

THE INTERSECTION OF SPIRITUALITY, RELIGION  
AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN THE  
AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

BY TAMEKA L. GILLUM, PH.D.

SPIRITUALITY AND DOMESTIC  
V I O L E N C E



**IDVAAC**  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
Institute on Domestic Violence In  
The African American Community



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



From slavery, to the Jim Crow Era, through the Civil Rights Movement, and up to contemporary times, the Church as an institution has long been regarded as a source of strength, comfort, and refuge for the African American Community. Although expressions of faith and spirituality have evolved over the years, their significance to African Americans in dealing with a variety of stressors remains constant.

Given the significant role of spirituality and religion in the Black community, it is not surprising that Black women look to their spiritual roots for solace and relief when coping with intimate partner violence. Although the scarcity of research in this area makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of clergy's response to their needs, the literature that does exist points to negative responses that could be disheartening and even dangerous to domestic violence victims. Notwithstanding this, Black women maintain that tending to their spiritual being served as a source of strength. Further, Black women in abusive relationships are more likely to employ prayer as a means for dealing with their situation than other racial groups.

The Intersection of Spirituality, Religion, and Intimate Partner Violence in the African American Community explores the role of the Black church in addressing intimate partner violence. The monograph offers information that supports the notion that, because of its standing and influence, the Black Church has an exceptional opportunity to play an active role in addressing intimate partner violence in the African American community. The document concludes with a set of recommendations for domestic violence and sexual assault service providers on how they can incorporate spiritual elements into their programs. Likewise, the monograph offers suggestions for clergy on how they can facilitate healing for victims of intimate partner violence and address perpetrators.

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# INTRODUCTION



The problem of intimate partner violence (IPV) within the African American community is indeed a serious concern. The epidemic has been well documented, with culturally specific contributing factors identified and noted. However, little attention has been devoted to the role that the Black Church, a central pillar in the African American community, can play in addressing this problem. Consequently, the purpose of this monograph is to document the extent to which this epidemic manifests itself within the African American community, culturally specific factors that impact the dynamics of such violence, the importance of spirituality and religion to African Americans, the centrality of the Black Church within this community, and the response of the Black Church to this epidemic. This monograph will also highlight the urgent need for the involvement of the Black Church and conclude with recommendations for ways in which the Black Church can be more responsive to this epidemic.

For contextual purposes, it is important to define some of the terms that will be used in this monograph. Spirituality has been defined by African American women as “a connection to and/or a belief in a higher external power” (Mattis, 2000, p. 108) or as “a personal belief and faith and/or relationship with the Divine” (Shambley-Ebron & Boyle, 2006, p. 202). Religion has been defined as “the conduit for achieving spirituality” (Mattis, 2000, p. 115) or “the allegiance of an individual to the specific beliefs and practices of a group or social institution” (Frazier & Hansen, 2009, p. 81). These will be the working definitions of spirituality and religion for this monograph. The Black Church and religious institutions will be used interchangeably to encompass “any predominantly African American congregation, even if it is part of a predominantly White American religious denomination” (Adksion-Bradley, Johnson, Sanders, Duncan, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2005, p. 187). Faith community will be used to refer to the community of individuals within those institutions.

# PREVALENCE

Research indicates that as many as 25%-31% of women report experiencing IPV in their lifetime (Collins et al., 1999; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Early research on IPV indicated rates of such violence as higher within the African American community compared to the majority community (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). However, other research has revealed that once socio-economic status was considered, African American families were no more violent, and may even be less violent, than their White counterparts (Cazenave & Straus, 1979; Coley & Beckett, 1988; Hampton, Gelles, & Harrop, 1989). A subsequent report by the National Institute of Justice supported this finding. The agency’s report states that though survey results indicate higher rates of IPV for African Americans than Whites, differences among minority groups diminish when sociodemographic and relationship variables are controlled (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Research conducted by the Commonwealth Fund demonstrated that though lifetime intimate partner abuse rates are disturbingly high for all women, rates vary little by race/ethnicity (Collins et al., 1999). The work of Benson, Wooldredge, and Thistlethwaite (2004) further supports these results. Applying social disorganization theory and research on urban poverty, these colleagues have argued that identified race differences between African Americans and Whites in IPV prevalence are primarily a function of their location in different ecological contexts. The authors were able to demonstrate that rates of IPV vary by type of community, with rates being highest in the most socially and economically disadvantaged communities and lowest in least disadvantaged communities for both African Americans and Whites. The authors provide evidence that there are much higher concentrations of African Americans in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, which, therefore, gives the perception that rates of IPV are higher within this community. However, race differences are substantially reduced or even disappear altogether when Whites are compared to African Americans in similar ecological contexts.



# CULTURALLY SPECIFIC MANIFESTATIONS/CONCERNS

The literature indicates a number of culturally specific factors that may contribute to IPV in African American interpersonal relationships. The early work of Staples (1982) suggested that African American families were under greater stress because of a belief held by many African American husbands that their wives will seek sexual satisfaction outside of marriage if they are not satisfied at home. He argued that jealousy, in conjunction with community norms that encourage extramarital affairs and regard marriage as a license to physically dominate women, contribute to violence in African American relationships. Similarly, Willis (1989) proposed that when the African American male meets the African American female, he sees someone whom he has been told is dominant in the family, “a castrating black woman [the matriarch].” He argued that African American males and females have been programmed from an early age, by society, to be destructive toward one another. The author contends that such negative attitudes have their origins in the American slavery era and have been passed from generation to generation. As a result, mate selection in the African American community is predicated on negative stereotypes, which increases the likelihood of problems in these relationships.

Asbury (1987) also identified factors that contribute to violence in African American relationships including:

- 1) flexibility and fluidity with the roles of African American males and females;
- 2) economic difficulty, which is pervasive in many African American families;
- 3) early exposure of children to violence in some African American communities;
- 4) substance abuse;
- 5) arguments over children and pregnancy; and
- 6) questions about the wife’s fidelity and sexual problems.

She also identified factors that influence African American women’s help-seeking decisions, which included

- 1) feelings of social isolation;
- 2) feelings that they may not be understood or welcomed at shelters; and
- 3) reluctance to seek help because of internalized common stereotypes about African American women, including that of the sexual temptress, ugly mummies, bridges that hold the family together, and/or emasculating matriarchs.

Collins (2000) and Gillum (2002) have both identified stereotypes of African American women (e.g., mummies, matriarchs, jezebels, and welfare mothers) as contributing to violence within intimate partnerships between African American women and men. They are identified as controlling images that cause African American men to objectify African American women and reflect the dominant group’s interest in maintaining African American women’s subordination (Collins, 2000). Empirical research has provided evidence of a link between stereotypes about African American women and IPV in the African American community (Gillum, 2002).

## THE FACTS

- **Stereotypes of African American women as sexual temptresses, mummies, bridges that hold the family together, emasculating matriarchs, jezebels and welfare mothers have been identified as contributing factors to violence in African American intimate partnerships.**<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6,7</sup>
- **Economic difficulties/poverty as well as economic disparities between African American women and men contribute to strain in intimate relationships.**<sup>1,2,6,8</sup>
- **Racism, both external and internalized, creates yet an additional stressor for African Americans, compounding relationship dynamics.**<sup>2,6,8,9</sup>
- **Exposure to violence of many African Americans, societal tolerance for violence against African Americans, and perceptions of violence as normative within the African American community have been identified as precipitating factor for IPV.**<sup>2,6,10</sup>
- **Inaccessibility & mistrust of formal IPV services often inhibit African American survivors’ helpseeking.**<sup>1,8,11</sup>
- **Limited education regarding IPV contributes to the rampant prevalence within the African American community.**<sup>10, 12</sup>



Brice-Baker (1994) and Thomas (2000) also explored cultural factors that contribute to IPV in African American families. Both have indicated that a societal tolerance for violence against African Americans in the U.S., as well as the myth that violence is an acceptable and condoned part of African American culture and family life, contribute to IPV in African American communities. Also discussed was the impact of the harsh realities of institutional and internalized racism experienced by African American men and their association with low-self esteem (a characteristic often attributed to batterers), as well as economic distress that disproportionately affects African American communities. Stereotypes of African American women were also identified as a contributing factor to such violence, having the effect of undermining African American women's self-esteem and suggesting that they are somehow at fault for the violence they experience (Brice-Baker, 1994; Thomas, 2000).

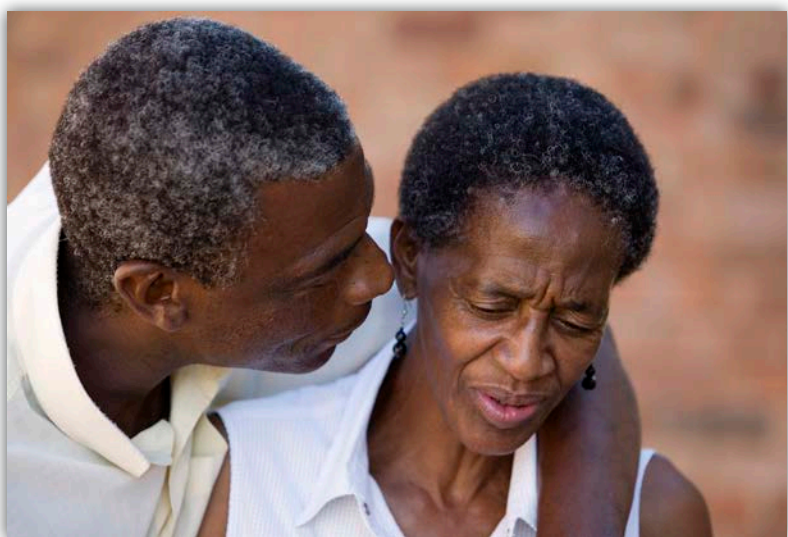
Bent-Goodley (2004) has also conducted a qualitative investigation of African American survivors' perceptions of IPV. Focus groups with 14 African American women receiving services from a New York City social services agency – 12 of whom identified as having experienced some form of domestic violence – revealed four perceptual distinctions:

- 1) differences between the “standard” definition and their perception of what constitutes domestic violence, including a need to differentiate between beatings (escalated violence) and abuse (less severe);
- 2) inaccessibility of domestic violence services, including lack of knowledge of existing programs;
- 3) need for public education about domestic violence; and
- 4) concern about child welfare workers finding out that domestic violence occurs in the home and the related fear of having their children removed from their care.

More recently, Nash (2005) qualitatively explored African American women's constructions of their experiences with IPV. Themes that emerged from her interviews with survivors include perceptions of African American women as protectors of African American males, acknowledgement of racism and disparities between partners as external sources of relationship tension, and resistance to formal intervention services.

Another recent study of African American women who have experienced IPV identified a significant relationship between perceived racial discrimination and the experience of IPV. The researchers concluded that African American women who have experienced these two phenomena – racial discrimination and IPV – are likely being “... uniquely and exceedingly burdened by mental and physical health problems as well” (Waltermaurer, Watson, & McNutt, 2006, p. 1221). They further identify the need to consider the multiple stressors experienced by this population in order to best respond to their health needs. Morrison, Luchok, Richter, and Parra-Medina (2006) undertook the investigation of experiences of informal help-seeking among African American survivors. They identified culturally specific responses as perceived by survivors. The authors drew several conclusions based on survivor responses, including that informal sources of support (family and friends) within the African American community were typically forthcoming with advice and instrumental support for survivors. However, emotional support was less forthcoming. Informal sources of support voiced concern about being involved in the “business” of survivors and consequently limited their involvement. Also identified was the sentiment that some within the African American community perceive IPV as normative and thus undeserving of attention. The authors also concluded that there seems to exist among some members of the African American community a lack of adequate knowledge of how to appropriately assist victims of abuse, and that these individuals may be ignorant to the dynamics and intense nature of IPV. The stigma of being victimized also appears to have hindered some help-seeking efforts among the participants in the study.

Findings from the aforementioned literature provide evidence that there are issues unique to African Americans that must be explored and addressed when attempting to eradicate IPV in this community. These issues include the effects of slavery, institutional and internalized racism, racial stereotyping, and economic inequalities. The importance of spirituality and the Black Church to the African American community and its relationship to the dynamics of IPV within the community should also be explored.



# IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUALITY, RELIGION, & THE BLACK CHURCH IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Spirituality and religious involvement have been demonstrated to be of particular importance within the African American community. Research suggests that religious involvement is generally higher among African Americans than among Whites (Chatters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 1999; Levin, Taylor, & Chatters, 1994; Taylor, Chatters, Jayakody, & Levin, 1996), and is higher among African American women than among African American men (Chatters et. al., 1999; Levin et. al., 1994). African Americans use spirituality and religious involvement to cope with life stressors ranging from perceived discrimination to disease to recovery from substance abuse and natural disaster (Brome, Owens, Allen, & Vevaina, 2000; Casarez & Miles, 2008; Constantine, Wilton, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002; Lawson & Thomas, 2007; Scott, 2003).



Within the African American community, the Black Church has always had a strong presence, and African Americans have a long history of a strong faith tradition (Brice-Baker, 1994; Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Ellison, Trinitapoli, Anderson, & Johnson, 2007; Oliver, 2000). Consequently, several researchers have documented the importance of addressing spirituality and faith when working with African American survivors (Arnette, Mascaro, Santana, Davis, & Kaslow, 2007; Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006; Gillum, 2008b; Gillum, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2006; Potter, 2007). A number of qualitative studies of African American survivors have documented these women's accounts of the importance of spirituality and religious involvement to their ability to cope with and heal from abusive relationships (Gillum, 2008a; Gillum, 2008b; Potter, 2007; Taylor, 2004; Yick, 2008).

Gillum (2008b) found that African American survivors identified spirituality as significant in their healing process. For some, the fact that they had been raised spiritually and/or raised in the church made spiritual healing a necessary component of intervention. Others spoke of the importance of spirituality to their overcoming and coping with their abuse experiences. They also spoke generally to the centrality of spirituality for African Americans.

Potter (2007) interviewed 40 African American survivors to explore their experiences with utilizing ecclesiastic resources in their efforts to escape abuse. She found that the majority of her sample indicated a reliance on their spirituality as a means of coping with and/or getting out of abusive relationships. This reliance on faith was prominent even for those women who also turned to secular resources for assistance. Some of these women expressed their spirituality as very present despite their decreased involvement in religious practices during their abusive relationships.

In her ethnographic study of 21 African American survivors, Taylor (2004) identified the theme of Renewing the Spirit as important to their recovery from victimization experiences. The women in her study spoke of the need to nurture the spiritual self and their actively seeking spiritual community and connections and engaging in a variety of spiritual practices in efforts to facilitate their spiritual healing. They identified such exercises as providing them with strength and valuable insight.

Quantitative studies have also documented links between spirituality and faith-based practices and both coping and psychological well-being among African American survivors (El-Khoury, Dutton, Goodman, Engel, Belamaric, & Murphy, 2004; Watlington & Murphy, 2006). In their quantitative analysis of survivors' help-seeking strategies, El-Khoury et al. (2004) found that African American women were significantly more likely to endorse the use of prayer as a coping strategy for dealing with IPV and to identify such as helpful to them. Watlington and Murphy (2006) found interesting associations between spirituality,

religious involvement, and mental health outcomes for African American survivors. They found high levels of spirituality and religious involvement to be associated with less depression and higher religious involvement to be negatively associated with post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, also supporting the helpfulness of spirituality and religious practices to African American survivors' well-being. Another study found spiritual well-being among African American survivors to be a protective factor against suicide attempts (Meadows, Kaslow, Thompson, & Jurkovic, 2005).



## THE FACTS

- **Spirituality:** “a connection to and/or a belief in a higher external power”<sup>13</sup> or “a personal belief and faith and/or relationship with the Divine.”<sup>14</sup>
- **Religion:** “the conduit for achieving spirituality”<sup>13</sup> or “the allegiance of an individual to the specific beliefs and practices of a group or social institution.”<sup>13,15</sup>
- **Spirituality and religious involvement are of particular importance within the African American community and African Americans use spirituality and religious involvement to cope with numerous life stressors.**<sup>16,17,19,20,21,22,23</sup>
- **Within the African American community, the Black church has always had a strong presence and African Americans have a long history of a strong faith tradition.**<sup>2,24,25,26</sup> Consequently, several researchers have documented the importance of addressing spirituality and faith when working with African American survivors.<sup>11,27,28,29</sup>
- **Numerous studies of African American survivors have documented the importance of spirituality and religious involvement to their ability to cope with and heal from abusive relationships.**<sup>28,30,31,32,33,35,36,37</sup>



# RESPONSE OF THE BLACK CHURCH TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Given the previously described findings related to the importance of spirituality, religion, and the Black Church, it is not surprising that some African American survivors turn to spirituality and/or their faith communities in their search for strength, solace, support, and assistance. Some find strength to cope with, heal from, break free from, and/or remain free from abusive relationships through their spirituality and/or engagement in religious community (Banks-Wallace & Parks, 2004; El-Khoury et al., 2004; Gillum, 2008a; Potter, 2007; Taylor, 2004; Watlington & Murphy, 2006). The literature is limited in addressing the reception that African American survivors receive when turning to their religious leaders and/or community for support and assistance. That which does exist reveals that many have received a less than helpful or desirable response.

Gillum's (2008a) work reveals that domestic violence service providers working with African American survivors have encountered women who have received a blaming response from clergy prompting them to return to an abusive partner. Potter (2007) found that all of the African American survivors in her study who turned to Christian clergy for counsel found them unsupportive. Most were advised to stay with abusive partners and make the relationship work. These survivors became disheartened with their churches after such an experience. In addition, many other participants indicated that they did not turn to the church for assistance because of the unsupportive response they had witnessed other survivors receive and because they suspected their reports of abuse would not be believed by their pastors. Some spoke of their disillusionment with the Black Church and of their belief that these churches should address issues such as IPV.

The existence of sexism and promotion of patriarchy and traditional marital roles within some Black churches may inadvertently serve to facilitate perpetration of IPV and survivors' suffering. A study of predominantly African American perpetrators revealed that half of them endorsed conservative religious teachings that dictate that men should be the leaders and decision makers in relationships. These respondents reported their belief that societal promotion of female-male equality was in conflict with this teaching and consequently led to relationship conflict (Levitt, Swanger, & Butler, 2008). A study of African American church leaders and congregants revealed related findings. Participants believed that due to their own sexism and sex-role perceptions, clergy often missed opportunities to end violence in the home. One participant in particular expressed her perception that the church and domestic violence combine to traumatize women. Participants spoke to manifestations of sexism within many churches, as well as to the lack of adequate knowledge and understanding of faith-based communities regarding IPV (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006).

Taken together, the preceding speaks to the need for the Black Church to play an active role in addressing IPV within the African American community. Considering the centrality of the Black Church to the African American community and the respect with which clergy and fellow congregants are viewed, the Black Church's proper attention to and acknowledgement of the presence of such violence has the potential to make a significant statement of no tolerance. Diligent efforts by the Black Church to address this issue could conceivably decrease the silence surrounding the epidemic, decrease violence in their congregations and communities, and hold perpetrators accountable. For survivors in particular, bringing visibility to this issue and condemning it could serve to give them a voice, provide validation and acknowledgement of their experiences, provide much-needed assistance and support, and facilitate spiritual healing. The literature supports the positive effects of survivors receiving support and validation from their clergy and faith communities (Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000; Neergaard, Lee, Anderson, & Gengler, 2007; Pyles, 2007; Rotunda, Williamson, & Penfold, 2004).





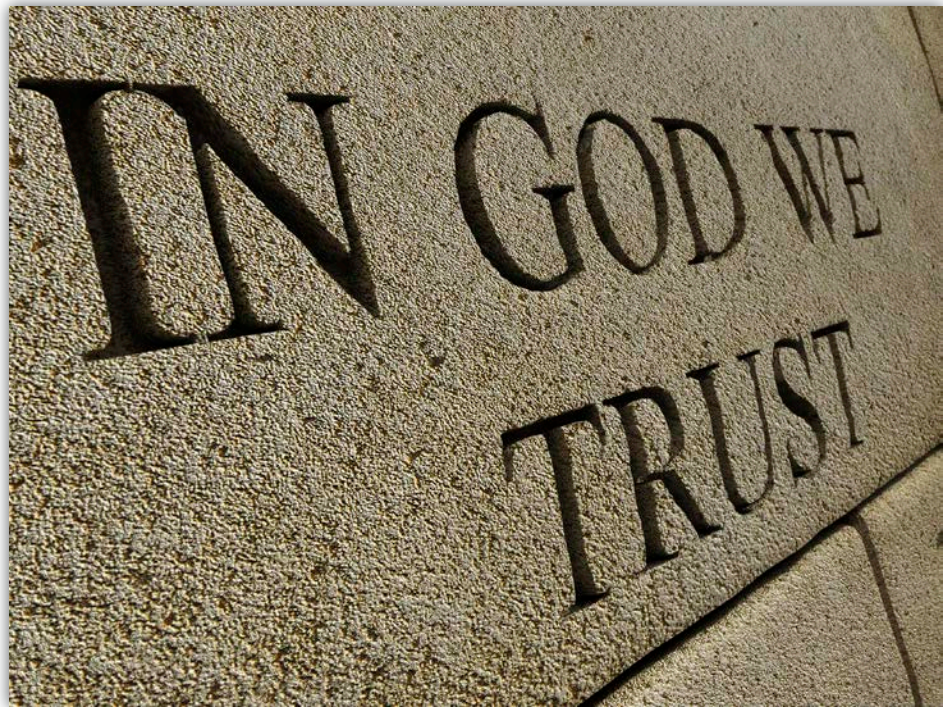
# THE FACTS

- Many African American survivors turn to spirituality and/or their faith communities in their search for strength, solace, support and assistance. Some find strength to cope with, heal, break free and/or remain free from abusive relationships through their spirituality and/or engagement in religious community.<sup>30,31,32,34,35,36</sup>
- Unfortunately, many African American survivors have received less than helpful and often negative responses when turning to clergy or religious communities for support and assistance. These include responses of blaming and urging them to remain with or return to abusive partners.<sup>30,32</sup>
- The existence of sexism and promotion of patriarchy and tradition marital roles within some Black churches inadvertently serve to facilitate perpetration of such violence and survivors' suffering.<sup>11,38</sup>
- Considering the centrality of the Black Church to the African American community and the respect with which clergy and fellow congregants are viewed, the Black Church needs to play an active role in addressing IPV within the African American community.
- The literature supports the positive effects of survivors receiving support and validation from their clergy and faith communities.<sup>39,40,41,42</sup>

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACILITATING SPIRITUAL HEALING & FREEDOM FROM INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

There are indeed numerous ways in which the Black Church could play an active role in facilitating lives free of IPV for African American survivors and their spiritual healing. In fact, survivors themselves have expressed the need for faith communities to offer such services (Gillum, 2008a) and many have admitted to turning to clergy and faith communities for support and assistance when involved in an abusive relationship (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006; El-Khoury et al., 2004; Potter, 2007). For some survivors, engagement in a faith community and assistance received from clergy and/or their faith family fostered the strength they needed to cope with or leave abusive situations, provided them with much-needed support and assistance for doing so, and/or facilitated their spiritual healing (Gillum, 2008a; Knickmeyer, Levitt, Horne, & Bayer 2003; Rotunda et al., 2004; Senter & Caldwell, 2002).

As a starting point, having clergy and lay leaders receive education and training on the issue of IPV is crucial to raising awareness and facilitating helpful and effective responses. There are a number of resources that such individuals could turn to for education and training. For example, the Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute, [www.bcdvi.org](http://www.bcdvi.org), is a nonprofit agency that focuses on leadership development and empowerment of religious leaders in the Black Church to effectively respond to and prevent domestic violence through clergy training and advocacy. This agency also seeks to develop relationships between domestic violence agencies and congregations with the goal of fostering partnerships toward effectively addressing domestic violence. The Faith Trust Institute, [www.faitrustinstitute.org](http://www.faitrustinstitute.org), is an international organization that works with multiple faith communities toward ending domestic and sexual violence. This organization provides consultation; training; and video, print, and internet educational resources. It also aims to foster connections between secular domestic and sexual violence organizations and religious organizations. The mission of the Soul Sanctuary, [www.thesoulsanctuary.org](http://www.thesoulsanctuary.org), is to “promote healthy relationships and violence-free families.” To this end, the organization provides trainings for clergy and lay leaders, in-person support groups, and e-support for domestic abuse survivors. Utilizing such resources would allow these individuals to acquire a better understanding of this issue and respond appropriately, thereby enabling them to provide the much-needed emotional and spiritual support that African American survivors of faith need.



Religious institutions and faith communities could offer instrumental support to survivors who desire to end abusive relationships and leave abusive partners. Provision of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, employment connections, permanent housing, child care, and financial assistance, in addition to spiritual and emotional support, are all critical for women taking this major step in their lives. This is particularly true for survivors who have children and/or have been dependent on their abusers to meet their financial needs. In addition, clergy and lay leaders becoming knowledgeable about community resources for survivors within the broader communities that religious institutions serve and providing appropriate referrals could be especially helpful.



Black churches could also be the site of intervention and prevention efforts to address IPV. Literature provides evidence of the success of church-based efforts addressing a multitude of health issues and social concerns within the African American community. These include such issues as mental illness, obesity, diabetes, prostate cancer, youth involvement in the juvenile justice system, and substance abuse (Baker et al., 2006; Goldfinger, Arniella, Wylie-Rosett, & Horowitz, 2008; Husaini et al., 2008; Murrock & Gary, 2009; Mynatt, Wicks, & Bolden, 2008; Pickett-Schenk, 2002; Samuel-Hodge et al., 2009; Stahler, Kirby, & Kerwin, 2007; Shelton, 2008).

The provision of support groups by religious institutions has the potential to be especially helpful to survivors. Such groups could be led by trained clergy and/or lay leaders or by trained domestic violence counselors or advocates from domestic violence services brought in by clergy for such purposes. This could serve to both validate women's experience and facilitate survivors' connections with other women of faith that have had similar experiences. Such efforts also show women within these faith communities that their faith community cares about their experience and their healing.

Clergy, religious institutions, and faith communities could offer services to perpetrators within their congregations as well. Research indicates that perpetrators may also seek counsel regarding their situations from clergy (Rotunda et al., 2004). Educating perpetrators on the reality of this violence within communities of faith would put them on notice that clergy are aware of the issue and see it as important to address within their communities. Along with this, clergy and lay leaders need to hold perpetrators accountable when they come to them seeking counsel or are identified by women who are being abused by such individuals. Religious leaders could condemn such behavior while simultaneously facilitating perpetrators' healing from their spiritual brokenness and referring them to appropriate community resources. In addition, for those religious institutions with adequate financial and community resources, they may choose to hold batterer intervention groups for perpetrators to facilitate a possible path toward non-violence in their lives, learning new ways to resolve conflict, and valuing the significant others in their lives.

Religious institutions and communities of faith could also offer services to couples prior to their entering into a committed relationship such as marriage. Many religious institutions offer such programs as pre-marital classes. The inclusion of IPV education in such classes could also serve to raise awareness and possibly prevent some women from solidifying a relationship that may not be mentally, physically, emotionally, or spiritually healthy for them and not a proper representation of a Godly union.

Religious institutions and communities of faith could offer a number of programs and services to their congregations at large to address this issue as well. Delivering messages from the pulpit that discuss intimate partner and sexual violence can serve multiple purposes. Educating one's congregation about the reality of such violence within communities of faith could serve to raise awareness and promote discussion of the issue, breaking the frequent silence surrounding IPV in communities of faith. Condemning this violence from the pulpit can serve to help survivors understand that such behavior is un-Godly and that they are not deserving of such abuse. This may serve to facilitate survivors' seeking help from abusive situations. It would demonstrate to perpetrators that such behavior is inappropriate and will not be tolerated. It would likely facilitate fellow congregants being supportive of women who are experiencing such violence and hold accountable those men who are perpetrating such abuse. Delivering messages that teach the proper way to interpret scripture, the proper way to treat one's significant other, and the equality of women in relationships could facilitate healthier ways of interacting within these unions.

Women's and men's ministries within religious institutions are yet another outlet for ending the silence surrounding violence and facilitating healing. Many faith communities offer programs and services that are specifically geared toward women or men. Women's ministries could provide information to women about the problem of IPV. This could include warning signs, prevalence, and resources available to them. This would provide a safe place for women to reveal such violence if they are experiencing it and provide confirmation that they deserve to live free from violence in the places that should be their refuges – their homes. Ministering to men could include information on IPV prevalence, resources for batterers, the message that battering is not appropriate behavior, and identifying proper ways to treat and value a partner.

Other activities can reinforce these efforts as well. For example, including articles or segments on IPV in newsletters and bulletins of religious institutions and hosting church events that educate and raise awareness can be particularly powerful. Religious institutions partnering with sexual assault and domestic violence agencies within their communities in the hosting of community events and fundraisers may have similar positive effects.

Also important is acknowledging the impact of such violence on youth. Adolescents perpetrate and are victimized by dating violence at disturbing rates (Eaton, Davis, & Barrios, 2007; Howard, Wang, & Yan, 2007; Sears, Byers, & Price, 2006; West & Rose, 2000), and children witnessing IPV in their homes have been known to experience negative

outcomes (Geffner, Igelman, & Zellner, 2003; Kernic et al., 2003). Consequently, services should be provided for youth as well. Religious institutions can include education segments on dating violence in ministries for teens. Support groups for children who have witnessed such violence in their home, facilitated by trained clergy or trained domestic violence agency staff, would be especially helpful. Such resources could assist faith communities in implementing the recommendations that have been presented.

Though religious institutions can and should play a significant role in addressing the issue of IPV within communities of faith, domestic violence and sexual assault programs can also facilitate activities that recognize the intersection of intimate violence and faith for many survivors. One approach these programs could offer is spiritual or prayer groups on site, particularly within domestic violence shelters. Such programs and agencies frequently offer diverse groups for survivors, including support groups for domestic and sexual violence, substance abuse groups, parenting groups, and the like. While offering such programs is an attempt to adequately address the multiple needs of survivors, many often neglect survivors' spiritual needs as they cope with their abusive experiences. Providing regular non-denominational or inter-faith spiritual healing or prayer groups, on a volunteer basis for participants, could be especially healing and powerful to many survivors. Appropriate clergy or lay leaders from the faith community could be brought in to facilitate such groups. Providing space within a shelter designated for meditation or prayer could be very helpful as well. Providing transportation for resident survivors to facilitate their attendance of religious services could also foster healing. Initiatives such as these could serve to lessen the impact of an already traumatic experience for survivors who have been displaced, as well as increase their social support networks.

## CONCLUSION

Given the epidemic of IPV, the importance of spirituality to African Americans, and the centrality of the Black Church within that community, it is the obligation of the Black Church to effectively address this issue. Many recommendations have been presented, and resources have been identified to assist in their implementation. It is suggested that individual religious institutions take on only those recommendations that they have adequate resources to implement. Smaller institutions should do more partnering and referral, while larger churches could implement many of the recommendations presented. The end result should be the acknowledgement of this phenomenon and a lessening of its presence within the African American community, thereby improving the health and safety of African American families.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT PROGRAMS

- Offer spiritual or prayer groups on site, particularly within domestic violence shelters. Providing regular non-denominational or inter-faith spiritual healing or prayer groups, on a volunteer basis for participants, could be especially healing and powerful to many survivors. Appropriate clergy or lay leaders from the faith community could be brought in to facilitate such groups.
- Providing space within shelters designated for prayer or meditation or prayer could be very helpful as well.
- Providing transportation for resident survivors to facilitate their attendance of religious services could foster much needed healing.



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLERGY FOR FACILITATION OF SPIRITUAL HEALING AND FREEDOM FROM INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

- Having clergy and lay leaders receive education and training on the issue of IPV is crucial to raising awareness and facilitating helpful and effective response.
- Religious institutions and faith communities could offer much needed instrumental support to survivors (food, clothing, shelter, transportation, employment connections, permanent housing, child care, financial assistance, etc.) who desire to leave abusive partners in addition to providing spiritual and emotional support.
- Clergy and lay leaders should become knowledgeable of community resources for survivors within the broader communities they serve and provide appropriate referrals.
- The provision of support groups by religious institutions has the potential to be especially helpful to survivors. Such groups could be led by trained clergy and/or lay leaders or by trained domestic violence counselors or advocates from local domestic violence agencies.
- Clergy and lay leaders need to hold perpetrators accountable when they come to them seeking counsel or are identified by women being abused by these individuals. Religious leaders could condemn such behavior while simultaneously facilitating perpetrators' healing from their spiritual brokenness and referring them to appropriate community resources. Religious institutions with adequate financial and community resources may choose to hold batterer intervention groups for perpetrators.
- Religious institutions can include education segments on dating violence in ministries for teens.
- The inclusion of IPV education in pre-marital classes could also serve to raise awareness and possibly prevent some women from solidifying a relationship which may not be mentally, physically, emotionally or spiritually healthy for them.
- Delivering messages from the pulpit which condemn IPV and teach the proper way to interpret scripture, the proper way to treat one's significant other and the equality of women in relationships could facilitate healthier ways of interacting within these unions.
- Women's ministries could provide information to women about the problem of IPV. This could include warning signs, prevalence, and resources available to them.
- Ministering to men could include information on prevalence, resources for batterers, the message that battering is not appropriate behavior, and identifying proper ways to treat and value a partner.
- Including articles or segments on IPV in newsletters and bulletins of religious institutions and hosting church events which educate and raise awareness can be particularly powerful. Religious institutions partnering with sexual assault and domestic violence agencies within their community in the hosting of community events and fundraisers may have similar effects.
- Support groups for children who have witnessed such violence in their home, facilitated by trained clergy or trained domestic violence agency staff, would be especially helpful.

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