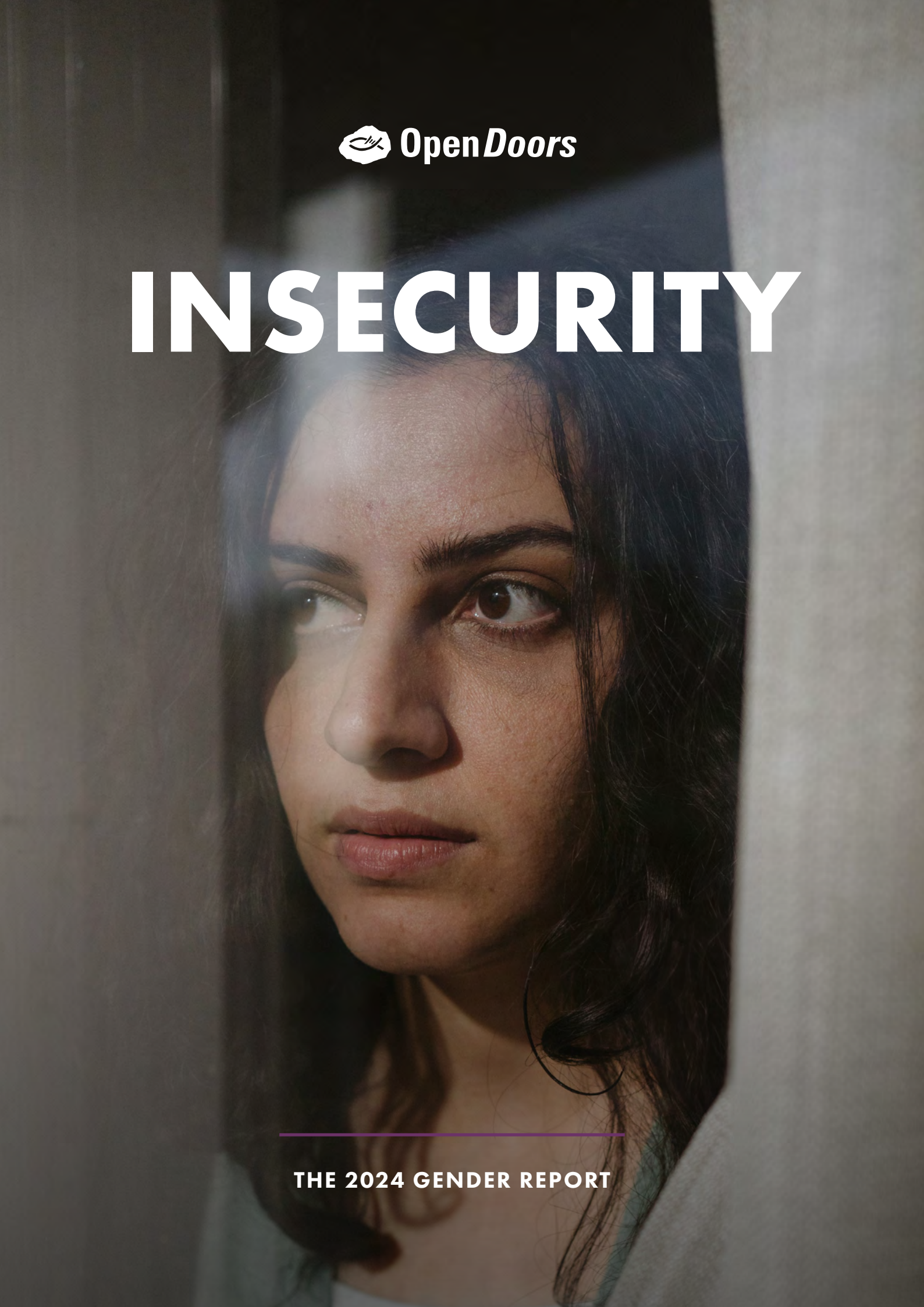

Open Doors

INSECURITY

THE 2024 GENDER REPORT

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Cover image: Simin from Iran, read more of her story on page 5
Representative image and name changed to protect her identity

1 March 2024

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Key findings

Insecure contexts and associated violence compound existing vulnerabilities, exacerbating certain forms of gender-specific religious persecution (GSRP).

Violence acts as a spark that exposes and exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities. Accordingly, in contexts where violence is high, faith-related sexual violence for women and physical violence for men, including lethal violence, are more common. Insecurity can incite new forms of violence as well as exacerbate everyday violence, such as intimate partner violence (IPV).

Marginalized Christians, especially women, can be particularly vulnerable in insecure contexts, such as settings of conflict, forced displacement and criminal violence.

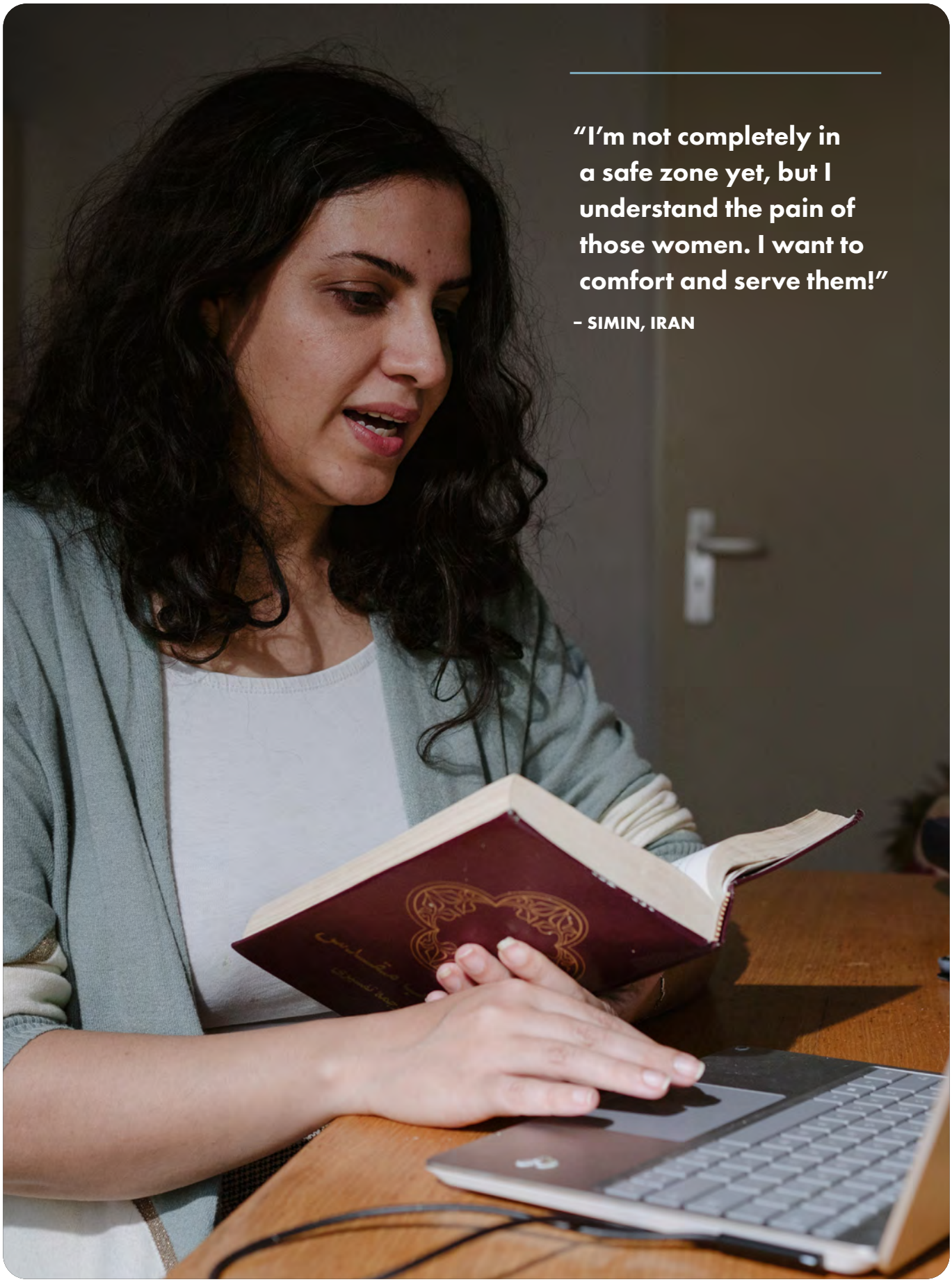
There is no single experience of being a religious minority. Many factors impact a person's experience: their geographical location, political views, gender, age and health needs. By and large, however, it is those already vulnerable who become more at risk when violence escalates. Women belonging to religious minorities are often one such group.

Violent insecurity leaves an indelible imprint on societies for decades.

Even when violence formally ceases, men and women of marginalized religious communities still face compounding challenges. This can include the legacies of trauma, the challenges of forced displacement settings and continued marginalization when societies restructure, all of which can be impacted by religion and gender.

Local faith actors (LFAs) are uniquely placed to respond to gender- and religious-specific needs.

LFAs are often the first responders in times of crisis. They are trusted by and often have easy access to impacted communities. They are uniquely equipped to understand the needs of religious minorities, including their psychological and spiritual needs. Increasingly, they are working towards gender-sensitive approaches.



"I'm not completely in a safe zone yet, but I understand the pain of those women. I want to comfort and serve them!"

– SIMIN, IRAN

Simin* became a Christian in Iran where she was part of a house church. She and her husband were arrested and interrogated, and Simin lost her job at a hospital. She and her family fled Iran, now facing the insecurity of life as refugees. Simin now serves other women in situations like hers. **Name changed and representative image used to protect her identity.*

Introduction

A pastor in rural Mexico.

Gender-specific religious persecution is unrelenting. Insecure contexts compound existing vulnerabilities, exacerbating certain forms of gender-specific religious persecution.

There are multiple reasons why a place may be insecure – economic collapse, natural disaster, political instability and conflict to name a few. These often interrelating elements undermine human security[1] and aggravate existing vulnerabilities, making it even harder for an individual, family or church community to bear.

One of the dynamics that can create insecurity is a high level of direct violence. **This report will primarily focus on violent forms of insecurity (hereafter "violent insecurity")**, such as religiously targeted violence, armed conflict and criminal violence. The consequences of insecurity are also significant; they include impoverishment, forced displacement and a normalization of violence. While no setting may ever be completely secure and safe, there is a spectrum of security to insecurity – with the countries under focus in this report towards the extremely insecure end of the scale.

In some extreme instances, violence impacts entire regions and countries; the vast majority of the population feels the weight of insecurity. In other contexts, **violence has a disproportionate impact on specific people groups**. In the Manipur conflict in India, for example, both the causes and implications of insecurity compound existing ethnic, gendered and religious vulnerabilities. As explored in the following sections, violent forms of insecurity tend to see women and girls more vulnerable to sexual violence, whereas men and boys face a heightened risk of physical violence. The story of two Kuki Christian women in Manipur experiencing severe sexual violence, as the father and brother of one victim is beaten to death, is a shocking example of this.[2]

There are many other forms of insecure contexts which often have local manifestations. For example, the struggle for territorial control between criminal gangs in Mexico has made Christians living in affected areas more vulnerable to attack. Church leaders, often male in Mexico, can be particularly targeted because of the perceived threat they pose to criminal operations.[3]

But there is hope. Most notably, **local faith actors (LFAs) are uniquely placed to support individuals and communities impacted by gender-vulnerabilities, religious persecution and insecurity**, as well as to advocate on their behalf. Around the world, they are helping to meet the physical, mental and spiritual needs of highly vulnerable people, although often may need external support to do so.

Seven years of gender-specific religious persecution (GSRP) research findings have confirmed a clear pattern, that whether male or female, young or old, religious persecution is rarely experienced as a single, isolated Pressure point. A multiplicity of actors enact GSRP in a myriad of ways, shaped heavily by individual socio-economic contexts and legal environments.

For men and boys, GSRP is focused, visible and severe. It is marked by targeted **physical violence**, including lethal violence, as well as by state and economic pressures.

For women and girls, it is complex, hidden and violent. It is characterized by **sexual violence** and forced marriage, as well as by insidious, invisible violence behind closed doors.

[1] What is Human Security? UN Trust Fund for Human Security, 2018.
[2] Manipur assault video emboldens women to speak out. Arya, D., BBC News, 23 July 2023.
[3] Mexico: Full Country Dossier. Open Doors International, May 2023.

The global picture of GSRP

The gender-specific ways Christian men and women experience religious persecution remain remarkably consistent over seven years of research. Commonly, it targets men for their perceived strength as leaders and financial providers, and women for their perceived sexual and familial honor. In countries where Christians face acute levels of persecution for their faith – whether driven by violent religious groups, extended family or other drivers of religious persecution **– a person's gender can be one of the factors that charts the course of persecution they face.**

It's difficult to compartmentalize systemic gender inequality into one neat box. It seeps into the way communities, families and individuals experience their everyday life – from how they access basic necessities such as food and shelter to how their work or home life is structured. In the same way, religious persecution can encompass the pressures within family life and community life, experiences of violence, and beyond. **When these two structural forces meet and intertwine in gender-specific religious persecution, the outcomes can have a devastating impact on the way someone experiences their everyday life.** The consequences of which, can reverberate for years.

The following sections give insight into the global picture of GSRP, providing essential context. Analysis of how this interacts with insecurity in particular, begins at page 8.

Pastor Daniel (name changed) from Colombia.

Top pressures: Christian men and boys

GSRP analysis of the 2024 World Watch List (WWL) top 50 countries shines a light on how Christian men and boys are most likely to experience gender-specific forms of religious persecution. **The top five Pressure points are consistent with previous years of GSRP research:** physical violence, psychological violence, governmental imprisonment, economic harassment and military/militia conscription.[4]

Top 5 Male Pressure Points

Men and boys particularly risk experiencing faith-related physical violence in 39 of the 50 WWL countries, places where Christians face severe hostility on account of their religious affiliation.

Across many (although not all) of the countries under study, church leaders are predominantly male. As such, they are **exposed to specific and violent persecution for their role as leaders and spiritual providers for the faith community.** Pastors or church leaders may be ambushed as they are traveling between congregations, or in contexts where the church is underground, house group leaders may be hunted down and assaulted.

In Colombia, pastors have been forced to flee their homes because of risk of attacks and extortion. Exemplifying these dangers, since March 2021, the Bishop of Buenaventura reported that he has been threatened by armed groups with the use of explosives for denouncing violence and drug trafficking in the region.[5] This is one of many such cases.

Men's perceived social role of "protector" is strategically undermined by groups who target male heads of household for repeated acts of torture, increasing pressure to recant their faith and impacting their ability to keep their family safe. Even children can be targets of physical abuse, with reports of boys in primary school experiencing beatings just because they are Christians.

In military contexts and for those who have converted from another religious background, the risk of physical abuse and torture can be even higher and the costs even greater for those who choose the Christian faith. In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Christian men and boys in particular are subject to recruitment into militia groups, targeted kidnappings, and killings.[6]

In addition to attacks on their bodies, **Christian men and boys experience attempts to exert pressure on their minds.**

[4] For more detail, see Appendix B on page 28. For the 2024 WWL countries, see Appendix D on page 32.
5 Persisten amenazas contra la vida de obispo de Colombia. Verdad en Libertad, 8 February 2022.
[6] Why Do Soldiers rape? Masculinity, Violence and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC). Baaz, M.E. & Stern, M., International Studies Quarterly, 53(2), pp.495–518, 2009.

Psychological violence remains another leading form of persecution of men and boys. This can include close monitoring and surveillance, such as phone calls and movements being monitored, pressure to participate in rites of the majority religion, and/or ongoing psychological pressure to recant. At times, the pressure is so intense that Christians may experience threats on their life.

As part of the psychological pressure exerted on Christian men in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), they are made to attend Friday prayers and even go on a 'forced hajj' pilgrimage to Mecca. Participating in this tradition is thought to influence someone on a practical and spiritual level, aligning their loyalty to Islam.

The impact of repeated cycles of violence, both physical and emotional, cannot be underestimated, causing **long-lasting psychological distress to Christian men and boys**. The ripple effect of this extends to their families, communities and churches.

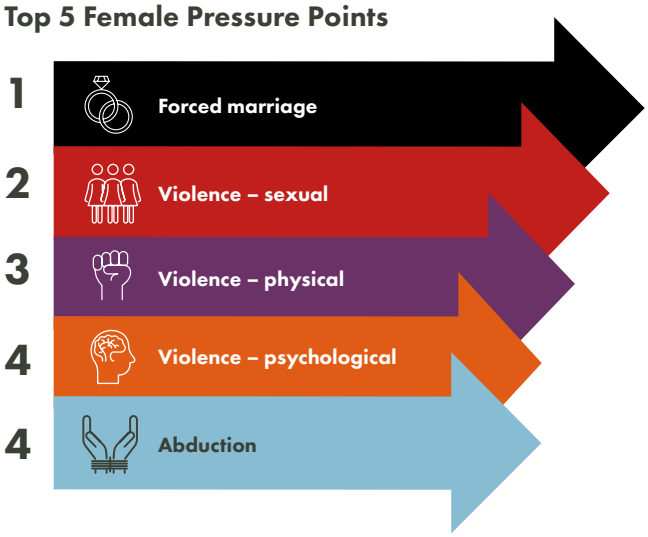
Top pressures: Christian women and girls

Globally, women and girls are subject to numerous pressures and disadvantages in their everyday lives. For Christian women and girls, these pressures compound, meaning they experience specific gendered forms of religious persecution.

Across the WWL countries, **women and girls commonly experience persecution within the private sphere, often behind closed doors or perpetrated by those already known to them within their existing communities and relationships.** For example, a regional expert on Morocco explains the situations of converts: "the family exerts all types of violence and pressure so that the Christian desists and returns to the religion of the family. Both men and women are affected by this type of persecution but women are much more vulnerable and also less independent in the Moroccan society."

The top five Pressure points for 2024 displays a strong pattern experienced by women across previous years of GSRP research: forced marriage, sexual violence, physical violence, psychological violence, and abduction.

Top 5 Female Pressure Points



Latifa (name changed) from North Africa was rejected by her family when she chose to convert to Christianity from Islam. She was put under house arrest for two weeks before being thrown out.

This year, faith-based forced marriage was identified as a risk for Christian women and girls in 84% of the WWL countries; a concerningly common practice. Forced marriage is a form of exploitation and control and in many contexts, this risk is interwoven with sexual violence. For example, in the Horn of Africa, young female Christian converts from a Muslim background can be forced into marriage to keep them from dishonoring their families for leaving the faith. A regional expert notes that often they are forced to marry much older men. Sexual violence and forced marriage are employed as a means of intimidation and control, with these strategies targeted at preventing Christian women and girls from pursuing their faith in Christ.

In some areas of Mali, DRC, Kyrgyzstan and Mozambique, bridal kidnapping on faith-based grounds is a risk. Christian women and girls can be abducted in order to be forcibly married to soldiers and other non-Christians, frequently to Muslim men.

Across the MENA region, women and girls who have converted from another faith background such as Islam risk being coerced into marrying a non-Christian man who carries some religious authority or who is committed to the faith, with the hope that he will influence them to recant. This can involve young girls being forcibly married to much older men.

Pre-existing attitudes and socially-constructed ideas of female honor heighten the vulnerability of women and girls to sexual discrimination and abuse as a form of GSRP. A regional expert on Oman explains, "women see all eyes on them...women have always had to earn honor, men have always had it."

The GSRP faced by women and girls is **consistently more complex and multifaceted** than the persecution faced by men and boys. The average number of Pressure points per country for women and girls in 2024 was 8.4, in comparison to 6.6 Pressure points per country for men and boys. This does not speak to the severity of persecution, but does suggest that women and girls especially face a multiplicity of types of pressure and violence.

A detailed breakdown of regional dynamics can be found in *A Web of Forces: The 2023 Gender Report*.[7]

[7] A Web of Forces: The 2023 Gender Report. Open Doors International, 2023.

GSRP & Insecurity

Levels of violence fluctuate from place to place and time to time. While Christians can face religiously targeted violence in a whole range of contexts, there are certain areas where overall levels of violence are particularly high.[8]

While there are multiple ways to identify the WWL countries where levels of violence are severe, one way is to compare data with another source, such as the Global Conflict Tracker. It highlights ongoing violent insecurities around the world, including armed conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and civil war in Sudan, as well as situations of criminal violence such as in Mexico and violent extremism in the Sahel, where WWR has highlighted targeted violence against Christians.[9] **21 countries of the 2024 WWL top 50 are identified as in situations of violent insecurity** according to within the Global Conflict Tracker, indicating the pervasiveness of violence and insecurity.

There is no single way that violence interacts with religion; it is increasingly recognized that religious identities, beliefs and communities play significant and varied roles in contexts of violence, such as in conflict.[10] **One of the ways that contexts of violence and insecurity interact with religion is as an exacerbating factor for GSRP.**

In general, **insecurity inflames existing injustices**, such as poverty, racial injustice, and gendered inequalities. Where there are already acute levels of religious persecution, situations with high levels of violence can create further opportunities for persecutors to target Christians. Acute levels of religious persecution can also create high levels of violence, with a minority group such as Christians being targeted.

"In areas [of Cameroon] affected by armed conflicts and religious tensions, Christians...[can be] at heightened risk of violence and exploitation. Female members of the Christian community, in particular, are vulnerable to forced marriages as a means of intimidation and control in regions experiencing conflict-related challenges."

– A REGIONAL EXPERT ON CAMEROON

For example, **belonging to a marginalized religious community can make someone particularly vulnerable to sexual violence in times of conflict, where targeted, gendered sexual violence can be hidden within situations where violence is already prevalent.**[11]

Conflict-related sexual violence continues to be pervasive, both as a weapon of war and as an indirect consequence of increased instability.[12] Sexual violence is an abuse that "is often linked to, and stems from, harmful social and traditional practices related to perceptions of gender and power dynamics surrounding them."[13] Furthermore, the *Report of the UN Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence* comments that "the profile of the victim...is frequently an actual or perceived member of a persecuted political, ethnic or religious minority,"[14] suggesting an interplay between religious persecution, gender dynamics and conflict. For more on this, see During violent insecurity.

Suspected Boko Haram attackers shot four of Adija's family members, leaving her a widow at the young age of 25, Cameroon.

But GSRP is not just at play during high levels of violence – it can shape and be shaped by the surrounding context before violence escalates and after it de-escalates too. It can become part of daily life. **Exploring this interaction helps enrich understandings of religious persecution, dynamics of insecurity and gendered vulnerabilities**, as both distinct and enmeshed phenomena.

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[8] WWL 2024 Article on violence. Open Doors International, WWL 2024 Compilation of all main documents, pp.34-66, January 2024.
[9] WWL 2024 Executive Summary. Open Doors International, WWL 2024 Compilation of all main documents, pp.13-15, January 2024.
[10] On the Significance of Religion in Conflict and Conflict Resolution. Schliesser, C., Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, S. & Kollontai, P., Routledge, London, 2020.
[11] 2020 Gender-specific religious persecution. Open Doors International, February 2020.
[12] Conflict-related sexual violence: Report of the United Nations Secretary-General. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, July 2023.
[13] p.2, ICRC Strategy on Sexual Violence 2018-2022, International Committee of the Red Cross, 2018.
[14] p. 3, Conflict-related sexual violence: Report of the United Nations Secretary-General. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, July 2023.

Before violence escalates

Much of the violence and discrimination that is present in situations of insecurity already exists in society, even before insecurity and violence escalate. Contexts of insecurity and violence are fed by and perpetuate inequality and social hierarchies. GSRP research over seven years has outlined how religious affiliation and gender can contribute to inequality and dictate positions in social hierarchies.[15]

When violent insecurity escalates, these patterns of inequality don't disappear. Instead, they mutate, exacerbated by wider contexts of violence. Attention therefore needs to be paid before situations escalate to the pre-existing vulnerabilities that a person, family or community might hold.

Pre-existing patterns of GSRP

Gender-based violence can be used against women, girls, men and boys to assert and reproduce gender roles and norms.[16] When thinking about persecution against Christians, this **is commonly used to reinforce notions of gender and identity that are intertwined with other belief systems, hierarchies and majority religions.** For example, in Niger, Christian women are vulnerable to sexual harassment because they do not meet Islamic dress codes. In India, a regional expert comments: "[the] rural landless, migrant workers, some itinerant caste groups[17] and easily identified women such as Catholic Nuns or Muslim women in Purdah become victims of violence, and often of sexual violence." In Syria and across the wider region of the Middle East, women who have converted from Islam can face rape and abuse, considered a traditionally acceptable marital right of the husband.

Despite the near universality of gender violence, local manifestations are highly variable. They vary depending on how gender is defined and what resources are available to those who have been harmed.[18] **Kinship structures, gender inequalities, and levels of violence in the wider society are all factors that influence how men and women experience gender-specific abuse in different places.** A regional expert on Bangladesh summarizes the country context: "Both men and women experience violence, but the distinguishing feature is that men most commonly are subjected to visible acts, often in public, of religious persecution, whereas women more commonly experience invisible persecution which often involve shame and sexuality."

There are also non-violent patterns of GSRP. A key one is **socio-economic vulnerability**. Men can be culturally perceived to be the financial provider for their family. As such, they can be particularly targeted by economic forms of persecution. For example, Economic harassment via business/job/work access is a Pressure point that has consistently been characteristic of the persecution of Christian men across multiple years of research.[19]

How does this connect to insecurity?

How a society treats its most vulnerable in times of stability gives some indication of how they will be treated in times of insecurity. Insecure contexts can exacerbate those inequalities that are already present in a society. Ever-present gender disparities and other overlapping inequalities and violences shape how people experience, and are harmed in, situations of instability. For more on this see During violent insecurity.

Violent insecurity provides an opportunity for inequality to be reframed. But there is also a risk of inequalities becoming further entrenched as people strive for stability. **When tracking examples of gender violence through pre, current, and post-violent states, a thread of gender inequality and discrimination can be traced through each.**[20] Women and men also have different access to resources, such as power and decision making.

One example of where people are trying to put a stop to the escalation of violence is the field of conflict prevention. There is general consensus that conflict prevention necessitates looking at the structures of a society that impact the complexities and impact of conflict.[21] **A holistic view of such structures includes considerations of gender inequality and religious persecution.**

Shalman (name changed) from Bangladesh started following Jesus in secret. When local religious authorities found out, they tried to force him to return to Islam, but he refused. He was beaten up and publicly shamed.

[15] See for example, A Web of Forces: The 2023 Gender Report. Open Doors International, 2023. To explore other GSRP research, see Gender-specific religious persecution. Open Doors Analytical [password: freedom], accessed 31 January 2024.
[16] Gender violence: A Cultural Perspective. Merry, S.E., Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
[17] As an expert in India shares: "In the Indian context, the caste system adds another layer of vulnerability. Young Dalit men and women face violent attacks from dominant caste people – usually for marrying or for being in a relationship with someone from an upper caste. When these young people convert to Christianity, hoping to escape this discrimination and violence, they face social ostracism from their own families."
[18] Ibid.
[19] Percentages of top 50 countries recording Economic harassment via business/job/work access as a Pressure point affecting Christian men and boys remain within the 65%-75% range for the last six years.
[20] Gender Equality and Peacebuilding: An operational framework. CIDA, January 2001.
[21] Contemporary conflict resolution. Ramsbotham, O., Miall, H., & Woodhouse, T., Polity, 2016.

Case study: Sara in Iraq

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An example of how gendered vulnerabilities can play out in one person's life can be seen in Sara's story. Converting to Christianity in Iraq meant that she encountered many obstacles, shaped by her unique vulnerabilities of being female, young and from a Muslim background. Her story gives insight to what gender specific religious persecution can look like in an everyday setting.

Sara (name changed) grew up in Baghdad with her Muslim father. She lived in a neighborhood of mostly Christian families and her best friend was a Christian. When she was 15, she began to be more curious about her friend's church, but the security guard at the door wouldn't let her in because she was a Muslim.

Her curiosity continued, reading the Bible and Islamic books to compare and memorizing Christian prayers given to her by her friend, even though her father had said the Bible was a fabricated book.

Sara reading her Bible, Iraq.

"I would have preferred if you ran away with a man to get married and not done this."

– SARA'S FATHER, IRAQ

In her search to learn more, she found online a man who had also converted from Islam. Influenced by his videos, Sara began judging her family members, even verbally attacking them. Her family responded angrily. One day during dinner they had an argument and Sara's father flipped over the table and put his daughter under house arrest. He took her phone and locked his daughter in her room.

"I felt very scared and shocked, as my father has always been kind to me." For ten days, she was locked inside the room and given nothing to eat. "Even though my situation seemed helpless and impossible, I still had hope and faith in Christ." But when her father finally opened the door at the end of the ten days, Sara's situation was even worse. "He told me, 'Get ready, tomorrow you will marry your stepmother's nephew. I did not raise you right, maybe he will.'" Again, he locked the door behind him.

That night, Sara went to bed with the hope of not waking up the next morning.

Miraculously, Sara was able to escape. In her own words: "Someone came like a light, held my hand and dragged me out of the locked room. I felt like I was in a trance, it was like a dream. He put me in a silver car. That morning, I woke up in a hotel room in a city in north Iraq, hours away from where I lived."

After two days, Sara's father came to her. "Who took you out of your room and brought you here? The house camera and the camera at the checkpoint were stopped only at the time you left?" he asked. "I would have preferred if you ran away with a man to get married and not done this."

Her father returned to Baghdad, while Sara stayed in northern Iraq. She explains that she has faced many difficult situations as men have tried to exploit her for sex; living alone is not considered acceptable for women in Iraq.

Finally, she was connected with a restaurant owner who was a Christian. The owner found her a house and paid her rent, and also got her a job where she still works. Later, when she sent for her papers to get married, she was told that her dad had erased her name from the family records. "I expected this to happen," she says. "However, hearing this and seeing it for real, broke me." The loss of family is one of the most painful consequences of following Jesus, especially for an unmarried woman in Iraq.

Unfortunately, Sara's story is not uncommon. For example, incarceration by family members is a challenge for Christian women and girls around the world. In 2024 data, it found to be a risk for female Christians in more than half of WWL top 50 countries.

Throughout her difficult journey, Sara continued to hold on to her faith and pursue it. She regularly attends a church where she is accepted and can grow in her faith — one of the Centers of Hope that Open Doors helps support. Despite her challenges, Sara's hope is to get an identity card that says she is a Christian: a dream "that I belong to Him in my ID as well."

During violent insecurity

Contexts of violent insecurity exacerbate particular forms of GSRP, notably sexual violence.

Violent patterns of GSRP are more common in countries experiencing violent insecurity, and can be intensified by these insecurities. When comparing characteristic Pressure points between WWL countries experiencing violent insecurity as identified by the Global Conflict Tracker, and the wider set of top 50 countries, **sexual violence for Christian women and physical violence for Christian men occur across a higher percentage** in the former.[22] When similar analysis was conducted using data from the International Crisis Group in 2021, the data followed the same pattern.[23]

Sexual violence

Sexual violence that happens in contexts of violent insecurity, such as conflict, displacement or criminal violence **may have a direct or indirect connection to the wider violence in which it sits**. The nature of violent insecurity may provide motivation to the perpetrator and/or dictate the nature of the act of GRSP, including that of sexual violence.

Insecurity may also lead to, or be catalyzed by, a **culture of impunity**, a normalization of violence or a weakened capacity of the state to protect and respond, facilitating an increase of sexual violence.

A culture of impunity and lack of rule of law can suppress the reporting of violence, which can create opportunities for persecutors. Unequal gender norms and the marginalization of religious communities, amongst other factors, creates inequalities in the likelihood of receiving justice. Accordingly, **in some contexts, Christian women and girls in particular may become 'easy targets.'** For example, research has demonstrated how a confluence of factors in Pakistan, including a lack of legislation, facilitates the early marriage of minority girls.[24]

Sexual violence is not an inevitable "by-product" of insecurity and war but can be a strategy of war and a form of insecurity itself. **Existing marginalization and discrimination against religious minorities reinforces their vulnerabilities during conflict and other contexts of violent insecurity, heightening the risk of sexual violence.** This is particularly pronounced for minority women.

For example, in the Central African Republic, "Christian women and girls face heightened risks of rape…and forced marriage during attacks by militants on civilian villages." A regional expert continues, "Instances of sexual slavery for abducted girls are reported." With decades of conflict and

When Charlotte from the Central African Republic became a Christian, her father threatened to kill her. His threats did not work, so he planned to marry her off to a 45-year-old Muslim businessman. With support from her church, Charlotte fled to safety to live with an aunt.

political instability, and one of the world's highest poverty rates, economic conditions are crippling[25] – to the extent that in some cases parents may feel there's no other option than to consent to a daughter's marriage in exchange for significant gifts. This can create further vulnerabilities.

In conflict, sexual violence may be directly or indirectly linked to the conflict setting. Examples of sexual violence that may happen in conflict include rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, and forced marriage. It "is brutal, deliberate and [often] intended to punish and/or humiliate individuals and their communities."[26] Sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war to spread terror, shift the ethnic balance in contested areas, enforce population displacement or to provide "reward" for soldiers.[27]

However, militarized sexual violence, such as rape as a "weapon of war" is not the only form of sexual violence that religious minorities are subject to in contexts of violent insecurity. **Everyday forms of sexual and gender-based violence are exacerbated by high levels of insecurity.** Indeed, intimate partner violence (IPV)

[22] For reasoning why the Global Conflict Tracker was used, see page 8.
[23] In 2024, analysis was conducted using conflict countries identified by: Global Conflict Tracker. Council on Foreign Relations, accessed 26 January 2024. In 2021, analysis was conducted using conflict countries identified by: International Crisis Group, accessed 31 January 2024.
[24] Conversion without Consent: A report on the abductions, forced conversions, and forced marriages of Christian girls and women in Pakistan. Jubilee Campaign, November 2022.
[25] Central African Republic Poverty Assessment 2023 – A Road Map Towards Poverty Reduction in the Central African Republic. World Bank, 16 November 2023.
[26] Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: 5 things you should know. Kovac, V., Center for Civilians in Conflict, 17 June 2022.
[27] Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and the Policy Implications of Recent Research. Wood, E.J., The International Review of the Red Cross 96(894), pp.457-478, 2014.

remains the most common form of sexual violence both within and outside conflict affected communities.[28] For example, research has found that during the Yemeni civil war, patterns of domestic violence have increased, most prominently sexual violence.[29] One regional expert commented that in Yemen, "there is a great risk of sexual assault targeting Christian women and girls, especially migrants from Africa in Houthi-controlled areas."

Hidden violence

GSRP research has long acknowledged the invisibility that can be at play.[30] Due to the hidden and stigmatized nature of sexual violence, data can be hard to gather. The inherent instability of insecure situations provides extra obstacles.

During conflict and peace, women are more likely to experience IPV than any other forms of violence. Forced displacement is also associated with increased rates of IPV.[31] **During times of violent insecurity, the protective structures of individuals, families, and communities are strained, and in turn, IPV prevalence is aggravated.** For Christian women or girls, the domestic sphere is often "the hidden location for their family or partners to apply pressure and violence."[32] For some women and girls who may be the only converts within their household, violence and pressure may be used "to 'correct' their choice of religion."[33] Persecution within the home is less easily monitored, and may be unreported due to fear of bringing dishonor to the family and/or reprisal.

Women are disproportionately the targets of sexual violence during times of both stability and instability because of historical and structural inequalities.[34] However, **sexual violence targeting men and boys is reportedly higher than often assumed or admitted** during conflict.[35] Widely underreported, it is perceived as shameful and a sign of weakness in common contexts of expectations for men to be 'protectors' rather than 'victims.'

Why does sexual violence at home increase during conflict?[36]

- **Household stress and poverty may increase** and in turn, increase rates of domestic violence or sexual exploitation. In addition, alcohol and drug use may increase with exposure to violence and increased substance use has been linked to increased rates of domestic and sexual violence.
- **Unequal power and increased controlling behaviors** may increase during armed conflict and violent insecurity as men may seek to 'protect' women and family codes.
- **Child, early and forced marriages** rates may increase as families may not be able to support their children, may seek to protect their children from sexual violence or to protect family honor.
- **Changing gender roles due to violence, conflict and displacement** may mean that men are unable to fulfil traditional masculine gender roles such as providing financially or protecting their families from violence. Men's belief that they do not meet ideals for masculinity has been linked to the perpetration of sexual violence during conflict.[37] For many women, contexts of insecurity can up-end traditional gender roles and creates opportunities for women to take on new roles, such as earning money outside of the home, often contextually seen as "masculine". However, these changes in gender roles may contribute to IPV as men try to restore their position of power in the household.
- **Normalization of violence.** Violent conflict can desensitize a person's perception of violence which can lead to an increased acceptance. As the normal 'rules' of society are suspended, behaviors that go against traditional social norms, such as rape, become commonplace.[38]
- **Families are often restricted to their living place** during times of conflict and insecurity and therefore have few options for how to release tensions and quarrels. For example, during Covid-19, rates of IPV were seen to increase as households were put under state lockdowns and people were told they couldn't leave their homes.[39]

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[28] IPV is defined by the WHO as "any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship." p.1, Understanding and addressing violence against women: intimate partner violence. World Health Organization, 27 November 2012.
[29] Fragile Walls: A Study of domestic violence against women during the war in Yemen (2014-2021). Mwatana for Human Rights, August 2022.
[30] WWL 2019 Gender-specific religious persecution: Analysis and Implications. Open Doors International, February 2019.
[31] Forced displacement and violence against women: A Policy Brief. Arango, D.J., et al., World Bank, 2021.
[32] p.12, 2020 Gender-specific religious persecution. Open Doors International, February 2020.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018. World Health Organization, 9 March 2021.
[35] Into the Mainstream: Addressing Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Conflict. Dolan, C., 2014.
[36] Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence. Moser, C. & Clark, F., Bloomsbury Publishing, April 2001.
[37] Why Do Soldiers rape? Masculinity, Violence and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC). Baaz, M.E. & Stern, M., International Studies Quarterly, 53(2), pp.495–518, 2009.; Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens. Wright, H., Saferworld, 2014.
[38] Why Do Soldiers rape? Masculinity, Violence and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC). Baaz, M.E. & Stern, M., International Studies Quarterly, 53(2), pp.495–518, 2009.
[39] The COVID-19 pandemic and intimate partner violence: Collection Articles. BMB Public Health, last accessed 15 February 2024.

Case study: Manipur

One of the forms violent insecurity can take is conflict, and religious persecution can be intertwined with conflict dynamics in a myriad of ways. Religious identity has the potential to make already marginalized communities especially vulnerable to violence.[40] Women's bodies in particular, have been described as a **"battleground during riots and conflict."**[41] This was recently evidenced in the Indian State of Manipur, which erupted into violence on the 3rd May 2023.[42]

Conflict context

A peaceful Tribal Solidarity March, organized to protect a recent decision by the Manipur High Court that was considering giving official tribal status to the Meitei community, ended in aggressive clashes between the Meitei and Kuki-Zomi communities. The Kukis (Christian majority) feared that this development would allow the Meiteis (Hindu majority) to strengthen their already strong influence on government and society and allow them to buy land in predominately Kuki areas.[43]

By mid-August, an estimated 160 persons had been killed, mostly from the Kuki ethnic community. **Serious human rights violations and abuses impacted thousands**, including forced displacement, extrajudicial killings, destruction of homes and churches, torture and wide-scale sexual violence.[44]

Bibles burned in Manipur violence, India.

The roles of religion and ethnicity

Reports agree that the **factors underpinning this conflict are multifaceted and complex**. Migration from Myanmar has heightened tensions, unemployment has pushed youth into various militias, and drugs are rife. Many media reports propose that this conflict is primarily rooted in ethnicity. Indeed, editor of the Frontier Manipur, Dhiren Sadokpam, specifically stated that "this time, the conflict is strictly rooted in ethnicity, not religion."[45]

"Effects of the violent incidents that occurred in Manipur still continues. Women and girls especially have been victims of these incidents. They have been targeted irrespective of their tribe because of their gender and faith. From loss of property, to rape and death, they have suffered through many forms of violence. Young mothers who gave birth while escaping from their villages now live in IDP camps with newborns under minimum facilities. Videos of Kuki women being paraded naked, that were shared on social media speaks of the brutality and the severity of these incidents. Yet, these are only the tip of the iceberg. Many cases of sexual violence go unreported due to fear of losing their lives and the shame."

– EXPERTS IN THE FIELD

Ethnic tensions represent a core root of this conflict, but it is impossible to remove religion from the picture. Archbishop Dominic Lumon of Imphal, head of the Catholic Church in Manipur, shared that "the undercurrent of religious intolerance stands out… subtle attack on Christianity seems to have found a clean and unsuspecting space."[46] UN experts too, have specifically highlighted the intersecting vulnerability of victims on the basis of their ethnic and religious identity, as well as their gender:

"It is particularly concerning that the violence seems to have been preceded and incited by hateful and inflammatory speech that spread online and offline to justify the atrocities committed against the Kuki ethnic minority, particularly women, on account of their ethnicity and religious belief."[47]

[40] Guidance Note: Protecting Vulnerable Religious Minorities in Conflict and Crisis Settings. Religious Freedom Institute, January 2020.
[41] Manipur: India outrage after women paraded naked in violence-hit state. Mollan, C., BBC News, 20 July 2023.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Manipur violence: What is happening and why. Baker, G., BBC News, 20 July 2023.
[44] India: UN experts alarmed by continuing abuses in Manipur. OHCHR, 4 September 2023.
[45] Manipur violence: What is happening and why. Baker, G., BBC News, 20 July 2023.
[46] Violence in Manipur, North-east India. Investigative Report to the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, 21 June 2023.
[47] India: UN experts alarmed by continuing abuses in Manipur. OHCHR, 4 September 2023.

While Kukis have mostly been the victims of targeted attacks, Meitei Christians have also experienced large scale violence. A Meitei Pastor, whose church was burned to the ground, shared: **"We are facing hostility by the Meiteis on the basis that we are Christians, and from the Kukis on the basis that we are Meiteis."**[48] While primarily unreported, there are indications that many Meitei women have also experienced sexual violence.[49]

Sexual violence against women and girls

A graphic video that captured events from May 4th, a day after the violence erupted, showed two Kuki women called Glory and Mercy[50] forced to walk naked through a large Meitei mob, shortly before they were allegedly stripped and gang-raped.[51] "I was treated like an animal," shared one of the victims, "It was hard enough to live with that trauma, but then two months later when the video of the attack went viral, I almost lost all hope to continue living." Highlighting the long-term rippling effects of sexual violence, the second woman shared: "I find it hard to face other people, in my own community. My pride is gone. I will never be the same again." Both women had to flee their homes and went into hiding.[52]

Field experts have collated similar stories of sexual violence against Christian women, all of whom were attacked by Meitei youth. Victims and family members of victims have little hope of justice, with cases rarely being investigated:

- A 24-year old daughter of a Church Pastor, for example, was sexually molested by a mob of vigilantes before being murdered. No police action has been taken.
- A 52-year old woman was stripped naked and sexually molested by a mob of vigilantes. No police action has yet been taken.
- A 21-year old woman was raped and murdered by the vigilante mob in Konung Manang area of Imphal, Manipur by members of a vigilante mob. The police have taken no further action in this case.

The full scale of sexual violence incidents is masked, as many victims choose not to report attacks due to shame. **Others live in fear of the authorities, who were widely reported to be bystanders to attacks and in some instances, actively complicit.** Some government officials

Pastor Mohan (name changed), looking at a destroyed church in Manipur. He was away during the violence, but his wife and his children suffered death threats, saw the escalation and destruction, and managed to escape their village.

[48] Violence in Manipur, North-east India. Investigative Report to the International Religious Freedom or Belief Alliance, 21 June 2023.
[49] Manipur assault video emboldens women to speak out. Arya, D., BBC News, 23 July 2023.
[50] Names of the two women have been changed, and reflect the aliases used in the BBC's article: Manipur women in naked assault video 'will not give up'. Arya, D., BBC News, 10 November 2023.
[51] Manipur state, India: Shocking video emerges of sexual assault amid ethnic violence. Suri, M., et al., CNN, 21 July 2023.
[52] Rape And Sexual Violence In Manipur, India. Ochab, E.U., Forbes, 22 November 2023.

of Manipur have reportedly been directly involved in disinformation campaigns against the Kuki ethnic minority community, and in particular against women.[53] Further reflecting the inadequate response of the authorities, procedures for medical examinations of victims of sexual assault have commonly not been followed.

"In India, sexual violence often goes unreported as traumatised victims fear being cast out by their families and ostracised by society. The problem is, when women come out to speak, they don't get justice. It often takes years and a lot of strength from the victims, who are already economically marginalised and may have been forced to move away from their homes due to fear and shame."

– A REGIONAL EXPERT ON INDIA

The risk of sexual violence remains high for Christian women and girls in Manipur, and for those who fled their homes and now live in IDP camps.

Broader gender dynamics

Within the context of conflict, **both men and women are vulnerable to attacks that bear long-term repercussions**. For women and girls, this primarily takes the form of violent sexual attacks which leave victims with deep shame, trauma and fear. This form of attack harms men and women alike; the father and brother of one of the victims in the viral video tried to intervene and protect her. This choice led to their deaths. Within minutes they were beaten and lynched by the mob.[54] "I saw them die in front of my eyes," shares Mercy.

"I want to tell all mothers of all communities to teach their children, no matter what happens, never disrespect women."

– MERCY

The husband of the other female victim, Gloria, shared about the pain he felt as a bystander: "I feel sad and angry at my inability to do anything. I could neither save my wife nor the villagers. That breaks my heart. Sometimes I get very upset thinking about everything that has happened, engulfed by grief and anger, I feel like killing someone."[55]

Shame and trauma from such incidents deeply harms entire families and communities well beyond the incident itself. However, being seen and upheld by community can wield enormous change; while the emergence of the video in July 2023 initially scarred the women, they now reflect on it positively, "Without the video, no-one would have believed the truth, understood our pain," shares the husband of one of them.

A pastor and his wife whose house was destroyed in the violence, Manipur.

[53] Rape And Sexual Violence In Manipur, India. Ochab, E.U., Forbes, 22 November 2023.
[54] Manipur assault video emboldens women to speak out. Arya, D., BBC News, 23 July 2023.
[55] Manipur women in naked assault video 'will not give up'. Arya, D., BBC News, 10 November 2023.

Context: International law

"For months I listened to the radio waiting for a decision, worrying that our decision to speak out would be in vain… When I heard the news that Akayesu had been found guilty I danced!" – Victoire, who testified on her experience of sexual violence in the Rwandan genocide, speaking of Jean-Paul Akayesu who had been found guilty on nine counts of crimes against humanity, including rape.[56]

When violence escalates to the point of conflict, one of the **key tools in establishing and enforcing the parameters that are supposed to protect civilians from abuses is the law.**

Domestically, laws on sexual and gender-based violence vary from country to country. Internationally, these typically come under frameworks of International Human Rights Law (IHRL). However, **in times of conflict the context shifts**; often domestic justice systems can be inaccessible, commandeered by conflict actors, or even collapse completely. Acceptable norms and practices also shift, and law enforcement actors can themselves be complicit in atrocities.

The specific laws that govern times of conflict are collectively known as **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)** or alternatively as the laws of war. The most well-known of these are the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. There are multiple other agreements such as those specific to weapons, chemical weapons and anti-personnel mines, amongst others. Crucially these cover the conduct of actors within times of war, not whether recourse to force is legal in the first place, which is covered separately.

"When I heard the news that Akayesu had been found guilty I danced!"

– VICTOIRE, SURVIVOR OF THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE

International Criminal Law (ICL) has a very close, but oftentimes complicated relationship with IHL.[57] ICL relates to some of the most serious atrocities that can be committed, such as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Some of the most famous examples of ICL being utilised are the *ad hoc* tribunals: the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). The permanent court is the International Criminal Court (ICC), with the Rome Statute as its foundational treaty.

International law has evolved in addressing sexual and gender-based violence. The ICTY and ICTR were particularly significant in laying key groundwork for the "meaning and scope of the law applicable for sexual and gender-

"If I was in Afghanistan now, I would not be alive today, for sure," says Nilofer, (name changed) a refugee. She is explaining the cost of following Jesus in her homeland, Afghanistan. She's one of many believers who fled when the Taliban swept into Kabul and seized power in August 2021.

[56] p.148-149, Our Bodies, Their Battlefield: What War Does to Women. Christina Lamb, William Collins, London, 2020.
[57] The International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Criminal Court: Turning international humanitarian law into a two-headed snake? García Pinto, Fernanda, International Review of the Red Cross, No. 914, December 2021.

A displaced Yazidi woman from nothern Iraq.

based violations."[58] There was little precedent laid out in IHL previously; these *ad hoc* tribunals were foundational in developing provisions on sexual violence in the Rome Statute. For example Article 8(2)(b)(xxii), which details the war crime of "Committing rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy" in international armed conflict.[59] While rape and indecent assault are briefly covered in the 1949 Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols,[60] the Rome Statute codifies forms of sexual violence "as *independent* crimes, not as implicit forms of torture or inhuman acts," a key landmark in the development of law concerning conflict related sexual violence.[61]

"International criminal tribunals have torn down one wall after another when it comes to SGBV."

– FERNANDA GARCÍA PINTO

This reflects **the growth of legal recognition of conflict related abuses which are so heavily shaped by gender dynamics and vulnerabilities**.[62]

While international frameworks reflect an emerging consensus of significance of gender in conflict, some experts argue that certain laws problematically depict women as victims and men as perpetrators. This can undermine women's agency, fails to consider their broader experience of and roles in armed conflict and can fail to recognize men as victims of sexual violence.[63] One step towards addressing this has been UN Security Council resolution 1325 which reaffirms women's roles in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and other peace oriented activity.[64]

Questions also remain around implementation, with a distinct lack of convictions on conflict-related sexual violence; precisely one by the ICC between 2002 and 2021.[65] A recent development of interest have been the trials in Germany of the perpetrators of crimes against humanity and genocide that targeted the Yazidi community in Iraq by Islamic State (IS), the first trials on the principle of universal jurisdiction.[66] In June 2023, a woman was jailed for crimes including the aiding and abetting of rape of the Yazidi woman she and her husband kept as a slave.[67] These trials indicate **hope that sexual violence related crimes will not be relegated to the principle and letter of international law, but actively prosecuted** as part of wider systems of justice and restitution for survivors.[68]

For the more general global legal framework for GSRP outside times of conflict, and more detail on IHRL, see *A Web of Forces: The 2023 Gender Report.*[69]

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[58] p.197, The Legacy of Ad Hoc Tribunals in International Criminal Law. Sterio, M. & Scharf, M. eds., 2019. *The Legacy of Ad Hoc Tribunals in International Criminal Law: Assessing the ICTY's and the ICTR's Most Significant Legal Accomplishments,* Cambridge University Press.
[59] p.96, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (last amended 2010). UN General Assembly, 17 July 1998
[60] Art. 27, IV Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in time of War, 12 August 1949; Art. 76(1), Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, 2010.
[61] Emphasis in original text, The International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Criminal Court: Turning international humanitarian law into a two-headed snake? García Pinto, Fernanda, International Review of the Red Cross, No. 914, December 2021.
[62] For more detail on how gender dynamics shape atrocities in IHL beyond and including sexual violence, see The dialogue of difference: gender perspectives on international humanitarian law. Durham, H. & O'Byrne, K., International Review of the Red Cross, 92(877), March 2010.
[63] Gender and Conflict: Topic Guide. Strachan, A.L. & Haider, H., GSDRC, 2015.
[64] Resolution 1325. UN Security Council, 2000.
[65] The International Criminal Court and Sexual Violence: Between Aspirations and Reality. Altunjan, T., German Law Journal, 22(5), 2021.
[66] Germany/Iraq: World's first judgment on crime of genocide against the Yazidis. Amnesty International, 30 November 2021.
[67] Islamic State: Woman jailed in Germany for keeping Yazidi woman as slave. Kathryn Armstrong, BBC news, 22 June 2023.
[68] See more: Rape as a Crime in International Humanitarian Law: Where to from Here? Dixon, R. European journal of international law, 13(3), 2002.
[69] p.10-11, A Web of Forces: The 2023 Gender Report. Open Doors International, 2023.

Forced displacement

Forced displacement is an insecurity that can be a product of insecurity. When high levels of violence resolve or de-escalate, there is relatively little attention paid to the ways people experience violence in that new setting. While the majority of people who experience violent insecurity remain in their homes and face the challenge of rebuilding lives and communities, millions have already fled in search of safety, exposing them to further vulnerabilities.

Many families are forced to make deeply challenging choices. In some instances, men flee in search of work while leaving their families at home. In other cases, it is the wives and children who flee while the men remain, either to work or to protect their home. **Families and communities are torn apart** by displacement.

An overview of forced displacement

"Forced displacement" is a term used to describe various types of involuntary movement, both within and across national borders. It refers to situations where persons leave or flee their home due to conflict, violence, disasters, persecution and severe human rights violations. This includes refugees, asylum-seekers, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and stateless people.

Bishop Chimon Daniel was one of the leaders of the Mar Elia camp in Erbil during the 2014-2016 displacement, caused by the Islamic State insurgency in Iraq.

UNHCR estimates that as of September 2023, more than **114 million people worldwide had been forced to flee their homes**.[70] The majority are IDPs who have fled conflict and violence.[71] According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), conflict displacements are rising fast. In 2022 the number was three times higher than the annual average of the past ten years.[72] Displacement impacts people around the globe, although the highest rates of displacement are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 31.7million people were internally displaced as of the end of 2022.[73] An upcoming 2024 Open Doors report will focus in more detail on this region, exploring the experience of Christians impacted by displacement.

Those who stay (and return)

The vast majority of people impacted by contexts of violence and insecurity remain in their homes and communities. They too, can face compounding challenges when conflict fades. Others return after periods of being displaced, determined to re-build their homes and communities.

One legacy of conflict situations is a longer-term normalization of violence,[74] both on a public level and behind closed doors. Separation from family and community, and destabilization of social and gender norms contribute to increased rates of IPV in contexts of violence and insecurity. Even after violence has settled, negative coping mechanisms such as alcohol consumption interplay with economic uncertainty and a break-down in regular support structures to produce stress, anxiety and depression that may contribute to IPV. Often, men's inability to fulfil the traditional 'provider' role may contribute to feelings of anger and shame, which can then manifest themselves in violence.[75]

Religious minorities can face heightened social and economic marginalization, particularly in contexts where they were already at an economic disadvantage on account of their religious identity. They may face renewed tensions with neighbors or community/state actors, and struggle to earn enough to re-build their lives.

"The destruction is massive, and many Christians lost all hope of returning. We need to work on improving the basic services in the village. It is a time to exert our efforts and power to rebuild our town and ask for more and more support for the returnees to let them feel safe and stable in their own land." – Iraqi priest, Karamles.

[70] Over 114 million displaced by war, violence worldwide. UN News, 25 October 2023.
[71] By the end of 2022, an estimated 108.4 million people were displaced by war, persecution, violence and human rights abuses. Of this figure, 62.5 million were IDPs who had fled conflict and violence. 29.4% were refugees. 2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2023.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid. Figured are as the end of 2022. 28 million by conflict and violence, and 3.7 by disasters. It should be noted that estimates vary between organizations regarding the exact figures.
[74] Why Do Soldiers rape? Masculinity, Violence and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC). Baaz, M.E. & Stern, M., International Studies Quarterly, 53(2), pp.495–518, 2009.
[75] Drivers of intimate partner violence against women in three refugee camps. Wachter, K., et al., Violence Against Women, 24(3), pp.286-306, 2018.; Armed conflict, alcohol misuse, decision-making, and intimate partner violence among women in Northeastern Uganda: a population level study. Mootz, J.J., et al., Conflict and health, 12(1), pp.1-11, 2018.

According to a reliable source, jihadists came to a village in Niger near the Burkina Faso border on Saturday 10 June 2023 and gave the ultimatum that Christians should either leave within 72 hours or accept Islam as their new faith. At least 69 Christian families left the village, taking refuge in a town and living under the trees despite it being the rainy season.

Violence within displacement contexts

Fleeing violence does not mean escaping violence. As noted in Open Doors' *Church on the Run* report, refugees and IDPs are vulnerable within displacement contexts to further human rights abuses. **Forced displacement disproportionately impacts people with existing vulnerabilities**, such as women, children[76] and those with disabilities.[77] Members of religious and/or ethnic minorities, too, face heightened risks.

The forms of violence experienced within displacement settings are wide-ranging, including **physical, sexual, verbal and psychological violence, as well as the deprivation of a person's rights or access to resources**. Following the outbreak of Covid-19, for example, it was reported that in many camps Christians were denied access to aid, or given disproportionately less.[78] An additional need is psycho-social support, as many struggle to overcome past and ongoing sources of trauma.

> **"I know in the Bible God tells us that his Word is Himself. It has been hard for me to live without my Bible. Now brothers and sisters have given me a new Bible. I am so happy. The past year without a Bible has been empty, now I am filled."**
>
> **– IDP WOMAN IN NORTHERN CAMEROON, WHOSE HUSBAND IS WORKING IN THE SOUTH**

How Christians are impacted

Religious minorities are often heavily impacted by displacement contexts. For example, Rohingya women and girls in Myanmar are vulnerable on account of being female, refugees, and members of an ethno-religious minority. This combination makes them highly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, which can have significant long-term repercussions on their lives beyond the initial trauma of an attack.[79] This is before considering other factors that may also shape their vulnerability, such as being a child, or having a disability.

Christian IDPs, too, have experienced violent attacks. In October 2023, experts shared that Fulani extremists attacked 11 women a few kilometers away from their informal IDP camp while they were searching for firewood.

They were raped in turns, at gunpoint.

These women and their families had all been displaced because of Fulani attacks on their villages in predominately Muslim northern Nigeria. "They remain vulnerable to further attacks on a daily basis" a local expert shares, "because Fulani herders have boxed them in. Fulani herders visibly surround the camps guarding their cattle. Anytime IDPs leave the camp, it is a matter of life or death."

Attacks such as these are common across Nigeria, predominately in the North. In April 2023, a Good Friday attack on an IDP camp by Islamic extremists left 32 Christians dead. The majority of the Christians within the camp were women and children, in part because the men had already been killed or were seeking to run their farms and bring in an income.[80]

During conflicts it is predominately men who are killed. In displacement settings the risk for women increases as there are fewer men left to target, or indeed protect them. The devastating long-term ripples on families and communities cannot be underestimated. As noted in the Church on the Run report, "the division of families through displacement also creates challenges that impact the emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing of children and youth."[81]

The role of local faith actors

Displacement is a global phenomenon. So is the church.

In many countries around the world, local churches and local faith actors (LFAs) are uniquely placed to respond to conflict-induced displacement. As noted in Open Doors' 2022 report *The Faith Factor*, they have significant social capital and resources, an understanding of their community's psychosocial and spiritual needs, are well-trusted and have a longer-term commitment to an area than other humanitarian organizations.[82]

In Sudan, nuns have opened up their home to take in IDPs, including those from other faith backgrounds. In Cameroon, LFAs have provided Christian IDPs with relief packages that included a Bible.

> **"That's why we live with the Sudanese whether they are Christian or not, in joyful time and sorrow time."**
>
> **– SUDANESE NUN WHO IS HOSTING IDPS**

The response of LFAs includes gender-specific responses. The Shalom Trauma Center in Nigeria, for example, offers long-term support to trauma victims, as well as training to Church leaders in how to provide trauma care. This includes supporting victims of gender-based violence and sexual assaults.

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[76] Internally displaced children, youth and education. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, accessed 30 January 2024.
[77] Persons with disabilities. UNHCR, accessed 20 January 2024.
[78] Covid-19: The Last in Line, Open Doors, 2020. Available here: Serving Persecuted Christians Worldwide - Reports, Summaries, and Briefings - Open Doors UK & Ireland.
[79] "All of My Body Was Pain": Sexual Violence against Rohingya Women and Girls in Burma. Human Rights Watch, 16 November 2017. Note both Christian and Muslim Rohingya experience these dynamics.
[80] At Least 32 Christians killed in Good Friday attack on IDP camp in Nigeria. Open Doors UK & Ireland, 11 April 2023.
[81] p.18, The Church on the Run: IDP & Refugee report 2022. Open Doors International, 2022.
[82] The Faith Factor: A Global Study: Faith Actors' Engagement in Post-Conflict Development Programs. Open Doors, 2022.

Conclusion

When violence escalates, the **vulnerable are at risk of becoming more vulnerable**. This can include specific forms of violence that target Christian men and women, as well as general contexts of instability where GSRP is exacerbated.

For policymakers, this is a reminder to take a holistic view. To incorporate sensitivity to religious and gender vulnerabilities into assessments for planning and programming for insecure contexts, and beyond.

Gender inequality is widely understood as one of the drivers of fragility. Seven years of research by WWR has illustrated how gender inequality can be enmeshed with religious persecution in countries experiencing acute levels of persecution. **A holistic approach to incorporating gender-sensitive approaches should always consider how religious dynamics may also be at play.**

For LFAs it's a reminder of the risk that insecure contexts pose to the men, women and families of the church. It's a call to take proactive steps to prevent violence from escalating, to meet the needs of people when they are at their most vulnerable, and to seek justice and restoration for those who have faced gender and religious specific discrimination and violence. **Gender sensitivity can strengthen the resilience of church against targeted forms of persecution.**

Participants at the Shalom Trauma Center, Nigeria.

The ripple effects

Extreme and widespread violence can be dramatic and headline grabbing. But once the attention fades, **communities, families and individuals deal with the consequences for decades. And if the experience of high insecurity has been shaped by gender and religion, then the consequences will too.**

For example, 2024 marks ten years since Islamic State (IS) took control of significant locations in Iraq, such as Mosul, Iraq's second city, and Qaraqosh, often called "Iraq's Christian capital."[83] For minority communities, such as Christians, the legacy of IS still **shapes their livelihoods, their connection to (now destroyed) religious heritage sites, where they live and who they live alongside**.[84] This can be influenced by gender. For instance, Christian Chaldean Catholic and Orthodox women in Iraq still consider gender-specific harassment to be a considerable challenge, to the point of quitting their jobs to avoid unwanted advances and kidnapping threats. This is aggravated by a broader context of large scale displacement from the time of IS control – the whole community feels insecure.[85]

> **"The area of Thaura...never had a significant number of Christians, it is a Muslim area. There are hardly any Christians left. The Christians still there adapt their dress code."**
>
> **– A REGIONAL EXPERT ON IRAQ**

It is vital to consider how factors such as religious persecution and gender shape a person's vulnerability to discrimination and violence in the long term – from before violence escalates to the midst of attacks to when a place is viewed as 'peaceful.' It is also important to recognize that the neat arc of how violence escalates and de-escalates is, in practice, often messier, less linear, and blurs the borders of discrete categorization.

The challenge is this: **to consider gender- and religious-specific vulnerability not only within the parameters of protection in times when violence is high, but beyond to realms of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, development and human rights**. Such big picture thinking is also supported from a forced displacement angle. The IDMC emphasizes the need to strengthen conflict resolution and peacebuilding as well as climate resilience, food security and poverty reduction (all phenomena that exacerbate the risk of harm in conflict) in order to reduce the number of IDPs.[86]

[83] Respectively: Iraq crisis: Islamists forced 500,000 to flee Mosul. BBC News, 11 June 2014.; Iraq Christians flee as Islamic State takes Qaraqosh. BBC News, 7 August 2014.
[84] The Islamic State is Defeated in Iraq, but its Legacy Lives on. Ali, O.O. & Mohammed, N.A., LSE Blogs, 8 December 2023.
[85] The Lived Experiences of Marginalised Christian Chaldean Catholic and Orthodox Women and Their Families in Iraq. Yousef, Y. & Butti, N., Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious Minority Backgrounds in Iraq, Institute of Development Studies, December 2022.
[86] 2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2023.

Reasons to be hopeful

Over the last century, approaches to peace have often been dominated by men and secular approaches. Yet it's estimated that 49.7% of the world's population is female and 84% are religiously affiliated.[87] **Shifts towards more inclusive approaches are already beginning to take place.**

Research has shown how women's participation in peace processes "increases the durability and the quality of peace."[88] **Local faith actors (LFAs) can be uniquely placed to understand and respond to the needs of their communities**, including their spiritual needs. They are known and trusted and are often already embedded in the community.[89]

For example, in post-genocide Rwanda, churches contributed "to the social changes needed for sustainable peace on multiple levels."[90] While female, religious peacebuilders can often be invisible, notable exceptions include 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate Leymah Gbowee, who led a non-violent movement in Liberia that brought Christian and Muslim women together in support of peace; scholarship on this area is slowly growing.[91]

Through the unique agency of the church and the strategic position held by policymakers, change is possible, and indeed already underway. This is an encouragement – as well as an invitation to join in.

"If we would have a little bit more knowledge about counseling, our impact would be much bigger." That need, as expressed by Judy (right), is felt all over Syria. To meet that need, Open Doors started a counseling school, the first in its kind in the country. For two years the participants will be trained to become counselors in their churches and society. Judy now is one of the facilitators of the course and her mother, Ruba (left), is one of the participants.

[87] Respectively: Population, female (% of total population). World Bank, 2022.; The Global Religious Landscape. Pew Research Center, December 2012.
[88] p.985, Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace. International interactions, 44(6), 2018.
[89] The Faith Factor: A Global Study: Faith Actors' Engagement in Post-Conflict Development Programs. Open Doors, 2022.
[90] p.114, Christian perspective: religion in post-genocide Rwanda's quest for conflict resolution and reconciliation. Schliesser, C., On the Significance of Religion in Conflict and Conflict Resolution, pp.103-116, 2020.
[91] Women, religion, and peacebuilding. Hayward, S., The Oxford handbook of religion, conflict, and peacebuilding, pp.307-332, 2015.; Leymah Gbowee – Biographical. The Nobel Foundation, 2013.

Recommendations

To address the gender-specific nature of persecution and discrimination, Open Doors recommends:

1. Donor governments and institutions should:

- Ensure a gender perspective is integrated into programs designed for protecting and promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), and that sensitivity for issues of FoRB is integrated into gender-related anti-discrimination programs (as recommended by the Special Rapporteur on FoRB)
- Include religion as a factor of vulnerability in any assessment made in planning and programming
- Include targeted programming and aid for women and girls who face double vulnerabilities as members of minority faiths, recognizing the important role of such programming in countering violent extremism
- Integrate flexible funding opportunities into their programming to allow well-coordinated and non-partisan Local Faith Actors to carry out their work including providing access to food, safe drinking water and essential medical supplies, locally appropriate psychosocial care, reconciliation and community-building projects.

2. Given the prevalence of sexual violence, forced marriage and human trafficking against women and girls from religious minorities, governments should:

- Ensure women and girls have equality before the law so that perpetrators of sexual violence, forced marriage and human trafficking are not treated with impunity
- Ratify and abide by the terms of the CEDAW, CRC and UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- In line with joint general recommendation no. 31 of CEDAW/ general comment no. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), repeal all legislation that condones, allows, or leads to harmful practices, including traditional, customary, or religious laws, and any legislation that accepts the defense of honor as a defense or mitigating factor in the commission of crimes in the name of so-called honor.

3. Given the way sexual violence in conflict is used against women and girls from religious minorities, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict should carry out a study, with input from the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), to enhance understanding of the double vulnerability faced by women and girls from religious minorities and to propose how the protection of women and girls, who are doubly vulnerable due to their adherence to a minority faith, can be enhanced.

4. Given the synergies between FoRB and women's rights, the CEDAW Committee should issue a general recommendation that:

- Recognizes that women's rights and religious freedom are mutually reinforcing, not contradictory
- Encourages state parties to consider this interrelatedness
- Proposes measures to address the double vulnerability of women and girls from religious minorities, such as encouraging mechanisms for cooperation between institutions and actors working for women's rights and FoRB; and encouraging governments to enact and enforce the legislation highlighted in recommendation 2 above.

5. The Global Church should:

- Openly acknowledge the extent and severity of violence against Christian women and girls, especially in communities under pressure for their faith
- Seek justice for women and girls facing any form of discrimination, persecution or violence, by empowering women, men, girls and boys to access justice, in order to hold perpetrators to account.

6. Commit or refresh resources to building stability in fragile states, ensuring that the needs and representation of vulnerable religious minorities and the importance of religious freedom are fully integrated into these efforts.

– Recommendations in the WWL Advocacy Report 2024

Methodology

Sources

For the 2024 GSRP report, the specific religious persecution (SRP) Unit of Open Doors World Watch Research (WWR) gathered and analyzed data using a mixed methods approach, comprised of both qualitative and quantitative elements. During the 2024 reporting period (October 1, 2022, to September 30, 2023), WWR monitored religious persecution dynamics in over 100 countries. SRP analysts studied data from the 78 countries where persecution is high, very high or extreme. This report primarily presents analysis of the top 50 countries on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List (WWL). However, some findings additionally draw from countries that rank 51 – 78 in the pool of countries monitored by Open Doors (countries that score very high and high levels of persecution without making it onto the top 50 list).

The data the SRP Unit studies comes from Open Doors' field staff and field contributors, external experts and WWR persecution analysts. As part of the data collection process, regionally based experts collected qualitative data from trauma specialists, church leaders, focus groups and experts. Additionally, the report offers case study information based on interviews with Christian men and women who have experienced violence for their faith, gathered by Open Doors field staff or partners. SRP analysts consolidated this research with desk research, drawing from publications by the media, UN and governmental institutions, academia and NGOs.

Changes in WWL top 50 countries

In the study of Gender SRP, the sample of 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian is adjusted yearly based upon WWR persecution scores. In 2024, the sample of 50 countries remained the same as 2023.

Method

The SRP Unit analyzed the resulting WWL questionnaire data using a Pressure point framework in order to reveal how often Christian men and women experience the various Pressure points, Questionnaire data provides both quantitative incident reporting as well as qualitative descriptions of these incidents in specific contexts. The Pressure point framework assesses the qualitative input and codes responses according to the 30 Pressure points for gender (see Appendix A). This framework has been refined over the last seven years of conducting the research and publishing the Gender SRP Report. The statistics allow researchers to observe and track overall trends in the patterns and dynamics of global religious persecution and discrimination.

Regardless of the frequency of use of a Pressure point within each country, Pressure points are either categorized as "characteristic" or "non-characteristic" of female-specific or male-specific religious persecution. Pressure points which affect both genders equally, without gender distinction, are not captured. Neither are Pressure points which are gender-specific but lack a religion-specific element. Final SRP categorization of Pressure points for each country are then reviewed for accuracy by WWR Analysts who are experts on each country.

Pressure points demonstrate:

- **How common a specific type of persecution that targets Christian men or women is across multiple countries**
- **The different, specific experiences of groups within Christian communities in a particular country or region**
- **The complexity of situations faced by groups of Christians**

In addition to this initial level of coding, Gender SRP researchers also captured per tactic, via qualitative descriptions, variations across countries in how this pressure is brought to bear in different contexts. Where the information was available, the researcher captured the frequency at which the Pressure point was occurring, which age group was primarily affected, the religious background of victims, wider contextual information and severity level.

The scale used to measure frequency was:

Frequency level	Description
Unknown	Cited by respondents as a means of pressure or persecution, activity level unknown
Live risk, no known cases	Cited by respondents as an active threat that influences behavior, but no known cases in the 2024 reporting period
Isolated incident	A single case
Indication of occurrence, scale unknown	Cited by respondents as an active means of pressure or persecution, but undetermined number of incidents. Could be 0-50
Several incidents	2-10 cases
Moderately widespread	11-50 cases
Widespread	50+ cases (and in several areas across the country)

The scale used to measure severity was:

Severity level	Description	Example of Pressure Point in this severity level
Low	Low impact to daily life	Enforced religious dress code
Moderate	Medium impact on daily life, causing moderate mental harm	Discrimination/harassment via education
Severe	Non-fatal, but significant physical or mental harm	Violence – physical
Very severe	Fatal to life, or extremely traumatic	Violence – death

Limitations

By nature, qualitative research is limited, and respondents' open-ended feedback allows for subjectivity that can limit the quality of the response and ease with which it can be analyzed. Furthermore, limitations on the collection of gender-specific information stem from stigma and feelings of shame surrounding gender-based violence. For example, for many Christian men and Christian women, reporting sexual violence is unspeakably difficult or dangerous. Not only is speaking out often too risky for survivors, but interviews can also present grave dangers to their mental health, re-traumatizing victims.

In particular, the use of the frequency and severity scale involved subjective interpretation. While questionnaire correspondents often gave a numerical estimate for forms of persecution, these were not given for every answer (and notably, not for the questions that specifically related to gender). Questionnaire contributors employed various terms to describe frequency, however it is recognized that their interpretation of these terms may have varied from the scale above. Furthermore, the Pressure points which are normalized in a society may blend in to such an extent that they are not reported as being notable.

Year to year, there are some fluctuations in the capture of Pressure points. These may be driven by trends in persecution, difficult contexts exacerbating gender SRP, the number of respondents and/or increases of gender awareness (or lack thereof). To draw substantiated conclusions from the data, a strictly numerical approach is avoided. Instead, SRP analysts take a holistic and balanced approach to the data set, recognizing the specific influences of shifts in data collection and using internal audit processes to confirm trend analysis.

Definitions

a. Persecution
There is no international, legal definition of religious persecution. Situations can be defined as persecution, where persons experience the denial of the rights listed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, WWL methodology has opted for a theological rather than a sociological definition, "Any hostility experienced as a result of one's identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians." This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.[92]

b. Gender equality
This term is used according to the definition provided by UN Women, namely, "Equality between women and men (gender equality): refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development."[93]

c. Pressure point
"Pressure point" is the term used to refer to both the pressures and violence faced in the course of religious persecution. In WWL methodology, "pressure" usually denotes non-violent persecution experienced in all areas of a Christian's life and "violence" is defined as "the deprivation of physical freedom or as serious bodily or mental harm to Christians or serious damage to their property" (and related incidents), which can potentially occur in all areas of life.[94] Pressure points are areas of particular sensitivity or vulnerability for men and women within a religious community. Researchers borrowed the term from the martial arts context, where a Pressure point is a "point that, when pressure is applied, produces crippling pain." They are "used to exploit a weakness or vulnerability in the human body to gain an advantage over an opponent."[95] These Pressure point categories provide a means to establish the frequency with which a particular form of pressure is associated with each gender.

[92] p.7 Complete WWL methodology, Open Doors International, October 2023.
[93] Concepts and Definitions. UN Women, [Accessed 18 January 2023].
[94] p.29 Complete WWL methodology, Open Doors International, October 2023.
[95] Martial Arts Pressure points: Medium Range, John Gahan, LCGI, 2017.

Appendix

Appendix A: Pressure point definitions

The following table provides definitions and simplified definitions for the 30 Pressure points (two with sub-categories) that are identified and analyzed in Open Doors' gender-specific persecution report. he table also specifies the area of SRP research to which each Pressure point is attributed.

Pressure Point	Definition	Gender	IDPR	Children
Abduction	The act of making a person go somewhere with you, especially using threats of violence.[96]	■	■	■
Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites	The denial of access to Christian religious material, such as Bibles, study notes and Christian symbols, teachings, such as from churches, youth groups, Sunday schools and Christian parents, and rites, such as baptism.	■	■	■
Denied access to social community/ networks	The denial of access to social community or networks.	■	■	■
Denied citizenship	The intentional act of denying or removing citizenship from nationals.	■	■	
Denied access to a Christian parent	The act of denying a child access to a Christian parent on a permanent or semi-permanent basis.		■	■
Denied communal resources	The intentional act of denying or removing access to communal resources, such as communal organizations, buildings or other public goods, services or programs.	■	■	■
Denied custody of children	The act of denying a person of the legal and/or physical custody of their child/ children, or the right to have a relationship or direct contact with their child/ children.	■	■	
Denied food or water	The act of deliberately denying another person of food of water.	■	■	■
Denied inheritance or possessions	Denying a person of their inheritance rights or their possessions.	■	■	■
Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse	The act of denying a person the legal right to marry a Christian spouse.	■	■	
Denied/restricted healthcare	Discrimination affecting users of health care services. It serves as a barrier to accessing health services, affects the quality of health services provided, and reinforces exclusion from society for both individuals and groups.[97]	■	■	■

[96] Abduction, Cambridge Dictionary, last accessed 10 June 2022.
[97] Adapted from the Joint United Nations statement on ending discrimination in health care settings. WHO, 22 June 2017.

Pressure Point	Definition	Gender	IDPR	Children
Discrimination/ harassment via education	Distinguishing, excluding or limiting access to education. Specifically, by: a) depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level; (b) limiting any person or group of persons to education of an inferior standard; (c) establishing or maintaining separate educational systems or institutions for persons or groups of persons; or (d) by inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are incompatible with human dignity.[98]	■	■	■
Discrimination/ harassment via the asylum system	Discriminating against the asylum seeker by affecting their asylum status, and/ or using the system to harass the asylum seeker.		■	
Economic harassment via business/job/ work access	Targeting or boycotting a business to its economic disadvantage, or distinguishing, excluding or limiting a person's access to work or jobs due to their Christian faith. Specifically, by: a) preventing Christians from obtaining or retaining gainful employment; (b) limiting any person or group of persons to working conditions of an inferior standard; (c) by inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are incompatible with human dignity; or d) forced labor, including subtle means such as accumulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities, but not extending to slavery.[99]	■	■	■
Economic harassment via fines	The act of disadvantaging another person through inappropriately applied fines.	■	■	
Enforced religious dress code	The act of forcing, or applying significant pressure on someone, to wear religious clothing.	■	■	■
False charges	Legal charges against a person that are unproven and untrue, made in the spirit of deliberateness or deceit.	■	■	
Forced divorce	The act of terminating a marriage or marital union without the consent of the spouse.	■		
Forced family separation	The act of forcing family members to be separated, for example by manipulating the use of resettlement schemes.		■	
Forced marriage	A marriage in which one party has not personally expressed their full, free and informed consent to the union.[100] This includes child marriage, or early marriage, where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. It also includes unannounced and disadvantageous polygamous marriage with the intent to subjugate for religious reasons.	■	■	■
Forced out of home – expulsion	The act of suddenly and forcibly expelling a person from the residence they have been living in, or applying such pressure that they feel they have no freedom to stay.	■	■	■
Forced to flee town/country	The act of suddenly and forcibly expelling a person from the town/country they have been living in, or applying such pressure that they feel that they have no choice to stay.	■	■	■

[98] Adapted from Article 1 of the Convention against Discrimination in Education. UNESCO, 14 December 1960.
[99] Adapted from the International Labor Organization. 10 March 2014.
[100] Child, early and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, last accessed 14 February 2024.

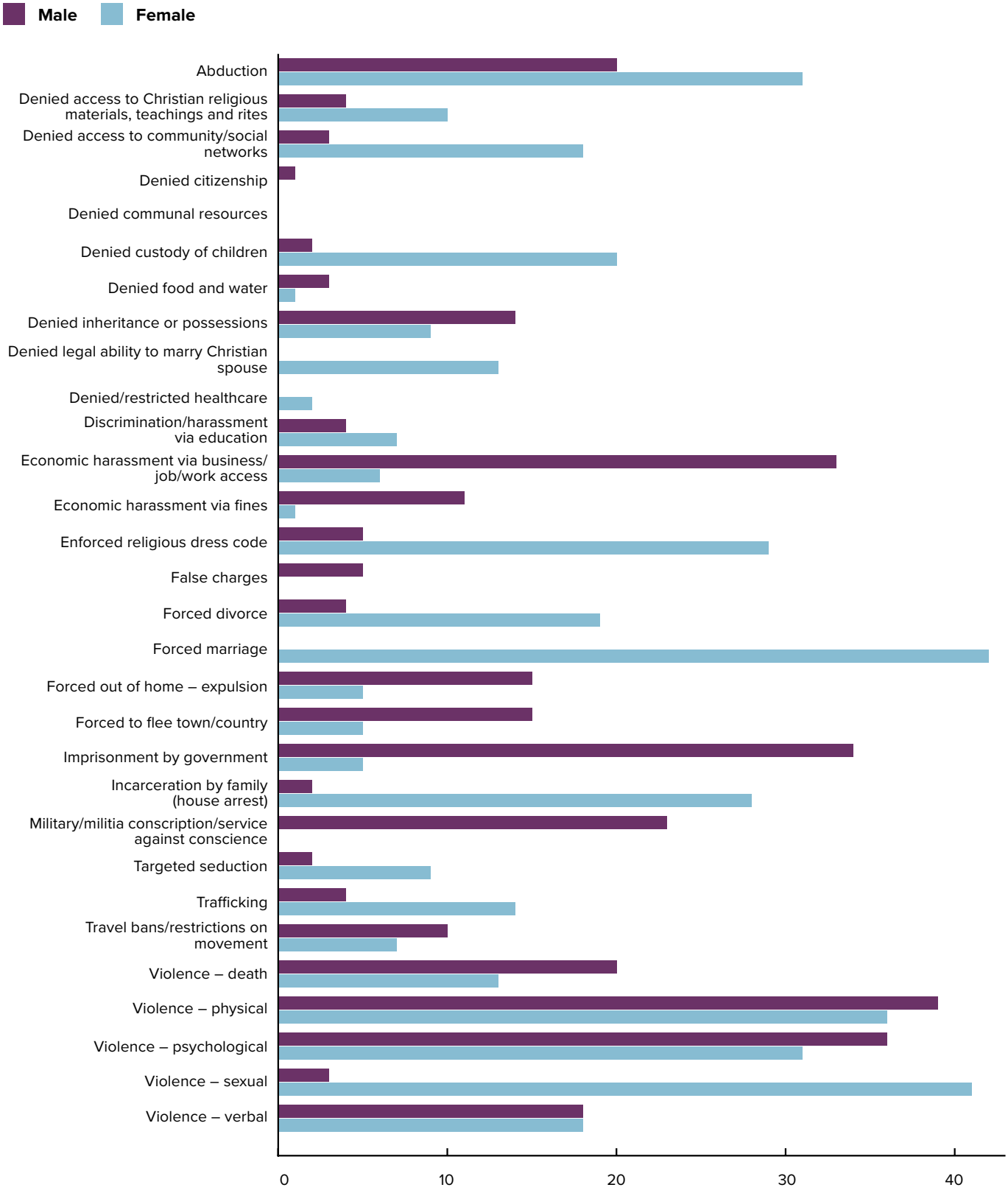
Pressure Point	Definition	Gender	IDPR	Children
Incarceration by family (house arrest)	The obligation upon an individual that she/he be forbidden to leave his or her place of residence except for limited, specified circumstances.	■	■	■
Imprisonment by government	The act of being imprisoned in a prison, or place used as a prison, by a government body or agent.[101]	■	■	■
Military/militia conscription/ service against conscience	Serving in the military forces of a country against a person's conscience, being ill-treated (denied Freedom of Religious Belief) in the service of the military, or being forced to carry out specific acts in military service that are against a person's conscience.	■	■	■
Refoulement (forced return)	The practice of forcing refugees or asylum seekers to return to a country in which they are liable to be subjected to persecution.		■	
Targeted Seduction	The act of seducing someone (here with a sexual connotation) with the intent purpose of leading them away from their Christian faith.	■	■	■
Trafficking **a. Sexual exploitation not explicitly mentioned** **b. Sexual exploitation explicitly mentioned**	Trafficking: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploiting a person.[102]	■	■	■
Travel bans/ restrictions on movement	Preventing a person from traveling somewhere, or restricting their movement against their will.	■	■	■
Violence – death	The cause of loss of life.	■	■	■
Violence – physical (including torture)	Bodily harm inflicted by one person on another person.[103] Researchers limit the designation of this Pressure point to instances which clearly indicate instances of physical harm (such as beatings/acts of torture) but which do not result in death. Instances of sexual violence are excluded.	■	■	■
Violence – physical (including torture)	Any intentional conduct that seriously impairs another person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats.[104]	■	■	■
Violence – sexual **a. Rape not explicitly mentioned** **b. Rape explicitly mentioned**	Any sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationships to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.[105]	■	■	■
Violence – verbal (including harassment and insults)	Harsh and insulting language directed at a person, intended to cause them emotional harm.[106]	■	■	■

[101] Adapted from the Cambridge Dictionary,. Last accessed 14 February 2024.
[102] Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. 15 November 2000.
[103] Adapted from the Law Dictionary. Last accessed 14 February 2024.
[104] European Institute for Gender Equality. Last accessed 14 February 2024.
[105] Adapted from the World Health Organization. Last accessed 14 February 2024.
[106] Adapted from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Last accessed 14 February 2024.

Appendix B: 2024 Global Pressure points

1. Global: 2024 GSRP Pressure points for top 50 WWL countries

This chart illustrates the number of WWL top 50 countries in which a particular Pressure point is recorded as characteristic for Christian men and women. In some countries, a Pressure point is recorded as both male and female; this is due to an explicitly different dynamic of religious persecution being associated with the application of pressure for each gender.



2. Global: 2019-2024 Male and Female Pressure points

The top 10 Pressure points for male and female Christians for 2024 are ranked below, with comparisons provided for the percentage scores since 2019. The percentages refer to the percentage of WWL top 50 countries where the Pressure point is recorded as characteristic of the experience of specific religious persecution for the gender.

Male top 10 Pressure points for top 50 WWL countries

2024 Rank	Pressure Point	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
1	Violence – physical	78%	72%	80%	86%	82%
2	Violence – psychological	72%	72%	68%	66%	56%
3	Imprisonment by government	68%	68%	64%	74%	66%
4	Economic harassment via business/job/work access	66%	72%	66%	74%	66%
5	Military/militia conscription/ service against conscience	46%	50%	58%	56%	40%
6	Abduction	40%	42%	32%	34%	34%
6	Violence – death	40%	46%	38%	48%	38%
8	Violence – verbal	36%	44%	46%	44%	38%
9	Forced out of home – expulsion	30%	38%	26%	38%	34%
9	Forced to flee town/country	30%	44%	34%	38%	40%

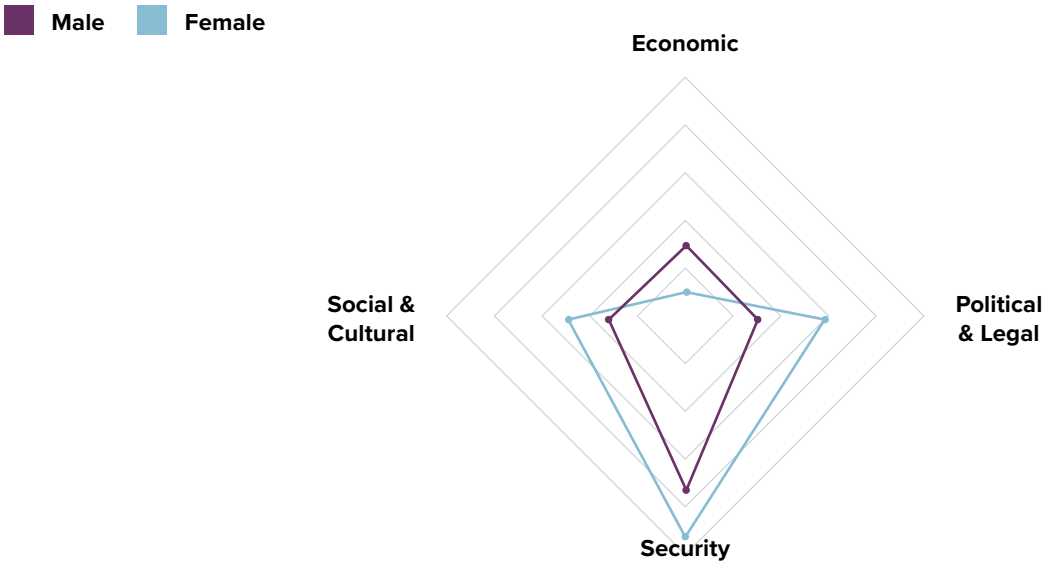
Female top 10 Pressure points for top 50 WWL countries

2024 Rank	Pressure Point	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020
1	Forced marriage	84%	84%	88%	90%	84%
2	Violence – sexual	82%	86%	90%	86%	84%
3	Violence – physical	72%	76%	78%	84%	64%
4	Abduction	62%	54%	62%	58%	50%
4	Violence – psychological	62%	62%	78%	74%	40%
6	Enforced religious dress code	58%	52%	42%	40%	30%
7	Incarceration by family (house arrest)	56%	68%	66%	70%	60%
8	Denied custody of children	40%	40%	44%	42%	34%
9	Forced divorce	38%	38%	58%	64%	64%
10	Denied access to social community/networks	36%	48%	52%	52%	36%
10	Violence – verbal	36%	58%	54%	56%	46%

Appendix C: PREST concentration

Political and legal, Economic, Security, Social and cultural, and Technological (PREST) categories are used by Open Doors WWR to understand landscapes of persecution. Each GSRP Pressure point is correlated with its appropriate PREST category (see table below).

Below is the PREST radar graph of 2024 GSRP Pressure points for global top 50 countries. This represents the spread of Pressure points impacting Christian men and women across the WWL countries under study.



PREST categorization of Pressure Points			
Economic	**Political & Legal**	**Security**	**Social & Cultural**
Denied inheritance or possessions	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites	Abduction	Denied access to social community/networks
Discrimination/harassment via education	Denied citizenship	Forced out of home – expulsion	Denied communal resources
Economic harassment via business/job/work access	Denied custody of children	Forced to flee town/country	Denied food or water
Economic harassment via fines	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse	Incarceration by family (house arrest)	Denied/restricted healthcare
	False charges	Military/militia conscription/ service against conscience	Enforced religious dress code
	Forced divorce	Targeted seduction	Violence – psychological
	Forced marriage	Trafficking	Violence – verbal
	Imprisonment by government	Violence – death	
	Travel bans/restrictions on movement	Violence – physical	
		Violence – sexual	

There are no Pressure points assigned to Religious or Technological categories; all the Pressure points can be considered religious as they are used for the purposes of religious persecution. In the same way, there is no Pressure point for 'forced conversion' since it is a goal of religious persecution, not a means of persecution.

Technological means can be used to enact a range of Pressure points. For example, removing a phone from a Christian convert may be a means of denying them access to digital religious materials. But surveillance using technological means would be characterized as a form of psychological violence. As such, technological means of applying pressure are captured using sub-categories of relevant Pressure points.

Appendix D: Regional categorization: WWL top 78 countries

In 2024 there were 78 countries recorded by WWR as experiencing high, very high or extremely high levels of persecution.[107] The table below lists how these 78 countries are categorized regionally within WWR. As GSRP analysis primarily uses data from the top 50 countries, as designated within the WWL, countries within the 51-78 range are greyed out to indicate which are the primary countries under research (in black).

Asia	Latin America	Middle East and North Africa (MENA)	Sub-Saharan Africa
Afghanistan	Colombia	Algeria	Angola
Azerbaijan	Cuba	Bahrain	Burkina Faso
Bangladesh	Honduras	Egypt	Burundi
Belarus (Eastern Europe)	Mexico	Iran	Cameroon
Bhutan	Nicaragua	Iraq	Central African Republic
Brunei	Venezuela	Israel	Chad
China		Jordan	Comoros
India		Kuwait	Democratic Republic of the Congo
Indonesia		Lebanon	Djibouti
Kazakhstan		Libya	Eritrea
Kyrgyzstan		Mauritania	Ethiopia
Lao		Morocco	Gambia
Malaysia		Oman	Guinea
Maldives		Palestinian Territories	Ivory Coast
Myanmar		Qatar	Kenya
Nepal		Saudi Arabia	Mali
North Korea		Syria	Mozambique
Pakistan		Tunisia	Niger
Russian Federation		Turkey	Nigeria
Sri Lanka		United Arab Emirates	Rwanda
Tajikistan		Yemen	Somalia
Turkmenistan			South Sudan
Ukraine (Eastern Europe)			Sudan
Uzbekistan			Tanzania
Vietnam			Togo
			Uganda

[107] For more information on this, see WWL 2024: Compilation of all main documents. Open Doors International, January 2024.

OpenDoors

research@od.org
opendoorsanalytical.org/gender-specific-persecution
[password: freedom]