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THE GENDER REPORT 2022

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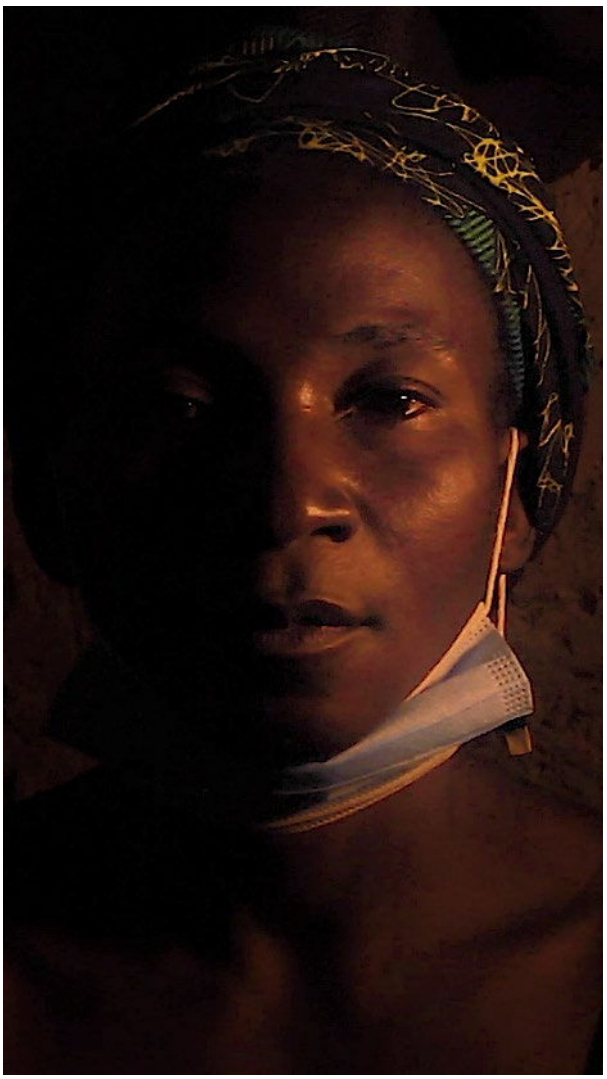
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PERSECUTION AGAINST CHRISTIAN MEN IS FOCUSED, SEVERE AND VISIBLE.



PERSECUTION AGAINST CHRISTIAN WOMEN IS VIOLENT, HIDDEN AND COMPLEX.



READ. SEE. CHANGE.

The 2022 Gender Report explores how men and women experience persecution differently, and how this systematically wreaks havoc on the Christian family and community as a whole.

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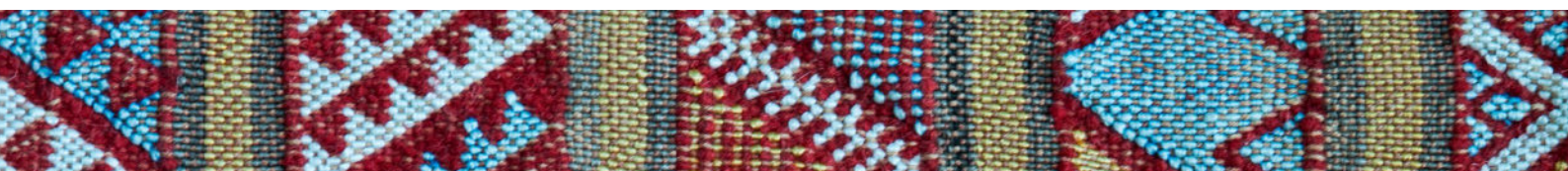
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Key findings

Gender-specific religious persecution (Gender SRP) is endemic, strategic and intensified through conflict, crime and crisis.

The 5th year of researching the Pressure Points of how men and women suffer for their faith confirms a stability in global trends.[1] Persecutors exploit socio-cultural norms and values, often embedded within or facilitated by the legal system, to pressurize Christian men and women and, ultimately, weaken the Christian community.

Persecution of Christian men and boys aims to remove them from the picture.

Across all regions, men and boys risk being abducted, imprisoned, physically beaten, falsely charged and forced into the ranks of militias or criminal gangs. In an effort to remove men from their expected roles as providers and protectors of Christian community, men are also more likely to be killed for their faith. Within many regions, those involved in church leadership are additionally vulnerable.

Persecution of Christian women and girls targets them as sexual objects and vehicles of shame.

Sexual violence, forced marriage, and trafficking stalks marginalized Christian women and girls across diverse global regions, often as a means of punishing and shaming Christian families and communities. Widely viewed to be of lesser worth, their child-bearing capabilities and sexual purity are targeted. They are further vulnerable to being trafficked as brides particularly within Asian countries, or sexually enslaved by extremist groups in Africa who view them as trophies of war able to bear future fighters.

The drug-trafficking industry exacerbates Gender SRP dynamics facing Christians.

The power and pervasive control of cartels and criminal gangs in some regions creates an opportunity for the religious persecution of Christians through drug-related gender-based violence, including physical and psychological manipulation through coerced drug use. Already present economic inequalities can become further exacerbated when rejecting drug-related activities.

Global crises escalate the vulnerability of Christian men and women, intensifying Gender SRP.

New opportunities to harm unwanted Christian populations are created by global crises, and can occur within wide-ranging contexts such as conflict, criminality, parallel religious legal systems, or even those making positive steps towards gender equality. Acute situations, whether the Taliban take-over in Afghanistan or the COVID-19 pandemic, serve to accentuate the vulnerability of the most vulnerable and thereby intensify gender-specific persecution trends.

[1] "Pressure Points" include aspects of both pressure and violence, which are analyzed separately in Open Doors' World Watch List standard methodology and literature. A list with definitions of all GSRP Pressure Points can be found in the Gender SRP methodology pp. 4-7. [password: freedom].



Introduction

Since 2018, gender-specific religious persecution (Gender SRP) has pointed towards enduring tactics with an interwoven impact on Christian communities. Persecutors exploit socio-cultural norms and resulting vulnerabilities related to the perceived value and purpose of men and women – men as financial providers and leaders, women as honor-bearers of the family and as wives and mothers. Men are denied work opportunities and made examples of in order to strike fear into Christian communities. Women's bodies are assaulted and controlled to shame families and communities. The next generation is deprived of stable homes to grow up in.

Gender SRP dynamics typically affecting men are **focused**, and **visible**. By contrast, women experience patterns and forms of persecution which are **complex**, and **hidden**.[2] Both are marked by **violence**, but Christian men typically face more severe and even lethal violence, whereas the insidious violence faced by women tends to be invisible and long-lasting.

At the meeting point of faith and gender, **Christian communities face challenges that persist beyond singular episodes of persecution.**

Gender SRP is not static; events of the past year have generally aggravated patterns of Gender SRP, although rare examples of easing also appeared. On top of a baseline Gender SRP, pressure and violence experienced by the Church has been exacerbated by a myriad of events.[3]

This 2022 Gender SRP report takes a deeper look at dynamics specific to global regions and includes spotlights on Afghanistan, drug-related religious persecution and COVID-19 impact after two years.

In order for Christian communities to identify steps to prevent or curtail the damage of Gender SRP, local faith actors must engage in gaining a granular level of understanding of how violations of both these human rights are at work in conjunction against their specific community.

Advocacy recommendations outline opportunities for local faith actors and those in policy-oriented work to confront powerful oppression, recognizing that religious persecution may seek to deprive men and women of their value in society but cannot strip them of what they are truly worth.

Gender SRP annual analysis and reporting builds on the Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) study of religious persecution. Open Doors World Watch Research (WWR) produces the WWL annually, investigating countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian across the world.[4]

[2] In 2018, preliminary findings identified these Gender SRP dynamics; these characteristics have been re-affirmed year upon year of reporting.
[3] The application of different forms of pressure are determined through using a Pressure Points framework, see footnote 1.
[4] In WWL 2022, there were 76 countries identified where Christians face high, very high or extreme levels of persecution. Details concerning WWL 2022 can be found in the WWL documentation. The persecution situation in each of the 76 countries can be found in the Full country dossiers. [For each, password: freedom].

2022 Gender Specific Pressure Points

TOP PRESSURES AFFECTING CHRISTIAN MEN AND BOYS

Persecution of Christian men and boys is about attempting to **remove them from the picture.** "It's a simple principle," shares an expert in India, **"kill the leader and win the battle."**[5]

By targeting men who are church leaders, fathers and financial providers, persecutors inflict pain on the wider Christian community. By boycotting the man's business or falsely accusing him of crimes to land him in prison, **families are left destitute.** By recruiting men into militias and criminal groups, abducting or killing them, **families and communities are left traumatized and defenseless.**

Attacking fathers and church leaders **embeds a cycle of violence against both boys and girls.** By taking out the figure who acts to protect, encourage and rescue those most vulnerable, the **next generation stands exposed;** in the most extreme circumstances, boys may be swept into the hands of militias or killed at the hands of extremists. If still alive, the older generation feels the pain of being unable to provide protection.

Persecution against men is **endemic and consistently violent.** Since reporting began in 2018, three Pressure Points have consistently ranked in the top five: Physical violence, imprisonment and economic harassment via work. These Pressure Points are enabled by discriminatory laws, state pressure and socio-cultural norms that view Christians as inferior.

Burdened by the economic pressures which have been exacerbated by COVID-19 measures, Christian men struggle to find work, be recognized for promotions or set up businesses without going through additional hurdles. Being unable to provide for his family is a **source of shame for men**, driving many to migrate away in search of opportunities. **This further fragments Christian families and communities.**

Male converts to Christianity are **often despised in the eyes of their local community.** As men, they are expected to lead their family in all respects – including religious beliefs. By converting to Christianity, a man fails in his role and betrays his family, culture and community. In the best-case scenario, his family may quietly tolerate his new-found faith, provided he keeps it quiet. In the worst-case scenario, he will be completely socially ostracized, beaten and/or killed at the hands of extremists, community members or even his own family.

Top 5 ranking Pressure Points for men[6]





Philip, an Open Doors worker who supports Muslim background believers, Asia.

[5] The Pressure Point 'Violence – death' was reported in 33% of the top 76 WWL countries, compared to 23.6% for women. Killings of church leaders was particularly common. For example, 59% of the Christians killed in Latin America during the reporting period were men involved in church leadership or outreach. See Latin America (page 11) for more information.

[6] The top 5 Pressure Points were reported across the top 50 WWL countries at the following rates for men: Physical violence (reported in 80% of countries), Psychological violence (68%), Economic harassment via work (66%), Imprisonment by Government (64%) and Military/Militia conscription/service against conscience (58%). For the full top 10 list of Pressure Points see the Appendix (2a) (page 18).

TOP PRESSURES AFFECTING CHRISTIAN WOMEN AND GIRLS

Persecution of Christian women and girls targets them as **sexual objects and vehicles of shame.**

Women are **targeted as a sexual 'prize' and as an instrument used to punish or harm** the wider Christian community.[7] They are widely viewed to be of lesser value, **both as Christians and as women.** As easier targets for sexual crimes, attacks may also result from their general lower status instead of explicitly religious reasons. They "have no value or worth," an expert in Afghanistan shares, "therefore if or when they are discovered, there is a high probability they will be turned into sex slaves." Conversely, in Latin America, Christian girls are targeted due to their perceived sexual purity.



Lisa, a secret believer, Asia.

Whether women and girls are viewed as pure or worthless, **their bodies become a vehicle for imparting shame on the Christian community, particularly** in cultures when sexual purity is inextricably tied with family honor. Survivors of sexual abuse **return traumatized and symbolic reminders of the power of the perpetrators.** Families and local communities **struggle to overcome the stigma** attached to the abuse she has experienced, particularly if she returns home pregnant, or with a baby.

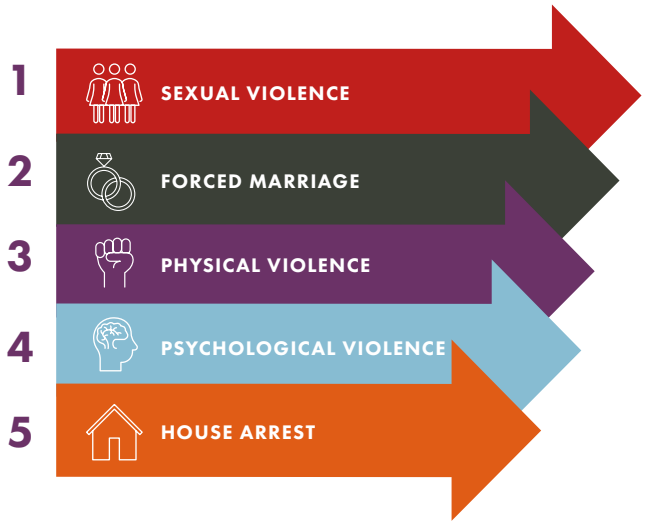
The sexual exploitation of women serves to **stem the growth of Christian populations, while increasing that of other populations.** In conflict-affected countries such as Nigeria, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Christian women and girls are abducted, forced into marriages with militants in order to bear future soldiers and boost their ranks.

Female **converts to Christianity suffer harsh pressures from family members,** those to whom they previously turned for love and protection. **Every measure is taken to ensure she gets back "in line."** Converts risk being placed under house arrest, forced into marriage, physically or sexually abused and put under extreme pressure to recant her new-found faith. Converts often face several of these pressures concurrently as well as sequentially over many years, exacerbating her sense of isolation. If already married she risks being divorced by her husband and losing the potential financial and physical security her marriage may have afforded her.[8] She might further lose access to her children.

Sexual violence and forced marriage have consistently **ranked in the top two Pressure Points over the past five years;** both were reported in over 88% of the top 50 WWL countries. Year upon year of reporting, a greater variety of Pressure Points have been recorded for women, showing that they **face a greater breadth of persecution than men.[9]**

In many of these countries women and girls have few legal rights to begin with and perpetrators of violence are commonly granted impunity. Within this context, persecutors do not have to look far to find available pathways to harm Christian women, and in so doing, the wider Christian community.

Top 5 ranking Pressure Points for women[10]



[7] Reports of sexual violence targeted against female Christians were found in 90% of WWL top 50 countries. Associated Pressure Point include 'Abduction,' reported in 62% of countries, and 'Targeted Seduction,' which was captured in 24% of countries. This latter Pressure Point refers to the act of seducing someone (with a sexual connotation) with the intent purpose of leading them away from their Christian faith.
[8] Reports of female Christians being forcibly divorced and denied custody of their children were found in 58% and 44% of WWL top 50 countries respectively. These forms of pressure are also utilized against Christian men, but with less frequency and generally fewer ripple effects given the greater societal freedoms of men.
[9] For 2022, 28 different female Pressure Points were recorded, compared to 24 different male Pressure Points.
[10] The top 5 Pressure Points were reported across the top 50 WWL countries at the following rates for women: Sexual violence (reported in 90% of countries), Forced marriage (88%), Violence – physical (78%), Violence – psychological (78%) and Incarceration by family/House arrest (66%). For the full top 10 list of Pressure Points see the Appendix (2b) (page 18).

Regional analysis[11]

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The Sub-Saharan regions **have high levels of insecurity** and Gender SRP is characterized by patterns of violence by armed groups in which **Christian men are typically killed and women sexually assaulted.**

The risk of death for men and boys in Sub-Saharan Africa is among the highest rates of all the regions. Conflict shapes a variety of contexts, whether latent or violent; religious dynamics are intertwined with complex and multifaceted situations. An expert from the Central African Republic explains that "jihadists kill Christian men because they think they are reducing the 'potential enemy'." Further exacerbating the dangers, activity of extremist groups has been growing,[12] with Sub-Saharan Africa considered an emerging hotspot for jihadists,[13] first identified by WWR in 2016.[14] Even if not killed, physical attacks and abduction into the ranks of militias remain a pervasive threat.

Female Christians face the highest average number of Pressure Points in sub-Saharan Africa, facing on average **10.8 Pressure Points** per country. The global average is 8.9.

Being kidnapped, raped and forcibly married by jihadist groups is a well-founded fear shadowing female Christians in nations within and neighboring the Sahel belt, and their access to education can be restricted on the basis of safety concerns. Sexual violence, forced marriage and abduction were reported in all Sub-Saharan African countries of the WWL Top 50 and often found to be used in tandem. Jihadists do not solely wield this threat; women and girls are also at risk from family and community members.

Removal of children is often used as a punishment for a woman's conversion to Christianity, with a secondary purpose in ensuring that the child is brought up according to the family's majority-religion beliefs.[15] Sub-Saharan Africa is the region where women are denied custody of children at the highest rate. While sometimes enacted through legal means, this also includes instances of children being removed from their mother by community, or even family, members. The prevalence of Sharia in some contexts also creates opportunities to separate children from parents.[16] However, this is not fixed, as in Sudan where "the law is changing to prevent this kind of discriminative practice, [but] it will take some time to change since sharia dogma is intertwined in the customs of the people", as shared by a country expert.[17]

In Sub-Saharan Africa women will continue to experience more pressure especially as Christian men are being targeted and killed. The widows often face insufficient resources and risk being subjected to damaging widowhood rites and otherwise being treated as a burden to the community.[18]



Esther and two of her children, Nigeria.

[11] For an overview of which WWL countries are categorized in each region, please see Appendix 5.
[12] In 2021, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Mali saw escalating levels of extremist violence. Violence by armed groups and government forces escalated in Ethiopia. World Report 2022: Events of 2021. Human Rights Watch, 2022.
[13] Jihadist networks in sub-Saharan Africa. European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2021.
[14] The Sahel: Rising Islamic militancy and persecution of Christians. WWR, 2016. [password: freedom].
[15] Children and Youth Specific Religious Persecution 2021: Preliminary findings from 50 countries. Open Doors International, September 1, 2021. [password: freedom].
[16] The interpretation and application of Sharia can vary, but often discriminates against mothers and those leaving Islam. For example, in some contexts, mothers can lose rights to guardianship if she becomes an apostate, while fathers do not lose guardianship rights on any grounds. See for more information: Comparative legal review of the impact of Muslim family laws on women across commonwealth Asia and Africa. Sisters For Change & Musawah, 2019.
[17] According to local experts, political will has lagged behind the announcement of these positive policy developments, with changes coming about very slowly.
[18] See for more information: Widows speak out: Abuse and Discrimination. Resilience and Agency. Widows for Peace through Democracy, 2020.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA)

Familial standards of fidelity and connection in the societies of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) often poses the greatest threat to Christians who convert from Islam to Christianity. **Family members attempt to exert control over women; for men, outright rejection is more likely.**

100% of MENA countries report at least one instance of **house arrest of female Christians**, within the WWL top 76.

This control over Christian women and girls can be seen in the **widespread use of house arrest**; it was reported as an issue for Christian women from Muslim backgrounds in all MENA countries. Other means of isolation, such as denying convert women access to churches or even their mobile phones, are also frequently carried out by male family members.

Similar patterns of persecution within the domestic sphere are found globally. However they are particularly notable in MENA due to high rates of legal and social discrimination which enable heightened levels of maltreatment.[19] Examples of such discrimination include practices of male guardianship[20] and dominant forces of honor and shame.

Marriage is also a particular avenue of persecution for female Christians. Women from Muslim backgrounds frequently face additional legal restrictions when attempting to marry a Christian.[21] Furthermore, forced marriage is a means to coerce Christian women and girls in almost all MENA countries. Forced marriage is used most frequently as a threat, whereas in rural areas of some countries it is a stark certainty for some. For example, in rural Egypt, particularly the Upper Egypt region, the combination of "dire economic circumstances as well as cultural norms" can amplify levels of forced marriage, as commented on by an expert.

"For men and boys, being disowned by their family and having their financial and emotional support removed is a common form of persecution. Families will often lie about the reason for the harsh treatment or say it was a horrible offense," one expert says of men from Muslim backgrounds. But rejection is not only carried out by families; male Christians more broadly can also face losing their jobs and community status. Generally having more freedom of movement than women, men may leave the country altogether when put under such pressure, particularly converts.

When fleeing danger, both men and women are in precarious situations. As Christian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or refugees, gender-specific vulnerabilities can shape their experiences, such as women and girls facing sexual violence and trafficking with little recourse to justice and men and boys from the region more likely to flee their country in the first place. Regionally, displacement is driven by both persecution and protracted conflicts.[22]



Sarah, a North African woman persecuted for her faith in Jesus.

[19] Women, Peace, and Security Index 2021/2022: Tracking sustainable peace through inclusion, justice, and security for women. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2021.
[20] Male guardianship enables high levels of control by male family members and restrictions on domestic interference. See for example: Qatar: Full Country Dossier. WWR, 2022. [password: freedom].
[21] Both Christian men and women can be affected by restrictions upon marriage, dependent on background. However, the Pressure Point 'Denied legal ability to marry a Christian spouse' is found to have a greater effect on women, reported in 9 countries in the top 50 (8 of which are in MENA).
[22] Open Doors WWR will be releasing research on IDPs and refugees later in 2022.

ASIA

Reflecting the diversity of the region, Gender-SRP across Asia is impacted by a variety of socio-political dynamics, ranging from dictatorial rule in East Asia, harmful traditional practices in Central Asia, to escalating violence in South Asia. While countries with communist-based political systems advocate equality regardless of gender, the societies still have the patriarchal norms underpinned by traditional philosophy, such as Confucian thought. Laws and societal traditions across this region are **primarily underpinned by a culture of honor and shame**, which exposes any man or woman who subverts expectations.

A common thread that runs throughout Asia is the risk of sexual violence, forced marriage and trafficking for women and girls. In Central Asia, where 'bride-knapping' still receives general societal acceptance, converts can be forced into marriage with a Muslim through this tradition.[23]

In countries neighboring China, Christian women and girls **continue to be exploited in a web of trafficking**; traffickers reportedly specifically target impoverished Christian communities to be sent as 'brides' to China.[24] The abduction and sexual violence of religious minorities in also endemic within local communities such as in Pakistan, where men seek out underage Christian girls for marriage and forced conversion. As noted by a CREID report, seeking justice isn't easily obtained, as the legal system **'discriminates against them, both as women and because of their religious minority status.'**[25] Therefore it is common that victims of abduction are trapped with their abductor, who by producing a certificate of conversion can easily win the favor of the local court.

Christians – primarily men – are falsely accused of committing crimes, or insulting the majority religion. This form of persecution knows no age limits: A Christian boy as young as twelve was accused of raping an eight-year-old Christian girl even though, as an expert comments, "everyone at the school including the principal knew it was the teacher."

The category 'False charges' was recorded 16 times for men across the top 76 WWL countries; **9 times in Asia.** It was most commonly recorded in Central and South Asian countries.

In addition to being used as scapegoats for serious crimes, men and boys risk being accused of blasphemy by colleagues and neighbors, simply as a way of removing them.

Pressures from state bodies typically affect Christian men and boys more than women. In North Korea, women stand a greater chance of fleeing the country, as men are under heightened surveillance. In Central Asia, men typically bear the brunt of state raids on gatherings, risking imprisonment, fines and interrogations. Church leaders are at particular risk, a local expert comments, because they are viewed "as primarily responsible for the conversion of their people." These dangers are particularly acute in India, where several pastors were killed or injured in violent attacks in the WWL 2022 reporting period.[26]

SPOTLIGHT: AFGHANISTAN

Afghan Christians, like all Afghanis seeking personal freedoms, are **violently and strategically repressed as a part of the re-established power and dominion of Taliban rule.** Leaving the Taliban's version of Islam has long been unacceptable, and any other expression of faith is met with harsh reprisals.

Under the Taliban's all-male, highly conservative Islamic government, **women from religious minorities, such as Christianity, are especially vulnerable.**[27] If discovered, unmarried females are used as wives and mothers to bear a new generation of Taliban fighters. "Fathers are being forced to give their daughters to fighters at the point of a gun," a local expert shared, "and girls as young as teenagers are taken out of school to be forced into marriage [to a Taliban member]."

Systemic gender inequalities and a deeply engrained honor-shame culture have threatened the freedom of Christian men and women for years. Forced marriage, house arrest and rape are used as tools for forced (re-) conversion, particularly against women and girls from a Muslim background. Male converts, on the other hand, are more at risk of discrimination in the workplace, physical abuse, and in some cases, of being immediately killed.

Once more under Taliban administration, Christians fear what lies ahead. Men and boys are being forcibly recruited into its new army.[28] According to an Afghan church leader, "it's just an obvious thing that they're [the Taliban] going to take all of your kids…and the boys, they have to go to be re-educated in madrassas and definitely they will be trained as [Taliban] soldiers forcefully."[29] Further fragmenting the Afghan Church, church leaders (usually male) have been targeted for abduction, beatings and killings.

These dynamics are often viewed as an inevitability; fearing such pressure, **hundreds of Christians chose to flee Afghanistan throughout 2021.** Those that remain have gone deeper underground, with some men even seeking lower positions in the workplace to avoid public attention.



[23] 'Bride kidnapping' haunts rural Kyrgyzstan, causing young women to flee their homeland. The Conversation, June 7, 2021.
[24] Trafficking in Persons Report 2021. Department of State, United States of America, June 2021, p.441.
[25] Why religious inequalities can lead to trafficking and forced labour. Wilson, E. CREID. July 30, 2021.
[26] For example, see: Son pledges to continue his father's ministry after shocking murder. CSW, May 24, 2021.
[27] Transcript of Taliban's first news conference in Kabul. Al-Jazeera, August 17, 2021.
[28] Taliban to build new army in Afghanistan. The Portal Centre, October 26, 2021.
[29] ICC interview with Afghan church leader, referenced in Afghan Christians Face Terrifying Future Under Taliban. CBN News, August 16, 2021.

LATIN AMERICA

Paralleling Gender SRP dynamics found in Sub-Saharan Africa, **visible and vicious violence traps Christian men and boys, while Christian women and girls are targeted as sexual objects.** Unlike the global trend, men and boys in Latin America are exposed to a greater number of Pressure Points, indicating that they face a greater breadth of pressures in this region. Within a context of ongoing political instability, corruption and criminal activity, it is **young men who are most at risk.**[30] For example, in Mexico criminal groups prefer to recruit minors due to lesser sentences if arrested and the need to fill gaps in their ranks caused by considerable casualties. Forcibly recruited into criminal gangs, teenage boys resign themselves to their seemingly unavoidable fate. Within these gangs they are forced to carry out criminal activity for the gang, including killings and drug-running.[31] In Cuba, where pressure predominately comes from the state, the number of detentions rose significantly following the 11th July protests in 2021; many Christians – particularly young men – chose to take part in the protests motivated by their faith-based principles.[32] According to a local expert, they were specifically targeted by the government as Christians.

Globally the average number of Pressure Points recorded for men in each country is **6.1.** In Latin American countries **this rises to 10.2.**



Pastor Justo and his children, Colombia.

In order to protect their territory and numbers, **gangs are quick to silence activists and church leaders who speak against their activities,**[33] or who try to rescue young men from gangs. 59 percent of the Christians killed in Latin American countries in the WWL 2022 reporting period were male pastors or leaders involved in conducting outreach. Edwin Arellano from Honduras was one such pastor. As the leader of a youth group at an evangelical church, he worked hard to rescue gang members out of cycles of violence. He was shot dead in February 2021 and his family and friends strongly suspect that his rescue work was the motive for his murder.[34]

In El Salvador and Honduras, gang members **who convert to evangelical Christianity have historically been allowed to leave the gang on the grounds of religion.**[35] Gangs have however, become more reticent to allow converts to leave in recent years; having lost members through the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict with police. If allowed to leave, they remain under the watchful eye of their old gang, who monitor whether he is living out an 'authentic' Christian life. Making it even harder to integrate into Christian community, their scars and tattoos make them prone to suspicion. "All these elements make the reintegration of the former gang member very difficult," an expert explains, leading some to return back to the clutches and perceived safety of gangs.

Within this environment, Christian women and girls are far from safe. **They risk being abducted, sexually assaulted, trafficked or forced to participate in criminal activity.** "Criminal leaders pay special attention to the children of devoted [Christian] parents," an expert in Mexico explains, "because their obedience is presumed." **Targeted for their perceived sexual purity and presumed docility, girls are targeted both as objects of sexual pleasure and as a means of punishment.** Should a church leader overstep his place and conduct missional activity in gang territory, raping his daughter is a sure way to hurt him.

While many women and girls flee Latin American countries, it is primarily young men that depart to seek economic opportunities, including from Christian families and communities. Left alone in countries such as Venezuela, women and girls are at increased risk of prostitution as a means of survival. State support is not a viable option, given that most government services are offered to those who belong to the party.[36] Christian families who refuse to align with the government do not receive state support and as a result fall into destitution.

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[30] For more information, see: Same Faith, Different Persecution. Open Doors International. March 1, 2021. pp. 10. [password: freedom].
[31] Ibid.
[32] La policía cubana libera al seminarista Rafael Cruz Dévora después de tres días de arresto. Cope, July 2021.
[33] Patterns of Gender SRP differ in Cuba, where both men and women come under intense pressure from the authoritarian regime. Church leaders (predominately men) are very unlikely to be killed, but risk being harassed, fined and detained.
[34] Pastor de jóvenes era el hombre asesinado en su negocio de tacos en Choloma. La Prensa, February 8, 2021.
[35] See footnote 30, Same Faith, Different Persecution, pp.10.
[36] El Sistema Patria, una nueva estructura de control social en Venezuela. El Pais, April 20, 2021.

Spotlight: Drugs: trafficking, cartels and criminal gangs

2022 survey results[37] reveal an unexpected link between Gender SRP and the wide-ranging impact of drug trafficking including physical and psychological manipulation, drug-related violence and economic inequalities.

Psychological and physical effects of drug addiction can be a powerful tool to weaken the Church. Reports from Asia indicate that **some young Christian men have been intentionally and successfully steered down a pathway to addiction**; globally, drug use is generally more prevalent among men.[38] For example, in Myanmar, drug production has long been enmeshed into the social and political landscape;[39] in light of spiraling violence, the drug trade is of increasing concern.[40] While religion is not a primary driver compared to financial motives, drugs are made accessible for those not joining insurgent groups, to render them effectively 'useless.'

Drug-generated incapacitation can be used to facilitate abuse of Christian women and girls. In Nigeria, Kenya and Somalia, girls abducted for the purposes of forced marriage and forced pregnancy face a myriad of violations. Sedation has been used in an effort to gain complete control. A Nigerian respondent explained that abductors "sexually abuse the girls, spike their food and drink, control what they wear and where they sleep, and continually evoke evil spirits upon them to the point that these girls completely lose their minds and can't think of going back to their homes."

Forced recruitment of Christians into drug-related criminal activities **entrenches drug abuse and alienates young people and their communities.** Young men in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa particularly face the threat of recruitment into cartels or criminal gangs. Forced to become drug runners, exposed to higher risks of physical attacks and participate in violence against their beliefs, efforts to reject this future can lead to death threats, attacks and killings targeting not only them, but their family too. Faced with an impossible choice, many view participation as an "inescapable destiny."

Young women can be endangered by a different form of recruitment by cartels or criminal gangs: Abduction for the purposes of sexual slavery and forced prostitution (see: Latin America, page 11). "Vulnerable and marginalized groups, youth, women and the poor pay the price for the world drug problem", as summarized by UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly.[41] While drug trafficking continues to proliferate in specific contexts, the networks themselves have a global reach, encompassing Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia.[42]

Efforts to make positive change can be met with harsh reprisals. Church leaders in Latin America, who tend to be men, know this all too well where they have worked on programs such as rehabilitating and socially reintegrating drug addicts and preventing gang recruitment. Perceived as a threat, surveillance, death threats, kidnapping, extortion and physical violence are some of the risks leaders entertain when undertaking such activities.[43] Taking a faith-based stand on avoiding drug-related activity, including other associated illegal activities, can add to the economic hardship as well. For example, refusing to work on coca crops in some regions of Colombia has resulted in heavy fines for Christians, with illegal armed groups particularly targeting pastors to pay on behalf of their churches.

It is equally dangerous for young men who actively seek to leave drug-related activities. In Venezuela, an attack was reported on a Christian center involved with outreach to young people caught in drug trafficking. Attackers broke into the center where they found four attendees, young men who were seeking faith-based support as they were striving to move away from drug-related activities. They were forced to eat pages of the Bible and were scarred with the sign of the cross.[44] Yet, church leaders and communities persevere.

"The Church's work with young people is fundamental," an expert on Mexico shares, "because sometimes it is the only hope of families for their children to move away from the circle of violence, to rehabilitate themselves from drugs or even have the opportunity to access a better education."



Mario, a former drug-trafficker who became a Christian in prison, Colombia.

[37] Through the 2022 data coding process, repeated mentions drug-trafficking were correlated with the vulnerabilities of minority Christian women or men.
[38] World Drug Report 2021. United Nations: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, June 2021.
[39] Fire and Ice: Conflict and Drugs in Myanmar's Shan State. International Crisis Group, January 8, 2019.
[40] One Year On from the Myanmar Coup. International Crisis Group, January 25, 2022.
[41] UNODC World Drug Report 2020: Global drug use rising; while COVID-19 has far reaching impact on global drug markets. United Nations Press Release, June 2020.
[42] World Drug Report 2021. United Nations: UN Office on Drugs and Crime, June 2021.
[43] See Latin America overview on page 11 for further detail.
[44] Con tubos, palos y cuchillos atacaron a evangélicos en Mérida, los marcaron y les hicieron comer la biblia. Sandyaveledo.com, February 17, 2021.

Spotlight: COVID-19 Impact

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, avenues to harm Christian men and women have widened. **Jobs have been lost, violence has increased and Christians have been used as scapegoats of blame.** In the *Same Faith, Different Persecution* 2021 spotlight on COVID-19, it was observed that the crisis surrounding the pandemic had exacerbated social, cultural, economic and other structural vulnerabilities for men and women alike.[45] A year on, **it is evident that Christians will remain disproportionately negatively impacted by COVID-19 for years to come.**[46]

While COVID-19 restrictions were introduced around the world as intended protective measures, millions of people – primarily women and children – became more vulnerable overnight. Locked in with their abusers, with state resources diverted to handle the pandemic, victims feared the inevitable. According to a UN report, women have experienced consistently higher rates of physical, sexual and emotional abuse since the pandemic began.[47] For Christian converts punished harshly by their families if their new-found faith is discovered, **lockdowns provided an avenue for persecutors to increase pressure with ease; converts became additionally isolated**, unable to escape the abuse they experienced behind closed doors for any periods of respite. "Pressure Points on women are often hidden," an expert in Turkey shares, "and this is even more so during Covid."

Christians have come under additional pressures from the economic impact of COVID-19. According to the International Labor Organization, 8.8 percent of global working hours were lost in 2020 alone, equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs. Economic recovery in 2021 has been slow, uneven and uncertain.[48] For Christian men already at a disadvantage in the working world on the basis of their faith, **the pandemic narrowed the door of available opportunities.** "The toll that the pandemic has placed on access to resources and employment in places where Christians had already been facing persecution should be observed and preventative measures taken to protect the Christian population" an expert in Kenya notes. While this has affected Christian men and women alike, it is primarily men who assume the role of financial provider across WWL countries.

Criminal gangs and militias exploited global changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to consolidate control and expand their reach. Human trafficking and the recruitment of children in Latin America, for example, continues unabated. "Forced recruitment is a frequent and unfortunate reality in the country, especially in rural areas," an expert on Colombia shares, adding that "the pandemic has only contributed to making this situation worse, because by reinforcing the territorial control of criminal groups, they have had more opportunities to know the precise identity of their targets to be recruited."[49] The diversion of police resources to handle the pandemic also created greater opportunities for criminal activity to occur undetected.

Others **took advantage of the pandemic to punish Christians.** As a Myanmar expert explains, "many people who are against pastors and believers often took advantage of the coup and pandemic situation to wrongfully accuse and imprison pastors." In Cuba, the government has also targeted Christians, charging them for 'spreading the pandemic'.



Woman with COVID-19 relief aid, Myanmar.

While rare, some reports did indicate that pandemic measures had eased pressures for Christians in some respects, such as by being less exposed to pressure in the local community, or educational setting. The closure of Chinese borders for example, posed barriers to traffickers and consequently slowed the rate of bride trafficking. However, the closure of borders has hampered some efforts to rescue trafficked 'brides' stuck in China,[50] and the economic impact of COVID-19 has subsequently driven more families to send their girls abroad in order to support their families, where they are more vulnerable to exploitation.[51]

In summary, COVID-19 has served to expose and worsen existing inequalities for Christian communities.

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[45] Open Doors International. 2021, pp.9. [password: freedom].
[46] This conclusion has been corroborated by research by CREID: Understanding Intersecting Vulnerabilities Experienced by Religious Minorities Living in Poverty in the Shadows of Covid-19. CREID, October 2021.
[47] COVID-19 and violence against women: What the data tells us. UN Women, November 24, 2021.
[48] COVID-19: ILO Monitor – 7th edition: ILO: Uncertain and uneven recovery expected following unprecedented labour market crisis. January 25, 2021.
[49] Reclutamiento forzado de niños en Colombia: cifras, situación y victimarios - Conflicto y Narcotráfico – Justicia. ELTIEMPO.COM, March 17, 2021.
[50] Trafficked 'brides' stuck in China due to coronavirus after abuse. Thomson Reuters, March 12, 2020.
[51] Pandemic seen fuelling Cambodian 'bride trafficking' to China. Thomson Reuters, December 11, 2020.

Implications and Conclusion

Five years of annual Gender SRP reporting has illuminated violations that often go undetected, opening opportunities to reinforce the resilience of Christian communities. Local faith actors (LFAs) and governments have an opportunity to work together to increase the effectiveness of one another's actions at different levels - local, national and international. These actions will be most effective when they take into account the following implications of Gender SRP.

Gender-specific vulnerabilities embedded into the legal and socio-cultural environment enable Gender SRP to become **endemic**. Patterns of discrimination, harassment and violence are built into the structures that shape daily life across the world. This report has highlighted practices ranging from harmful traditional practices in Central Asia to customs of male guardianship in the Middle East and North Africa, to impunity for crimes enabled by insecurity and corruption in Latin America, all examples of Gender SRP within different regions. Such entrenched forms of persecution mean that escape is not straightforward.

Minimal resources are required to target the Church; by exploiting socio-cultural beliefs about men and women, persecutors can effectively fracture communities. The ultimate message of rejection is the same for men and women, yet methods differ. Expectations around female sexual purity and male financial provision and leadership result in **strategic** attacks which cause maximum damage. When aiming to isolate Christians, men may effectively be removed from communities, whereas women can be isolated within households. Christians marginalized for their faith are generally resilient in the face of persecution. Yet commonly held beliefs about men and women can create gender-specific opportunities for persecutors to cause damage to which Christians are not resilient. In particular, long-term traumatic effects threaten to fragment the fabric of family and community relationships, either worsened or alleviated by the community response to attacks (see: Psychological Violence in Gender SRP).

Gender SRP is not static; it can be exacerbated or eased by specific contexts and events extraneous to religious freedom. The political, cultural, economic and technological forces shaping Gender SRP dynamics must be included in the process for taking responsive action. COVID-19, the 2021 Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and drug trafficking cross over with vulnerabilities due to faith and gender. This can **intensify** religious persecution in complex and interconnected ways. Changing situations require agility both in responses by LFAs to the fluid needs of communities, as well as in understanding specifically what is going on and how it affects Christian men and women.

Policy-oriented work at the national level can challenge legal and social discrimination which enable Gender SRP. Putting the voices of marginalized Christian communities at the forefront of this work is vital, recognizing their agency and knowledge while prioritizing their physical and emotional safety. In identifying the specific contexts that shape gender-specific vulnerabilities, LFAs can be key to agents in addressing the endemic gender elements used against their communities.

The interplay of gender and faith is a frequently marginalized consideration both within situations themselves and their analysis; it must be integrated into assessment, practice and reporting at the international level. Similarly, explorations of and actions addressing faith- and/or gender-based vulnerabilities must explore the role of socio-political phenomena in amplifying or alleviating Gender SRP. By understanding how Gender SRP is intensified in specific contexts, actors for the protection of Freedom of Religious or Belief will move closer to gaining a complete picture of religious persecution and discrimination.

Positive faith narratives on gender have the potential to strengthen the resilience of Christian communities. Within communities, cohesive and compassionate responses to Gender SRP have the potential to powerfully challenge the shame and rejection that attacks are designed to trigger, thereby undercutting the strategic effectiveness of Gender SRP.

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE IN GENDER SRP

Highlighted as a 'Pressure Point of concern' in the 2021 report *Same Faith, Different Persecution*, psychological violence remains one of the most widely utilized forms of pressure against the Christian community.[52] This form of violence **includes threats, intense pressure to recant, coercion to partake in activities against their beliefs, and the long-term trauma that is experienced after an assault.**

The nature of coercion and threats corresponds closely to the top Pressure Points for each gender; women live in fear of the threat of sexual violence, forced marriage, forced divorce, and being hid from society. Men are coerced through threats of losing their job, being beaten, imprisoned, killed, or forced to fight against their conscience. These threats are often accompanied by deeply denigrating words.

While many testimonies of Christians in hostile circumstances reflect their resilience, optimism and deep-faith, **thousands still live with trauma, struggling to rebuild their lives.** This is an unnoted form of psychological violence which often accompanies physical violence and requires a much longer journey of recovery. As others see the pain of the targeted individual, there is also a knock-on effect of fear in the community as they become apprehensive of the increased likelihood that this could happen to them. The terrorizing element is a key part of the strategic choice to target church leaders, converts and young women.

[52] See footnote 30, *Same Faith, Different Persecution*, pp.6.

Methodology

Open Doors WWR monitors religious persecution dynamics in over 100 countries annually. The GSRP analytical team studied data from the 76 countries where persecution is high, very high or extreme in the WWL 2022 reporting period (1 October 2020 – 30 September 2021). In this report GSRP analysts have prioritized findings from the top 50 countries on the Open Doors World Watch List 2022. However, some detail has been drawn from countries ranked 51-76, particularly to develop analysis of regional dynamics.

The data comes from In-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, external experts and WWR analysts. As part of the data gathering process, regionally based experts collected qualitative data from trauma specialists, church leaders, focus groups and experts. The report also uses information from interviews with Christian men and women who have experienced violations based on their faith.

Qualitative research, while limited by increased subjectivity in respondents' answers, provides a depth of insight that complements the quantitative research elements. Collection of gender-specific data can be limited by stigma and feelings of shame often connected with gender-based violence. For many Christian men and women, reporting sexual violence is unspeakably difficult or dangerous. There is also a risk of re-traumatization through interviewing that can have a negative effect on potential respondents' mental health.

The analytical team used a mixed methods approach; data was analyzed to reveal how often Christian men and women experience the range of 30 Pressure Points and record qualitative descriptions of incidents and trends in specific contexts. Both participant's comments and broader statistics resulting from coding the data through this framework allows GSRP analysts to observe and track overall trends in the gender-specific patterns and dynamics of global religious persecution and discrimination.

The Pressure Points framework has been refined over the last five years of GSRP research. Changes since the 2021 report consist of reclassifying denied access to religious trainings from 'Travel bans/restrictions on movement' to the expanded 'Denied access to religious materials, teachings, and rites', and adding subcategories to Psychological violence to include extra detail of violence type.

A more detailed methodology can be found at Open Doors Analytical, including an in-depth outline of the Pressure Points framework and corresponding definitions. [53]



Shalom Trauma Centre, Nigeria.

[53] 2022 Gender SRP methodology, Open Doors Analytical, 2022. [password: freedom].

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 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 programing
   - Include targeted programing and aid for women and girls who face double vulnerabilities as members of minority faiths, recognizing the important role of such programing in countering violent extremism
   - Ensure meaningful participation by women and girls who have faced double vulnerabilities as members of minority faith in designing, assessment and implementation of targeted programs and aids
   - Encourage programs (research projects) to support evidence generation in relation to Gender SRP.

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
   - 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
   - Enact legislation to counter child, early, and forced marriage, and ensure such laws are enforced
   - Ratify and abide by the terms of the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
   - Encourage ratification of CEDAW and CRC.

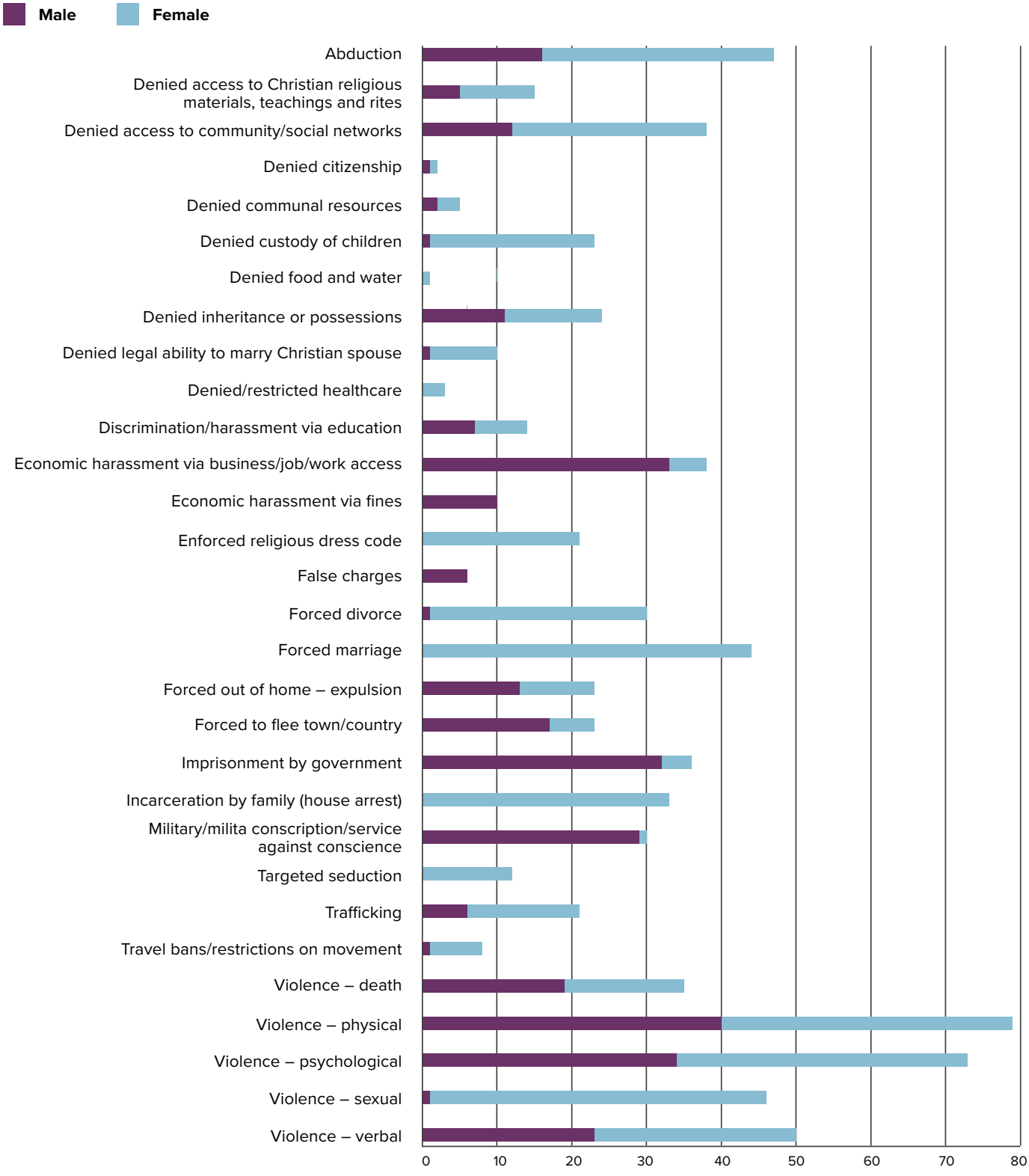
3. **Given the way sexual violence in conflict is being used against women and girls from religious minorities, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict should carry out a study, with input from the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), 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
   - Recognizes the existence of a double vulnerability faced by women and girls from religious minorities
   - Identifies the synergies between FoRB and women's rights to equality, drawing on the groundwork the Special Rapporteur on FoRB in addressing this theme
   - 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
   - Pray for women and girls who are doubly vulnerable due to their gender and faith
   - Advocate on behalf of women and girls facing this double vulnerability
   - Seek justice for women and girls facing any form of discrimination, persecution or violence, by:
     - » Propagating a biblical understanding of God's heart for justice, and the dignity of all humans
     - » Empowering women, men, girls and boys to access justice, in order to hold perpetrators to account.

Appendix 1:
Complete 2022 Pressure Points – distribution by gender

The full list of 30 Pressure Points and a visual representation of the distribution of Pressure Points for male and female Christians is presented in the bar chart below. This chart illustrates the number of WWL top 50 countries in which a particular Pressure Point is recorded for males or females. In some countries, a Pressure Point is recorded for both genders.[54] This is due to an explicitly differentiated dynamic being associated with the application of pressure for each gender.



[54] A list of Pressure Points with their associated definitions can be found in the 2022 Gender-specific religious persecution methodology, WWR, 2022.

Appendix 2:
Top 10 Pressure Points tables – progression 2019-2022

The top 10 Pressure Points for male and female Christians for 2022 are ranked below, with comparisons provided for the percentage scores since 2019. The scores refer to the percentage of World Watch List (WWL) top 50 countries where the Pressure Point is recorded as characteristic of the experience of religious persecution for the gender.

2A) TOP 10 PRESSURE POINTS TABLE FOR TOP 50 COUNTRIES: MALE

2022 Rank	Pressure Point	2022	2021	2020	2019 Augmented*
1	Violence – physical	80%	86%	82%	74%
2	Violence – psychological	68%	66%	56%	44%
3	Economic harassment via business/job/work access	66%	74%	66%	72%
4	Imprisonment by government	64%	74%	66%	52%
5	Military/militia conscription/ service against conscience	58%	56%	40%	36%
6	Violence – Verbal	46%	44%	38%	68%
7	Violence – death	38%	48%	38%	32%
8	Forced to flee town/country	34%	38%	40%	20%
9	Abduction	32%	34%	34%	22%
10	Forced out of home – expulsion	26%	38%	34%	30%

**Augmented data was added subsequent to the publication of the 2019 Gender SRP report.*

2B) TOP 10 PRESSURE POINTS TABLE FOR TOP 50 COUNTRIES: FEMALE

2022 Rank	Pressure Point	2022	2021	2020	2019 Augmented
1	Violence – sexual	90%	86%	84%	88%
2	Forced marriage	88%	90%	84%	76%
3	Violence – physical	78%	84%	64%	62%
3	Violence – psychological	78%	74%	40%	38%
5	Incarceration by family (house arrest)	66%	70%	60%	62%
6	Abduction	62%	58%	50%	34%
7	Forced divorce	58%	64%	64%	60%
8	Violence – Verbal	54%	56%	46%	52%
9	Denied access to social community/networks	52%	52%	36%	58%
10	Denied custody of children	44%	42%	34%	46%

Appendix 3:
Gender SRP PREST Concentration – Radar Graph

Political and legal, Religious, Economic, Security, Social and cultural and Technological (PREST) categories are used by Open Doors World Watch Research (WWR) to understand landscapes of persecution. Each Gender SRP Pressure Point is correlated with its appropriate PREST category (see Table below).

The PREST Gender SRP radar graph represents the spread of Pressure Points impacting Christian women versus Christian men in the WWL 2022 Top 50 countries.

This graph demonstrates the concentration of Pressure Points facing Christian men, predominately economic and security concerns. In contrast, Christian women face a wider spread of Pressure Points, especially into the socio-cultural areas and related to legal inequalities.



PREST CATEGORIZATION OF PRESSURE POINTS

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. While technological means may be used, in part, to carry out several Pressure Points, no Pressure Points refer exclusively to Technological aspects of persecution.

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	

Appendix 4:
Gender SRP – Regional density of Pressure Points

The average number of Pressure Points for each gender per region for top 76 countries is listed in the table below.

	Male	Female
Sub-Saharan Africa	5.7	10.8
Middle East & North Africa	5.5	10.6
Asia	6.3	6.9
Latin America	10.1	5.1

Appendix 5:
Regional categorization of WWL top 76 countries

In 2022 there were 76 countries recorded by WWL as experiencing high, very high or extremely high levels of persecution.[55] The table below lists the how these 76 countries are categorized regionally within WWR.

Asia	Latin America	Middle East and North Africa (MENA)	Sub-Saharan Africa
Afghanistan	Colombia	Algeria	Angola
Azerbaijan	Cuba	Bahrain	Burkina Faso
Bangladesh	El Salvador	Egypt	Burundi
Bhutan	Honduras	Iran	Cameroon
Brunei	Mexico	Iraq	Central African Republic
China	Nicaragua	Israel	Chad
India	Venezuela	Jordan	Comoros
Indonesia		Kuwait	Democratic Republic of the Congo
Kazakhstan		Libya	Djibouti
Kyrgyzstan		Mauritania	Eritrea
Laos		Morocco	Ethiopia
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
Uzbekistan			Sudan
Vietnam			Tanzania
			Togo
			Uganda

[55] For more information on this, see WWL 2022: Compilation of all main documents. WWR, 2022.