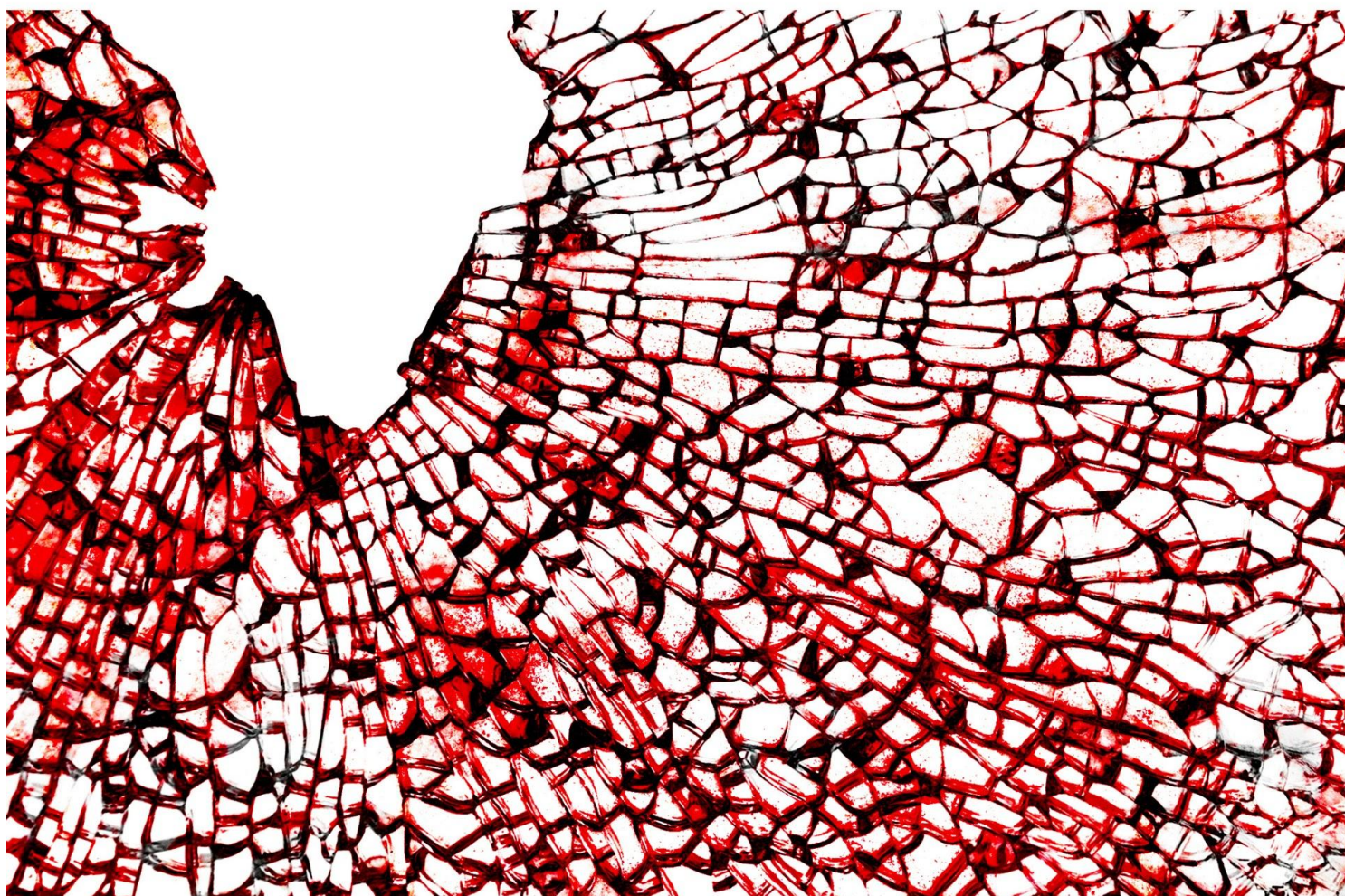


Broken Silence 2.0



pastors' attitudes and actions
around
domestic and sexual violence
in the **#metoo** era

FULL REPORT • SEPTEMBER 2018

Executive Summary

Although sexual violence has fallen by half in the last two decades, the wide-ranging nature of the problem remains significant: around every two minutes in any given day, an American endures some sort of sexual assault.¹ While the World Health Organization labels intimate partner violence as a significant threat to human rights globally, in the U.S. context a groundswell of attention has emerged following a significant celebrity elevation of the topic in the public consciousness. As data and analysis follow the #MeToo movement, we are aware of the church as an initial place where survivors turn to share their stories and seek help.

It is in this context IMA World Health and Sojourners set out to explore how perceptions of gender-based violence have evolved among Protestant pastors in the U.S. On behalf of the We Will Speak Out coalition and campaign, of which both organizations are members, this new study builds on the research previously conducted in 2014. Then, in perhaps the first study of its kind, Protestant pastors were surveyed about their perceptions and responses to domestic and sexual violence in their communities. In this update, we consider how - and even if - those perceptions have evolved in light of the #MeToo movement. We also consider the perceptions and pervasiveness of the #churchtoo movement, which aims to reveal Protestant church communities are not immune to harassment, sexual, physical and other kinds of abuse.

There is significant encouragement found within this report. **More pastors than ever before - 95 percent - have reported they are familiar with resources locally available to which they can refer a parishioner struggling with abusive situations.** While we do not associate causality with the #MeToo phenomenon, it may be assumed that the increase in attention in the public space, and perhaps concentrated efforts in the faith community such as ours, is spilling from the public square in through the church door.

This rising #MeToo tide also reveals much room for growth. Most pastors (81 percent) surveyed in this update reported being confronted with some sort of abusive situation requiring their attention: a staff member, a parishioner, a community member or others. **Yet, half the pastors surveyed report receiving little or no formal training to be able to respond to abuse effectively.** Among seminaries, among church denominations and among faith communities at large, there is still much room for growth and action.

Introduction and context

Normalization of rape and abuse was as pervasive in ancient near-east cultures as it is today. Antiquity studies reveal rape as a common theme of dominance, even if the interpretation of it varied among near-east culture literature.² This ancient context also gave birth to the Hebrew biblical canon still used today. While biblical Hebrew has no exact, explicit word for rape, its use as a demonstrative tool is evident at multiple points in the scriptures: the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34 and of the nameless

¹ <https://www.rainn.org/statistics>

² <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40593869>

concubine among the tribe of Benjamin in Judges 19-21 are but two examples. There is even ample evidence that Boaz's protection of Ruth following her interaction with gleaners in the field is in response to sexual harassment.³

If rape and harassment were made manifest and reflected in culture as presented in the Bible, modern culture, too, reveals its pervasiveness. Celebrity claims of unwanted advances, harassment, quid pro quo exchanges and other dynamic abuses of power permeate our news cycle. Perhaps the difference, then, is in how we consider our response. Striking to note is that in each biblical example of rape, a community response follows: God calls for retribution and even war. The #MeToo and #churchtoo movements are a community response in their own right. It stands to reason that culture is revealing light where there was once darkness. As rape, abuse and harassment do not end at a door under a steeple, churches can and must respond.

Even though we are witnessing (or, have witnessed) what many call the rapid secularization of American culture, some 70 percent of Americans still identify as Christian.⁴ Indeed, churches are places where Americans turn in times of national or personal crisis. Churches continue to be lifted up as a frequent community resource where those experiencing sexual violence, abuse or harassment might turn for support, resources and even emergency shelter. One study estimates as many as 40 percent of abuse survivors seek support from a house of worship.⁵ Marriage is considered by many to be a religious rite, perhaps most of all by those who are active in a community of faith. Data indicate the intersection of religiosity, spirituality, abuse and domestic issues means many secular care providers are not willing to take on the task of assisting overly religious survivors of abuse.⁶ Natural questions arise: if God blessed my marriage, why am I in danger? What is the "meaning" behind my enduring abuse? Because God sanctified my marriage, is the abuse the result of Divine will?

These and many other intimate questions reveal the role pastors and other spiritual care providers play in navigating the journey from victimization to survival. This study revealed significant need for growth in the realm of pastor training. While 9 out of every 10 pastors surveyed here reported being called on to address a situation of abuse or harassment, only around half reported being formally trained for such a response. So, clergy are left in the untenable position of being expected to respond with little experience to channel when needed.

Of the 70 percent of Americans who ascribe to being "Christian" in the Pew Center survey, most identify with denominations for whom a pastor was aligned and surveyed in this report (a combined 46.6 percent). As members of the global, faith-based coalition seeking to end sexual and gender-based violence, We Will Speak Out, we value the unique and critical role faith communities play in preventing and responding to abuse and harassment. Clergy often face a twofold role in responding to claims of violence, abuse and harassment: first is to serve as a confidential resource to seek assistance and

³ <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/people/related-articles/sexual-harassment-in-the-book-of-ruth>

⁴ <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10349280>

⁶ <https://cts.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.1387627&site=eds-live>

support from the wider community, followed by helping the person experiencing the harassment to answer the existential questions that might follow.⁷ As the Reformed tradition continues to evolve and seek justice as proclaimed by the teachings of Jesus, we propose a more intentional effort be made to ensure pastors are as prepared as possible to respond. In so doing, they affirm the spirit of the #MeToo movement without and the #churchtoo movement within the greater Body of Christ.

Methodology

Both the 2014 initial study and this update were conducted by LifeWay Research. The phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors was conducted June 19 – July 2, 2018. The calling list used a random sample stratified by church size, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches. Quotas were used to maintain the correct proportion of each church size. Responses were weighted by region to more accurately reflect the population. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called.

The completed sample is 1,000 surveys. The sample provides 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed ± 3.2 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

The project was sponsored by IMA World Health and Sojourners on behalf of the We Will Speak Out coalition, of which both are members. We Will Speak Out U.S. is a movement of diverse faith groups seeking action and advocacy to end the silence around sexual and gender-based violence.

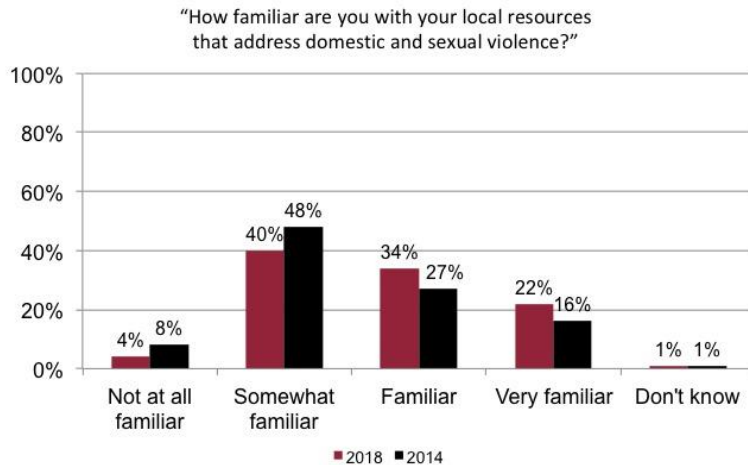
Comparisons are made to a phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors conducted by LifeWay Research May 7-31, 2014, using the same methodology.

Major findings

Awareness

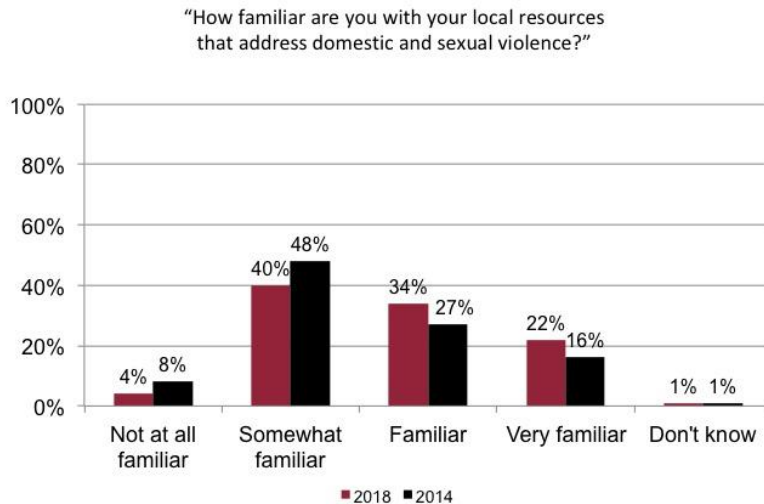
There is an **increase in awareness** among Christian pastors that abuse and harassment are problems within their communities. More pastors are seeing domestic or sexual violence as a problem in their community, say they are trained, see its impact, and are aware resources are available to help (up 35 percent from 2014 to 91 percent today). Of the 1,000 pastors surveyed, 81 percent say they know someone who has experienced domestic or sexual violence, up from 74 percent in 2014. Around 1 in every 5 pastors surveyed reported having experienced abuse or harassment directly, validating the #churchtoo movement and the need to address the problem inside church communities.

⁷[https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/Commentary.pdf/?searchterm=A percent20commentary percent20on percent20religion percent20and percent20domestic percent20violence](https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/Commentary.pdf/?searchterm=A%20commentary%20on%20religion%20and%20domestic%20violence)



Outside resources and intervention

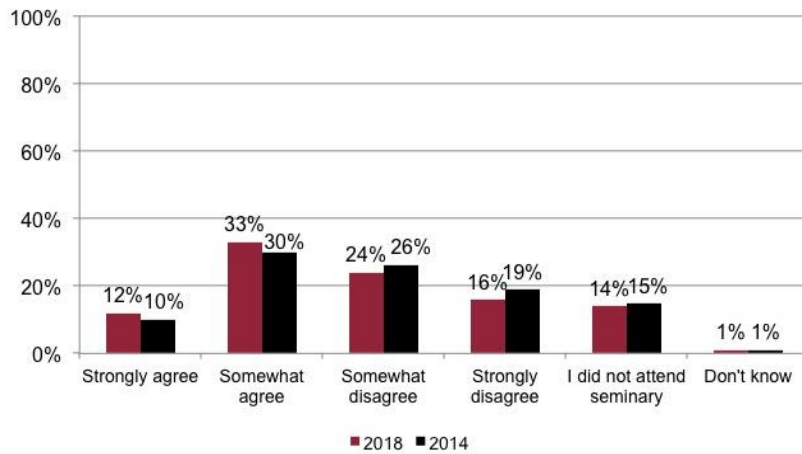
More pastors say they are familiar or very familiar with local resources that can help survivors. Referrals to service agencies are the most common response to dealing with domestic and sexual violence (81 percent) and have increased since 2014 (70 percent). More pastors have conducted safety risk assessments than in 2014 (40 percent v. 31 percent).



How churches respond to sexual and gender-based violence

While as many as 90 percent of pastors surveyed report having dealt with issues of abuse and harassment, only half report they've had formal training to address it. **More pastors (51 percent, in 2018) say they speak to their church about domestic or sexual violence several times a year or more than they have in the past (34 percent, in 2014),** with around 3 out of every 4 (77 percent) reporting they speak about it from the pulpit at least once each year.

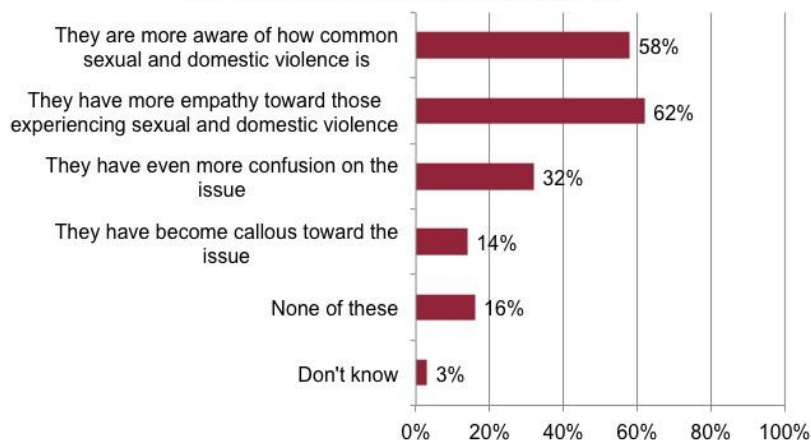
"As a pastor, my seminary training provided me with sufficient resources to address situations of domestic violence."



#MeToo and #churchtoo contexts

A majority of pastors (85 percent) say they have heard about the #MeToo movement, and of those 41 percent say they are more inclined to preach about domestic and sexual violence from the pulpit. The movement has had an influence on pastors' understanding of issues of abuse and harassment, with 4 out of 10 Protestant pastors saying they understand more about sexual and domestic violence because of #MeToo. Congregationally, among pastors who have heard about the #MeToo movement, the majority say the movement has resulted in their congregation having more empathy (62 percent) and awareness of sexual and domestic violence (58 percent).

"For your congregation, which if any of the following have been a result of the #MeToo Movement?"



Conclusion

This research tracks notable progress while raising significant questions as well as opportunities for exploration and action. The goal is to equip pastors and other faith leaders better for their necessary roles in violence prevention and response. The responses pastors provided revealed a clergy that are more engaged and aware than those queried in the 2014 study. Recognizing a perhaps inextricable tie between pastoral care and social work, this report reveals encouraging links between pastors who may be the first confidant in which the story of abuse is shared and the community resources available to ensure safety, escape and healing. However, even as more clergy are speaking out and making connections to community resources, few report they have received any kind of training to safely and appropriately support those enduring sexual and/or domestic violence.

This lack of training creates a dangerous opportunity for well-meaning pastors to make potentially harmful recommendations. One concerning data point this survey revealed was that more pastors today (70 percent) have provided marriage counseling when dealing with domestic and sexual violence situations compared to 2014 (62 percent). The National Domestic Violence Hotline does not recommend couples counseling in the context of an abusive relationship.⁸ The need for accountability on the part of the perpetrator is critical, and any potential victim-blaming is to be avoided at all costs. Therefore, we are deeply concerned the counseling pastors are providing may unintentionally put those suffering from violence even more at risk, doing more harm than good.

We are eager to learn more about the demographic makeup of pastors as a whole and how the faith community at large is shaping clergy to serve congregations. There is room for dynamic growth in connecting seminary training with domestic violence and social work resources so pastors understand where to turn when walking in accompaniment with those who may come to them seeking help. We call on seminaries, denominational bodies and church leadership to examine their course offerings, ordination requirements, policies and other considerations to make clergy education on these issues a priority.

Additionally, as suggested in the 2015 “Interrogating the Silence” report Harvard Divinity School released in partnership with We Will Speak Out, there is further room for the development of lay leaders within churches to support those within their congregations who suffer from abuse and violence.⁹ A pastor may set the tone for a church’s violence prevention and response efforts, but he or she cannot and should not be a lone voice in speaking out against violence and supporting those who are hurting. We also recognize a strong need both denominationally and within individual congregations to create policy and procedures, and to mandate related training, to prevent and address situations when abuse and harassment and violence in any form comes from within the church setting or takes place among church staff. We must diligently protect our houses of worship—and those within its walls—from violence, stigma and the potential for further victimization. If our worshiping communities are not safe, what is?

There is significant room for growth in how clergy understand the ways responding to domestic and sexual violence intersect with their Christian witness. If pastors are called to create and share Christian community, more pastors are including proactive steps to cast a vision from the pulpit where it is clear that community should be, at the very least, free from abuse and harassment. The next step is ensuring they are properly equipped to live out this calling.

⁸ <https://www.thehotline.org/2014/08/01/why-we-dont-recommend-couples-counseling-for-abusive-relationships/>

⁹ <https://imaworldhealth.org/new-harvard-research-explores-faith-leaders-response-to-sgbv/>

Why This Survey Matters

Jim Wallis, President and Founder, Sojourners:

Sojourners seeks to articulate the biblical call to social justice, to inspire hope, and to build a movement that transforms individuals, communities, the church, and the world. Opposing domestic and sexual violence openly and explicitly, including providing practical resources for faith communities to combat this evil, is an essential element of faithful Christian witness. The results of this study help to inform and direct that Christian witness. We are encouraged that more and more pastors are speaking out and seeking training to make their churches safer sanctuaries for survivors of violence, but the results also show that we—as a Christian community—still fall short. If we believe that how we treat the most vulnerable is how we treat Christ, we must be in deep solidarity with the women and men who experience domestic or sexual abuse at some point in their lives. If we believe that we are all created in the image of God, we cannot tolerate that only half of pastors feel prepared to respond to domestic and sexual violence situations.

Rick Santos, President and CEO, IMA World Health:

“As a faith-based, global public health agency, IMA World Health is committed to ensuring health, healing and well-being is available for all God’s children. Our work combating sexual and gender-based violence globally drives us to do more about it in the U.S. context. The effects are no less horrific here than in the developing countries where we work. We know caring faith communities respond to need. But in responding to abuse and harassment, we have much work left to do. Our next generation of faith leaders need to be prepared to preach about prevention from the pulpit, create a safe space within their churches and lend their voices to the movement for lasting change in our society.”

About the Partners

IMA World Health, the secretariat and host of We Will Speak Out, is a faith-based public health and development organization. IMA’s mission is to build healthier communities by collaborating with key partners to serve vulnerable people. www.imaworldhealth.org.

Sojourners is a national Christian organization committed to faith in action for social justice. The organization seeks to inspire hope and build a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world. With a 40-year history, Sojourners is a nonpartisan leader that convenes, builds alliances among, and mobilizes people of faith, focusing on racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship. www.sojo.net.

We Will Speak Out U.S. is a coalition of diverse faith groups and organizations from across the United States joining together with other leaders for action and advocacy to end sexual and gender based violence. wewillspeakout.us/broken-silence

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