Church/Community Involvement

Support Team – The Church assigns a support team (one or multiple couples) to each spouse. The abuser may even be temporarily placed in the home of one of the support couples. The team’s goal is reconciliation at all costs, which may lead to lack of transparency and attempts to manipulate victims, church pressure, community pressure, familial pressure, harassment, stalking. Connecting with the support team could be an important advocacy strategy.

*Assess who the victim’s chosen support team is and encourage the victim to ask for emotional and logistical support with defined safety planning strategies

Forgiveness – Church and community will encourage that forgiveness of the abuser and moving forward is important - “Forgive and Forget.” The Amish belief that forgiveness means silence is believed by many to be more harmful than any other abuse. Speaking of the abuse is as great a sin as that of the abuser

Spiritual Abuse – Abuse can stem from multiple sources at the same time: within the home, the church and community

Taking Sides – If the Church supports the abuser, the victim and victim’s supporters (family, friends, silent mentor, etc.) may be penalized by not being allowed to participate in certain activities or to patronize community-owned businesses. In return, the community may not patronize the victim’s/supporters’ businesses

Guidance – Victims often use lay counselors and ministers in the church community for insight into the situation

View on Trauma -- Church leadership often doesn’t believe in PTSD or lasting trauma resulting from abuse

Excommunication – Church rule (the Ordnung), and how strictly it is applied, dictate things like whether the victim may be allowed to attend church and amount of contact with church members. They cannot participate in the church meal.

Restoration Team/Conservative Crisis Intervention (CCI) Team – A group of Amish men/women who put a plan in place for the court to handle the abuser post-sentencing. They are notified if abuse is reported, and they separate the couple. These team members typically have an 8th grade education and are not certified to counsel the abuser

Legal Outreach

Amish & other Plain communities believe that protection orders, legal separation, and legal representation are within the discretion of church leadership. Victims must be educated and encouraged to understand that they have the same rights as all United States citizens and may avail themselves of those rights as needed for their safety.

Victims over 18 years may not realize they are legally independent adults

Advocacy Tips for Supporting Victims in the Amish/Plain Community

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Additional Information

Education – Most Amish attend Amish schools where they receive an 8th grade education that does not include any form of health or science education. All educational materials are approved by the church. The requirement to be a teacher is to be a member of the church in good standing. An ordained minister, deacon or bishop receives no further education and is elected to his position.

Counseling – All types of counseling options approved (AOD, Sexual Assault, Mental Health, DV, etc.), typically residential counseling in another state at Plain Community non-licensed private facilities provided by church members with 8th grade education – aimed at rehabilitating sex offenders and domestic violence abusers.

Personal Business – News spreads quickly within the community, and is viewed as sharing essential information, not gossip.

LGBTQ – Because of religious beliefs, victims may have reservations about working with service providers who identify as LGBTQ.

Outreach – The community embraces educational meetings on awareness topics. Public meetings are held where the speakers are men and topics discussed are explained through the lens of church doctrine.

Resources

“Doorway to Hope” by The Sewing Circle, stories drawn from domestic violence victims from IN, OH and PA; belief that suffering on Earth will be rewarded after death.

“Tears of the Silenced: An Amish True Crime Memoir of Childhood Sexual Abuse, Brutal Betrayal, and Ultimate Survival” by Misty Griffin

“Behind Blue Curtains: A True Crime Memoir of an Amish Woman’s Survival, Escape, and Pursuit of Justice” by Molly Maeve Eagen and Lizzie Hershberger

“The Plain People’s Podcast” https://theplainpeoplespodcast.libsyn.com/
Accessibility/Safety

Phones – some victims may own a cell phone, share a cell phone, or have access to a phone or black box at an outside location (work, neighbors, etc.). If a phone isn’t in the home, sometimes children are asked to run to make a phone call to get help.

Language Barrier – Although victims likely speak English, frequently check in for understanding of terminology/phrasing and seek interpretation if needed.

Transportation – If clients don’t live close to your agency, they may need assistance with arranging transportation. They may hide their intentions by running errands before or after their appointment. Ensure your agency has a place for parking horse and buggies.

Silent Mentor – someone from the English community (landlord, employer, business owner, etc.) that assists with communication, transportation, and legal pursuits in addition to moral support

Courtesy – Ensure that your agency has a place for men to hang their hats and for women to place their bonnets, jackets, and shawls

Legal Action

Divorce – Divorce is typically not an option in the eyes of the Church

Decisions – Protection orders, legal separation, legal representation, etc., are at the discretion of church leadership

Child Support – Often resistant to filing for child support (don’t want the entanglement/feeling of not deserving husband’s money)

Court – Typically not able to “swear” into court (against God), but can “affirm” into evidence

Personal Property – Husbands are entitled to the property of the wife. Transferring ownership of a horse or having a support system member purchase a horse and buggy for the victim may be necessary.