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## Addressing Domestic Violence Among Small Baptist Church Clergy

Katherine Liefertink  
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ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG SMALL BAPTIST CHURCH  
CLERGY

by

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B.S. University of Central Florida, 2005  
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Sociology  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis was to survey and discuss how small Baptist church clergy address domestic violence (DV) with the goal of studying how clergy in small Baptist churches view domestic violence and how they address the problem of domestic violence within their congregation. The Baptist faith was selected since they form the largest portion of the Protestant faith in the United States. The sample consisted of clergy from small Baptist churches located within the geographic limits of Brevard County, Florida. Interviews were conducted with ten small Baptist church clergy. The interview questions were constructed to ascertain specific areas of information regarding personal beliefs, perceptions about domestic violence, understanding of issues, and to find out information regarding clergy qualifications, roles, and responsibilities in the area of domestic violence.

After summarizing the content of the responses, several conclusions regarding how small Baptist church clergy addresses domestic violence can be made. Within this group of small Baptist clergy, scripture does not justify DV. The clergy are aware of the issue of DV but their training in addressing the details and extent of the problem is often dependent upon the time period they were trained and ordained. Older clergy or those with less recent training, still regard physical abuse as the main element of DV. Counseling within the church is the primary method most of the clergy use to address DV. At the same time, physical danger or injury is referred to law enforcement and other agencies. Referral to other agencies or resources is an essential element to their DV

programs. However, most do not have a formal system to implement these actions. Given the lack of resources within the church and heavy workload demands on the clergy, the effect of most small Baptist church clergy is positive in the areas of education, observation, referral, and awareness of domestic violence.

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Herbert H. Wilson and my husband, Philip Duncan  
for their love and support.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
The prevalence of domestic violence	2
The relevance of religion	2
The association between domestic violence and religion	3
Does religion act like a barrier, preventing victims from leaving violent relationships?	5
Barriers to recognizing and responding to domestic violence within the religious community	7
Intervention	8
METHODS	11
RESULTS	15
How do Baptist clergy members from small churches view domestic violence?	15
Do small Baptist church clergy influence domestic violence through their teachings?	16
What are Baptist clergy trained to do in respect to domestic violence?	17
Are they aware of existing resources?	19
DISCUSSION	21

CONCLUSIONS	25
The problems for small Baptist church clergy regarding DV	25
How to improve DV responses for clergy	26
Recommendations for research improvements	27
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	29
APPENDIX B: RESPONDENT BACKGROUND	32
APPENDIX C: DEFINITIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	34
APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL LETTER	36
REFERENCES	38



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Respondent Data	32
Table 2 Definitions of Domestic Violence	34

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B.A.	Bachelor of Arts
B.S.	Bachelor of Science
DV	Domestic Violence
KJV	King James Version (Bible)
M.A.	Master of Arts
M.S.	Master of Science
Ph.D.	Doctor of Philosophy
IRB	Institutional Review Board
Th.D.	Doctor of Theology
UCF	University of Central Florida

## INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence not only affects the families involved but also the community and society as a whole. Estimates of the prevalence of domestic violence indicate that 1.8 to 4 million women are physically abused by partners each year (Acierno and Resnick, 1997). Moreover, as the body of research on the subject of domestic violence is more than thirty years old, many researchers have examined factors associated with victimization, perpetration, and consequences. However, one factor that is studied less often is religion (Cunradi, 2002). Researchers have considered whether or not there are religious affiliation differences in domestic violence perpetration, and have considered the influence of religiosity (Ellison and Anderson, 1997). What is not known, however, is how religious personnel view domestic violence and how they treat it within the context of their congregation.

The goal of this research is to study how clergy in small Baptist churches view domestic violence and how they address the problem of domestic violence within their congregations. By examining their viewpoints and determining which types of programs that their faith can support, a better understanding of clergy and domestic violence may be gained (Smullens, 2001). Specifically, this study addresses the following questions: How do Baptist clergy members from small churches view domestic violence? Do small Baptist church clergy influence domestic violence through their teachings? For example is domestic violence addressed through sermons, literature in church, or through church counseling or supported community agencies that provide counseling, shelters and legal

advice when requested? What are Baptist clergy trained to do with respect to domestic violence? And are they aware of existing resources? Interviews with Baptist clergy from small churches will be used to gather information about their perspectives on domestic violence.

### The prevalence of domestic violence

According to National Violence Against Women Survey, 25,677,735 women and 7,327,092 men were victims of domestic violence during their lifetime (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). Other researchers have reported that, 0.3% to 4% of women experience severe violence, while 8% to 17% experience all other forms of violence each year in the United States (Wilt and Olson, 1996). According to a report from the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control approximately 22.1% of women will experience physical assault by intimate partners during their lifetime (2003). Clearly domestic violence affects a significant proportion of the population and research examining factors that are related to it is warranted. One such factor is religion.

### The relevance of religion

What is the importance of religion in the United States? An indicator of the importance of religion in the U.S. can be found in the data found within the General Social Survey. Nearly 63% of Americans believe in God without a doubt while only 2.2% do not believe in God. More to the point, about one third believe that the Bible contains the actual words of God, with over 80% believing the Bible is divinely inspired. The degree of exposure to religious instruction is extensive as 61% of Americans claim membership in a religious organization, with 45% attending church monthly and 29%

attending weekly or more often. The Baptists or conservative Protestants comprise approximately 26% of religious Americans with only liberal and moderate Protestants forming a larger group with 29% (Sherkat and Ellison, 1999). By any reasonable measure, religion has an impact upon a significant number of people and some of these people could be victims of domestic violence.

#### The association between domestic violence and religion

Researchers have considered that religion may be associated with domestic violence. Some studies concerning the links between religiosity and domestic violence highlight positive aspects of regular religious involvement. For example, one study demonstrated that religion provided an outlet and control mechanisms to relieve stress of family problems (Ellison et al., 1999). The data were gathered from a population primarily comprised of Catholic, Protestant, and Baptist churches; however, a person's specific faith did not appear to be a significant factor. Another study found that domestic violence is condoned and promoted by adherence to conservative Protestant teachings (Nash, 2006). The impact of specific teachings may be hard to judge, however, as a significant problem appears to be the preconceived notions held by some secular and non-secular counselors that religious teachings or a lack of belief in such, predispose victims to abuse and keep them from effective treatment (Nason-Clark, 2004). All of these studies, in contrast to studies mentioned previously, sought to establish links between religion and domestic violence. The need to provide a more detailed study of the factors involved with religion and domestic violence is reflected in the diversity of existing studies and the lack of consensus in the results.

A search of scholarly reference materials has revealed few studies regarding religious intervention for domestic violence (Brinkerhoff et al., 1992). Despite some studies finding religion does not have a strong or direct impact upon intimate partner violence (Cunradi et al., 2002), the same researchers insist religious institutions can play an important role in intimate partner violence prevention. For example research indicates that regular weekly attendance by men to religious services reduces the numbers of abuse cases (Ellison and Anderson, 1999). Some researchers argue that domestic abuse seems to be more prevalent under those religious teachings that emphasize the submissive gender roles of women (Foss and Warnke, 2003). Other accounts attribute individual recognition of inequities between genders through church provided biblical study (Pevey et al., 1996). According to Nash (2006), Baptist women may learn that the commonly held belief of submission could also be interpreted as the guidance of their husbands toward a leadership role. However, they may also be advised by members of the congregation that the traditional literal interpretation should be used. Despite individual interpretations, recognition, and observance of religious teachings, the congregation viewpoint or understanding is applied. Acceptance of the group interpretation of religious teachings overrides the independent interpretation and highlights to leadership role of clergy in forming the congregational outlook.

In addition to the influence of religious doctrine on domestic violence, researchers have also found that religious heterogeneity may be an important risk factor for violence. Researchers have also found that men who hold much more conservative religious views than their partners are more likely to be abusers (Ellison et al., 1999). In one study,

marriages with a mixed denominational background are more likely to have a higher rate of abuse than same denominational backgrounds. This is consistent with other studies, emphasizing that violence is more likely when the male is of a more fundamentalist background (Waite and Lehrer, 2003). Other points of contention arise when the male understanding of sex-role attitudes and the female understanding come into conflict.

The effect of large scale social change issues especially regarding familial roles that affect female roles assignments and the stereotypes of both sexes are the most disruptive to marital relationships (Osmond and Martin, 1975). Social changes challenge the old order of beliefs and established perceptions of men and women, and the leadership or lack of guidance would force individuals to make decisions formerly preached by clergy. The legalities of marriage are fairly straight-forward, however the inclusion of extra-legal norms (Stark 2001) especially religious norms can create a very tangled mess with both understood and self-imposed expectations. Previously, religious teachings would have produced a single form or pattern for the extra-legal norms or expectations. Skewed or uneven interpretations and differing standards between partners can lead to domestic violence and clergy may be extremely important in making sure both parties have the same understanding and objectives within a marriage or relationship.

Does religion act like a barrier, preventing victims from leaving violent relationships?

What are some of the barriers that help hold a victim within an abusive situation? There exist numerous economic, social, and psychological barriers that keep a victim captive. For example, many women lack the resources to move, establish a household,

and care for children (Eisenstat and Bancroft, 1999). They stay in order to meet their obligations to others. A study of an older generation of women found that younger women face many of the same issues including a lack of education or job skills, being rebuffed early on when seeking help, and facing health challenges without sufficient resources (Zink et al., 2003). Ferraro and Johnson noted that many victims often refuse to accept that the problem is actually their partner. They believe that there is an external problem and once the problem is resolved, the abuse will go away (1983). Others may take a passive approach, accepting the abuse as justified and believing that the abuse would have never taken place if they had been more accommodating to their husband's desires (Ferraro and Johnson 1983). All of these factors may be seen in the roles and expectations put forth in some religious groups and are reinforced through clergy guidance and teachings. One interpretation of Ezekial 16,"the role of the woman was to wait to serve the desires and needs of the male and is considered only a recipient not originator of gifts" can be seen to objectify women. Translations from the Hebrew text by several religious scholars tend to indicate that women are possessions to be used rather than considered equals (Day 2000). Another religious based barrier can be the moral or philosophical need for forgiveness and reconciliation. The idea that the offender can be forgiven within a religious context while the victim is pressured to forgive because of the church teachings can keep an abusive situation active (Nason-Clark, 2004). This can leave little incentive for the perpetrator to change as all will be forgiven.

The role of clergy within the teachings of religious values includes the question of gender roles of both partners. The understanding by the congregation of what constitutes



domestic violence may be based upon the clergy's transmission of dogma. The evangelical, for example, believe in a literal and strict interpretation of the Bible (Steenland et al., 2000). They are taught strict adherence to particular religious doctrines regarding morality. In evangelical churches women are taught that they are the property of their husbands. "That in such a world a woman is validated only by her man, not primarily by her own worth." (Pohli, 1983). Morality is sanctioned through practices imparted to parishioners by their leaders, with many clergy placing an emphasis on marriages that are devoid of love but that keep with the religious belief that a wife is subservient unto the husband (Manetta et al., 2003). For some perpetrators of DV, the religious stereotyping of family roles by gender has used to justify dominance over others (Foss and Warnke, 2003). When a woman's faith is so rooted so deeply in patriarchal traditions of the church, it creates a backdrop that permits the act of domestic abuse to occur (Burris and Jackson, 1999). This situation has created a need for clergy leadership in bring awareness of appropriate living expectations for families.

#### Barriers to recognizing and responding to domestic violence within the religious community

Many people choose not to turn to their religious leaders during a crisis for understanding, help and support for fear of rejection or lack of explanation to what the abuse meant (Manetta et al., 2003). Consequently religious leaders may become roadblocks for the domestic abuse victims, leaving women feeling lonely and abandoned by family and the religious community. The consideration to place the perceived religious aspects of a relationship above the rights of an individual can also drive women back into an abusive relationship. Religious leaders have been known to urge victims to

try harder in their relationships with the abuser (Hage, 2000). The need to change this attitude may be seen in the efforts of various religious groups to address domestic violence.

Reflecting that mainstream social beliefs are heavily influenced and dominated by religious beliefs and practices, counseling within the church has grown in addressing domestic violence issues (Delaplane and Delaplane, 2001). Unfortunately, most clerics have limited training in handling domestic violence issues. Many members of the clergy are fervent supporters of the traditional marriage, holding that it is a sacred and traditional institution that should remain intact no matter the circumstances (Levitt and Ware, 2006). Acceptance of this position by the church membership can cultivate passivity in the abuse victim. This perpetuates the abuse by making it acceptable. McGuire (1990) argues that many religious groups condone the abusive silently by stating that the abuse would not have occurred if they (the wife) had not done something to bring about the abuse. The barriers raised by all of these factors impact the beginning of the process to intervene and treat the problem of domestic violence. Clergy and victims need to recognize the existence of the domestic violence for what it is. This is the essential step between identification and intervention.

### Intervention

The study of the influence of religious personnel within domestic violence has been attempted in several ways. The results of research by Chavez and Tsitsos (2001) using data from the National Congregations Study found that religious organizations are not an alternative to secular social services. Clergy and other religious professionals can

be part of a support network through training and education. This is important, as many women first turn to the church for assistance from abuse only to be confronted with a staff unable or unwilling to provide a proper response (Hage, 2000). Another reason for the inclusion of religious people and organizations to assist victims is the lack of funding for victim services within the secular legal system (Richman, 2002). The lack of resources within a small church can be overcome by collaboration with other community churches and organizations to pool resources and focus efforts (Bos 1998). The fact that domestic abuse occurs from a feeling of entitlement, is often accompanied by the fallacy of blaming the victim for the abuse. By becoming aware of the possible bias and difficulties in getting assistance, clergy can help inform, assist, and guide victims and abusers to the organizations that best prepared to help.

The ability of clergy to recognize domestic violence abuse varies greatly. As mentioned in a study of Oklahoma's faith based organizations, training and education are needed to make the clergy an effective part of the social services (Sharp, 2003). A self-education package developed by the Australian National Council on Violence Against Women provides an example of a system to train lay personnel in gathering information to detect domestic violence (McCosker et al., 1998). The validity of such systems may be seen in the work by medical professionals (Sherin et al., 1998) for family physicians and staff to use a routine part of health screening. Such systems could be used with religious personnel. Equally important is the need to modify or suspend portions of the fundamentalist culture to allow the removal of the limitations of recognition of the problem of domestic violence.

In summary, the literature review shows the influence of religious doctrine and clergy on issues related to domestic violence. The areas of clergy impact lie in education of theological issues to replace folklore interpretations of scripture used to justify violence. Clergy also have a role in detecting abusive situations, providing a sanctuary to victims, and insuring an appropriate response is made. The way that clergy in small Baptist churches address domestic violence to their congregations regarding these factors is the focus of this research. This research seeks to gather more information about the views of clergy and religious doctrine on domestic violence.

## METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gather information regarding how small Baptist church clergy address domestic violence (DV). As the largest portion of the Protestant faith within the United States, the Baptist faith was selected for this research. The Baptists have several distinctive sub-divisions to include the Southern Baptist Convention with 15.7 million members, American Baptist Churches in the USA with 1.5 million members, and two prominently African-American groups, the National Baptist Convention of the USA with 8.2 million, and the National Baptist Convention of America with 3.5 million members (Bedell, 1997). The Southern Baptist Convention was selected to help limit disparities from association differences among the Baptist churches. Other criteria were used to help eliminate bias due to economics, size, and location when comparing church clergy responses.

The sample consisted of clergy from ten Baptist churches located within the geographic limits of Brevard County, Florida. According to the United States government FedStats web resource, the population of Brevard County was 534,359 in 2006 with a median household income of \$44,248 in 2004. The county occupies an area of 1018.19 square miles as reported in 2000. Because the availability of domestic violence resources may vary by size of the congregation, the congregational size was limited to minimize the impact in resource availability among study participants. Churches with congregations of approximately 350 members and fewer were included in the study. Due to the small size of the churches selected, most have only 1 or 2 clergy assigned.

Recruitment of participants initially began with a search for small Southern Baptist Convention churches through the Internet, telephone directories, and personal acquaintances. The first steps were telephone calls to gain appointments with the clergy to ask for participation. Several churches required physical visits as other methods such as the Internet or voice mails proved slow and unreliable. These initial contacts were provided with a description and explanation of the research project. An additional complication was that a number of the churches did not have a full time pastor or were conducting a search for a new pastor. Nineteen churches were contacted in order to gather the required number needed for the study. Responses ranged from enthusiastic cooperation to having the door literally shut in the researcher's face. Those electing to participate were advised about the need for the informed consent, purpose of the study, intent to record and transcribe the interview, the limitations and confidentiality procedures. The interview was deliberately structured to not reveal names or other identifying details. After each interview was completed the voice files were recoded, transcribed and the recording was saved. Archival materials will be secured for 3 years in compliance with UCF requirements, under password protection and physical lock.

The research is based upon the interview responses of ten small Baptist church clergy. The interview method was chosen for its strengths regarding clarification, focus upon topics, and the information developed from interaction between individuals. The interview questions were constructed to ascertain specific areas of information regarding personal beliefs, perceptions about DV, understanding of issues, and to find out information regarding clergy qualifications, roles, and responsibilities in the area of

domestic violence. The open format of the interview allowed the respondents to expound upon aspects that interested them or they felt needed clarification. The interview questions served to establish the size of the congregation served, and personal data regarding the clergy. In addition, age, length of experience, training, awareness of DV issues, types of assistance available, resources devoted to domestic violence, communication to congregations, and personal understandings of religious belief involving DV were aspects of the study.

The process to conduct and complete the interview followed these guidelines. After IRB approval by the university, the local churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention were contacted to ascertain their congregation size. They were then telephoned to seek an appointment with the clergy to explain the research proposal and ask for participation. After an initial meeting to present the research those interested were provided a list of interview questions, told the confidentiality procedures, the need for recordings, an informed consent letter, and contact information. If possible an interview was scheduled for a time after the subject had an opportunity to become familiar with the interview questions. Otherwise arrangements were setup later.

Interviews were conducted with the recorder placed in full view and a reminder to avoid compromising any confidences. At the end of each interview, the participant was asked if they could refer another minister who might be interested in participating in the research and if their name could be used as a reference. After the interview took place, the recorder was downloaded onto a password protected computer and emailed to a transcription service without any identifying information on the file. These files were

labeled with the date of the interview. Transcripts were performed by a professional court recorder service. The digital recorder was erased after checking the transcript accuracy.

The information from the transcripts was used to ascertain the congregation size and any information regarding the members. Other information gathered included the clergy's education level, time period of instruction, any additional qualifications, and specifically information regarding domestic violence training and awareness. The duties of the pastor in regards to advisement, counseling, and responsibilities for DV were also solicited. Another area of interest was the existence and breadth of any DV programs. Communication of DV to the congregation through sermons, counseling, referrals, and provision of materials were also covered. The responses were listed in a condensed format in the results section.



## RESULTS

The results of the interviews were taken from the clergy responses to a list of questions given to the respondents prior to the interview. These were given to the respondents as part of the initial recruitment meeting. The interviews all began with questions designed to gather background information. Table 1, Respondent Data, portrays the basic details of the 10 research participants. The number of members in the churches ranged from 40 to 275 regular attendees. Only one church had a formal domestic violence program. Three clergy were educated in the 1990s. Two other clergy had received educations in 1980s with another two being trained in the 1970s. Two clergy had received their training in the 1960s with one clergy member's education remained unknown. All respondents but one provided counseling and in all cases referrals were made available as needed.

The following sections are organized according to the responses to the central questions from the interviews. The questions form a subset of the original interview questions given to the respondents. The details of the actual interview maybe found within the interview transcripts.

### How do Baptist clergy members from small churches view domestic violence?

The response to the appropriateness of physical violence within a relationship was uniformly the same. According to religious teachings, the Bible does not support the use of violence in relationships. The pastors interviewed were adamant that although their reading of the scripture made the husband the spiritual and domestic head of the family,

this was not a dictatorial position. This does not mean being subservient or losing one's identity. It should be stated that the Southern Baptists do not believe to be submissive is the same as being subservient. Among those expressing an opinion, it was held that a wife was not a second class citizen but an equal partner in a relationship, deserving respect. However according to one pastor, "The wife is submissive in the sense that when they come to a head and the husband and wife can't agree on anything on a subject, then it is the husband who has to go ahead and make the decision to go."

Yet each minister encouraged the men in their congregation to listen to their spouse's input. According to one minister, "women are detail oriented, and catch nuances that men overlook." The assignment of roles according to gender was qualified by the need for both the wife and husband to work. The majority of the respondents defined domestic violence as physical abuse. The majority of clergy (9 of 10) requested clarification of the term, intimate partner violence. Several ministers acknowledged there were verbal, sexual, emotional, and mental aspects to domestic violence. All but one of the pastors indicated that the topic included only family members when abuse is defined as domestic violence. That exception uniquely defined DV to include same sex relationships, unmarried partners, child abuse, and nearly any relationship other than a dutifully married couple.

#### Do small Baptist church clergy influence domestic violence through their teachings?

The primary method of instruction and information to the whole congregation is the sermon. Only one pastor made the topic of domestic violence a keynote issue for a sermon. The other pastors addressed the topic during sermons as a derivative issue. The

sermons were focused on proper behavior, roles and duties, and expectations for Christian behavior. Under their understanding of religious guidance, physical violence between husband and wife was not acceptable under any circumstances. The ministers use individual counseling to provide more detailed and focused information and assessment of DV to victims and those seeking more advice. Those seeking advice were helped in varying degrees. All but one of the ministers specified counseling as their primary tool against DV. The initial counseling session by the minister was used to determine if they were confident in their training to help resolve the problem. When the problem exceeded their ability to help the situation, outside referrals were made including civil authorities, state agencies, Christian counselors, and other assistance groups. During this initial counseling, if severe abuse or danger was detected, immediate assistance to insure safety was provided.

What are Baptist clergy trained to do in respect to domestic violence?

The background training for the respondents varied according to the age or date of their primary training as ministers. Eight of the ten clergy interviewed had limited counseling training, although not specifically DV training. Those whose graduation dates from seminary were the latest seemed better prepared to recognize and intervene in DV cases. Seminary education topics regarding DV apparently did not begin until the mid to late 1980's. Counseling as a formal requirement or item for discussion began to become more widespread in the early 1980's and early 1990's. Prior to this period, the topics of counseling and DV were non-existent in the form recognized today. There are still disparities with secular definitions of DV regarding verbal and mental abuse as part of

DV. Most ministers viewed physical abuse as the determinant of whether to consider factors in a relationship as abuse or not. All of the pastors saw physical abuse as DV, while only 6 out of 10 considered verbal abuse as DV. Emotional abuse was recognized by 4 out of 10 as DV while only 3 out of 10 viewed mental and sexual abuse as DV components. Table 2, Definitions of Domestic Violence, lists the percentages recognizing different categories of abuse. All clergy interviewed stated that there was no justification for such behavior in their religion. However, nine respondents requested clarification of the term before answering. A pastor with specialized education in counseling stated he felt more knowledgeable to “address certain counseling issues” since he had gone on to complete a master’s degree after seminary. Several of the clergy members hold advanced degrees regarding psychology and counseling. One respondent holds several advanced degrees, a Ph.D. in Christian counseling, a Th.D. in religion, and another doctorate in clinical Christian psychology. Additionally, he has worked with other agencies regarding DV. Another pastor holds a master’s degree in divinity with a minor in psychology.

The primary response to DV by more than half of the ministers was to conduct initial evaluation counseling with each individual and to determine if the matter was within their experience and skill. Only two clergy had both members of the couple together for the initial evaluation. In all cases when the pastor deemed the problem beyond his skills and ability, referrals to other more skilled counselors or agencies were made. A single pastor did not counsel but insured that those in need were aware of police protection, the injunction process, and the cycle of violence. All of the respondents were quite clear that in cases of severe physical harm or danger that law enforcement and other

outside agencies would be called in. One factor mentioned in varying ways was the fact that each church had its own counseling programs as each Southern Baptist church is an autonomous free-standing entity unlike some faiths such as the Catholic Church. This fact means there is no set standard beyond secular law for churches to plan, train, and measure themselves against.

A lack of standardized training, standards, and operating guidelines leaves the DV response uneven among the churches. It was acknowledged that a number of Southern Baptist church counselors were not credentialed or trained specifically as counselors. This was perceived as a problem within the scope of their limitations regarding domestic violence. Specifically, counseling and DV were not topics of study until recently. Those with such training were more comfortable in determining their limitations and to make referrals for assistance.

#### Are they aware of existing resources?

Small Baptist churches as mentioned previously do not have a centralized authority to set standards and enforce compliance. This does not mean that the Southern Baptist Convention has ignored the topic. All of the ministers responding to the interview questions regarding the availability of DV materials were interested in acquiring appropriate Christian DV materials. Three of ten ministers were aware that DV material was available through the Southern Baptist Convention but two did not have copies on hand. One pastor had literature in an accessible location. The clergy participates in a circle of referrals of DV resources outside of individual counseling including agencies such as the North Brevard Counseling Center, Serene Harbour, Hope Ministries, Circles

of Care, Child and Family Services, and civil authorities such as police. The ties to these outside agencies are mostly informal with two ministers stating they were part of the 211 system. Despite of networking of clergy with regards to addressing domestic violence through counseling or referring to shelters, the majority are unaware of agencies such as the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence that can aid in furthering their skills, education, and resources.

## DISCUSSION

The current study set out to examine the role of Baptist clergy with respect to domestic violence. Interviews were conducted with ten clergy members who were asked about their beliefs and perceptions to domestic violence and how they dealt with this issue within their own congregation. The small Baptist church clergy influences domestic violence through their role to provide an interpretation of scripture and to provide guidance to the congregation. The interviews did not find any reference or justification for domestic violence among the pastors surveyed. This is in contrast to a study (Nash, 2006) that found domestic violence is condoned and promoted by adherence to conservative Protestant teachings. Some researchers argue that domestic abuse seems to be more prevalent under those religious teachings that emphasize the submissive gender roles of women (Foss and Warnke, 2003).

Other accounts attribute individual recognition of inequities between genders through church provided biblical study (Pevey et al., 1996). For some perpetrators of DV, the religious stereotyping of family roles by gender has used to justify dominance over others (Foss and Warnke, 2003). The interviews consistently held that tenets of the Baptist faith stated the husband was the spiritual, provider, and protector of the family. According to the interpretation by several pastors interviewed, in the KJV of the Bible, Ephesians 5:22 “Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord” directs women to accept the husband as the spiritual head of the family. However, the treatment of wives under Ephesians 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the

church and gave himself for it;” (Bible). He is to love his wife, as Christ loves the church. The wife is to be an honored, uplifted, and exalted member of the family. She is not a second class citizen. Though the husband is the spiritual leader, he is expected to get her input on decisions. The idea of subservience or second class citizenship was not, according to the pastors, reflective of their teachings. Certain roles were expressed as being more in line with each gender. The wife was expected to be the nurturer while the husband was expected to be the provider for the family. Several of the pastors mentioned influence of modern economic reality in which both partners need to work outside of the home. Within this research sample, all of the clergy accepted the idea of a wife working outside the traditional setting of the home. Social changes such as the necessity of two incomes challenge the old order of beliefs and established perceptions of men and women, and the leadership or lack of guidance would force individuals to make decisions formerly preached by clergy.

Of the clergy interviewed, all but one did not have a formal domestic violence program within their church. However, all were aware of other resources to address the problem of church members needing assistance. Counseling within the church appears to be the first response of most clergy unless there is a physical threat to the victim. In all cases they stated they would refer members to outside counseling or assistance if needed. The issue of internal counseling is the major method used to handle domestic violence issues in the congregation. Most of the clergy attempt to triage the situation with an initial evaluation, mostly by counseling each member individually first. This initial session allows the pastor an opportunity to size up the problem and to see if he might be qualified



to continue the counseling. The levels of formal training varied as did the content of that training and education. The seminary training of the 1960's did not address domestic violence nor did it address counseling. However, the pastor with the 1960's seminary and was college educated and did receive counseling classes. This clergyman also presents formal sermons on domestic violence, a unique difference from the later trained pastors in this study. Generally, seminary education from the 1970's only addressed family counseling. Seminary topics from the 1980's and 1990's began to teach about DV and counseling. Those with advanced degrees are often a resource for other pastors to recommend. This difference in education and training may be seen reflected in the numbers that accept secular definitions regarding DV. Only three of the clergy interviewed also included mental, verbal, and emotional abuse as DV in addition to physical abuse. These were the members with higher levels of formal education. The majority (6 of 10) of clergy with training post 1970, acknowledged the existence of verbal abuse as part of DV. All accepted that physical abuse was considered DV. After the initial counseling session, when referrals were required, the individual clergyman used their experience to determine what type of assistance was needed. This ranged from agencies for shelter, counseling, more skilled clergy outside the church, to the civil authorities such as law enforcement and other state agencies. The ministers did not consider simply making the marriage work as a solution. Referrals and counseling are their primary tools when DV occurs. A local networking of resources was evident by the number of common referral policies and points of contact a number of ministers provided.

Education of the congregation was addressed by only one pastor in the research group in sermons dedicated to the topic. Other clergy addressed DV as an effect of not following proper Christian teachings. Southern Baptist faith teaches that violence is to be abhorred. It is never acceptable in any situation. Human life is valued. Violence is improper. If members of the congregation follow these teachings, there will be no domestic violence. This may be reflected by the relative lack of DV cases reported by the clergy. Although no strict accounting of DV cases is available, each clergy member rated their church's system to deal with DV to be either very good or average. This may be, according to one pastor, due to the small size of the congregation and the selection process for members, which may keep those with DV out. An interesting statement by the sole clergyman with a DV program was that he would rate his program as average in getting results from counseling. In his estimation this was due to the fact both parties had to recognize there was a problem involving both partners instead of only one party being completely in the right or wrong. Other education means were very limited. The clergy stated they were interested in displaying and passing out DV literature of a suitable Christian nature. The majority (7 of 10) were unaware that DV literature was available from their national organization.

## CONCLUSIONS

### The problems for small Baptist church clergy regarding DV

Addressing the issue of domestic violence by small Baptist church clergy mainly impacts the congregations they serve. All of the interviewed pastors were aware of the problem of domestic violence. The degree to which each pastor saw the nature, extent, definition, and reaction to DV seemed to be linked to the date of their education and age. For example the more distant the education, the less awareness of domestic violence and less often specific counseling was used. Most ministers did not recognize the term intimate partner violence; but did recognize the abuse defined by the term. The ability to spread DV awareness to the congregation followed the same factor. Sermon content and DV literature were less available where the clergyman's education was older.

However, small church clergy actively respond to DV with counseling, information, and referral to other agencies to provide assistance. The primary response is to provide counseling within the church. All clergy interviewed believe that law enforcement and outside agencies should be called in when needed. None of the pastors believed that any DV was justified by scripture. Every minister interviewed said much the same thing as the first clergy member, "Our faith teaches that domestic violence is wrong in every situation. It's never acceptable." Gender based roles are supported in the majority of the churches but none considered that a source of superiority or to be a basis for abuse.

The influence of small Baptist church clergy by addressing DV also bears on the communities they are a part. The large number of religious participants means that the ability of the clergy to prevent, detect, counsel, report, and refer has a direct influence upon the congregation. Through their sermons and more specifically through individual counseling, clergy can create a greater awareness of DV and provide information to members of the congregation.

#### How to improve DV responses for clergy

The limitations of the type and depth of DV services provided has the potential for improvement by additional and updated training. The views, understandings, and amount of DV resources appear to increase with the relative newness of the respective pastor's education. Without a hierarchy of authority, each church is left to develop its own standards regarding the DV issues. Additionally, the small church size and limited resources also limit the scale of DV programs.

One of the positive influences of small Baptist church clergy is their ability to network on the issues of DV within their circle of peers. By addressing domestic violence small Baptist church clergy have a beneficial effect through teaching education, awareness, and referral. The small Baptist church clergy are aware of the problem of domestic violence and act to prevent or stop abuse. They are limited by a lack of updates to their education and limited resources. They are enhanced through the intimacy of small numbers in the congregation. The interpretation of doctrine for the congregation does not accept DV as part of the religion. The clergy needs to be made more aware of available DV literature resources by the national and local organizations. The extent of this

problem can be seen in the fact that only 3 out of 10 ministers knew of faith based DV literature was available. The clergy needs to disseminate Southern Baptist Convention appropriate DV literature to keep the members of their congregations informed. Their direct influence is limited to the members of the congregation they serve but they have a broader effect on DV issues in general.

#### Recommendations for research improvements

The research study provided a larger amount of useful data than expected. The use of the interview process allowed personal interaction and expounding by participants on topics related to domestic violence. A more definitive and broad-based study would be useful in establishing factual and unbiased reference points for research into religious influence regarding domestic violence. In some other studies, the age of the study reflected an older education standard for the clergy. This study updates that experience and knowledge to the present. The drawbacks of time required, cost of transcription and travel, and the relatively small study group could be solved through additional funding and the ability to use properly trained assistant researchers. Face-to-face meetings and referral contacts were essential to gaining participant acceptance, cooperation, and openness.

The research provides an insight of the small Baptist church clergy view of a problem previously not addressed as domestic violence. The relative lack of studies and data mentioned by other researchers is addressed through this focused effort to collect opinions, facts, and backgrounds on a specific group. It was evident as the effort to recruit participants began, that there exist circles of referrals among the clergy. The

willingness to participate snowballed after a few ministers provided a reference and permitted their name to be used when proposing participation to specific ministers. There seemed to be three circles of referrals, northern Brevard, central coastal Brevard, and southern Brevard. The ministers reflected a willingness to acknowledge domestic violence and treat it rather than cover it up as suggested in other studies. The fresher the education, the more likely counseling and domestic violence were a part of the clergy member qualifications. Only a solitary minister closed the door when approached concerning the project. No trend or specific reason appeared to be the cause for declining to participate but rather the use of referrals seemed to be the best method of access to clergy participation.

The results of the study offer a picture of the small Baptist clergy working to aid members of the congregation within the context of their faith. This research offers a picture of how the clergy attempt to deal within their primary mission, religious direction, the problem of domestic violence. The more recent the education and training of the research sample respondent, the more aware of the details of DV and the options used to help the victims. This research found that the small Baptist church clergy held that women are not second class citizens, that domestic violence exists but there is no place for it in their religious belief, and there is a hierarchy in the family of support, love, and trust. The research also shows an increased reliance on counselors with higher level education, specialized training and certification to work with victims in a faith-based environment.

APPENDIX A:  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How many clergy are assigned to this church?
2. How long has this church been in existence?
3. What is the size of your congregation?
4. How would you describe the average parishioner regarding age, marital status, economic standing, and length of membership?
5. What are the basic tenets of your faith regarding the family?
6. In the ideal Baptist family, what roles are assigned to men and women?
7. In the eyes of your church, what would a healthy relationship look like?
8. Does the church have a domestic violence program?
9. If so, how long has it been operating?
10. Who has the primary role in advising and/or counseling the congregation regarding domestic violence?
11. Could you define your program's guidelines for me?
12. How well do you think your program works?
13. What is the typical type of domestic violence cases you see or hear about in your congregation?
14. If you are involved with counseling in your current job, how long have you been counseling?
15. Are there any specific criteria or credentials required to work as an advisor or counselor?
16. What in your faith's teachings do you believe may have an effect on people's attitudes or the way they think or feel about domestic violence?



17. Is there a set plan to follow if someone tells you they are being abused? What does it involve?
18. Are there any formal or informal ties to any community agencies to provide counseling or shelter for victims? Could you name them or describe what sort of agency they are?
19. Are there any higher faith authorities or directives guiding your participation in domestic violence?
20. What is your definition of intimate partner violence and how does it relate to Baptist teachings?
21. Does the church provide information to the congregation about domestic violence?
22. How does the church get information on domestic violence to the congregation? Are there pamphlets, flyers, contact numbers, or other means? And where can they be found?
23. Do you specifically include domestic violence in sermons to the congregation?
24. Is there anything you would like to add to this interview?

APPENDIX B:  
RESPONDENT DATA

Table 1 Respondents Data

# Members	DV Program	Education Date	Counsels	Referrals
230	No	1970s	Yes	Yes
42	No	1990s	Yes	Yes
70	No	Unknown	No	Yes
125	No	1980s	Yes	Yes
45	No	1990s	Yes	Yes
275	No	1970s	Yes	Yes
200	No	1960s	Yes	Yes
40	Yes	1960s	Yes	Yes
60	No	1980s	Yes	Yes
240	No	1990s	Yes	Yes

10 small Baptist church clergy participated

APPENDIX C:  
DEFINITIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Table 2 Definitions of Domestic Violence

Type	Number Out of 10 Clergy Accepts As Part of DV
Physical Abuse	10
Verbal	6
Emotional	4
Mental	3
Sexual	3

APPENDIX D:  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS

## Notice of Expedited Review and Approval for a New Protocol

From : UCF Institutional Review Board

**FWA00000351, Exp. 5/07/10, IRB00001138**

To : **Katherine Lieftink,**

Date : **May 30, 2007**

IRB Number: **SBE-07-05016**

Study Title: **Addressing Domestic Violence Among Small Baptist Church Clergy**

Your research protocol noted above was approved by **expedited** review by the UCF IRB Chair, Vice-chair or designated reviewer on 05/25/2007. **The expiration date is 05/24/2008.** Your study was determined to be minimal risk for human subjects and expeditable per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.110. The category for which this study qualifies as expeditable research is as follows:

#7 – Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. All data, including **all signed consent form documents**, must be retained in a locked file cabinet for a minimum of three years (six if HIPAA applies) past the completion of this research. Any links to the identification of participants should be maintained on a password-protected computer if electronic information is used. Additional requirements may be imposed by your funding agency, your department, or other entities. Access to data is limited to authorized individuals listed as key study personnel. To continue this research beyond the expiration date, a Continuing Review Form must be submitted 2 – 4 weeks prior to the expiration date. Advise the IRB if you receive a subpoena for the release of this information, or if a breach of confidentiality occurs. Also report any unanticipated problems or serious adverse events (within 5 working days). Do not make changes to the protocol methodology or consent form before obtaining IRB approval. Changes can be submitted for IRB review using the Addendum/Modification Request Form. An Addendum/Modification Request Form **cannot** be used to extend the approval period of a study. All forms may be completed and submitted online at <http://iris.research.ucf.edu> .

**Failure to provide a continuing review report could lead to study suspension, a loss of funding and/or publication possibilities, or reporting of noncompliance to sponsors or funding agencies.** The IRB maintains the authority under 45 CFR 46.110(e) to observe or have a third party observe the consent process and the research.

On behalf of Tracy Dietz, Ph.D., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 05/30/2007 09:28:46 AM EDT

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board

Office of Research & Commercialization

12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501

Orlando, Florida 32826-3246

Telephone: 407-823-2901, 407-882-2012 or 407-882-2276

[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

IRB Coordinator

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