed consent to take part were included in the study. Every effort was made to ensure confidentiality with all data made anonymous or de-identified in all outputs. Further, researchers were trained in trauma-informed approaches to research. Care for participants' wellbeing was upheld at all times and participant distress protocols were developed for the research. Information about national and local support services was provided to all participants.

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

The three surveys undertaken for this project provide results which offer much insight. Using statistical terminology, a limitation of these studies is that they each use non-probability samples. Probability sampling means that every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected and therefore a random sample will be statistically representative of the whole population.

The Prevalence Study methodology was a non-probability survey utilising samples drawn from online panels. The Family Violence Working Group who commissioned this research wished to compare prevalence between church-attending Anglicans, others who identify as Anglican, and the Australian population. There were no existing data for this analysis, and the expense of collecting new data from a large enough probability sample (given the low incidence of church-attending Anglicans) is prohibitive. The Online Research Unit (ORU) hosted the survey and provided the samples. ORU describes itself as Australia's leading online data collection agency and meets ISO 20252 & ISO 26362 standards for both market research and panel work. However, because it utilises non-probability samples, it is not possible to claim that the whole population or all Anglicans are represented. In general, all online panels have some level of bias (e.g. those without internet are excluded). Notwithstanding these inherent limitations, online panels are widely used for research, including this study, and we believe they represented the most viable option available to meet the stated goals of the study. Counter measures that we implemented to address potential biases were to set demographic quotas on recruitment and to weight the data in line with Australian and Anglican population characteristics.

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

# 4 NAFVP Prevalence Study

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

### 4.1 Prevalence Study Method



#### Prevalence Study

The study was an online survey of over 2,000 males and females, aged 18+, conducted in December 2019. The Online Research Unit hosted the survey and provided the respondents. Standalone quotas were set for age, gender and location, derived from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing, with additional soft quotas set for education. Results for a sample of the general public (n=1146) were compared with Australians who identified as Anglican (n=825). A larger sample of Anglicans (n=1382) was used to compare those

who attended church regularly with those who didn't. These were non-probability samples from online panels so representativeness to the wider population cannot be claimed.

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

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

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

It can be difficult to accurately record the extent of intimate partner violence in a population. Such incidents frequently occur behind closed doors and are often concealed by, and denied by, their perpetrators and sometimes by their victims (ABS, 2018). An aim of the Prevalence Study was to collect up-to-date information on how common or widespread domestic violence was, as reported by comparable samples of all Australians and people who identified as Anglican.

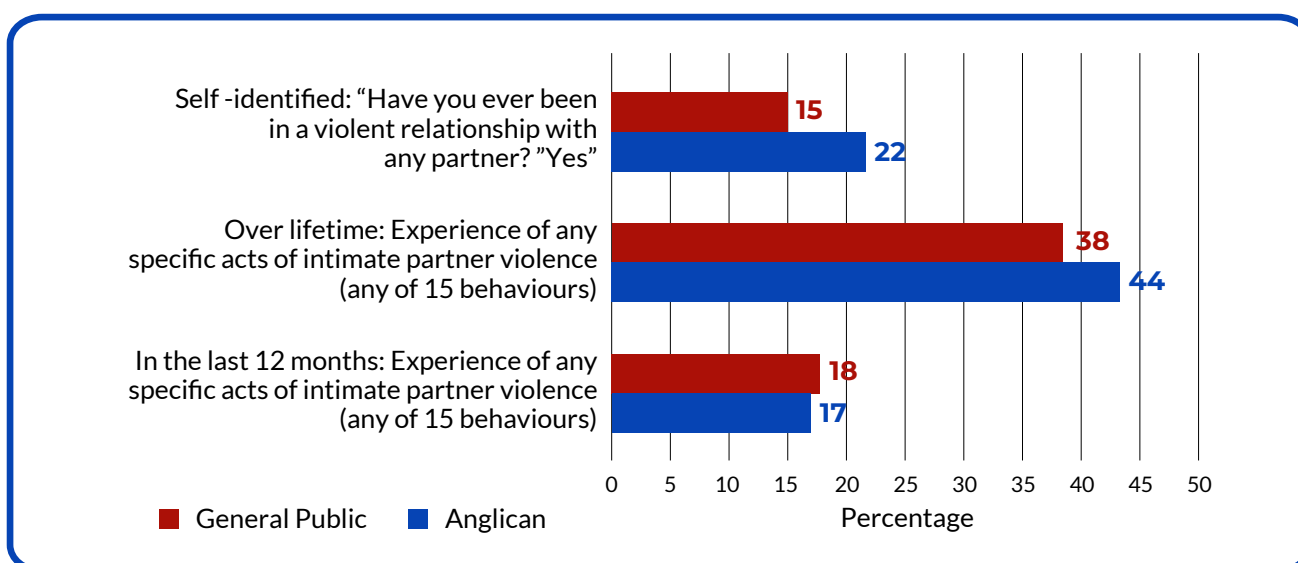
When asked the direct question "Have you ever been in a violent relationship with any partner?" some 22% of Anglicans who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship said "yes". This compares to 15% for the equivalent group of the general Australian public.

When presented with specific instances of violence, higher proportions of respondents in the general public and among Anglicans agreed that these actions had happened to them during their adult

lifetime. In the general population, the prevalence of IPV overall across their adult lifetime was 38% of those who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship. Among those who identified as Anglican it was 44% (see Figure 1). Some 10% of the general public sample, and 10% of Anglicans, also reported having experienced spiritual abuse at some point in their adult life.

The survey was conducted in December 2019, so respondents were being asked to report on their experiences over 2019. In the 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study, the prevalence of IPV in the previous 12 months was 18% in the general public sample, and 17% in the Anglican sample. Some 5% of the general public sample, and 4% of Anglicans, also reported having experienced spiritual abuse in the previous 12 months.

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



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

## 4.3 Church attendance and domestic violence

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

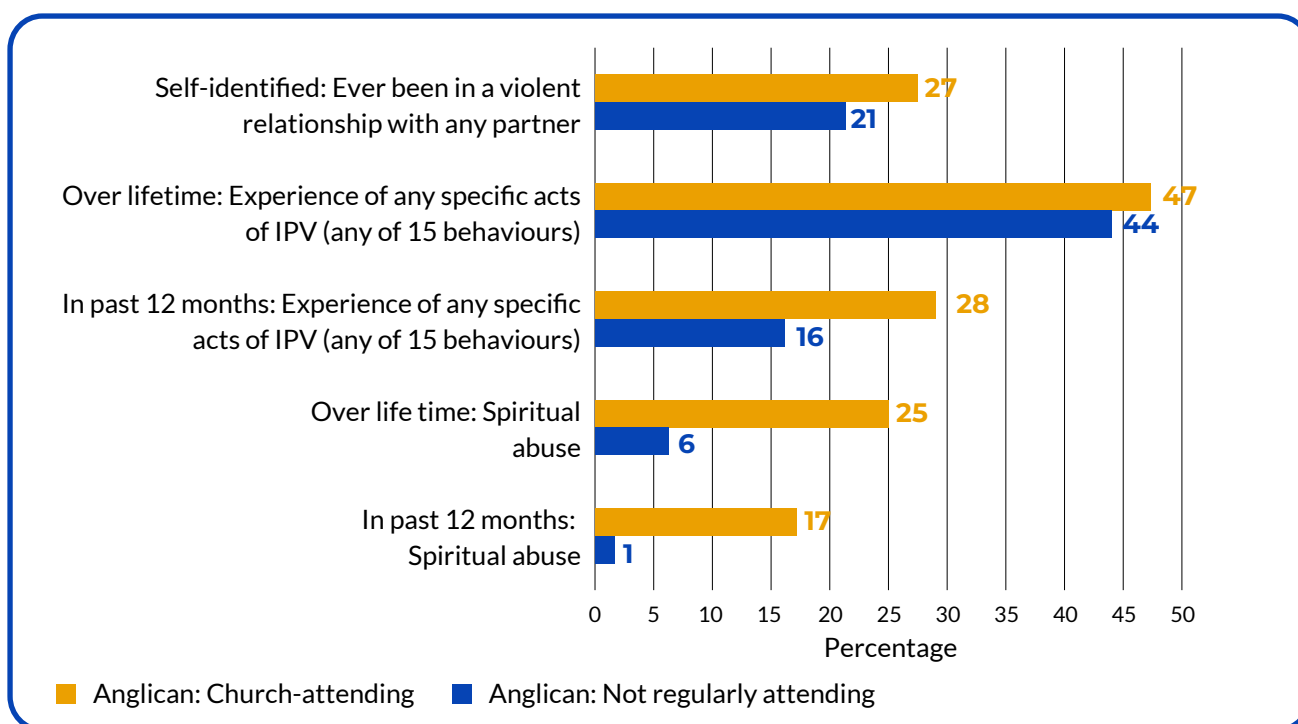
**Defining church attendance:** We distinguish “church-attending Anglicans” and “Anglicans who do not attend regularly” as Anglicans who indicated that they attended religious services at least several times a year versus those who attended less often. Church attenders comprised 26% of all Anglicans in the Prevalence Study. This broader definition was chosen, rather than “at least monthly” church attendance, in order to achieve a reasonable number of cases of church attenders for analysis and to reduce vulnerability to weighting fluctuations. In a further test, the definition of church-attending was set as “at least monthly”. While the percentages differed for this smaller sample, the overall patterns of the two analyses are similar.

When asked the direct question “Have you ever been in a violent relationship with any partner?” some 27% of church-attending Anglicans who had ever been in an adult intimate relationship said “yes”. This compares to 21% of other Anglicans (see Figure 2). This was not a statistically significant difference.

In terms of the CASR-SF, the lifetime prevalence of IPV overall did not differ significantly between church-attending Anglicans and other Anglicans (47% and 44% respectively). The 12-month prevalence of IPV was higher for church-attending Anglicans than for other Anglicans (28% and 16% respectively). Possible reasons for this significant difference when considering a 12-month time frame are not obvious.

Some 25% of church-attending Anglicans reported having experienced spiritual abuse at some point in their adult life, compared with 6% of other Anglicans. Some 17% of church-attending Anglicans reported having experienced spiritual abuse in the previous 12 months, compared with 1% of other Anglicans.

**Figure 2:** Experience of violence in the all Anglican sample by church attendance



Source: 2019 NAFVP Prevalence Study. Percentages are based on those who indicated they had ever been in an adult intimate relationship (all Anglican n = 1,287).

NB. Differences between attendance types for self-identified and lifetime measures were not statistically significantly different.

## 4.4 Gender and domestic violence

**Key finding: The prevalence of intimate partner violence was higher among women than men.**

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

**Table 1:** Lifetime prevalence of IPV and spiritual abuse victimisation in the general public and Anglican samples by gender

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

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

## 4.5 Approachability of the church

**Key finding: Most Anglican victims of domestic violence did not seek help from Anglican churches (88%).**

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

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



## 5.1 Clergy and Lay Leader Study Method

### Clergy & Lay Leader Study

The Clergy and Lay Leader Study focuses on the attitudes and practices regarding IPV among Anglican clergy and local church leaders.

It used a mixed methods approach with two phases:

**Phase 1: Focus groups** of Anglican clergy in the Diocese of Sydney, NSW (metropolitan) in December 2019 and the Diocese of Southern Queensland (metropolitan and regional) in February 2020 (two groups in

total). Clergy participants who responded to a general invitation were particularly invested in the topic, with significant and direct experience with ministering to both victim survivors and perpetrators. Data assisted with design of an online survey.

**Phase 2: An online survey** of approximately 30 minutes duration was promoted to parishes across Australia from May to August 2020, with a request for all clergy plus interested lay leaders to participate. The final number of respondents was 827, from 387 parishes, consisting of:

- 383 clergy respondents, two-thirds of whom were rectors, vicars or senior ministers, from 304 parishes, and
- 444 lay respondents, a quarter of whom were wardens and a fifth of whom were other parish councillors, from 201 parishes.

Results may be biased towards clergy and lay leaders with a stronger awareness of and interest in the topic than is likely to be the case across Australian Anglican parishes as a whole.

## 5.2 Attitudes and knowledge regarding domestic violence

**Clergy views on gender roles within marriage and the family varied strongly by church tradition.**

Church and the institution of marriage are deeply interwoven, particularly for churchgoers. Most clergy, across church traditions, agreed with the statement that “marriage is a sacred covenant which is important to preserve”. However, church tradition plays a strong role with regard to views on gender roles within marriage and the family with key differences between Anglo-Catholic clergy and clergy from Evangelical and Reformed traditions.

**Clergy and lay leaders were well informed about breadth of domestic violence.** Almost all survey participants understood that domestic violence was more than physical and sexual violence but also included psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. While clergy were more likely to indicate this awareness than an earlier survey of the Australian population, it is possible that the increasingly high profile of domestic violence in the Australian media may have improved general knowledge and understanding.

**Clergy and lay leaders understood that it is more often men than women who commit domestic violence.** This view aligns with wider evidence from various sources that it is mainly men, or men more often, who commit acts of domestic violence.

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

**Clergy and lay leaders were aware of the widespread nature of the problem of domestic violence in Australia, but less aware of its prevalence in church communities.** Nine in ten clergy and lay leaders agreed that domestic violence is common in Australia, and around six in ten agreed that domestic violence is just as common in churches. A view that domestic violence is less common in the churches is challenged by the NAFVP Prevalence Study which found that people who experience domestic violence are part of Anglican Church communities in similar or higher proportions than the wider community.

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

## 5.3 Practices in local church contexts

**Churches have a role in education about domestic violence.** There was widespread agreement among clergy that domestic violence is an issue that should be discussed in church and that local churches should do more to raise awareness of domestic violence. Around seven in ten clergy reported that their church prayed for victims of domestic violence in the previous 12 months. A minority of clergy reported often or sometimes talking about domestic violence in public settings, including preaching. According to clergy, other actions by churches, such as display of posters and leaflets, donations of money or goods or working with local organisations, occurred in around a third to half of churches.

**Most clergy had been aware of victims of abuse in their churches and had dealt with specific domestic violence situations as part of their ministry.** Three quarters of clergy had been aware of people in their churches who were victims of domestic violence, and around half were aware of perpetrators. The most common action, used by almost all clergy who had dealt with domestic violence situations, was to provide pastoral and spiritual care to the victim, followed by referring the victim to support services. Around half of clergy offered counselling to the victim, talked to the perpetrator and assisted with a safety plan. More interventionist actions such as contacting the police, providing the rectory as a refuge, or intervening to keep children safe were undertaken by a quarter of clergy. Most clergy felt that having women on the pastoral team equips a church to better respond to domestic violence.

**Dealing with domestic violence situations resulted in some negative impacts for most clergy.** Among clergy who have dealt with domestic violence situations in ministry, the majority identified a negative personal impact. Fatigue was particularly common and four in ten said they had experienced

manipulation from a perpetrator of domestic violence. Domestic violence situations may be protracted and complex, and especially if both perpetrator and victim are a part of the same church and impacts on clergy considerable.

**Two thirds of clergy had not collaborated with clergy/leaders from other churches in relation to domestic violence.** This survey question was non-specific and it is unclear whether clergy were reporting on collaboration on educational programs, seeking information and advice from others, and perhaps even passing on information about particular domestic violence situations. Three in ten had made contact with the diocese (informed or sought help) in relation to a specific domestic violence situation.

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

**Clergy confidence in their personal capacity to respond to domestic violence was low to moderate.** On the whole, clergy reported being knowledgeable, experienced and trained in domestic violence situations. However, confidence in their personal capacity to respond to domestic violence was low to moderate. Confidence was only a little higher among clergy who had been trained.

**Although few leadership teams had been trained, there was moderate confidence in the churches' readiness to respond.** A minority of lay respondents had been trained and their confidence was relatively low. However, clergy respondents were a little more likely to agree that their team knew how to respond to domestic violence situations than they themselves did personally.

**A minority of clergy felt very familiar with support services or very confident to refer people to them.** Almost all clergy felt that it was their responsibility when ministering to a victim of domestic violence to help them to access support services, yet a minority felt very confident to make these referrals. Given the importance of specialised support for people in domestic violence situations, clergy awareness of domestic violence support services and confidence to refer people to them could be further improved through targeted training.

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

**Views by clergy of the role of the bishop when a clergyperson was a victim or abuser were: to be pastoral, to carry out disciplinary procedures and to seek involvement of services outside the church.** Using an open text format, most respondents gave their views about the role of the bishop when a clergyperson is a victim or a perpetrator. Views most commonly expressed about the role of the bishop when a clergyperson is a victim was to provide pastoral support, and when a clergyperson is a perpetrator, to carry out discipline accordance with church procedures. In both cases, the second most common response was that the bishop should seek the involvement of organisations and services outside of the church.

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



## 6.1 NAFVP Experience Study Method

### Experience Study

The key research questions for the NAFVP Experience Study were “What is the nature of experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV) for those with a connection with Anglican churches?”, and “How has the Anglican Church featured in these experiences?”

The study used a mixed methods approach with two phases.

**Phase 1: Online scoping and recruitment survey.** The online scoping and recruitment survey aimed to probe the diversity of experiences of IPV across the Anglican Church and to assist with the recruitment of interview participants. The survey was open from September 2020 to January 2021. Some 305 individuals took part, with 81% having had some sort of personal experience with IPV, including 58% who had experienced violence from an intimate partner.

**Phase 2: Face-to-face interviews.** Phase 2 involved individual in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 people across Australia (19 women and one man) who had experienced violence from an intimate partner (victim-survivors). These participants were handpicked following their participation in the online scoping and recruitment study. Interviews took place via Zoom, in person, and via phone, between November 2021 and February 2021. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed by means of coding and interpreting the meaning and significance of the data at a deeper level. To understand the role of churches in participants’ experience of violence, we used a framework that drew together trajectories of abuse, church culture and relationships, and human needs.

This summary describes features of violence experienced by our participants and highlights a few key findings about:

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

## 6.2 About interview participants and features of violence

Anyone can experience domestic violence. It affects people from all backgrounds and walks of life. Violent relationships are characterised by a breadth of abusive behaviour and patterns of control and intimidation over time. Domestic abuse can cause significant harm to an individual’s wellbeing. We heard from our participants:

- The experience of various forms of violence – physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, social, economic and spiritual abuse
- Early warning signs or “red flags” that participants commented were sometimes present in the relationship

- Contrasts between violence at home and the image presented by the abusive partner in public
- Coercive controlling dynamics and cycles of abuse
- Participants' efforts to try and make sense of the abuse, especially personality disorders and problems such as narcissism (which may or may not have been formally diagnosed),
- The impact of the abuse on participants' wellbeing and identity
- Ways that participants used their agency, the ability to make choices and act on them, in the abusive relationship.

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

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

He used to get triggered by small things...For example, if I didn't cook dinner, he used to hit me. If I didn't clean the house, he used to hit me. And I never understood why that happened. In my family, that never used to happen...Because those days, I had to call in sick all the time because I would be bruised all over... That was next level violence...Yes, it was tough. Those days were tough because I would end up with pain and aches in my body

Physical was unusual. The verbal and threatening and other emotional abuse was standard. It was really the blanket of our marriage. The emotional stuff never stopped... That was just constant. I never knew what I was coming home to... There was never really an in between and that was probably the hardest thing... the walking on eggshells all the time and it changed in an instant.

## 6.3 Findings about the role of the church

When people in abusive relationships are part of Anglican Church communities, their church interactions can be overwhelmingly positive or overwhelmingly negative. However, our research suggests that it is common for churches to play a dynamic and varied part. The full NAFVP Experience Study report is over 140 pages long. It is based on the analysis of survey responses from over 300 people and more than 400 pages of transcripts from 20 in-depth interviews with 19 women and one man from across Australia who had been in abusive relationships and also had a connection with an Anglican church. It contains many direct quotes from participants which indicate complex and nuanced journeys.

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

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

### 6.3.1 The role of the church: religious teachings and norms

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

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

**Although unintended, Christian teachings sometimes contribute to and potentially amplify situations of domestic violence.** Our interviews showed that, however unintended it may be, teachings related to marriage, gender and forgiveness can be a contributing factor in the extension of the cycle of IPV and can create a situation of harm for people in abusive relationships. Absolutist discourses related to marriage as a lifelong commitment, the submission of the wife to the husband, unconditional forgiveness, and suffering for Christ – whether they are taught by church leaders, internalised by victim-survivors, or co-opted by abusers in this way – are harmful for those who experience abuse. Participants recounted feelings of self-doubt, self-blame, entrapment and shame that they directly attributed to certain discourses about intimate relationships. Conversely, discourses such as marriage as a covenant, the equality of partners in a marriage, and God's mercy and love can help to empower victim-survivors to extricate themselves from abusive relationships.

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

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

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

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

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

**Christian teaching that addresses IPV can also empower victim-survivors to begin a process of change.** At key moments - or crucial instants or occasions - in the cycle of abusive relationships - where people have an opportunity to make choices and act on them, clergy and church leaders can offer alternate perspectives that empower victim-survivors to begin a process of change. Among participants were people whose church had helped them to realise that they were experiencing domestic violence and that it wasn't acceptable. A sermon, or talking with their minister/pastor, helped provide a framework and language for their understanding. When clergy speak in ways that are fully sensitised by the reality of IPV in church communities – whether in teaching and preaching or privately in conversation – it can carry considerable weight with members of the congregation.

Discourses that participants described as liberating, whether heard from church leaders or sometimes by means of participants' own reading or listening, included:

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

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

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

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

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

In our analysis, we understood churches as places of or spaces for relationship. In this study, we were sensitised to the relationships and social interactions between our participants, church leaders and congregants. In cases where the partner was also a part of that church community, this also included relationships between the abusive partner and others in the church.

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

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

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

Participants highlighted the critical importance of genuine care. Asking after an individual's wellbeing may or may not result in a disclosure, but if done out of genuine concern for that person and in a way that doesn't expose them to other people or to judgment, this signals to the victim-survivor that this is someone they could perhaps reach out to in future. Trusted people in the church might not always know what to do or what to recommend, but if they show genuine concern for a person's wellbeing, perspective and agency it can make a real difference.

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

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

In our analysis we heard how churches can help or hinder those who experience abuse to meet their needs and based on a review of the data, framed needs as follows:

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

In this study, at the time of their interview, all participants had physically separated from their abusive partners. As participants shared their stories, it emerged that the impact of trauma often continued. Analysis revealed that church can play a role in fulfilling the following needs after separation as a contribution to rebuilding and recovering life.

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

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

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

**To have their own identity:** After separation churches can support victim-survivors as they re-establish their own identity by (1) not identifying the victim-survivor by their experience or marriage status; (2) allowing victim-survivor space and time to re-establish her self-identity.

**To make a contribution:** To be offering, helping to produce or achieve something was frequently a significant need for participants after separation. Many participants spoke about how they used their own experiences of IPV to support other victim-survivors. Several participants were active in raising awareness, both through formal church organisations and informal relationships. After separation, many participants went on to make significant contributions to the church through lay and ordained ministry.

**To have a spiritual life and relationship with God:** After separation, church was a place that facilitated transcendent experiences and healing for some participants, where they could grow in their understanding of and connection with God through and beyond their experiences of abuse. Key people in church, especially clergy, were central in this journey. However, often when participants were not adequately supported by their church community during their experiences of IPV their involvement with church remains fraught. Some also described their greater empathy for others who were on the margins of the church.

## 6.4 Participant recommendations for the Anglican Church

The influence of church leaders and whole church community relates to how they:

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

Participants' recommendations for Anglican church communities and for church leaders have been summarised below.

### 6.4.1 Participant recommendations for church communities

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

### 6.4.2 Participant recommendations for church leaders

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

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## National Anglican Family Violence Research Report: Top Line Results

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

Full results from across this project are presented in the main research report and three detailed reports for each study, which will be made available in coming months:

- National Anglican Family Violence Research Report: for the Anglican Church of Australia
- NAFVP Prevalence Study Report,
- NAFVP Clergy and Lay Leaders Study Report, and
- NAFVP Experience Study Report.



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