



The Presbyterian Panel



Listening to Presbyterians

SUMMARY

INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE AND OTHER TOPICS The November 1999 Survey

The Presbyterian Panel consists of three nationally representative samples of groups affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): members, elders (lay leaders), and ordained ministers. Ministers are split into two groups for analysis, based on current call: *pastors*, serving in a congregation, and *specialized clergy*, serving elsewhere. New samples are drawn every three years. These pages summarize major findings from the thirteenth and final survey completed by the 1997-1999 Panel.

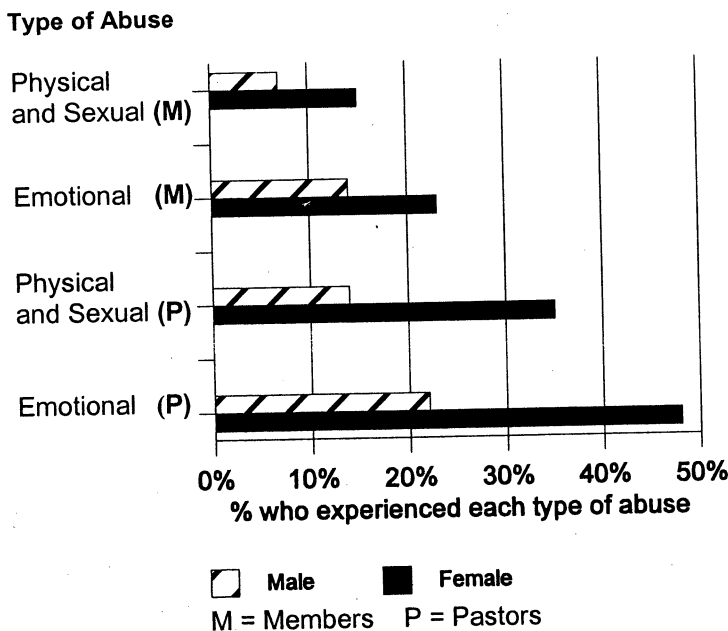
EXPERIENCE WITH VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Physical and Sexual Abuse

- ✓ Fewer than one in ten panelists report having experienced rape or some other form of sexual abuse.
- ✓ Fewer than one in ten panelists report having been physically abused as a child.

- ✓ Women are more likely than men to report past experience with each type of abuse.
- ✓ Fewer than 1% of members, but almost 6% of pastors, report past experience with physical or sexual abuse at the hands of a minister or other church professional.

Figure 1
Male-Female Differences in Reported Abuse



Emotional Abuse

- ✓ Childhood experience with emotional or verbal abuse is reported by 7% of elders and 20% of specialized clergy.
- ✓ Emotional abuse from a spouse or other partner is reported by 10% of elders and 13% of specialized clergy.

Secondary Experiences

- ✓ Majorities of panelists know someone who has experienced interpersonal violence, most often "emotional/verbal abuse" during childhood.
- ✓ In their role as counselors, majorities of pastors and specialized clergy report encountering people who have experienced physical abuse, often childhood sexual abuse, other childhood physical abuse, or partner abuse.

Who Abuses? Who is Abused?

- ✓ At least eight in every ten panelists in every sample *agree* that:
 - abusive people come from all the different economic groups
 - some people who abuse are responsible adults in their communities
 - many elderly persons are emotionally abused by their adult children
- ✓ More than eight in every ten panelists *disagree* that:
 - children are sexually abused most often by strangers
- ✓ Opinions are more divided on whether or not:
 - “abusers of elderly persons are most often their adult children” (45% of members and pastors *agree*, while 21% and 23%, respectively, *disagree*)
 - “people with strong religious beliefs are less likely to abuse” (49% of members and 22% of pastors *agree*, while 40% and 70%, respectively, *disagree*)

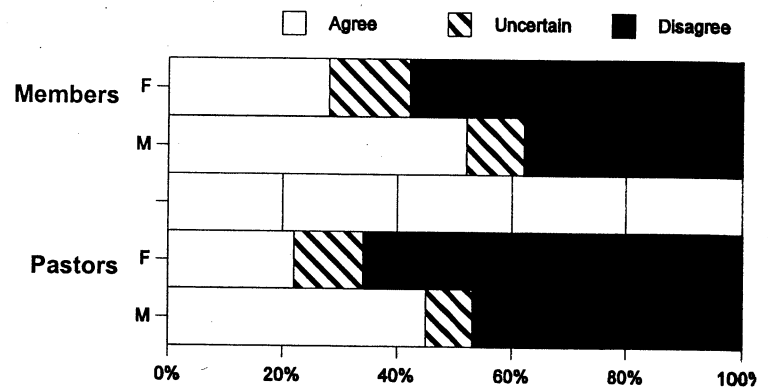
Blame

- ✓ More than eight in ten panelists *agree* that “victims of sexual abuse often blame themselves for the abuse,” but even larger majorities (91% or more in each sample) *disagree* that “when a woman is raped, it is probably her fault” and *disagree* that “in some cases where women are physically abused by a spouse, they deserve it.”
- ✓ Majorities (95% or greater) in every sample *disagree* that “elderly persons who are physically abused usually deserve it.”

Faith and Child Discipline

- ✓ Majorities of male members and elders *agree*, but majorities of female members and elders, and clergy of both genders, *disagree* that “my faith tells me that parents have a right to physically discipline their children by spanking or whipping.”
- ✓ More than eight in ten panelists *agree* that “a pastor should always report child abuse.”

Figure 2
Opinions on Faith and Child Discipline



Question: My faith tells me that parents have a right to physically discipline their children by spanking or whipping.

Husbands and Wives

- ✓ 95% or more in every sample *agree* that “it is never okay for a husband to slap his wife.” Almost as many (majorities of 89% or more) *disagree* that “there are times when it is okay for a wife to slap her husband.”
- ✓ Majorities of 95% or more *disagree* that “a husband has the right have sex with his wife whenever he wants it.”

Worship

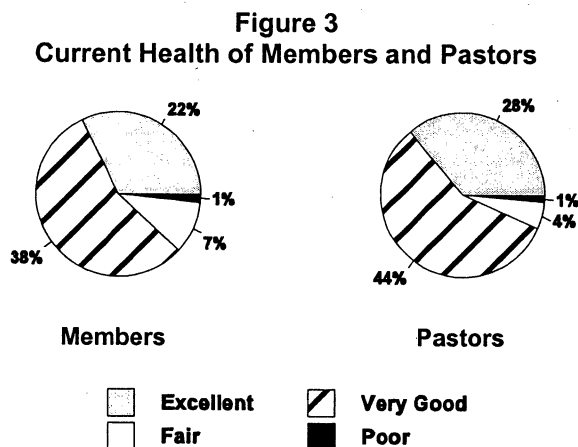
- ✓ Around three in four lay panelists and almost nine in ten clergy believe that “worship should include sermons on interpersonal violence.”
- ✓ Majorities of 95% or more in every sample *agree* that “worship should include prayers for victims of interpersonal violence.”

Churches and Congregations

- ✓ Fewer than one in ten panelists believe that “interpersonal violence is a private family matter and should not be a concern of my congregation.”
- ✓ Pastors are evenly divided on whether or not “the clergy in my congregation are adequately trained to respond effectively to incidents of interpersonal violence.”

Current Health

- ✓ Around a fourth of panelists rate their current health as *excellent*, and most of the rest choose *very good*. Fewer than 10% rate their own health as *fair* or *poor*.



- ✓ On specific health and mood issues, majorities in every sample report that *all* or *most of the time* in the last four weeks they have “been a happy person” and that *never* or only *a little of the time* have they “been very nervous,” “felt downhearted and blue,” or “felt worn out.”

Recent Problems

- ✓ When asked to describe the most recent “major problem or challenge you have faced,” panelists’ responses clustered in a few broad categories:
 - health (listed by 57% of members and 36% of pastors)
 - family and children (members, 29%; pastors, 21%)
 - work (members, 10%; pastors, 14%)
 - social activities and friendships (members, 8%; pastors, 21%)
 - love and marriage (members, 10%; pastors, 8%)
- ✓ As panelists worked through their problems or challenges:
 - few gave any thought to Satan’s involvement (90% of members and 87% of pastors responded *not at all* to this possibility)
 - few “questioned the power of God” (*not at all* was the response of 85% of members, 79% of pastors)

- many looked to God for “strength, support, and guidance” (combined *a great deal* and *quite a bit* responses were 79% for members, 90% for pastors)
- most looked for “a lesson from God in this problem,” but few did so *a great deal* (members, 14%; pastors, 22%)

Prayer

- ✓ Three in four pastors and two in three specialized clergy pray more than once a day, compared to 43% of members and 41% of elders. Almost every one else in each sample prays either *once a day* or *two or more times a week*. Only 1% (or less) report *never* praying.
- ✓ Around one in ten panelists in every sample are *very satisfied* with their prayer life; another four in ten are *satisfied*.

Doubts about Faith

- ✓ Most panelists have at least occasional doubts “about the things you learned in church,” but for most such doubts occur *once in while* (e.g., elders, 71%) rather than *fairly often* (elders, 8%) or *very often* (3%).
- ✓ Four in ten members (40%) and elders (43%) and one in five pastors (22%) and specialized clergy (21%) *never* have “doubts about your religious or spiritual beliefs.”

Congregational Care and Support

- ✓ More than three in four members (77%) and elders (86%) report that they felt “loved and cared for” either *very often* or *fairly often* by other members in their congregation over the past year.
- ✓ Majorities of members and elders report sharing their religious experiences with other members over the past year, but for many that sharing is very occasional.
- ✓ Only a minority of members report talking to their pastor about their own “private problems and concerns,” and most report doing so *once in a while* (32% overall) rather than *very often* (4%) or *fairly often* (11%).
- ✓ Few members (8%) or elders (13%) report that their pastor has “been critical of you and the things you have done” during the past year.

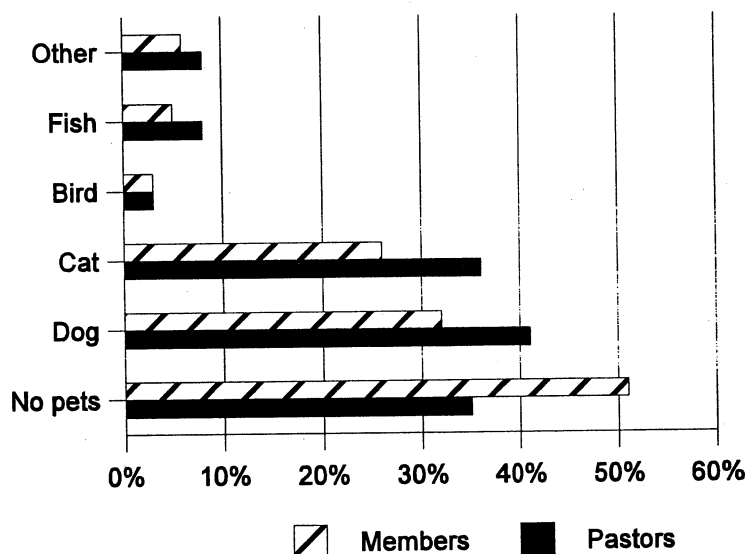
OTHER TOPICS

Panel Evaluation

- ✓ About three in four panelists in each sample find the three-year term they served as panelists *about right* in length. Among the rest, more view the number of years as *too many* rather than *too few*.
- ✓ More than three in four panelists in each sample find the four surveys per year and the 6-8 page length of each *about right*.
- ✓ A large majority of panelists in every sample (e.g., members, 78%; pastors, 89%) have at least occasionally shared a copy of a Panel *Summary* with someone else. The most common recipient is another person in their own household.
- ✓ Clergy are more likely than laity to share a Panel *Summary* with someone else, especially someone in their congregation.
- ✓ A majority of pastors at least occasionally have shared a Panel *Summary* with their congregation's newsletter editor.

- ✓ Among households with pets, more than one-half include a cat. Around six in ten include a dog.
- ✓ Among members, the average number of dogs in dog households is 1.3, and the average number of cats in cat households is 1.8.
- ✓ Few pet households have animals other than cats or dogs. Around one in ten have fish—usually several—and around one in twenty have a bird or birds.

Figure 4
Pets in Presbyterian Households



Pets

- ✓ Around half of members (49%), elders (52%), and specialized clergy (54%) share their households with a pet animal, typically a dog or cat. The rate among pastors is 65%.

	Members	Elders	Ordained Ministers
Number of surveys mailed	896	1,008	1,556
Number returned	563	664	1,016*
Response rate	63%	66%	65%

*Of the 1,016 returned surveys, 676 came from pastors and 340 from specialized clergy.

This survey was initially mailed in November 1999, and returns were accepted through January 2000. Results are subject to sampling and other errors. Small differences should be interpreted cautiously. As a general rule, differences of less than 6% between samples are not statistically meaningful.

For more numbers and interpretation of the November 1999 Presbyterian Panel results, a longer report with additional charts and graphs is available for \$5. Contact PDS (1-800-524-2612) and order PDS# 65100-99262. Included is a data appendix that presents the percentage responses to each survey question separately for members, elders, pastors, and specialized clergy.

For more information on programs and resources in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) on the issue of interpersonal violence, contact Peter Sulyok of the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy at 1-888-728-7228 ext. 5814.

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