

# INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN A CONSERVATIVE FAITH COMMUNITY: SPIRITUALITY, RELIGION AND COPING

Dr. Marciana Popescu, Fordham University

Dr. Rene Drumm, Southern Adventist University

# DEFINITIONS

## ❑ Conservative Christian Community

- ❑ Self-defined conservative denomination
- ❑ Guided by conservative theological principles

## ❑ Religiosity

- ❑ Conservative practice of religion
- ❑ Church attendance
  - ❑ Centrality of worship

## ❑ Religious coping

- ❑ The use of faith/spirituality/religious beliefs to deal with intimate partner violence

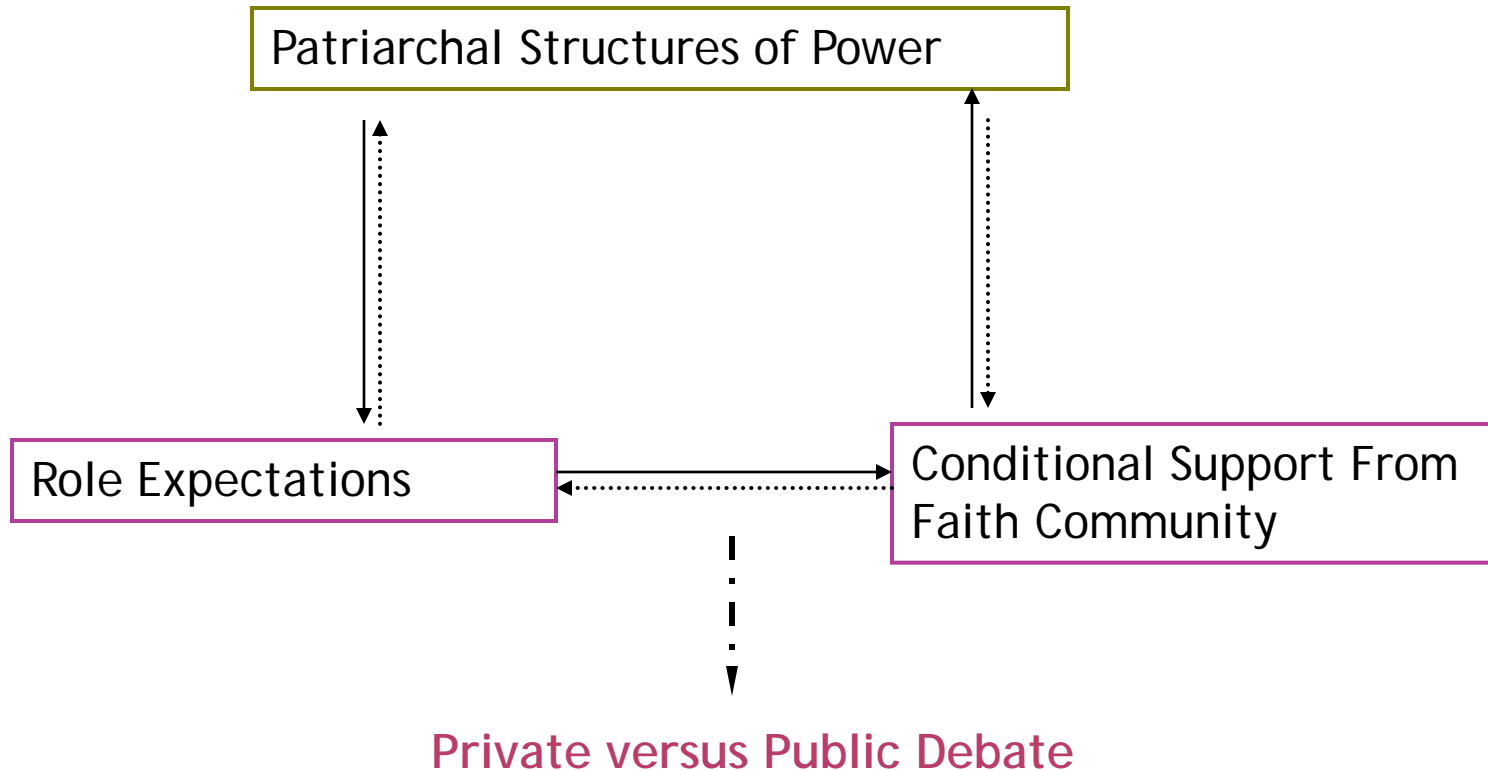
## ❑ Intimacy

- ❑ Mutual responsiveness between partners
- ❑ Entering a relationship based on consensual agreement (Cardarelli, 1997)

## ❑ Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):

- ❑ Any form of violence/abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological)
- ❑ Between intimate partners

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

| <b>Theoretical Perspectives</b> | <b>Core Concept</b>    | <b>Causality</b>         | <b>Core Issues</b>                     |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Feminist Theory                 | Patriarchal structures | Power and control →      | Patriarchal hierarchy<br>Male headship |
| Role Theory                     | Role expectations      | Role conflict →          | Submission of women                    |
| Exchange Theory                 | Social control         | Social approval of IPV → | Support is available but conditional   |
| Multi-dimensional approach      | Inter-relatedness      | Multiple causality →     | Externality of problem                 |

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- (1) *What is the prevalence of domestic violence in this conservative protestant community, when compared with the prevalence in the general population?*
- (2) *How does spirituality affect or impact current solutions employed and preferred by victims of domestic violence?*
- (3) *What could religious leaders and professionals do to improve their approach to domestic violence for women in faith communities, and to provide a safe shelter for women and their children?*

# METHODOLOGY

- Quantitative - victimization survey - two subsamples: regional ( $N_1=1,431$ ); and community ( $N_2=554$ )
  - *Prevalence of intimate partner violence*
  - *Victimization types*
  - *Help-seeking/coping mechanisms*
  - *Effects on health/spiritual life*
  - *Service recommendations*

# METHODOLOGY

## ◉ Qualitative

- Focus groups (6)- with women victims of IPV, professionals (police officers, health practitioners, social workers, counselors, women's shelter administrators), and clergy
- In-depth interviews (20) with women victims of IPV

# MAIN FINDINGS

- ◉ The ranking of abusive behaviors is similar in both sub-samples
- ◉ Controlling behaviors and escalating violence behaviors have the highest prevalence in this faith-groups
- ◉ Sexual victimization is identified was a core part of the intimate partner violence by 18% of the respondents in the community sample, and by almost a third (29%) of the respondents in the regional sample.



| Abuse Types                                   | Specific Survey Item   | Community Sample | Regional Sample |
|---|--|------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Controlling<br/>Demeaning<br/>Behavior</b> | <p>Told you what to do and expected obedience</p> <p>Made big family and household decisions without consulting you</p> <p>Limited your involvement with others</p> <p>Monitored your daily activities</p> <p>Ignored or discounted your accomplishments</p> <p>Was extremely jealous or accused you of having an affair</p> <p>Exhibited a general contempt for your gender</p> | <b>51%</b>       | <b>65%</b>      |
| <b>Escalating<br/>Violence</b>                | <p>Insulted, swore at you, or called you names</p> <p>Destroyed property or cherished possessions</p> <p>Threatened to hit or throw something at you</p> <p>Threw, smashed hit, or kicked something to frighten you</p> <p>Pushed, grabbed, or shoved you</p>  | <b>30%</b>       | <b>46%</b>      |
| <b>Sexual<br/>Victimization</b>               | <p>Used pornographic materials</p> <p>Used sexually degrading language towards or about you</p> <p>Used you sexually against your will</p> <p>Persuaded you to do something sexually that you consider a perversion</p> <p>Raped you</p>   | <b>18%</b>       | <b>29%</b>      |

| Abuse Types                                     | Specific Survey Item   | Community Sample | Regional Sample |
|---|--|------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Resource Deprivation Leveraging Children</b> | Did not let you have access to family/personal income<br>Restricted your use of the car<br>Prevented you from getting or keeping a job/education<br>Deprived you of heat, food, or sleep<br>Threatened to take the children away from you<br>Threatened to abuse your children<br>Abused your children or pets to punish you | <b>15%</b>       | <b>25%</b>      |
| <b>Severe Physical Abuse</b>                    | Threatened to used a weapon on you<br>Used a weapon on you<br>Beat you up  | <b>7%</b>        | <b>10%</b>      |

# MAIN FINDINGS

- Although severe physical abuse appear as the least prevalent form of intimate partner violence for this faith community, when comparing the data for these two samples, with the data provided by various national samples, the prevalence of physical victimization in this community is equal or higher than national rates

| Lifetime Physical Violence by an Intimate Partner        | Women Victimization Rates |                  |   |
|--|---------------------------|------------------|---|
|  | Regional Sample           | Community Sample | National                                |
| Type of assault  |                           |                  |   |
| Total (anyone reporting at least one of the following)   | 33.8                      | 18.1             | 22.11 <sup>1</sup> - 37.62 <sup>2</sup> |
| Threw, smashed, hit, or kicked something to frighten you | 27.4                      | 15.7             | 8.1                                     |
| Pushed, grabbed, or shoved you                           | 28.2                      | 18.1             | 18.1                                    |
| Beat you up  | 8.8                       | 4.9              | 8.5                                     |
| Threatened to use a weapon                               | 7.1                       | 3.9              | 3.1                                     |
| Used a weapon on you                                     | 2.0                       | 1.0              | .8                                      |

<sup>1</sup>Tjaden, P. & Thonnes, N. (November, 2000). *Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence against Women Research Report: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>2</sup>Coker, A. L., Smith, P. H., McKeown, R. E., & King, M. J. (2000). Frequency and correlates of Intimate Partner Violence by type: Physical, sexual, and psychological battering. *American Journal of Public Health, 90(4)*, pp. 553-559.

# SPIRITUALITY VERSUS RELIGIOSITY

- Religiosity - measured by religious practices (conservative versus liberal) and church attendance
- Religiosity appears to affect differently the two sub-samples:
  - Religious practices are a significant predictor for professional help-seeking - for the regional sample
  - Religious practices have a protective effect, limiting the negative coping behaviors - for the community sample

# RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AS PREDICTORS FOR PROFESSIONAL HELP-SEEKING

|  |  | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t     | Sig. |
|--|--|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
|  |  | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |       |      |
|  | (Constant)   | .354                        | .051       |                           | 6.932 | .000 |
|  | Controlling through Resources (Money and Children) | .163                        | .039       | .146                      | 4.195 | .000 |
|  | Abusive punishment during childhood                | .022                        | .005       | .126                      | 3.985 | .000 |
|  | Sexual Victimization                               | .112                        | .037       | .106                      | 3.058 | .002 |
|  | Practice the doctrines of your church              | .060                        | .021       | .087                      | 2.806 | .005 |

# RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AS PREDICTOR FOR NEGATIVE COPING

|  |  | Unstandardized Coefficients |             | Standardized Coefficients | T            | Sig.        |
|--|--|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|--------------|-------------|
|  |  | B                           | Std. Error  | Beta                      |              |             |
|  | (Constant)                                   | .127                        | .094        |                           | 1.363        | .174        |
|  | Abusive punishment during childhood          | .052                        | .012        | .250                      | 4.384        | .000        |
|  | Sexual Victimization                         | .233                        | .081        | .165                      | 2.881        | .004        |
|  | <b>Practice the doctrines of your church</b> | <b>.097</b>                 | <b>.037</b> | <b>.144</b>               | <b>2.588</b> | <b>.010</b> |

# COPING BEHAVIORS

| <b>Actions respondents took to help themselves</b> | <b>Percent of respondents engaging in these actions community sample</b> | <b>Percent of respondents engaging in these actions regional sample</b> |
|--|--|---|
| Prayed about it                                    | 93%  | 98%   |
| Talked it over with a friend                       | 79%  | 76%   |
| Talked the situation over with the person          | 76%  | 80%   |
| Talked it over with a relative                     | 62%  | 64%   |
| Talked about it with church member                 | 42%  | 59%   |
| Went to a professional counselor                   | 34%  | 42%   |
| Went to see the pastor                             | 30%  | 44%   |
| Bought a self-help book                            | 28%  | 41%   |
| Went to a support group                            | 16%  | 27%   |



# SPIRITUALITY AND COPING

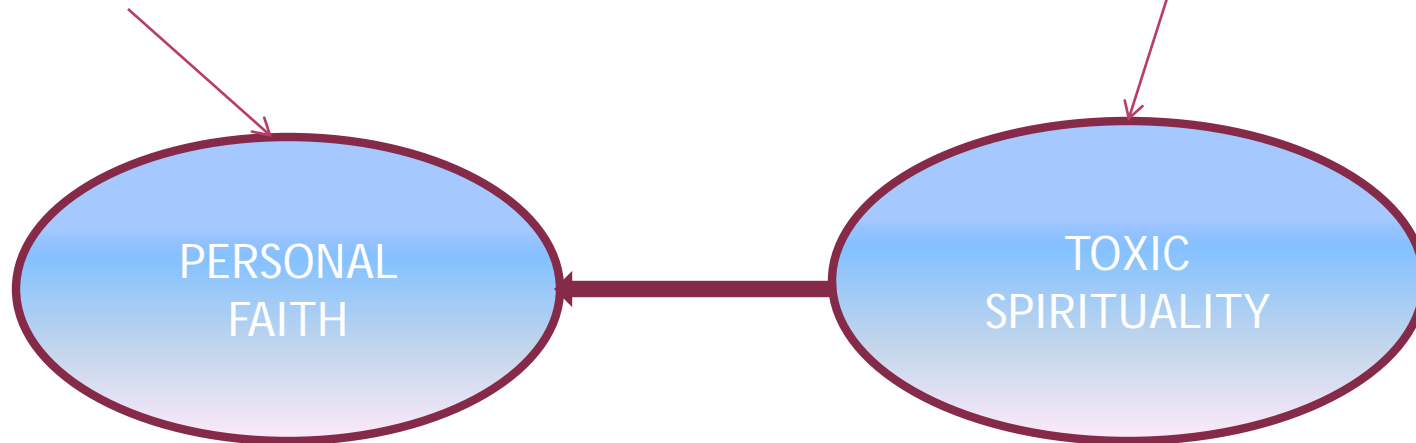
Through qualitative research we identified two major dimensions of spirituality:

## POSITIVE COPING

*HEALING*

## NEGATIVE COPING

*SCARRING*



# FINDINGS

Women overwhelmingly offered experiences with clergy and church leaders that increased rather than decreased their emotional and spiritual pain.

The faith community acts as a social control instrument, through external manifestations of religion as well as internalized values and beliefs

Personal faith/understanding of GOD as well as positive relationships with individual members of the faith community foster healing and spiritual wellness

MARRIAGE IS  
FOR LIFE

*"When you got married  
that was forever"*

*"Its like if your marriage has  
broken there's something bad  
with you."*

*"I believe that marriage was  
'Til death do us part'  
and it never entered my mind  
that anything else would ever happen"*

DIVORCE IS NOT  
ACCEPTABLE

*"God hates divorce!"*

*"I didn't believe in divorce"*

*"And in those two years, I believed that it was God talking to and through the church and that He removed his calling from me."*

*"When my sister mentioned divorce, oh, I got angry with her! I stopped talking to her!"*  
[...]

*"My church emphasized that the Bible said I should not be separated from my husband"*

## SUBMISSION OF WOMEN

*“ [...] whatever the situation we have to submit to it and we believe God expects that no matter what.”*

*“We have an idea we have to submit... ”*

*“The teaching of the church is that when you are hit, you turn the other cheek!”*

## CHURCH AS A PERFECT PLACE

*“Nothing bad can happen in the church, so therefore if you are having a bad marriage, you are too embarrassed to talk about it. And there you will wear this façade and you’ll go on as if everything is ok”*

*“You are part of a group of people who are looking at your life and you usually present yourself on Sabbath or Sunday with a perfect look and your family is just right. You don’t want to mire the image. About the things that hold you in the marriage, you belong to a subculture and a different group of people who are on show all the time.”*

# TOXIC SPIRITUALITY

*“The Christian part that keeps you in, the loss of identity if you leave, the fear, the humiliation... ”*

*“I would keep reading in the Bible to turn the other cheek, to be more patient, try harder... ”*

SELF-BLAME

*“I never thought that I deserved it, just that I instigated it sometimes... ”*

*“When it was a physical violence I would not report it because I knew that I were doing, I was behaving against the mandates of the church.”*

# SPIRITUAL HELP-SEEKING

"I tried to find help inside the church.

And I could not find any help inside the church!"

*"God was the only person to turn to. There was nobody else there sitting beaten up and bloody in the corner and my kids were off with the babysitter."*

*"I did call our local pastor, and I found out that my husband had a position, he was a doctor, he had a position in the church, and the pastor just said 'I think there is probably just miscommunication.'"*

*"There's always gonna be a storm. A storm that you'll have to have faith in God and push your way through."*

(E)





# RESPONSES FROM SPIRITUAL LEADERS

“I went to the pastor and to the first elder and I told them I needed to talk. I tried to start to speak, and I wasn’t going to go into the whole detail, but simply to tell them I needed prayer, but I couldn’t keep myself together. I was crying. The first elder asked me whether I felt free to share what had happened and the pastor said, “No, no, no! She doesn’t have to tell us. She just said she wants prayer. We can pray for her and we can go.” And so I realized the pastor can’t be bothered, he doesn’t want to, you know.”

“Then I went to the pastor and said, “Bobbie is sexually abusing me and tying me up” and I felt that I could confide in him a little bit. And I said, “I need help.” And then he says, “I find this hard to believe. I have never seen any evidence of that in him. All the times I’ve ever been with him, he never even said a curse word or anything, so it’s hard for me to believe.”

# SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING - RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Educating the clergy on domestic abuse and leadership roles:

“we need our pastors to be more, take the leadership role more seriously, you know? Cause they don’t know everything. But being a leader they could find somebody, to help you.”

Support groups as venues for positive spiritual healing

*“ God introduced me to Ms. Augustine!”*

Networks of professionals understanding the faith community - accessible to the women

“... Sometimes all that pastors can do is refer us to someone that knows enough to help us!”

# IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS AND PRACTITIONERS

- ◉ Understand the spiritual context of abuse
- ◉ Understand the spiritual context of healing
- ◉ Identify the elements of spirituality that help women survive and heal from intimate partner violence experiences
- ◉ Organize support groups with women sharing similar beliefs
- ◉ Work together with professionals in the faith community, and with community leaders to prepare educational materials, and resources for intimate partner violence survivors in this community