

“Religion was the basis for everything in my life - our weekly schedule, our finances, my education as a child, the clothes I wore, the shows we watched, the music I listened to, the profession I chose, and eventually even to how I voted. I was taught that “man is the head” and “women must submit.” Domestic abuse was not a forethought, because it was just our “normal.” “Man as the head” wasn’t just dogma, it was the foundation of our lives. I eventually married a pastor, and served as a pastor’s wife in an A/G church, all the while dealing with constant mental and emotional abuse from a narcissist and sociopath. But I was taught to stay, because divorce was a sin. Every decision, every thought, every action was governed by my religion. It took escaping that religion (and my ex-husband) to finally find God”. - Survey Respondent

RELIGIOUS TRAUMA IN RELATION TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

This is an independent, quantitative, research study conducted by Evan Jones in regards to possible correlations between RTS (Religious Trauma Syndrome) and the connections it may or may not have with Domestic Violence and/or Sexual Assault. These findings are preliminary and based upon a pool of 75 subjects, all who somewhat or positively identify as a victim of religious trauma. The study is ongoing and results will be published intermittently.

SUMMARIZATION OF PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

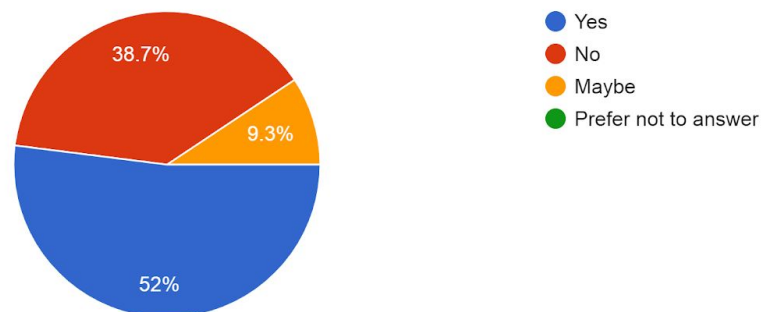
1. **52%** of RTS survivors also identified as adult victims of domestic violence, with **65.3%** identifying as children of domestic violence.
2. **77.3%** of RTS survivors believe religious influence perpetuated, supported, or promoted domestic violence in one form or another. While **82%** believe religious authorities or groups protected DV abusers.
3. **58%** of RTS survivors also identified as sexual assault survivors.
4. **64%** of RTS survivors believed religious influence perpetuated, supported, or promoted sexual assault in one form or another. While **82%** believe religious authorities or groups protected SA abusers.
5. **82.7%** of RTS survivors stated definitively that they believed there was a connection or correlation between religious trauma and Domestic Violence and/or Sexual Assault. While **17.3%** said that there maybe was a connection.

6. **77.3%** of Domestic Violence and/or Sexual Assault victims stated that they believed Religious Trauma Syndrome hindered their abilities to heal from their violence or assault.
7. **94%** of RTS survivors believed that YES a focus on RTS in the fields of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault would be beneficial.
8. Consequently, **92%** stated that NO there is currently not enough focus among DV and SA organizations.
9. **50.7%** of respondents stated they believed there was little research or focus on RTS survivors and **42.7%** stated they believed there was none at all.

*Using the formula of $1/\sqrt{N}$ we can speculate that with 75 respondents there is a margin error of .141 (or 14%). It is my hope to continue to increase the volume of respondents.

BREAKDOWN OF INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS:

Domestic Violence is defined as "violent or aggressive behavior in the home, typically involving the abuse of a spouse or partner". This includes but is not limited to; isolation, control, financial abuse, sexual abuse, physical violence, and more. Do you identify as an adult survivor of domestic violence?
75 responses

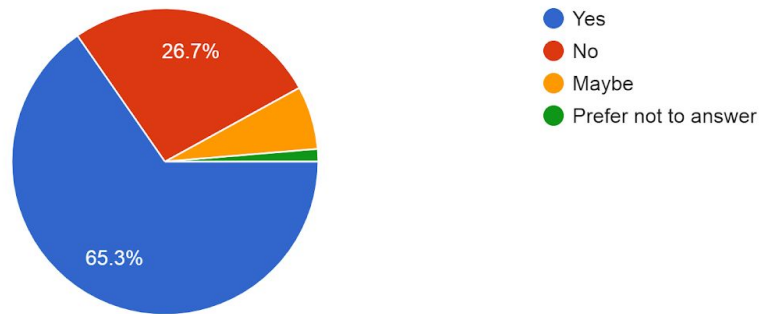


***THIS DATA IS PRELIMINARY AND NOT YET CONCLUSIVE**

COMPLETE QUESTION AS STATED ON SURVEY: Domestic Violence is defined as "violent or aggressive behavior in the home, typically involving the abuse of a spouse or partner". This includes but is not limited to; isolation, control, financial abuse, sexual abuse, physical violence, and more. Do you identify as an adult survivor of domestic violence?

Do you identify as a child of domestic violence? (Did you experience the violence from your parents or guardians)

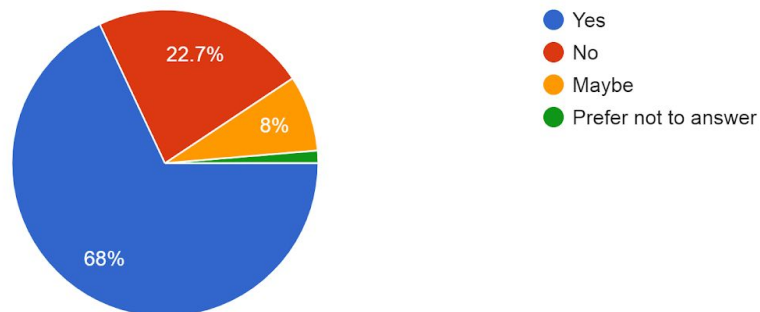
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Did you witness Domestic Violence against others in your home?

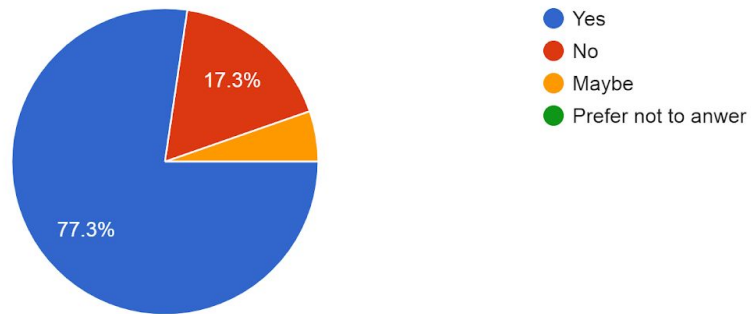
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Do you believe religious influence perpetuated, promoted, or supported Domestic Violence in your home in one form or another?

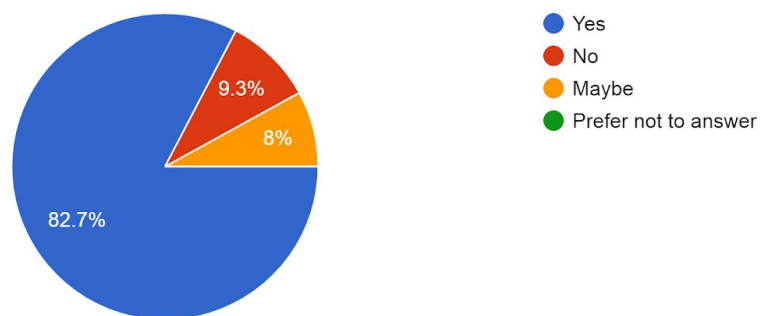
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***THIS DATA IS PRELIMINARY AND NOT YET CONCLUSIVE**

Do you believe religious authorities or groups in your life protected DV abusers in one form or another?

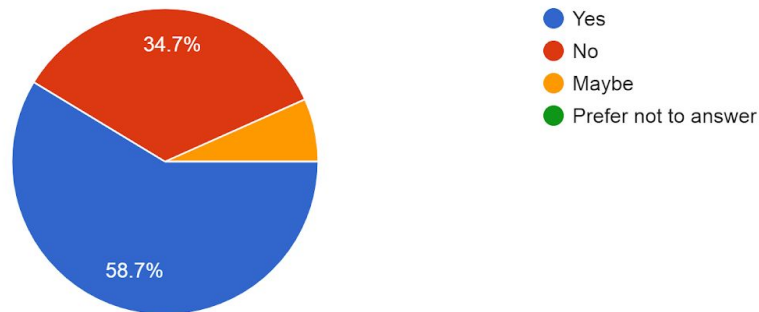
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***THIS DATA IS PRELIMINARY AND NOT YET CONCLUSIVE**

Sexual Assault is defined as "illegal sexual contact that usually involves force upon a person without consent or is inflicted upon a person who is...y" Do you identify as a survivor of sexual assault?

75 responses

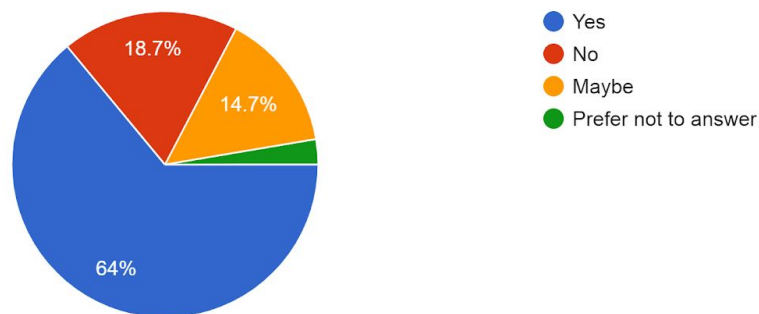


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COMPLETE QUESTION AS STATED ON SURVEY: Sexual Assault is defined as "illegal sexual contact that usually involves force upon a person without consent or is inflicted upon a person who is incapable of giving consent (as because of age or physical or mental incapacity) or who places the assailant (such as a doctor/pastor/parent) in a position of trust or authority" Do you identify as a survivor of sexual assault?

Do you believe religious influence perpetuated, promoted, or supported Sexual Assault in one form or another?

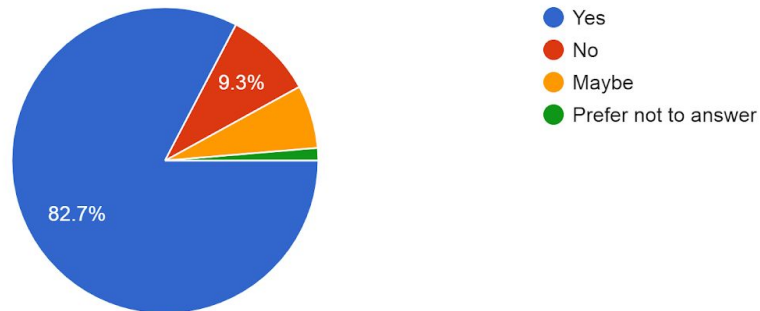
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Do you believe religious authorities or groups in your life protected SA abusers in one form or another?

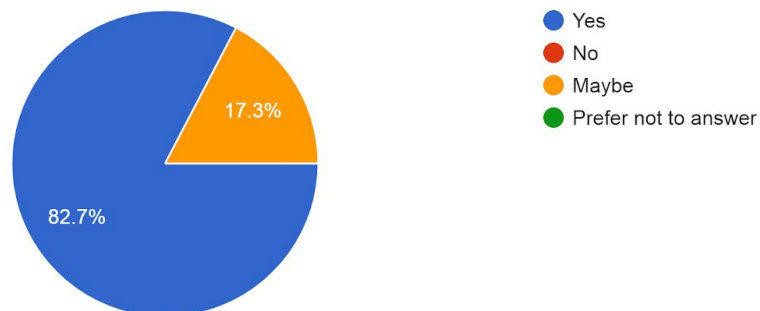
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*THIS DATA IS PRELIMINARY AND NOT YET CONCLUSIVE

Do you believe RTS (Religious Trauma Syndrome) and Domestic Violence and/or Sexual Assault are often correlated/connected?

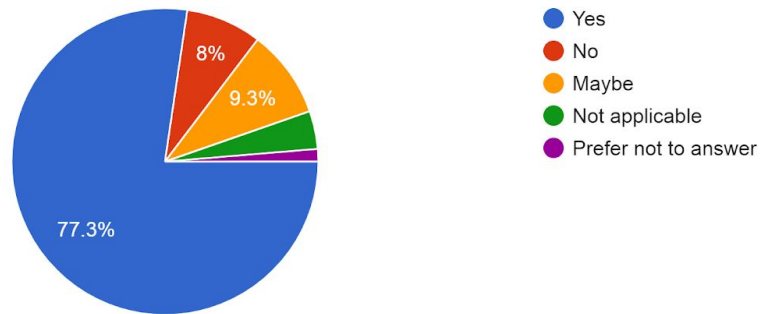
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Do you believe RTS (Religious Trauma Syndrome) has hindered or created barriers towards your personal healing as a survivor of Domestic Violence and or Sexual Assault?

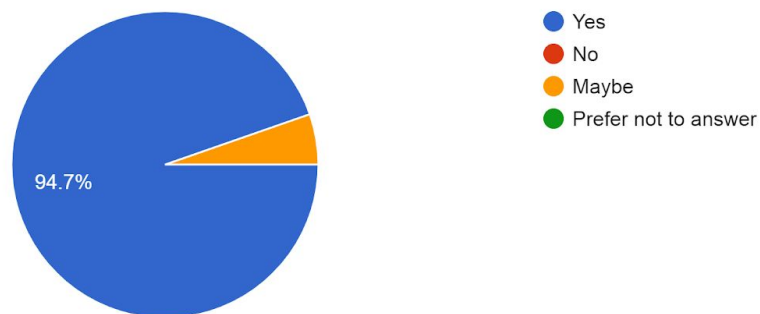
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***THIS DATA IS PRELIMINARY AND NOT YET CONCLUSIVE**

Do you believe a focus on RTS among Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault survivors would be beneficial?

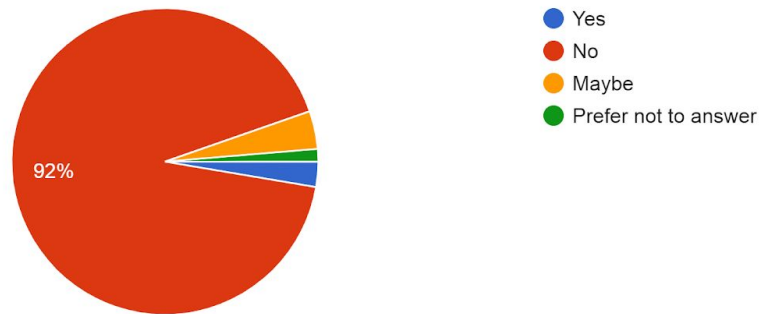
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***THIS DATA IS PRELIMINARY AND NOT YET CONCLUSIVE**

Do you believe there is currently enough focus on RTS among Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault organizations?

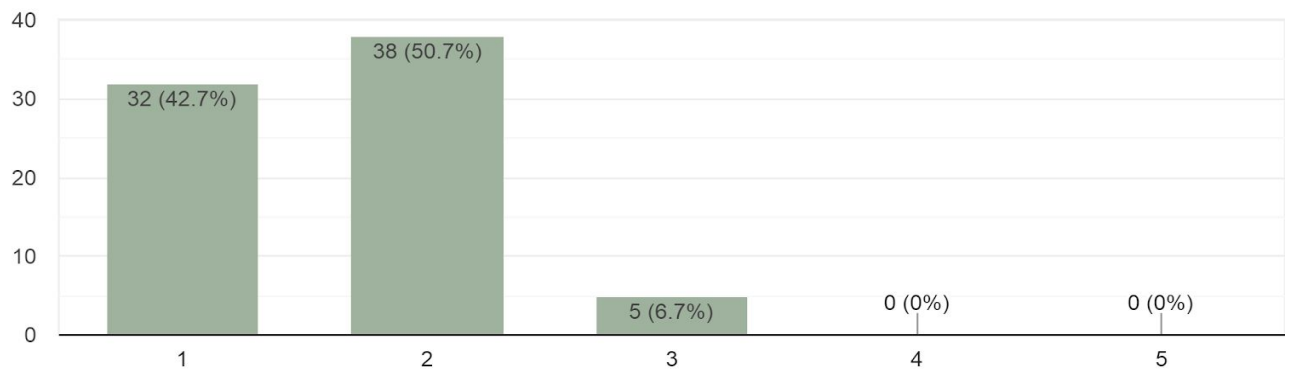
75 responses



***THIS DATA IS PRELIMINARY AND NOT YET CONCLUSIVE**

How much focus and research do you believe is currently available in general for victims of RTS?

75 responses



1. None at all 2. Little to some 3. Moderate 4. Good Amount 5. More than Enough

SOME OPTIONAL COMMENTS PROVIDED BY RESPONDENTS:

DO YOU BELIEVE RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE PERPETUATED, SUPPORTED, OR PROMOTED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

- 1. I suppose my struggle with answering these is that I was never hit or even disciplined in anger. The religious standards do have my parents facilitating an upbringing that meets some of the requirements for domestic violence (like isolation) but it's hard to let myself be grouped into the "violence" bit.*
- 2. The religion I was raised in instructed and encouraged parents to abuse their children. They were taught that if they didn't abuse the "sin" out of us, we wouldn't be destined for "hell". Abuse was praised publicly, and there was no one to report to as no one deemed it wrong or illegal. It was not until I became an adult that I learned the things that were done to my siblings and I, was most definitely physical, mental and emotional abuse.*
- 3. I sought help from church leadership regarding the abuse, they promoted silence. I got therapy once I left and reported to social services for in home investigation to help my siblings once I was out.*
- 4. "The man is the head of the household." "Husband is to be lord over the home." "God gives the commands to followers first. If your wife doesn't submit, you are not bound to showing the love of Christ until she does. It is your role to ensure she submits and the child obeys." "Authority is never wrong." "Don't question authority." "The father has total veto power in the home."*
- 5. My parents (especially my mother) read the Pearl's book "To Train Up a Child" and subscribed to the philosophy. Verses like "the blueness of a wound cleanses away evil (in a child)" were taken literally. I was spanked frequently, as punishment for just about any form of "disobedience" and was socially isolated for most of my childhood.*
- 6. My parents punished us with violence. (Whippings, soap in the mouth, lying about being abducted if we were bad, parenting with fear) however this is what they were told to do by the church. The schools also used these methods of punishment with permission from parents. Because this is what the religious leaders told them was right.*
- 7. Our pastor told my mom she couldn't leave her husband (the abuser) because the bible forbade a woman to leave a man. Also, once the abuser prayed for forgiveness we were expected to act as if it never happened.*

DO YOU BELIEVE YOUR RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES OR GROUPS PROTECTED DV ABUSERS?

1. *After being abused by our father one evening, our mother took us to her Sunday school teacher's home to tell him about what happened. She told him forgetting she had been told this before, she made a meal for dinner her husband did not like. He proceeded to break the dinner plates in the kitchen, throw the hot food across the kitchen, and abuse her in front of us. None of us left unscathed that night. While sitting on the porch of this "man of god," we heard him tell our mother that she was in the wrong for disobeying her husband. We were told to go home – to the hands of our abuser – and make him a "treat" and apologize.*
2. *I believe that many church leaders use their positions and "power" to coerce and keep quiet a multitude of sins they would not be able to indulge normally*
3. *During the sermons our pastor gave on punishing children, he often explained that punishments should take place in parts of the home where neighbors would not hear screaming and crying so that the neighbors would not call protective services. Children were made to understand that any complaints of abuse would not be heard and would be understood as rebelling against their parents.*
4. *It was claimed that God was the ultimate judge and that he would punish those who needed to be punished. It was better to protect the reputation of a "godly" church than to hold people accountable for their abuse toward others.*
5. *We were sent to marital counseling 3 times. Counselors in the church always sided with him. My parents sided with him. I was told if I would just be a better wife, if I didn't argue so much, if I lost weight and made myself more presentable.... it was always about what I should do differently. His actions were never questioned, because he was "the head" and a pastor.*

DO YOU BELIEVE RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE PERPETUATED, PROMOTED, OR SUPPORTED SEXUAL ASSAULT?

1. *Women and girls in our church were told they were not allowed to say "no" to a man's request for any reason.*
2. *I heard many rumors at church about statutory rape, in case at the hands of the youth pastor who was later fired, but the church leaders were good at convincing survivors and their parents to keep all disputes "within the church", so authorities were never involved and no ones reputation was ever hurt. I think this led to sexual abusers getting away with their crimes.*
3. *I had a controlling boyfriend who assaulted me multiple times and used the Bible to explain it. My mother was told, by a church official to be available to my dad anytime anywhere because if she wasn't he had the right to get it elsewhere.*
4. *I think my ignorance and lack of ability to consent played more a part because the abuse wasn't by someone of faith. Maybe I was more compliant because I was used to obeying? Idk*

5. *The sexual assault happened outside of the church, BUT had I actually been educated on what all the "dangers" the church & my parents constantly warned me about actually were instead of just saying "don't do that, god says it's bad" with zero basis, it probably could've been prevented*
6. *Women were taught that our husbands were next to God. It was our duty to perform sexually for them and telling them no, simply wasn't an option.*
7. *Sex was sinful, no sex education and no way to know I was being molested for a decade as a child. The religious environment banned all info on sex or sexual abuse, along with taught that if you were "lusted after" it was the victim's fault.*

DO YOU BELIEVE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES OR GROUPS IN YOUR LIFE PROTECTED SA ABUSERS IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER?

1. *While my experience as a survivor of sexual assault doesn't inform this, I did see other abusers protected by the church*
2. *My youth pastor was aware my pastor was pursuing me as a child and chose to look the other way since the pastor was funding his drug problem.*
3. *Regardless of the number of times SA would be reported, they would still be in the position to hurt another victim. They may be moved around to appease the situation but cover it up as a promotion. For example, teacher was accused of inappropriate touching or compliments - took years for any action to take place. Finally teacher was transferred to another school as a promotion and yet still did the same thing. Law officials were never involved, the church took care of it.*
4. *They were protected systemically, by the patriarchal belief that was instilled in young girls in my religion from the day we were born, that our only job was to please men.*
5. *There's a whole mindset that ministers are protected/to be believed/to not be questioned. And a whole mindset that turns a blind eye to the obvious.*
6. *There was one man excommunicated from my last church for child molesting. But there were several men there who had weird vibes or seemed creepy and I couldn't pinpoint why. After so many religious leaders have been caught doing this stuff, I think it's pretty clear they've had help hiding all kinds of stuff*
7. *Girls in my IFB church were sexually assaulted one more than one occasion by different people. In each case, when it was brought to light, they told everyone to keep quiet about it, however, they did contact authorities and sent the perpetrators away. The victims were not cared for. The victims were made out to be either instigators or liars in some cases.*
8. *They do everything in their considerable power to cover up leaders who are guilty of sexual assault, and if a victim tries to make public allegations they are threatened and smeared and accused of being the guilty party*

9. *In [the] same way as physical abuse—we could only report to the religious authorities, and they did absolutely nothing. One time I even showed a pastor/teacher pictures of what was happening to me, and he deleted them from my phone and gave me back the phone.*

DO YOU BELIEVE RELIGIOUS TRAUMA AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT ARE OFTEN CORRELATED/CONNECTED?

1. *I know that my upbringing in purity culture made it more difficult for me to leave abusive relationships later in life. Even after leaving religion, I always had the mindset that once I was physically intimate with a partner, I should do everything I could to make the relationship work, even if they turned out to be abusive, resulting in deep psychological harm and trauma. I also had deep feelings of inadequacy and insecurity resulting from my abusive childhood as well as the teachings of our church that even babies were "sinners" and deserving of hell. My low self-esteem persists to this day, ten years after leaving religion.*
2. *I know the trauma associated with being molested. I didn't have to look at my abuser face to face every service though, so I feel I had an easier time because of that. For those that are abused whether sexually or other stated traumas and they attend the same church, it's like ripping open the bandages before your wounds heals...but that's EVERY TIME YOU SEE THAT PERSON. It's a constant reminder, and nobody can heal from that until you are away completely. And that's just not the ifb way. You don't stop serving, you don't walk away from church or the ministry. So those victims are stuck in this hurtful pattern with no clear way out. So yes, both are connected, because the abuser will use all tactics necessary to keep their victims in submission.*
3. *Sexual assault can be a subset or RT. however RT Can exist without a sexual component. I've experienced RT at parent controlled Christian school (heavy shepherding control using shame). Also with the church's social arm, here they hide their control and gaslighting behind business and HR practices . (No sexual component here). I found refuge in a parish that was doing refugee ministry. It was the first church in rejoined of my denomination. "If it was safe for the refugee it was also safe for me. " (a refugee from the church). (PLUS you got to bypass the whole gender discourse). It lasted for a good amount of time.*
4. *They all often occur simultaneously and inform and/or enable one another.*
5. *100% in some situations. As to my own experience, yes, because religion was the lense that everything is viewed through. In the case of my family member in partner abuse, the religion wouldn't let her divorce or the teachings put added shame there. I would also add that if you have experienced RTS, you are at higher risk of abuse all over again. There are many aspects that need healing. As a child, looking back, I believe the current spiritual abuse I was experiencing allowed the abuse to continue, but it also impacted my ability to fight or flight.*
6. *Very much connected. The institutional level abusive belief structures trap victims in individual abusive relationships and give them no access to healthy relationship information to compare their situation to*

7. *I do feel that there is often type of person who is an abuser. These people can be drawn to the teachings of a church that validate or enable their abuse.*

WHAT OTHER COMMENTS DO YOU AS A SURVIVOR OF RTS HAVE?

1. *I would love to see more studies conducted on the topic. To my knowledge, there are few studies that focus on religious trauma, especially in fundamentalist Christian sects*
2. *I wish I had the language to communicate to people of my former church how much they have harmed me in a way that they could process and understand. If I had the words for this, I know talking to them about it wouldn't help deal with my trauma, but knowing that they continue to hurt people in spite of meaning well is so tragic to me.*
3. *I would like there to be an appropriate focus. Some people who have the same background as I have not experienced RTS... I'd hate to think that as soon as a certain religion is mentioned, that an assumption is made that the individual struggles in a specific way.*
4. *What has helped in healing from RTS is identifying abuse tactics as well as identifying what in my character is drawn to Spiritual Abusers. Along with a therapist, having this knowledge has been essential to attaining good mental health.*
5. *RTS is not taken as seriously by therapists and psychologists as it should be, I hope this survey helps to change that.*
6. *I do not feel that it is little to not understood at a I'm secular counseling. I'm currently struggling to find a counselor that is not religiously affiliated AND understands RTS. I seem to find religious counselors that might understand where I'm coming from but their counseling seems to revolve around becoming more close to god as a road to healing. As someone who had god used against them to validate abuse this is not a helpful approach for me personally. But a secular therapist seems to brush it off. One therapist told me, "Well... just find another church if that one didn't work for you." There was just no comprehension of the effects of church related abuse and the after affects.*
7. *I feel like we have just seen the tip of the iceberg. Definitely more research needed.*

****All rights to this preliminary study are waived and made available and free to the public to use as they wish.***

**Those interested in taking the survey or who have questions or comments about the survey are encouraged to reach out to Evan Jones directly at ejones@sojournerri.org*

**Please note this study is conducted independently and not currently tied to any organization or agency. It is my hope in the future to gather funding and resources to further study the effects of religious trauma and adverse religious settings.*

- Evan