

Domestic Violence, Cognition and the Church

Presenters:

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Abstract:

Recognizing and building upon the advances the church has made, regarding raising awareness of DV as a problem for our members and our congregations, this session will utilize a cognitive model to inform next steps to inform behavioral change efforts. A multi-step model, building on current change efforts in our churches and communities, will be discussed.

Full Proposal:

Historically, the Adventist church has not discussed domestic violence. However, awareness of and research on domestic violence in the Adventist church has grown significantly in the past two decades. Efforts include individual research projects as well as the End It Now movement and the global church's day of violence prevention. All of these efforts have contributed to a growing awareness of the problem and increased visibility for scholars in this field. This work is needed, as studies have documented rates of abuse are as high in the church as they are outside of the church, with one survey finding that 42% of a Midwestern sample of female, Hispanic Adventists self-identify as survivors (Ponce-Rodas, 2015, unpublished dissertation). While most of the work has focused on raising awareness of this problem, little exists to teach church members, congregations and communities how to prevent and intervene. The purpose of this session is to propose a cognitive model to highlight ways in which the church can take the next steps in dealing with DV to change behavioral patterns once cognitive change has occurred.

According to Bruner, Goodnow, and Austin (1956), the two main steps that lead to change are concept formation and concept attainment. Formation occurs when learners recognize that a conceptual category exists. Much of the current work on DV thus far in the church has targeted concept formation, recognizing that domestic violence occurs in our churches. At this stage, however, people may not be able to properly identify or use the conceptual category to inform behavioral changes. While concept formation is a necessary precursor to concept attainment, both are necessary to effect change. Learners who have achieved concept attainment are able to define the category by recognizing examples that either fit the category (positive examples) or do not (negative examples). This would enable people to distinguish between normal marital disagreements and patterns of violence.

In this presentation, utilizing findings from two studies on DV in the church, one with adult Hispanic women, and the other with a college sample, we will demonstrate how participants have achieved concept formation, but not concept attainment. We will then discuss possible ways to design programs that help members achieve both concept formation and attainment, which in turn are the basis for behavioral change programs. With this information, we believe that we can help inform the sermons provided for the day of violence prevention and suggest a multi-step model that can lead to behavioral change in our members, churches and communities.

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