

Religion and domestic violence: Exploring men's perpetration

Final report May 2023

SWIRLS | Social Work Innovation Research Living Space

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we meet and work. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded. We pay our respects to First Nations Elders past, present and emerging and affirm our commitment to the ongoing work of reconciliation.

We recognise the past atrocities against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this land and that Australia was founded on the genocide and dispossession of First Nations people. We acknowledge that colonial structures and policies remain in place today and recognise the ongoing struggles of First Nations people in dismantling those structures.

Adapted from <https://acij.org.au/about-us/acknowledgement-of-country/>

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Acronyms and terminology used in the Report

CTICR

Refers to the Lutheran Church of Australia's Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations

Domestic violence

Also known as intimate partner violence. As defined in the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022, p. 37): "Intimate partner violence, also commonly referred to as 'domestic violence', refers to any behaviour within an intimate relationship (including current or past marriages, domestic partnerships, or dates) that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm. This is the most common form of violence against women. Intimate partner violence can also occur outside of a domestic setting, such as in public and between 2 people who do not live together."

DSTO

Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions

Faith-based organisation (FBO)

The term FBO is inclusive of all religions, faiths and spiritualities.

Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA)

In providing a history of Lutherans in Australia, Zweck (2009, p. 394) describes how "the LCA is part of the worldwide Lutheran family of churches that originate from the Reformation of the 16th century ... The LCA is a confessional and evangelical Lutheran Church. When Lutherans say 'evangelical', they mean based on the evangel, that is, the gospel (good news) ... When the LCA claims to be a 'confessional' church, it means that its pastors and people accept, without reservation, the confessions of the evangelical Lutheran Church as contained in the Book of Concord of 1580 as a true exposition of the teaching of the Bible".

National Plan

Refers to the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022).

Perpetrators

Refers to the individuals who physically, mentally, sexually, socially, financially, and spiritually abuse others.

Religion

In acknowledging the diversity of religions and the difficulty of a singular definition, Possamai and Tittensor (2022, p. 8) note the difference between a "substantive understanding of religion; that is, what people say religion is" and a functionalist approach meaning "what it does for people or groups". We acknowledge this important point and as well, note Bouma's (2009, p. 23) description to assist articulating religion: "Both religions and spiritualities provide a basis for hope in contexts of uncertainty and fear, by affirming and celebrating such ideas and experiences as the interconnectedness of each with all; the existence of a being who cares, intervenes, judges and rewards or punishes; there being a time beyond this time when all will be made right; or the existence of a pro-life gradient, a life force in the universe."

Victim-survivors

As described in the National Plan victim-survivors are "people who have experienced family and domestic violence or gender-based violence. This term is understood to acknowledge the strength and resilience shown by people who have experienced or are currently living with violence" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022, p. 134).

Foreword by Bishop Paul Smith

I thank our gracious God for our sisters and brothers in Christ who have undertaken the important work in preparing this report for you. As you read through their work, please receive this report as a guide for the people of the Lutheran Church, to help us to grow in our understanding of what it means to love one another as we are loved by God.

At the heart of this report is the call for wider, open discussion and engagement in the Church around the issues of domestic violence. This report is full of consolation about the careful and deliberate work that we have already undertaken in confronting domestic violence, not only in society but in also in our churches.

But the report also tells us that there is still a lot more that needs to be done in our Church, to deepen our understanding of what is domestic violence, to identify it and to adequately respond to it. "How do congregations name it?" the report rightly asks.

So, we ask the Lord of our Church to give us wisdom from above as we purposefully take up this work. In his 2018 message to the Church, addressing this issue of violence amongst us, Bishop John Henderson directed us to the book of James, Chapter 3, where we are taught: *"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace."*

Let me express thanksgiving on behalf of the people of the Lutheran Church to Professor Sarah Wendt, Dr Josephine Clarke and Professor Wendy Mayer, and to all involved in producing this report. May its recommendations help to enable safe and flourishing Christian communities for women and men in the Lutheran Church both in Australia and New Zealand.

Bishop Paul Smith, Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand, 4 May 2023

Foreword by the Domestic Violence Taskforce of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand

The Domestic Violence Taskforce of the Lutheran Church of Australia and New Zealand welcomes this groundbreaking research report. It has been a privilege to support the research project by providing feedback throughout the process.

It is 30 years since a Church-wide convention first adopted a statement on domestic violence. It named the issue, condemned violence, and called for an appropriate response both to survivors and to perpetrators of violence. At that time ecumenical resources and training were provided in Queensland and South Australia, which specifically addressed the prevalence of domestic and family violence in churches and in communities and explored the many forms of abuse, including spiritual abuse. While some Lutherans took up opportunities to learn in an ecumenical setting, and others continued to raise the issue wherever possible, it wasn't until 2015 that the LCANZ was prepared to resource and launch a campaign called *Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts*, to raise awareness of domestic violence to equip pastoral carers to respond appropriately.

The *Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts* campaign is ongoing and continues to grapple with the issues of interconnections of theology and domestic violence, especially the difficulties of responding appropriately in a pastoral setting both to victim-survivors and perpetrators of abuse. This research takes these questions to a much deeper level and provides even more challenges for us as a church and as part of the wider Christian community.

We are grateful for this closer, independent examination of the link between religion and domestic violence within the LCANZ. The analysis of both written documents and the reflections of interviewees led to some important conclusions but also to some extremely important, and perhaps uncomfortable, questions and recommendations. We hope the Church leadership will take these seriously and act on them, because the lives of those caught up in the dangerous cycle of domestic violence depend on it.

Executive Summary

Despite the growing research into the domestic violence experiences of different groups of women, religion and domestic violence is an area that is under-theorised and under-researched. In addition, there are limited studies that have interviewed Christian men regarding their use of violence in intimate partner relationships. The inclusion of men's own ecclesiastical beliefs and practices in the analysis of domestic violence is needed. Ecclesiastical beliefs and practices are part of socialisation; hence exploration of the interface between faith, family, institutions, and domestic violence from the viewpoints of men who use violence is needed to advance understandings and solutions. This research study therefore addressed the research question – what theological framings shape men's perpetration of domestic violence?

The study used a layered qualitative design which allowed for exploration of an under-researched, sensitive phenomena, such as religion and experiences of domestic violence. It contained three layers: (1) document analysis; (2) interviews with Pastors; and (3) interviews with men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships.

109 documents were analysed and the following findings were made:

- The LCA is seeking to increase its capacity to prevent and effectively respond to domestic violence. This work is documented, and the current campaign was first supported by a General Synod resolution in 2015.
- In the LCA's current *Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts: Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence Campaign*, the church has clearly identified it has a role in recognising, preventing, addressing and responding to the incidence of domestic violence, and that this role includes supporting survivors of violence, as well as holding perpetrators of abuse to account.
- Understanding the context to domestic violence involves understanding LCA perspectives on gendered identities and expectations, gender roles and relations, family and marriage.
- LCA statements and practices regarding women and their role in the church, are by implication also practices shaping Lutheran male identity and masculinity; however, the role and identity of men is not being problematised to the same extent.
- While the LCA has official theological statements and policies, document analysis work demonstrates the LCA is diverse and dominant ideas and discourses are challenged. The current dominant LCA gender order had adapted, continues to adapt and is also being challenged. For example, male-only public ministry remains current LCA practice; however, this practice has been challenged.
- Given theological debates for and against the exclusion of women from public ministry, the practice of exclusion and discrimination on the basis of gender cannot be disassociated from current LCA efforts to prevent and respond to domestic and family violence.
- Current use and interpretations of the theological concepts of headship, subordination and order in creation in official LCA policy¹ and practice are informing *the social and organisational* context to the current LCA campaign to address family and domestic violence. There is the risk of confused messaging about safe, peaceful and respectful gender relations including – but not limited to – the risk posed to women (and children) if women continue to be denied equal opportunities *within* the church as a religious organisation but also, the church as an entity providing context and support to congregational and family life.
- Theological arguments relying on prioritising select scripture and the authority of God's word and dominant hermeneutic interpretations regarding women's role and place in

¹ For example, see *DSTO Volume 1 F. Women in the church: The role of women in the church – point F4.*

marriage, the family and the church overwhelmingly do not discuss the *experiences and impacts* of the exclusion of women from public ministry – on women, men, congregations and families, for example. Arguments for reinforcing the Word of God and current practice are being disassociated from the impacts of practices of exclusion; authority and responsibility for the practice of exclusion of women from public ministry is deflected to the Word of God.

- Dominant theological arguments regarding the role of women in the church, the family and in relation to men and husbands, that result in reasserting a patriarchal gender order whereby women are denied equal opportunities in the church, congregational and family life, are informing discriminatory practices against women. Theological drivers of church-based gender and social norms that discriminate against Lutheran women and *limit equality* in gender relations through discourses and practices 'othering' women, are at risk of normalising and condoning unequal relations between women and men in intimate relationships.
- *The Domestic Violence Handbook for Pastoral Workers* advises pastoral workers in every pastoral session to ask, 'How can I empower this woman?' Applying this advice regarding addressing domestic and family violence at an individual/congregation member level can be connected to the wider context of the LCA. There is the opportunity for the LCA to revise its theological priorities and practices *throughout the church*, to support the campaign's intent but also, extend the LCA's capacity to promote safety and equality (for women and men; in relationships, families, congregations, workplaces) and address injustices on the basis of gender.

Eleven Pastors and one man were interviewed, and the following findings were made:

- All Pastors reflected on theological narratives that shape gender expectations and described these expectations as having a long history; hence they shape and describe constructions of identity for men, women and family life.
- Some Pastors recognised that women's roles and femininity are largely focused upon in family life and rarely men and masculinity are deconstructed because of male power and privilege.
- Some Pastors recognised that hermeneutics, arguments for inerrancy and infallible truths play a role in uncritical acceptance of gender inequality and gender constructions.
- Some Pastors named the concept of fear, explaining that when men's identities are being challenged, they fear for their relationship with God.
- Most Pastors believed many families informed by Lutheran teachings of family life, may not recognise or understand domestic violence because they associate it with physical abuse, and do not see or interpret emotional, psychological or verbal abuse as part of domestic violence because these forms of abuse are intertwined with constructions of gender expectations that allow inequality or reflect the gender order.
- Some Pastors named shame, explaining that men will resist shame and resist being positioned with sin, because they believe they are living the gendered expectations according to God's will.
- The book of Ephesians, Chapters 4-5 in the New Testament of the Bible was a reference most Pastors mentioned in terms of how men can use these teachings to justify their male privilege and status above women, and therefore, their use of violence.
- All Pastors expressed their worry or concern about responding to domestic violence, describing they felt they did not have the expertise or knowledge to do so.
- Some Pastors explained they learned about domestic violence 'on the job' and it was through their experience of helping families that they developed an awareness of domestic violence.
- Some Pastors said they did not receive support from the Lutheran Church or leaders when they sought knowledge or assistance for responding to domestic violence in their congregations and hence sought 'outside' help, mainly from women's shelters.

The findings of the study show that religious contexts inform how domestic violence, marriage, family life and intimate partner relations are understood, discussed, and experienced. Theological determinations and arguments for truths based on scriptural interpretation, it was found, restrain gender equality and this restraint needs further recognition to increase support for safe and peaceful intimate partner relations. The findings demonstrate how the LCA is committed to addressing domestic violence and at the same time, troubled by aspects of Lutheran teachings and practice that are informing gender relations, roles and subjectivities, and that are constraining the care, peace and respect needed to address the risk of practices of harm and abuse.

The study concludes that gender inequality supports domestic violence – the two are inseparable and therefore it is imperative to understand the wider context and influences at work that shape practices of social exclusion and gender-based inequalities in religious settings.

The following recommendations are made based on the document analysis, interviews, discussion, and conclusion:

- Understand and celebrate gender equality.
- Support Bishops, Pastors, and other leaders to understand and respond to domestic violence.
- Explore and grow pastoral practice that focuses on men and masculinity.

Background

Faith and religious institutions have been recognised as important places for seeking help and counselling by individuals and families to improve psychological and mental health wellbeing. Studies have also established how spirituality and religion help victim-survivors of domestic violence recover from its impacts and related trauma and have explored understandings and responses by religious leaders (Turhan, 2023) . In comparison, few studies have examined how faith, religion, and spirituality influence men's perpetration of domestic violence. There are potentially many reasons for this including the diversity of religion and fear on the part of researchers of misunderstanding beliefs and practices, and the personal nature of spirituality (Wendt & Zannettino, 2015) . Perhaps more difficult to name is the wider gendered, political context of gender inequality that is present in leadership hierarchies and norms within religion (Ogden, 2022) .

Domestic violence is a serious and widespread problem internationally and in Australia. The *Australian National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* recognises that one in three women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and one in five has experienced sexual violence, and that on average, a woman is killed by an intimate partner every 10 days with rates of violence being even higher for certain groups, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women². *Furthermore, 95% of people who have experienced physical or sexual violence name a man as the perpetrator of at least one incident of violence and around four in five family and domestic violence offenders are men.*³

The evidence regarding the extent of domestic violence in religious communities is limited, however as Pepper and Powell (2022) report, in Christian populations it is estimated to be comparable to figures for the wider population. In Australia, the Anglican church commissioned the *National Anglican Family Violence Project* to investigate the prevalence of domestic violence in the Anglican community. A key finding of this research is that “the

²https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2022/national_plan_to_end_violence_against_women_and_children_2022-2032.pdf .

³ ibid

prevalence of intimate partner violence among Anglicans was the same or higher than in the wider Australian community" (Pepper & Powell, 2021, p. 5).

Reporting on the results of the *2016 National Church Life Survey*, Pepper and Powell (2022) note that overall, two-thirds of Christian leaders have experienced dealing with situations of domestic violence. Survey results with respect to Lutheran clergy report:

Some 93% of clergy dealt with victims of abuse – by counselling them (82%), referring them to specialist services (68%), and/or much less commonly conducting a safety risk assessment (18%). Around half of clergy (54%) either counselled perpetrators or referred perpetrators or did both (46% counselled, 25% referred).

Around half (54%) provided marriage or couples counselling in relation to DFV situations. Couples counselling is problematic. (NCLS, 2022)

The *Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence* (2016) recommended that faith leaders and communities establish processes for examining the ways in which they currently respond to domestic violence in their communities and explore practices of prevention or reporting of, or recovery from, domestic violence (Pepper & Powell, 2022). Just prior to this time, the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) established the *Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence Campaign*. The establishment of the campaign was requested by the 2015 General Convention of Synod, the highest decision-making body in the LCA. The campaign involves raising awareness in congregations, schools and other institutions of the church, as well as training, research, identifying and developing resources, and recommending and implementing specific actions to support and respond to both victim-survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence. The campaign was titled *Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts* and a Domestic Violence Taskforce was established in 2017. The campaign is overseen by a working group of people – known as the Taskforce – who have knowledge and expertise in the areas of support to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. Understanding women's experiences is vital in domestic violence research, and much of what is known about domestic violence and religion comes from women's stories. Women have long navigated, survived, and participated in research so that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners can seek to understand and combat domestic violence; men who use violence are, by contrast, largely invisible. Men's accounts and talk of violence are rarely analysed in research, therefore, in 2019, the Taskforce partnered with Professor Sarah Wendt and Professor Wendy Mayer and won an Australian Research Council Grant (PROJECT ID: LP190100269) to explore how religious beliefs and practices shaped men's perpetration of domestic violence.

The title of the project is *Religion and domestic violence: exploring men's use of violence in intimate partner relationships*.

As challenging as this endeavor seemed, this research was embarked upon for several reasons:

- The Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA) wants to reduce the incidence and effects of domestic violence in the church.
- Faith and religious communities want to talk about male domination and control and begin a re-examination of male attitudes to women.
- Church communities want to re-examine the ways in which they provide support to victim-survivors of abuse and challenge the values and behaviors of those who perpetrate it.

Introduction

There are limited international studies – and no Australian studies – that have interviewed Christian men regarding their use of violence in intimate partner relationships. In the Australian context, the research opportunity lies in exploring and identifying how Christian men misuse religious beliefs or practices to force women into subordinate roles or to justify physical violence or other forms of abuse, therefore the project was informed to address this significant gap and contribute to knowledge in this field. The **aims of the project** were:

- describe how Christian beliefs and practices can contribute to and perpetuate domestic violence;
- understand how a Christian denomination (Lutheran) responds to domestic violence;
- determine how men understand their use of violence in intimate and family relationships within the contexts of their Christian beliefs and practices;
- identify and analyse the perpetration of spiritual abuse as a form of domestic violence;
- explore men's help-seeking experiences inside their church settings; and
- identify strategies that will enable church settings to engage with men to enable attitudinal and behavioural change to stop the use of violence.

The coming together of academics in social work and religion, specifically to research and understand how men engage with and use religious teachings to justify domestic violence, is **innovative and pioneering**. The project was small and exploratory for the purpose of sensitively undertaking research to acquire new knowledge about the perpetration and justification of violence against women in Australia. Despite this, research is needed into the central features of spiritual traditions, beliefs and practices that perpetuate different forms of abuse within intimate partner relationships. Domestic violence impacts on future generations, the development and productivity of communities, cultural preservation, social harmony, and the health of individuals and families (Franzway et al., 2019).

Methodology

Design

The project used a layered qualitative design. A small sample size is necessary for exploratory, under-researched, sensitive phenomena such as religion and experiences of domestic violence. Qualitative designs are used to enable in-depth insights into a complex issue, particularly with hard-to-reach populations (men who use violence) (Robinson, 2014).

This study focused on one denomination of Christianity – Lutheranism, as practiced by the LCA – enabling deep exploration, explanation, and illustration of men's use of violence in a specific religious context (Yin, 2012). This allows researchers and practitioners to engage with the complexities, nuances and idiosyncrasies of domestic violence and religion, and take such learnings into other contexts (Wendt et al., 2015).

The research project's initial design contained three layers: (1) document analysis; (2) interviews with Pastors; and (3) interviews with men who use violence in their intimate partner relationships. Additionally, qualitative surveys were introduced to support the second and third layers.

Document analysis

A document analysis was conducted to build an understanding of how the LCA and Lutheran theology has understood and addressed domestic violence over time. This was important for two reasons. First, to understand the key theological drivers shaping viewpoints on domestic violence in the LCA, and second, to understand how the LCA has instigated policy and practice reform to address domestic violence in the past. The document analysis work and findings also informed interview schedules.

Sample

The approach used to select documents is best described as a process of purposive sampling (Cooper, 1988) where locating and reviewing only the central or key documents that published content on domestic violence and Lutheran gender relations. This type of sampling is especially useful in the earlier, exploratory stages of research when there is a lack of empirical evidence in a specific topic area. Expert input was therefore sought from Professor Wendy Mayer, Dr Anna Nürnberger, and Taskforce members to ensure highly relevant documents, materials, and policies were included in the analysis (Benoot et al., 2016).

Documents were sourced in the following ways:

- from the research project's partner Chief Investigator representing the LCA⁴
- from the *Lutheran Theological Journal*
- from the Lutheran Church of Australia's website
- from the LCA's Domestic Violence Taskforce members
- from *The Lutheran*.

Relevant articles from the *Lutheran Theological Journal* (LTJ) were sourced using two strategies. The LTJ has been published since 1967. Articles from the LTJ from December 1997 are available through the Flinders University online library using the ProQuest database. Using ProQuest, the LTJ (from 1997) was searched for articles using several terms (search numbers are in brackets):

- "role of women" (15)
- "divorce" (16)
- "family life" (14)
- "domestic violence" (9)
- "family violence" (4)
- "gender" (53)
- "marriage" (104)
- "children" (255 – excluded due to size of search results)
- "perpetrators" (8).

Of the results and after noting duplicated results, 44 references from these searches were initially identified as potentially relevant. As document analysis work progressed the ProQuest database was again searched for the term "abuse" (72 total results). Results from the search on "marriage" were revised to consider the first 20 results given the large number of results, and two were considered potentially relevant. The *Lutheran Theological Journal* Index of Articles was also checked for any articles referencing domestic and family violence.

Second, potential articles for inclusion from the LTJ prior to December 1997 were separately identified by additional research support provided by the Australian Lutheran College.⁵

This manual search was guided by looking for articles that consider women, ordination, children, family and divorce – that is, articulate the role of women and men including with respect to family life, gendered responsibilities, gender relations and the role of the Church. From this search 41 articles were identified as potentially relevant. Due to the large number of articles from the LTJ identified as potentially useful a decision was made to limit the number of LTJ articles analysed and prioritise a focus on those that discussed domestic violence. Editorials and book reviews were excluded. The 14 documents provided by the Chief Investigator representing the LCA included a selection of Lutheran journal articles and documents produced by the Lutheran World Federation. The latter were included to provide

⁴ Emeritus Professor Wendy Mayer, University of Divinity

⁵ The authors would like to acknowledge the research support provided by Dr Anna Nürnberger, Director of Research, Australian Lutheran College.

global context for LCA public documents.⁶⁷ There were also occasions when references in a document or article led to a mention of another key document to consider.

Later in the document analysis process – and following feedback from LCA's DV Taskforce – additional content was included from *The Lutheran* (a LCA publication) to support considering lived experiences. A decision was made to seek out articles, editorials and letters to the editor from 1993 which was the year the LCA General Synod made its first resolution on the matter of domestic violence, and also to limit the number of documents reviewed to ensure the research team had the time and resources to consider documents from this publication. Documents were requested in response to the following criteria:

- content that discusses domestic and family violence, and abuse,
- any published material authored by the current LCA *Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts* campaign, and
- any articles or letters to the editor (or other) that discuss the ordination of women, the authority of scripture, order of creation, subordination, and male headship.

As Table 1 displays, a total of 109 documents were analysed

Type of document	Number
Documents produced by the Lutheran Church of Australia	
Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions	6
LCA Domestic Violence Campaign documents (includes website)	3
Internal documents prepared by the LCA DV Taskforce	4
Other LCA documents	4
LCA policy documents	5
Other documents	
Articles from the <i>Lutheran Theological Journal</i>	24
Letters to the editor, editorials, and articles from <i>The Lutheran</i>	60
Documents produced by the Lutheran World Federation	3

⁶ Documents produced by the Lutheran World Federation were also suggested by other research project stakeholders

⁷ To provide additional context information, the LCA is an associate member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and of the International Lutheran Council (ILC). ILC public documents were not systematically reviewed.

Analysis framework

A framework was developed to support document analysis and consistency. Poststructuralist theory was utilised to inform and guide document analysis work as it enables analysis of issues, experiences, institutions and discourses, with a focus on understanding power as relational, and enables insights into how power and knowledge are connected. The framework and theoretical underpinning also supported identifying constructions of 'truths' that inform and impact everyday lives, practices, social and gender relations, and regulation and governance including that practised in a religious context and by the LCA (Foucault, 1980; Hall, 2001; McLaren, 2002). Specifically, this research engaged with Foucault's approach to theorising and analysing discourse as the interest was to gather insights into LCA documents and theological determinations that express the conceptualisation of power and knowledge guiding Lutheran practices with respect to gender relations, gendered subjectivities and importantly, the 'problematization' (Bacchi, 2009) of domestic violence in a Lutheran religious context.

Further, Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach to policy analysis was identified as useful to assist the document analysis method. Bacchi's (2009, p. xii) method includes six questions to problematise policy or rules and aims "to interrogate the problem representations that lodge within public policies in order to see what they include and what they leave out".

The framework developed includes these questions to guide document analysis:

- How are the documents describing and representing domestic violence?
- Historical perspectives – how do narratives about and representations of domestic violence change over time?
- How are the documents representing family life, intimacy and gender relations?
- How do the documents represent gendered subjects – including but not limited to femininity and masculinity?
- How are the documents representing who is impacted by domestic violence e.g. women, women and men, children, congregation?
- Do the documents reference controversies or differences?
- Are differences of opinion within the LCA described and/or critiqued?
- How is safety, duty of care and responsibility articulated?
- How are supports, services and help-seeking strategies being discussed?
- Is gender equality discussed?
- How does the LCA articulate its role and strategy in addressing the problem of domestic violence? Look for discussions of working with and supporting women who have experienced violence, working with male perpetrators, education and training (for whom?)/religious instruction, for example.
- In all of these points, what specific Christian Lutheran beliefs, scripture references and practices are being referred to, directed at whom, and for what use and outcome?

Further:

- Is the document a private or public document? (Bryman, 2016)
- Who is the targeted audience/reader, and is there clarity of document meaning or can there be other interpretations? (Bryman, 2016)
- What assumptions are being made in discussions? (adapted from Bacchi, 2009)
- Are there any 'silences' to note? (adapted from Bacchi, 2009)
- Where have the documents been produced and distributed? (adapted from Bacchi, 2009)

Reflexivity

The purposive sampling strategy, theoretical considerations and document analysis framework were also informed by feminist reflexivity in research practice, and this needs to be further explained when considering how articles from the *Lutheran Theological Journal* were selected. Being reflexive in research requires reflecting in action, that is, as researchers we continually questioned claims to knowledge (Daly, 2010). Adapting the frequent emphasis of reflexivity to empirical research, to the document analysis practice of this study, involved writing about decision-making practices on what to include and exclude and key reflections including challenges in reading theological articles and arguments. Additionally, the researcher leading the document analysis sought out clarification on key theological concepts when needed. This emphasises the various epistemological frameworks at work in engaging with religious discourses and theology as researchers work across disciplines⁸ and as Ackerly and True (2010) describe, draws attention to the relationship between feminist theory, method and researcher subjectivity.

This discussion of reflexivity is to identify some important considerations in the practice of doing feminist research on the relationship between religion and domestic violence, and is a conversation that returns to the point that the LCA has invested in the research with the support of its Domestic Violence Taskforce group. The intent of the research is to address domestic violence in the Australian Lutheran community, improve church understandings of the problem and support improved response practices. The document analysis therefore included considering theological articles from the *Lutheran Theological Journal* (LTJ) and theological arguments in order to understand how religion shapes gender relations and understandings of domestic violence. This is important to consider to further understand what can be done to prevent and respond to domestic violence and support recovery. The scope of research had a particular focus on considering how theology may shape and inform perpetrators' abusive actions, which shaped reflections in action.

The "interpretive" (Bacchi, 2009, p. 20) and reflexive aspect to engaging with theological arguments from the *LTJ* led to further revision during the process of doing the document analysis. For example, it quickly became apparent that the matter of hermeneutics is of utmost importance and, the matter of the role of women specifically with respect to the ordination of women. Journal articles excluded for example, are a number that consider and revise individual stories of women in the Bible, several – but not all – articles on the ordination of women, family life and children. While these articles are certainly important, due to resource limitations it was not possible to analyse the full range of articles identified as potentially relevant. That so many were identified indicate the legacy of how the *LTJ* has published Lutheran theological scholarship discussing and debating key matters pertaining to gender roles and gender relations.

A further consideration we took included noting the differences between the types of documents we have analysed. For example, LCA publicly available theological statements that guide LCA organising structure and practice within, are different to individually authored articles published in the *LTJ*. This prompted researcher discussion about the work of selecting and using theological articles, not only in the process of what articles are finally selected for inclusion, but also the feminist reading of articles that often contain arguments for inerrancy and infallible truths and are indicative of substantial conflict within the LCA, particularly regarding the role of women and the ordination of women. All articles are expressions of biblical witness and matters of faith and lived experience of Lutheran religiosity: this must be noted in feminist research practice investigating how the gender order and gender relations may be supporting violence against women.

⁸ The research team includes members whose disciplinary backgrounds include social work, social science and theology

Findings from the document analysis

Findings from the document analysis are now presented. First, we present the analysis of documents produced by the LCA and then analysis of articles published in the *Lutheran Theological Journal*. Third, a summary of findings from letters to the editor of *The Lutheran* publication are also provided. Finally, we discuss intertextual considerations reading across all the documents and present a summary of the findings from the document analysis.

Documents produced by the Lutheran Church of Australia

The document analysis clearly showed that the LCA is naming the problem of domestic violence and the history of this effort. In addition, four themes emerged from this document analysis including: representations of gender, safety, gender inequality and constructions of 'woman'.

Naming the problem of domestic violence

Document analysis showed that the Lutheran Church of Australia has a history of naming the problem of domestic violence, raising concerns about the issue and its impact, and developing initiatives to identify and respond to it. Over time, the trajectory of official LCA engagement with identifying and responding to domestic violence has transitioned from a broad-based statement acknowledging the significance of the issue to the current LCA domestic violence campaign involving multiple strategies to prevent and respond to domestic violence, support safety and manage risk.

In 1993 the LCA's Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions prepared a one-page statement on domestic violence that was adopted by the General Synod later that year (Lutheran Church of Australia [LCA], 1993). This document is a resolution by the LCA acknowledging the prevalence of domestic violence in the Australian and Lutheran community. The resolution acknowledges that domestic violence "has been defended as Christian discipline and the legitimate exercising of Christian authority" and goes on to condemn "all forms of violence in the family". Synod delegates resolved to support and respond to both victims and perpetrators of violence/ abusers. This is a short statement condemning violence and "call[ing] on people to live in the peace of Christ in their relationships in the family". The resolution also nominated education for "church workers and members ... in how to respond to both victims and abusers" and included encouraging LCA congregation members to participate in "studies which show what the Bible teaches us about the relationship between, and the equality of, men and women so that they are able to counteract the less than adequate versions of this that are being promulgated by some Christian groups in the name of Christianity". At that time with the 1993 statement the LCA makes a clear acknowledgement of the problem of domestic violence, that this has occurred and been defended in a Christian context. Furthermore, that the LCA has a role in addressing the problem and supporting victims and holding perpetrators to account for their use of violence, and resolves for education that demonstrates the Bible supports the equality of men and women.

At the LCA's General Synod in 2003, a resolution was made following the agenda item titled 'Creating a culture of peace.' The resolve details actions for the (then) current decade and thereafter, including supporting the availability of resources and "speaking out against" family violence; "material, emotional and spiritual support" to those experiencing violence; and promoting seminars about domestic violence with an awareness and prevention focus (LCA Inc., 2003, p. 26).

The LCA is currently implementing a campaign to prevent domestic and family violence, titled *Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts*. The campaign was established following a resolution made by the General Synod in 2015:

That the Convention of Synod reaffirms its condemnation of all forms of violence in the family and authorises GCC [General Church Council] to commit resources for a church-wide campaign to address the prevalence of Family Violence amongst us, which may

include sharing of resources, education initiatives and the provision of pastoral care to the survivors of violence, as well as the perpetrators of abuse. (LCA, n.d.)

The General Synod also resolved for the LCA's Commission on Theology and Inter- Church Relations (CTICR) to:

study the Lutheran theological and scriptural understanding of subordination and the role of male headship in marriage and the contextual implications for family violence. (LCA, 2018, p. 255)

The LCA established a taskforce on domestic violence in 2017. Similar to the 1993 resolution, in current LCA campaign documents it is recognised there is a need to support both victims of violence and perpetrators of violence, and to support families. Campaign documents have clear messaging about prioritising the safety of women and children. They also define and describe in detail types of domestic violence and discuss the impacts. Victim-survivor safety, risk and perpetrator accountability are all key considerations in campaign documents.

The 2017 *Domestic Violence Handbook for Pastoral Workers* (LCA 2017) offers examples of questions to support pastor and pastoral worker responses to victim-survivors and perpetrators, and promotes understanding limits to the support that can be provided and the need to work with service providers. The Handbook describes how responding to domestic violence within the church includes knowledge of, and relationships with, services outside the church. It is important to note the reference to pastoral support and care as intrinsic to efforts to recognise and respond to domestic violence, and the Handbook offers guidance on safety planning with victims to support and prioritise their and family members' safety. The campaign booklet discusses how victims of domestic violence need to be supported to feel safe in their faith community. The Handbook also clarifies that perpetrators make a choice to use violence and makes suggestions as to what constitutes taking responsibility for violent behaviour, and how to engage with and respond to perpetrators and support victim safety. The latter includes consideration of how a perpetrator may remain in a faith community or be referred elsewhere. Thus, supporting victim and family safety is understood as a responsibility across the church in that safety is supported by individual pastoral care and response as well as by increasing congregation and faith community capacity to understand and respond to domestic violence.

Representations of gender

The LCA's domestic violence campaign website offers more practical information on seeking support and getting help, useful contact information, information about lived experiences, and links to resources. Included in the LCA campaign narrative is an emphasis on a commitment to transformation, to reducing the occurrence and impacts of domestic violence and the need for change within the church. More specifically, it is worth noting that the campaign acknowledges that there have been inadequate past practices by the church and interpretations of scripture supporting male power, violence and abuse. For example, the LCA's domestic violence prevention campaign website (LCA, 2020) describes how:

Too often past practices in church communities were built on false myths of male domination and control. And too often this meant that men were excused for their violent and abusive behaviour, and women were blamed and/or forced to return to very unsafe relationships. It is therefore imperative that we re-examine the ways in which we provide support to victims of abuse, and challenge the values and behaviours of those who perpetrate it.

The campaign draws on theological references to illustrate the importance of initiating change:

The Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts campaign helps people to recognise violence wherever it occurs and to respond appropriately and pastorally. It encourages the building of relationships and communities that are kind and loving, based on mutual servanthood and respect. (LCA, 2020)

The campaign strategy is an invitation to all church members to become aware of and play a role in the effort to address domestic violence and we see gender relations becoming part of the narrative as the LCA highlights the impacts of domestic violence on women, men and families.

Furthermore, the campaign documents (including the website) also describe the need for a theological underpinning to change and challenge male behaviours, and recognise the misuse of New Testament scripture, in particular Ephesians 5:21-25⁹ which references male headship and marriage, and submission in marriage. The campaign website, for example, describes how scriptural references to submission and subordination (and male headship) cannot be used to support abuse:

Any man among us who uses Christianity and the Bible to justify abuse of his wife or partner has clearly lost sight of his faith. If we are to use the word 'subordination' at all, it must relate to Christ's voluntary submission to the will of his heavenly Father when he went to the cross. Such submission is freely given and never demanded. It's a loving expression that marks the difference between Christians and the world (see the contrast Jesus establishes in Matthew 20:25-27). That does not mean that we encourage people, particularly women who at risk [sic], to stay in abusive relationships. We plead with such women: please actively seek help and support to protect yourselves and your children. (LCA, 2020)

This quote from the campaign's website indicates the concern about understandings and uses of Ephesians 5:21-25, and how selected scripture has been used to support inaction on domestic violence, as well as support a man's/husband's power, control and violence over and against a woman/wife.

The *Domestic Violence Handbook for Pastoral Workers* (LCA 2017) also discusses the (mis)use of Ephesians 5:21-25. Again, it is argued that (male) headship does not equate with 'dominance'. Further, neither male headship nor dominance are referred to in the LCA Statement on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage – a point also made in the campaign's website and brochure. The Handbook discusses how practising forgiveness does not mean one needs to accept and live with violence; which is largely a role women have been expected to fulfil. The campaign's brochure also refers to the concept of forgiveness and additionally, refers to repentance – the latter "is much more than saying sorry. True repentance will be shown in changes in attitude and behaviour." (LCA, 2017, p. 6)

Safety

In considering the LCA's campaign documents and statements on domestic violence and its impacts – including definitions of spiritual abuse – it is clear that prevention and response strategies prioritise victim safety and support addressing injustices through a faith-based lens. Scripture of concern is cited, particularly Ephesians 5:21-25 and the concern is the misuse of scripture by perpetrators and the wider church community whereby abuse has been justified and condoned. Campaign documents deliver the clear message that Ephesians 5:21-25 is not to be interpreted as justifying male power over women or violence against women. Other scripture cited in campaign documents offers hope and support to address domestic violence as a matter of faith, and provide evidence that Jesus treated women equally.

⁹ Ephesians 5:21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (The Holy Bible, 1973/2011).

Concerns with the misuse of Ephesians 5:21-33 are also expressed in the Commission on Theology and Inter-Church Relations (CTICR) Taskforce on Domestic Violence 2018 report prepared for the General Convention of Synod. As previously cited, at the General Synod in 2015 the church passed a resolution that the CTICR will study understandings of subordination and male headship with respect to "the contextual implications for family violence". The Taskforce report in its research, identified four views the view found to have 'most consensus' draws on Ephesians 5:21-33 and the interpretation that:

In this view, male headship is radically inverted so that its primacy is not one of power or control, but of humble, self-sacrificing service. In this model, the wife's response is indeed to submit to her husband, just as he has first given himself up for her, as described in the opening statement to this passage on marriage in Ephesians 5 - 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph 5:21). In this 'mutual submission' model (as it is sometimes called) the role of the husband is counter-culturally transformed, in line with Christ's teaching about love of the neighbour in the 'sermon on the mount' (Matt 5-7). In this view of the husband and wife living together in mutual love and submission, the original created relationship is restored, radically changing the whole context of the discussion, moving it from the arena of controlling power to that of Christ-like love and service. It is founded on 'mutual love' rather than a mutual struggle for dominance. (LCA, 2018, p. 256)

Yet the views the Taskforce identified diverge and one of the other views identified is that 1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:23 demonstrate "women are simply subordinate to men in marriage" and are required to submit to their husbands as this is a "divine order" established by God.

The Taskforce 2018 report and campaign documents identify and address the risk of the use of select scripture to condone and justify violence against women. Indeed, in the report the authors ask the question "Have Lutheran theological understandings of subordination and male headship contributed to male violence against women in the church?" This is the risk identified and it is a theological matter of concern to the LCA as expressed through the Synod statements and campaign documents. The authors of the Taskforce report conclude "no public theological statement or position of the LCA consciously condones or justifies violence against women" yet also note scripture has at times been used to justify control and abuse of women. The Taskforce report also goes on to discuss repentance and forgiveness and recommends further study "in the context of violence in relationships" (p. 257). Finally, in providing the clear statement that violence against women and in marriage is unacceptable, the report poses several questions that further problematise the relationship between Lutheran theology and practice as the church seeks to address the problem of domestic violence:

Is more needed, however? Would the LCA benefit from a clear theological and pastoral statement renouncing violence in the home and being clear about the servant nature of male headship in marriage?

In what ways might our churches systemically, though unintentionally, cooperate with abusive persons, helping them to justify and perpetuate their abuse?

Is it possible that an all-male clergy may in some way contribute to the conditions that allow domestic violence to continue? For instance, through lack of experience or awareness, could male clergy fail to take domestic violence seriously, or be manipulated or trapped into colluding with male perpetrators? Is it more difficult for women to disclose domestic violence to their pastor because he is male? (p. 258)

The Taskforce report demonstrates the significance of the key religious concepts of forgiveness, repentance, male headship and subordination as it engages in a theologically-inspired reflective process to understand the Lutheran context to the perpetration of intimate partner violence.

Gender inequality

The Taskforce report along with other campaign public and internal documents, exemplifies how the LCA has identified key concepts that inform the theological and social context to lived experiences of domestic violence, and is engaging in a process of review and reflection in order to prevent, reduce and respond to domestic violence through a range of initiatives including awareness-raising and training. These key concepts and scripture are troubling the church, but also the above cited questions indicate how the issue of the current practice of male-only ministry is a concern. The church acknowledges past practices including the misuse of scripture that have condoned violence against women. While frequently the emphasis is on errors of *past practices*, the campaign evidences the effort of church-based culture change not only regarding addressing violence against women and its role and responsibilities, but also adapting gender relations. In this effort, the Lutheran church's responsibility and duty of care to victim-survivors and perpetrators of violence, as well as to supporting inclusive and safe faith communities, are being reconfigured.

The church has clearly identified it has a role in offering pastoral support to victim-survivors and hold perpetrators to account for their use of violence and in supporting safety and change: the 'church' being a multi-dimensional entity transforming its understanding of its responsibilities with respect to domestic violence. Yet the LCA is diverse and theological understandings of gender relations – and uses of scripture – are also diverse. General Synod resolutions and LCA domestic violence campaign efforts are nested in other LCA theological explanations and practices regarding gender relations, roles and responsibilities which we now discuss. These are often at variance with the desires that the LCA campaign expresses. Together these documents and the LCA domestic violence campaign are revealing when read intertextually.

The Lutheran Church of Australia does not permit women to hold the office of ministry. The rationale for this practice is detailed in the publicly available Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions¹⁰ (DSTO) document *Theses of Agreement VI: Theses on the office of the ministry*. This document was established in 1950 and reviewed in 2001 'unedited'. It describes how the New Testament defines matters of ordination and how the ministry is "an office instituted not by man, but by God." Specific New Testament scripture is cited to justify the LCA's position that women cannot be ordained:

Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old as well as in the New Testament, 1 Cor 14:34,35 and 1 Tim 2:11–14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. (LCA 2001)

This document together with a group of DSTO documents on women in the church, establish a LCA discourse where *women are a problem* in that documents discuss women's exclusion from public ministry whereby referencing the matter of women and ministry is problematic and requires a focused explanation and justification. These same documents establish the opportunities women do have available to them e.g. as Sunday school teachers (LCA, 1978/2001a,b). The problem is the matter of gender roles and opportunities within the church and specifically opportunities for women, and the explanation is that exclusion and inclusion opportunities for women are determined by selected New Testament scripture.

Thesis VI.11 on the office of the ministry refers to New Testament scripture to justify the exclusion of women from public ministry. Hermeneutics and the inerrant standpoint of an unproblematic and fixed interpretation of selected scripture establish a Lutheran patriarchal organising structure and authority over women. Responsibility for the process of determining this official LCA theological position that involves *interpreting* scripture and *practice* resulting in a gendered church structure defining Lutheran gender relations and roles is never allocated to individuals; rather, responsibility is deflected to the Word of God. To be clear: this is official Lutheran theological discourse *and* institutional practice of social exclusion providing instruction to the reader and church membership. It is about women and men as

¹⁰ These are official theological statements of the LCA.

cumulatively, DSTO documents establish a heteronormative and patriarchal church structure informing gender relations, determining and restricting opportunities for women. Official DSTO documents establish women categorically and, also by implication, a Lutheran male identity is established as entitled – to the opportunity of public ministry, authority, and in relation to women. A Lutheran patriarchy is normalised – ontologically and epistemologically – as official discourse secures and restricts the meaning and use of selected scripture as well as gender categories and roles. Women are othered in relation to men and discrimination on the basis of which sex/gender is practised.

The social norm of patriarchy as expressed in DSTO discourse and deferral to select scripture in referencing women, values a type of Lutheran male ministry and masculinity that discriminates against women. In this Lutheran-as-religious-institution discursive space it is hard to name and challenge the impacts and effects of discrimination if responsibility for social and gender norms is hermeneutically organised and justified as fixed meaning in reference to the New Testament. The male/female binary opposition is theologically secured using scripture to determine not only public ministry but gender roles within the Lutheran church. The issue of gender equality regarding public ministry is inferentially named in the justification for male-only public ministry and then silenced in the official LCA theological argument that separates a theological determination within the organisation of the church from any reference to the lived experiences and impacts of discrimination on the basis of gender. Representation of scripture is separated from the use, experiences and impacts of scripture as well as from any contested interpretations of meaning and use.

Again, *the problem of women* is named in the LCA's Theses on public ministry when it details the theological rationale for excluding women. Moreover, the DSTO document *Volume 1 F. Women in the Church: The role of women in the church* (LCA, 1978/2001a) further articulates how women are positioned in relation to men and in the church as the organising structure informing faith communities and influencing gender relations, marriage and family life. This DSTO document again argues the matter of the role of women in the church is determined by a selection of scripture: "The sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the only source of teaching and right practice in the church" (LCA, 1978/2001a, F3). It lists examples of women who served Jesus Christ and then stipulates: "However, none of these women worked independently. They were helpers, supporters of the Lord and the apostles." The document goes on: "It seems that when the disciples were alive there was no real problem about the role of women in the church" (F3). This claim that there was no real problem is revealing of the current problem for the LCA – the problem is women and gender inequality in the church, inequity of opportunity, and the matter of male-only public ministry.

This DSTO document on the role of women goes on to detail New Testament scripture that supports the LCA's policy and practice regarding opportunities for women in the church:

The passages which come into consideration are 1 Corinthians 11:2-10; 14: 33b-36; and 1 Timothy 2:13,14. These lay down the principle of subordination and reserve for women in the church. Or to put it negatively: women are not to take a leading, independent, authoritative role in the church. Note: a congregation of women would, of course, have to have women officers. (F4)

Women are being positioned as helpers and supporters in relation to the Lord, the Church and men. The LCA uses the theological concept of subordination as per the cited scripture to support this position for women, for the practice of denying women equal opportunity in the church. This is an expression of power over women by the church – the 'church' includes those individuals that have determined the DSTO's and overarching and guiding Lutheran theological decrees – that cannot be disassociated from the practice and lived experience of gender relations whereby the LCA is asserting men have power over women. The 'church' here is not empty of individuals, embodied processes and power relations. Women are being denied equal leadership opportunities within the church and also are being positioned as subordinate to men. The theological argument for the principle of subordination – for this document is an argument notwithstanding the discourse that represents scriptural

interpretation as fixed meaning – has a consequence that connects church-based practice with gender relations within the church.

Constructions of woman

The DSTO document *Women in the Church: The role of women in the church* is one of three DSTO documents on the role of women in the church that together contribute to a broader LCA discourse that is patriarchal in the theological advice and instruction provided to the reader. The DSTO document *WOMEN IN THE CHURCH Statement on rights of women to vote at meetings of the congregations* (LCA, 1966) was prepared in 1966 and has not since been edited. The document commences with reference to scripture that establishes a sex/gender binary difference:

In Christ man and woman have equal standing, Mark 12:25 and parallels, Galatians 3:28; but there is a difference between man and woman by virtue of the fact of creation, 1 Corinthians 11:7–10; 1 Timothy 2:13; Genesis 2:18ff, by which a subordinate position has been given to women. A further reason is the role played by the woman at the Fall, Genesis 3:1ff; 1 Timothy 2:14. This subordination shows itself, as far as the individual woman is concerned, in the marriage relation, Genesis 3:16. (F1)

With respect to relations within the congregation, the document considers scripture as it pertains to the role of women:

4. Since the Apostle has in mind the worshipping congregation, the divine service, as the place for which his order is meant, it is improper by way of deduction to claim silence of women in all congregational, business, and social meetings.

5. By giving woman as a member of the congregation the right to vote she is not necessarily given authority over the man, as has sometimes been claimed. (F1)

The document goes on to detail that “congregations may grant women the right to vote at congregational meetings.” (F2) A resolution from the General Synod in 1968 clarifies the point that subjection can be ‘safeguarded’ as men and a male vote may make a final decision on a matter. Here the ‘congregation’ is defined as having a collective male identity as well as men having discretionary decision-making power over women within the congregation.

The LCA DSTO document Volume 1 H. *ETHICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES Marriage, divorce and re-marriage* (LCA, 1978/2001c) defines marriage as “the union of a man and woman”, defines the purpose of marriage and addresses divorce and re-marriage – all points are evidenced with scriptural references. In this document marriage is defined as heterosexual and an ideal is presented, one where divorce is to be avoided and pastoral counselling involves efforts to support a reconciliation so a marriage may continue, although divorce is permissible in certain situations. Notions of forgiveness, repentance and love are key concepts guiding a Lutheran understanding of marriage.

Marriage is again discussed in the DSTO document Volume 1 H. *ETHICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES Human sexuality: three key issues* (LCA, 2015). This summary document discusses human sexuality and marriage and asserts same-sex relationships do not demonstrate marriage. The document also discusses the breakdown of marriage specifically referencing domestic violence:

God's intention for marriage is that it be lifelong. ... God's will is most fully lived out when couples who experience conflict live in repentance and forgiveness. At the same time, the LCA can never condone abusive relationships, and places a high priority on protecting victims of abuse from harm, when conflict between a husband and wife becomes excessive. (p. 3)

This reference to abusive relationships is noted among the DSTO theological discussion asserting – and limiting – Lutheran heterosexual sexuality, gender and marriage identities and relations. A wider reading of DSTO documents indicates challenges to Lutheran social and gender norms and LCA concern about the issue of domestic violence within marriage, in the

context of theological determinations of what are permissible Lutheran intimate partner relations.

Yet the theological rationale driving the structure and organisation of the LCA with respect to male-only public ministry is contested at the same time it is maintained. While DSTO documents are publicly available on the LCA website, the website also contains information about the history of efforts to ordain women in the LCA – efforts that are more recent than the date of the above cited DSTO documents. Thus, the authority of these documents shifts considering intertextuality and how they connect to documentation of LCA efforts to seek transformation of the ministry and gain the support of the Synod to ordain women.¹¹ Further, comparative analysis of LCA documents – DSTO and DV campaign documents, for example – demonstrates efforts within the church to support gender equality and concern about how a range of selected scripture has been used supporting domestic violence and various types of violence including spiritual abuse, and the impacts including its consequences with respect to normalising and condoning violence against women.

Articles published in the *Lutheran Theological Journal*

Findings are categorised as four key themes in the analysis of articles in the *LTJ*. First, we discuss theological positions on understanding and responding to domestic violence. Second, we consider how discussions of key theological concepts with particular attention to submission and male headship, represent Lutheran theological understandings of the role of women and men, gender relations and how gender equality is theologically conceptualised. We then discuss how theological arguments position women in various relationships within the church, with attention to how women are 'othered' in theological arguments that involve concerns regarding what may be lost or disrupted if women are permitted to be ordained. Lastly, we examine how theological articles draw attention to the significance of the role of men and Lutheran masculinity in understanding the religious context to domestic violence.

Nürnberg (2020) provides an overview of the *Lutheran Theological Journal* and describes the journal's target readership, content and history, and changes. Originally the journal was intended to be a faculty journal of the Australian Lutheran College and content supported pastors and teachers. Nürnberg notes that in a review of the first decade there was only one contribution written by a woman. In the first two decades (1967-1987) most articles were written by academics and theologians. After this time content diversified to include discussion of a wider range of contemporary social issues such as the ordination of women from 1994, although as Nürnberg notes, debate has been going since 1972 (see also Pfitzner and Steicke 1999). Nürnberg (2020) also reports on how survey findings showed two-thirds of the readership is male and 15% female (18% did not identify their gender), while half identified as pastors.

Theological positions on understanding and responding to domestic violence

Several articles discuss domestic violence. Erickson (1994) describes a batterers' program supporting men who have been or are concerned they will be violent. Harms (1994) considers pastoral matters when working with families. Other articles draw on interpretations of Bible stories to make arguments about what the Bible says about domestic violence (Hunt 2007; Lockwood 2019). There is also discussion of domestic violence in relation to theological interpretations of headship and submission (Hensley 2020; Hultgren 2012; Wittwer 2019).

Erickson (1994) describes a Lutheran church-based program working with male perpetrators of violence and abuse. Supporting the safety of women/partners and family members and assessing risk, is considered and addressed. Detailed information is provided about resources used and the program adaptations made along the way. Formal program accountability is also addressed although note this is with respect to the church. In this article, as with Harms, a biblical understanding of sin, its pervasiveness and impacts, is discussed with respect to

¹¹ The Synod has voted five times in total – in 2000, 2006, 2015, 2018 and 2023.

domestic violence. Erickson is suggesting that sin is one of the causes of domestic violence and abuse, and that accepting the transformative power of God supports addressing wrongs. Erickson also makes it clear domestic violence is a crime.

Harms (1994) explores a Lutheran understanding of what is 'family' and what this means when considering the role of the state and law, as well as Lutheran understanding of the gospel and God's intent. The article raises the issue of changes and challenges to family life, and specifically discusses domestic violence, and considers the support family can offer. The article describes how 'family' is a "nomological" structure determined by "God's law" – that is, "under the kingdom of God's left hand" (Harms, 1974, p. 71). As Harms describes, God places us in a family and this is a gift from God, illustrative of God's love. Parents have responsibilities to children and children have responsibilities to parents. All families have sinners subject to God's judgement as "there is no-one without sin (John 8:7)" (Harms, 1994, p. 72). There is discussion of the "ideal circumstances" of marriage where husband and wife "are a team" (Harms, 1974, p.73). There is also discussion of how the family is impacted by the "order of the state" (Harms, 1974, p.73) and there will be state-based interventions when parents provide inadequate care of children. Harms specifically discusses the matter of abuse within families including how adult abuse impacts children. Harms does make it clear the church cannot be used to support family-based violence – knowledge about such violence cannot be kept within the church. Yet in contrast to the current LCA domestic violence prevention campaign, this theological discussion of the structure and role of the family and how to manage violence and abuse, does not necessarily put the safety of women and children up-front as it is not clear what Harms means when he suggests that counselling parents and families is the way forward with respect to addressing family-based problems including violence.

Discussions of domestic violence also result from theological discussion of Bible stories. For example, Hunt (2007) and Lockwood (2019) describe the story of Jephthah from Judges 11-12 as a story of family violence. Hunt (2007) provides a feminist reading of this story through providing Jephthah's daughter with a name (she is without a name in the Bible) and draws attention to her agency in the process of agreeing to be sacrificed to YHWH by her father. Hunt's revision of this Old Testament story is enabling its visibility and telling, reading Jephthah's daughter's agency and arguing that it is a warning about family violence in communities.

Lockwood (2019) also reviews the interpretation(s) and meaning of this story. He describes Jephthah's narcissistic masculinity as violent, unacceptable and a misuse of religion. Jephthah returns home from a battle where he has been victorious only to find his (virgin) daughter coming out dancing to meet him. Lockwood argues that despite Jephthah's expression of shock and grief, he made a calculated move as women often came out to greet returned soldiers. Further, Lockwood (2019) argues: "The vow is not rash; it is faithless, deliberately so. It is faithless because Jephthah uses religion in the service of his self-serving political agenda." (p. 83) Jephthah's daughter agrees for him to proceed with his sacrifice of her. As Lockwood points out, Jephthah does not try to negotiate with Yahweh. Further, Lockwood refers to the scripture to point out how Jephthah blames the victim.

Lockwood argues Jephthah misuses his power over his daughter, and he misuses religion in making the vow to sacrifice to Yahweh. Lockwood also finds agency in the actions of Jephthah's daughter and the establishment of a tradition to remember her, and through this remember that domestic violence is unacceptable in relationships and in the community. Thus, Lockwood is arguing for a clear Lutheran message and position though reading Judges 11-12 – according to scripture, domestic violence is not to be tolerated.

Another way in which theological articles discuss domestic violence is by reference to the biblical concepts of subordination and headship. Wittwer (2019) considers the concepts of subordination and headship and noting the key resolution passed at the LCA's 2015 General Synod to study the Lutheran understanding of subordination and male headship in marriage, goes on to explain that she will consider how scripture broadly understands subordination and headship and describes how over time specific texts particularly Ephesians 5:22-23 and 1

Cor 11:3¹² have been used "to teach that women are a subordinate class of humanity, more prone to sin and imaging God in a lesser way than men, and used to affirm a hierarchal relationship between men and women in marriage" (2019, 22). Wittwer cautions against a highly selective use of scripture and emphasises the importance of more broadly considering and interpreting scripture regarding relations between men and women including marriage. Further, Wittwer argues that there is a historical and cultural context to scripture. While scripture from Ephesians may be used to argue for men having power over women in marriage, there is another interpretation and emphasis offered – that Ephesians 5:21-35 starts with stating how women and men are subject to each other. The author goes on to discuss 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 in detail: this is a passage frequently cited and used to support the argument that a man is the head of his wife. Wittwer also notes it is a passage that has been used to support violence against women.

Reviewing examples of Jesus' relationship to women and reading across the Old and New Testaments regarding the role of women, Wittwer argues that headship should not be interpreted as 'superiority' but rather, it can be understood that Paul was addressing social hierarchies. This review of the meaning of scripture leads Wittwer (2019) to conclude: "When a Lutheran hermeneutic is applied to the question of subordination and headship, it is found that Scripture does not support a hierarchal view of marriage." (p. 37) Further, passages from Ephesians 5:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 cannot be used to justify a husband having power over a wife – to do so "is an abuse of Scripture and an abuse of power." (Wittwer, 2019, p. 38)

Elsewhere, Hensley (2020) argues headship and subordination do not permit abuse. Hensley makes this point in the context of discussing how marriage relates to 'divine headship' – that is, marriage is a key component of an order that is witness to God's creation and Christ's love:

... Paul reveals the work of Christ as the summation of biblical testimony concerning God's gracious dealings with his people (cf. Eph 1:10, 20–23), and the particular way Christian married couples bear witness to it. Far from a recipe for oppression and vice, then, Paul's exhortation to Christian husbands and wives is inspiring and life-giving for those with ears to hear it, and a call to repentance for those who abuse and corrupt it for their own ends. A similar situation pertains to Paul's ordering of public worship in 1 Cor 14:32–34 (and 15:27–28) and in 1 Tim 2:11–14, which presupposes the equal dignity and independent value of all concerned. (2020, p. 43)

In this article Hensley further explores passages from the New Testament that clarify the male/husband and female/wife relationship and ordering in marriage:

... headship and sub-ordering within the marital and ecclesial spheres are indeed *biblical*, and not an imposition upon the scriptures (so-called 'eisegesis'). These are good gifts of a good God through which he desires to bless his people. From the outset it must be stated clearly that these texts do not advocate the unilateral subordination of women to men or any notions of inferiority. Nor do they give permission for abuse premised on false understandings of headship. On the contrary, these texts reveal God's ordering in specific relationships: within marriage and the ministry of the church as a worshipping community. They presuppose the inherent equality of women and men created in God's image. They do, however, recognise differences in how men and women fit into God's orders of marriage and the church. (2020, p. 44)

Hensley is making the point that differences in how men and women are placed in marriage do not equate to a relationship of inferiority (of women to men) and the notion of headship does not permit abuse. Hensley goes on to examine use of words related to subordination and the translation, to argue that the important point is that through scripture and Paul, God is offering instruction on marriage and ordering in a community, church and family for the

¹² 1 Cor 11:3 *But I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (The Holy Bible 1973/2001)*

purposes of receiving God's blessings. This is not a matter of inferiority or superiority or about hierarchy, it is about someone finding their place "in God's order" (Hensley, 2020, p. 45).

Hensley (2020) goes on to untangle what he terms "hermeneutical pitfalls" (p. 45) by focusing on some key passages discussing male-female relations and marriage – passages from Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Corinthians 11-14, 1 Timothy 2 and Genesis 1-3. First Hensley considers Ephesians 5:22-23 arguing that Paul's instructions to Christian husbands and wives is to make a connection with Christ's marriage to his bride the church. A husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is head of the church. In these passages, husbands are also instructed to love their wives as Christ loves the church, and be self-sacrificing. Instruction on human marriage runs parallel to the divine marriage, and in this Hensley argues headship for a husband "calls a husband to take responsibility for his family's spiritual wellbeing, as Adam was called to do (Gen 2:15–17, 24) and which Christ does perfectly as head of the church." (p.47) Hensley makes a critical argument about Eph 5:22-23:

It is worth pausing here to recognise that no other biblical passage decries domestic violence more specifically or strongly than this passage. Nourish and cherish, says St Paul, not abuse, starve, beat, or neglect. Far from approving of any husband who should appeal to 'headship' to justify selfish demands or abusive behaviour, Eph 5:28–30 enjoins them to the very opposite." (2020, p. 47)

Hultgren (2012) offers a different theological perspective through his discussion of "contradictions in scripture" (p. 30). Hultgren discusses hermeneutics and the matter of the 'unity' of scripture. He considers how to interpret scripture and in the context of Luther's writings, how to understand the Word of God, and how to recognise and work through diversity in scripture and interpretations. Hultgren poses a series of questions to assist with interpreting scripture – a 'third way' to manage diversity, be respectful of the Lutheran canon and its authority, consider articles of faith and manage assumptions. Hultgren runs a test case on the texts regarding the silence of women (which are also about subordination). He writes:

The very idea of 'subordination' is offensive to modern sensibilities and modern ideas of sexual equality. For many people that alone is sufficient ground to disregard the biblical texts. That view is understandable. Before we make a rash decision, however, we must listen to and honor the concerns of both 'sides' - both those who would uphold these texts as authoritative, and those who would disregard them. The one side is legitimately concerned that the church will let the 'spirit of the age' (in the form of secular ideologies) control the interpretation and application of biblical texts in the church. By excluding a priori certain biblical texts as authoritative in the name of a modern ideology, does the church not run the risk of doing violence to the Word of God? Yet the other side is legitimately concerned that an uncritical acceptance of every biblical text as Word of God for the church entails an untenable view of divine inspiration, and that an uncritical acceptance of texts that are saturated by ancient presuppositions and ideologies can (and in fact does) do great harm (i.e., it is used to justify oppression of and violence against women). (Hultgren, 2012, pp. 36–37)

The author goes on to discuss 1 Corinthians 14: 33-36 and 1 Timothy 2: 11-14. After much discussion, he links how accepting some texts can and do harm and oppress women and he also refers to the use of texts to justify violence against women. In contrast to other authors and articles Hultgren is considering hermeneutics and *the impacts* of "uncritical acceptance of texts" on women. Hultgren's article is also a discussion of theological differences within the church.

All articles included in the document analysis make it clear that domestic violence is unacceptable. This is consistent with the full breadth of documents analysed. However, it must be noted that in some theological arguments domestic violence is disassociated from theological arguments supporting discriminating against women with respect to leadership and the gender norms and relations around subordination and male headship that justify support for this theological position which is also current LCA church organising practice. No association is made between practising discrimination against women and how this may

impact women and men, intimate relationships and family life, and yet as we will see in the next section, there are other theological arguments adamant that marriage, family and community life are fundamentally connected and ordered in a divine arrangement.

Gender equality, inequality

As described above, articles argue various interpretations of scriptural references to the concepts of subordination and headship. These arguments have significant consequences regarding gendered subjectivities and roles including religious leadership opportunities for women. The range of article discussions regarding subordination and headship include consideration of how gender roles, intimacy and marriage and family life, are inextricably connected to ideas about Lutheran congregation and community life. Further, this connection is guided by and guiding formal church structure and divine relationships including relating to God.

Kleinig (2005) argues how subordination supports 'community' and a healthy church: "Community depends on subordination. Without subordination there is no true community." (p.196) Subordination supports giving and receiving, experiencing love and joy for example, and as Kleinig (2005) describes: "Subordination supplies the context for self-giving love to flourish in our families and our church, without the abuse of power." (p.197). Thus for Kleinig, subordination does not imply inferiority as one can be subordinate and equal. Elsewhere (Anonymous 2005a) an emphasis is on interpreting the significance and role of 'service' in supporting marriage, family, community and the church (see also Kleinig 2005).

In Kleinig's article there is extensive discussion defining and considering subordination and how it enables order including of the household and family. This involves three sets of relationships: wives and husbands, parents and children, and masters and slaves. The New Testament offers guidance: Christ is the head of the husband and the husband is the head of the wife; however, Kleinig argues this relationship is about 'respect' rather than 'obedience'. People are always in relationships of subordination, including in the church:

This includes the silent subordination of women (and men!) to the men who teach God's word in their congregation (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11). The purpose of subordination is the reception of all that Christ gives to the church through his word. (Kleinig, 2005, pp. 202-203)

Kleinig's argument is also one against the ordination of women as well as an argument on the position of women in a community, congregation, family and heterosexual relationship. This discourse embeds Lutheran femininity and masculinity in scripture: Kleinig discusses subordination and power arguing that patriarchal gender norms are spiritual opportunities supporting equal social relations. A male/female binary is informed by bible text, and diversity of experience and the voice and experiences of those seeking change are excluded. The request for transformation – that is, for women to be ordained – is embedded in the discourse seeking to stabilise Lutheran gender norms.

Hensley (2020) reviews 1 Corinthians 11-14. In this letter Paul addresses several matters but of particular interest to Hensley here is the matter of women and public worship. By closely examining "taxonomical language" Hensley concludes that Paul is asking women to defer to the judgement of prophets. This is not a positioning in terms of a male/female hierarchical distinction whereby women are "lesser" (p.49) – this is a distorted interpretation – rather, Hensley is arguing this instruction by Paul regarding women, marriage and the church, can be understood as such:

But male and female are created in God's image, not the other way around. Such human distortions therefore do not set the pattern. Rather, the perfect union, love, and order between *the Father and the Son within the Trinity* give headship and subordination their proper character in marriage and the church. (pp. 49-50)

Hensley further discusses 1 Corinthians 11:

The taxonomy is first laid out in 1 Cor 11:3: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of every man, a man is the head of his wife. This last relationship resonates clearly with Ephesians 5:22–33, where God's creative ordinance provided the theological foundation for Paul's instruction (Eph 5:31, citing Gen 2:24). 1 Corinthians 11 does the same thing. After 11:3 adduces the same taxonomical relationship between man and wife, vv. 8–9 ground it in creation through allusion to Gen 2:18 and 22: 'For man is not from woman but woman from man. Neither was man created for (ἰὰ + acc.) woman, but woman for man.' This creational, theological reality undergirds the whole of Paul's instruction for women and men in 11:2–16 and is no cultural construction. (p.50)

Hensley's argument emphasises that Paul's instruction for women and men "urges a notion of headship and order in marriage and the church that is nourishing and good, and that affirms the equal dignity and value of all." (p.50)

Hensley progresses his argument by concentrating on 1 Corinthians 14. In this text women are not to publicly speak in the church. He argues that here Paul is qualifying women's conduct in the public space of the church. He is not saying women cannot speak or interrogate, or banning them from talking, but qualifying where this is done (it can be done at home and with their husband). The author further discusses 1 Cor 12-13 and how male/female distinctions refer back to Genesis. Again, the point is that male/female distinction is instructed and in this distinction all are equal.

Several articles considered offer hermeneutic interpretations that suppress leadership opportunities for women, do not address the lived experiences of inequality and social exclusion as a religious practice, and prescribe a limit to how women can express their religiosity (Anonymous, 2005a,b; Kleinig, 2005; Hensley, 2020). These are arguments also limiting male subjectivities and roles, and positioning men in a very limited relationship to women – although this latter point is not theologically interrogated. The practice of gender-based discrimination effecting inequality is disputed as a practice of power over women by men, through theological arguments emphasising God's intention in ordering Lutheran family and community life.

In contrast to these efforts to re-assert gender norms particularly regarding public ministry, other articles offer different scriptural emphasis and interpretations regarding the role of women and in relation to the gospel, often noting the historical context to scripture. For example, in Anonymous (2005c) the author is arguing that Paul provides plenty of evidence to support women being alongside men in worship. It is argued that Paul's words about women need to be understood in the context of his concerns about worship practices in congregations he was writing to, that were hindering appreciation of the gospel. This article thus challenges text interpretations that justify excluding women from public ministry as fixed – rather, scripture is historically and socially situated. In this article it is argued the New Testament describes many opportunities for women and includes women in preaching the gospel (see also Wittwer, 2019). The New Testament is interpreted as a text inclusive of women, and these arguments disrupt patriarchal hegemonic use of the New Testament that seeks to reaffirm the exclusion of women from public ministry.

Further, Anonymous (2005d) provides a historical overview of how the LCA has adapted in recent years to include women in roles they were previously excluded from. For example, in 1981 it permitted women to be delegates to the General Synod and in 1989 women were allowed to distribute communion. There is also information provided about Lutheran churches elsewhere, and their positions on the ordination of women. Women were first ordained in the Netherlands in 1929, for example. This article also provides examples of stories of women in the Bible, including in leadership roles, in roles where they have authority over men, as prophets, and where "women proclaim the gospel of Jesus" (Anonymous, 2005d, p.37). Importantly, this article considers lived experience and the impacts of excluding women from public ministry:

Our church has in its midst women who believe that God has called them to the public ministry. They are denied the opportunity to test their sense of calling within the LCA and

to fulfil their sense of calling. And the church at large - young and old, male and female - is denied the undoubted blessings of receiving ministry in all its fullness both from men and from women. (Anonymous 2005d, p. 50)

The article highlights the effort to transform church practices and support gender equality within the church. Wider readings and alternative interpretations of scripture challenge a powerful religious church-based gendered narrative constraining women's ordination and reasserting the practice of excluding women from public ministry.

Women and risk: othering women

There are many theological articles and arguments that concentrate on the role of women in the Lutheran church. Conversations about the role of women have gone on for a long time. For example, Overduin (1983) considers the impact of the introduction of the federal Sex Discrimination Act and expresses concerns that this (then proposed) federal legislation will disrupt Lutheran gender roles and life. His argument draws attention to how theology shapes and makes comment not only on the role of women in supporting family life, but also how the church and faith relates to legislative and secular processes.

As discussed above, Kleinig's (2005) interpretation of scripture is claiming a powerful position for an all-male clergy structure. It is seeking to reaffirm gender norms that the reader and author knows are being challenged. Kleinig makes a claim for a type of Lutheran religiosity over another that will potentially – it is argued – fragment multiple social relations and social structures. Women are directed to continue their silence in assembly, and raise questions with their husbands in the private domain of the family. Gendered and discriminatory binaries are included in this argument. The author is re-presenting a powerful historical discourse of Lutheran religious identity that is based on social exclusion. This is an argument to suppress diverse experiences of the Lutheran faith and the needs of those who seek change, justice and gender equality within the church.

The previous themes have included discussion of articles that can be understood as positioning the ordination of women and equal opportunities in Lutheran leadership as a risk to Lutheran religious life and order. There is risk in that the order of the Trinity, community and family will be disrupted and lost. As Anonymous 2005b describes:

God himself has commanded that women should not be admitted to the office of the public ministry. We may not fully understand his reasons for this prohibition, but we can be sure it is for the good of the church, the benefit of its mission, and the glory of Christ. (2005, p. 36)

This positions the equal opportunity for women to access public ministry as a disruption to and in defiance of God's command. This is a powerful rationale positioning women as a threat to Lutheran religiosity and at the same time, asking women (and men) to accept practising exclusion and injustice on the basis of gender difference. This also positions the author as not responsible for the practice of social exclusion on the basis of gender.

Wittwer (2019) offers useful commentary on Lutheran theology and hermeneutics:

The core of Lutheran theology is the doctrine of justification by faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone. The core of a Lutheran hermeneutic is that we read and interpret the Bible in the light of God's free gift of grace. (p. 23)

Following this emphasis on the practice of reading and interpretation, Wittwer notes that according to the Bible, no group can claim to be superior over another. Paul in Galatians 3:28 is cited to illustrate this point – "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Wittwer, 2019, p. 24).

Further, discussions regarding the role of women, subordination, headship and power, also draw attention to how theology connects with key concepts including equality, justice and human rights for example – engagement with these concepts is through theological

reasoning. This is an important consideration particularly with respect to considering gender equality as the significance of the issue may not necessarily be accepted as integral to or significant in theological reasoning – as well as it (gender equality) being theologically conceptualised as discrimination in the interests of women and illustrative of a Lutheran embodiment of equality.

This point is highlighted through an article by Pfitzner (2006) who provides several reasons why the LCA has not taken up engagement with human rights issues, including “stress on evangelism and individual salvation (seen mainly in afterlife terms) rather than service to others through social action” (p.73), tendency to focus on religious issues and not wider social/global issues, and emphasis on provision of aid rather than addressing systemic problems. He then goes on to present the core of his argument in this article:

The argument of this article is that it is important for the LCA to develop a human rights culture if it is to be effective and credible in its Christian witness in today’s situation. (p.73)

Pfitzner discusses how some theologians have described how human rights is not a biblical idea, yet he argues there are analogies and ideas that can be linked. He also argues the point “while theological reflection is important, it must not become a substitute for taking action against specific abuses.” (Pfitzner, 2006, p.75). Further, Pfitzner’s argues that as well as a focus on “personal morality” the church must also engage with “systemic abuses” and challenge systems to address injustices and inequalities. He also notes moments in history when churches have not acted or spoken up about abuses, as well as times they have.

This article has been included as while it does not have an overt focus on the role of women or gender relations, it provides an important example of a Lutheran perspective on advocating changing LCA culture so it further supports engaging with the concept of human rights and taking action on justice and equity issues at a systemic level to prevent abuses. Pfitzner’s argument is also advocating for a shift in how the church relates to the state to ensure the church supports human rights. Pfitzner argues the LCA has a critical role in engaging with human rights – concept and issues – to support a revision of the LCA to establish its relevance and place in contemporary society including its role in preventing and responding to abuses. This article also argues the essential need for the LCA to recognise the socio-historical and political context to the church and Christian practice. Pfitzner argues for a church reconceptualised as an active and situated participant in addressing abuses of human rights.

The role of men and Lutheran masculinity

Theological arguments regarding the role of women are by implication also discourses and practices shaping Lutheran male identity and masculinity. Yet the role of men is not overtly focused on and theologically scrutinised to the same extent as the role of women.

Theological arguments draw on scripture and detailed hermeneutic argument to argue for and against the ordination of women. Often these arguments are connected to how women and men are enabled to connect with the divine, expressed through Lutheran hermeneutic review of how the Bible informs relating to God. Marriage, family, congregation and religious leadership life, are all embodying connection to God and expressing that faith and responsibility.

There are examples of theological articles that name the power and privilege of men through theological critique of – and challenge to – the current gender order guiding male-only ordination. Some articles also challenge hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy through their critique of unacceptable behaviour represented in the Bible – for example, in the analysis of Jephthah from Judges 11-12 as a story of family violence (see Hunt, 2007; Lockwood, 2019).

Elsewhere, Worthing (1999, p. 99) draws attention to how the church practises discriminate against women through the use of “exclusive language” which involves, “the use of language in worship, in sermons, in songs, in Scripture readings, and in conversation that

excludes women". He argues that these practices are detrimental to men as well as women and against the intent of the gospel. Worthing argues:

Language that recognises only male persons or that reduces the female to the status of a sub-category of the male also dehumanises men. It robs us men of our full humanity, forcing us to speak of our mothers, sisters, daughters, wives or partners as if they were not really or fully there. (1999, p. 102)

Further, Worthing argues men need to be involved in addressing the detrimental impacts of exclusive language on women and men and gender relations. He is concerned about the impacts on men's relationships with women including female family members. The language of exclusion is one where men also suffer the from the impacts of social exclusion expressed in gendered and masculine biblical scripture talk and word choices; for example, the repeated assumption and use of male pronouns.

Summary of findings from letters to the editor of The Lutheran

Reading across letters published in *The Lutheran*, similar themes raised throughout the document analysis to date, continue.¹³ Letters argue for and against the ordination of women; reference a Lutheran gender order – either maintaining a patriarchal order or seeking change and gender equality; include arguments for particular prioritising and interpretation of scripture to support arguments; and importantly, articulate lived experiences of the Lutheran gender order.

The diversity within the church, of experiences and thoughts on making critical changes to Lutheran gender relations, is expressed in reading these letters. Clearly the church is diverse and gender relations are being overtly discussed, critiqued, challenged and defended. The opinions expressed are also historically situated, indicating the significance of recent times where the General Synod has considered and voted on the matter of the ordination of women. There are two letters specifically referencing domestic violence and one connects the issues of domestic violence and the ordination of women, arguing for inclusive church practices that in turn will promote equitable gender relations and the church as a place of refuge for victims.

As revealed in analysis of other types of documents, through letters there are arguments for prioritising husband headship and male-only pastors in the church. There is argument for male-only pastors and also, description of how scripture is describing a Lutheran masculinity supporting marriage as well as a patriarchal church structure. These are arguments connecting family, marriage and the church with God through maintaining current gender relations within the Lutheran gender order as per current interpretation and use of scripture. There are also references to fearing a split in the church over the matter of ordaining women. Other letters are conciliatory in the hope of a way forward for the church in managing the divisions within the church.

There are many letters expressing the view that the ordination of women is just and permitted according to New Testament scripture. The role of women in the Bible and Jesus' relationship with women is highlighted. It is also important to note that there are letters by Pastors supporting the ordination of women and expressing concern about the misleading use of theology to discriminate against women. In one letter a woman describes her call to ministry and her experience of loss given her exclusion from this opportunity, leading to her decision to leave the church. Many authors are hopeful for changes to Lutheran practices including public ministry and reference changes over time that have occurred, that are more inclusive of women.

These letters include views and argument on *matters of faith* as they relate to the roles of women and men in the family and church structure specifically public ministry, arguments to resist and avoid change, as well as those describing a momentum challenging and engendering change to the church's current gender order and efforts to support gender

¹³ The authors have chosen not to reference individual authors of letters.

equality. As the letters describe, 'gender' certainly matters with respect to the church and family structure, and relations within. There are variations in the use of scripture and what is prioritised as relevant to understanding female-male relations and the Lutheran gender order. What these letters do is describe experiences of Lutheran faith and gender equality issues as they are experienced by individual women and men, including experiences of social exclusion on the basis of gender.

Intertextual considerations

The official LCA and dominant church hermeneutic practice of gender relations with respect to excluding women from church leadership, is challenged and met with expressions of concern regarding the impacts when considering other types of documents analysed including arguments, views and lived experiences expressed in *LTJ* articles and letters and articles from *The Lutheran*. Lutheran religiosity more broadly and beyond Australia, can also be understood as seeking to address gender-based discrimination as fundamental to addressing violence against women, when considering documents produced by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

LWF documents advocate for member churches to ordain women to support gender equality. The LCA is an associate member of the LWF. The *LWF Gender Justice Policy: Principles Summary* (The Lutheran World Federation 2015) details principle number one as "Promote gender justice as a theological foundation for dignity and justice for all, with gender equality as a universally recognized human right." Principle 10 is "Engage all aspects of theology, liturgy, and devotional life from the perspective of gender justice." The LWF has identified its responsibility to revise Lutheran practice with respect to scriptural use priorities considering concern for the detrimental impacts on women of using certain scripture for example, Genesis. LWF documents (see also The Lutheran World Federation 2002, 2013) advocate for a critical revision of biblical text and gender mainstreaming efforts within the church, for the purposes of supporting gender justice and equality, and addressing violence against women.

The LWF documents illustrate an expression of Lutheran religion and church culture whereby addressing gender equality and violence against women are matters of faith that can be supported by theological revisions in practice – scripture use, liturgy, congregational life, church-as-institution structure, for example. This advocacy for change is situated in contrast to the LCA's current problem of women and gender inequality.

Summary of key findings from the document analysis

Considering all the documents analysed, these summary points are made:

- The LCA is seeking to increase its capacity to prevent and effectively respond to family and domestic violence. This work is documented and the current campaign was first supported by a General Synod resolution in 2015.
- In the LCA's current *Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts: Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence* campaign, the church has clearly identified it has a role in recognising, preventing, addressing and responding to the incidence of domestic and family violence, and that this role includes supporting survivors of violence as well as holding perpetrators of abuse accountable.
- Understanding the context to domestic violence involves understanding LCA perspectives on gendered identities and expectations, gender roles and relations, family and marriage.
- LCA statements and practices regarding women and their role in the church, are by implication also practices shaping Lutheran male identity and masculinity; however, the role and identity of men is not being problematised to the same extent.
- While the LCA has official theological statements and policies, document analysis work demonstrates the LCA is diverse and dominant ideas and discourses are challenged. The current dominant LCA gender order has adapted, continues to adapt, and is also being

challenged. For example, male-only public ministry remains current LCA practice; however, this practice has been challenged.

- Given theological debates for and against the exclusion of women from public ministry, the practice of exclusion and discrimination on the basis of gender cannot be disassociated from current LCA efforts to prevent and respond to domestic violence.
- Current use and interpretations of the theological concepts of headship, subordination and order in creation in official LCA policy¹⁴ and practice are informing *the social and organisational* context to the current LCA campaign to address domestic violence. There is the risk of confused messaging about safe, peaceful and respectful gender relations including – but not limited to – the risk posed to women (and children) if women continue to be denied equal opportunities *within* the church as a religious organisation but also, the church as an entity providing context and support to congregational and family life.
- Theological arguments relying on prioritising select scripture and the authority of God's word and dominant hermeneutic interpretations regarding women's role and place in marriage, the family and the church, overwhelmingly do not discuss the *experiences and impacts* of the exclusion of women from public ministry – on women, men, congregations and families, for example. Arguments for reinforcing the Word of God and current practice are being disassociated from the impacts of practices of exclusion; authority and responsibility for the practice of exclusion of women from public ministry is deflected to the Word of God.
- Dominant theological arguments regarding the role of women in the church, the family and in relation to men and husbands, that result in reasserting a patriarchal gender order whereby women are denied equal opportunities in the church, congregational and family life, are informing discriminatory practices against women. Theological drivers of church-based gender and social norms that discriminate against Lutheran women and *limit equality* in gender relations through discourses and practices 'othering' women, are at risk of normalising and condoning unequal relations between women and men in intimate relationships.
- The *Domestic Violence Handbook for Pastoral Workers* advises pastoral workers in every pastoral session to ask: 'How can I empower this woman?' Applying this advice regarding addressing domestic and family violence on an individual/ congregation member level can be connected to the wider context of the LCA. There is the opportunity for the LCA to revise its theological priorities and practices *throughout the church*, to support the campaign's intent but also, extend the LCA's capacity to promote safety and equality (for women and men; in relationships, families, congregations, workplaces) and address injustices on the basis of gender.

¹⁴ For example, see DSTO Volume 1 F. Women in the church: The role of women in the church – point F4.

Interviews with Pastors

Interviews with Pastors were conducted for two main reasons. First, within the LCA Pastors are perceived as respected members of the community and have the authority to make suggestions about or even interventions into family issues. Second, research has found that theological beliefs may hinder their ability to counsel victims of domestic violence and men who perpetrate such violence (Shannon-Lewy & Dull, 2005; Wendt 2008). The interview schedule was informed by the document analysis and hence included questions exploring Pastors' understandings of domestic violence and their experiences in counselling men who use violence against women. Pastors were encouraged to elaborate on how their beliefs shaped their understandings and responses (see Appendix A for the interview guide). Interviews were face-to-face with Professor Wendt in a confidential office space and ranged between one to two hours' duration. Interviews were digitally transcribed.

Sample

To recruit Pastors to the study, several steps were undertaken. First, the Bishop of the LCA endorsed his support of the study in writing. Second, the Taskforce then emailed District Bishops representing the states/ territories of Australia, Assistant Bishops and three Mission Directors. This leadership team were introduced to the study and asked to forward the email containing information sheets on to Pastors who were considered 'champions' – that is, those that were known for having an interest in the topic of domestic violence and wanting to be part of the solution, being empathetic to addressing the problem, and could potentially identify men who use violence in their relationship.

This method of recruitment resulted in two interviews with Pastors.

To reach more Pastors, in consultation with the Taskforce, it was decided to advertise the scope of the research and the opportunity to participate in two LCA publications. First, a short article was submitted to *The Lutheran* magazine, and second, an article was published in the LCA's eNews. Both these recruitment strategies targeted Pastors, with the aim of also talking to them about supporting men's safe participation (see below, Interviewing Men).

During this recruitment opportunity, it was also decided with the Taskforce that a qualitative survey option be introduced as another method to support data collection, considering the difficulties experienced in recruiting via emails and having face-to-face interviews as the only option. This method would offer anonymity online. The link to the survey was included as part of the story in the LCA media outlets described above. The surveys also provided opportunity for Pastors to provide contact details to the researchers if interested in being interviewed face-to-face and/or to support a man to participate.

This method of recruitment resulted in seven Pastors completing the survey, and two interviews face-to-face. As detailed below in Table 2, four Pastors were interviewed and seven Pastors completed the survey.

Table 2: Pastors interviewed

Pseudonym	Age	Married	Length of service	Christian
Pastor Pete	55-60 years	30-35 years, adult children	Ordained for 10-15 years	Entire life
Pastor Tom	55-60 years	30-35 years, adult children	Ordained for 25-30 years	Entire life
Pastor Stephen	60-65 years	30-35 years, adult children	Ordained 30-35 years	Teenager
Pastor Henry	60-65 years	30-35 years, adult children	Ordained 35-40 years	Entire life

Table 3: Pastors surveyed

Pseudonym	Age	Married	Length of service	Christian
Pastor Andrew	32-41 years	Not asked	Ordained for 6-10 years	Entire life
Pastor Jeff	32-41 years	Not asked	Ordained 0-5 years	Entire life
Pastor Sam	52-61 years	Not asked	Ordained 30-35 years	Young adult
Pastor Bill	52-61 years	Not asked	Ordained 31-30	Entire life
Pastor Greg	62-71 years	Not asked	Ordained for 21-30 years	Entire life
Pastor Les	52-61 years	Not asked	Ordained 11-20 years	Entire life
Pastor Daniel	52-61 years	Not asked	Ordained 11-20 years	Entire life

Interviewing men

This project aimed to recruit men who have used violence in their intimate partner relationships, to gain firsthand accounts and understandings of how their religious beliefs shaped their experiences – as this has not been successfully attempted in Australia. However, the recruitment was unsuccessful.

Pastors who showed an interest in participation were asked to recruit men who were not high risk or in a state of crisis and showed signs of readiness to talk about their use of domestic violence. This recruitment of men within the context of a known church and with familiar Pastors, was selected to ensure participant privacy, confidentiality, and safety. Pastors and men who indicated an interest were then supported by a member of the research team to discuss information sheets, consent, and formats of interviews, as well as the setting up of time and venue. If Pastors did not feel they could recruit men, they were welcomed to be interviewed regarding their experiences of helping men. This strategy enabled one man to be interviewed (shown in Table 4) by Professor Wendt, face-to-face, for three hours (over two sessions).

Table 4: Men

Pseudonym	Age	Married	Christian
David	55-60 years	25-30 years, adult children	Entire life

Analysis

First, the four interviews with Pastors were analysed through thematic analysis, where major themes were identified from each interview. The interviews were long and hence transcription provided rich, dense documents. They were independently read once in full, read a second time and coded with a theme/subtheme heading, then read a third time, the codes checked, and quotations selected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This produced the following themes and subthemes as detailed in Table 5.

Table 5: Themes from interviews

Theme	Subtheme
Gender	Expectations
	Contestations
Understanding domestic violence	Power and control
	Shame and sin
Theological framings	Bible texts
	Teachings
Being a Pastor	Learning on the job
	Gender oppression

Second, the qualitative responses written by Pastors in the survey were also analysed through thematic analysis to build saturation, where opportunities were sought to allocate content to the themes/ subthemes identified through the interviews.

Third, the interview with David was analysed as one case study to inform, sophisticate, and increase theological understandings of domestic violence by engaging with the complexities, nuances, and idiosyncrasies of his story (Stake, 1995). David's story was invited into the presentation of findings from analysis of Pastors interviews to provide an elegant intricacy of understanding of how religious beliefs and practices are used by men to perpetrate domestic violence.

Findings: Interviews

Gender was dominant in the themes and sub-themes; hence, gender provided a framework for how Pastors understood domestic violence and how they articulated their explanations for why they perceived a denial of domestic violence in religious contexts. Pastors were able to share theological framings that shaped such gendered ideas and therefore contributed to domestic violence. Pastors also performed self-reflection during the interviews and surveys, which gave another layer of insight into gendered subjectivities that are constructed in religion.

Gender expectations and contestations

All Pastors reflected on theological narratives that shape gender expectations and described these expectations as having a long history; hence they shape and describe constructions of identity for men, women and family life. Pastors used phrases such as gender expectations being 'deep', 'strong', and 'powerful' and associated men and masculinity with 'privilege', 'not emotional' and women and femininity with 'service' and 'relational' and 'emotional'. For example, Pastor Pete said:

Living up to expectations... men have been brought up in the church with the teachings of gender not being equal, and unfortunately the church is still teaching that in lots of ways. They aren't encouraged to show any emotion and if they are being taught that they are the head of the house that all fits in with it. Nothing is the male's fault whatever happens.

David reflected on his own childhood and identified that he was taught that strength equated to being male.

My dad was big and hard-working. Very loud, very strong, and I witnessed violence in the house... I just remember getting belted all the time – I was in fear of my father... I almost lost sight of what's right and wrong because I didn't know whether I was going to be laughed at, smiled [at] or belted for my actions. So, and being a male with – a created male by God which is – has a physical strength, I was a strong – I was working with Dad, so I was a physically strong lad.

Pastor Stephen spent some time in his interview talking about the teachings of gender that Pastor Pete describes. He expanded to talk about how ideas of gender inequality have a history in the church and therefore shape men's and women's identities over time and their relationship with each other and the church.

Theological narratives are deep narratives because they describe identity, then some narratives that describe the role and service of women in church and society then describe relationships and in the home. Women keep silent is a strong text that has been used for millennia to say that women, therefore, are to submit and be silent. And if I'm using that as a cultural thing; so, women were only allowed to vote in the Lutheran church, in the 1980s, they could not vote before that. You could not have a woman as a delegate until the end of the 1980s going to Synod. So, the women then did not have a voice for themselves ... So, that is the culture of the church, and that was justified by biblical texts. In congregations, the same thing was happening in congregations, and therefore, also in families. So, there is a long conversation we could have about that.

Pastor Henry talked about expectations placed on women and family life. During his interview he shared a story about a family he knew well over a significant amount of time. He described intimate partner violence and violence towards children by the husband and he also talked about the strength of the wife enduring the violence.

I notice that it was the women, the wife who would keep things up, keep the lid on things, protect their husband ... And preserving the family unit was her safety blanket ... women live with a strong sense of shame, if anything ... because there were very strongly traditional communities. And so you had to keep the social fabric intact, and everyone had their place within that social fabric. And a woman's job was to support her husband.

Furthermore, when the Pastors were describing gender expectations, they also offered reflections that these gender expectations were being challenged by men, women, and families, and some clergy. However, in their descriptions of this challenge, they painted a picture of contestation and a culture of persistence with gender expectations, as alternatives to gender inequality were positioned as threatening to theological teachings. Pastors spoke about how men with a Lutheran upbringing are struggling to understand alternative narratives because they potentially disrupt their own sense of self. Pastor Stephen reinforced this point by suggesting that questioning male power and privilege is difficult because the theological and identity investment is constructed as 'truth' that cannot be changed or cannot be wrong.

People are so heavily invested in male power and privilege it's just so much to give up ... So it's asking a lot for people to consider another way of being ... so when you are talking about mutuality and equality of women, some men get really anxious about the language of equality, why is he positioned differently now, he believes theologically his needs come first, but he loves her and provides for her but she has to be submissive to him because the scriptures tell him to do that. Now if we introduce some narrative that says that how he understands his wife is not adequate, he has now hurt her by not letting her be equal ... he can't bring himself to admit that he did that ... Therefore, you'll find people motivated by things that you'll never understand ... he is being taken to a place he doesn't want to go, cannot comprehend.

Pastors talked about how theological teachings, including relationships between men and women, shaped people's identity, and sense of self, that is, who they are and their

relationship with God. When investment of such teachings shapes and influences life and is connected to ideas of the afterlife, perceived challenge of such teachings is felt personally, and builds fear – fear that somehow a relationship with God will be compromised.

Fear was also a theme that Pastors spoke about. For example, Pastor Henry spoke about how the claim of divinity is used to justify beliefs and practices, yet he argued that men often do this out of fear. He spoke about trying to question men's understandings of who they think God is and why they think God wants them to act violently as that is not the God of Jesus Christ. He explained that men justify violence because they are afraid of their relationship with God and afraid of losing their identity in society, of 'surrendering authority and power'.

But is fear something that governs your behaviour patterns and that controls your whole life is, is the antithesis of the gospel. Because fear is the precursor of death not of life. A perfect love drives out fear ... I think if the idea of the man is to govern people by them being afraid I know there is a cycle of abuse.

Pastor Stephen and Pastor Pete both talked about their noticing of men's reactions to arguments of gender equality. Defensiveness, confusion, and anger were some phrases they used to describe reactions. They oscillated between empathy for older men, particularly those that had grown up in the Lutheran Church, as they were experiencing challenges to their masculinity and personal turmoil as a result, and frustration as they themselves described their commitment to personally embracing gender equality and trying to embrace that challenge. For example, Pastor Pete shows this oscillation when he reflects:

The older I get the I can see that blokes are doing it tough in some ways, and not understanding their role in the relationship and then how they handle that ... blokes sometimes are not very good at communicating ... I am starting to connect with men and looking at men's groups and relationships to talk about this stuff. I do not think some men are doing this well ... So, there is a selfishness there. Anger will come out sometimes.

David reflected on his role in his marriage, but also his partners throughout the interview. He talked about trying to understand marriage, and confusion he felt in terms of understanding why it was not working, despite seeking counselling, reading the Bible, and praying to God.

I think it was just love her more, but I didn't understand what that meant. Was that giving in more? Giving her, allowing her to do, but I – I think through my Christian values, I was committed to the relationship, I had no affairs, but I also then understood a deeper understanding of my own makeup, my own sexual desire, my own physical attributes.

Pastor Tom offered a personal reflection about his own journey of confronting his male power and privilege. He spoke about his childhood, teenage years and then his marriage and how he noticed the favour or benefit awarded to his father and himself at the expense and humiliation of women in his life. He talked about questioning the teachings that awarded him privilege.

Realising that the way I'd heard my father speak to my mother was not right ... it wasn't funny. It was treated as humour at the time, very old-type humour about gender, but it was humiliating, it was degrading and that is the way I was speaking to my wife as a way of controlling her.

Pastor Stephen also spoke about men in the church who were seeking alternative narratives that challenged the gender expectations they grew up knowing. He described how men resist the 'not emotional', 'strong' male image, instead seeking masculinities that embrace caring and love, which Pastors described is also the image of Jesus Christ. Pastor Andrew wrote in the survey, that the "doctrine of male headship is a terrible burden for us all". The construction of masculinity being a burden and therefore something to be relieved of, reflects that gender expectations and contestations are felt and lived in the everyday lives of Lutheran families.

I see a lot of men almost showing some relief that they can be a little more tender and a little more aware and caring because I think that is who they want to be. I can see women exercising more strongly their voices. I listen to kids they don't put up with anything (Pastor Stephen).

Understanding domestic violence

The theme of gender expectations and contestations provided an important backdrop to how Pastors constructed their understandings of domestic violence. Pastors described domestic violence with physical abuse and then would expand to other forms, particularly emotional or spiritual. Sexual abuse was not mentioned. For example:

Using violence or the threat of violence to establish and maintain control over a spouse/household (Pastor Andrew).

Domestic violence is not exclusive to physical violence, and much DV is psychological, spiritual, or mental (Pastor Jeff).

The Pastors who were interviewed had the opportunity to expand on their understandings of domestic violence, hence provided insight into their explanations and interpretations of what domestic violence was, and why it occurred. To unpack and reach for the nuances of theological interpretations of domestic violence, Pastor Tom through his own experience and reflections in the interview, talked about the consequences of gender expectations and inequality and how gender constructions shaped the possibilities of domestic violence because power is exercised in family relationships.

To understand what domestic violence means needs to be informed by those who are experiencing the violence and to learn how to listen to them, how it affects them. I really appreciate that this is a male problem, distinctly male problem. I know that people push back against that but it is a male problem that men have to work at dealing with it ... After that workshop on domestic violence ... for me that was hugely confronting.... So there was a professional realisation but there was also a deep personal realisation that the culture that I'd grown up in and in what I'd taken for granted as a way of the husband relating to his wife as acceptable I realised wasn't. I had to think long and deep about myself and the way I was acting as well as my professional self and the help that I was offering people and I became more and more involved in that community and in that conversation and it helped me a lot because first I could understand what I was experiencing but it also gave me ways of responding.

Pastor Pete explained that he believed many families informed by Lutheran teachings and Pastors, may not recognise, or understand domestic violence, because they associate it with physical abuse, and do not see or interpret emotional, psychological or verbal abuse as part of domestic violence because they are intertwined with constructions of gender expectations that allow inequality. Pastor Stephen similarly reflected that he thought Pastors and families did not recognise domestic violence as a form of control, beyond physical violence, because gender power relations construct the possibilities that men can speak harshly to their wife, they can tell her what to do, and they are given permission to not be good at communicating or good at relationships, as this is the domain of women – to service relationships and the family.

However, Pastor Stephen also expanded his explanation for why domestic violence is largely only seen as physical violence. He introduced the concept of shame. He talked about men experiencing shame. First, he connected the concept of shame with sin. Sin brings shame in front of God and in front of congregational peers; therefore, if interpersonal gendered exchanges within the family, that subscribe to gendered expectations of relationships, are labelled abusive, Pastor Stephen explained it is overwhelming for couples, because sin then emerges and compromises a perceived relationship with God.

The raw thing is always shame before family, shame before others, shame before God ... I could start talking about fear, fear of judgement because shame is a church thing, because church and my faith is a congregational activity ... let's go deeper below the

shame ... God comes to us and takes upon our sin on the cross and freely gives his righteousness ... I'm put right with God, in my baptism I am called Christian, I didn't earn it ... but often with domestic violence, people are caught up and feel ashamed that I have sinned, and God will strike me dead. If I was more righteous, I wouldn't have done it. If I was more righteous, I wouldn't have accepted my husband doing it. So, it becomes an expression of my failure to be adequately righteous ... I need to be holy and righteous before God, and I am failing, therefore God will send me to hell.

Second, he explained that men will resist shame and resist being positioned with sin, because they believe they are living the gendered expectations according to God's will. Therefore, the language and meanings of domestic violence, particularly exercising male power and privilege is not viewed as abusive.

Then often people in shame, will retreat from the church and they'll get further and further away from the preaching and teaching of what God does for you, and you end up in this mire that God hates me, God hates them, which is very hard to deal with ... and there is that conflict in the sexes and the desire of the man to be found without shame.

David grappled with the possibility of divorce and talked about many ways in which he sought help to keep his marriage, such as reading the Bible, counselling, and reaching out to Pastors for guidance. It was only when he perceived permission, through God's grace to divorce, did he divorce, but as his quote shows, he was still grappling with what he perceived to be his sin and his wife's sin.

I said, 'I can't do this anymore.' So I moved out of home and rented a place but I only moved out to get some air and rebuild the relationship, but she didn't, yeah, didn't happen. So, I guess, the thing that made it [a] final decision, I was talking to a Pastor about it and saying, 'I'm doing the wrong thing by divorcing – thou shalt not divorce', and this guy said, 'Now you're putting God's law, thou shalt not divorce, above God's grace, right?' – that was the clincher. So then ... I will go through with this and get divorced, but even still, that was like, the whole process, the Pastors, they just – they don't know how to deal with it. You go there thinking my life isn't what it is in scripture as it should be, and I know I'm a sinner, I know I've failed, I know repentance, I know forgiveness, but freakin' hell... but I think Pastors are too freaking soft, they just preach flowery stuff these days. They don't – maybe I wanted them to nail (names his wife) ... but they don't nail us anymore and tell us we're crap and then build us up again, as in, if you're never told you've done anything wrong, then you're always living in this lovely flower zone, well then, what's the problem? Just carry on as you are, but we're just bad, we're sinners, we do wrong, right? We need to be able to understand how to really repent of that and then believe you're forgiven and then be free again, but you can't stop doing wrong.

Theological framings

Asking Pastors to reflect on their understandings of domestic violence, as shown above, allowed them to offer interpretations beyond broad definitions that have formed in mainstream policy and practice contexts. Their explanations enabled insight into how Lutheran families understand and identify (or not) domestic violence within broader theological framings of gender and sin. At the same time, Pastors also identified and explained theological references and teachings that (1) men who perpetrate domestic violence use and engage with to understand and justify their behaviour, and (2) that they themselves draw on to assist victims and perpetrators.

The book of Ephesians, Chapters 4-5 in the New Testament of the Bible, was a reference most Pastors mentioned in terms of how men can use these teachings to justify their male privilege and status above women, therefore their use of violence. Pastor Stephen spoke about Ephesians for some time during his interview and provided insight into the contestation of interpretations regarding gender roles.

Ephesians Chapter 4 and 5 ... I want to show you the New International Version ... Paul is going on, through Ephesians, and following God's example, therefore walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us ... Now this is a commonly understood text, and see, this is instructions for the Christian household ... so can you see it says submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, submit yourselves to your husbands as you do to the Lord ... and then it says husbands love your wives. Now, in the first publication of the international version, verse 21 was included here. So, it says, yep, sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of the Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, was the way they published it ... In their first edition of the New international version – that line was in a previous paragraph, and then it had instructions for Christians household, as a heading for a new paragraph. So, they divided a sentence to make a new section ... why am I telling you that?

I'm telling you that because this whole section is about submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ ... But to put it in the preceding paragraph and to start mid-sentence, as a new section, is what we call eisegesis, it's reading into the text – your agenda ... It means that it is easy to say the language of submission is biblical, the NIV translation imported their agenda on gender and ignored that dominant phrase. The church always has that struggle when we are talking cultural expressions.

In the presentation of Ephesians, one can see that Pastor Stephen is trying to tell a history of translation, language use, and interpretations influenced by cultures of the day, which is performed through gender power relations. He argues that the interpretation of celestial inequality between men and women meets multiple male hegemonic agendas including for the church constructing the Christian household in a particular way, and for men who use violence, a way to explain and justify their behaviour. Other Pastors in the survey also wrote about Ephesians and supported the argument made by Pastor Stephen that interpretations can be corrupted to suit men who use violence.

I have drawn attention to Ephesians 5:21 and explained submission is mutual and voluntary and this passage is not a good Christian wife as an obedient follower of her husband. I gently tried to show that Christian marriage (and relationships generally) involve mutual respect, trust, service and honouring. Submission as described in the Bible is mutual and voluntary and cannot be mandated (Pastor Bill).

Sinful nature vs the new nature in Christ. Ten commandments, the image of God in each person but also in [the] relationship, the expression of love per 1 Cor 13, the love of Christ for his bride the church, the two become one and harming one's partner is self-harm. Freeing loving, serving the partner benefits self (Pastor Greg).

Pastor Henry also reflected on Ephesians and talked about how male leaders of the clergy claim status of the divine scripture, such as Ephesians, and use culture to create a system which encourages inertia, so that it is impossible to challenge or change. When it is divine that's the final word on everything, Pastor Henry explained, therefore closing conversations.

It's contextual, it's not written in a vacuum from some sealed envelope. I'm sorry it was a patriarchal world and that's just what it was like. So the Bible's contextually and I think always has to be read contextually it's not prescribing a divine order of society. I don't believe there's any such thing ... the church doesn't prescribe a divine order of how the church should be run either. Lutherans are free to have any form of structure they want ... We have liberated from having to have a Pope and all that sort of stuff. So we have multiple wives for example in the Old Testament, how many did Abraham have? There is no perfect form of society or government and the worst kind of family is when a man says 'God put me in charge do as I say.'

David reflected on his perceptions of men and women's roles in relationships, and he positioned masculinity with strength, and women with emotion. In trying to understand domestic violence, he believed women are perpetrators of domestic violence because they

use their emotional strength to manipulate men. However, he positions women as the possible cause of violence and hence men naturally act out their physical strength – hence there is a justification present in his quotation as he draws on his biblical ideas of male and female.

I don't think we're educated on who we are as a male and as a female. I don't like society trying to make us the same. We are equal in God's eyes but we are completely different people and boys are just full of energy and are strong and physical, and I think we should be made aware of that, of our own physicality and what problems that can bring about, and we need then to be really educated on the beauty, the gorgeousness, of female, the frailness, in a sense, of – and learn to understand that ... blokes deal with things, they just punch each other and ... move on, whereas women get all emotional and moody, so in some environments it's expected that men will be physical. By no means am I saying that in a marriage situation, that physical stuff is not accepted, not at all, but then there needs to be an education process that women can be very vicious and emotionally manipulative as well.

Through the interview, Pastor Stephen also named other biblical texts that he identified have been used to justify gender inequality and hierarchy, particularly the debates regarding the order of creation and the ordination of women. With such vehement debate regarding these issues, Pastor Stephen stated these constructions of gender influence Christian households, and therefore can keep domestic violence unspoken or unrecognised, or justified – perhaps as seen in David's account above. Again, to make his point, he identified 1 Corinthians, Chapter 14 and the book of Colossians that use language of women's submission in the church and household. He explains that such language is used in a particular historical time, with the development of Lutheran tradition and how teachings captured that people have a relationship with God and God has a place and task for everyone. He said that cultural context and history needs to be understood in how these interpretations of gender have remained.

It is the cultural things that a person who is maybe pushing or saying and they are often unable to just delineate that ... they might not be self-aware to see that they are caught up in cultural definitions that are not framed by the scriptures ... so we have Lutheran families with a strong tradition, who will have that embedded in their psyche ... Lutheran tradition, it's your status in life, or your station, not simply your vocation, where God has placed you.

Similarly, Pastor Bill in his responses, explained that domestic violence is not recognised or understood by some men in the Lutheran church because they equate it with the gender order, but he also explained that men will use scripture to reassert this power and position in the church and family. What Pastor Stephen and Bill's accounts show is that there is tension between constructing men as 'knowing no different' because they are acculturated by gender beliefs they have been taught their entire lives, and constructing men as strategically using theological teachings to maintain power and privilege. The tension of what is divine versus what is cultural is present in the debates.

Men deny that they have done such a thing – domestic violence – because of their view of male and female roles in marriage ... I see this as the worst in some men, acting in the assumption that they are behaving in a God-pleasing way. My view of the depth of sin in all of us has also increased, noting our willingness to twist God's word for our own fearful, selfish ends (Pastor Bill).

Pastor Henry also identified references to Adam and Eve and how texts about them and sin can be used to justify gender inequality and domestic violence.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, people go right back there for their justification that's probably one of the prominent ones ... and how Eve ate the apple and Adam was supposed to dominate her and people claim superiority on one gender over another ... but this is all so ... iffy ... particularly when one studies languages and translation.

All Pastors expressed their worry or concern about responding to domestic violence (discussed more below), describing how they felt they did not have the expertise or knowledge to do so. To provide a response, Pastors explained they would draw on theological teachings to assist victims and perpetrators, hoping that their shared faith in God would bring some comfort to families. For example, some Pastors talked about relationship with God, and the act of forgiveness to heal from the turmoil of domestic violence.

We might justify the sin because we are humans ... it doesn't make it right; I did have a really good chat with one of the mums about forgiveness because her husband has left her ... she was really struggling with that forgiveness, it's hard to explain it ... There are ways forward, that is the gospel side of it ... through grace and a God is a loving God, and he is walking with you (Pastor Pete).

I think I have. I am more prone to lift up references to grace and forgiveness, as well as the fact that we are all sinners in need of God's grace (Pastor Bill).

In Pastor Pete and Bill's description of using theological teachings, they are drawing on neutrality, that is, no one is to blame for domestic violence because it happens because all people are sinful. They do not judge the woman or her partner, instead they talk about healing through a relationship with God. They are drawing on Lutheran teachings that we are all born in sin, and it is only through the grace of God that we are forgiven. On the other hand, other Pastors also talked about the concept of sin, to understand and respond to domestic violence, and inferred that domestic violence was a man's sin, and therefore they were careful to not urge women victims to forgive domestic violence. For example:

I draw heavily on the sinful nature into which we are born, and therefore we need Jesus.

God did not allow this to happen, but rather the sinful free will of man did this. God is a God of second chances, forgiveness, and love. And through the Holy Spirit we must be willing to engage in that process with each other. But NOT if it then places the woman in harm's way, I am wanting to help them to understand that it was not anything they did, there is no blame to be put on them for being abused (Pastor Jeff).

I have always avoided any reference to male headship ... I have also never held the sanctity of marriage, or the call to forgive as reasons to leave a woman trapped with a violent partner, by guiltting them or requiring them to forgive and love when endangered by lack of love and respect (Pastor Greg).

Pastor Tom talked more overtly about his use of theological teachings to support victims of domestic violence and position men with responsibility for their use of violence. He expressed, for him, it was important to name male oppression of others.

There are social justice themes throughout the scriptures that looks very much at advocating for the weak and the oppressed. I look at those themes and the importance of Christian life being enriching, sustaining, nurturing, encouraging life and taking joy in another. This is embedded deeply within the Christian scriptures. So, I take a social justice view, who is taking that from you ... male power is impressing on other people, I do not care about not saying that anymore ... it needs to be said.

David shared theological teachings and passages from the Bible during his interview, sharing them as a way of trying to understand himself and marriage. David talked about sin, being born in sin, and the turmoil he felt trying to please God.

This is when Noah got off the ark and then Noah built verse 20, so Genesis Chapter 8, verse 20. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, 'Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood.' So with that I thought, I remember thinking gee, I naturally don't have good intention. So left alone this aggressiveness, this physicality will only turn to evil without Christ ... And then again in Matthew the same ...

Matthew 7 verse 11, 'Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be open.' God is saying, he is going back to the garden of Eden, going back to original sin saying, you've broken off the love for me, and the love is now focused in on yourself, get out of the garden and toil. I've built you strong and physical, you've got to work your arse off now ... these, I remember these really stuck out and thought, gee whiz don't condemn myself for being this angry aggressive person, because this is what God is saying I am. I think this is the verses that I really remember it's that 1st Peter again, in Chapter 2, no Chapter 1 around 13 or 14. Therefore prepare your minds for action, be self-controlled, set your hope fully on the grace to be given to you when Jesus is revealed. As obedient children do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. So once again it's reaffirming your evilness, so therefore I never then felt guilty or burdened by my behaviour, it's almost, that's natural, that's expected that's who I am ... I had still this human nature welling up wanting to retaliate.

Pastor Henry, when he reflected on gender relations and domestic violence tried to explain that it continues to exist and is difficult to tackle because as he stated "there's the theology of the church and then there's the culture of the church – traditional long held customs". He argued when one studies and reads the teaching of Jesus Christ domestic violence can never be justified, that it is culture that enables domestic violence.

Culture is driven by our human nature and our, perhaps our fear, our anxiety. And the others driven by the gospel, which we believe is the word of God to us, which gives us freedom and healing. And I think they have quite different sources and it's a struggle between the one and the other. The struggle is the thing we call religion or the practice of religion ... the other driver, which is the theology of the church, which I think has given us all the idealism about society, human rights and equal opportunity and equality of the sexes. And all of those things actually come from the better side of the church. And they're always fighting an uphill battle against our human nature which continually tries to turn it into a political or power game. The only reason I could be in the Lutheran Church ... is for the second reason, not for the first. I don't need the church to be religious, but I do need it if I want the word of God and the gospel. So the church is always fight – it's almost as though we're at war with ourselves on that front.

Being a Pastor

The Pastors also talked about where their understandings of domestic violence came from, and how their knowledge developed over time. Pastors reflected two sub-themes in how they came to engage with knowledge about domestic violence. First, some Pastors explained they learned about it 'on the job' and it was through their experience of helping families that they developed an awareness of domestic violence. Second, some Pastors said they did not receive support from the Lutheran Church or leaders when they sought knowledge or assistance for responding to domestic violence in their congregations and hence sought 'outside' help, mainly from women's shelters.

Some Pastors said they understood domestic violence because it was thrust upon them in their work, mainly because women victims in their congregation asked for assistance in emergency circumstances. For example, Pastor Pete said he did not have 'a great deal of experience', but over time domestic violence appeared as part of his work, and he therefore developed an interest and wanted to understand it more.

There have been two occurrences where the husband has been violent, and in one circumstance the police called and said, 'Can you come around? Can you collect this furniture, collect this lady and take her away?' I have not done any formal study ... I didn't go looking for it but realising that it is an issue when the circumstances arrived or appeared for me.

During the interviews, some Pastors wanted to express their dismay or frustration that the Lutheran Church did not support any training or awareness about domestic violence; hence they sought knowledge from 'outside' the church networks. As Pastor Pete expanded, he said:

It's probably only the last five years and probably since the Royal Commission that churches have got serious about it, so prior to that no nothing, no support, nothing in one's studies...

Pastor Tom had a similar experience to Pastor Pete, where he too explained that he was thrust into supporting some women to leave violent relationships. Again, when he sought assistance from the church to better understand domestic violence, this was absent and hence he sought out networks with women's shelters to learn about domestic violence.

My training all those years ago ... I don't think I heard domestic and family violence mentioned once. When I graduated, I was completely oblivious that it was a thing, and then I encountered it very early on in my ministry as a novice. I didn't have a name for it and I certainly didn't have a conceptual framework for it to understand what it was I was seeing. I just knew that she was in danger, and I didn't know what to do about it. I did as much as I thought I could. It was frightening for me and that's sort of my first conscious introduction to it ... I've helped women pack up their cars, I've taken my car and loaded it ... Middle of the day you turn up and you just as fast as you can load up the cars and just getting the heck out of there.

Pastor Tom spoke about trying to reach out to the church for support to develop his understanding of domestic violence, but he described this as very difficult, hence he sought out local domestic violence action groups and women's shelters in his areas of ministry to support their work and learn about it. Pastor Tom also expressed sadness at the responses he received when he did reach out to the church and instigated conversations with leaders about domestic violence. He explained over time he felt unsafe persisting with the institution to take notice of domestic violence.

My response is that the institutional church provided me with none. While individual people who are members of the church provided me with significant help, they were very few. I felt thoroughly unsupported and even at personal risk in my professional practice. I found that there was no willingness to discuss the matter; that I was cautioned to not place the sanctity of marriage at risk; that I'm only listening to one side of the story and that I haven't listened to 'him' and how 'he' might have felt provoked by 'her'; and that dealing with domestic violence is part of an anti-Christian, pro-feminist, anti-male social movement... I couldn't connect the Gospel that the church espouses with the actions and culture that I was experiencing. To that end I sourced help and support from a variety of non-church, non-Christian sources. I found those sources to be most helpful, and the relationships that I subsequently formed as most supportive. Sadly, I felt most safe, supported and resourced in my professional practice by people and in contexts outside of the institutional church ... As I reflected on this I sensed that the prevailing issue was a threat to male power and privilege in the LCA – something that legitimised our church's male-only leadership structures and practices.

Like Pastor Tom, three Pastors in the survey also indicated that they sought assistance to respond to domestic violence outside the church.

I have received training and PD [professional development] at various levels and institutions over many years (Pastor Jeff).

I have been privileged to work with a variety of organisations. They have been vital in forming my awareness and response to DV (Pastor Keith).

On the other hand, three Pastors in the survey stated that they had received support from the church and found it helpful in forming their knowledge and responses to domestic violence.

Through the Hidden Hurts Healing Hearts material and also some trustworthy, mature and sensitive parishioner (Pastor Bill).

Finally, some Pastors shared their personal journey of growth and insight as a leader and man, and hence saw it as part of their role to understand and tackle gender oppression more broadly. For example, Pastor Pete stated:

I think your theology changes and I think once you read a bit more and look at some of the research and listen to more people... you start to see generational change, and the way my father has changed some of his thinking too. So, I have seen a change in myself, I hope it's for the better.

Pastor Stephen spoke about his journey of self-reflection and how power is exercised by him as a Pastor and as a man. He shared his decision to seek opinions both inside and outside the church on a regular basis, to be accountable as a church leader.

I always will be asking the question, so it's really what God is asking of us, is this really the mission of God, or are we simply perpetuating cultural norms for some reason, under the guise of being the church, to constantly be asking that question because we believe the spirit will always be unfolding what God is asking. Spiritual yearning needs to be deep. I need to be self-accountable and question my inner drive.

Pastor Tom, throughout his interview, continually reflected on the exercise of power. He explained he saw misuse of male power in families and intimate partner relationships, and this prompted him to seek professional and personal development, which was received from outside the church. He shared that he has personally grappled with the lack of response from the church and how this too has shaped his growth as a leader in the church.

I think it's partly realising, that as a white, Western male, I've been thoroughly enculturated into a particular view of power, and I can see that now ... which takes a long time ... that is what I have realised about perpetrators, that some of them are incomprehensible but others actually don't want to be living the life that they're living and they would desperately love to find a way out of it ... I personally have faced the context of power and the unequal distribution of power ... but now my faith has taken me to a space of someone who serves ... The fear is the fear of being feeble, being weak, being humiliated and to live away from that fear or as though that fear is of no consequence at all is a powerful thing, yeah ... it's taken far too long but I can see a different world now.

Pastor Henry reflected on how women have been excluded from positions in the church and how this has led him to agitate for change. Again, he discussed the difference between culture and theology for him, and how culture justifies male privilege.

Gender inequality and domestic violence, I'm absolutely appalled by it... took me far too long to wake up to the fact that that's what was happening. Forty years ago we didn't even ask about women clergy... one of the reasons I couldn't continue in my job... is that I couldn't abide anymore being the leader of a church which denied women that role... I have done everything I could and I am devastated and ashamed that women cannot be ordained ... the reasons given are cultural not faith or theological.

The Pastors represented in the survey did not reflect on power like the three Pastors interviewed, but instead wrote about their relationship with God and how this had changed because of their engagement with helping families experiencing domestic violence.

My view of God's grace, forgiveness and overflowing love has deepened. Perhaps that's a reaction against what I see as the worst in some men, acting in the assumption that they are behaving in a God-pleasing way. My view of the depth of sin in all of us has also increased, noting our willingness to twist God's word for our own fearful, selfish ends (Pastor Bill).

My faith is not informed by human sin but informed by God's good design and desire for humanity and his judgement on sin through His self-giving love. Domestic, street, or violence in the arena of war does not change those truths. What has changed is my awareness of the wrongs done in the name of love when people do not live according to love your neighbour as yourself (Pastor Greg).

David spoke a lot about trying to understand what it means to be a man during his interview. He drew upon notions of sin, and numerous times spoke about evilness within human beings and God's grace being the only meaning for change, but this change was impossible without Jesus Christ. He reflected numerous times about men being strong, physical and that is who they are. He discussed 'human nature', and therefore stated domestic violence will never change. In David's accounts there is struggle and tensions in how he understands men, women, and relationships, and how he looks to theology to help his understandings of himself, his use of violence and the role he perceives women play in provoking it. In short, perhaps he is arguing if women played their natural order, domestic violence would not be necessary – and hence he is subscribing to what Pastor Henry points out to be a perception of the divine order and that's the final word on everything. The power of divinity claims silences in the naming of men's violence against women.

Men you are not allowed to hit your wives. Yeah I know that. Men you're not allowed to speed. Well okay, no one speeds. Footballs you're not allowed to break the law on a footy field ... society just needs honest, honesty needs to be men this is who you are, this is who we are... it is always in men's groups who do you want to be, never who we are ... it is like women, are they fully aware of who they are, their emotions, their hormones, the issues that are coming their way... we are sinful in nature, so we have tendencies, we have issues, we have struggles ... I seem to be harping on that point at the moment. Who are we? Scripture tells us who we are ... then it's understanding who the opposite gender is as well. And I'm saying, well yes the man's got to stop hitting you, but why can't you walk away? And it's just understanding everybody and having expectation of when we understand how the genders are naturally through creation are going to behave, understand that.

Summary of key findings from the interviews

Considering all the interviews analysed these summary points are made:

- All Pastors reflected on theological narratives that shape gender expectations and described these expectations as having a long history; hence they shape and describe constructions of identity for men, women and family life.
- Some Pastors recognised that women's roles and femininity are largely focused upon in family life and rarely men and masculinity are deconstructed because of male power and privilege.
- Some Pastors recognised that hermeneutics, arguments for inerrancy and infallible truths play a role in uncritical acceptance of gender inequality and gender constructions.
- Some Pastors named the concept of fear, explaining that when men's identities are being challenged, they fear for their relationship with God.
- Most Pastors believed many families informed by Lutheran teachings may not recognise, or understand domestic violence, because they associate it with physical abuse, and do not see or interpret emotional, psychological, or verbal abuse as part of domestic violence because these forms of abuse are intertwined with constructions of gender expectations that allow inequality or reflect the gender order.
- Some Pastors named shame, explaining that men will resist shame and resist being positioned with sin, because they believe they are living the gendered expectations according to God's will.
- The book of Ephesians, Chapters 4-5 in the New Testament of the Bible, was a reference most Pastors mentioned in terms of how men can use these teachings to justify their male privilege and status above women, therefore their use of violence.
- All Pastors expressed their worry or concern about responding to domestic violence describing they felt they did not have the expertise or knowledge to do so.
- Some Pastors explained they learned about domestic violence 'on the job' and it was through their experience of helping families that they developed an awareness of domestic violence.
- Some Pastors said they did not receive support from the Lutheran Church or leaders when they sought knowledge or assistance for responding to domestic violence in their congregations and hence sought 'outside' help, mainly from women's shelters.

Discussion

Increasingly religious organisations and communities are recognising they have a role in identifying, preventing, and responding to domestic violence. This includes churches and faith-based organisations developing various strategies and campaigns to recognise and address intimate partner violence. Initiatives include activities to raise awareness of what is domestic violence; training clergy, lay workers and key personnel; developing inter-faith strategic connections; developing organisational policies and procedures that clarify church-based and institutional legal responsibilities regarding responses and provision of support to those experiencing and impacted by violence and abuse, and to promote safety.

Further, some religious organisations have expressed their concern that there are connections to be made between specific ecclesiastical beliefs and practices that have detrimentally contributed to domestic violence and specifically, male perpetrator violence against women. Some religious organisations have also undertaken or commissioned research to further understand gender-based violence in their communities (Powell & Pepper, 2021). At the same time there is evidence of faith leader and community reluctance to recognise and discuss issues relating to domestic violence (Truong et al., 2020; Knickmeyer et al., 2010).

Theological arguments expressed in the articles analysed provide insights into arguments that are part of an effort to counter challenges and stabilise current dominant Lutheran gender norms and relations, to maintain the current LCA gender order where it is acceptable to interpret scripture in a way that discriminates against women. Other articles include expressions of concern regarding the misinterpretation of scripture to justify discrimination against women and assert theological arguments for the ordination of women and gender equality within the church. Some articles directly name the misuse of scripture to support male power over women and lament the impacts and consequences for women and men. Together these theological arguments can also be interpreted as lived experiences of gender-based discriminatory practices and indicate not only how authors understand their role in maintaining or challenging a Lutheran gender order but also, express the theological arguments at work in problematising Lutheran masculinities and challenging hegemonic masculinity. The gender order and equality that Hensley and Kleinig articulate for example, is not connected with consideration of those who experience the injustice of theologically-based practices of discrimination such as experiencing domestic violence as a woman and with respect to the matter of the ordination of women.

It is important that scripture is identified in detail to illustrate how domestic violence is not acceptable. Yet there is the opportunity to extend the argument that focuses on scripture to engage with lived experiences of domestic violence in congregations and in the church and the church's response, responsibilities and accountabilities. Theological discussions are not always including considerations for pastoral practice. For example, on the one hand Paul's teachings are provided as evidence illustrating how domestic violence is unacceptable and yet on the other hand, other teachings of Paul's are cited and analysed to argue for an ordering of marriage and gender relations that have the lived experience of social exclusion on the basis of gender. This can create matters to be debated for decades and lived experiences and pastoral practices can unintentionally be silenced.

Christian scriptural priorities supporting a complementary theological argument for gender differences in leadership opportunities are constraining women's ordination and reasserting the practice of excluding women from public ministry. This is a constraint on women that women and men are being asked to continue to practice through powerful arguments in that women's equal rights to religious leadership are framed as disrupting and thus a threat to Lutheran religious life and the church, and a deviation from the love and order provided by God. This can be understood as a theological rationale limiting women's religiosity; however, in this analysis it is important to also recognise the limits to Lutheran masculinity being argued. Articles together indicate diversity within the church, that the church is heterogenous and that there are efforts to contest and reassert the power to continue to exclude women from public ministry.

Analysis of theological articles and arguments draws attention to hermeneutical injustice. This is when religious norms may cause harms and also, prevent people and groups from recognising and understanding how to address injustices including abuse and violence (see Panchuk, 2020). If gender inequality in religious leadership is theologically argued as an acceptable practice and Lutheran norm to guide the nexus of marriage-family-community and the individual relationship to God's grace, this theology sets a concerning framing of women per se as embodying risk to the Lutheran gender order. This gender order makes it extremely difficult to name and respond to men's violence against women in intimate partner relationships. This is gender inequality practised through theological argument. The articles for male-only ordination do not engage in hermeneutic reflection on power as theologically practised by men over women with respect to what risks may arise for men given how they are positioned in a Lutheran order, how individual responsibility is understood, nor what may be gained in sharing the power imbued in the opportunity for religious leadership. Without this reflection or possibility, understanding and tackling domestic violence becomes difficult and contested.

This discussion returns to the context of the analysis of theological articles. Transformation is sought with respect to domestic violence; that is, the LCA has supported research to increase its capacity to understand, address and prevent domestic violence. These theological articles and scripture interpretations and priorities need to be threaded with a consideration about gender relations, roles and structures and how these ideas shape domestic violence and violence against women. Walby (2012) offers a useful discussion of ontological violence to inform this point:

The sociological analysis of violence requires the development of an appropriate ontology of violence; defining the concept and elucidating the nature of the relationship between violence and other social forces. This concerns the relationship of violence with the biological aspects of bodies, with other forms of power, politics, the state, the economy and culture. (p.101) ... It is important to develop a conceptual repertoire that does not reduce violence to other forms of power, but rather enables the analysis of the relationship between them. (p.103)

Religion is another key social force informing the context to violence and abuse. Religious contexts inform how domestic violence, marriage, family life and intimate partner relations are understood, discussed and experienced. The interviews in this study brought out the capacity of gendered theological discourse and the truth valency of scripture to both inform domestic violence and potentially be part of the solution, while at the same time the narratives express the inherent tensions and the resistant inherent religious culture.

Accounts of violence are shaped by men's relationship to violence and by their more structured relation to power – maleness is not inherently violent (Hearn, 1998). To open possibilities of difference and enable men's navigation of other discourses of everyday gender in religious contexts requires understanding and intervention against this gender-violence nexus (Jakobsen, 2014) that is reinforced culturally and structurally in religious practices. This is of course difficult, and many people have endured resistance and backlash by and within religious institutions. The challenge, as this research has highlighted, is that such a backlash will always be present in a religious context when dominant masculinities are perceived to be divine and endorsed institutionally. Religion is used to naturalise gender difference and this in turn, allows the reproduction of domestic violence. Gendered discourses enable men individually and collectively in religion to determine what does and does not count as violence. Theological determinations and arguments for truths based on scriptural interpretation that restrain gender equality, need further recognition to increase support for safe and peaceful intimate partner relations. Therefore, it is imperative that the role of religion, use and impacts of theology are further considered when they are contributing to gender inequality, and that religious organisations and leaders come to the fore, in the effort to address domestic violence.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study aimed to generate knowledge about how religious beliefs and practices are used by men to perpetrate domestic violence. The document analysis and interviews with male Pastors and the one man who identified as a perpetrator of domestic violence provided rich accounts of how the LCA and men understand and talk about domestic violence with gender constructions and gendered hierarchies featuring heavily. Gendered expectations that constructed service to men by women were supported through teachings of the order of creation, gendered compatibility, and submission. Through biological or essentialist ideas of man and woman together with historical and cultural privileges to constructions of Lutheran masculinity, domestic violence was viewed as inevitable, or a representation of the nature order – a man being a man. This study has shown the way gender constructions are maintained through male interests in family life, and how gender permeates and is reinforced by religion – a significant institution with multi-level systems of social practices – endorsed through ideas of divinity. Domestic violence in religious contexts is intricately intertwined with gender – that is, performances of gender norms that maintain gender hierarchies and vice versa. For many people practising religion there is no problem of domestic violence because this is their cultural frame that has been rewarded through beliefs and practices. Religion is a key site for reproducing gendered and gender-normative discourses and the performance of dominant masculinities.

Yet domestic violence exists. This study raises important questions to be considered by the LCA if it is to move forward in its quest to tackle domestic violence.

- To what extent does the instruction around women's 'quiet' and place in the church/marriage/ family life order – and conversely, instruction for men on masculinity – contribute to the lived experiences of gender-based violence and inequality?
- How does a woman experiencing domestic violence talk about their experience if their voice is excluded from the leadership space of the congregation and public church?
- How does a man perpetrating domestic violence recognise and seek support to address his violence if his masculinity is positioned as dominant/ dominating in the Lutheran gender order and in his marriage?
- How does a congregation – a collective identity and experience – name the problem of domestic violence and address it?
- Where and how does the issue and experience of domestic violence and gender equality get not only theologically considered, but spoken about and addressed by the church including through pastoral practice?

Gender inequality supports domestic violence – the two are inseparable. Spiritual abuse may be committed by an individual perpetrator against their intimate partner. Further – and as this research illustrates – it is imperative to understand the wider context and influences at work that shape practices of social exclusion and gender-based inequalities. To address violence against women and domestic violence then fundamental to this effort is the need to address spiritual abuse at an individual, structural and cultural level. Further, this requires theological reflection with respect to how accountability and responsibility to victim-survivors and perpetrators of violence, is to be practised by the Lutheran Church of Australia. It is imperative that responsibility for addressing and ending domestic violence is not left solely in the hands of the individual, but that the LCA provides leadership on a structural level to contribute to address gender-based inequalities in its effort, care and reflection on how to support individual safety and caring communities of worship.

Religion – including Lutheranism in the Australian context – provides individuals with guidance and support pertaining to morality, how to live, hope, relate, love, experience intimacy and family, manage the challenges of life and the various life-stages, and prepare for the afterlife. It also can offer victim-survivors and perpetrators much-needed support. Religious leaders and the LCA have much to offer in supporting people and communities to feel safe. The interview findings together with the document analysis demonstrate how the LCA is committed to addressing domestic violence and at the same time, troubled by aspects of

Lutheranism and LCA practice that are informing gender relations, roles and subjectivities, and that are constraining the care, peace and respect needed to address the risk of practices of harm and abuse.

The research findings and limitations in gathering interview data acknowledge the difficulties in researching and talking about domestic violence in a religious context. It is our hope that this landmark research project inspires the LCA to continue its journey in understanding, responding to and ending domestic violence. We sincerely appreciate the LCA's leadership. We also hope this research and the church's commitment to addressing domestic violence contribute to an evidence-base that inspires other denominations and faiths to further understand their capacity to address domestic violence.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the document analysis, interviews, discussion, and conclusion.

- Understand and celebrate gender equality.

Gender injustice and inequality are drivers for domestic violence. The LCA has an important role in enabling social inclusion and supporting, advocating for, and theologically leading a culture whereby gender justice and equality are respected and embedded in scripture use, liturgy, and congregational life.

- Support Bishops, Pastors, and other leaders to understand and respond to domestic violence.

The role, responsibility, and capacity of leaders in the LCA are vital in leading evidenced-based understandings and responses to domestic violence. Congregations value and listen deeply to LCA leadership and hence leadership plays a powerful role in the development of community and family life. The LCA has an important role in supporting leaders by endorsing evidenced-based research that addresses the gender drivers of domestic violence, as well as establishing safety for families and responders. Through this endorsement the LCA can formally integrate and/or mandate domestic violence training into Pastor education; build evidence-based policies, procedures, and practices; and provide ongoing education and professional development opportunities regarding best practices. Leaders need to feel safe when trying to understand and respond to domestic violence, hence the LCA has an important role in enabling self-care, debriefing, and ongoing support for its leaders.

- Explore and grow pastoral practice that focuses on men and masculinity.

Fear and shame act as barriers for men to talk about their use of violence in family life. The LCA has an important role in providing theological and spiritual guidance for men to safely explore their beliefs and assumptions about using violence as well as understand their own fear and shame. However, this exploration cannot compromise women and children's safety. Risk and safety are paramount when working with men.

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Appendix A: Interview questions

Sample questions for Pastors:

- Collect basic demographics: age, married, how long been Pastor, journey into ministry, how many churches etc.
- Please start by telling me what you understand about domestic violence? What motivated you to take part in this study?
- Tell me about how you came to understand domestic violence as a Pastor? Where did you get your knowledge from?
- What are your experiences of supporting men who use violence?
- What are your experiences of supporting partners (women) and children?
 - Have there been any challenges in supporting both?
 - How have you managed women's and children's safety while supporting men?
- What theological framings do you draw on to understand and help people experiencing domestic violence?
 - What scriptural passages do you use and engage with?
 - Have you adapted your use of scripture over time? For example, have you changed the scriptural references you use?
- Tell me about moments when men you have supported talked about scriptural beliefs or practices to justify and explain their use of violence. How do you work with that knowledge?
- Have you received support from the Lutheran Church of Australia in how to understand and respond to domestic violence – tell me about that?
 - Training at the Australian Lutheran College, Campaign, informal support because you reached out, sought formal training outside the Church?
- Have your theological framings or understandings changed over time because of your engagement with domestic violence? Tell me about that change?
- Tell me about the man you are referring to in the study – how long you have known him, does he still go to Church, where are his partner/ children? Tell me about safety for this family?

Sample questions for men:

- Collect basic demographic details:
 - Tell me about your age, married, children, employment etc.
 - Tell me about your identification with Christianity, how long, your involvement with church life, roles in the church?
 - Tell me about your relationship with your partner – together, separated, do both still go to the church etc. Your relationship with your children?
- Please start by telling me what you understand about domestic violence? What motivated you to take part in this study?
- Tell me about your experience of reaching out to a Pastor for help?
- How have Christian beliefs and ideas influenced your understanding of intimate partner relationships?
- How have Christian beliefs and ideas influenced your understanding of domestic violence – your use of violence in your relationship/family?
- How has the teaching and example of your parents/carers influenced your understanding of domestic violence?
- Are there particular scriptural passages that you draw on to understand your use of violence? Have these changed over time?
- Have there been moments where you stopped your wife/children from going to Church, or practicing Christianity? Tell me about that...
- Are there Christian teachings that you draw on to enable healing/change?
- Have you received support from your Church community to address your use of domestic violence – tell me about that?

- Have you received support from non-Church services about domestic violence – tell me about that?
- Tell me about your relationships now with your partner/children (if relevant)? How has that changed since seeking help from a Pastor, the Church community, non-Church service?
- Has your faith changed over time (spiritual practices and beliefs) since talking about and seeking help for domestic violence? Tell me about that change?