

DECIDES CARIBBEAN

Cultural Rights to foster behavioral changes and women's empowerment against Domestic Violence in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean

A Handbook for Religious Leaders

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A Handbook for Stakeholders

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The project is implemented by:



WOMEN'S MOVEMENT



This project is co-funded by the European Union



Handbook for Stakeholders

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Produced by Interarts with financial support from the European Union as part of the project EIDHR/2015/371-604 “DECIDES Caribbean: Cultural Rights to foster behavioural changes and women’s empowerment against Domestic Violence in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean”.

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Introduction

This handbook has been drafted in the framework of the “DECIDES CARIBBEAN – Cultural Rights to Foster Behavioural Changes and Women’s Empowerment against Domestic Violence in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean”, funded by the European Union and implemented by Interarts in partnership with Caribbean Women’s Association (CARIWA); and Advocates for Safe Parenthood; Improving Reproductive Equity (ASPIRE); and Women Against Rape (WAR).

The aim of the handbook is to increase stakeholders' ability to understand and appropriately respond to situation of domestic violence in Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines.

Cultural biases are considered by most local organizations and experts as the main causes of under-reporting of domestic and gender-based violence crimes.

This handbook is designed as a tool for professionals and stakeholders who assist survivors of domestic violence. It intends to give Caribbean professionals basic guidance to recognise possible cases of domestic violence and take the right measures to create a safe environment for the survivors and refer them to the designated local structures and institutions (the police, shelters, hospitals, legal aid clinics, etc.) for adequate assistance.

The handbook will offer an overview of legislation and international recognition of the issue of domestic and gender-based violence, a basic explanation of the causes, characteristics and consequences. Moreover, it aims to give some tips and suggestions for local professionals on how to address people who



seek for their help or advice in an emotionally, culturally sensitive and appropriate way.

Two different versions of this handbook have been issued to address different professional categories: **religious leaders** and **teachers** and **school managers**.

This publication does not intend to establish a response procedure protocol, but rather raise the awareness of professionals on the best attitudes to adopt when caring for victims and survivors of domestic violence, taking into account their emotional and psychological needs.



PART I

INTRODUCTION TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence and culture

Domestic violence affects all ages and sexes but, since it is linked to unequal relations of power and control, it primarily affects women (35% of women compared to 15% of men) and children and is deeply entrenched in societal cultural and behavioural norms.

Domestic violence tends to be culturally normalized, for many people still consider it a private matter, or continue to hold sexist attitudes about women¹. Indeed, *“cultural prejudices against women and the trivialization of violence within relationships have a devastating effect on women’s rights, particularly their right to be free from violence”*².

¹ Gibbons. A. Y. (2015), *op. cit.*

² UQAM’s International Clinic for the Defense of Human Rights in and St Vincent and the Grenadines Human Rights Association, (UN, November 2014), *Shadow report on the State Party St Vincent and the Grenadines. Violence against women and girls.*

Professionals and stakeholders, such as teachers or religious leaders, who are references for potential victims in their everyday life, as well as police, health and social-care providers, who are in the first line of response to domestic violence episodes, play a fundamental role in creating safe environments where domestic violence survivors can find protection and information about their rights.

Therefore, it is important for all these professionals to have a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence that goes beyond cultural biases and preconceptions.

1.1 Legislation on Domestic violence

The last 40 years witnessed great advances towards the recognition by the international community and, gradually, by the Caribbean countries, of domestic violence as a crime to be challenged and punished.

International framework

- **1979** – The *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* wanted to provide women with the same fundamental rights of men.
- **1992** – The States began to commit in undertaking measures to end violence against women in all forms, mainly due to the CEDAW General Recommendation n° 19 where gender-based violence started to be considered as criminal penalty together with other crimes against women as trafficking, rape, etc. Gender-based violence is defined as a:



“(...) form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men”.

- **1994** – The *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women* (Belém do Pará) made the issue of domestic violence in the Caribbean emerge. Art. 2 states that violence against women includes domestic, sexual and psychological violence:

“Whether it happens within the family, domestic environment or in whatever other interpersonal relation, whether the abuser shares or had shared the same domicile with the victim. That comprehends among others the violation, the abuse and the sexual abuse (...)”

- **1995** – The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* followed the Fourth World Conference on Women was adopted to promulgate a set of **principles concerning gender equality worldwide.**

Regional framework

- **1997** – The *CARICOM Model Legislation on Domestic Violence* was fundamental for the development of domestic violence legislation across the region. Although it did not provide a definition for domestic violence, it allowed **“for the making of protection orders, occupation orders and tenancy orders.”**

The ratification of these international agreements by Caribbean countries paved the way for the creation of national legislations addressing the issues of violence against women and gender based violence. National legislations improved upon the CARICOM model legislation by providing a definition of domestic



violence and by expanding the range of persons who can seek relief.

- **2007** – *Domestic Violence Bill* as part of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Family Law Reform Project created with the aim to develop a harmonized Family Law and Domestic Violence Legislation for **Member States**³.

Caribbean states have implemented since the 1990s their own Domestic Violence Acts at different points in time and the legislation in the region is, therefore, uneven. As a matter of fact, the protection of victims, the obligations of professionals and the penalties inflicted to the perpetrators vary from one country to another.

Since 2010, in the Caribbean States a revision of the legislation governing domestic violence has taken place and substantial changes have been produced (see Grenada, 2010, Antigua and Barbuda and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 2015, Barbados, 2016).

It is important to keep in mind that⁴:

“Persons, who by reason of their profession may have knowledge of circumstances of domestic violence, should be given (...) the power to intervene in circumstances where they have compelling reasons to believe that domestic violence is about to occur”

³ Division of gender relations (2010), *Saint Lucia’s report to the 11th session of the regional conference on women in Latin America and the Caribbean*, <http://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/saintlucia.pdf>

⁴ Williams, R. K. (2010), *op. cit.*, p. 3.



Country	Domestic violence legislation
Antigua and Barbuda	A new <i>Bill</i> was introduced in 2015 stating police duties may be brought on behalf of the applicant by any other person, who has a material interest in the well-being of the applicant, including a police officer, a social worker or advocate, save and except that the application shall be brought with the consent of the applicant (except in exceptional circumstances). The bill also underlines the criminal law to apply Before the publication of the Domestic Violence Proceeding Act 1997 and the Sexual Offences Act 2010 ⁵ .
Barbados	Issued a <i>Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) and a Sexual Offences Act in 1992</i> . A new <i>Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) (Amendment) Bill</i> was then discussed in 2016 ⁶ . The act provides definition of domestic violence and of possible victims enlarges the possibility of application for protection orders, underlines duties of stakeholders and of police.
Dominica	Introduced the <i>Sexual Offences Act</i> in 1998 and successively a <i>Protection against Domestic Violence Act</i> in 2001. Prior to its enactment, domestic violence would have to be addressed through ordinary criminal laws. A range of persons other than the victims can make applications for such Orders under the Act. Criminal code was amended in 2012

⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Antigua-Et-Barbuda : Information Sur La Violence Conjugale, y Compris Sur Les Lois, La Protection Offerte Par L'État Et Les Services De Soutien (2016).", www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=56d7f82e4

⁶ The full text of the Bill amendment, <http://ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/104933/128164/F335900786/BRB104933%20Bill.pdf>.



	to address deficiencies related to weak penalties for sexual offences, and the long legal process. Finally, a <i>National Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Protocol</i> (2011) provides guidelines to responders in their interventions.
Grenada	Updated its <i>Domestic violence act</i> in 2010. The Domestic Violence Act did not offer protection to victims in all types of intimate partner relationships, as it did not include partners in visiting or dating relationships. With the Domestic Violence act of 2010 professionals' duties – and especially police's duties - are made explicit. Visiting relationships are taken into consideration as well.
St. Kitts and Nevis	Introduced its <i>Domestic violence Act</i> in 2000 (amended in 2005 and revised in 2009). Prior to this Act, there was no legislation in St. Kitts and Nevis that was specifically aimed at alleviating domestic violence which was linked to criminal conduct
St. Lucia	Created its <i>Domestic Violence Act</i> in 1995 ⁷ and amended it in 2005.
St. Vincent and Grenadines	Created its <i>Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act</i> in 1995. The act only provided for civil action against the perpetrator. Furthermore, it did not allow persons who were not living together (i.e in a Visiting Relationship) nor police officers or social workers to apply for an order on behalf of the woman who is being abused ⁸ .

⁷ Domestic Violence Act,

<https://cyber.harvard.edu/population/domesticviolence/SAINTLUCIA.htm>

⁸ Ellis & Associates Inc. Ministry of National Mobilisation, Social Development, the Family, Gender and Youth Affairs (July 2014), *National Review St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In the context of the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World*



The act did not provide a comprehensive definition of Domestic Violence and did not comply with international standards on combating domestic violence. In addition, the provisions of the Criminal Code defined rape and incest in an extremely narrow manner, thereby failing to protect all women and girls. Things have changed with the *Domestic Violence Act* of 2015 that introduced a comprehensive definition of domestic violence and made reporting of domestic violence obligatory⁹. The act also ensured greater protection for victims strengthened the mechanism and responses to protect children from abuse; called for a proper reporting and data collection¹⁰.

1.2 Some data on Domestic violence in the Caribbean

The acquisition of data on domestic violence in the Caribbean region is a real challenge. Police's and other professionals' data are not put in network at local, national or regional level and there is no survey using a common methodology to document the levels of violence. Also, many victims tend not to report the abuse due to

Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Presented to the Division for Gender Affairs of Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean on the way to Beijing+20.

⁹ *St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2016 UPR: Joint Submission from the United Nations Subregional Team for Barbados and the OECS*, p.1, <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?filename=2723&file=EnglishTranslation>

¹⁰ "Parliament Passes Stronger Domestic Violence Law." *IWitness News*, 3 May 2015, www.iwnsvg.com/2015/05/03/parliament-passes-stronger-domestic-violence-law/.



the non-comprehensive attitude of professionals and to recurrent biases and victimization of survivors¹¹.

Professionals frequently do not receive enough preparation to deal with this type of issue. Moreover, the frequent retractions of accusations by the victims, which can be signs that family and community pressures are still present, represent a further obstacle to data collection.

Although the underreporting prevents the estimation of the real size of domestic violence, the available data and the last decade wide research reports show persisting rates of violence in the region.

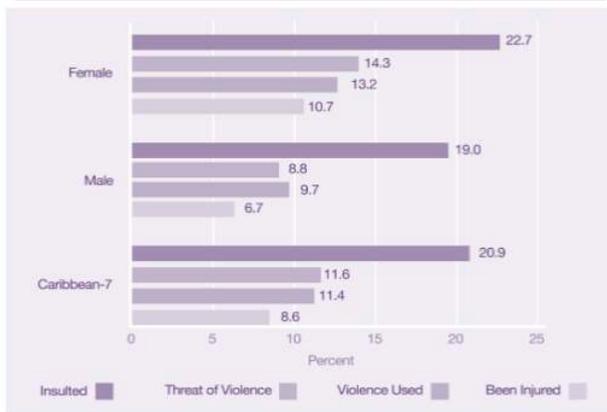
According to the UNDP charts of 2010 on domestic violence in the Caribbean, rates range from 6 per cent of respondents in Jamaica to 17 per cent in Guyana.

In the Caribbean the overall murder rate is four times that of North America. Sexual violence is also higher than the world average. Official crime data from 1995 to 2013 in Trinidad and Tobago report that 8.4 % of all murders cases (5,264) were cases of domestic violence. From 2009-2013, there were 117 murders due to domestic violence, which represent 5.5 per cent of all murders during this period¹².

¹¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Antigua-Et-Barbuda : Information Sur La Violence Conjugale, y Compris Sur Les Lois, La Protection Offerte Par L'État Et Les Services De Soutien* (2016), www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=56d7f82e4

¹² Seepersad, R. (2016), op. cit.

Self-Reported Victims of Domestic Violence, by Type and Gender, Caribbean-7, 2010.



Source: UNDP Citizen Security, 2010.

Self-Reported Victims of Domestic Violence, Caribbean-7, 2010.



Source: UNDP Citizen Security, 2010.

67% of women in Suriname have experienced violence in a cohabiting relationship and 30% of adult women in Antigua & Barbuda and Barbados have experienced some form of domestic abuse¹³.

“In the Caribbean violence may receive a cultural pass when the man who is the perpetrator of physical, emotional or sexual violence against the woman or child (...) is a formal spouse, reputed spouse, brief dating partner, a temporary step parent, or a former spouse or lover. On the other hand, because categorizations are murky, such occurrences are usually excluded from statistics on family violence, creating unreliable information on incidence and prevalence.”
 Allison Y. Gibbons, 2015

Although data are still quite alarming, we can observe an ongoing positive change in the rhetoric and in the perception of violence. This may be due to the ratification by most countries of the Caribbean of the international conventions that make family violence a human rights violation.

However, the strongest contribution to the reduction of gender based violence is to be attributed to the community mobilization, the civil society engagement and the work of government employees under formal obligation and personal motivation, to work together to eliminate violence through a wide range of perspectives and methods.

¹³ “Domestic, Sexual Violence Rates Soaring in Caribbean - Wiltshire”, *Stabroek News*, 28 September 2010, <http://www.stabroeknews.com/2010/news/stories/09/28/domestic-sexual-violence-rates-soaring-in-caribbean-wiltshire/>



“Stereotypical and narrow representations of violence inhibit women from even recognizing and naming their experience as violence. One of the key reasons why women do not report incidents that meet the legal definition of sexual assault is that many do not fit common stereotypes of real rape: they were not by a stranger, did not take place outside and with a weapon, and did not involve injuries”

Michael Flood, Bob Pease, 2009.

1.3 Defining Domestic violence

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence, or family violence, includes all set of abusive behaviours undertaken by the perpetrator to gain control and dominate a family member. Domestic violence can take place between:

- **parent and child**
- **Siblings**
- **relatives**
- **boyfriend/girlfriend**
- **visiting relationships**
- **spouse**
- **former intimate partners**
- **persons in same sex relationships.**

Domestic violence, since it occurs “at home” still happens to be perceived as a family affair. Although most domestic violence is



perpetrated by men against women, we shouldn't forget that violence also occurs to men and homosexual couples.

Domestic violence can be:

- Situational violence is a sporadic violence that tends to be isolated and less likely escalates over time;
- Coercive violence **is the intentional attempt of the abuser to gain control over his/her victim;**
- Defensive violence **is the violence perpetrated by the victim as an attempt to defend herself from the abuser.**

It is vital to recognize the type of violence to risk confusing the abuser with the victim or not pay enough attention to the event.

What can be the causes of domestic violence?

Violence is a learned behaviour which grounds its roots in culture and in the way societies are structured and organized. Violent behaviour is learned during childhood and is transferred from one generation to the other through family, education, the media etc. The factors that influence the probability to experiment or commit violence can be found at an individual, family, community and society level.

- **At an individual level,** the person has a greater chance to experience or commit domestic violence if he/she has learned to solve conflict in a violent way, if he/she has a personal history of violence in the family, if has a low self-esteem, abuses of drug and alcohol as inhibitors, is in a precarious social condition etc. Other factors that might increase the chances of experience or commit domestic violence might be:



poor anger management, past trauma, poor coping skills, work/environmental stress, unemployment, parenting stress. Individual motives for domestic violence can be: to dominate and control, to express anger and to communicate or to retaliate for something the other person did.

- **At a family level**, the factors that can predict the presence of domestic violence are, for example, the presence conjugal conflicts, of an authoritarian and patriarchal family that expresses in the male control of goods and decision making etc.
- **At a community level**, the elements that can predict the presence of domestic violence are values, traditions and dynamics of the community organization have in reinforcing the isolation of women, their lack of social support, tolerance and legitimization of violence. At this level, we can find the institutions and social structures in which develop social relationships and the characteristics that increase the risk of violent acts as institutions are the reproduction tool of beliefs, social norms, and stereotypes.
- **The society level** represents the widest context. It refers to factors that have to do with the way society is organized, with cultural norms and beliefs that contribute to create an environment that favours or inhibit violence. It relates to socialization mechanism that articulate and reinforce power relationships. It refers to unequal relationships, at the idea of obedience, at the concept we have over family and rights. At this level we can find public policies in different fields (economic, educational, health and social) that contribute to maintain inequality among different social groups.



What are the common abusive tactics of GBV perpetrators?¹⁴

- **Physical abuse**

It refers to the use of the physical force to injure, harm -but also kill – the victim in order to gain control over her/him. Examples of physical violence are: hitting, shoving, biting, restraint, kicking, or using weapons.

- **Sexual abuse**

It takes place when the refusal of the person is not respected. Most of times sexual abuse is considered as a taboo subject due to embarrassment, religion or cultural attitudes toward sex. Rape, sexual assault, incest, molestation, infliction of pain during sexual intercourse; use of drugs or alcohol to incapacitate or lower resistance of the victim; assaults against a sleeping victim are all forms of sexual abuse, which can also take other forms.

- **Emotional and psychological abuse**

It may include behaviours as intimidating, threatening to harm to self, children, other family members, pets, property etc. Emotional abuse frequently either precedes or accompanies physical abuse as emotional abuse facilitates the perpetrator to gain control of the victim especially if the victim is exposed to the abuse over a long period of time.

- **Verbal abuse**

It has the objective to subjugate and gain control over the victim by discounting, using abusive sarcasm or jokes; criticism; blaming; etc.

¹⁴ This is a not exhaustive list, as domestic violence can manifest in many other forms.



• **Financial abuse**

It is the attempt of the perpetrator to control and manipulate the victim by withholding the victim’s economic resources. The perpetrator might also oblige the victim to beg for money, could prevent her from working or from continuing her studies. These are only few of the numerous forms of financial abuse.

• **Stalking (and cyber stalking)**

It is often misunderstood or not enough considered since victims are stalked by somebody they know e.g. ex-intimate partners. Also, victims of stalking often have a past story of physical or sexual abuse.

• **Spiritual abuse**

It occurs when the victim holds a strong belief. The abuser can then use the so called “God’s Will” or interpret the scriptures as to subjugate the victim or to justify or encourage the use of violence against her.

Police, educators, social workers, health professionals must become capable to recognize and report the signs of a domestic abuse provide the right assistance and support the victims.

Who are the targets of domestic violence?

Victims of domestic violence are mainly women, in particular: **Young women aged 18-24 years and teenagers**¹⁵, Pregnant women: 30% and 60% of domestic abuse either commences or

¹⁵ Jones, A. D., Trotman Jemmott, E., Da Breo, H. (2017), *op. cit.*,p. 4 (re-adapted).



accelerates during pregnancy. Also, attempts to end a relationship are strongly linked to intimate partner homicide.

Women victims who separate from their partner face a higher risk of physical violence and sexual assault as well as homicide. Violence that continues after separation tends to be more serious and is more likely to involve stalking type behaviour and lead to homicide.

According to UN Women Caribbean, **on average, at least one in three women is beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused by an intimate partner in the course of her lifetime.** Far from being a haven – a place of peace - for many women home is a dangerous place. Women unlike men are more likely to be beaten and sometimes killed, not by a stranger but by their husband, boyfriend or partner.

Violence against women affects a significant percentage of women and girls in the Caribbean. Three of the top ten recorded rape rates in the world occur in the Caribbean. While the worldwide average for rape is 15 per 100,000, The Bahamas have an average of 133, St. Vincent and the Grenadines 112, Jamaica 51, Dominica 34, Barbados 25 and Trinidad and Tobago 18¹⁶.

According to UN Statistics, up to 7 in 10 women in the world report having experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lifetime and as many as 1 in 4 women experience physical or sexual violence during pregnancy.

¹⁶ United Nations Officer on Drugs and Crime World Bank, Crime, Violence and Development: Trends, Costs and Policy Options in the Caribbean. Report N° 37820 (2007), http://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Cr_and_Vio_Car_E.pdf



Nevertheless, we shouldn't forget that domestic violence can involve, children, male spouses, parents, elders etc.¹⁷

In particular, the following targets are frequently neglected:

- **People belonging to the LGBTI community** do not have an equitable access to support services due to homophobia and frequently face legal complexities due to the fact that same sex relationship is not legally acknowledged.
- **Victims living with HIV** suffer from stigma and for this reason might choose to stay with a battering partner rather having to face rejections from new partners. Also, women who acquired the virus as a consequence of rape frequently lack access to justice.
- **Elders** might suffer from abuse of younger members of the family and being physically weak and dependent may be reluctant to disclose the abuse. Reluctance is reinforced due to the fact that they are frequently accompanied by others when they visit a lawyer, doctor etc.
- **People with disabilities** are frequently dependent to the family and therefore might be reluctant in communicating the abuse. People with cognitive disabilities tend to experience much higher rates of sexual victimization than people who do not have a disability and might suffer abuse specific to his/her disability. Women with disabilities often experience multiple and intersecting forms of disability-based and gender-based discrimination.

¹⁷ Antigua and Barbuda National Review Beijing Platform for Action +20 [https://www.cepal.org/mujer/noticias/paginas/3/51823/Antigua_and_Barbuda_Review_Beijing_20.pdf].



Why a victim might remain in an abusive relationship?

The victim frequently faces the “Why don't you just leave?” stigma. **Remaining with the abuser may appear illogical but frequently represents a survival strategy.**

Indeed, the victim might face several obstacles to leave as she/he:

- **Might be financially dependent,**
- **Might fear of losing the custody of the child,**
- **Might be a child,**
- **Might be unable to afford legal assistance for divorce,**
- **Might fear isolation from social or family connections,**
- **Might lack of self-confidence,**
- **Might be conditioned by the abuser's expressions of remorse and promises to change,**
- **Might have cultural/ religious constraint.**

Also, leaving or staying might be equally dangerous if the victim is not supported enough. If the victim stays, the perpetrator may continue to hit and injure her/him but if she/he leaves this can continue and be more violent, intensifying the cycle of violence. Psychological violence might continue after the survivor has left, especially in the cases where there is an on-going contact due to a child in common. Standard of living in case of financial abuse might remain the same or get worse after the victim leaves: the perpetrator might attempt making the victim lose the job, refuse to pay for child support etc.

There is a misconception that the most dangerous abusers will present as if they have personality disorders. In reality, the most dangerous abusers are usually those that appear stable, charming, calm, and even rational.



How does domestic violence occur?

Domestic violence generally responds to a three-phased cycle called **the “cycle of violence”**.

These three phases have a variable duration but each time they repeat they tend to increase in frequency and intensity. The perpetrator rarely returns to a lesser violence form of control with the victim. Domestic violence cycle may be disrupted before it degenerates into life-threatening.

- **Phase 1: Tension accumulation**

In this phase, violence is present in a subtle and psychological form which can manifest in multiple ways: comments that disqualify the victim; controlling how the victim is dressed, when goes out etc.

This initial phase is characterized by the victim trying to satisfy the abuser’s desires but never managing to do so. One element that characterizes an abusive relationship is social isolation. The perpetrator doesn’t let the victim visit relatives and friends and tries to convince her/him to stop working. The victim’s sense of guilt and shame can prevent her/him to talk about it with friends and can bring her/him to justify the behaviour of the perpetrator.

- **Phase 2 – Violent phase**

Violence explodes due to an episode that breaks the control. If violence was initially psychological, it will now turn into physical. The gravity of this phase normally increases over time.

The prolonged exposure to the cycle of violence causes a loss of confidence in the victim.



- **Phase 3 - Reconciliation or “Honey moon”**

After an act of violence, the abuser usually shows to be sorry, excuses himself but normally assigns the responsibility of his action to exterior conditions.

The excuses frequently correspond to the intensity of the episode: the more violent the episode the more intense the excuses. Culture, through the ideal of unconditioned love and of all-life-long marriage, has a crucial role in the cycle of violence’s repetition.

The cycle intensifies and it becomes harder and harder for the victim to react, for example for women to leave the relationship. This creates a state of tension, fear and paralysis.

Domestic violence has a higher rate of repeat victimization than any other crime.

2000 British Crime Survey: England and Wales, Home Office, 2001.

What are the consequences of domestic violence?

The direct consequences of domestic abuse on the survivors are getting more and more recognized.

Victims might witness:

- **Emotional and**
- **Physical problems**
- **Mental illness as posttraumatic stress disorder dissociation, etc.**
- **Depression**
- **Sexual dysfunctions**
- **Abortions**



- **Miscarriages**
- **Suicides**
- **Etc.**

These effects might stay way longer after the violence has ended and permeate daily lives of survivors.

Violence against women, besides affecting physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health, might have consequences on her working conditions due to the time off she needs to take in order to heal.

Domestic violence will most probably influence the child adult's behaviour increasing the chances of making him a victim or a perpetrator due to multi-generational transmission of domestic violence.

Also, people need to stop to thinking of domestic violence as a victim's or family's matter for the direct and indirect, social and economic costs it bears for the community and the society.

As a matter of fact, **direct costs to the community** include psychological counselling and medical treatment (as the hospitalizations, care in clinics and doctors' offices etc.) costs, police services costs, including for example the cost of incarceration; the costs imposed on the criminal justice system (prison and detention, prosecution and court cases); for the provision of shelter centers for women and their children; the cost of replacing property damaged by an abuser etc.

Also, domestic violence bears **indirect costs to the community** as, but not limited to: victim's lost earnings and time, lost investments in human capital, life insurance costs, psychological costs and other non-monetary costs.

Reports are scarce on the other human and social costs such as medical and health consequences and disabilities to victims as a



result of family violence. Psychological costs are not measured for child victims, whether girls or boys, and the duress under which women live when under the threat of spousal and relationship violence.

The Jamaican government in 1991 paid 90% of the direct medical costs of US \$454,000 for treating 640 victims of intimate partner violence and other types of violence at the Kingston Public Hospital.

In some countries annual cost of intimate partner violence was calculated from US\$ 1.6 to US\$ 5.8 billion.

Waters H, Hyder. A, Railptia. Y, Basu. S, Rehwinlel. JA, Butchart. A, 2004

Local authorities and institutions need to understand that not contrasting domestic violence is not sustainable.

It is of fundamental importance to properly design prevention and intervention systems. Benefits to be derived from preventing Domestic Violence are likely to far exceed the costs of implementing holistic, cost-effective and cost-efficient systems.



PART II

RELIGIOUS LEADERS

2.1 Premises

Religious leaders' have a fundamental social responsibility in welcoming, listening and supporting the survivors of domestic violence and in creating a safe environment for all members of the community. An environment in which survivors can feel free to talk about what they have experienced, perpetrators to eventually confess the incidents, and witnesses to share what they have been exposed to. Indeed, people are often reluctant to talk about domestic violence, because they fear they will not be listened to nor supported by their interlocutor. At the same time, spiritual leaders might feel uncertain to help, because they often lack specific training on this issue and thus they might not know how to adequately support the survivors. While awareness efforts should be enhanced to recognize domestic violence as a serious issue for the religious communities, religious leaders and congregations

must also know that it is a serious criminal offense that may result in physical, emotional and financial harm and shall in no case be justified. Communities of faith play a unique and vital role in the response to and elimination of domestic violence, as they carry the responsibility to protect and nurture the spiritual wellbeing of the community as a whole and of its individual members.

This hand book is a tool that offers religious leaders some tips on how to best approach survivors, perpetrators, and witnesses of domestic violence within their faith communities and how to become a fundamental point of reference to raise awareness about this extremely sensitive issue.

Religion and domestic violence

As stated in the general introduction of this manual, **domestic violence primarily affects women** (35% of women compared to 15% of men) and children and is deeply entrenched in societal cultural and behavioural norms. Furthermore, **domestic violence is also an issue of very serious moral and spiritual concern** for several reasons among which:

- It violates the basic principles of religious faith traditions¹⁸;
- it happens inside the family, which is a social institution closely linked and supported by many religions¹⁹;
- it can be committed because of a misinterpretation of religious traditions;
- the survivors often look for solace in faith and might seek for the support of their religious community.

¹⁸ New York State, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ Donati Marciano, T. (1987), *op. cit.*



There is a common tendency to confuse the teachings of religious customs with behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs that are better understood to be the result of traditions and practices²⁰, with the consequence that religious beliefs are used by the perpetrators as a way to justify their behaviour, especially within patriarchal societies.

Among the many world religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam for example, incorporate beliefs and practices that vary greatly in their impact on women who are survivors of violence.

In this sense, interpretations of religious texts and teachings as well as activities implemented in the religious communities have a strong influence in people's attitudes towards domestic violence.

For instance, Christian Scriptures contain many stories of violence against women that have permitted batterers to “discipline” their wives and their children all for the “good of the family.” The Jewish concept of *shalom bayit* (peace in the home) has been misused by placing on women the sole responsibility for maintaining peace in the home and even has been used to pressure women to remain in or return to homes in which they have been the survivors of abuse. Within Islam texts and interpretations of texts have been used by abusive men to justify their behavior: The most abused verse is ayah 34 of Surah four: “*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah gave more to the one than the other, and because they support them from their means...*”²¹.

Bearing this in mind, **you, as a religious leader, are uniquely positioned to help strengthen and inspire a healthy family life** and lead the community toward an equal and not violence

²⁰ *Op. cit.* in footnote 1.

²¹ Fortune, M. and Enger, C. (2006), *op. cit.*



interpretations of the sacred texts, hence limiting domestic violence.

2.2 The role of religious leaders

All religious leaders— including priests, pastors, monks, nuns, spiritual directors and others – play a very important role both on a personal level, for the people who report the violence (perpetrators, survivors or witnesses) and on a wider level within the religious community and the society as a whole. Filled with sorrow, people often seek for religious leaders' advice, support, and spiritual and moral counsel, and consequently, you, in your role of spiritual guide, have to be able to respond to these needs.

Domestic violence is a particular kind of violence, because it happens in a private environment where victim and perpetrator have a close relationship. Moreover, blame and censorship are often very strong within religious environments where the family is a sacred institution. Keeping this in mind you need to acknowledge that **faith can be of extremely strong help for perpetrators and survivors** and offer targeted help. Indeed, religious beliefs can be used to build hope and moral strength for abuser and help the survivor to react to the traumatic experience they have been exposed to.

At the same time, you may work to transform your religious community into environments safe from violence, as well as in spaces where survivors, witnesses and even perpetrators can find refuge and support, without feeling judged. Faith communities can inspire society to show compassion and provide comfort for those afflicted by the tragedy of domestic violence without re-victimizing and blaming the people involved, especially survivors who tend to not report for fear and shame. **It becomes fundamental for you and your faith communities to welcome and support the**



survivors, the perpetrators and the eventual witnesses of domestic violence.

In addition, beyond highlighting and celebrating those religious narratives and texts in which women serve as strong and courageous role models, you need to raise your community's awareness on the fact that, theologically and ethically, sexual and domestic violence constitute sin - a vicious physical, psychological, and spiritual violation of one person by another.

2.3 Survivors

Survivors of domestic violence are the most important and most delicate to target, because they are the ones who have experienced the violence more directly and those who may be more reluctant to talk about it. You, as a spiritual guide, have to be ready to help any survivor despite their age, gender or sexual orientation. As mentioned before, persons living in domestic violence context, tend to avoid reporting for fear of the consequences, for various reasons:

<p>Fear</p> <p>They fear the perpetrators' or other family members' revenge.</p>	<p>Shame</p> <p>In small communities anonymity is difficult to be preserved.</p>	<p>Ignorance</p> <p>Many of them do not know exactly what their rights or the procedures for a restraining/protection order are.</p>
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Also, very often domestic violence survivors do not trust official agencies (e.g. the police, health and social workers, judges) due



to their recurrent biases and victimization of survivors or to what Lazarus-Black calls "rites of domination" at courts²².

Religious leaders, often lack specific training on issues related to domestic violence and therefore are not able to offer the survivors the helpful, comprehensive and active listening they need. Conversely, they might be influenced by the patriarchal structure of the society and consequently consider women as submitted to men - wives to husbands. In the worst cases this leads them, despite the violence perpetrated, to defend the abuser instead of listening to the survivor.

Moreover, in the name of the "sacredness of family" some of them could feel the need to preserve it and therefore tend not to be willing to listen, as well as to "re-victimize" the survivors, or, even worst, to justify the perpetrator. As a result, survivors may believe that they should forgive, live with the abuse, or honour the covenant of marriage no matter what.

Of course, this is not what always happens, but it is unfortunately a common trend.²³ It is important to acknowledge that you have a paramount responsibility because you often are among firsts to whom survivors of domestic violence report the abuse. Therefore, it becomes urgent for you to be able to face any domestic violence situation that might occur in your community, have at least a general knowledge of the legal procedures to follow in these situations and address the persons involved to relevant experts.

²² This term refers to events and processes that occur regularly in and around court arenas and court houses, which, in spite of new legislation designed to help subordinated people obtaining their rights - such as children in need of child support or survivors of domestic violence - reproduce rather than eliminate hegemony and reveal that in practice very little changes as a result of that new legislation. See Lazarus-Black, M., *op. cit.*

²³ See Levitt, H. and Ware, K. (2007), *op. cit.*



A spiritual leader should make of the church or temple a safe place where survivors of domestic violence can go for help.

The following table contains DOs and DON'Ts of effective listening, when dealing with people who confide the violence they have experienced at home.

DO's

DON'Ts

Welcome the survivors and make them feel at home within the religious community	Isolate believers from their religious community because of domestic violence. Survivors of domestic violence very often suffer from social isolation and might consequently feel the need to find support within their religious community more than ever.
Help them believing in their faith again	Be judgmental and victimize them again making them feel guilty for what has happened or scared to talk about it. Do not say that everything will be fine.
Offer accountability	Make referrals to the authorities without the consent of the person counseled.
Refer the survivors to appropriate professionals or services in situations that are beyond your level of expertise	Offer advices on behaviors to adopt with the perpetrator, nor assure the survivors on matters you have no control on.
Always act in the best interest of the survivor	Try to preserve the unity of the family at all costs.
Focus on listening. Survivors need to be listened to	Tell them what they should or should not do.



Pay attention to their nonverbal communication not only during private conversations, but also during collective activities within the community	Make assumptions about things they do not directly manifest or tell.
Provide your telephone number and always be ready to answer to their call at any time	Show indifference.
Understand that they might not be ready to contact anyone. Understand the survivors' ambivalent attitude; they often still love their abusive partners	Insist nor push them to act in any way. and especially don't justify the behavior of the perpetrator
Find out which are the existing local organizations who deal with issues related to domestic violence. Ask them for advice on which behaviors are currently considered as domestic violence and which are not. Keep an updated list of referral resources.	Isolate your community from domestic violence advocates, local shelters, police or state officers in charge of domestic violence programmes

2.4 Perpetrators

Addressing abusers is a very sensitive issue, because you, as a faith spiritual guide, have to offer listening and understanding, and at the same time condemn their act. Therefore, it is essential to make the abuser to feel at ease and confident to safely seek help within the community and at the same time held him accountable for his violence.

Perpetrators may turn to you, perhaps either as a means of legitimizing the abuse or to seek guidance and support in



understanding and changing behaviors. You have to bear in mind that **an abuser can be supported, without supporting an abusive behavior**. You also have to be prepared for the possibility that the abuser is part of the same religious community to which the survivor also pertains. In this case, you have to be very careful not to give the impression to conspire with the abuser in any way, in order not to make the survivor feel in danger nor to lose their trust. Keep in mind that an abuser must be held responsible and accountable because the violence is not the fault of the person who is being harmed. The perpetrator will often deny, minimize or blame the survivor, others, alcohol, drugs, stress, poor anger management, poor communication skills, etc. for the abuse;

It is extremely important to find the right way to communicate that religion has zero tolerance towards domestic violence.

Also, you have to be prepared, in case the abuser confronts you, and be careful not to offer acceptance to the perpetrator in exchange for a calmer behavior. It is important to confront abusers in non-aggressive manner and acknowledge abuse without revealing survivor and children as source of information, using instead training or observation as source.

Abusers can be neighbors, service providers and respected members of the community who are not violent in other relationships. They can be charming and lovable in a social situation, yet display extreme violence in the privacy of the home. If the abuser confides about his abusive actions, then you shall contact the local domestic violence program which may be able to



make a referral to a mental health professional or abusers' treatment program²⁴.

2.5 Children

Children are often the real witnesses of domestic violence, if not survivors themselves. Religious leaders occupy a privileged position to get in contact with children and win their trust, if we consider that often they also teach religion at school, and are therefore constantly in contact with children. They might consequently be able to see things from a closer perspective and easily detect behaviours that can be somehow related to domestic violence.

Against this backdrop, you play a key role in creating an environment where children can feel safe and free to talk. Education is a primary way to create awareness about domestic violence and to change destructive violent patterns.

Children are the only case in which, on the basis of an evidence of harm perpetrated, it becomes imperative to report the fact to the authorities.

Dealing with children who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence is the hardest task of all, because they may have feelings, questions and doubts about what has happened that **need to be addressed by a specialist**. They may blame themselves for what has happened, for having not been able to defend or help their family members, or they may feel ashamed because of what they have experienced and witnessed. Especially when very young, they also might perceive the risk to

²⁴ Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (2002), *op. cit.*



be taken away from their families, and thus have one more reason to not be willing to talk.

Considering all this, engaging children in a conversation on a subject like domestic violence may be extremely difficult, and take a lot of patience and sensitivity. As suggested when dealing with the survivors, you **always have to try to talk to the child alone first**, but this time you might need to **use more simple and reassuring words**, and try to engage them with the excuse of a game or a joke. Offering them some tactile material, like crayons or play dough, may be useful to lower their anxiety level. Always bear in mind that **dealing with children is very different from dealing with adults**; children might express themselves in a less linear way, and may use storytelling, play acting or other means. They might also be influenced by what they have seen or heard, and not completely understand the reality of the situation; they may misinterpret the situation or your words and tell you what they think you want to hear, which may not exactly correspond to the reality. They may also have ambiguous feelings towards the perpetrators of domestic violence (anger, protectiveness, etc.) them being members of their family.

You have to consider all these issues when dealing with children and always try to make them feel that it is fine to talk about what has happened at home, whatever feeling they might have towards their parents and other family members or whatever form their speech will take.

Never insist to obtain their witness, nor make unjustified assumptions, and in the case of suspected violence, try to make the child talking with a specialist.



2.6 Religious leaders preventing domestic violence

Finally, as mentioned before, religious leaders play a very important role not only as guides and confidantes, but also as moral authorities who **can help families to overcome family issues that could lead to violence**. Indeed, it is commonly believed by professionals that deal with domestic violence that **prevention is always to be preferred to intervention**. Therefore, it is essential for religious leaders to guide their faith community through practices that can be useful in preventing violence in all its forms.

Contrarily to what is generally believed, **preventing is not easier than intervening**; indeed, domestic violence is a particular kind of violence, considering the relationship existing between the survivor and the perpetrator and also due to the social stigma that surrounds it. Especially within religious environments, where family is considered as one of the most important institutions and where culture tends to normalize it, it is even more important to organize public activities to openly denounce it and generate positive changes of some more traditional beliefs.

Always avoid making direct and public reference to a specific event of domestic violence that involved community members. It is advisable to take a general perspective on the issue, as to raise awareness on a subject of general importance for the society at large.

The following scheme contains a set of tips for the organization of specific activities to tackle the issue of domestic violence within your religious community at large, as well as outside it, by networking with other entities and advocating towards society.



The DECIDES CARIBBEAN Project

The EU-funded “DECIDES CARIBBEAN - Cultural Rights to foster behavioural changes and women’s empowerment against Domestic Violence in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean” project is a part of the Interarts DECIDES Programme launched in 2007.

DECIDES CARIBBEAN develops research, training and awareness raising activities to root out biases, promote behavioural changes and reduce domestic violence in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean Region (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines).

The project refers in particular to the cultural dimension of the issue of domestic violence, at different levels, promoting dialogue and cooperation between different relevant actors (CSOs with local and international remit, police, judiciary, local and national authorities, local health and social workers, teachers, and religious leaders).

In a comprehensive and societal approach that is preventative, responsive to the needs of victims, justice oriented and geared towards improving agency capacity & skills, the DECIDES CARIBBEAN project is designed to counter gendered attitudes and behaviours. It seeks to systematically include victims in political decisions that affect them and foster gender-sensitive approaches at all societal levels.

For more information visit the **DECIDES Caribbean** website:
<http://www.decides.pro/decides-caribbean/>

• **Speak out about domestic violence in its different forms** during meetings and sermons. As a faith leader, you can have a powerful impact on people’s attitudes and beliefs through preaching, teaching and prayer and leading sacred texts interpretation that condemn violence and support equality.

• **Seek support and collaboration of civil society organizations and activists experienced in tackling domestic violence:** organize joint activities and make connections with experts and carers who can help the persons involved.

• **Organize seminars for families about domestic violence prevention:** invite professionals to moderate and help. Only specifically trained people should provide counselling in delicate cases when abuses may have taken place.

• **Raise awareness:** display brochures and posters which include the telephone number of the domestic violence and sexual assault programs in your area. Organize workshop to produce material together with the community. Place the material in common and visible places and distribute it at important events.

• **Consider writing a domestic violence policy:** encourage efforts by religious congregations to develop and implement safe church policies as well as efforts to address allegations of abuse by clergy or lay leaders. Ask advice to organizations who might be of specific support.



DECIDES Caribbean Partners:

Caribbean Women's Association (CARIWA), GRENADA,
e-mail: cariwa@hotmail.com;

Advocates for Safe Parenthood Inc. (ASPIRE), SAINT LUCIA,
e-mail: aspirelu@gmail.com;

Women Against Rape Inc. (WAR), ANTIGUA,
e-mail: womenagainstrapeab@gmail.com.



The project is implemented by:



This project is co-funded by the European Union



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