

Domestic violence goes unrecognized in faith communities

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Australians who are frequently involved in religion and who identify as religious are less likely to acknowledge domestic violence is an issue within their faith community, despite acknowledging it as a national

issue, a new study has found.

Led by researchers at The Australian National University (ANU) the study examined determinants of domestic violence among more than 1,200 people.

Lead author Professor Naomi Priest from the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods said the study looked at the links between religious involvement and identity and determinants of domestic violence.

"Our study clearly shows people who are frequently engaged in religious activities, such as attending services or prayer, or who identify as religious, are less likely to acknowledge domestic violence is an issue in their faith community," Professor Priest said.

"We also found the same among people who attended religious activities infrequently.

"However, this doesn't mean that people who are religious don't acknowledge domestic violence as an issue at all. Despite being less likely to acknowledge domestic violence as an issue within their own faith community, there was no evidence that religious involvement or identity were associated with failure to acknowledge domestic violence as a national issue.

"Simply put, this study found if you're religious it doesn't mean you think domestic violence isn't happening. But, you are not inclined to recognize it as an issue among members of your own faith."

The study, based on a representative sample of Australians, also looked at the prevalence of patriarchal gender attitudes among people who are religious. According to Professor Priest, patriarchal gender attitudes are

a key determinant of domestic violence.

"In this study we found that the more religious people were, the more likely they were to have patriarchal gender attitudes," Professor Priest said.

"Religious service attendance, frequency of prayer, and spiritual or religious identity were each associated with more patriarchal beliefs about gender roles."

Professor Priest said the study's findings were important as Australia still "grappled to address the serious burden of domestic violence across our whole society."

"Religion plays a major role in the health and wellbeing of our population and religious communities are key to helping us prevent and respond to domestic violence," she said.

"Addressing patriarchal beliefs and acknowledgment of domestic violence as an issue within [faith communities](#) among those who regularly attend services, pray and identify as religious, are key targets for action to address [domestic violence](#) and improve population health," she said.

"Our findings highlight that if we are to make progress there is still much work to be done."

More information: Naomi Priest et al, A 'dark side' of religion? - Associations between religious involvement, identity and domestic violence determinants, (2021). [DOI: 10.31235/osf.io/9hf6d](https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/9hf6d)

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