

The Rapha Project

A study on domestic violence and the Church in Québec

Part 3 – Focus groups with clergy and church leaders

Presented by Christian Direction

Fall 2024



“Religious leaders have a prophetic voice. And that prophetic voice is very important, and they have to be thoughtful about using it. When a social worker says to an abused religious woman, ‘the violence isn’t right’, that’s important. But for a religious woman when her pastor or priest or rabbi says, ‘God does not condone that’, it’s incredibly impactful.”

Nancy Nason-Clark

“But then the, the old, the eldest pastor was saying, ‘You have to say when it's enough. You get to say when you, you know, you’ve tolerated it enough.’ Right. He gave me that power.”

Survivor, Rapha Phase 2

« J’ai une amie qui est très croyante aussi, qui m’envoie une vidéo d’un père-curé en France, qui explique que malgré la religion, malgré la foi tout ça, il faut quitter ces relations-là. Ça m’a tellement confortée dans ma décision, puis m’a réconfortée aussi. »

Survivante, Rapha Phase 2

¹ I Believe You: Faiths’ Response to Intimate Partner Violence, Dir. David Vinik, Diva Communications, 2010.

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Risk factors/protective factors

A risk factor is an element that increases the probability of developing a disease or suffering a trauma. At the same time, a protective factor can diminish one's chances of suffering trauma or of creating negative psycho-social elements in a person's life. Protective factors are characteristics or conditions that act as risk moderators, i.e. they reduce the negative impacts associated with risk factors and help young people to cope better with their situation. In the sphere of domestic violence, risk or protective factors can include socio-economic background, region of residence, social and family network, family history, access to social services and self-help services.

Domestic violence

Domestic violence occurs within the context of a current or past love relationship. It can occur in any type of intimate relationship, regardless of duration, including married or civil union relationships, common-law relationships or any other intimate relationship between people of the same or opposite sex. This type of violence can occur at any age, and often results in an imbalance of power within the relationship. Domestic violence mainly affects women, regardless of their social status, culture or income. To control the victim, the abuser uses multiple strategies, such as insulting, threatening or intimidating her. Domestic violence also includes acts of violence against the victim's loved ones, property or even pets. It can also be directed at the victim's new partner.²

*We can also talk about abusive relationships, although in Quebec, we more frequently use the term “conjugal violence” translated as domestic violence, especially in the case of romantic or partner relationships.

Cycle of violence (or the violence wheel)

This cycle is often described in terms of three phases: crisis/aggression, remission and tension. Violence and control are present in each phase of the cycle, but take on different faces. One might think that violent behaviour is only present at the moment of crisis, because that's when it's most obvious, most “striking”. On the contrary, psychological violence is very intense at the time of remission (manipulation, gaslighting, lies, false promises, etc.), and coercive control is very present in the tension phase (micro-regulation of daily life, rules of behaviour, depriving or

²“Qu'est-ce que la violence conjugale ?”, Éducaloi, 2023.
(<https://educaloi.qc.ca/capsules/la-violence-conjugale/>) [consulted on November 9, 2023].

diminishing freedoms, etc.). Each phase contributes to maintaining and reinforcing the hold, and the victim never really gets a break from domestic violence³.

Experiences or episodes of violence

It is possible to experience episodes of violence in a relationship between intimate partners that are part of a cycle of violence or that are experienced in an isolated or punctual way. A person may experience these episodes and not consider themselves a victim or survivor of domestic violence. In all cases an intervention, in the form of psychological services or legal aid, is desirable and even recommended.

Intimate partner violence

Many sources in academic literature use this term, which applies freely to any romantic relationship, regardless of the couple's legal or marital status. This term is different from that of family violence (see definition). The forms of violence and the dynamics of the cycle of violence are the same as for the term domestic violence. It should be noted that SOS Violence Conjugale, one Quebec's primary reference centres for victims, now uses intimate partner violence, conjugal violence and domestic violence interchangeably, but they prioritise intimate partner violence (IPV).

Family violence

Family-based violence is defined as a form of abuse, mistreatment or neglect suffered by a child or adult at the hands of a family member or a person with whom he or she associates.⁴

Survivors and/or victims

A survivor is anyone who has experienced violence at the hands of their partner. She is usually no longer in the cycle of violence, but situations vary from person to person. A victim, in general, is someone who has experienced violence or is experiencing violence in a current relationship. Often, a person doesn't choose or doesn't want to identify themselves as a victim, for fear of being stigmatised or labelled, or they simply don't identify with the experience of being a victim. In the Rapha survey, we often used the terms "living with violence" or "I have an experience of violence" instead of the word victim.

Abuser or predator

An abuser is a person who uses violence in its various forms to control or dominate his or her partner. The abuser generally uses a variety of means to maintain his or her hold on the victim, and will intentionally draw his or her partner into the cycle of violence. In the Rapha survey, we often used the terms "person who used violence or abuse" or "perpetrator or author of violence".

³ "Crise, rémission, tension: le cycle de la violence", SOS Violence Conjugale (<https://sosviolenceconjugale.ca/fr/outils/sos-infos/crise-remission-tension-le-cycle-de-la-violence>) [consulted on November 9, 2023].

⁴ "La violence familiale", Gouvernement du Canada, March 7, 2022. (<https://www.justice.gc.ca/fra/jp-cj/vf-fv/index.html>) [consulted on November 9, 2023].

Various forms of domestic violence

Physical Abuse

“Physical abuse, including assault, is the intentional use of force against a person without that person’s consent. It can cause physical pain or injury that may last a long time. Physical abuse includes:

- pushing or shoving
- hitting, slapping or kicking
- pinching or punching
- strangling or choking
- stabbing or cutting
- shooting
- throwing objects at someone
- burning
- holding someone down for someone else to assault
- locking someone in a room or tying them down
- killing someone. ” (Government of Canada)

Sexual Abuse

“Sexual abuse of an adult can include:

- sexual touching or sexual activity without consent
- continued sexual contact when asked to stop
- forcing someone to commit unsafe or humiliating sexual acts

All sexual contact with anyone without consent is a crime. This includes sexual touching or forcing sexual activity on a spouse, a common law partner or a dating partner. Even when married, a spouse cannot be forced to have sexual contact.” (Government of Canada)

Verbal Abuse

“Verbal violence is used to intimidate, humiliate or control a person or a group of people. [...] Like psychological violence, verbal violence can be difficult to recognize, because many people minimise and ignore it (telling themselves that it is none of their business). Here are some indicators that can help to identify verbal violence:

1. sarcasm:
 - complimenting someone while intending to convey the opposite
2. insults:
 - ‘You’re a real drag on the team!’
 - ‘How do you manage to stay alive when you’re such an idiot?’
 - ‘Hey refugee, go back where you came from!’
3. degrading or humiliating remarks:
 - ‘With cleavage like that, it’s no wonder you got promoted!’

- 'We've never seen anyone as incompetent as you are. The boss should fire you!'
 - 4. shouting or giving orders:
 - 'I never asked you for your opinion, so just shut up!'
 - 'If you don't want to be called stupid, stop saying such stupid things!'"
- (Gouvernement du Québec, web)

Emotional/Psychological Abuse

"Emotional abuse happens when a person uses words or actions to control, frighten or isolate someone or take away their self-respect. Emotional abuse is sometimes called psychological abuse. It can include:

- threats, put downs, name calling or insults
- constant yelling or criticism
- controlling or keeping someone from seeing friends or family
- making fun of preventing someone from practising their faith or religion
- destroying belongings, hurting pets or threatening to do so
- bullying: intimidation or humiliation (including on the Internet)." (Government of Canada, web)

"Psychological violence is generally used to gain or maintain control over someone. There is no respect, and consent is obtained in an unacceptable manner. The common thread in all strategies that rely on psychological violence is that one person acts in an abusive way toward another person." (Quebec Government)

Financial/Economic Abuse

"Financial abuse happens when someone uses money or property to control or exploit someone else. It can involve:

- taking someone's money or property without permission
- withholding or limiting money to control someone
- pressuring someone to sign documents
- forcing someone to sell things or change a will." (Government of Canada)

"Economic violence is the least understood form of violence, even though it is rampant. A person who is subjected to economic violence loses their financial independence, even if they work outside the home and earn a good salary.

Economic violence can occur between people who are equally wealthy or poor, just as it can between people with unequal incomes.

A few indicators that may reveal the presence of economic violence include:

- imposition of financial control
- vigilant monitoring of a budget
- withholding or removal of identification cards
- forced financial dependence" (Gouvernement du Québec)

“When the abuser forbids his partner to work or, on the contrary, forces her to work beyond her strength in order to benefit from a better family income, it is economic violence. The abuser may also control his partner's choice of work or interfere with her education. Extreme restrictions on spending for food, clothing, recreation, or denial of access to financial resources are also ways in which the abuser may use economic abuse.” (Regroupement des maisons pour femmes victimes de violence)

Spiritual Abuse

“Within relationships, spiritual abuse happens when one person misrepresents scripture in order to control and create dependence on the other person. This can happen between husband and wife and can happen in churches where church leaders encourage the victim of abuse to remain in an abusive situation or be ostracised by their community.” (Restored UK)

SOS Violence Conjugale uses the term “spiritual violence⁵” and defines it as, “Attacking the victim's deepest values or the meaning they give to their life; imposing beliefs or preventing the victim from practising her religion; challenging or undermining the victim's efforts to reach her dreams or ambitions.”

Coercion and Control

When abuse is present in a relationship, it is often the result of the use of various forms of coercion and control of the person experiencing abuse. Control and coercion can take many forms, but can include restricting your movements, not allowing you to see certain family members or friends, having to report your activities and whereabouts frequently, etc.

Post-separation violence

Contrary to what we might hope, separation is not always a guarantee of safety for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV), at least in the short term. Victims may be subjected to post-separation violence and continue to suffer severe consequences on themselves and their children. Post-separation violence has different goals: to convince the victim to return, to continue to exert control, to prevent the victim from exercising her rights, to exact revenge for what the abuser sees as a final provocation... or simply to “win” and have the last word. (SOS Violence Conjugale)

⁵ The Rapha team proposes its own definition of spiritual abuse in the Part 2 Report of the Rapha study. This is a form of intimate partner violence that is very little studied, and not very documented. We believe that spiritual abuse needs to be studied more in order to be understood and prevented.

1. Introduction

In phase 1 of the Rapha study, published on December 6, 2023, the results of a survey of church-going Quebecers were presented and analyzed. The perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of 503 respondents about domestic violence were examined, as well as their opinions and wishes regarding the role the Church in Quebec should play in educating people about domestic violence and its prevention. Of equal interest was survey data on self-reporting and experiences of violence by the 503 respondents in intimate partner relationships.

In the second phase of the Rapha study, “Part 2: Presentation of qualitative interviews-listening to survivors”, we focused on the experiences of survivors of domestic violence, namely those of women who were attending a Christian Church in Quebec at the time of their violent relationships. Among other things, we wanted to examine the role of the Church and its teachings towards people who experience violence in their intimate relationship with their partner. One of our aims was to determine where the Church might be failing survivors of domestic violence and how it can be a supportive and healing community for people leaving abusive relationships. To do this, we conducted qualitative interviews with 13 survivors.

There is reliable literature that broadly presents the realities of women of faith who experience violence at the hands of their intimate partner. Academic literature indicates that “the faith community is paradoxically a source of help, but also a barrier to survivors of domestic violence⁶”. We must never underestimate the role of the Church in the life of a Christian survivor of domestic violence. “The interaction between religion and domestic violence is not simple. Institutions can play an important, even dangerous role in the victim’s mental state and intimate and community relationships, yet religion can also promote post-traumatic growth, healing and support.⁷” In addition, the role of the religious leader is very important in the life of a Christian woman who is a victim of violence. Sociologist and researcher Nancy Nason-Clark points this out in her book *Religion and Domestic Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions*. She writes: “Many religious and devout women will seek help from their leaders in the aftermath of a domestic violence incident. Most of the time, they are looking for practical

⁶ Pyles, Loretta. “The complexities of the religious response to domestic violence: Implications for faith-based initiatives”. *Affilia* 22, no. 3 (2007), p.282.

⁷ Lalonde, C., Arnocky, S. (2023). “Religion and Domestic Violence”. In: Shackelford, T.K. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85493-5_1431-1.

assistance and have questions of a spiritual nature.⁸” Several women in part 2 of the Rapha study cited experiences with their communities and with their leaders. They sought practical assistance; also, a listening ear and they had spiritual questions as predicted by Nancy Nason-Clark. Sometimes the response from leaders was helpful, sometimes it was harmful. For better or worse, religious leaders and Christian communities are woven into the fabric of the lives of Christian women who are victims of domestic violence in Quebec.

To better understand this dynamic, we initiated a third part to the Rapha study: focus groups with church leaders. We set up seven focus groups with 39 Christian leaders: pastors, assistant pastors, parish priests, chaplains, deacons and elders. We listened to their voices to understand their perceptions, hopes, challenges and experiences on the issue of domestic violence in their communities. This third and final report from the Rapha Project contains the results of the research among Quebec clergy.

1.1 Methodology

a. Focus Groups

The focus group as a research method was popularized in the 1950s, mainly thanks to the American sociologist Merton. He was responsible for studying the morale of the American army. Sometimes frowned upon in academic circles (researchers felt that the method was too subjective), the focus group gained in popularity throughout the 20th century, mainly to obtain the point of view of consumers, and eventually in the field of health and psycho-social intervention⁹. In his book *Successful Focus Groups: Advancing the State of the Art*, researcher Morgan offers the following definition of this approach: “A group discussion organized around a central theme, hence the name *focus group* (which means to focus on, to take stock of a particular element)¹⁰.”

A discussion group generally takes the following criteria into account¹¹ :

- The group is made up of between four and twelve relatively homogeneous people.
- The aim is to gather people’s views on a given subject.
- The discussion is led by a moderator who is prepared for this type of data-taking and has a list of questions and themes to cover.

⁸ Nason-Clark, N., Fisher-Townsend, B., Holtmann, C., McMullin, S. (2018). *Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: Understanding the Challenges and Proposing Solutions*. New York. Oxford University Press.

⁹ Boutin, G. *L'entretien de groupe en recherche et formation*. Montréal, Éditions Nouvelles, 2007, p.16.

¹⁰ Morgan, D.L. (ed.) (1993). *Successful Focus Groups: Advancing the State of the Art*. Newbury Park. Sage.

¹¹ Boutin, G. *L'entretien de groupe en recherche et formation*. Montréal, Éditions Nouvelles, 2007, p.18.

- The presenter is accompanied by an assistant who provides technical support and acts as an observer.

The Rapha team followed these criteria in drawing up the interview protocol, drafting the questions and conducting the interviews. We had two facilitators, Julie Bérubé and Jeremy Favreau. They were accompanied by Jenna Smith, who acted as an assistant. The role of the moderator was to set the mood, welcome people and what they had to say, ask questions, invite participants to express themselves or explore certain themes in depth, and manage the discussion.

The assistant's role was to present the objective of the project at the start of the session, to ensure that technical or logistical issues were under control (e.g. sound for recording, etc.) and to take notes during the discussion, which generally lasted between 90 and 120 minutes.

b. The objective of phase 3 and the research question

The third phase of the Rapha Project aimed at using the focus group data to explore the perspectives and experiences of clergy and Christian leaders in Quebec's Christian communities in relation to domestic violence. The overall research question of the project was: what are the experiences of victims and survivors of domestic violence in the Quebec Church and what are the attitudes of leaders and believers in Christian communities on this issue? The focus groups in phase 3 enabled us to answer the second part of our question.

Based on the data collected, our hope is to gain a better understanding of the needs of Christian victims and survivors of domestic violence and to understand the challenges and needs of the churches to draw up recommendations that will help them to better support victims and prevent violence in their communities.

c. Creating the discussion protocol and questions

A sub-committee of our Rapha Project drew up the discussion protocol and list of questions (see Appendix 1). The questions probed leaders' definitions of domestic violence, their perceptions of their role in dealing with the issue, and the challenges and capacities they face in intervening in the matter of domestic violence, in preventing it and raising awareness of this issue in their communities. We also wanted to find out what their needs were so that we could better equip them to respond to the problem of domestic violence.

The facilitators led the groups using the semi-structured interview method. We insisted on giving participants the freedom to express themselves, without worrying about time constraints, staying on topic or embarrassment about gaps in their knowledge or experience. In

fact, a good number of them said that they had never had to intervene in a situation of domestic violence during their ministries. This in no way prevented them from participating in the process.

d. Ethics and confidentiality

The ethics and security protocol were supervised by CREO¹². Once CREO approval was obtained, there were a series of safeguards and protocols to be put in place in this phase of the project to ensure the safety and confidentiality of participants. Those who responded to the Rapha team's invitation were screened to determine their eligibility for the project, which included questions about their role in their church, the family of churches to which they belonged and their preference on format (face-to-face or videoconference mode).

Firstly, participants' names were only used on the informed consent forms. We gave pseudonyms to the participants who took part in phase 3, in the interview transcripts and data analysis. During the transcription process, all identifying information was also removed. We also read an ethics protocol to the focus groups at the beginning of each session (see Appendix 2), asking participants not to disclose the identity of their colleagues or to recount what was said in the conversations. Three months after publication of the study results, all audio recordings, transcripts and consent forms were destroyed.

e. Focus group transcripts

The sessions were recorded using digital equipment and the transcriptions were made on the Sonix platform. The research assistant made the necessary changes.

1.2 The participants

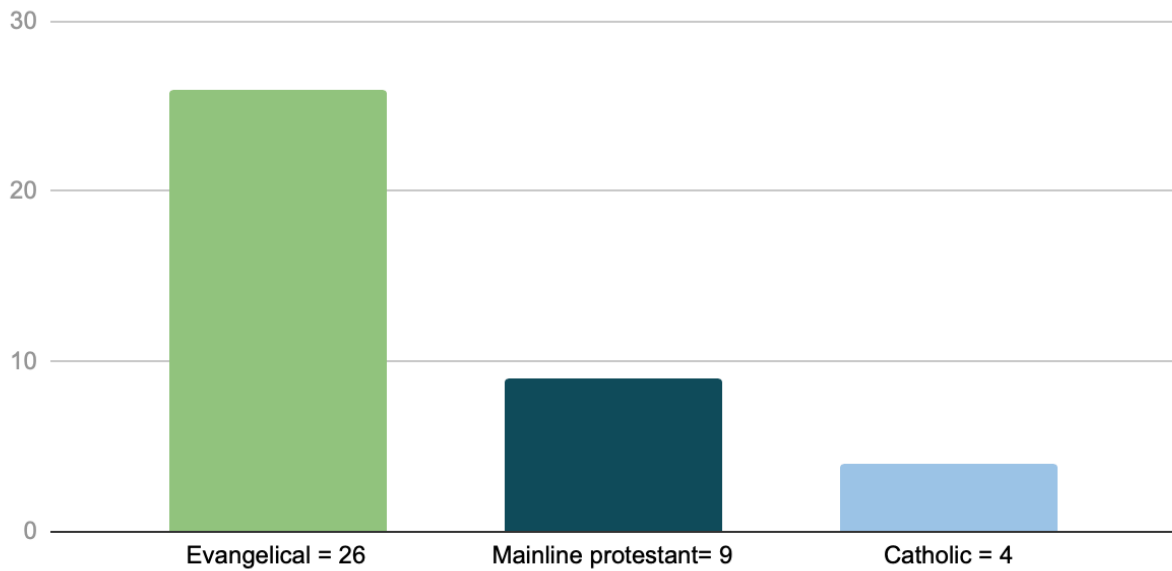
a. Participant profiles

In all, 39 people took part in the focus groups (22 men and 17 women). The tables below show the denomination of the participants, their roles within their community and their gender. Also of note: 12 of the 39 leaders were culturally diverse or worked in a cultural community (for example, a predominantly Asian parish). Some 29 participants live and work in the Greater Montreal area (Laval, Longueuil, Montreal and the North and South Shore.) We had participants from the Eastern Townships, the Outaouais, the Charlevoix region, Quebec City and the Chaudière-Appalaches region.

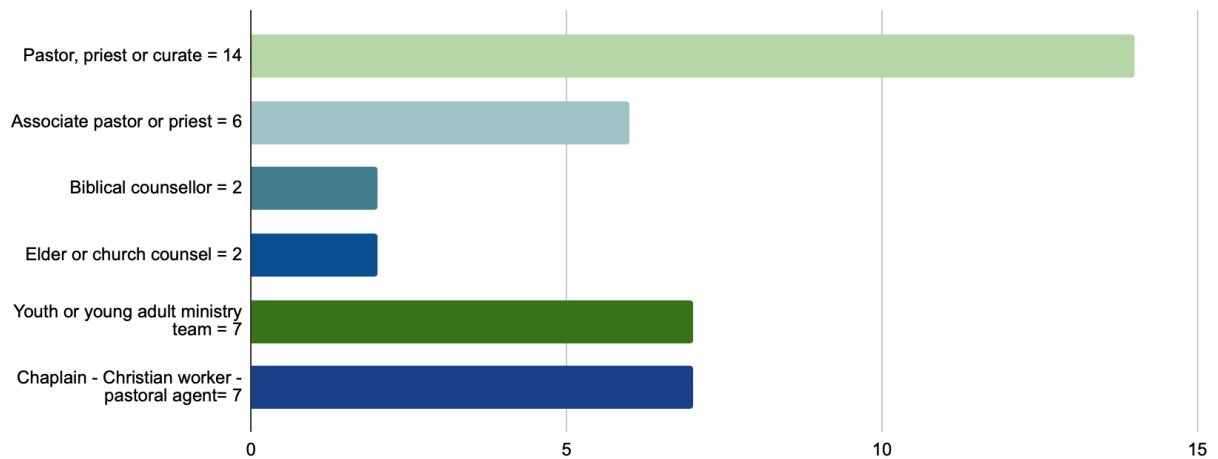
¹² Community Research Ethics Office: <https://www.communityresearchethics.com>

b. Breakdown of participants

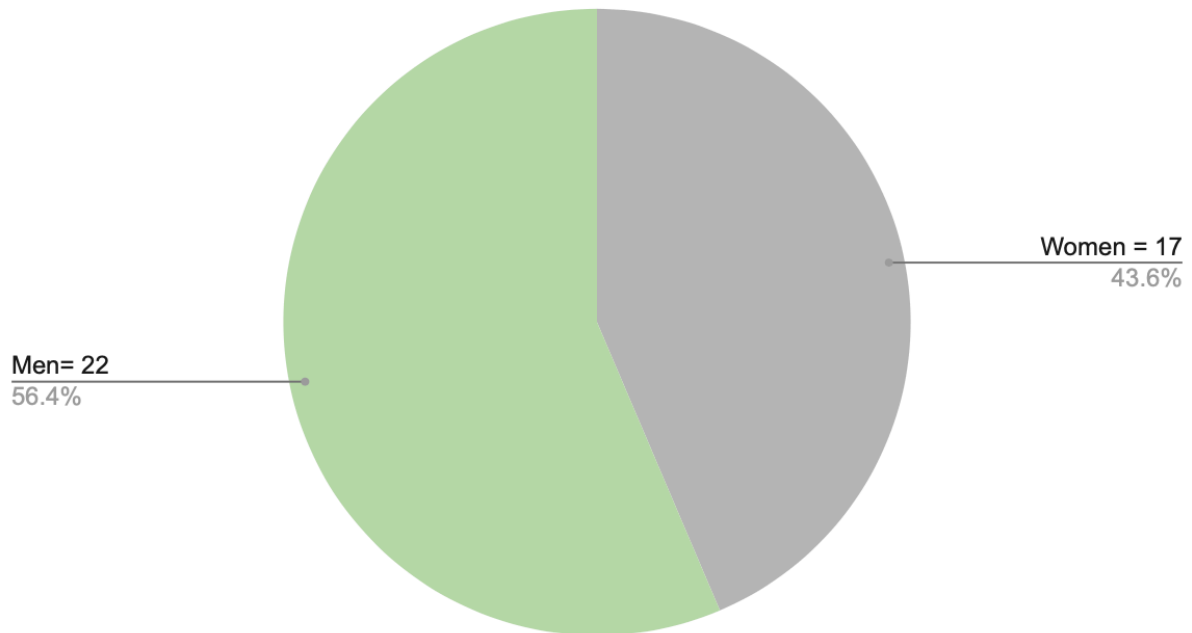
Church tradition



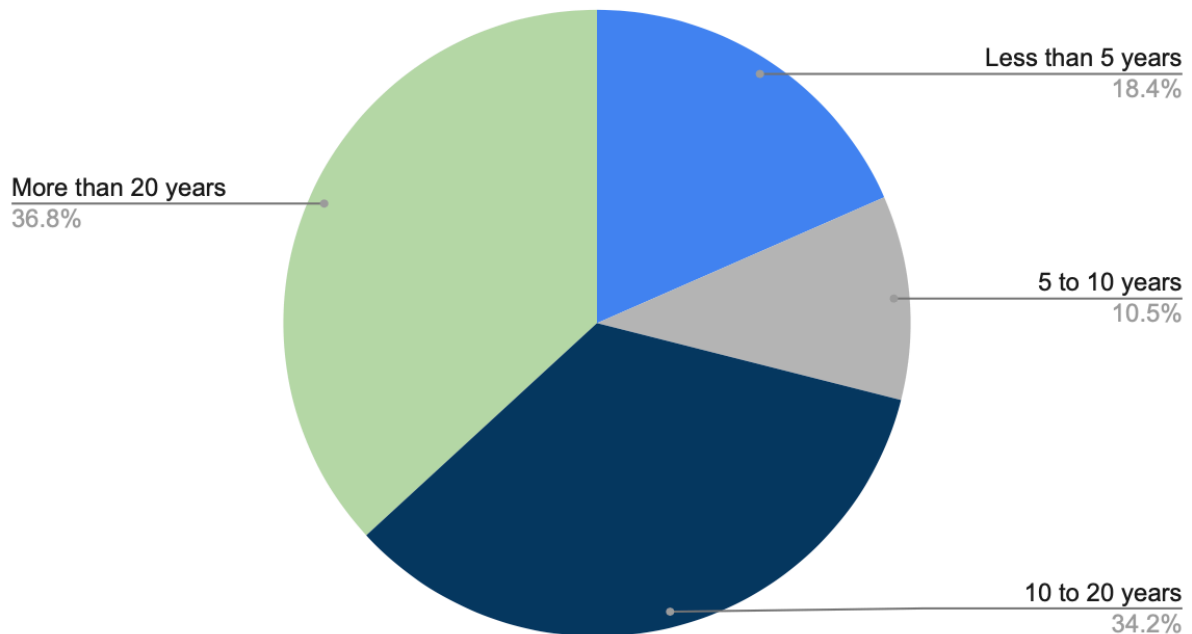
Role or responsibility in church



Gender of participants



Years of experience within church ministry



c. Languages and group homogeneity

Four groups were held in French and three in English. We tried to group the participants in such a way as to ensure a certain homogeneity (for example, participants from church families without too many doctrinal differences). This tactic is recommended¹³ to a) avoid too great a disparity b) avoid the risk of confrontation and c) facilitate data collection.

d. Group dynamics

In general, the participants were cordial, respectful and attentive to their colleagues (almost without exception). None of the participants asked to be excused from the group or to withdraw their participation, and several said they had learned about the subject from the comments of their peers or had been enriched by the experience. In fact, this is one of the aims of the discussion group. Several people thanked the Rapha team for their work, and in return the team would like to thank the participants for their openness, vulnerability and willingness to engage in constructive dialogue on such a sensitive subject. A number of people spoke of what they had learned, their hopes and their discouragement, or of a feeling of being overwhelmed by the scale of what was at stake. The pastor below sums up these feelings.

“Je ressors avec des encouragements et du découragement. D'une certaine façon un peu découragé parce que je trouve que l'église... Je connais beaucoup, beaucoup de pasteurs et de dirigeants d'églises et tout. Je pense que la plupart d'entre eux sont bien intentionnés, incluant moi-même. J'ose espérer. Mais on a beaucoup, beaucoup de misère à mettre les bonnes ressources, les bonnes formations, les bonnes communications, traiter les bons sujets. On a beaucoup, beaucoup de misère à faire ça. Puis malheureusement, c'est les gens dans nos églises qui en souffrent, hein. Il y a des gens dans nos églises qui souffrent réellement du fait qu'on n'aborde pas les bons sujets, qu'on n'a pas mis nos ressources et notre effort au bon endroit. Puis ça fait en sorte que c'est ça. Il y a de la souffrance dans nos églises. Ça fait que ça me décourage parce que je me dis qu'on ne peut pas juste être bien intentionnés. Puis en même temps, ce qui m'encourage, c'est que je crois qu'on est quand même plus conscients aujourd'hui qu'on l'était il y a peut-être dix ans pis qu'il y a 20 ans.”

e. Personal or professional experience of domestic violence

Regularly, one or two participants in each group had greater familiarity with, or even personal experience of, domestic violence. Some participants (women) told the group that they

¹³ Boutin, G., (2018), L'entretien de groupe en recherche et en formation, Montréal: Les éditions JFD inc.

themselves were survivors of domestic violence, or that they had been brought up in a home where there was domestic violence.

"I remember my sister and I; we discovered that five generations of men in our family have been abusive. We were at this event, and we're talking to my aunt. She shared this with us. My sister and I, like, pinky promised, or blood swore – It was 30 years ago – that we would not marry abusive men. Because that's what people do when they've only known that to be true. And so, I think that when kids have witnessed this, it's also all they know and then it's what they look for in a partner. So some kind of training [is needed] to help them see another way, which is part discipleship, part therapy."

The participant below tells the story of the violence between her parents, the harmful response of the Church and the spiritual deconstruction that followed in her own life.

"I'm a survivor of domestic violence as a child and teenager, that was the situation with my parents. And, you know, my mom didn't leave for so long. And I understand why she didn't leave, because I shared the same worldview as she did. It took her, I don't know, ten, 12 years to leave. And when she left, it all came crumbling down. It was like, okay, everything I thought about the world and how it works is not really true anymore. And so, your life is in shambles in a practical, but concrete, concrete ways, but also in cognitive ways and like your spirituality, your theology, what you believe about all these different things, they're so interconnected. And that takes years of deconstruction...But the role of the church is also so important there, and you know, in my experience, and that's one of the reasons that I care so much about these issues, because in my experience, the church failed so utterly. And because, you know, there's that culture of silence. It's so strong. And there's a moment, where after years, you know, somebody is brave enough to sort of talk to the elders of the church, but then the elders of the church don't believe the person. And they say, 'Well, it's a marital problem, we don't know what to believe, they both say different things.' And the woman, my mom, says, 'Okay, but can you talk to my adult daughters who have been witness to this for years to have a second opinion?' And the elders are like, 'No, we can't talk to the adult daughters without their father's permission because he's the head of the family.'"

Other participants had – through their ministry or previous jobs – professional experience as counsellors, lawyers or support workers for victims of domestic violence. Sometimes, sharing these experiences helped to reveal the extent of the problem of domestic violence (this supported the results of Rapha, phases 1 and 2). The quotes below are good examples.

"And, and I pray, I PRAY, I'm the only one at this table who has sat with somebody who 48 hours later was dead. And I have several of those people. And so you're sitting there

and you hear these stories and this need to 'I need to respond' because you're standing on the edge of a cliff. Mhm. And you know, so that's, it's a terrifying thing."

"I'm with my denominational women's leadership, and we've had talks in the past about the whole situation of abuse, and I went to a conference a number of years ago and thought I was the only person in there that would have had any knowledge of anybody going through any experience. And the first question they asked was, 'How many of you know somebody that's going through a situation', and almost every hand in the room went up. And the second question, 'How many of those were in the church', and the majority of hands went up. And that's when I knew."

Some participants who had in-depth expertise presented their approaches or knowledge, and this enlightened their colleagues around the table.

"Most – not most – ALL of the abuse cases have first come to me as a request for marriage counseling, and once after a meeting or two, it's clear that it's abuse. Well, then I say, 'We are not doing marriage counseling anymore, we're going to do something else.'" So that's how I respond.

*"Historically, the church has been very silent. Historically, the church has done incredible damage. Um, I'm not talking about this (my) church. I'm talking about all these other churches where I have had ministers show up and defend batterers, and I have had to work with victims where they have had horrifically awful things, told them essentially spiritual abuse. Mhm, mhm. And I think the role of the church **has to be** to set forth a corrected narrative. Um, I don't even want to say a different narrative because I know God created no one to be abused."*

In all cases, the presence of these participants enriched the discussions. Their testimonies and opinions served as a voice of expertise for the members of the group.

2. The results

2.1 Answers to preliminary questions

The research team asked participants to complete a preliminary questionnaire before the session began. Of the 39 participants, 27 completed the preliminary questionnaire.

Do you believe that domestic violence is present in your parish – community – congregation?
(N.B.: we let participants write down their answers to allow them to elaborate on their thoughts).

Yes – 10 respondents

No – 2 respondents

Maybe, probably or don't know – 8 respondents

Other written answers :

“University students definitely experience domestic abuse.”

“Je n’ai connaissance d’aucun cas, mais je ne serai pas surprise qu’elle soit présente.”

“I hope not. Don’t have evidence for any. Actually, three young adults in our church had abusive fathers.”

“Yes; in all its forms. Physical, verbal, spiritual, financial ; coercive control.”

“I am not aware of any issues with domestic abuse in our congregation currently but I know it has been an issue in the past, and I would not be surprised to find out it is still an ongoing issue. It is something that we try to be aware of and prepared to address. Our denomination has a strong safe church ministry and our congregation has a safe church policy in place, but we recognize abuse is a reality in our church.”

“Petite église, je ne crois pas que ce soit une dynamique en ce moment, mais...”

“I have observed emotional, mental, spiritual and physical abuse and harassment in my congregations.”

2.2 Major themes

a. Ability to define intimate partner violence – familiarity with the subject.

The first question posed to focus group participants was: “What is your understanding/definition of domestic violence?”

This question enabled the participants to express themselves, to discuss with their colleagues their understanding of the phenomenon of domestic violence and to establish a common vocabulary and concepts. We sometimes observed participants working together to develop definitions and concepts and to name the various forms of domestic violence.

“We often think of physical violence, but psychological violence and emotional violence are also really important. Verbal abuse, financial abuse. But it’s often these patterns of coercion that happen, where an exploitation or manipulation, where you have a person who engages in abuse, a person who, often is trying to take control, is trying in a way that harms other people in the family network.”

“Pour moi c’était toute action ou comportement qui brime la liberté d’une autre personne dans une relation.”

“I think there’s an element of it being a sustained, you know, it’s a sustained pattern. I would say, yeah, of oppression or coercion. And the stripping of one’s agency can be in many, many ways. It can even be spiritual. Whereas someone is not using their own body or words, but they are twisting scripture to gain control over another person.”

“On parle des formes de violence. Donc de violence physique, de violence psychologique? Euh. Dans la vie de couple et puis euh. Euh, peut-être qu’il faut, il faut peut-être nuancer les situations occasionnelles qui se résolvent peut-être. Et puis les, vraiment les problèmes où la violence conjugale est utilisée de manière permanente dans le cadre de la relation par un des deux conjoints.”

This first question also gave participants the opportunity to ask clarifying questions or express their uncertainties about the issue. Many sought to clarify or deepen their understanding of the issue of domestic violence by raising the following questions:

- What are the different forms of domestic violence?
- If someone inflicts an injury or commits an unintentional act of violence, is this domestic violence?
- Are men also victims of domestic violence, and if so, to what degree?
- Are the children the victims, or what is the impact on the children if there is domestic violence?

The comments below clearly show the questions asked by some of the participants.

“... quand tu as dit un acte qui est volontaire parce qu’à mon avis, il peut y avoir de la violence même lorsque c’est pas volontaire, c’est l’action en tant que telle, qui mérite le qualificatif de violence. Donc on peut faire violence même lorsqu’on n’a pas voulu le faire. Est-ce que tu serais d’accord?”

“What would that be? I’m just trying to get to the clarified idea of domestic abuse. Would that be spiritual abuse? What my colleague was talking about, like spiritual authority. And then you’re asking for domestic, like spousal, parental?”

“Je voulais dire par dommage collatéral, je pense que les enfants à la fin de la journée, il y a du dommage qui est fait... S’il y a une violence à la maison, les enfants sont de facto victimes aussi, que ce soit sur le plan psychologique, même si le père ne va pas peut-être physiquement frapper l’enfant, mais un enfant qui voit sa mère physiquement se faire gifler, comme tout le temps, il y a un impact.”

“Donc la question c’est de savoir si c’est seulement possible pour l’homme de faire vivre la violence conjugale? Je ne serais pas surpris que les statistiques démontrent que c’est majoritairement le cas, et probablement avec une forte majorité. Mais c’est ça, dépendamment de... de notre définition de la chose. Je crois sincèrement qu’il y a des relations toxiques ou qu’il y a une certaine forme de contrôle qui est de la femme envers l’homme aussi. Donc. Moi j’avais l’impression que ça pouvait aller dans les deux sens.”

b. What is the role of the Christian leader in responding to domestic violence?

We asked participants several questions about their role (or their understanding and perception of their role) in dealing with domestic violence. These related to prevention, the response to disclosure, and raising awareness of the issue among Christians.

i. The leader’s role: responding to disclosure

Several people reflected on their approaches and roles in the event of disclosure or whistleblowing. One of the leaders expressed her concern for the safety of the individual:

“My first thought when you asked that question was to make sure the person is safe. I know it’s common sense, but I don’t know if I heard that yet. But yeah, just to immediately get them out of the situation if they’re not safe.”

This assistant pastor stresses the importance of believing the person when they disclose a situation of violence.

“We might be the first person to ever say ‘I believe you’... it gets back to this idea of creating a safe space. And, and just this listening. But. But ‘I believe you’ can be one of the most powerful things for a victim to hear.”

ii. The leader’s role: guidance, pastoral care and support

Participants also identified coaching, support and mentoring as part of their role in situations of violence, or as a way of preventing violence. This implied a desire to use good listening and intervention methods or to refer to external resources.

“One of the ways in which I feel like I can come alongside is to be a little piece of a restored agency, because abuse strips people of their agency and dignity. So, for me to slowly restore that every time I can by giving options to the person.”

“Ben moi, quelque part, ce que je fais, ce que j’offre, c’est de l’accompagnement spirituel. Donc en tant qu’aumônière, c’est ça que j’offre aux jeunes adultes, aux

étudiants. Donc quelque part, ça irait encore dans de l'accompagnement, du soutien émotionnel, de l'accompagnement dans la marche à suivre, d'aller se renseigner, etc."

"Faut pas avoir peur de poser de bonnes questions, mais l'approche faut que ça soit très très doux, très lentement, très calculé."

Often, someone named their role as *accompagnier* as complementary to a support system (in collaboration with church leadership, a women's refuge, or the police).

"Alors souvent, c'est juste ça. Offrir du soutien. Et comme mentionné, il faut faire très attention de ne pas juger les situations, mais de poser de très bonnes questions pour les faire réfléchir dans leur situation. Et si on voit que c'est sérieux, ben, là, c'est sûr que c'est quelque chose que je ramènerais à mon leadership. Puis, s'il y allait, il faudrait intervenir d'une façon ou d'une autre. Ben là, on le ferait. Puis de toute façon, avec eux, avec leur consentement. Et s'il faut, téléphoner à la police ou s'il faut, les encourager d'appeler peut-être un centre d'hébergement ou quoi que ce soit."

iii. Role of the leader: teaching and preaching

The participants reflected on their teaching one by one or in groups, and on their role as preachers. The pastors below mention the importance of preaching with a vulnerable tone so that the members of their church feel open to expressing their problems.

"Si notre enseignement est un enseignement où on n'est pas vulnérable, où on ne parle pas nécessairement de ça, on n'implique pas nécessairement des termes qui sont personnels. On parle plutôt de 'il faut pas pécher, nous devons pas pécher'. J'ai trouvé que dans ce temps-là, la congrégation va être un peu plus refroidie. Ça va être difficile pour les personnes de juste s'ouvrir, d'être vulnérables."

"I guess a struggle would be how to present that to the church, to let them know that they have a place and resources to turn to because some of them may not feel like 'I would want to share it, I have no place to go.' They feel isolated... to know that 'Hey, my pastor does care, my church cares, and I think there's somewhere I can turn.' How do I preach that? How do I bring that across? How do I let my congregation know that, 'Yeah, you can come,' that's something I'm trying to work out."

A good number of participants reflected on the content of their teachings with a concern for people experiencing violence or toxicity in their marriages.

"Usually pastors won't catch it [domestic violence] right away because it's seen as a marriage problem, because we value marriage so much. And I'm not saying to throw that out, but I'm saying that we should probably change the way we think of, and the way we

teach, the purpose of marriage so that people don't see it as something to sacrifice their very dignity for."

"I love being able to tell people, 'God created no one to be abused.'"

The leader describes the importance of correcting what he perceives as dangerous or harmful thinking on the part of the victim. These include thoughts that they deserve violence or that God wants them to remain in a violent situation.

"There is like a spiritual piece to that in the church context, because people will use, you know, biblical language, God-language to justify abuse. And people will, um, stay in because they think God wants them to do that. And so sometimes to be a naming person, you know, or just to say, 'You know, God doesn't want this for you, this is abusive and no, God doesn't want you to stay in this.'"

Best practice

The leader below talks about an intervention she had with a victim of domestic violence. Her response is a model to follow. We understand from her words:

- 1) that the leader believed the victim, without minimizing or doubting her words
- 2) it confirmed, with complete certainty, that the woman did not deserve violence (so the violence is not justified or justifiable) and finally,
- 3) it finds that it is not God's will that this person should experience domestic violence, affirming a sound theology.

"I said to her, 'There is nothing that you have done that deserves you being thrown down the stairs or smashed into the wall or any of those things. It's not your fault.' And I think that's the thing, that women in those situations often think they deserve the situation that's happening to them. And that is a really big thing. Yeah, it destroys that whole thing that we're all in the image of God, and they lose that whole sense of self-worth. And, you know, I think that's the hardest thing to get through."

iv. The leader's role: to identify and recommend resources and social and community services

Several participants reflected on the importance of knowing the local social and community services to direct their members to the right, reliable resources when they are going through a crisis or a time of need.

“My role as a pastor is to know, I would want to know, the resources that are out there to train not only the people who are on our leadership team that could be trained, could be well equipped, but also to know the resources out there, that if I’m not equipped for it, okay, who is there to equip? Where can I go to bring that person to a safe space, that they’re safe, that they can get the counseling and the help that they need, the social help.”

Creating trust and connections with social services, police or legal authorities or community resources, as well as openness or reluctance to work with them, was a major theme in the discussions. Section 2.e **“Use of legal, social and community service”** covers this theme.

v. The leader's role: to condemn violent acts

We have received comments from participants who feel that “correction, confrontation and discipline” are all part of their pastoral role:

“Another thing on the role of ministry leaders and pastors is church discipline. Rebuke, exhort, admonish, confront and correct. We should all be looking at the wrongs in our church and addressing them. And then church discipline can even lead progress further outside the community.”

Similarly, many leaders believe that their role, and that of the Church, should be to condemn violence, because it is a question of justice and mercy (confrontation and correction are also named as a challenge for pastors. We discuss this in 2.d.iii “Confrontation”).

“Condamner la violence. Mais je viens aussi avec la question de la miséricorde et pourquoi je dis ça dans le cas d’un homme qui va blesser? La violence auprès de sa femme, il y a quelque chose là, sur le plan de l’âme de cet homme-là. Donc, il faut condamner.”

c. Challenges and limitations expressed by leaders

i. Challenge: the complexity of the intervention

In this section, we discuss the challenges or limitations expressed or felt by the participants. During the focus groups, many of them recounted situations in which they had been called upon to intervene. On several occasions, the leaders demonstrated commendable expertise and wisdom in dealing with domestic violence. On a number of occasions, and in several focus groups, the approaches, analyses or courses of action taken by the leaders are discouraged by research on domestic violence (both Christian and non-Christian resources). The aim of this study is not to put every word or intervention of the leaders under the microscope or to judge them. The process of learning and becoming aware is human and deserves a merciful look. For this reason, we leave their words and interventions without comment, but we encourage the reader to refer to the recommendations in the third section of

this report to learn about the avenues of intervention as well as the pastoral and theological approaches that are generally recommended by experts in the field. This report also highlights the “best practices” that several participants gave as examples in their ministry or in their comments.

One of the biggest challenges expressed by the leaders was that they did not feel equipped or able to intervene in the event of a disclosure of violence. In fact, most of the leaders did not have access to an intervention protocol issued by their church or denomination or to a protection policy in the event of domestic or conjugal violence. Several leaders (if not most) confirmed that their churches or parishes had policies for protecting minors or policies for protecting against harassment. Among the comments, we note the following:

- The observation that they are not psychosocial counsellors (and that this represents a limitation for them) or that they do not have enough training in intervention or in helping relationships.
- A pressure felt by pastors to intervene too quickly.
- An inability to diagnose the situation (wondering, is it really domestic violence?)
- A reluctance to recommend external resources or to know when to do so.
- Perplexing questions about the protocols to be adopted for police intervention (i.e., when should a complaint be lodged and how?).
- Recognize your limits and the difficulty of not bringing your work home.
- Some feel obliged to cross-check victims’ disclosures.
- Many mentioned a feeling of contempt or lack of confidence in institutions on the part of their parishioners. This prevented them from recommending necessary resources to people (police, hospitals, etc.) See section 2.e “Use of social and community services”.
- Many do not have a protocol for dealing with disclosures.

For example, the two participants below acknowledge their limitations, while expressing an ethical duty or moral responsibility:

“C’est sûr qu’il y a aussi mes limites. Je suis pas un psychologue, je suis pas, je suis pas un thérapeute, je suis pas. En même temps, je pense que ce fardeau là, je le porte.”

“I think that it is important that we do recognize that each of us has a role to play that isn’t somebody else’s role. None of us at this table are legal authorities. We’re not the cops, right? That doesn’t mean that we don’t have certain responsibilities.”

Several participants expressed hesitations (described in the list above) about not knowing when and how to act, and on the basis of what information they should act. Detecting violence seems to be very difficult for many Christian leaders.

Participant 1: "J'ai certaines hésitations, un peu comme mon collègue. Parce qu'à titre de pasteur, on a l'impression qu'on peut avoir l'impression ou donner l'impression qu'on est au courant de, de ce qui se passe dans les couples, des fois même très rapidement et puis. Et on a souvent à jongler entre, euh, prendre une décision trop vite."

Participant 2: "Ou trop lente!"

Participant 1: "Trop rapidement ou trop lentement. Euh. Quand accompagner plutôt que transférer? Euh... C'est quoi le niveau de violence qui interpelle tel type de décision? Et souvent, les victimes comme les personnes qui posent ces actes finissent par, pour X raisons, par tempérer ce qu'on a déterminé comme étant violence pour quasiment finir par trouver leurs propres solutions plutôt que d'attendre l'intervention de la part du pasteur."

"Parce que pour agir, il faut être informé. Ça, c'est pour moi, c'est de base et on n'est pas toujours, en tout cas, je ne sais pas pour d'autres, là, mais il arrive qu'on ne soit pas toujours la première personne à en être informée. Parfois c'est le cas. Tout dépend de chaque victime ou de chaque famille. Ou est-ce qu'il y a une victime? Mais souvent ce n'est pas le cas... Pour évaluer si la personne est victime, est-ce qu'elle est à risque d'être encore victime? Et à quand pour avoir toutes ces données en main? C'est pas toujours évident et il faut les avoir pour déterminer est-ce qu'on fait une référence?"

"Peut-être des fois c'est qu'on est pas sûr de nos limites si je pourrais dire ça, c'est comme est-ce qu'on sait qu'il y a quelque chose? Est-ce qu'on en parle? Est-ce qu'on en parle pas? Est-ce que...? Alors c'est pas toujours évident!"

ii. Challenge: the complexity of situations

The complexity of domestic violence represents another level of difficulty in intervention for leaders. Some say that both partners' versions of events vary, for example. Others observed that the victim was sometimes confused, or that mental health issues (anxiety, depression) were often linked to the violent situation (both for the victim and the partner). These complexities and the seriousness of the situations were a real challenge for the leaders.

"Such physical harm without ever touching something, right? Like, you know, we know the terrible effects that, um, all that cortisol has from stress hormones, right? Like that's real. And it has so many effects in people's lives. And these people are going around

and under so much stress that it's terrible for their physical health as well as mental health."

"At one point, three women [in our church] that were in abusive situations – and everyone is different, obviously – but I just can't imagine the downhill slope from that relationship at the beginning that slowly starts to erode until they have such a low self-esteem that they think they deserve to be treated that way. That, for me, was one of the really hard things; to watch women lose that ability to recognize it's not their fault and they don't deserve it. That's the really tough thing."

iii. Challenge: confrontation

Confronting the couple or confronting the perpetrator of the violence is experienced as a challenge by many leaders. The participants expressed this difficulty or discomfort in the confrontation process. Several courageously named situations of relational toxicity, violence or dangerous scenarios in their churches, and did so with the people concerned. Others spoke of their discomfort in confronting toxic people or relationships without offering any recourse.

"... la situation que j'ai vécue il y a quelques mois, ce que je sentais qu'il y avait comme une zone de violence psychologique. Je ne voulais pas nécessairement... C'est des chrétiens matures qui pourraient être mes parents. Tu sais, je fais la rencontre, mais je me dis si je vais trop frontale pour leur dire 'il y a la violence psychologique ici', ils vont littéralement être insultés, peuvent l'être. Voyons donc! Ça fait que j'ai vu à ce moment-là à quel point mon rôle était de les faire réfléchir. Poser des questions et les allumer."

"Pis en même temps, tu veux pas condamner les gens qui ont ces problématiques-là à être seul toute leur vie, sauf que dans mon expérience pastorale, ça n'a JAMAIS bien tourné. Oui, il y a des cycles, il y a des moments tu sais où ça va mieux, mais c'est des moments, puis après ça. Mais le cycle de violence ou d'abus ou d'alcool repart, puis c'est une vie qui fait qu'il y a vraiment une part (de dommage). Comment est-ce que, euh, tu sais, on n'est plus, on n'est pas des curés, tu sais, qui disaient: 'Si t'as pas ma bénédiction, tu sais, tu peux pas être ensemble, tu sais.' Ils vont aller voir un autre pasteur, ils vont trouver d'autres façons. Fait que, comment? Quand même, ce qu'on a, ce rôle-là, ou comment récupérer ce rôle-là?"

iv. Challenge: problematic theologies or hermeneutics

The participants, especially those who are pastors or parish priests, expressed the challenge, even the frustration, of confronting and correcting theologies or hermeneutics that they considered to be erroneous. So-called erroneous theologies or hermeneutics affect

leaders' ability to refer people to resources outside the Christian world, to accompany a person towards separation or to help a victim develop a better vision of God and of his or her own Christian identity. The pastor below felt under pressure to offer a biblical or spiritual response to any situation, to solve everything internally, and the problem of doing so.

“C’est là que la difficulté s’impose un peu pour nous. Nous, étant les pasteurs, c’est-à-dire on est appelé un peu à, on a l’impression qu’on doit trouver toute solution à partir de la Bible. On doit régler les choses un peu selon 1 Corinthiens chapitre six, entre nous, à l’intérieur de l’Église et ne pas engager les gens de l’extérieur.”

Some pastors or leaders have had to intervene with parishioners or members to correct toxic readings or thoughts on the biblical teaching (or doctrines) on divorce, and the priority of marriage over the well-being of the person.

“Limite que je dirais, qui m’a vraiment frappé et même frustré. Et je me suis demandé si c’était général à une génération dans l’Église. Mais le fameux fléau de ‘je peux pas me divorcer, c’est pas dans la Bible, c’est pas de Dieu’, cela m’a moyennement affecté, même dans ma famille proche. Juste dire, ‘là tu vis de la violence psychologique pis c’est intense pis ça va pas changer là!’ Puis d’amener la personne même si tu pouvais donner des arguments théologiques. Pis, voici ce que Jésus a dit. Puis il y avait un contexte dans l’Ancien Testament, tu sais. Pis. Dire ‘non c’est pas de Dieu, pas de Dieu, pas de Dieu!’ parce qu’elle a déjà entendu ça d’une personne. Pis moi c’est une limite qui m’avait, ça m’avait tellement dérangé.”

“But we sometimes in the church tend to prioritise marriage and the institution of marriage over safety. In fact, I think that the Bible speaks more to our role to join with God in protecting people who are vulnerable and need care over and above ‘you stay, pray and obey’. So that’s my position on that. And if your theology prevents you from taking that perspective, then you better have a robust way of addressing abuse in the home... Yeah, so if your theology says that the wife can’t go and stay in a shelter because that’s separation, then how are you going to care for her? How are you going to keep her from getting beaten every day? What are you going to do?”

The participant below had to deal with the repercussions of her church’s teachings when she was confronted from some social workers in her community.

“L’historique qui n’est pas si loin que ça. ‘Ces hommes et femmes resteront ensemble. Nul ne peut les séparer.’ Et puis je me souviens d’une directrice d’une maison d’hébergement en violence conjugale qui était venue nous voir en paroisse, en pastorale, parce qu’elle, elle était inquiète de savoir ce qui se disait, si quelqu’un allait

voir la paroisse: 'Est-ce que vous dites encore: 'Tend l'autre joue', pis euh, 'pardonnez'. Et puis c'est quoi votre langage?'"

The teachings on female submission were also mentioned, in connection with imposed suffering or spiritual abuse.

"And I saw the spiritual abuse. I mean, which had other effects. But pitting God against someone, it's really hard, you know, especially if you're raised in a tradition and you want to please God. You know, this idea that 'God will not be pleased' or 'to be a submitted wife', you know... um, people going around with a lot of fear because they've been threatened. I saw a lot of that in the spiritual language.

The following leader not only identifies the teaching of female submission as a risk factor in domestic violence, but also wonders whether this teaching exacerbates the victim's suffering.

"Au niveau de l'Église, on parle de la soumission de la femme à l'homme. Alors ça dépend de comment on interprète le terme de soumission. Et c'est souvent ça qui fait problème. Le bourreau peut se prévaloir de dire que 'ma femme doit être soumise à moi, alors je suis'. Elle peut supporter toutes sortes d'affaires et dans le subconscient de la femme, elle va intégrer ça jusqu'au moment où ça sera plus vivable. Et quand la victime sort de la relation, elle est tellement maganée que la prise en charge, l'accompagnement prend énormément de temps pour essayer de restaurer la personne. Donc sur le plan de l'Église, avec le concept de soumission, je ne pense pas que ça aide beaucoup les femmes."

The above examples help us to understand the challenges of leaders on Christian teachings and the need to promote healthy hermeneutics. They also describe the spiritual and psychological challenges of a Christian victim when faced with decisions related to:

- 1) her ability or freedom to leave an abusive relationship.
- 2) her level of comfort in using external resources, in particular secular psycho-social services or shelters.
- 3) her sense of identity, dignity and well-being in relation to her intimate relationship or role as a wife.

v. Challenge: breaking taboos

Several leaders expressed a particular challenge, that of breaking taboos. In almost all the groups, comments were made about the need to talk publicly about the subject of violence, but about the difficulty of doing so. This led to feelings of sadness and frustration, both towards the preachers and towards the parishioners or members of the Church.

In addition, many participants spoke of their experiences of receiving disclosures of family or conjugal violence as soon as their church discussed the topic openly, either through a homily or a public discussion.

“These are things we don’t talk about because there’s too much shame attached to it.”

“Il y a deux ou trois ans, j’avais annoncé qu’on allait parler de la violence à l’Église. Alors après ce passage-là, j’ai eu deux, trois personnes qui sont venues me voir dans les dimanches qui suivaient à ce sujet-là. Je pense que c’était la première fois qu’on évoquait la violence conjugale dans les Églises. Donc, j’ai recueilli pas mal de témoignages de personnes blessées.”

“Je veux dire, j’en entends jamais parler dans les homélies, je n’entends pas parler dans les feuillets paroissiaux qu’il y a des ressources pour ça au sein de notre diocèse. Il n’y en a pas en fait, j’ai jamais vu d’interpellations à ce niveau-là. Si vous vivez un problème de violence conjugale, sentez-vous à l’aise d’en parler avec votre pasteur ou avec quelqu’un? Un membre de votre Église, un diacre? Quelqu’un? J’ai jamais vu ça. Jamais, jamais vu ça.»

“And I think that’s the first time that I’ve heard a sermon – even though I preached it! – but I haven’t heard any myself, or I haven’t heard, myself, from any other pastors – do a sermon on domestic violence or misogyny. I think it just needs to be spoken about more... I think a lot of times too many in the church just bury their heads in the sand. They go, ‘Yeah, we might know one or two people or, we know that there is, family history and whatnot, but our family’s not like that, right?’”

“So much in the culture that makes it challenging. In my own church tradition, it’s hard to speak up. There’s a lot of people. There’s a good old white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, being silent about your issues and not talking. And especially if it’s something at home, you put up a good front.”

The reasons given for the “taboo phenomenon” vary. Among answers, the following factors were named:

- A lack of acceptability among the cultural communities of the parish or church.
- Discomfort or feelings of insecurity on the part of the leader himself or herself.
- Leaders detect a sense of shame among divorced people.
- Victims are too ashamed to tell their leaders.
- The pressure to present a perfect image of the Christian life and the Church.

- Not knowing in what context (one-to-one, through preaching, in small groups) and in what way to broach the subject of family or conjugal violence.
- Not knowing how to de-stigmatize or normalize the conversation.
- A preference for the private sector over the public sector.

"We're not sure how to talk about it in general. I'm thinking to like all the other things that so I grew up in, like, uh, Chinese ethnic churches, um, the things I love to bring up oftentimes partially because I liked pushing my pastor's buttons, but like, it was sex, the Holy Spirit and mental health were, like, the three things that are always kind of like 'hush hush' in Chinese churches. And so I would always try to start those conversations. Um, and so I guess the word that comes around my mind is like, 'destigmatizing the conversation'."

"Très souvent, lorsqu'elle est vécue, les gens n'en parlent pas dans l'espoir que les choses peuvent s'arranger. Et tout dépend de la culture aussi et de la situation particulière de chacune des personnes. Est-ce qu'ils ont des enfants? Est-ce qu'ils sont sans enfants? En tout cas, c'est délicat. C'est délicat et privé."

"And I wonder – it's very layered to build a culture like that, that you don't have to preach about domestic abuse in a four-week series and bring people through that per se. Although, you also don't want to shy away from addressing topics, you know. So, I think there's a complexity to how you speak about it, when you speak about it, without ever speaking about it... I think there's a layered approach to helping people know it's safe, that 'you can talk to someone'. (Sometimes) we overly present a perfect picture of a Christian in different ways, or never share examples of brokenness, or we always share finished stories, not halfway stories. We could then be diminishing the fact that someone could be in a situation that they feel uncomfortable sharing, because it's like, 'Well, I better wait till the story is done. Then I could tell my story, you know?'"

"Donc on ne sait pas comment aborder la question, mais en privé, ça se fait beaucoup plus facilement étant donné qu'on compte sur la confidentialité. La personne à qui on communique son expérience."

"Jésus est la réponse à tout et c'est la vérité. Je sais pourquoi d'abord. Mais on se sent démuni en fait, en termes de violence conjugale ou certains sujets qui seraient plus tabous. Pourquoi? Pourquoi le manque, le sentiment de manque de ressources pour aborder le sujet des fois?"

vi. Challenge: expectations around reconciliation

Several leaders referred to the expectations or hopes of Christians around marital reconciliation as a challenge they must manage. Some of them had the impression that Christians are desperate to see couples reconcile, whereas leaders say that this is often not possible in cases of domestic violence. The two participants below describe these feelings.

"I think sometimes the tendency for people, especially in church circles, is to say, 'Oh, look, the person has done the work. Isn't this wonderful? They've taken the time; they've done their work and he or she is all better now. Why doesn't the partner recognize that? Why doesn't the spouse recognise that and get back together?' 'Because that's the ultimate goal. And to say, No, like it's going to take a lot more than that.'"

"I'm very much aware too, we are in a fallen, broken world. You have God himself saying 'I hate divorce', but then you go through the Old Testament prophets. He talks like a divorcee. He talks like he's been abused. And that's why He's had to separate from Israel. And I think, to me, that's informed my understanding as well. When a marriage relationship fails to reflect God's will for what marriage should be, I'd love to see it. I would love to see reconciliation. But I also realize there are times, yeah, a person does not have the time to wait for the other one to do something they have no intention of doing."

The pastor below confirms the challenges linked to the expectations of Christians regarding reconciliation and sees, in his role, the need to give courage to the victim to leave the partner.

"On a souvent eu, dans notre cas, le rôle de donner du courage à la victime de quitter ou d'affronter la situation. Eum. Parce que malheureusement, beaucoup de femmes croient que ça va aller contre Dieu si elles décident de partir. De penser que c'est absolument important. Comme si le mariage était LA chose. Bien, c'est une chose sacrée, évidemment, mais que c'est comme si Dieu était pour les punir, ou peu importe si elles étaient, si elles quittaient leur mari."

In her work as a counsellor, one participant noted the churches' lack of understanding of trauma. This could explain the unrealistic expectations around reconciliation in cases of domestic violence.

"Churches, they don't understand trauma. So, I think being more trauma informed in general, what trauma will look like in a victim's body, in their reactions and how long that takes to heal. Churches love redemption stories to a fault and will start championing that too early, I find."

vii. Challenge: relationships with both partners

One of the biggest challenges was certainly the fact that both partners often belong to the same church community. When a partner discloses his or her experiences of violence, this can be complicated by the relationship, or even friendship, that the leader has with the perpetrator. If the perpetrator of the violence holds a leadership position in the Church, the situation is even more complex.

“Des fois, quand la personne est en leadership, si jamais le mari ou la femme sont dans une autre position de leadership, donc l'autre va se sentir un peu coupable de mettre son partenaire dans ce genre de situation ou en parler trop.”

Leaders or respondents felt sometimes inclined to cross-check the violent partner's version of events. The assistant pastor below described a very difficult situation in which he felt caught between two parties. After cross-checking the disclosure of the victim of domestic violence, he was in a state of confusion.

“Le problème, la fille m'appelle: 'Ok, je vous avoue que ça fait un bout de temps qu'il a commencé à consommer. Ça ne va pas bien, on se chicane, il est violent.' Je parle avec le gars, qui est un ami! Pis je le confronte et 'voici ce qu'elle m'a dit là, tu sais'. Et il me répond: 'Oui, mais c'est ça qu'elle t'a dit? Mais elle t'a pas dit? Voici elle aussi comment elle est. Elle aussi me frappe.' Donc, il y avait une situation toxique... Oh! Au-delà de oui à la violence conjugale, le couple est toxique en général. Puis elle aussi, elle fait de la violence conjugale aussi. Elle se défend. Mais j'ai pas toutes les données tu sais. Est-ce que c'est elle qui a commencé tout ça donc? Mais j'étais juste, 'C'est lui le méchant, c'est lui le méchant, c'est lui le méchant.' ... On n'a pas toutes les données-là.”

Academic and laypersons' literature on domestic discusses the problem of religious leaders wanting to use marital mediation in cases of violence¹⁴ (although this is not recommended), as this approach is perceived as good pastoral care for both members of the community. The literature also states that when there is a case of domestic violence within a church, leaders often want to adopt a position of neutrality, because they know both partners. The pastor below recounts how he felt obliged to cross-check the victim's testimony, but then couldn't act decisively enough.

¹⁴ “La médiation dans les situations de violence conjugale est une solution qui maintient le problème ou l'aggrave, car elle nécessite la mise en place d'un dispositif qui replace la victime en présence de son agresseur et donc en position de soumission: elle tend à rendre interactive la responsabilité de l'acte violent, à donner à la victime une part de responsabilité dans cet acte et à privatiser ou minimiser la nature délictuelle ou criminelle des actes de violence conjugale. La médiation n'est donc pas une panacée. Sa mise en œuvre au sein d'une assemblée par des personnes non professionnelles est extrêmement problématique et ajoute à la confusion courante entre conflit et violence. Cette confusion est très préjudiciable.” Efonta, Paul, “Existe-t-il des facteurs aggravant la souffrance des victimes de violence conjugale au sein de nos Églises?” dans “Violences Conjugales: les identifier pour mieux agir en Église”, *Les cahiers de l'école pastorale*, HS 21 (4/2020), p.84.

“Je voulais revenir sur la question de la complexité que cela pose pour nous, pasteurs... Des fois, la situation est déjà très très très très grave et c’est souvent une personne du couple qui la mène et c’est souvent la victime qui la mène... on s’attend à ce que la victime prenne position tout de suite, évidemment à prendre position parce que voici une personne qui nous dit ‘je suis victime de cela’, mais évidemment on est là, on est responsable aussi d’entendre l’autre pour faire la part des choses. Et à partir du moment qu’on fait cela, on finit ou bien par prendre une décision... trop vite ou d’être critiqué, d’avoir été trop lent.”

Finally, separation and divorce are difficult for the Church to accept, as they often lead to the loss of one of the two partners.

“...Un des conjoints n’était pas vraiment engagé dans la vie de l’Église comme la victime. Donc c’est comme... Je crois que je pourrais dire dans un certain sens, ça simplifie la résolution.”

“Nous, on a vécu une situation de violence conjugale sur le plan de, de, de gens (un couple) qui sont importants dans l’Église. Puis beaucoup de gens le savaient. On avait à cœur d’aider, on priait, on était attristé, mais personne ne savait comment s’y prendre. Personne ne savait comment intervenir. Personne ne savait comment. Personne ne voulait blesser non plus. Et on était poli.”

d. What is the Church’s role in responding to domestic violence?

We collected a few reflections on the role of the Church (as an institution and as a community) in its collective response to domestic violence.

i. The role of the Church: creating safe spaces or mechanisms conducive to disclosure

Several participants emphasized the importance of safe spaces. The creation of such *safe spaces* or an environment of confidentiality is seen as much as a preventive measure as a response to a crisis when it arises. This requires intention on the part of the leader and the active participation of the members.

“I do think that my role in this starts long before I would even know about any abuse or any incidents, which is to create relationship, to create a safe, um, a safe environment for the people that I’m working with that they know they can come to me, that they know that there’s a non-judgmental place for them.”

It was also important to some that there were mechanisms or protocols in place so that members of their churches could disclose information or seek help in confidence. The pastor below describes such a practice in his church.

“We have a safeguarding and whistleblowing policy that we put on our welcome table and at the kids check in table that has contact information for anyone if you want to bring up a difficult conversation.”

Several participants explored the idea of creating spaces where perpetrators of violence could feel free to express themselves, to seek advice, to be confronted and to access confession. Protestant participants wondered whether the practice of confession was a model to follow.

“Why is there something within Catholicism that this guy can just freely go into the church and chat with the priest – and the priest doesn’t condone what he does – but there is some kind of freedom there that he’s able to share. And I wonder, how do we build that into our culture? Not to condone things, but that’s also for the abuser, right? Imagine the abuser felt a comfort of going to share openly, what could happen. Imagine how preventative that could be as well. And then for the abuse, they can be able to fully share – I think it’s a cultural thing we somehow build within the church, which is theological roots that our theology would have to support.”

ii. The role of the Church: to foster or nurture a healthy community, able to welcome and support a person in difficulty

Even while affirming the importance of safe spaces or mechanisms, some participants expressed doubts about the benevolence or confidentiality of their own contexts.

“La question que je me pose est sur le tissu social dans nos contextes ministériels: est-ce qu’il est assez solide? Est-ce qu’il est assez prévenant? Est-ce qu’il est assez?”

“Mais, c’est l’aspect du tissu social de savoir un peu est-ce que, euh, est-ce que même à l’intérieur de l’Église, est-ce que c’est un endroit safe? Pour être vulnérable par rapport à ces enjeux-là? Ou, est-ce que tu vas subir le jugement, que tu vas subir une autre sorte de violence à l’intérieur des membres?”

We received a good number of comments from participants expressing their desire to run a healthy community (in their church or parish) where someone would feel comfortable confiding in them when they were in distress. A healthy community, with people who are good listeners, is seen as a protective factor for victims.

“I’m learning more now of like what does it mean to have spaces or people available to, to listen to that, that people know if they see and also like having our congregants or

people that we work with be able to identify what abuse looks like and have that kind of education like as a role of the minister to the victim, like having all that already in place in some ways.”

The pastor below described his role as a shepherd or gardener. Knowing that he could not do everything on his own, he saw the importance of having people and a team of leaders capable of detecting problems in a spirit of care and vigilance.

“Moi j’essaie de le voir un peu comme le rôle de berger. Donc un berger devrait connaître ses brebis. Mais aussi j’aime beaucoup le rôle de jardinier ainsi je pense à un jardinier qui marche dans son jardin puis qui essaie de voir c’est où que la mauvaise herbe est en train de pousser? C’est ce qui est un peu en train d’être laid dans notre Église. Donc des fois, c’est ça, ça veut pas dire que le pasteur lui-même va tout voir, mais il devrait y avoir des mécanismes en place pour avoir des leaders de groupe ou peu importe, qui sont capables de détecter quand il y a des choses laides qui sont en train d’émerger dans des couples ou qui voient des dynamiques toxiques.”

Best practices

Although the scenario below is not necessarily prescriptive or reproducible, we would like to highlight the protective factors in place when there is a healthy community with mature people who can offer to listen, help each other and report when there is a danger or risk to a person in distress. We understand the intervention below.

- 1) The community is a place of fraternity where people can confide in each other.
- 2) Laywomen have the confidence of leaders to play a role of trust and support.
- 3) This community is “a source of help and support for women who are victims of domestic violence¹⁵”. This can help in the support and prevention of violence.

“Dans notre communauté, il y a... il y a un esprit quand même assez fraternel, et je dirais qu’il y a quatre personnes plus âgées. Souvent c’est des, c’est des femmes qui jouent quand même bien le rôle de grande sœur et puis qui euh. Qui vont, qui s’intéressent aux gens en difficulté puis elles vont parfois être les premières à entendre une confidence. Et ces personnes-là, merci Seigneur! Elles ont la sensibilité de savoir quand en parler, disons aux pasteurs. Donc je pense que dans notre Église, ça joue un rôle, un gros rôle, c’est que la communauté elle-même contribue à cette... prévention ou des espèces de signalements mais, mais ça aussi c’est très précieux quand ça existe.”

¹⁵ Nolet, Anne-Marie, “Prévenir la revictimisation des femmes victimes de violence conjugale par l’intervention centrée sur leur réseau social”, in Dir: Boulebsol, C. *Pratiques et recherches féministes en matière de violence conjugale: coconstruction des connaissances et expertises*, Presses de l’Université de Québec, 2022, p.130.

iii. The role of the Church: taking a stand against domestic violence

Some participants insisted on the role of advocacy or taking a stand that the Church must play in condemning domestic violence. Their reflections were often linked to notions of justice and peace and the desire to combat complicity in violence.

“Si l’Église vit l’Évangile et selon la parole de Dieu, je pense que l’Église devrait être la première institution qui devrait condamner la violence sous toutes ses formes.”

“Quand il s’agit de l’Évangile, on a la paix, on a la force, on a la puissance de Dieu, on a le renouvellement de l’Esprit qui est donné par le Saint-Esprit. Puis pourtant on agit comme si la société pouvait être plus informée. Mais c’est vrai que les psychologues ont étudié. Mais quand il s’agit d’âmes, quand il s’agit de paix, quand il s’agit de justice, quand il s’agit de rétablir l’humain de la manière dont Dieu le veut, ça, c’est notre rôle. C’est le rôle de l’Église.”

“It stands out to me when Paul says in Ephesians to ‘take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them’. It stood out to me as it really brought out the sin of omitting, to do what I ought to do in exposing something, if I’m aware of something or suspicious of something, I should take the steps necessary to pursue that. Lest I’m complicit in looking the other way.”

“Donc toutes les expériences m’aident à me dire je prends parti, je veux prendre parti dans ma foi, je vais dire: ‘Seigneur, aide-moi à être, à ce qu’on soit solidaire.’ C’est le comment qu’on dit ça. La plus grande arme du bourreau, c’est le silence.”

“C’est vraiment être une voix pour les personnes, être une voix pour les victimes.”

iv. The role of the Church: preventing domestic violence

There was also talk of preventing violence in many ways, through the practices, initiatives, teachings and culture of the Church. Some of the ideas that emerged were:

- A caring community is one that welcomes and listens.
- Creating spaces of trust will facilitate disclosure.
- Healthy teaching will help to establish healthy, violence-free relationships.
- Existing resources or the ability to refer to services will help to detect and respond quickly and effectively.
- A marriage preparation ministry will help prevent violence or detect toxic situations.

- Christian education of young people with good pastoral care for young people will help to prevent violence from adolescence onwards.

“L’Église devrait avoir les moyens de toucher et de faire de la prévention à différents niveaux, en s’attaquant aux causes probables, aux sources possibles, que ce soit des crises, des situations financières, des gens, que ce soit la question de la santé mentale de nos fidèles, parce qu’on sait très bien qu’il y en a des cas de violence qui découlent, qui viennent de là, de l’état mental des personnes.”

e. The Church and the use of social, legal and community services

i. Using services: a solution to the limitations of church leaders

While many leaders express limitations, a lack of resources in their churches or a feeling of insecurity about their ability to intervene or accompany a victim, they perceive recourse to social services as a solution to their limitations. The leader below describes the attitudes of members of his community who wish to rely solely on pastoral help and the need to draw on the help of experts in the field.

“Alors j’ai dû faire preuve de beaucoup de sagesse parce que quand on est frappé d’un coup comme ça avec autant de cœur, faut se poser la question quand même. Étant donné qu’ils sont ultra-chrétiens aussi, des fois, ils croient vraiment que si un pasteur va prier pour eux, la situation va se régler... Il y a deux cas où j’ai pas eu le choix d’appeler, de référer à un centre pour femmes, puis d’éloigner la personne parce que c’était clairement un cas de violence extrême. Puis c’est difficile à faire dans l’Église je trouve, parce qu’on veut être capable de soutenir seulement spirituellement, puis que ça règle tout, tout de suite. Mais il faut, comme il faut être, il faut être réaliste, puis référer les personnes à des psychologues et à des psychothérapeutes qui sont disponibles.”

Some participants highlighted the tension between the desire to “sort everything out internally” and the conviction they felt to call on external resources.

“I don’t know, sometimes people come to church, it’s like, ‘church will care for me and these faceless institutions won’t’. It’s like, actually, you probably need to call the cops here or, you know, you DO need to go to the government organization to work with them. But that is anti-institutionalism or just in the spirit – I think it’s very, very common inside and outside the church.

In fact, “recognising your limits” has been named by more than one person as a leadership trait:

“There’s only certain things that we can do ourselves. And that’s important to know, so that we don’t try to do something that’s beyond our expertise, but to know what resources we can connect people with... That’s our job as leaders, I think. To know that.

ii. The need to take legal action

On a number of occasions, participants recounted scenarios in which they had had to lodge a complaint with the police or had encouraged others to do so.

“S’il y a des actions criminelles, il faut absolument que ça soit signalé à la police, et cetera, pour que les bonnes dispositions soient prises à ce moment-là.”

Going to the police can be difficult for some people, and Christians are no exception. Below, a pastor highlights this hesitation. His colleague rightly points out the obligations and limits of the intervener, depending on the situation (when there is a child, we have a legal obligation to report the situation to the police. In the case of an adult, she must lodge a complaint herself).

Participant: “And I still firmly believe that the point of the authorities is for our good. They may not always carry that out, but that does bring a complication within our role. Would people be hesitant to share? ‘Well, I don’t want to bring in the cops. I don’t want the pastor making that call.’”

Participant: “Again, if it’s a child, you don’t have a choice. But if it’s an adult, your role is to help them advocate for themselves. That’s your role. Because you don’t want to go ahead of the victim and start reporting, because that puts them in more danger. Because once the husband finds out that he’s found out is when he becomes most violent.”

Best practices

The clergyperson below describes a situation in which she accompanied a victim of domestic violence to the police. We understand from her intervention:

- 1) She has identified that the person is in danger, or even the victim of a crime.
- 2) She accompanied the person, providing support during their time of distress.
- 3) She worked alongside the policewoman, and the two of them provided a comprehensive response: spiritual, legal and psycho-social.

The result? A victim is now safe and a local church has demonstrated good partnership and Christian witness to the local authorities.

“J’ai accompagné une jeune fille... à la police directement. On est intervenus auprès de la CAVAC et elle est partie dans un centre (refuge pour femmes...) pour pouvoir garder son anonymat. Et c’était intéressant de voir que la réponse de la police a été fantastique. La dame qui nous a pris en charge était vraiment très convaincante et très chaleureuse pour que la fille ait le courage de pouvoir faire une plainte. Il y en avait suffisamment. Il y avait trois différentes situations qui étaient de ressort pénal. Mais là, l’expérience pour moi, c’était que la police

me dise: 'C'était la première fois que quelqu'un de l'Église leur amenait quelqu'un en danger.' Et ça, c'est extraordinaire pour eux. Et comment on a travaillé ensemble, la partie spirituelle, la partie de danger physique et la partie émotionnelle. Ça, c'était pour moi, c'était une belle expérience... et à partir de là, malheureusement, j'ai commencé à avoir d'autres, d'autres références..."

iii. Fear of secular services or legal authorities

In theory, the participants support the work of psychosocial services and legal authorities and recognise the importance of using them. Nevertheless, they expressed a number of fears about these bodies, both their own and those of their members.

The named fears are:

- Professionals who do not understand religious realities, values or beliefs.
- Fears about bioethical positions (medical aid in dying, gender and sexuality issues, abortion).
- The fear that psychologists or women's refuge workers will be too quick to advise a separation or divorce.
- The fear of having your child taken away by the Director of Youth Protection.
- The fear, especially on the part of people from immigrant backgrounds, of a corrupt police force.
- The fear of damaging the testimony or tarnishing the image of the Church.
- Pastors' fear of breaking a parishioner's trust.

"Je pense qu'on a, en tant que leader, à faire le pont, à être un pont avec les autorités, mais je pense qu'on est un peu coincés dans ça en tant que pasteurs, en tant que leaders d'Église, parce que c'est comment l'on fait pour travailler de concert avec les autorités, avec la police, sans ternir l'image de l'Église?"

Named frustrations or negative experiences are:

- The Department of Youth Protection (DPJ) does not consider a pastor or church worker to be a valid actor or support person in the case of a child.
- Secular institutions have imposed a non-Christian worldview.
- Members or parishioners are themselves anti-institutional, and therefore put up their own barriers to referral or recourse to the legal or judicial authorities.

"There is such an anti-institutional kind of mindset in many religious communities where it's like, there's the world and there's us, and we don't trust the world, we don't trust the secular institutions. They're going to, they're going to push for separation more than for getting back together or something. So we don't refer people. We don't trust people. We're like, 'we'll just handle it ourselves!'"

“J’imagine qu’il y a beaucoup de victimes qui viennent nous voir parce qu’ils se disent: ‘Je peux parler au pasteur, je peux parler aux dirigeants de l’Église parce qu’il y a un côté confiant envers la confidentialité.’ Puis tu sais, ils disent: ‘C’est pas la police’, mais en même temps, je suis sûr que si on travaille plus ouvertement, de concert avec les autorités, il y a peut-être des victimes qu’on va perdre parce qu’ils vont dire: ‘Si je parle au pasteur, c’est ça, il va aller à la police.’”

iv. Establish partnerships and friendly relations with local services

Some participants stated that it is commendable to establish friendships and collaborations with community organizations or social services, even if these are non-Christian services. They saw this gesture as a good opportunity for Christian witness, an opportunity to establish bonds of trust with their neighbours and to broaden the pool of help and resources for their parishioners.

“Je vais dire 100% collaborer. C’est pas à nous de tout réinventer de ‘Reinvent the wheel’, eux ont des compétences, ils ont des habiletés que nous on a pas. Ils sont professionnels. Faut avoir confiance. Et quand on dit on peut pas tout faire...”

“J’ajouterais que c’est comme notre responsabilité de connaître ces ressources-là... et de nouer des amitiés ou d’établir des collaborations avec les organismes. Oui, on a une foi en Dieu, mais en même temps on est des personnes qui offrent des ressources. Alors souvent, ce qui arrive c’est qu’une amitié va commencer ou au moins une relation de collaboration peut s’amorcer parce qu’il y a une confiance qui se développe.”

“We had one lady come to our church. Again, we have the women’s shelter right next door. We’re literally the next door to our church for her there, for shelter, for help, for food. And then I went over to the women’s shelter, got a whole bunch of flyers too, and we have it in our church, and that they know anybody comes to our church, ‘Okay, this is where you can find help.’”

Best practice

The pastor below describes the relationship that has been established between his church and a local community service. It shows:

- 1) An openness to external resources on the part of church leadership, modelled for parishioners.

2) The Church has created a relationship of trust and neighbourliness with the resource so that there can be a real exchange and collaboration.

3) This will facilitate future exchanges, and ease the burden on the Church of having to meet ALL the needs (psychosocial, medical, etc.) of its parishioners.

“Une des choses qui a aidé dans ce sens-là, c’est que souvent on faisait des collectes de fonds pour des organismes dans notre ville. Disons, pendant un mois, les fonds de telles choses allaient vers un organisme quelconque. On parlait de cet organisme-là de semaine en semaine, puis à la fin, on invitait un représentant de leur organisme à venir présenter leur organisme à l’Église un dimanche matin. Donc, de cette façon-là, ça m’attire beaucoup, la confiance entre l’organisme et nous. Parce qu’eux, ils étaient contents de recevoir un chèque et aussi d’avoir eu l’occasion de faire connaître leur organisme. Mais ça faisait aussi faire connaître leurs services. Donc, s’il y a des gens dans notre assemblée qui avaient besoin d’avoir recours à ces services-là, bien, ils savaient qu’ils existaient puisqu’on n’était pas en compétition avec ou quoi que ce soit. Donc, ça, ça résout un peu le fait qu’après ça, si on référerait quelqu’un, ils n’essaient pas de nous exclure du processus ou de dire ‘vous autres c’est religieux’ ou quoi que ce soit.”

f. Needs expressed by leaders

i. Needs: procedures and protocols for churches

We surveyed the leaders to find out what they needed in order to be better able to respond to domestic violence. One of the first needs was to have a protocol or procedure to guide churches in cases of domestic violence among their members.

“... having a statement on your website on what you believe about abuse would be a great way to help someone feel safe to be able to go to the church, to trust someone, or as this report is shared, have recommendations for the church on what they could do.”

“Je pense que les pasteurs bénéficient beaucoup d’avoir un peu une marche à suivre, une procédure, quand ils pensent, quand ils croient déceler une forme de violence conjugale, un peu d’avoir un genre de ‘checklist’ d’éléments et d’étapes pour pouvoir intervenir.”

ii. Needs: training leaders in domestic violence

The vast majority of participants said that they had not received sufficient training to detect and respond to domestic violence. Many stressed that they had not even received enough pastoral education to understand or master the subject. Moreover, those who were confident in their understanding of the issue or in their ability to intervene had received training prior to their seminary or Bible school education. It was thanks to professional experience, or studies other than their theological and pastoral training, that they felt able to respond and intervene.

The Rapha team would like to stress that it has witnessed a great deal of resistance from Bible schools regarding their willingness to collaborate with this project (distribution of the survey, offers to present the subject, etc.).

“Manque flagrant de formation je dirais.”

“... when I would encounter people or get involved into these situations, I did not feel equipped. So there is a gap from training, theoretical training and resources to what actually happens in the moment and how then to react to specific scenarios and how to minister to people.”

The participant below had a sober but realistic view of his colleagues' willingness to take training in domestic violence.

“Disons qu'on avait, nous les pasteurs, de la formation disponible pour nous. Sérieusement, on n'aurait pas le temps de la faire. Et on n'aura pas le temps d'accompagner tout le monde de toute façon. C'est pour ça que je crois vraiment qu'il faut avoir des experts ou des personnes vers qui on peut référer des couples, des situations plus difficiles.”

Some participants offered ideas for the training of lay people as a solution to the workload or limitations of the clergy.

“Tu sais, quand on fait la formation de nos leaders de petits groupes, on peut certainement leur donner des outils aussi pour être à l'affût de ces choses-là, puis être capables de. Si vous voyez quelque chose, vous vous en doutez, venez nous voir. Dans le fond, d'avoir un genre de chaîne de commandement dans un certain sens, là, que ces mini-responsables de pastorale, dans le fond, aient les yeux ouverts aussi pour ça, pour avoir un endroit qui est safe pour pouvoir partager.”

Other ideas or comments on the training:

- Leaders are too busy to attend long training sessions.

- Some pastors don't have the interest or the pastoral gifts to deal with this kind of situation.
- Online tools or short capsules are preferable to courses or lectures.
- We need to target people who have the interest or gifts to become resource people or references for this issue.
- A number of questions about the shortcomings of Bible schools and seminaries.

2.3 Secondary themes

a. Discussion on gender dynamics

i. Men in leadership: limits and solutions

Many participants mentioned the difficulty of working with women, especially in cases of domestic violence. One woman said: *"I feel being a woman, it is more approachable for women to come and open up."* The men felt that their gender was sometimes a limitation, because domestic violence is gender-based violence. In addition, they were concerned about creating an atmosphere of trust and safety for someone who was already traumatised by the opposite sex. Finally, the men confirmed the need to include, or even delegate, pastoral intervention in cases of domestic violence to a woman leader, counsellor or pastor.

"Just look at my situation. For some people, I may not be the person that they're readily going to come to because I represent a male authority in some way, and that may be a barrier for them coming forward."

"Je pense que l'une des limites, c'est le manque d'intervenantes, peu importe qu'est-ce qu'on pense sur le statut pastoral ou pas, là. Mais quand même, veux, veux pas, de prendre soin, le don de berger de prendre soin. Mais c'est un don que le Seigneur donne aux femmes, aux hommes, puis d'avoir plus de femmes équipées qui peuvent nous aider à faire cet accompagnement dans l'Église. C'est nécessaire."

"I think what I've seen is the biggest barrier is how to build those relationships of trust. I mean, I'm still relatively new in ministry, but here I am, you know, a white male. I find that I have to be careful what kind of conversations I'm having with people, how I frame those conversations so that it actually is a scenario where people know that they're safe... I find that that barrier of the expectations of, okay, 'You're a church person. Can I actually trust you?' So many of you can say there's expectations for what the church represents. And how can I actually open up to that?"

Several men offered solutions to these limitations, such as keeping their office door open when meeting with a woman, meeting with the person on Zoom or by videoconference, meeting with a

woman in leadership so that the victim does not feel alone with one or a few men. A number of people mentioned the importance of adopting a safe posture, of being someone they could trust, of building a bond of trust with the person and assuring them that they would not be judged. A few people also mentioned the fact that sometimes a man's voice or opinion can be helpful in a situation of domestic violence, because the man can confirm that the violent behaviour is not acceptable or normal.

"Gender: Is it strength or weakness as much as something to be aware of? Like there's strengths and there are weaknesses... well, a man's voice is different from a woman's voice, and so you gotta be aware of that... But, I mean.. having a pastor say, 'Hey, that's wrong.' Or having a man say, 'No, that's not normal. Men aren't like that', can be really eye opening for people too, right? So to help them feel like, 'Yeah, I shouldn't put up with this, I can get out of it, you know?'"

Some participants also reflected on the importance of modelling masculinity on the image of Christ within their churches, as an act of prevention against toxicity and violence.

"Ce qui reste, c'est le modèle négatif de 'c'est quoi être un gars ?' C'est comme un peu macho, toxique, etc. Je pense que les hommes sont un peu mélangés sur c'est quoi le rôle aussi. Faque je pense qu'il y a une réflexion, puis ça va probablement au-delà d'ici, mais il y a une réflexion. Comment est-ce qu'on aide les jeunes hommes à devenir des hommes qui sont des modèles comme Christ? Puis c'est quoi être un vrai gars? Tu sais, Jésus pleura, c'est le plus petit verset, mais le vrai gars pleure, tu sais, un vrai gars. Il se tient debout devant les injustices. Il y a comme un aspect vraiment à développer."

"We need to preach from the pulpit to them (men) to make them have some awareness of what's in their own lives and in their community, what kind of conversations they're having with other guys outside of the church that are actually life-giving or is it just promoting misogyny. You know, you can have masculinity without misogyny. We have to challenge them. We have to challenge them from the pulpit. We have to have a space for conversation... I am seeing this as a dad, we have to talk, or else there's unhealthy behaviors that develop, so we have to encourage actually bringing these things prayerfully in conversation and into our awareness. Because we have to have a shift in how we think about things as a society."

ii. Gender inequality in the Church

Several women raised the issue of gender inequality within Christian communities and theologies. This dynamic is seen as an obstacle to safety and to working with victims. The participant below describes the challenges of defending the interests of victims in the face of male leadership within the churches.

“My gender gives me a little bit of an in because I’m trusted to handle certain conversations that – typically victims are female. Not always, but typically. And the ones that I’ve worked with don’t want to tell their male pastor, they want to tell a female. But it has hindered me when I’ve had to advocate for the victim and show up in male-dominated spaces, where they want to take over the case or do something that I am telling them is either illegal or wrong, sometimes illegal, and they don’t even know. It’s just the way churches work. Like ‘we tell everybody everything’. Well, no, there’s laws about confidentiality, actually. So, things like that. It’s harder as a woman to advocate, but it’s easier to receive the disclosures.

The participant below expresses her frustration with a theology that she perceives as symbolically violent and its harmful effects on the well-being of girls and women.

“There’s this symbolic violence that is done to women in our theology and the fact that in Catholic and Evangelical churches, there are many things that women can’t do, and that only men have certain positions of influence and authority and so on. And you teach many generations of little girls growing up that they don’t have authority, they don’t have influence, they don’t have agency. They always have to refer to somebody else. They always have to obey somebody else.

The pastor below stressed the importance of communicating their church’s egalitarian stance to their community as a preventive action against domestic violence.

“... dans les moments publics, c’est-à-dire, par exemple, les prédications, les homélies d’une part, mais aussi les politiques de l’Église, les règlements internes, le document de vision, d’autre part, partout où est-ce qu’on peut communiquer, euh, que les femmes sont égales à l’homme.”

iii. The treatment of women in Church leadership

The participants in the focus groups are all in a leadership position, whether in a formal role (pastor, ministry leader, chaplaincy) or an informal one (volunteer with responsibilities, Christian counsellor, etc.) Many, especially those who are members of the clergy, recounted their difficult experiences as women leaders. This includes implicitly or explicitly aggressive treatment, negative reactions to their role or a lack of confidence on the part of Christians in their expertise or authority.

“Il faut ouvertement être clair dans la théologie que la femme est d’une façon égalitaire avec l’homme. Je crois que c’est essentiel si l’on dit à vive voix et si c’est la position de l’Église de le dire. Quand je suis arrivée, et pas seulement quand je suis arrivée parce que ça continue, moi j’ai reçu des lettres, ‘hate letters’ et lettres et comme quoi j’étais une femme et que les femmes devaient se taire à l’Église et que j’entends citer la

première lettre aux Corinthiens. Et c'est là que je me suis rendue compte du contexte théologique dans lequel j'étais."

"I've had people walk out of church when I've walked up to preach. I've been a guest minister in another church and been told, 'Yeah, there were several families that didn't come this morning because you were our guest minister.' One of my daughters said something to me: 'Yeah, I know, I know, you're a pastor, but you're the only woman pastor I've ever heard'... Even in a church community where women are able to be ordained, it's still very much an uphill battle. I just want better for my girls, I really do."

b. Power dynamics in the Church

On a few occasions, discussions revolved around issues of abuse of power or the unhealthy authority of certain communities or individuals in leadership, as well as theologies perceived as unhealthy and leading to abuse of power. Participants saw or explored the link between abuse of power or authoritarianism and domestic or family violence.

"Tout le monde est déjà chrétien et beaucoup viennent du genre d'Église où le pasteur était très autoritaire. Puis j'ai commencé à voir comme une corrélation justement entre ces gens-là et les cas de violence conjugale qu'il y avait, comme s'ils étaient déjà habitués, on dirait, à être comme soumis à des gens qui leur disent quoi faire."

"Par expérience, je sais qu'il y a certaines de nos familles qui sont dans le leadership, qui expérimentent de la violence et qui ne sont même pas au courant que la violence n'est pas seulement physique. Il y a la violence psychologique, il y a la violence surtout du point de vue spirituel. Je pense à ce que tu disais quand il s'agit des communautés qui viennent d'une certaine, d'une certaine théologie, il semble avoir plus d'instances de violence."

"Often I think something that normalizes abusive dynamics in a relationship is the fact that maybe the person is already experiencing abusive dynamics with their church, or their pastor or their priest, which are not recognized as such, are recognized as normal. And that's where spiritual abuse and domestic abuse really kind of intersect, because you'll hear pastors or priests who have way too much authority, this figure that is closer to God that we're supposed to listen to, and they'll have teachings like 'you can't trust your feelings', 'the heart is evil and corrupt', 'you can't trust your instincts or your intuitions, you have to go against that and listen to us'. And that's an abusive dynamic that is already installed. And so, it makes the additional dynamic in the individual relationship much – makes people more vulnerable to it."

c. The particularities of cultural communities

Approximately one third of the participants lead cultural Christian communities (ethnic or linguistic church, for example) or were themselves from a cultural community. During the Rapha study, the issue of Christians from immigrant backgrounds or questions relating to domestic violence within cultural communities came up repeatedly. While we did **not find a higher rate of** domestic violence among respondents from cultural communities in the first phase survey, the Rapha team notes that there are particularities, challenges and contextual factors in cases of domestic violence among Christian families from immigrant or cultural communities. Researchers into domestic violence observe similar dynamics: “Domestic violence is not a phenomenon that only immigrant women or women from immigrant families experience. However, a number of situational and contextual factors – oppression experienced in their countries of origin and on arrival in the host country – make these women highly vulnerable and in need of appropriate social responses¹⁶.”

Some particularities include the customs and family dynamics of the country of origin. The notions of marriage, hierarchy, family obligations and divorce may be perceived and experienced differently depending on the person’s country or culture of origin.

“Dans la plupart des cas, chez nous, dans les familles immigrées africaines, le mariage, c’est surtout entre deux familles. Ce n’est pas forcément entre deux personnes. Alors sur ce plan, ça devient très difficile de penser tout de suite à la séparation lorsque vont arriver des situations assez difficiles.”

Another difficulty identified by the leaders is a lack of knowledge or familiarity with the laws, rights and legal systems of Quebec and Canadian society.

“Donc, à la Fête de quartier où est notre église, il y avait un kiosque du Service de police de Montréal, le SPVM. Ouais. Et puis il y a un policier qui était d’origine antillaise et qui expliquait à de nouveaux arrivants, vraiment de nouveaux nouveaux arrivants que ‘comme la culture au Québec, c’est pas pareil comme en Haïti’. Parce qu’en fait c’était des Haïtiens, et il leur expliquait bien. Et puis il disait ‘on vous comprend’.”

The pastor below was concerned not to excuse a case of domestic violence on the grounds of cultural differences.

“Somebody not from Canada – I found one of the more recent cases I’ve had to deal with, and culture was a factor. It was an extended immigrant family. And unfortunately,

¹⁶ Zavala, Lafortune and Morales, “L’adaptation des services des maisons d’aide et d’hébergement aux femmes immigrantes et issues de l’immigration : des réponses diversifiées” in Dir: Boulebsol, C. *Pratiques et recherches féministes en matière de violence conjugale: coconstruction des connaissances et expertises*, Presses de l’Université de Québec, 2022, p.193.

even from the Canadian church, we hear, 'Well, that's their culture, though'. And that bothered me(...) I don't want to come in and totally dismiss their background, but each of us, I think, need to really look at our cultural background, and realize that it's got to also come under the rule of Christ. Whether it's European, Asian, whatever. That's been an interesting dynamic in the industry, especially in a place like Montreal where you've got so many different cultural groups, so many immigrant groups, and they're not necessarily fussy about which church they pick. It's a joy to see that mix. It's an image of what heaven is supposed to be like on Sunday morning. But it does make this a little more challenging."

Finally, as we said in the section on taboos, the leaders of churches or parishes that are predominantly cultural have repeatedly stressed the difficulty of broaching these sensitive subjects with their members.

"Coming from a pastor of a distinctly ethnic church, I would say we tend to maybe suppress those kinds of things that would happen at home. I'm talking about sexuality or abuse or anything like that. It's kind of difficult, but to recognize the signs – I'm here to learn and to listen and see how I can be part of it... I love my church. They're a great church. But, because they're so silent, you don't know what's going on behind the doors."

d. Marriage preparation courses

Domestic violence is a subject that is rarely discussed in Church marriage preparation courses. The majority of participants say this.

"... ça m'a vraiment fait réfléchir que dans la préparation au mariage, comme les séances qu'on donne, on parle pas. En tout cas, moi j'en parlais pas, ça fait pas ça, ça faisait pas partie du curriculum qu'on avait pour ma [famille d'Églises], puis on avait vraiment pas ça. Puis maintenant c'est ça, comment est-ce qu'on l'inclut là-dedans?"

The leader below describes his role in confronting violence and love toxicity as part of the preparatory journey to marriage.

"Puis je pense que toute la question des cours de préparation au mariage, c'est ça, c'est nécessaire que les pasteurs aient le courage d'affronter ce qu'ils voient réellement et d'aussi faire des suggestions aux parties et de les mettre en garde. Donc juste donner un exemple. Moi et ma femme, on fait quand même plusieurs accompagnements vers le mariage, puis je dirais qu'au moins un tiers, si pas la moitié des couples, on leur suggère de pas se marier, de mettre fin à leur relation parce qu'on voit déjà des modèles toxiques. Puis les gens ne nous aiment pas nécessairement pour ça. Il y a un couple,

entre autres, qui par le temps qu'on a vu les choses vraiment toxiques, c'était deux semaines avant leur mariage. Puis. Mais ils ont décidé de mettre fin, de tout annuler. Puis finalement, aujourd'hui, les deux nous remercient."

e. Ministry for Children, Youth and Young Adults

Participants who work in youth ministry (youth ministry, catechism classes, university chaplaincy, etc.) see the importance of talking about domestic violence and violence in love relationships from an early age. For some time now, the Quebec government has been talking about the consequences of domestic violence on a child's life. Legal policies and procedures and psychosocial interventions take this reality into account: "In a context of domestic violence, children suffer the negative effects of the situation. Whether or not they witness the violence, they are always affected by the climate created by the violence, even when it is not directly directed at them¹⁷ . The focus group leaders asked a number of questions about childhood and youth and its link to domestic violence. The questions included the following:

- Are children also considered victims of intimate partner violence?
- Do I have to report domestic violence to the police or the DYP even if the child is not directly a victim of violence?
- What are the consequences for a child who witnesses domestic violence?
- Should domestic violence be addressed in adolescence?

"Le couple est capable de cacher, à cause de la honte, à cause de la gêne... Mais quand il s'agit de jeunes, c'est très rapide. Le jeune va rentrer, tu vois qu'il y a un changement dans son comportement, tu l'approches, tu dis : 'Comment ça se passe?' Il répond: 'Je sais pas. Cette histoire de Dieu, j'en peux plus.' Puis ensuite dans la conversation tout de suite tu vois des instances de violence, puis les instances de violence. La plupart du temps, ce que j'ai remarqué, c'est qu'ils ne sont pas seulement physiques, ils sont très verbaux, très psychologiques. Il y a beaucoup de manipulation spirituelle aussi qui joue, et tu peux le voir dans le langage des jeunes et aussi dans la manière dont ils expriment leur théologie."

"In high school youth groups when people are starting to date, that's something that could be talked about."

"On pourrait même parler de violence familiale quasiment. Et on le voit dans les actes de féminicide dont on est témoin de plus en plus, en tout cas dans la société québécoise,

¹⁷ Gouvernement du Québec, *Politique d'intervention en matière de violence conjugale*, 1995, p.23.

c'est très rare que la personne qui pose l'acte se limite tout simplement... mais plus souvent ça touche toute la famille, les enfants inclus."

f. Theological and pastoral reflections and issues

Unsurprisingly, the majority of the discussion groups began with theological and pastoral discussions and reflections. Many of the contributions were profound and rich, and deserve to be explored further. The two participants below reflected on the long-term consequences of intimate violence within a family and the after-effects that this entails. The concepts of sin, the prosperity gospel and the forgiveness of sins are particularly relevant.

Participant: "I think as much for the perpetrators, in the teaching of the church, it's not just a redemption story. I think what we have to say is like, 'You're gonna stop doing this and your life might still be miserable afterwards, but you'll stop sinning, right? You'll stop hurting someone. And that's really good. And yeah, you might have to move out. You might live in an apartment, but you'll be a healthier person. And this is God honoring.' This is a good outcome and will even help you and the victims have to see that too, right? Like, 'Yeah, financially, this might be a disaster, but this is actually the stuff that God wants you to take.' And if you know the word – like the prosperity gospel, right. There's a huge temptation just at the human heart of, 'Oh, if I follow God, my life's going to get easier and easier and easier,' and God's asking me to do something that's gonna make my life a lot harder.

Participant: Yeah, the opposite of the prosperity gospel is the idea that sin has consequences. And those consequences don't always affect just you, but they can be far reaching."

The participants below offer a very interesting angle on the concept of spiritual violence as a form of domestic violence:

Participant: What's interesting, thinking through what it's like (to be an abuser). The abusive person is putting themselves between God and the other. "I'm taking the place of God in your life, and I'm going to be that idol, or I'm going to be that control, that sovereign power. And of course, that's utterly opposed to what Christ calls us to be.

Participant: And they'll even use Bible verses!

The participant below offered a reflection on the consequences for the missiology of the Church in Quebec regarding its collaboration with organisations and its denunciation of domestic violence.

“Le fait de collaborer avec d’autres organismes et de référer à ceux-ci peut être une occasion de mission, carrément. Quelque part, je reconnais ceux et celles autour de moi qui sont aussi, à leur façon bien imparfaits... mais ils sont en train de participer à la restauration de toutes choses... En tant que ministère, on valorise les gens, on valorise le bien commun, on valorise l’épanouissement humain... Les gens qui croient par rapport aux Églises d’habitude, c’est que d’habitude notre réputation est collée au fait qu’il y a eu des abus dans l’Église catholique ou dans l’Église évangélique dans les temps les plus récents. Là, c’est un peu cette réputation-là qui nous colle à la peau, tu sais. Mais là, de voir, en fait, il y a des exemples que ce n’est pas ça. Il y a des Églises qui dénoncent le mal... et ça peut être une possibilité de témoignage assez forte qu’il ne faut pas négliger non plus dans une société post-chrétienne.”

g. Feelings of discouragement or overwhelm

Many expressed a feeling of discouragement or overwhelm in the face of the enormous problem of domestic violence and the fact that the churches have been so ill-equipped to deal with it.

“I think one of the things, in my experiences as a leader in the church, I would say it makes me realise how ill-prepared our churches are, even the leadership, even the deacons. How well we are able to have policies in place to handle it. You know, ‘Here’s the plan of attack.’ And as you said, how to protect ourselves, how to do the right things, have the right approaches. We just don’t think about it.”

These feelings need to be taken seriously by all preachers, trainers and communicators on the subject. It is important to tell the truth, to be concerned about the sensitive aspects, while at the same time conveying a message of hope.

3. Analysis and recommendations from the Rapha team

a. Recommendation no. 1: Leaders must recognise the role they have to play on the issue of domestic violence.

It is undeniable that the parish priest, pastor, shepherd or leader in a church community plays a major role in preventing and responding to domestic violence, **even if the leader does not play the role of “referent”** (see 3.i Recommendation no. 9: appoint a referent, preferably a woman, to respond to needs relating to domestic violence), **intervener or counsellor in helping relationships**.

In phase 1 of the Rapha project, according to the quantitative survey, of the respondents who identified themselves as victims or survivors, 50% reported their experiences to their

parishes, and the vast majority did so to a person in a position of authority: the parish priest, the pastor or a leader¹⁸. The leader occupies a position of visibility and spiritual authority in the lives of Christians. Often, the leader symbolises the Church's response and spiritual care; a victim's perception of support will be greatly influenced by this symbol.

i. Detecting domestic violence: the role of the leader?

The pastor, especially the pastor of a large church, may not be the support person, intervener or respondent in cases of domestic violence. In this case, it is recommended that every parish or church determine who will fill this role. Sylvie Lévesque and Catherine Rousseau, researchers in sexology at the Université du Québec à Montréal, designed the four-step identification tool. The Rapha team uses this tool itself and promotes it in its training courses (intervention strategies for identifying reproductive coercion¹⁹).

- a. Welcoming: providing a safe, confidential place and environment in which to share.
- b. Identify: ask questions about the quality of your relationship with your partner.
- c. Support: let the person know that you believe them (see 3.a ii), validate what they say, reduce their shame and ask them if you can refer them to sources of help or information.
- d. Referral: directing the person to organisations specialising in domestic violence.

A leader or referral person who detects domestic violence in a couple is strongly recommended to refer the spouses individually or the couple to specialist organisations in order to create a support ecosystem for the family (see section 3b. Recommendation 5: Know your socio-community networks and establish eco-systemic collaborations). It is also strongly recommended that all parishes and churches have a domestic violence protection policy (see appendix) so that they have a pre-established procedure to follow. It is not up to a leader in a pastoral position to take on the sole role of detecting or diagnosing domestic violence. But he or she can nevertheless play a vital role in identifying and referring to someone in distress.

ii. The leader's role: believing the person

¹⁸ *Executive summary*, Christian Direction [<https://fr.direction.ca/sommaire-executif>] (consulted on November 12, 2024).

¹⁹ Lévesque, S. and Rousseau, C. (2021). *Reproductive coercion and intimate partner violence*. Un guide d'intervention destiné aux professionnel-le-s de la santé et aux intervenant-e-s. Montréal: Université du Québec à Montréal, [https://www.raiv.ulaval.ca/sites/raiv.ulaval.ca/files/publications/fichiers/BROCHURE_Coercition_V14avril.pdf] (accessed November 12, 2024).

Although the pastor, parish priest or deacon may not be a first responder or a referral person in matters of domestic violence, **every church leader can insist on the importance of believing the person who discloses their experience.** A faith leader can be the first person to tell a victim that they are believed; church leaders can be the first people to communicate to a community the importance of believing the voice of the vulnerable. This is vitally important. It's of great value to the victim, but it also communicates that your church stands on the side of the oppressed and vulnerable.

If a friend, volunteer or leader has doubts about what an alleged victim is saying, remember that **it is not their role to intervene in domestic violence or to resolve a domestic violence situation.** It is your role to welcome, listen, support and direct the person to the ecosystem of experts who are able to receive and assess the comments and apply the necessary laws and procedures. We will continue our discussion of this point in section 3.b Recommendation no. 2: it is important for all leaders to recognise their limits.

The Restored UK guide states: "The do's and don'ts of helping a victim, the importance of believing them: what they tell you is probably just the tip of the iceberg, and listening to what they say and taking it seriously²⁰". On the other hand, the authors of the guide remind us that we must not judge her words or minimize her testimony.

iii. The leader's role: putting safety first

Although the pastor, parish priest or deacon may not be the first responder or a point person for domestic violence, **every church leader can insist on the safety of people in vulnerable situations and put measures in place to protect individuals and the community in the event of a crisis.** This applies both to individual interaction and to collective policies and procedures relating to safety in the Church.

In **individual interventions and interactions** (without the partner being present), the leader, concerned about the health of the person's relationship, can ask the question: "Do you feel safe at home with your partner or when you are in his presence?" If there are doubts about safety, it is strongly recommended that the leader suggest courses of action, including directing the person to resources and practitioners with expertise in creating and implementing a safety plan. This approach is set out in the *Domestic Violence Protection Policy for Churches* developed by Plan to Protect®²¹, in the appendix. The leader below describes her experience working with an alleged victim and helping her develop a safety plan.

"Um, I've sat and developed safety plans with people. Um, whether or not they need them or not. But I tell them, 'You know, do this because it makes me feel better. I'm very

²⁰ Kuzaks-Cardenas, Legg and Sweetman, *A Guide for Churches in Dealing with Domestic Violence*, Restored UK, [<https://www.restored-uk.org/resources/>], p.43.

²¹ Collab, *Domestic Violence Protection Policy for Churches*, Plan to Protect®, 2024, [https://fr.direction.ca/_files/ugd/cc65b6_9e8a976c4623424aeeee0220d6133510.pdf]

anxious to reduce, reduce my stress level. Help me. And we'll develop a safety plan for you.”

Then, any leader can take actions and initiatives that will communicate the importance of safety and make **his or her church a safe place for everyone**. The *Guide for Churches on Responding to Domestic Violence*²² suggests a number of ways of ensuring that a parish or church is a safe place. These include, among other things, training volunteers and leaders, adhering to a Charter on domestic violence²³ and including teachings on violence against women or intimate partner violence when preaching or teaching.

In terms of measures to adopt in the event of a crisis, the *Protection Policy for Churches in Cases of Domestic Violence* proposes **detailed procedures to follow for any church faced with a situation of domestic violence**, including legal benchmarks, especially when a child is involved. If a church or parish wishes to adopt this policy, it is advisable for volunteers or leaders to attend a Plan to Protect® training course to familiarise themselves with the protection plan.

iv. The role of the leader: facing up to and being accountable

On many occasions, participants in the discussion groups talked about the perpetrators of violence, questioned their role in dealing with them or wondered how to deal with their violence in a theological or pastoral way. Confronting violence and helping someone to realise their sins in relation to violence can be additional to the roles of a leader or shepherd. The Christian Network Against Family Violence (an initiative of the World Evangelical Alliance) writes “Those who are aware of his (the attacker’s) actions should not continue to act as if nothing had happened. Silence can be misinterpreted as tacit approval. For too long, churches have wanted to protect their reputation or the reputation of a pastor and have chosen to ignore or cover up violence. Saying nothing, keeping things secret or covering things up is not God’s way of dealing with abuse. A perpetrator of abuse can be supervised, monitored and accompanied spiritually, but he or she must be made to understand that such behaviour is not acceptable among believers. It is not tolerable. When problems of violence arise, Christians must react by obeying the word of God. We must let the perpetrator face the consequences of his or her behaviour. We must not strive to obtain a less severe verdict, to be exempted from a batterers’ discussion group

²² Kuzaks-Cardenas, Legg and Sweetman, *A Guide for Churches in Dealing with Domestic Violence*, Restored UK, [<https://www.restored-uk.org/resources/>], p.34.

²³ Idem, p.61.

or from court-ordered follow-up. We must ensure that we let justice and the law take their course.²⁴”

Any meeting must be carefully supervised and meticulously prepared. The Rapha team recommends the following two sources: *A Guide for Churches on Dealing with Domestic Abuse*, section “Responding wisely when the abuser is a member of your congregation²⁵” and *When home hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church*, chapter 5 “Confronting the abuser²⁶”.

A few principles that are essential when dealing with a perpetrator of violence:

- Confronting or confronting the aggressor will increase the degree of risk for the victims or their families.
- This is not done without the consent of the person who has suffered the violence.
- This is not done before ensuring the safety of the victim and her children.
- Professional support for the perpetrator of violence is essential.
- Sometimes the abuser will be someone charismatic or charming and he or she will be very good at justifying their actions. It is vital that leaders have a very clear idea of what initiates real repentance and a theology of justice.
- You need to know and recognise the key signs to know whether a perpetrator of violence is really changing his behaviour.²⁷

v. The leader’s role: to teach and inform

It is perfectly valid, indeed necessary, for leaders to make it clear that violence is never justified or justifiable. They can do this through their speeches, their teaching and preaching and their pastoral counselling. Several participants affirmed their desire to use their gifts and platforms for the prevention and eradication of violence. Specifically, they found it appropriate to

²⁴ Jackson, Amanda ed, *Relationships from a Biblical Perspective: Tackling Domestic Violence*, Christian Network Against Family Violence, 2020
[<https://women.worldea.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/1517-CNEDA-Booklet-FRENCH-v3WEB.pdf>]
(accessed November 8, 2024)

²⁵ Kuzaks-Cardenas, Legg and Sweetman, *A Guide for Churches in Dealing with Domestic Violence*, Restored UK, [<https://www.restored-uk.org/resources/>], p.46.

²⁶ Pierre, J. and Wilson, G., *When home hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church*, Fearn, Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2021.

²⁷ Kuzaks-Cardenas, Legg and Sweetman, *A Guide for Churches in Dealing with Domestic Violence*, Restored UK, [<https://www.restored-uk.org/resources/>], p.48.

communicate the following through their homilies, speeches or theological and pastoral teachings.

- That God did not create anyone to abuse and be abused.
- That it is acceptable, even desirable, for people to confide in us when they are in distress.
- There are erroneous beliefs held by perpetrators and victims of violence, and these beliefs perpetuate suffering.
- That the Church must take a stand against injustice and condemn all forms of violence.

Taking into account the words of leaders and research in the field of domestic violence and the Church, the Rapha team maintains that **teaching about and raising awareness of love violence, family violence and domestic violence are necessary acts for their prevention.** Churches and parishes have a distinct opportunity, as they offer times and places where biblical and psychosocial teaching is prescribed. Liturgy (through praise, prayers and the reading of Christian texts) and certain events in the calendar (the commemoration of December 6, for example) also provide an opportunity for training and raising awareness among members of a community. What's more, the Rapha team believes that **the act of teaching about domestic violence issues and raising awareness of them among Quebec Christians, in the public spaces of the church or parish, contributes to the creation of a community that is preventive and open to the disclosure of violence.**

b. Recommendation no. 2: it is important for all leaders to recognise their limits

Domestic violence is one of the most complex psychosocial issues that can arise in a church environment. Among the many contributions made by the leaders in the discussion groups, the Rapha team observed a feeling of discouragement and overwhelm as well as a feeling of confusion or uncertainty. These emotions are completely normal and show the severity of the problem and the good intentions of the majority of leaders. In our opinion, they want to act well and intervene in a fair and compassionate manner, in line with their pastoral and theological convictions, but they are for the most part lacking in knowledge and training on the subject.

With this in mind, we need to recognise our limitations. First, all leaders must **recognise the parameters and limits of their role as a member of the clergy.** “Your role is not to investigate... you are not a forensic investigator trying to make conclusive determinations about exactly what happened or who is not telling the truth. Your role is caregiving and accountability. You do not need to be a police officer or a lawyer to seek the information you need for

responsible pastoral action, and you should cooperate fully with officers who are investigating criminal matters. Well-trained victim advocates can be a tremendous asset in helping her (and you) navigate the subtleties of the specific situation²⁸. A member of the clergy or a leader, as Pierre and Wilson state, is not a member of the police force or a lawyer mandated by the Court to play a legal, judicial or investigative role. Furthermore, a member of the clergy is not a psychiatric doctor or a nurse, and therefore does not have to take charge of the medical needs or make a diagnosis of the person seeking help. Finally, a member of the clergy is not a counsellor or psychologist specialising in domestic violence or behavioural problems. They therefore have no need to intervene in the violence and are not mandated to resolve the violence in the relationship or to take sides. Health or counselling professionals with hundreds of hours of training and clinical supervision are better placed to do this. A member of the clergy can follow the four-step intervention formula described in 3.a.i, directing people to the necessary resources while fulfilling his or her role as a spiritual and pastoral companion. As we saw in 3.a, church leaders can and should take on a number of roles as shepherds, teachers, safety officers and community carers. All these roles will help victims and survivors in their efforts and contribute to building a healthy and safe community.

Secondly, all leaders should recognise **their mandate and the limits of their position in their church or parish**. A number of pastors said in the discussion groups that they were not necessarily the people responsible for meeting the pastoral or psychosocial needs of the community, or at least they were not the only ones to do so. It is perfectly acceptable, even expected, that the parish priest or senior pastor of a church or parish should not be the first responder in a situation of domestic violence. The pastoral team, even a team from a small parish or church, would do well to appoint a reference person (see 3.i) or to decide which people in the community are best suited to take over the pastoral role of preventing, raising awareness of and responding to domestic violence.

Finally, it is important for **all leaders to recognise their personal limits when faced with situations of domestic violence**. Anyone responding to a situation of domestic violence or undertaking a prevention or awareness initiative (for example, a sermon on the subject, a discussion group, etc.) had better be aware of their personal or professional limits, such as:²⁹

- Lack of knowledge or skills.

²⁸ Pierre, J. and Wilson, G., *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church*, Fearn, Christian Focus Publications Ltd, 2021, p.67.

²⁹ List provided during the webinar Gauthier, Rebecca, October 16, 2024, “Quelque chose ne va pas! Recognizing and responding to domestic violence in your churches: tools and information for Christian leaders, friends and volunteers.” (Webinar offered as part of the Rapha project) Christian Direction.

- Negative attitude (being shocked by what is said, wanting to condemn or minimise the words of the person who is confiding in you).
- Cognitive bias (for example, wanting to say “this is not violence” because the descriptions do not fit in with our preconceived ideas of what domestic violence is).
- Discomfort.
- The feeling of powerlessness.
- Personal attitudes.
- The intrinsic characteristics of the speaker (e.g. gender, age, language).

Best practices

The leader below is a good example of a stakeholder who is aware of his or her limits.

- 1) He describes a situation in which he recognises and names the violence, while at the same time asserting that action and decisions must come from the person suffering the violence. This is difficult, but necessary. It does not force the person to act in one way or another.
- 2) Secondly, he recognises the time it takes in the person’s life (in this case, it was a period of four years).
- 3) Finally, he plays the role of spiritual shepherd: he went to bless her new home when she separated. Rituals of this kind can support a victim’s healing and show spiritual and institutional support, even validation, for her decision to separate.

“One of the challenging things of this is we can’t do other people’s work for them, right? So we are, maybe we’re naming ‘this is abusive’... But they have to do this work. Only they can make that move. You can’t go in there and physically move them out of the house. So I suppose it’s about you know, I’ve seen that take years. I mean, if you’re in a ministry situation for a while, you can watch people do that journey. Um, and I remember like in one case we ended up a group of us quietly went over and blessed her new house. Finally! This is over, like, four years.”

c. Recommendation no. 3: Clergy and leaders should be trained and equipped to deal with domestic violence.

In Quebec, there are huge gaps in training on domestic violence for clergy and church staff. We condemn the lack of training in seminaries and Bible schools.

Ideally, seminaries and Bible schools would offer basic training for students preparing for pastoral ministry. In addition, dynamic issues and research in domestic violence would be subjects of ongoing training for Christian leaders and practitioners. Below is a brief comparative overview of training offered in a Christian context.

Organization	Training	Target customers	Number of hours

Faith Trust Institute ³⁰	Pastoral care for victims of abuse or assault	Pastors, priests, clergy, pastoral workers	12
Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches in France	Introduction and overview of the ecclesiastical issues surrounding domestic violence	Pastors	6
Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches in France ³¹	Training to support victims of domestic violence in the church environment	Volunteers or referees	12
Restored UK ³²	Awareness, knowledge and support for domestic violence	Committed Christian individuals	15 hours (in three modules)

Taking these factors into account, the Rapha team proposes two training paths for anyone in a position of ecclesial leadership, depending on their role.

- i. **A six-hour awareness-raising course on domestic violence for any member of the clergy or a pastoral team.** Topics covered include a socio-demographic portrait of the situation of conjugal violence in Quebec and in Quebec churches, definitions and forms of conjugal violence, false beliefs, spiritual violence and biblical texts used in cases of conjugal violence, and courses of action for any church wishing to prevent, raise awareness of and respond to conjugal violence. It also provides an overview of the protection policy for churches in situations of conjugal violence.
- ii. **Twelve hours of training for a volunteer or referral person.** Topics covered include items from the awareness training, in addition to the four-step intake and detection approach, an overview of community services and resources, the principles of supporting a victim or survivor and guidelines for helping a victim establish a safety plan.

³⁰ Safe and Healthy Churches Training, [<https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/news/safe-healthy-churches-training/?searchterm=training>] (accessed November 8, 2024)

³¹ Together against domestic violence, [<https://actus.feebf.com/ensemble-contre-les-violences-conjugales/5543-2>] (accessed November 8, 2024).

³² Restored UK, Trainings, [<https://www.restored-uk.org/partner/get-involved/training/>] (accessed on November 8, 2024).

d. Recommendation 4: Marital mediation and marital therapy in cases of domestic violence should be avoided without exception.

Without exception, the literature and research stipulate that mediation or marital therapy are not valid remedies in cases of domestic violence. Moreover, it is strongly recommended NOT to cross-check the victim's version of events with the violent partner. When a couple seeks marital therapy, and the therapist detects intimate violence, it is his or her duty to offer individualised help for each party. The authors of Restored UK's *Guide for Churches* explain the logic behind this approach.

“In general, marriage counselling, mediation and marriage preparation can offer effective solutions to couples' problems. They can help people resolve conflicts, communication problems, childhood issues or intimate difficulties. However, in the case of a relationship with an abuser, they run the risk of doing more harm than good. These measures do not guarantee the victim's safety. Her honest and open participation could lead to an escalation of violence on the part of the aggressor. Abusers are skilled manipulators and know how to use these spaces as another stage on which to exert their domination and control. Marriage counselling, mediation and marriage preparation presuppose the concept of mutuality in the relationship. There is no such thing with an abuser, who has no respect for the victim and no interest in equality. Participating in this type of support as a couple presupposes a shared understanding of the problems within the couple. Violence is not a shared problem. It is the aggressor's problem. Violence is a choice made by the aggressor to use his strength to exert control over the victim. Generally, in these situations, the couple will be asked to focus on their individual feelings. This is a counter-productive approach to a relationship with an abuser. He already spends too much time worrying about his own feelings, and not enough about his actions and their impact on his partner³³.

e. Recommendation no. 5: We need to be aware of our socio-community networks and establish eco-system collaborations.

Domestic violence is one of the most complex issues in the fields of psychosocial, medical and criminal intervention. **It is neither realistic nor desirable for a parish or church**

³³ Kuzaks-Cardenas, Legg and Sweetman, *A Guide For Churches in Dealing with Domestic Violence*, Restored UK, [<https://www.restored-uk.org/resources/>], p. 34.

to want to manage a case of domestic violence internally. Moreover, a church community wishing to manage such a case entirely in-house would raise many concerns and 'red flags'. **When a crisis presents itself to church leaders, they can lighten the load if they already have links of trust and a relationship with psychosocial services in their sector.** While many churches find it difficult to make a lasting or in-depth commitment to their neighbourhoods or to forge ties of trust with secular community organisations, there are some very simple things that every parish or church can do to get to know its socio-community network better, such as:

- Find out about the contact details, website content and services of SOS Violence Conjugale.
- Write down the contact details of a nearby shelter for women who are victims of violence.
- Have contact details for the SOS Violence Conjugale centre, the local police station, the CLSC, the walk-in clinic and at least one community organisation that helps women or families in the area at hand.
- Get to know at least one psychosocial worker, nurse or first-line responder (a member of your parish or a neighbour in the church) and pray regularly for that person.
- Encourage your parish or church to sponsor an organisation through mutual aid, donations or regular Sunday morning prayers. This creates familiarity with nearby help services.

f. Recommendation no. 6: Cultural communities must have access to materials and trainers adapted to their needs and contexts.

Domestic violence is present in all communities and social strata, regardless of the language, culture or socio-economic background of the family. That said, cultural communities, particularly those with asylum seekers or immigrant backgrounds, have their own particularities that must be respected and taken into account in any intervention or awareness-raising project. Social mores, family expectations, the culture of taboo, the dynamics of immigration and ignorance of the rights and laws of the host country are all factors that add to and complicate the issue of domestic violence.

It is in the interests of the leaders of cultural churches or those welcoming families from a migrant background to take these factors into account and create a pool of resources and a network adapted to their contexts and needs.

Here are some ideas for action.

- Offer information evenings to their members on Canadian and Quebec legislation, the health network and socio-community services in their neighbourhood.
- Find out about social and community services that have staff or resource people from diverse backgrounds.
- Information posters on domestic violence in several languages (SOS Violence Conjugale offers this service).
- Speak publicly about domestic violence and give the floor to a professional in the field who is a member of the diversity community (for example, a lawyer, advocate or social worker from a diversity background).

g. Recommendation no. 7: Include teaching on healthy relationships, trauma and healthy communication in the Christian education of children and young people.

Participants in youth ministry (youth pastors, university chaplaincies, catechism teachers) stressed the importance of talking to teenagers and young adults about relationship violence before they start dating. Violence between intimate partners is a growing concern among teenagers.

“According to self-reported data from the *2018 Survey on Safety in Public and Private Spaces*, more than four in 10 teenagers (45%) have experienced dating violence since the age of 15. Self-reported dating violence includes criminal acts such as physical and sexual abuse, as well as acts that may not be considered criminal (e.g., emotional abuse), but can have devastating consequences for victims³⁴. ”

Moreover, the psychological, spiritual and physical effects on the life of a child who has been exposed to family or domestic violence are profound and serious.

“To develop normally, children need to be physically and psychologically safe. Growing up in a world where one parent is violent towards the other creates a situation of great insecurity and is, in itself, a form of psychological abuse of children. It is also important to remember that when there is domestic violence in a family, there is often direct violence against the children themselves (psychological, physical or sexual violence), and that domestic violence is carried out ‘by proxy’ through the child. We can therefore speak of

³⁴ Sutton, D. and Burczyk, M., *Dating Violence Among Teenagers Aged 15 to 17 in Canada, 2009 to 2022*, Statistics Canada, 2024, [<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2024001/article/00004-fra.htm>] (consulted November 6, 2024).

children who are co-victims of domestic violence or of a dynamic of family violence, in addition to the dynamic of domestic violence perpetrated by one parent against the other³⁵.

Restored UK believes that the Church has a unique opportunity to help children and young people by instilling healthy beliefs (and changing attitudes) about communicating with each other, healing from violence and preventing domestic abuse.

“Studies show that young men and women don’t necessarily understand what a healthy relationship looks like. The Boys to Men research project showed that 49% of boys and 33% of girls aged 13 to 14 thought that hitting a partner was okay in at least one of the 12 scenarios they were presented with³⁶. Clearly, educational programmes help to change young people’s attitudes towards domestic violence. As churches, we are in a privileged position, because children and young people come through our doors, whether for church activities proper or activities hosted by the church. It’s essential to teach them, from an early age, what healthy relationships look like, what’s acceptable and what isn’t, and who to turn to if they feel there’s a problem³⁷.”

Taking all this into consideration, the Rapha team strongly recommends that youth pastors and the directors of catechesis or Christian education programmes regularly integrate teachings, workshops and curriculum on healthy relationships, respectful communication and love of neighbour according to the person of Jesus Christ. Related subjects such as sexual exploitation, relational co-dependency and its prevention, and mental health can be added to this. By adapting the content to suit the age group, and by approaching the biblical themes from this angle (love, respect, forgiveness, human dignity), the Rapha team hopes that the Christian education and training of children and young people in Quebec will provide fertile ground for the prevention of violence.

³⁵ *Children: Witnesses and Victims of Domestic Violence*, SOS Violence Conjugale, [<https://sosviolenceconjugale.ca/fr/articles/les-enfants-temoins-et-victimes-de-la-violence-conjugale>] (consulted on November 6, 2024)

³⁶ “Safe Young Lives: Young People and domestic abuse”, *Safe Lives*, 2020, [<https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Safe%20Young%20Lives%20web.pdf>] (accessed July 9, 2021)

³⁷ Kuzaks-Cardenas, Legg and Sweetman, *A Guide for Churches in Dealing with Domestic Violence*, Restored UK, [<https://www.restored-uk.org/resources/>], p.32 .

h. Recommendation no. 8: Include information and discussion about family and domestic violence in marriage preparation courses.

One thing is certain: marriage preparation courses do not provide enough information or content on domestic violence. If the curriculum used by pastors or trainers does not include this content, they are responsible for using books, resources or Internet material to address the following topics.

- Basic information on violence between intimate partners: what violent behaviour and key signs are, and how to recognise the cycle of violence.
- Discussions on the balance of power in a couple, how to deal with imbalances, and exploration of what triggers a hold of domination or power.
- Healthy communication.
- Conflict resolution.
- Drawing up a crisis management plan should disagreements, anger or distress in the couple increase.
- Discussions on the models, history or family traumas of each partner.
- Recognising toxicity in love.

It is also important to refer the couple (together or individually, depending on the situation) to specialist professionals to discuss childhood or family trauma, or to unravel dangerous patterns.

i. Recommendation no. 9: Appoint a contact person, preferably a woman, to deal with domestic violence.

Given the workload, areas of interest and abilities of several leaders, it is sometimes difficult for a pastor or parish priest to play the role of respondent or referral person in situations of domestic violence. This is especially true in large parishes, where the leadership plays several different roles. It's also important to remember that many women prefer to confide in a woman in a situation of domestic violence. The Rapha team is therefore proposing the model adopted by the Fédération des Églises évangéliques baptistes de la France, under which a person appointed by his or her church can act as a reference and respondent in matters of domestic violence (see appendix).

- The contact person acts as an “interface”:
 - She refers victims of domestic violence to the right person(s) or association(s); she is neither their therapist, nor the legal expert, nor the shelter that provides support for victims, but she refers them to the right people.

- It raises community awareness of domestic violence.³⁸

This person undertakes to be trained (see section 3c. Recommendation no. 3: clergy and leaders must be trained and equipped to deal with domestic violence). The Church, for its part, undertakes to listen to and respect the training, knowledge and confidentiality of victims and survivors under its guidance and the guidelines it offers in situations of domestic violence. If a church or parish is unable to fulfil this role, we recommend appointing a referral person from the family of churches or a partnership of churches.

j. Recommendation 10: Women’s voices, especially those of victims and survivors, must be listened to and placed at the heart of any pastoral approach to domestic violence.

The importance of centring women’s voices in the churches, and especially of centring the experiences, knowledge and desires of women who are victims and survivors of domestic violence, has been said many times throughout the Rapha study. Any recommendation will not have its desired impact if the Church and its leaders do not learn to ask the question (and prepare to hear the answer!) that Jesus asked Mary of Magdala: “Woman, why are you weeping? What are you looking for? What are you looking for?” (John 20:15).

4. Conclusion

Phase 3 of the Rapha project gathered the opinions, experiences, reflections and testimonies of 39 Christian leaders in Quebec. These men and women from a wide range of Christian traditions, urban and regional contexts, and occupying a variety of roles within their communities all lent their voices to help us answer our initial question: “What are the experiences of Christian victims of domestic violence in Quebec, and what is the Church’s response to them?”

The results of our survey are sometimes comforting, sometimes disturbing. The Church in Quebec still has a long way to go when it comes to domestic violence if it wants to be preventive, supportive and safe. This is as true in terms of understanding the issue as it is in terms of training leaders, the ability to discuss the subject openly in the community and procedures for intervening in cases of domestic violence. The leaders told us about their failures, their uncertainties and their questions. The survivors, in Rapha phase 2, told us about

³⁸ Comité contre les violences conjugales, Fédération des Églises évangéliques baptiste de la France, “Cahier de charge de la personne référente”, January 5, 2021, [<https://actus.feebf.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Cahier-des-charges-du-referent-mis-au-propre-corrigé-5.01.21.pdf>] (accessed November 7, 2021).

their wounds in the face of a Church that had not been sufficiently considerate or attentive to their needs. The final recommendation of this report was “to listen to the voice of women”. This is a huge charge, if we really want to pursue it, apply it and embody it. The women in leadership who took part in our *focus groups* told us about their painful, humiliating and even violent experiences in their professional and vocational lives within the Church. If they have faced so many obstacles, being educated, ordained and employed by their institutions, how much more will the victims have to face when they come forward?

Yet we met 39 leaders who want to eradicate violence from their communities and from Quebec society. Leaders who maintain that: “The Church should be the first institution to condemn violence in all its forms.” The will, conviction and wisdom we have witnessed should give hope to the readers of this report that Quebec’s clergy see the suffering caused by domestic violence and want to act. The Church can be a place of suffering, but it can also be fertile ground for healing, justice and restoration. What path will the Church in Quebec choose for the future of Christian women, especially those who are victims of domestic violence?

After asking Mary of Magdala the questions: “Woman, why are you weeping? What are you looking for?”, the risen Christ revealed himself to her and told her to announce his resurrection to the others. John 20:18: “Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things.”

A suffering woman, a risen Christ, a woman emancipated and authorised to announce the resurrection of her Lord. What would this mean for Quebec’s Christian victims and survivors? If Jesus took the trouble to ask Mary the question, to show concern for her, all the more reason should we do the same, have the same attitude and disposition that Jesus had towards women. When it comes to domestic violence, we should model this sensitivity and this prophetic message from Jesus in our Churches. If Jesus entrusted to her the inaugural act of the first church, that of announcing the resurrection, can we aspire to do the same? To entrust to women, especially those who have experienced suffering, the proclamation of the resurrection and the prophetic message of a God who sees suffering and thirsts for justice.

Annex 1 - Interview protocol

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this discussion group which will inform the third phase of the Rapha Québec study on domestic violence. The Rapha study asks: What are the experiences of domestic abuse of survivors in the church, and what are the attitudes of laypeople, and leaders in Christian faith communities in Québec towards this issue? This focus group will be focused on the attitudes towards and experiences of domestic abuse of lay leaders, clergy, and other church leaders in Christian faith communities in Quebec?

As indicated in the informed consent form you all have signed, this focus group will be recorded. We will begin recording now.

The recording or notes from this focus group will not be associated with your name in any way; only the moderator and other participants will know who said what, and we would ask that you all keep the contents of this discussion confidential. When we are speaking about incidents of domestic abuse, please keep the names of the individuals private - either by using pseudonyms or omitting names altogether.

The following are some guidelines to ensure healthy discussion: we can ask each other questions, or reflect on what our neighbors say, but this is a non-judgmental space. We are here to learn from each other's experiences and offer space for growth. We are not held to agree with each other's views, but please refrain from correcting, insulting or throwing accusations at your neighbour. If someone says something hurtful, we welcome open feedback and invite you to express your concerns to the moderator.

Before we begin, please take 5-10 minutes to fill out the questions on the first page before you. These questions will be anonymized and included in the transcription of this focus group discussion.

We will take a few minutes to introduce ourselves before we begin...[moderator introduces themselves first]

Focus Group Written Questions

1. Name
2. Church

3. Role at your church
4. Denomination/Affiliation of your church:
5. I identify as:
 - a. Egalitarian
 - b. Complementarian
 - c. Somewhere in the middle
 - d. Unsure
 - e. Do not wish to respond
6. On a scale of 1-10, to what extent do you believe that domestic abuse is a problem in Québec?
7. On a scale of 1-10, to what extent do you believe that domestic abuse is a problem in the church in Québec?
8. Do you believe that domestic abuse is present in your congregation?

Focus Group Questions

1. What is your understanding/definition of domestic abuse?
2. What is your perception of your role as a leader with a victim of domestic abuse?
3. What is your perception of the Church at large's role in the issue of intimate partner violence?
 - a. Do you think this is something that should be spoken about publicly at church? If not, what is your hesitation?
4. What are the challenges/limitations in your capacity to intervene in the context of domestic abuse?
 - a. Follow up questions/prompt: these can be based on gender, theology, or personal experiences.
 - i. As a church leader, do you consider your gender a strength (opportunity) or a limitation or neither when it comes to your capacity to intervene in a situation of intimate partner violence?
 - ii. Does the theology of your church or denomination prohibit you from intervening or counseling as you would see fit in such situations? How ?
 - iii. Does the theology of your church or denomination equip or strengthen you in intervening or counseling as you would see fit in such situations? How and what ways?
 - iv. Do you have personal experiences that limit your capacity to intervene, or, if this is the case, do you feel your life experiences actually equip you to better serve the context of domestic abuse?
5. Professional experiences as a church leader: What experiences have you had/situations in which you have had to intervene as a leader in connection

with domestic abuse? (This can be any form of connection: a situation in which violence is still occurring, a survivor who has confided in you even if they are now separated, a member of your community who grew up in a violent home, etc.)

- a. What did you learn from these experiences?
 - b. What would you have liked to have done differently?
6. What resources do you know/have available to support you in an intervention related to domestic abuse?
 - a. Prompts: reference people, organizations, documents, denominational resources?
 - i. How do you feel about referring parishioners or members to social services, even non-christian therapists, social workers, etc.
 - ii. Are you in contact with local service providers in your neighbourhood (ie, the local police, community organizations, intervention workers, etc)
 - iii. Has your denomination or organization provided any training or resources on the issue of intimate partner violence, domestic abuse? Do you consider it adequate?
 - iv. Were you trained for this issue in seminary?
 - v. Do you have ready access to books, articles, materials pertaining to the subject of domestic violence and the church?
7. How would you like to be equipped to support people who are victims of domestic abuse? *(Prompting them to ignore any limits of money, time, or space may help to get a better idea of their needs if there is hesitation in responding.)*

Conclusion:

Thank you all for your input and insight. Before we leave, we would ask that you take 2 minutes to fill out this second set of questions. If you have any additional thoughts or comments that you would like to make, please feel free to email the lead researcher - please indicate if you would like those thoughts or comments to be included as data in the study.

Final Written Questions:

1. On a scale of 1-10, to what extent do you believe that domestic abuse is a problem in Québec
2. On a scale of 1-10, to what extent do you believe that domestic abuse is a problem in the church in Québec?
3. Do you believe that domestic abuse is present in your congregation?

Annex 2- Informed Consent Form

Rapha Québec: A Study on Domestic Violence and the Church in Québec Phase III Informed Consent Form

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study on domestic violence and in the church in Québec. The purpose of this study is to produce a report that will identify the reality of church-connected people who have experienced domestic violence, suggest actionable ways to change the narrative for Christian survivors of domestic violence in Québec, and inspire churches to develop ministry response(s). The goal of the third phase of the study is to explore the perspectives and experiences of domestic abuse of clergy and lay leaders in Christian faith communities in Québec.

This research project is being conducted by Christian Direction, a Christian ministry that partners with local congregations and social service agencies for the social and spiritual transformation of youth, families and their communities in Quebec. The lead investigator, Emily Simunic, and the project director, Jenna Smith, are employees of Christian Direction.

Information

The study is separated into three distinct phases: an online survey for churchgoers in Québec, interviews with survivors of domestic abuse, and focus groups with church clergy and lay leadership. This consent form is for the third phase: focus groups seeking to document the experiences, perspectives, and stories of Christian clergy and lay leaders pertaining to domestic abuse. The focus group discussion will cover topics such as experiences with domestic abuse among members of your church; the challenges and limitations experienced when intervening in the context of domestic abuse; the resources and training available (or unavailable) to Christian leaders on domestic abuse and intervention in cases of domestic abuse..

There will be multiple focus groups held throughout the province of Québec, each consisting of 4-10 participants. You will be placed in a focus group in your region which will be approximately 1.5-2 hrs hours long - this includes a break.

Recording and Transcription

All focus groups will be audio recorded for research purposes only. Recorded focus group discussions will be transcribed. Transcripts and interview recordings will only be available to our research team (study manager, lead researcher, focus group

moderator, and research support officer). Transcription will be done by a member of our research team and all information from the audio recording will remain confidential. Transcripts and audio recordings will be used for data analysis and to provide quotes for research reports.

At the end of the study all audio recordings will be deleted. Transcripts will remain on file under a pseudonym for three months after the report is published in case the researcher needs to revisit the data, and will not be used for any additional purposes without your permission. All audio recordings and transcripts will be kept in an encrypted file.

Confidentiality

Your name will only be used on this informed consent form and in the focus group discussion – a pseudonym will be used in the transcription of the discussion. Due to the dynamic and communal nature of focus groups, you will not be able to withdraw your consent after having participated in a focus group discussion. While you are welcome to exit the focus group at any point, any comments that you have made prior to exit will be included in the transcription of the focus group.

Please note that while academic researchers in Québec do not have a duty to report potential harm to adults, we are bound by the requirements of the Youth Protection Act to report if we hear that a child has been harmed or is at risk of being harmed.

Risks

To prevent any, even unlikely, harm to participants, all possible steps will be taken to ensure your anonymity in all published materials. We also ask that you agree to keep the contents of the focus group confidential and that you anonymize, or use pseudonyms, when telling any stories about abuse in the focus group - please never use the actual name of a person who experienced abuse or who used abuse.

Benefits

They will also benefit from the knowledge that their participation may help victims of domestic abuse and potentially change church culture in Québec on this issue. The results acquired from the focus group data will be used to create a report which will inform churches in Québec about the prevalence, attitudes, and awareness of domestic abuse within their congregations and the strengths and weaknesses in responses from church leadership. This knowledge will come with a

list of recommendations to strengthen church responses, better protect victims and survivors, and create a more cohesive community. We believe that all participants will benefit from this research because it will strengthen Christian community and the protection of the vulnerable in churches - both of which are part of the vocational call of church leaders.

The results from these focus groups will allow us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of current church leadership in responding to domestic abuse. Consequently, our report and recommendations will provide tools and suggestions of how church leaders can better equip themselves to serve their congregations and their community with regard to domestic abuse.

Contact Information

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the project lead, Jenna Smith at jsmith@direction.ca, and 514 878-3035.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Community Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in our information, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the Chair, [Community Research Ethics Board](#), at: Community Research Ethics Office (Canada) Corp. c/o Centre for Community Based Research, 190 Westmount Road North, Waterloo ON N2L 3G5; Email: creo@communitybasedresearch.ca; Telephone: 1-888-411-2736.

Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate at any point before the focus group begins without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time prior to the focus group without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

Feedback and Publication

The research results will be written up in a three part report - one for each phase of the project - as well as an executive summary report. All final reports will be made available through the Christian Direction website. There will also be dissemination of the anonymized results of the study in public presentations, social media posts, and the creation of short videos.

If you would like to receive the final report for phase three, as well as the executive summary, please let the researcher know and specify in what form you would like to receive these reports (physical copy, digital copy). We anticipate that these documents will be complete in the Fall of 2024. Should you have any questions in the meantime, or interest in discussing the progress of our analysis, please contact Jenna Smith : jsmith@direction.ca

Consent

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.”

Participant's printed name & signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's printed name & signature: _____

Date: _____

Annex 3 - Plan to Protect (™) Policy for Protection in cases of domestic violence in Churches

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We strongly encourage you to listen to our corresponding webinar to provide background on the recommendations provided in this document, available at www.plantoprotectschool.com

We are grateful for the work of CCADA for their commitment to addressing Domestic Violence.
<https://ccada.org/>

This policy was inspired by the good work of Christian Direction in Montreal and their Rapha Study, a comprehensive study on the prevalence of Domestic Violence in Quebec, published in 2024. The Rapha Project is a study of experiences of domestic abuse and the response of the church in Quebec. Though this study focuses on Quebec, there is much to learn from their findings that apply to all organizations.
www.direction.ca/rapha

Domestic Abuse / Intimate Partner Violence

Introduction

Seeking Safety

(adapted from the book “Healing the Broken Places” by Kate Johnson)

When it comes to one’s own safety and the safety of their children, we can never be too careful. Although nothing can guarantee their safety, there are things we can do that will add to their ability to feel safer and more protected. Psalm 140: 1-5 states, *“Rescue me, O Lord, from evil men; Preserve me from violent men Who devise evil things in their hearts; They continually stir up wars. They sharpen their tongues as a serpent; Poison of a viper is under their lips. Selah. Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked; Preserve me from violent men Who have purposed to trip up my feet. The proud have hidden a trap for me, and cords; They have spread a net by the wayside; They have set snares for me. Selah.”* (NASU). This scripture is not talking about rescue physical violence, but verbal and mental anguish.

When we think of safety, it is also important to learn about safe people and unsafe people. It is all part of personal safety. Unsafe people are those who you ask for support and they are all too willing to give you advice, tell you what you should do, and/or tell others what is happening. Safe people respect decisions, and help individuals think through choices, they do so in a supportive way where the individual will feel empowered and loved. It is important to be a safe person and help individuals find safe people with whom they can be themselves and receive encouragement. Everyone has a right to safety in all relationships.

Just as God commands David to seek safety from Saul when his life is in danger, so God wants each person to be safe from those who would do harm. Another example of God condoning seeking safety is the story of Rahab hiding the spies.

When Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. It was told the king of Jericho, saying, “Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.” And the king of Jericho sent word to

Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. “It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. Joshua 2:1-7 (emphasis added).

In this, we can clearly see that God blesses those who help His people escape from those seeking to harm them. It is no different for those in abusive situations. The Lord is our protector, using whatever means are available to do His will. And His will is for everyone to be safe.

What a safety plan is and isn't:

A safety plan will help individuals to be safer both in and out of the relationship. Individuals experiencing domestic abuse are wise to seek help and take care of themselves and their children. Emotional, psychological, sexual and spiritual safety are just as important as physical safety. Scripture shows us that we have a right to not only protect ourselves, but God wants us to be safe. God is our refuge and our strength for our spiritual health and well-being, but our physical health and well-being depends on careful planning. It is also important to know that leaving an abusive relationship does not guarantee one's safety. As the abusive person feels that they are losing their power, they may escalate their abuse in order to try to regain their power and control. The most dangerous time is when a victim of domestic abuse decides to leave or just after they have left the relationship. This does not mean they should stay. It just means that they must be careful. The Church can be instrumental in helping victims of domestic violence find safety.

Below is a suggested safety plan for victims of domestic violence. There are great community resources and shelters available for families fleeing from domestic violence.

“Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief... I have become like broken pottery... But my trust is in you, O God; I say, ‘YOU are my God’ My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.”

Psalms 31:9-15 (NIV)

Definitions

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour used by one person to gain power and control over another person with whom he or she has, or has had, an intimate relationship with. This pattern of behaviour may include physical violence, sexual, emotional and psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, stalking, and using electronic devices to harass and control their partner or ex-partner.

Exposure to Domestic Violence

Children who live in homes where a parent or caretaker is experiencing abuse are commonly referred to as "child witnesses" or "children who are witnessing" domestic violence. Children's exposure to domestic violence typically falls into three primary categories: hearing a violent event; being directly involved as an eyewitness, intervening, or being used as a part of a violent event (e.g., being used as a shield against abusive actions); and or experiencing the aftermath of a violent event.

Children's exposure to domestic violence also may include being used as a spy to interrogate the adult victim, being forced to watch or participate in the abuse of the victim and being used as a pawn by the abuser to coerce the victim into returning to the violent relationship. Some children are physically injured as a direct result of the domestic violence. Some perpetrators intentionally physically, emotionally, or sexually abuse their children in an effort to intimidate and control their partner. In addition to being exposed to the abusive behaviour, many children are further victimized by coercion to remain silent about the abuse, maintaining the "family secret."

Policy

[Name of Church] is committed to providing an environment of safety for their members and adherents. [Name of Church] does not condone any form of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. As such, we will not dismiss, ignore, downplay or tolerate violent behaviour of our staff or volunteers, during or outside of our programs or services. We expect Ministry Personnel to be pursuing holiness and righteousness in their daily lives and interaction with others.

Ministry Personnel should notify leadership if a restraining order is in effect or if a potentially violent non-work/ministry-related situation, such as domestic violence exists that could result in violence at the church.

Program Leads, Staff and Leadership have an additional responsibility to act immediately on observation of a potentially dangerous situation of domestic violence. Leadership and Program Leads are responsible for addressing potential problems before they become serious. Immediately complete a Suspected Abuse Report Form and submit it to leadership. See also Responding to Vulnerable Adult Abuse Policy Statement. All information gleaned will be handled with confidentiality and only shared on a need-to-know basis.

Learning of Domestic Violence from the Alleged Victim:

All reports of domestic violence will be taken seriously and the alleged victim will be provided trauma-informed pastoral care, a Safety Plan, including but not limited to reporting it to the police and if willing will be referred to a licensed therapist who will provide trauma-informed individual counselling.

Ministry Personnel are to encourage the person to make the report, and support them in their decision, whatever they decide. At no time should the individual be discouraged or instructed not to call the police or to stay living in a home where they or their children are exposed to an abusive relationship.

Ministry Personnel must not force or coerce the victim to report, nor can they make the report on behalf of the victim. Victims must consent and be engaged in the reporting process. However if and when the victim is ready and willing to report the abuse, Ministry Personnel can be present and support the victim in the reporting.

If children are involved, there is a mandatory duty to report. This report must be made to Child and Family Services^[1] or the police. (See also policy statement on Hearing and Reporting Allegations of Child Abuse).

From time to time, [Name of Church] will provide opportunities for the community to gain greater knowledge and understanding of domestic violence including community support groups, stress management, conflict resolution, nonviolent crisis intervention, bullying and violence, etc.

The needs of the alleged victim and the children must be paramount.

Learning of Domestic Violence from the Alleged Perpetrator and/or Dealing with the Alleged Perpetrator of Domestic Violence:

All disclosures of domestic violence will be taken seriously.

Do not confront individuals accused of domestic violence until such time as the alleged victim is in a safe home or shelter.

The Alleged Perpetrator will be provided pastoral care and referred to a licensed therapist for individual counselling.

If the individual is a staff member or person in leadership, they must be temporarily suspended until an investigation is completed and their name has been cleared or they receive a recommendation from the licensed therapist that they can return to active service.

[Name of Church] will recommend and provide opportunities to gain greater knowledge and understanding of domestic violence including community support groups, stress and anger management, conflict resolution, nonviolent crisis intervention, bullying and violence, etc.

Conducting an investigation of Domestic Violence

If a report has been made to legal authorities, [Name of Church] will leave the investigation of Domestic Violence to the Director of Youth Protection or law enforcement.

If a report has not been made and children are not involved, but the alleged perpetrator is a staff member, or a person in leadership in the church, [Name of Church] reserves the right to investigate the allegations of domestic violence. [Name of Church] will appoint a third party investigator or individuals without bias to investigate the allegations and determine the preponderance of evidence of the domestic abuse.

If the allegations are substantiated, [Name of Church] reserves the right to practice progressive steps of discipline, requiring steps to be taken to address the abusive behaviour.

Also refer to policy statements on Disciplinary Action and Whistleblower.

Safety Plan for Victims of Domestic Violence

Be Prepared to Get Away...

Keep a spare set of keys, a set of clothes, important papers, prescriptions and some money with someone you trust.

Keep any evidence of physical abuse (ripped clothes, pictures taken of injuries or destruction of property) or verbal abuse or threats (messages left on the phone or voice mail).

Plan the safest time to get away.

Keep your cell phone with you at all times in case violence escalates and you need to get help. If you do not have a cell phone, contact your local domestic violence agency or police department to see if they have a free 911 phone.

Know where you can go for help. Tell someone you trust what is happening to you so that someone else knows.

Call the police if you or your children are in immediate danger.

If you are injured, go to the hospital or doctor and ask them to document your injuries and cause in your file.

Plan with your children and identify a safe place for them to go or someone to call for help. Teach them how to call 911. Reassure them it is not their job to take care of you, but to stay safe.

Arrange a signal with a neighbor or friend to notify them of danger (such as turning on a porch light in the daytime) so they can call for help.

Contact your local domestic violence hotline to find out about area resources to use during a crisis (such as a shelter) or for support.

Seek out individual (not couples) trauma-informed pastoral care and professional counselling from a licensed therapist.

[1] In Québec, this is the Director of Youth Protection. Please consult: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/childhood/services-youth-difficulty-families/youth-protection/reporting-a-situation-to-the-director-of-youth-protection/how-to-report-a-situation>

Annex 4 - "Charte d'engagement contre les violences conjugales de la Fédération des Églises
évangéliques baptistes de la France"

NOTRE ÉGLISE

1. **IDENTIFIE** la violence conjugale comme l'agression d'une personne dans le contexte d'une relation de couple. Cela inclut la violence physique, sexuelle, psychologique, spirituelle, émotionnelle ou financière.
2. **AFFIRME** que la violence conjugale dans toutes ses formes est inadmissible, injustifiable et irréconciliable avec la foi chrétienne.
3. **RECONNAÎT** que la maltraitance conjugale est un problème sérieux, qui se produit aussi bien dans des couples chrétiens que dans la société en général.
4. **S'ENGAGE** à écouter, soutenir, orienter et prendre soin des personnes victimes de violence conjugale.
5. **ACCORDE** toujours la plus grande priorité à la sécurité des personnes victimes de la violence conjugale. Si tu es un enfant et que tu es témoin ou victime de violence à la maison, parles-en à notre référent (voir son nom au point 10). En parler n'est pas manquer d'amour envers la personne qui vous maltraite, toi ou tes proches. Tu as le droit d'être protégé, de vivre en sécurité.
6. **CROIT** en un Dieu de justice et d'amour.
7. **ENSEIGNE** et cherche à vivre l'égalité hommes-femmes, créés tous deux à l'image de Dieu.
8. **JOUE SON RÔLE** en enseignant que la violence conjugale est un péché. Elle s'oppose aux enseignements que l'on tire de la Bible dans l'intention de justifier ces comportements ou minimiser les différentes formes de maltraitance.
9. **FAIT CONNAÎTRE** aux victimes les associations d'aide et les ressources existant pour leur accompagnement.
10. **S'ENGAGE** à permettre la formation de personnes référentes sur ce sujet et à sensibiliser ses membres sur cette question.

Dans cette Église, voici les coordonnées de la personne à contacter si vous avez des questions, ou si vous souhaitez un accompagnement en toute confidentialité, en lien avec cette douloureuse question de la violence conjugale :

C'est maintenant le moment d'agir, ensemble

Adoptée par l'Église de :

Date :

A l'occasion de :

Stop à la violence conjugale !

CAHIER DES CHARGES DE LA PERSONNE-RÉFÉRENTS

Comité contre les violences conjugales

A la suite de la diffusion de la « Charte d'engagement de l'Eglise contre les violences conjugales », nous vous proposons ci-dessous un « cahier des charges » pour la personne choisie comme référente pour la communauté.

Nous recommandons, autant que possible, que ce référent soit une femme parce que les victimes, majoritairement des femmes, se confieront plus facilement à une personne du même sexe.

Un homme victime de violences conjugales, se confiera, s'il le souhaite, à un frère de l'Eglise qui fera le lien avec la personne-référent.

I. Son rôle

La personne-référent sert d'« interface » :

- elle oriente les victimes de violences conjugales vers la (les) bonne(s) personne(s) ou association(s) ; elle n'est ni leur thérapeute, ni l'expert juridique, ni le foyer d'accueil qui assure l'accompagnement des victimes, mais elle les adresse vers les personnes compétentes ;

- elle sensibilise la communauté sur le sujet des violences conjugales. Elle peut pour cela utiliser les ressources mises à disposition sur le site de la FEEBF : <https://actus.feebf.com/reflexions/contre-les-violences-conjugales>

II. Sa formation

La personne-référent doit avoir suivi obligatoirement la formation de base sur les violences conjugales, proposée chaque année par la FEEBF (une douzaine d'heures réparties sur 2 journées). Les dates et modalités des sessions de formation seront disponibles sur le site FEEBF.

L'Eglise est invitée à réfléchir à la prise en charge financière d'au moins une partie de cette formation pour sa personne-référent.

Puisque la personne-référent oriente les victimes, elle doit bien connaître les ressources disponibles, et surtout localement (3919, associations notamment le

CIDFF, aide juridique et sociale...).

Elle assiste à la rencontre annuelle prévue au niveau national par la FEEBF entre personnes-référents et formateurs. Cette rencontre lui permet de se tenir régulièrement au courant de l'évolution de la prise en charge des victimes dans les domaines législatif, associatif (création d'associations locales, régionales, possibilités d'hébergement d'urgence, partenaires locaux, procédures médicales locales d'urgence...), et également d'être elle-même accompagnée.

III. Sa nomination

Elle doit être validée par le conseil de l'Eglise locale qui peut fixer une durée pour son mandat.

Il serait préférable que la personne-référent travaille en collaboration avec l'équipe pastorale locale. Malgré tout, elle est garante de la confidentialité envers les personnes qu'elle épaulé. En particulier, rien ne doit être publié, communiqué ou archivé sous quelque forme que ce soit concernant cette victime, de façon à la protéger, et à protéger ses enfants si elle en a.

Nous encourageons le conseil de l'Eglise locale à faire le point avec la personne-référent de façon régulière (annuellement).

IV. Ressources

Si le conseil de l'Eglise locale a besoin d'aide pour discerner qui pourrait être cette personne-référent ou en cas de survenue d'un problème de violences conjugales, nous encourageons les responsables de la communauté à contacter directement la FEEBF qui pourra les mettre en relation avec une personne ressource.

Le comité contre les violences conjugales, 5 janvier 2021