and second studies were so similar, the researchers involved in the studies believe that together the findings offer a fairly accurate picture of spouse abuse among Adventists in North America. The table on page 9 shows the type of actions, survey items, and percentages of people who experienced these forms of behavior.

How do these figures compare with the “world”? National studies vary in their reports of the amounts and types of abuse experienced by adults in their intimate relationships. No single study captures the total picture on victimization within any given population. From our extensive review of the prevalent literature, it appears that Adventists in North America are on par with and in some cases—particularly with male victimization—higher than national statistics. These findings should intensify efforts to promote training and education among church members both in building prevention strategies and caring for victims of abuse.

Before significant behavioral changes can occur or more ministry services are organized, it is important for more church members and leaders to recognize the extent and severity of abuse issues among Adventists. In the survey, we asked people to respond to the statement “Domestic abuse is a significant problem in the Adventist Church.” Only 16 percent of the respondents strongly agreed with this statement. Given the statistics on the prevalence of abusive experiences indicated by recent research among North American Adventists, thoughtful individuals must admit that domestic abuse is a significant problem confronting the Adventist Church today.

Where to Find Help

The first two studies also give us insight into the types of actions people took during difficult times such as abuse in an intimate relationship (see table on this page). The number 1 action that church members took to cope in difficult times was to pray. About 98 percent of the members who took the survey reported praying in response to relationship difficulties. This is a finding to celebrate—we are a praying church, and we take our difficulties to God in prayer. It makes sense that members would seek comfort, guidance, and strength in their relationship with the Lord during these difficult times.

While our members found prayer to be essential as a way to cope with difficult situations, the findings also reveal a number of active strategies that members used to move out of these painful situations. Our analysis shows that men and women find effective help in different ways. For women, professional counseling was the next most effective means for getting help that either solved the problem or made a significant difference. Men reported that going to the emergency room was the second most effective action in getting help. It might be that women seek help at an earlier stage of abuse, whereas for men, having to go to the emergency room serves as a wake-up call that something must be done.

Another significant difference between men and women is the role of the pastor as one from whom they seek help. For women, talking to a pastor about the situation was not in the top five actions that made a difference in problem solving. Talking to a pastor for men ranked as the fifth most effective action. In our third study, we explored this difference in the role of a pastor as someone victims seek out for help, with some important findings emerging.

In the in-depth interviews with women survivors of violent situations, the findings indicate some possible reasons why seeking help from pastors or other church leaders may not be a preferred course of action among women victims. Women interviewed to date shared several concerns that influenced their choice of action, including gender, lack of condemnation of abuse from the pulpit, a church leader’s poor advice, and not being taken seriously by the church leader.

Women stated in the interviews that they would not confide in a pastor simply because in most cases the pastor was a man. Kathy, a marital sexual abuse survivor, said, “I could never go to a man to tell this stuff to. It’s just too intimate.” In the single case where the survivor’s home church employed a female pastor, the abuse survivor recalled that female pastor as being a “godsend.”

Another concern expressed by women participating in the interviews was that they were unsure where their pastor stood on the abuse issue. Betty shared, “I have never heard even one sermon that even mentioned abuse, let alone condemned it.” It is important for abuse survivors to hear clear messages from the pulpit that condemn violence of any kind in the marriage relationship. Such messages help build member confidence in their pastor as someone in whom they can confide.

Among the concerns reported by women interviewed was the fact that when they had turned to the pastor for help, the pastor had offered poor advice. One pastor told a woman who came to

### Effective Help-seeking Actions

#### Rank Order of Effective Help-seeking for Females

1. Prayed about it.
2. Went to a professional counselor.
3. Talked it over with a friend.
4. Talked about it with a church member.

#### Rank Order of Effective Help-seeking for Males

1. Prayed about it.
2. Went to the hospital emergency room.
3. Talked the situation over with the person.
4. Talked it over with a friend.
5. Went to see the pastor.