CHURCHES AS SAFE SPACES

77%

of respondents who experienced abuse did not select church leaders/members as a source they asked for help.

How can the church become a safer place to turn?

61 of 79 respondents reported personal experience of abuse.

CHURCHES AS SAFE SPACES

84%

of respondents want churches to create safe spaces where women can speak openly

Women are asking the church to listen—and to respond safely.

DISRUPTIVE *voices* OF THE PACIFIC

Churches as Safe Spaces Survey
97 RESPONDENTS

CHURCHES AS SAFE SPACES

79%

want trained church care teams

79% of respondents want church care teams trained to respond to domestic violence.

Compassion matters.
Knowing how to respond safely matters too.

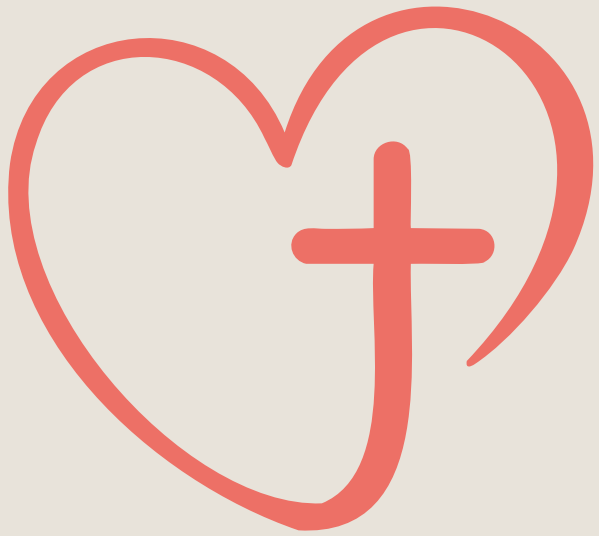
DISRUPTIVE *voices* OF THE PACIFIC

Churches as Safe Spaces Survey
97 RESPONDENTS

CHURCHES AS SAFE SPACES

75% want churches to preach about God's heart for women's wellbeing and safety.

What the church speaks about helps shape what people feel safe to disclose.



DISRUPTIVE *voices* OF THE PACIFIC

Churches as Safe Spaces Survey
97 RESPONDENTS

CHURCHES AS SAFE SPACES

69%

of respondents want more women trained and included in pastoral care.

Women need safe and trusted people within the church to speak to.

DISRUPTIVE *voices* OF THE PACIFIC

Churches as Safe Spaces Survey
97 RESPONDENTS

CHURCHES AS SAFE SPACES

62%

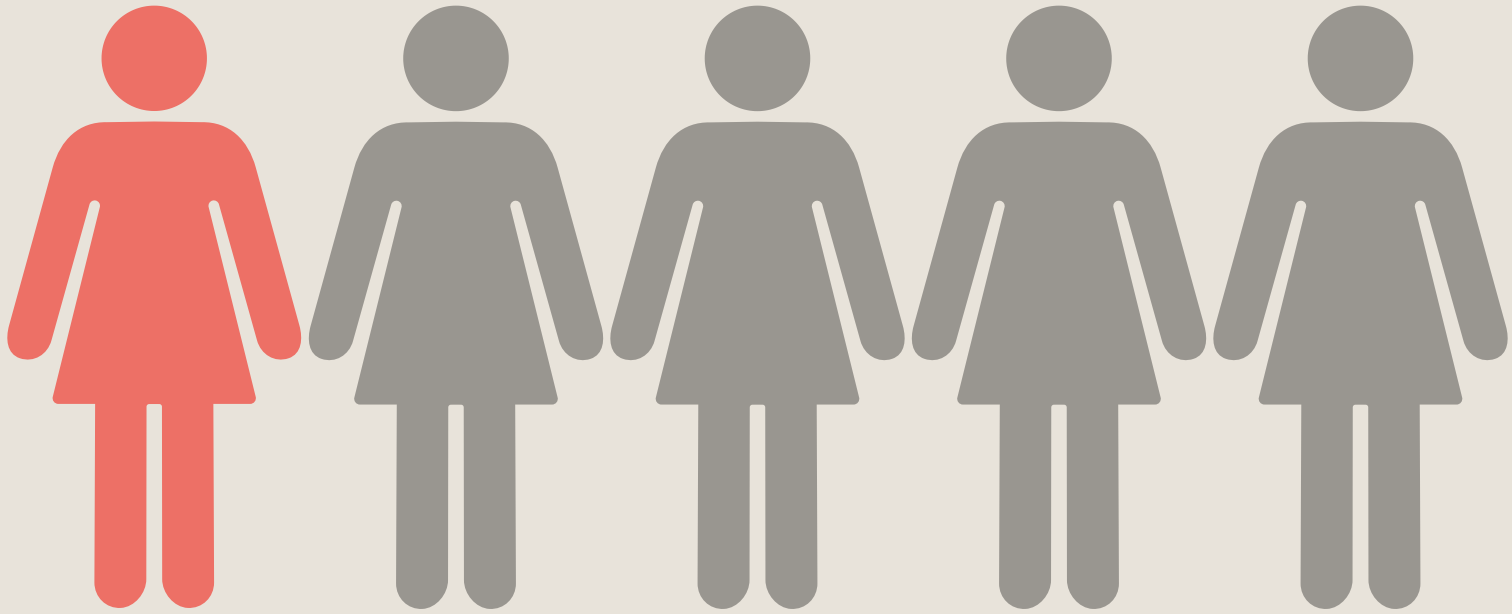
of respondents had heard neither a sermon on domestic violence or a sermon on abuse.

Silence from the pulpit can contribute to silence in the congregation.

DISRUPTIVE *voices* OF THE PACIFIC

Churches as Safe Spaces Survey
97 RESPONDENTS

CHURCHES AS SAFE SPACES



20% **of respondents currently receive support from church.**

Church support is reaching only about one in five respondents.

CHURCHES AS SAFE SPACES

81%

of respondents who experienced abuse were not currently receiving help from church.

How can our churches make support easier to find and safer to access?

CHURCHES AS SAFE SPACES

SURVEY RESULTS

97 **women responded to the Churches as Safe Spaces Survey**

What women told us about abuse, support and the role of the Church

This report summarises the responses of 97 women. The figures describe this group of respondents and should not be treated as population-wide prevalence estimates.

Executive Summary

Three themes stand out. Abuse was commonly witnessed and personally experienced among respondents. Many women did not turn to churches for help, and relatively few reported receiving current church support. At the same time, women strongly want churches to become safer, better informed and more proactive places of support.

84% **want churches to create safe spaces where women can speak openly.**

1. Abuse Is Common Among Respondents

Women reported witnessing multiple forms of abuse in their communities and relationships:

Type witnessed	Women	%
Verbal abuse	80	82.5%
Emotional abuse	70	72.2%
Physical violence	59	60.8%
Lack of freedom/privacy	57	58.8%
Sexual violence	20	20.6%

These responses show that abuse was highly visible within the lives and communities of the women surveyed.

2. Abuse Is Personal

Respondents also reported their own experiences of abuse:

Personal experience	Women	%
Verbal abuse	65	67.0%
Emotional abuse	61	62.9%
Physical violence	45	46.4%
Lack of freedom/privacy	40	41.2%
Sexual violence	27	27.8%
None of the listed forms	17	17.5%

2 in 3 **women surveyed reported experiencing verbal or emotional abuse.**

3. The Impact of Abuse

Women described impacts extending beyond the immediate experience of abuse:

Reported impact	Women	%
Emotional	61	62.9%
Social	52	53.6%
Mental	45	46.4%
Spiritual	29	29.9%
Concern for children's safety	25	25.8%

Nearly one-third reported a spiritual impact, indicating that abuse can also affect how some women experience faith, God and church community.

4. Where Women Sought Help

Source of help	Women	%
Family	43	44.3%
Friends	43	44.3%
Counsellors	29	29.9%
Church	20	20.6%
Police	20	20.6%
No one	30	30.9%

77%

of respondents who experienced abuse did not select church leaders or members as a source they asked for help.

Women were more than twice as likely to seek help from family or friends as from church. Thirty women reported seeking help from no one.

5. Current Support

Current source of support	Women	%
Friends	40	41.2%
Family	39	40.2%
Church	19	19.6%
No support	28	28.9%

Only about one in five respondents reported currently receiving support from church, while nearly three in ten reported receiving no support at all.

6. Fear, Shame and Church Culture

Some women identified barriers connected to church culture and community attitudes. Reasons for not seeking help included:

- Fear that church members would judge them.
- Concern for family reputation, shame or embarrassment.
- Concern that reporting abuse could affect the reputation of a church or ministry.
- Fear they would not be believed because the abusive person was respected or well known.
- Not knowing where to go for help.

The survey does not show that churches are causing abuse. It does, however, suggest that some women fear they may not be believed, understood or supported if they speak openly.

For some women, the fear of judgement appears stronger than the expectation of support.

7. The Silence Problem

Respondents reported hearing sermons on the following issues:

Sermon topic	% who had heard it
Poverty	39.2%
Alcoholism	35.1%
Domestic violence	33.0%
Abuse	33.0%
Mental health	26.8%
Justice issues	23.7%
Gender inequality	17.5%

62% **had heard neither a sermon on domestic violence nor a sermon on abuse.**

What the church speaks about helps shape what people feel safe to disclose. When abuse is rarely discussed publicly, some victims may conclude that they should remain silent.

8. What Women Want From Churches

The strongest recommendations from respondents were practical and clear:

What respondents want	Women	%
Create safe spaces for women to speak openly	81	83.5%
Train care teams in domestic violence response	77	79.4%
Preach God's heart for women's wellbeing and safety	73	75.3%
Workshops and seminars on domestic violence	72	74.2%
Raise awareness on how to report abuse	67	69.1%
Train and include more women in pastoral care	67	69.1%
Raise awareness on how to get help	66	68.0%
Appoint counsellors	62	63.9%

84% **want churches to create safe spaces where women can speak openly.**

Women are not asking the Church to do less. They are asking it to do more: more listening, more awareness, more training, more safety and more support.

What This Means for Churches

The results point to an opportunity for churches to strengthen trust and create clear, safe pathways for disclosure and support. Practical priorities include trained care teams, trusted women in pastoral care, clear referral and reporting pathways, regular teaching on abuse and safety, and relationships with qualified counsellors and specialist services.

A safe church is not one that assumes abuse never happens. It is one that knows how to listen, respond carefully, protect people at risk and connect them with appropriate help.

Closing

The strongest message from respondents is not rejection of the Church, but a call for the Church to become safer, more informed and more responsive. Churches have an opportunity to become places where abuse is no longer hidden and where women can be heard, supported and helped.