Survey Report: Domestic Violence and the Church

When the Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts website was launched in November 2017, the website included a survey, developed by the Christian Research Association, which gauged the attitudes of respondents to domestic and family violence. The Christian Research Association has compiled the results of the survey and has given the LCA a report.

The responses to the survey indicate that there is a good understanding of the factors that may contribute to domestic and family violence and its impact on children. Nevertheless, there are also some responses to other sections of the survey that invite further reflection.

A number of respondents indicated that individuals may contribute to the violence inflicted on them. This position indicates the need for more education within the church, as there is no excuse for using violence, even if it occurs during the course of an argument for instance. The perpetrator must take full responsibility for the recourse to violence.

There was also a number of respondents who still felt that their ‘faith tradition teaches that men are better equipped to undertake leadership roles within the church’. The inference here is that women are to be submissive to men, who are the heads of church and families. The LCA’s Statement on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage, however, states that the purpose of marriage is ‘to unite one man and one woman (that is husband and wife) so that they become “one flesh”. In this relationship the one person is the complement of the other (Matthew 19:5)’. The emphasis here is on the mutuality of the marriage relationship.

Most respondents did agree that there are some religious beliefs and practices that have been used to justify violence against women. Using Scripture as an excuse to abuse women and children is never acceptable.

Respondents were allowed space at the end of the survey to make personal comments. Several comments made by women indicated that, as victims, they felt that they were not supported by their congregations, with one respondent stating that her congregation had ‘shunned’ her after she left a violent relationship.

Several male respondents stated that they, too, had been victims of domestic violence. We acknowledge that men can be the victims of abuse, but we continue to note the evidence that women, in the main, are on the receiving end of violent behaviour. Statistics cited by the Christian Research Association indicate that ‘women are five times more likely than men to require medical attention or hospitalisation as a result of intimate partner violence, and five times more likely to report fearing for their lives’.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The survey suggested that there is a general and growing awareness of domestic violence within the church and the wider community, which provides a solid basis on which the LCA can continue to generate a deeper understanding of the issues and responses to them. This will include:

* Training of pastors and church leaders so that all people in positions of trust in congregations and institutions can provide appropriate support to any person who is a victim of domestic abuse. Training will be rolled out across LCA Districts in 2019.
* Raising awareness of the underlying causes of domestic and family violence is also important so that we can avoid being judgemental of a victim or falling into the trap of excusing a perpetrator. The report suggests that we need to engage in ‘constructive dialogue and education’ in order to promote a greater understanding of the issues.
* Further research in the area. The Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts project is actively considering this recommendation.

Above all, we will be led by Jesus Christ to work for peace-filled relationships in our church and community that will truly reflect his reconciling love for all creation.

1. http://www.ourwatch.org.au/Understanding-Violence/Facts-and-Figures [↑](#footnote-ref-1)