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With the recent, high-profile cases of abuse in Amish communities, it is important to examine the underlying structure of these communities to determine how this structure protects women, how it may make them vulnerable, how the leadership handles abuse when it happens, and why these leaders might delay in accessing outside help to deal with perpetrators or to seek help for victims.

I wish to argue that Amish social structure provides unique ways in which women are valued and protected. However, in the most serious cases of abuse, this same structure may encourage delayed action against perpetrators and delayed help for victims.

The Amish are only one of a variety of “Anabaptist” groups in the USA. Others are Mennonite, Hutterite, and various “Brethren” groups. Historically, these all practiced a simple lifestyle, peacemaking, a focus on the gathered church community, an emphasis on church-state separation, and an emphasis on the practice of adult-only baptism. They each endured a history of persecution in Europe. Anabaptists range from traditional groups who may reject all petroleum-powered farm equipment to highly-accultured, progressive groups who welcome partnered homosexuals into church membership.

We can designate Anabaptists who limit their technology and are more communitarian as *Old Order* groups. Examples are some Mennonite and most Amish groups. These can be characterized as *embedded religious minorities*—*embedded*, because they practice their distinct culture in the midst of broader US culture; *religious*, because church and community highly overlap; and *minorities*, because all of them exhibit significant differences from the non-Anabaptist cultures around them. Members of these groups usually do not drive cars and do not use modern technology, and thus they guard their unique identities vis-à-vis the surrounding culture.

The Amish broke off from other European Anabaptists in 1693. Today the Old Order Amish number almost 300,000 people and are found only in the continental USA and Canada. They typically hold worship services every 2 weeks in homes, and drive horse and buggy. In most groups, the men wear suspenders and broad-brimmed hats and the women wear white prayer coverings and plain-colored, long dresses.

The Amish consist of many distinct subgroups. For example, from 1979 to 1981 I lived with a White-buggy Amish farm family in central Pennsylvania, sleeping in an upstairs bedroom and eating meals with the family. During this time, I conducted an empirical study of kinship, marriage, and how both of these related to their periodic church divisions. I have returned briefly every several years to visit the community.

In 1980, the White-buggy Amish consisted of 902 men, women, and children living in four

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counties in central Pennsylvania. This group was not one united church; it consisted of four independent “denominations” (non-communing groups) divided into eight local congregations. Most of the families farmed, either on their own land or on land leased from another. Even compared to other Amish groups, the children grew up with very little formal education.

In this chapter, we raise the issue of abuse in the Amish community. Abuse is not an absolute concept, it is always culturally defined. The US Office on Violence Against Women defines domestic violence as a “pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner.” Domestic violence “can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender,” and can take many forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, economic, and psychological abuse (United States Department of Justice 2012).

Here, I define violence against women as: *a pattern of abusive behavior used by a male to gain power and control over a woman, usually in an intimate relationship. This can include physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological abuse.*

In any community, it is impossible to identify precisely how often violence against women occurs because abuse is often hidden behind the closed doors of a household. And, for multiple reasons, a woman is often hesitant to name the violence and report it to outsiders. In the Amish community, additional barriers exist against identifying abuse, making it even harder to quantify. Amish society forms a seamless whole—religion, kinship relations, geographic propinquity, and similar vocations and life experiences. It is a closed society with walls of separation against the broader culture. The German language separates them, especially the women, who tend to use less English than do the men and have less contact with outsiders. Further, the Amish prefer to deal internally with their problems and, when issues arise, they are reluctant to enlist outside help.

The Amish themselves would certainly label physical or sexual violence against a woman as abuse. And yet, outsider professionals need to re-

alize that when working with the Amish, certain types of female submission to males and certain types of male power and control form part of Amish culture, and should not automatically be defined as abuse. A few examples:

1. The father may spank his children.
2. The husband may control all the finances of the family.
3. The Bishop in the community may forbid women from wearing certain types of clothing.

Even though people in the broader society may object to some of these practices, Amish people, including women, usually accept these practices and view them as normal and even desirable.

Community Structure

What makes the Amish unique? Unlike almost all Americans living in a *Gesellschaft* society, the Amish live in a small-scale *Gemeinschaft* community (after Tönnies 1957). Living in the *Gemeinschaft* accounts for so many of the differences that outsiders observe about the Amish (see Table 15.1).

In the *Gesellschaft*, people are more ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse, but in the *Gemeinschaft*, members are homogenous in belief and cultural practice. For example, most Amish speak a German dialect, experience similar schooling, practice similar vocations, share the same religious beliefs and practices, and have many relatives within the group. In the *Gesellschaft*, the woman and men are separately linked into independent networks such as a vocation, a club, or a friend group. In the *Gemeinschaft*, both women and men are immersed in a total community and share great social capital; they have the contacts necessary to satisfy their needs and address their concerns. This rich matrix of relationships provides great accountability for behavior, including abusive behavior.

“Isolated Amish” is an oxymoron. Each Amish family has multiple Amish neighbors within a few miles. They have no telephones in the home and therefore practice much spontaneous visiting. People know what other people are doing. *Gemeinschaft* communities such as the Amish

Table 15.1 Two contrasting types of society. (Adapted from Tönnies (1957). Barn and City images from Table 15.1 are in the public domain at <http://search.creativecommons.org/> and <http://openclipart.org/search/?query=barn>)



Gesellschaft	Gemeinschaft
<i>Greater US society</i>	<i>Amish society</i>
Large-scale	Small-scale
Indirect	Face-to-face
Open society	Closed society
Known roles	Known people
High division of labor	Low division of labor
Father works away	Father works at home
Different beliefs	Common beliefs
Different life experiences	Similar life experiences
High geographic mobility	Low geographic mobility
Oriented toward the individual	Oriented toward the group

provide some protection for women, including women in bad marriages, because households usually include relatives outside of the nuclear family. People are immersed in a web of kinship and friendships. Therefore, people are held accountable for their actions.

In the Amish *Gemeinschaft*, division of labor is strong and traditional. People sit at the table in their order, usually with men and boys on one side and women and girls on the other.

Unlike the broader society, the whole family cooperates in a single task such as running the family farm or small business. For example, since the White-buggy Amish do not use mechanical milkers, the whole family rises before dawn and goes out to the barn to help with the milking. The 6-year-olds may gather the eggs and the old men may do harness repair.

The community prescribes roles for males and females. Amish women's roles tend to be quite distinct from roles of "English" [outsider] women, and more stable, and closely related to the domestic sphere. Women exercise great care for the sick, infirm, or elderly, and for other women around their childbearing time. Competition between husbands and wives is rare; indeed, the church looks down upon overt competition in any form since competition indicates pride, and pride is considered one of the cardinal sins by the Amish community.

Traditionally, men perform the more public roles such as purchasing farm equipment, interacting with salespersons and buyers, and traveling. Men do the butchering and smoking of meat. They maintain the farm equipment, care for the horses, and repair the house, barn, and other structures. They do most of the fieldwork, although if a thunderstorm threatens, women may join them in the haying.

Women do most of the infant and childcare, laundry and housecleaning, meal preparation, and clean up. They sew many of the family's clothes, care for the infants and children, and tend a large vegetable garden. I lived for months in a White-buggy home and never saw any man preparing food in the home, setting the table, or doing dishes.

Women have some contact with outsiders when they shop for food and household goods, purchase fabric, or sell their quilts and woven baskets. Women's merchandising is mostly restricted to selling to other Amish people, but some women run public vegetable stands. Some women run small stores attached to their homes. Others may do reflexology (a folk practice of rubbing, diagnosing, and curing), or they may sell vitamins and supplements to other Amish people in the community. White-buggy Amish women tend stalls at the weekly Belleville, Penn-

sylvania market. An older White-buggy Amish woman sold vitamins, food supplements, and health appliances.

Because of the strong male/female division of labor, women's roles are indispensable and highly valued. Amish society is pronatalist, a woman's role in childbearing is greatly respected, and a new baby is a happy occasion for the whole community. Men depend on the women and women depend on men, so much so that if a single man is running the farm, he may ask his unmarried sister to live with him and help.

Formerly, most Amish people lived and worked on farms. Today, although the Amish still live in rural areas, more and more are working in home cottage industries. Some work for an Amish or Mennonite employer, and some even work for an English (non-Amish) employer. The ideal is the family dairy farm, but this is becoming too expensive for new farmers. The next best is for the family to work together in a family business. This may be a carpenter shop, blacksmith shop, carriage shop, small drygoods or grocery store, a business constructing gazeboes, or many other businesses. In many cottage enterprises such as quilt-making, small grocery, or drygoods stores, women often handle the business and make the decisions.

All of these family-owned businesses allow the father to be near home most of the day, and allow the children and mother to participate in the enterprise. This builds bonds of dependence among all the family members. However today, more and more Amish men are working away from home in carpentry or masonry crews, mobile home assembly, or even in Amish-run or English-run factories. This certainly changes family dynamics and separates the father more from his family.

Today, we can classify Amish male subsistence activities in four categories, moving from the most to the least culturally desirable: (1) working on the family farm, (2) working on someone else's farm, (3) running a cottage industry, (4) working in an industry away from home, but for Old Order employers, (5) working away from home for "English" (non-Amish) people. As males move away from farming, and espe-

cially as they move out of the home for work, gender roles begin to change. As roles change for men, female roles must change also.

In the *Gemeinschaft*, people marry people, often relatives, that they have known from childhood. In one White-buggy home I am familiar with, the father and all his siblings married second cousins, and the wife and all her siblings married second cousins. This is because marriage is restricted to one's own church affiliation, which in 1980 averaged a population of only 300 men, women, and children (Hurd 1981, p. 47). Among the Amish, divorce is almost nonexistent; spouses need each other. Most couples forge a strong working partnership in the family farm or business, and in raising children.

The main farming family lives in the main house. A newly-married couple may live temporarily with the parents of the bride or groom, or with a brother of one of the pair. Grandparents may live in the *dawdy haus*, an attached apartment with a bedroom and a sitting room. They will often take their meals with the rest of the family. In this way, large extended families live, work, and eat together on the farm.

The White-buggy Amish are a patriarchal society, in that, as in most traditional societies, men control the public sphere. For instance, only men serve on the local Amish parochial school board.

Church Structure

At the time of their baptism, Amish males, but not females, must promise to serve as church leaders if they are chosen. Both women and men may vote for church minister. All those males who receive a vote are eligible, and the leader is chosen by lot from these candidates. Every 6 months, the church congregation meets for a council meeting. Here, suggestions and grievances are freely offered by both men and women. Shall the church allow chainsaws? Cellphones? People discuss types of allowable entertainment, as well as women's headgear and dress.

How does church structure affect women's roles and the protection of women? The Amish community is organized around the church and

cannot be separated from it. The *church district* is similar to a parish, geographically bounded and incorporating up to 40 family households (although, English families may also live in this geographic area). These church districts usually have a bishop, two ministers, and a deacon, and are autonomous, that is, although they may cooperate with other church districts, they do not have to answer to anyone outside of the local group.

The church ordains three types of ministers: bishops, preachers, and deacons. These leaders are always male, always chosen by lot, and serve unpaid for life. Similar to all church members, they have an eighth-grade education. They have no special qualifications and undergo no formal religious training. Ultimately, the community depends on these leaders to make important church and community decisions, including decisions about abuse or other wrongdoings in the community.

Although these leaders make decisions, they depend on community consensus. The goal is for all members to agree on the decision, or at least assent to the will of the majority. Without consensus, the church cannot celebrate Holy Communion, since communion is a social event that celebrates, in addition to Christ's death, the unity of the church body. The bishop may excommunicate a member, but the whole church must decide to accept the wrongdoer back into fellowship. This need for consensus allows women to have some power in the church, since they, like men, have the veto power.

When women wish to make their voices heard, they may vigorously try to influence the leadership, especially by working through their husbands. They may negotiate with their husband for more decision-making power. But most women tend to accept their societal roles performing domestic work, being submissive to their husband and to male authority, and deferring to male church leadership.

Because the church meets every 2 weeks in homes, the host family's life is on display. This keeps people accountable for certain areas of lifestyle. For instance, in one White-buggy church, members were not allowed overhanging eaves on their buildings. When people arrived for church

and saw eaves on the family doghouse, their criticism eventually led the homeowner to cut them off! In this way, members are held mutually accountable. People notice and people talk and people take their concerns to the church.

Anyone in the community can talk to church leadership on their own behalf, or on behalf of a third party. Thus, a practice of abuse is harder to shield from the community. There is a formal process by which she can seek redress, and the abuser is under the same leadership authority.

Amish beliefs militate against abuse, emphasizing peacemaking and simplicity. *Gelassenheit* is a powerful Amish concept which means humility, submission, peacefulness, and a yieldedness to the community and ultimately to God. This is how one's life should be characterized.

The Amish are to maintain separation from the "English" way of doing things, worldly entertainments and businesses, worldly wealth and clothing styles, and worldly technology, including automobiles and tractors. This separation insulates, especially the young people, from alternative beliefs and lifestyles.

The church rejects war and violence, forbids members from joining the military, and even forbids members from mounting lawsuits. It is not unknown that a whole community might pick up and move to another county if they encounter an irreconcilable conflict with county authorities. Because of this strong emphasis on peacemaking and nonviolence, cases of Amish abuse of women become particularly tragic.

Cases of Abuse of Amish Women

Several case studies will illustrate the types of female abuse that have been reported in the Amish community. I have used pseudonyms in cases that have not reached the media.

A case many years ago among a conservative Amish group involved an accusation of rape that was later rescinded. Elmer was courting the minister's daughter, Ella, but then he broke it off with her. Ella accused Elmer of rape, and she and her father went to Elmer's bishop. Two of the church's ministers wished to interview each

of the young people separately, but Ella's father jumped in, and he and Elmer's bishop interviewed the young people together. At last, Ella's father instructed her that she should confess publicly before the church that she had lied, and that the rape had never happened.

Did the couple have sexual intercourse? Was she pressured into denying that it was rape? We do not know. There is no record that Elmer ever made any reparations. In this case we see how this private issue quickly became a church issue, and how church leaders attempted to resolve the situation.

In a Pike County, Missouri community, the church leadership considered Chester Mast somewhat spoiled. He had lost several jobs, and had repeatedly threatened to commit suicide. Now he stood accused of sodomy, of raping his cousin, and of sexual misconduct on several occasions both within and without the Amish community. The bishop reported trying to work with the issue internally, including punishment, eliciting Chester's confession, and the use of excommunication. [This means he could not participate in the communion service, and further, church members and family members must withdraw contact with him and not eat meals with him.] They excommunicated him on three occasions, without avail. In 2009, they finally appealed to the law enforcement authorities (Gay 2010). This case illustrates how the Amish tend to see these incidents of violence as a spiritual and moral issue, rather than a legal or pathological one. It also illustrates the reluctance with which they seek outside help.

In Guernsey County, Ohio, Norman Byler had a history of pedophilia starting in the 1970s, and was diagnosed with depression and incipient dementia. He allegedly molested several of his eight daughters and another woman. Later, his own daughter discovered he was molesting his granddaughters, ages three, five, and eight. She went to the ministers. When confronted, Norman admitted this, repented, and was excommunicated and shunned for 6 weeks. But the behavior did not stop. Eventually, the church bishop allowed a son-in-law of Norman's, Tobie Yoder, to take

Norman to a hospital. But after he was released, an English (e.g., non-Amish) neighbor saw blood on the leg of Norman's granddaughter and called Guernsey County Childrens Services. The Amish community was very angry with this whistleblower and threatened her (Labi 2005). Another of Norman's victims, Anna, tried to get outside help, and finally tried to run away. But her mother found her, and punished her by having all her teeth pulled out (Labi 2005).

In Ohio, Levi Schwartz, a confessed child molester confessed that the church had failed him. He went to the ministers thinking they would help him to change. It did not stop his behavior, and the Bishop discouraged his attempts to get outside counseling. Finally, he checked himself into Oaklawn Psychiatric Hospital, a Goshen Indiana facility specially designed for the Amish. He was afterward arrested but only sentenced to probation. He has since left the Amish (Labi 2005).

These Ohio stories suggest several things. They illustrate that many of the cases of violence against women involve incest. They illumine how the Amish church deals with serious instances of abuse, especially their reluctance to seek outside help for the perpetrator or victim. The last case illustrates the relatively light sentences sometimes given to Amish perpetrators of violence against women.

Mary Byler lived in the Viroquia, Wisconsin Amish community. Her father was killed in a buggy accident when she was five. The family moved to New Wilmington, Pennsylvania where her older cousins and brothers began sexually molesting her. By the time she was in her teens, she was being raped regularly by two brothers, in spite of everything she did to try to escape.

After she married, she began to suspect that another brother, David, was molesting her younger sister. Mary warned the church's ministers that she would press charges if they did not do something. They did nothing, so she reported the incident, and her two brothers were eventually convicted of sexual assault. But because she had gone to the authorities for help, the church promptly excommunicated her! (Labi 2005).

This incident illustrates how an Amish community might punish an individual who seeks help from outside the community.

By far the most extreme case comes not from an Amish community, but rather from a horse-and-buggy Mennonite community, originally from Canada, that has settled in Bolivia. The community accused several men of raping as many as 130 women and girls, aged 8–48. In August 2011, eight men were found guilty of rape in a Bolivian court. Also, one man was convicted of providing a sedative spray (intended for use with cattle) that apparently was used to render whole families unconscious in their homes while the rapes were taking place (Muir 2011).

It is apparent that the colony leadership was unable to deal with this grave series of events. Outside Mennonite observers say that corruption and bribery decide most legal cases in Bolivia. They suspect the colony provided \$ 100,000 to officials to keep the suspects in jail without bail. Lawyers for the accused said that some of the men made confessions to church leaders only under threat of lynching. Indeed, some church members took one man suspected of the rapes and hung him from a pole for 9 hours. He died soon after (Muir 2011).

This Mennonite case illustrates how a small, closed community can sometimes lose its cohesiveness and fail its members. Apparently, there was almost a “culture of rape” in the community. In this case, many men cooperated in carrying out these rapes. Eventually the community attempted to handle this by resorting to violence. In the end, the leadership resorted to an outside law enforcement agency.

How the Church Handles Cases of Abuse against Women

Any *Gemeinschaft* community, such as the Amish, manifests strengths and weaknesses with regard to violence against women. In the Amish church, males are in control. Only males are eligible for ministry positions, and the ministry makes the important community decisions. The minister’s

position often places him in the role of judge or counselor, a role for which he has no special training. All ministers are selected from among the male laity and have no formal training, especially training in how to deal with serious crimes. And yet, they confront and resolve most issues, including accusations of abuse.

Amish culture has clear lines of cultural practice that demand that children submit to their father, girls should defer to boys, women to men, and all should defer to church leadership. If church leadership is weak or ineffective, any abuse may continue or grow worse, and all this may be shielded from the outside world.

The Amish are a conforming society, valuing *Gelassenheit* and submission to church authority. Deviation is seen as rebellion. Thus, the perpetrator is seen as rebelling against authority. Excommunication is an ancient Christian practice going back to New Testament times that is designed to purify the local church by removing a member who continues to violate church standards. This is done by the Amish bishop and announced to the church, and in serious cases it can last 6 weeks. Excommunication has a primary goal to win the person back. An excommunicated person may still attend church, but he or she may not participate in its most sacred meal—bread and wine communion. In addition, Amish members are asked to shun the wrongdoer. Shunning means social avoidance and it has a long history. Indeed, when in the seventeenth century European Amish came into conflict with other Anabaptist groups, the Amish position was in favor of a stricter shunning.

A member can help a shunned person, but cannot receive anything from him and cannot eat with him. She can counsel him, however, and beg him to come back into the church. The main concern is that the perpetrator becomes right with God and right with the church. The ministry has a strong concern for the perpetrator’s soul, and they work hard to help him confess and seek forgiveness. Most perpetrators eventually confess their misdeeds because they believe that if they do not, they may lose their salvation.

In one small Amish community, Sarah's brother Martin was excommunicated and shunned from the church back in the 1940s because he had joined the army, and afterward, Sarah had only infrequent contact with him. Sarah and Martin had lived for years doing the delicate dance of excommunication and shunning, and therefore Sarah could not accept anything offered to her by her brother. When she visited him in 1980, she found him divorced, living in a small, rundown mobile home. He had some cookies and punch on his kitchen counter and offered some to her, letting her know that he did not make them. He was following the rules. Sarah did not take any.

After the designated period of shunning, the wrongdoer may, if he wishes, return to the church and repent on his knees before the whole congregation. Then the congregation will accept him back into fellowship. I know of no case where a person has thus repented and the congregation has refused to forgive and accept him back. After the person has been readmitted, members are expected to offer a full forgiveness, and no person, including the victim, is ever allowed to bring up the infraction again.

There is no such thing as a solitary Amish person. Leaving the Amish fellowship means abandoning one's Amishness. If a woman's husband is excommunicated and shunned from the church, she has a tough decision to make. She may separate from him and remain in fellowship with the church, or she may choose to stay with him, and thus suffer excommunication and shunning. If her husband is abusing her and she chooses to stay with him, she will be separated even more from the church community and even from her relatives, and find herself more isolated, more at risk of abuse.

In one case, a woman had a husband who was sexually abusing their daughters. Soon his sons were also abusing their sisters. The woman blamed herself for failing to sexually satisfy her husband, and thought his behavior was to some extent her fault. Some Amish people even try to cure the perpetrator with herbs. Mary Byler's mother gave her two sons some herbs that would reduce their sex drives, and perhaps keep them from abusing Mary (Labi 2005).

Saloma Furlong, a former Amish woman, wrote about the alleged abuses of Sam Mullet. (Mullet was later convicted of hate crimes against other Amish). She says, "...they [the Amish] don't recognize that there is sometimes a psychological basis for this behavior. If the person repents, he makes a public confession in church which means no one may ever speak of it again....none of the Amish I know have a way of dealing with sociopaths or sadists among them who commit great evils... So a fanatic can be spawned out of any Amish community..." (Furlong 2011, par. 5).

The church may seem more concerned with the perpetrator's reinstatement and salvation than with the needs of the victim. In the Wisconsin community, after Mary had suffered sexual abuse at the hands of her brothers and cousins for years, Mary's mother blamed her for not resisting and praying enough (Labi 2005). Since church members have an obligation to confess fornication, her brother Johnny had done so when he was 21. However, he did not say the fornication was with his sister, and that it was rape. He was excommunicated for 2 weeks. But nothing was done to help Mary. Mary warned the ministers that she would press charges but they ignored her and when she finally pressed charges, they excommunicated her! Members criticize those who take "internal troubles" outside to the public, or refer issues to the secular courts and criminal justice system.

Gelassenheit is the core attitude a member should have toward the church and the church's leadership. This attitude is demonstrated when all members, even victims, are socialized to forgive those who have sinned and then confessed. After the offender is disciplined, members are urged to forgive him, and may even be disciplined if they ever speak of the incident again. The aim here is total forgiveness. Leaders point to the Lords Prayer: "forgive us our sins as we forgive the sins of others." Many members tie the forgiveness of their own sins to their ability to forgive others. In this way, the needs of the victim are often overlooked. There are many resources inside the Amish community for friendships and a

sympathetic, listening ear, but only rarely is professional counseling sought for the victim.

Resources Outside the Community for Victims and Perpetrators

The force of law is contrary to the Christian spirit and contrary to Amish teaching. Plus, most Amish people believe that the cost of seeking outside help is greater than any benefit. The Amish are reluctant to go to outsiders because of the cost, because of a lack of trust, and because they desire to handle these issues inside the community.

The Amish see most acts of abuse as spiritual or moral problems and they often do not recognize deep-rooted psychological problems. Mr. Schwartz, an uncle of one perpetrator, expressed more concern that his nephew changes and becomes a better person than he did about the punishment his nephew received (Gay 2010).

From an outsiders viewpoint, the church is too easy on offenders whereas state law is much stricter. But even the state is sometimes lenient with the Amish. Labi (2005) observes that this often assumes the Amish community will police itself.

The Amish usually provide in-home care for people with mental health problems and do not tend to seek outside help. In one case, a wife shielded her abusing husband from legal retribution, and made excuses for him. In another case, when a man threatened suicide, the family never sought outside help. He finally killed himself with a shotgun.

The Old Order communities even tend to refuse help from fellow Anabaptists. Mennonite Central Committee, a relief and disaster response organization, has had extensive experience in dealing with abusive situations, and has offered to help both the victims and the perpetrators in the affected Mennonite communities in Bolivia. But up till now, they have declined this assistance.

In recent years two things have happened to address the few serious cases of abuse in Amish

communities. First, some Old Order people (Amish and Mennonite) are becoming more willing to seek outside help. Second, counseling organizations are recognizing the need to offer unique services to Old Order people, and some counseling services have been specifically designed to do so. More and more, the Amish community is supporting these customized centers.

Oaklawn, a Goshen, Indiana clinic sponsored by Mennonite Health Services Alliance, provides clinical services for three adult residential facilities that are constructed, maintained, staffed, and managed by the Amish people themselves. The residents help with housekeeping, food preparation, laundry, and gardening. Group therapy is conducted in the Pennsylvania German language and the Amish leaders hold periods of morning and evening “devotions.” But the clinic itself is staffed with professional counselors (Oaklawn 2010).

Lois Gerber lives in Lititz, Pennsylvania, and works for Upward Call Counseling Services, where she sees mainly women clients from Amish and Mennonite communities. She still struggles with the common perception of her clients that mental health problems are signs of spiritual weakness. She focuses on God’s unconditional love when that issue arises (Jenner 2012).

Life Ministries in Conestoga, Pennsylvania, draws about 90% of their clients from the conservative Anabaptist community (Mennonite, Amish, Brethren). They have no long-term residential programs, but do follow up with home visits. Having counselors who are known by potential clients and whose families are also known by potential clients is an advantage. It helps to promote trust. They occasionally run sex abuse workshops and conduct group therapy sessions. The local churches and religious leaders support the focus on counseling but are in opposition if the groups look or function like Bible studies.

The Counseling Center of Wayne and Holmes Counties, Ohio, has developed specialized counseling programs sensitive to the 35,000 Amish people in this area. DeRue et al. (2002) researched opinions about these services among a large sample of Amish community clients of

these counseling programs, their families, Amish support groups, and Amish leaders. All respondents agreed that family support of the patient is very important. The majority of people in the support group who responded to the survey said they would probably seek treatment for emotional problems without consulting their bishop. In contrast, 75% of the surveyed Amish ministers said that people should first consult Amish leaders before seeking treatment.

Many of the Amish people surveyed are still relying on prayer, herbs, or hard work to help cure people with mental health problems and are reluctant to access psychotropic medications. But the researchers did conclude that Amish attitudes toward outside help are changing. Overall, the Amish seem to have a positive attitude toward the counseling center (DeRue et al. 2002). Unfortunately the DeRue et al. study did not discriminate between the more progressive Amish and the more conservative Swartzentruber groups in the area.

Summary

The Amish are constantly warned by their leaders against gossip and criticism. This may encourage some people to accept a wrong rather than deal with it. There is a strong ethic of forgiveness, regardless of the offense, especially if the perpetrator confesses his wrong.

Are perpetrators sinners, criminals, or mentally ill? The Amish church traditionally has treated them as sinners in need of excommunication, followed by their repentance and forgiveness. Leaders seek outside law enforcement only as a last-ditch effort. They have been hesitant to seek psychological counseling or psychotropic medications. However, this is slowly changing as more and more counseling centers are becoming more sensitive to the Amish and conservative Mennonite cultures.

One might ask if the *structure* of Amish society provides help or hindrance in cases of abuse. Ministers are available to hear complaints, but do not have the psychological training to provide

help for the victims or perpetrators. Ministers are also embedded in the web of Amish kinship and are reluctant to act against a near relative.

Cultural norms make it difficult to go outside the community to seek help. Members do not take kindly to outsiders interfering in their personal affairs. They seem ready to forgive, but less ready to provide outside help for victims and perpetrators. A perpetrator may be excommunicated for a time, but the church has no way to force the person to seek professional help. The church deals with abuse as a sin rather than as a criminal or mental problem.

Communities are changing and the economic base is changing from farming to multiple occupations such as small businesses, traveling carpenters and masons, even working in English businesses (e.g., mobile home factories in Indiana). Necessarily, this provides more interaction with the outside world and more opportunity for people to seek outside treatment for abuse.

Outside therapists and counselors need knowledge about the Amish community. They need to appreciate how the community defines abuse, how they diagnose it, how the church deals with it, and why leaders are so reluctant to seek outside help. With this knowledge, professionals will be much more effective in working with these Old Order communities.

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