

Overcoming Conflicting Loyalties: Intimate Partner Violence, Community Resources, and Faith, by Irene Sevcik, Michael Rothery, Nancy Nason-Clark, and Robert Pynn. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2015. 248 pp. ISBN 978-1-77212-050-9.

The primary concern of this book is whether or not religious people and entities have a role in responding to social problems in a secular society. The painful and personal matter of intimate partner violence (IPV) is at the core of this otherwise sprawling question, as well as at the centre of the innovative Faithlink project of Calgary, Alberta.

The book's four authors are impressively qualified to undertake the research and writing necessary to examine the topic thoroughly. Dr. Irene Sevcik, presently retired, earned her PhD from the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work and has a Masters in Religious Education from Asbury Theological Seminary. She was the Program Director of FaithLink before it concluded its work. Dr. Sevcik's research, publications, and clinical practice were in child neglect, women of faith, caregivers and caregiving, and abused church women, *inter alia*. Michael Rothery is a Professor Emeritus at the University of Calgary in the Faculty of Social Work. His PhD is also in Social Work from the University of Toronto. He has at least twenty-five publications, many in the fields of IPV, abused women, child abuse, and research methods. He has taught social work theory, social work practice, research methods, and, within the FaithLink context, studied connections between religious and secular helping. Nancy Nason-Clark is a Professor and Chair of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick, and has been Acting Director of the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research. She has authored several books on IPV and her research emphasis has been on abuse and faith. The Very Reverend Robert Pynn's graduate degree is from the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is a former Archdeacon and Dean of the Anglican Diocese of Calgary, and former Prolocutor of the Anglican Church of Canada. During his ministry, he has several times helped to found community service organizations. He has received multiple awards, including the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

The book contains three qualitative research studies, all soundly conceived and implemented, and all yielding findings pertinent to the culture clash posed by secular practitioners helping religious women struggling with IPV. The first study aimed to characterize how religious and minority ethnic community memberships develop undesirable ways in which women victims perceive IPV. For example, some religious and cultural groups are closed-in, making it difficult for victims of violence to seek help from the wider community. Moreover, what counts as abuse and therefore wrongful varies among different cultures. Furthermore, even sympathetic religious leaders are under pressure to uphold patriarchal privilege, and so forth. Focus group and individual interviews provided the study data from 85 subjects. Interviewers were appropriately credentialed and schooled in IPV and religious or minority cultural perspectives.

The second study was concerned with perceptions of spirituality by non-religious and non-spiritual providers when one or more aspects of spirituality were important to their clients. ("Spirituality," a murky term, was well-specified in the present study.) The study method

was a “nonprobability availability sampling” of 21 management staff of agencies providing services to IPV victims. A semi-structured interview format enabled fairly wide-ranging but apt responses by the interviewees. The resulting information was valid, persuasive, and frankly worrisome because some spiritual groups apparently privilege marriage relationships over victim safety, blame women victims, and support abusive husbands in court to the disadvantage of women victims..

The final study sought to discover whether or not contemplative meditation was helpful in enabling IPV service providers to reduce stress levels, protect themselves against vicarious trauma, affect how they and clients interacted in the counseling context, and affect provider working relationships with colleagues. The study’s methodology was, in Phase 1, to implement meditation training and support program for helpers, and, in Phase 2, to collect and analyze outcome data. The intervention and research design and findings were appropriate and encouraging.

The book appears to be intended for a general audience of readers interested in the topic, for religious leaders in general, and for secular professionals in IPV research and clinical practice. It is difficult to imagine any reader not promoting IPV awareness and support among religious entities, and (by the same token) interest in religious, spiritual, and ethno-cultural communities on the part of IPV care providers as well. It ably makes the case for appreciative and respectful understanding across client and provider cultural differences.

Altogether, this book forthrightly examines the gap between a scientifically-informed culture of IPV researchers and clinicians, on the one hand, and their clients, on the other hand, who are animated by or in some degree dependent upon religious, spiritual, or ethno-cultural commitments. The book makes evident that religious people do have a role in resolving IPV and its various antecedents, even though religious and ethnic minority values and practices can be incompatible with norms of science and wider society. The most problematic aspect of secular versus religious culture clashes is that the religious person, usually a woman, highly dependent upon her religious community but victimized by IPV and so also dependent upon a secular helper in the close context of a counseling relationship. Thus it is right, as these authors insist, to have a lively concern for individuals (women) caught in the middle, torn by the anguish of real or potential breakups of marriages and families, judged by non-supportive religious leaders, and helped by supportive but non-religious professionals all at the same time.

The book is current and fully equal in quality to other research in its field. It should be helpful for IPV practitioners, religious leaders, researchers, theorists, and marriage and family policy-makers. The only quibble I have is that the claims and assumptions of scientific methodology, which guide social science practice and research, may not necessarily predispose a scientist or secularist to as inimical a posture to religious sensibility as is occasionally asserted or implied in the book.

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