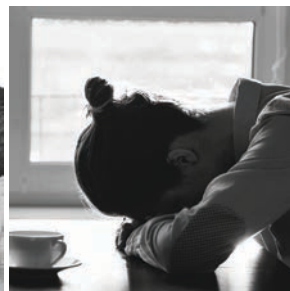


# SOCIAL WORK & CHRISTIANITY

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## ARTICLES

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A Qualitative Study of Staff Motivations

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## PRACTICE NOTE

Learned Optimism: A Balm for Social Worker Stress

***Overcoming Conflicting Loyalties: Intimate Partner Violence, Community Resources, and Faith***

Sevcik, I., Rothery, M., Nason-Clark, N. & Rynn, R. (2015). Edmonton, AB: The University of Alberta Press.

In the first chapter of this book, the authors assert that when it comes to intimate partner violence (i.e., domestic abuse), secular and religious helpers do not trust each other. The chapter continues with outlining the various secular and religious philosophies and ideologies that provide an historical framework regarding the tension between these two supposedly polar opposites. The major focus of this chapter is centered on the concept of “patriarchy—the ideological treatment of gender relations that value male privilege”—and the authors seek to have “transdisciplinary discussions (that) tackle the patriarchy question” (p. 10). A discussion about the role of patriarchy and the role of religion in regard to intimate partner violence continues throughout the book’s nine chapters.

Chapter two presents definitions and provides the context for intimate partner violence (IPV). The authors refer to an evangelical focus, but specifically direct their research to what they refer to as three “religious/ethno-cultural groups.” These three groups include the Christian, Jewish, and Khmer Canadian (Buddhist) communities. The Khmer Canadian community is founded on the refugees from Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge genocide that occurred from 1975-1979.

Chapter three introduces FaithLink, a program that began in 2000 in Alberta, Canada. The goal of this program was to develop a community-wide response/model to IPV that would include the participation of the religious community along with the planning and work of the service sector (i.e., police, prosecutors and defense lawyers, victim services, probation officers, and treatment providers). This response included discussions, the provision of resources, and seminars in order to develop collaborative actions on the part of both religious and secular services groups. For example, educational and resource materials were made available that reflected the religious beliefs and cultural norms that the service providers could use when working with specific ethno-religious groups. For in-depth knowledge about IPV, FaithLink wrote a comprehensive manual, *Hope and Healing: Domestic Violence Resources for the Church (2004-2007)*, which was given to interested Christian congregations in Calgary. Because of these resources and the assistance given in dealing with IPV, FaithLink staff became more strongly connected to the community and served as a liaison between religious leaders and service providers that helped build more awareness of, and strategies to combat, IPV.

Chapters four, five, and six reported on the three qualitative research studies that FaithLink conducted in regard to IPV within the context of connecting spiritual and secular care. The first study focused on listening to

the voices of women from the three religious/ethno-cultural groups previously mentioned who had experienced IPV. The second study explored how service providers addressed the spiritual needs of their clients. In the third study, researchers examined meditation as a means for self-care for service providers who were helping the victims of IPV.

Chapters seven, eight, and nine are reflections and a final summary on the research studies and the themes of the book. These chapters include thoughts on the dialogue that was created between secular-based service providers and the religious/ethno-cultural communities regarding confronting IPV. The final reflection, chapter nine, reviews what the authors call the overarching theme of the book which is “on the role religion has in responding to social issues in a secular society” (p. 201).

A unique feature of this book is that, at the end of each chapter, the authors or various panel members who contributed to content in that specific chapter give their reflection on what was written, as well as including some additional insight regarding their experience with IPV. In addition, one of the authors submitted a poem at the end of each chapter that reflects on the theme of the past chapter.

This book would be of interest to readers who want to review qualitative research studies that ask questions about the role, importance, and barriers in regard to the religious sector’s involvement and care for persons dealing with IPV. It also provides information about how one might provide a context for collaborative work with secular and religious care providers. For service providers working with refugee groups, the commentary about the Khmer Canadian (Buddhist) community could be helpful. Readers who are interested or who are involved in these religious groups that ascribe to the concept of patriarchy and of female submission might glean insights from this book.

For persons who are searching for further treatment approaches in confronting IPV or who do not work with patriarchal-dominant religious groups, this book may not be as relevant. However, this book is a useful reminder to all service providers that in assisting in any of our societal social problems, the religious and spiritual dimensions cannot be dismissed. Additionally, the authors provide ideas on how we might seek out the other partners needed to provide holistic care in confronting the social ills and pain that victims of intimate partner violence face. ❖

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