

Connecting with the World Church

WMI



Gender Based Violence: An International Perspective



With special thanks to our partners

Church of Bangladesh
Presbyterian Church of Taiwan
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United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands
United Church of Zambia
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1. Executive Summary

The Church of Scotland has produced a number of reports concerning violence against women (VAW) since 2003, all of which are rooted theologically in the Church's understanding of the imago Dei, the creation of every human being in the image of God. Advocating gender justice for all, these reports identify the overwhelming statistical evidence that women and girls are far more likely to experience forms of violence than men. This violence has been strongly condemned and understood as a dehumanising practice, contrary to the will of God. They call for all women to be treated equally, so that all of society can flourish.

This report asserts that we cannot assume that our theologies and experience are universal to all, but rather that cultural contexts are vital in women's experiences of what it means to be a woman and their experiences of violence. If we believe in a world where all are equal then we must hear the voices of women around the world, so that we can learn from one another and work together to ensure that all women and men are recognised and treated as equal, just as they are in the eyes of God. The Church of Scotland works together with international partners to address gender based violence (GBV) through the World Mission Council. This report is a culmination of voices and experiences from practitioners in our partner churches, who are taking practical steps towards creating a world where all can live life in fullness regardless of gender. These stories reveal the deep gender inequality in the world that women must contend with, which is inseparable from issues of class, caste, colonialism, religion and race.

Beginning by defining GBV and engaging with women theologians from Africa and Asia in order to develop an understanding of violence outside the Western context, this report is then split into three distinct sections: Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, and Restricted Freedoms. The first, 'Physical Violence' explores domestic abuse in Zambia and Bangladesh, as well as female genital mutilation in Egypt. Secondly, 'Sexual Violence', focuses on child abuse, rape, trafficking, and the relationship between sexual expectations and HIV. The final section, 'Restricted Freedoms', looks at the reality Palestinian and Sri Lankan women face as they live in conflict or post-conflict areas. These challenging stories ask us to question how we approach issues of gender equality and urge us to begin to work as a global community of God's people, women and men, to challenge unjust practices, to support one another and to put an end not only to GBV, but the conditions that foster this injustice.

2. Gender Based Violence: An International Perspective

“ Violence against women is contrary to the will of God. We believe in life abundant for all God’s people, and this is our prayer for the church and for the world.¹”



The Church of Scotland’s commitment to working towards the eradication of violence against women (VAW) has been strongly stated in the reports on Domestic Abuse in 2003 and on Violence Against Women in 2012 and 2014. Each report has a different emphasis, yet all condemn all forms of VAW and together they provide a theological basis for the church to understand this dehumanising practice. Rooting the Church’s work theologically in the creation of every human being as made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), these reports positively assert the equality of all human beings in the eyes of God and insist that all must be treated as such. Advocating gender justice for all and not ignoring incidences of violence against men, these reports identify the overwhelming statistical evidence that women and girls are far more likely to experience gender based violence (GBV)² than men and boys, which is symptomatic of the patriarchal societies in which we all live. Making practical recommendations for the Church of Scotland for policies, education and action in the life of the Church, these reports are to be commended for their recognition of the extent of VAW and the proactive attempt to begin to change the androcentric culture prevalent in society and the Church.

The scope of the Church of Scotland’s reports on VAW has come from a Scottish perspective, thus presented a Western understanding of VAW. The 2014 report has given us a strong theological framework to work from and shared the experiences of women from our own context, and this report seeks to add to this by sharing the experiences of our partner churches from around the world to enrich and challenge our understanding of VAW. As the 2014 report asserts, cultural contexts are vital in women’s experiences of what it means to be a woman and their experience of violence. The stories of women from our partner churches, and the response of churches across the world to GBV, reaffirm that this is a global phenomenon, which takes place in a particular location, in a particular culture, to a particular woman or girl. As part of the worldwide church, the Church of Scotland works together with international partners to address GBV and takes practical steps to creating the conditions where all can live life in fullness regardless of gender. By hearing the stories of women around the world we can learn from one another and work together to ensure that all women and men are recognised and treated as equal, just as they are in the eyes of God.



Gender Based Violence and Gender Justice

'Gender based violence refers to domestic, sexual and all types of partner violence'³ Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnuath continues: 'It takes many forms – physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, restricted freedoms, coercion and threats – occurring in both the public and private spheres. It includes domestic violence, rape (including marital rape), sexual harassment, forced prostitution, verbal abuse, humiliation, female infanticide, female genital mutilation and dowry-related violence.'⁴ Its basis is in patriarchy, which positions men over women (as well as some men over other men) often resulting in a sense of entitlement and privilege in many.⁵ Challenging patriarchy is not, as Althea Perkins from the University of Guyana says, about hating men, but rather, it is about striving towards gender justice, towards just and right relationships based on mutual respect and accountability.⁶ It is about full respect for the creation and the rights of children, women and men to live life in fullness.⁷ This report draws on the experience of women living around the world as well as the actions of our partners to work towards gender justice in their churches and their countries. If we as a church declare that 'We believe in life abundant for all God's people' then we must listen to the voices of women from across the globe and support efforts that are striving to ensure that there is gender justice for all.

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It is important to note that the struggle for gender justice in the global South has not been viewed through the lens of the women's suffrage movement, women's rights, and the demand for equal access to opportunities and privileges enjoyed by men.⁸ In addition to addressing gender

oppression, they must face the multiple oppressions of class, caste, race, colonialism and religion. Kwok Pui-lan states that the result of this is that 'the struggles of women in the Third World often operate from positions of extreme marginality, outside the established channels of national politics.'⁹ This is connected to the deep-rooted relationship between poverty and gender, which is highlighted in Christian Aid's 2014 report, 'Of the Same Flesh: exploring a theology of gender'. We cannot ignore that while women comprise of half of the world's population they make up the majority of people living in poverty today.¹⁰ This report reveals that those who suffer the most due to their gender are often also oppressed because of their ethnicity or socioeconomic location.¹¹ Culture, indigenous religions, traditional myths, and the Christianity of colonialism have all played a role in developing patriarchal understandings of the role of women. For example, the prevalence of Confucianism philosophy present in family life, Christian and non-Christian alike, in countries such as Taiwan and South Korea makes men the absolute masters in all aspects of life.¹² The impact of culture must not be underestimated in any context. Musimbi Kanyoro highlights the dilemma faced by the African woman who has been the guardian of traditional practices for many years, which are passed on as cultural values that are not to be discussed, challenged or changed.¹³ Among African women there are considerable disagreements about how to regard cultural practices, including female circumcision and labola (bride price); for some these practices are the essence of their culture and therefore central to identity, and for others they are acts of injustice to women, reducing them to mere instruments of men and culture.¹⁴

It is essential to remember these cultural issues particularly when we listen to the experiences of our partners and engage with their attempts to move towards global gender justice. When we try to understand the lives of women in the global South, we must set aside presumptions that our theologies are readily transferable and be prepared to be challenged and learn from the experiences of other women. Western feminist theologies speak from a cultural context in which Christianity is the dominant tradition, whereas, with the exception of the Philippines and South Korea, Christians in Asia are a tiny minority. Secondly, we must take care not to universalise the experiences of women in the West as if they represent the lives of all women, something Westerners have been criticised for.¹⁵ Kwok has argued that Western theologians often display racist and ethnocentric orientations, even while calling for a global sisterhood, which makes it all the more important that we listen carefully to the voices of women and be prepared to learn from them.¹⁶ While the theology of these women is very much locally rooted, it is also globally connected. It is for this reason that they look to enter into dialogue and seek solidarity with women in the North. We have much to learn from one another and much to offer to each other. In the words of Mercy Amba Oduoye, 'Western approaches to feminism may differ, but the goal – an end to the marginalisation of women is sound.'¹⁷ We differ for many reasons, but our ultimate goal unites us.

One of our goals is for the church to become a place where women and men can flourish, united in their diversity. Oduoye imagines the church as a place where 'all people [are enabled] to enter in hope into the struggles of others, to seek creatively to suffer our way through contradictions, to cope joyfully with diversities and with the varieties of

being human, and to celebrate them.'¹⁸ For her 'liberation must be viewed as men and women walking together on the journey home, with the church as the umbrella of faith, hope and love.'¹⁹ Women and men in our partner churches and organisations are standing up for gender justice and challenging unjust and oppressive structures that they see in their society to make this a reality. The North India Church Review (Vol XLIV No. 10): October 2014 featured a commitment to women and securing gender justice at a global level. Rev Priscilla Papiya accuses the church of leaving much of this work to NGOs, and using an evocative example of violence against women, poses a challenge to the Church of North India, a challenge that is relevant to us all:

“ One of our goals is for the church to become a place where women and men can flourish, united in their diversity.

The detestable part is when women and girls are raped during the evening or night, there are many who pose ridiculous questions as, 'What was she doing alone in the night, why did she have to go out at that time?' as though she deserved to be raped because of the crime of going out alone. How do we the church, look upon women who are abused, or those who are seeking justice? Or more pointedly, how does the church understand gender justice?²⁰

For Papiya, gender justice is not about doing women a favour, but rather it is 'to reclaim the original purpose of God in creating male and female in the divine image.'²¹ This is a challenge that is being taken up by our partner churches, as well as us, but there is still much work to be done.

The collection of experiences that follow has been largely gathered from women working in our partner churches as ministers, mission partners, medical staff, leaders of women's organisations and beyond, and reveals how our partners are responding to GBV by moving towards gender justice. Collected from our partners in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Middle East, they also purposefully allow the voices of women to be heard through the use of story.²² Split into three sections, physical violence, sexual violence, and restricted freedoms, many of these stories do not make for comfortable reading, but they are the real life experiences of women living in the twenty-first century. While many names have been changed or omitted, these are the voices of real women who are members of our partner churches, voices that need to be listened to because:

Until women's views are listened to and their participation allowed and ensured, the truth will remain hidden, and the call to live the values of the Reign of God will be unheeded.

Mercy Amba Oduoye and Musimbi R A Kanyoro²³





3. Physical Violence

“ *Women are not punch bags for men to prove their masculinity, what men need is to protect, love and affirm women.*

Rev Susan Matale, UCZ

Physical VAW comes in many forms including domestic abuse and female genital mutilation (FGM). Domestic abuse is prevalent in many societies, including Scotland. Here we will read about the experiences of women in Zambia and Bangladesh, as well as the steadfast work of our partners who are trying to put an end to GBV and support victims of violence in their countries. Culture, tradition and gender norms are a potent mix and a UN Report revealed that of the countries surveyed nearly half of all girls aged 15-19 believed that a husband was justified in hitting his wife under certain circumstances.²⁴ Some of our partners are determined to break down these unjust cultural norms and empower women and girls to live life in fullness. One example is the work of our partner in Egypt as they challenge FGM. FGM is one of the most controversial and distressing forms of GBV, which we often close our ears and eyes to; however, in parts of the Middle East and Africa young girls are suffering this physically and psychologically damaging atrocity.²⁵ The Synod of the Nile of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Egypt (Synod of the Nile) is fighting to combat FGM by raising awareness to educate and mobilise communities of women. Many of our partners aim to spread transformative messages that can change their societies. It is by no means an easy feat, but this commitment is to be commended and supported.

Domestic Abuse

While the Church of Scotland contributed to the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, our partner the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) used the global campaign to raise awareness of GBV in Zambia, particularly domestic abuse. Mable Sichali, Community and Social Justice Secretary of the United Church of Zambia, points out the male gender privilege in Zambian society and says that women lack empowerment, literacy, and the skills they need to demand gender justice. Having discovered that most cases of GBV happened in the home, the UCZ took up the theme for their 2014 campaign: 'From peace in a home to peace in a nation; Stop violence, empower women and men.' Women are overwhelmingly the victims of GBV in Zambia and are often too frightened to report cases to the authorities therefore end up seriously wounded or even dead. In response the church is committed to raising awareness and now the media and other stake holders are getting involved. The UCZ has taken steps to address GBV by training diaconal workers, church leaders and chairpersons in the issue. Three ambassadors were trained by the Christian Council of Churches in Zambia who are responsible for raising awareness and educating others, as well as monitoring the progress of governments. One particularly successful project, which comes under the auspices of the UCZ are the Tugwashanye Support Networks, which Mable Sichali runs in Mazabuka. This project works with people living with HIV, orphans and vulnerable children, widows and other women, focusing on women and youth empowerment.

The victimisation of women and girls is one of the most common, yet least visible forms of oppression. Its effects transcend the bruises and the fear to tear at the very fabric that holds families and communities together. It is accompanied by shame and often people feel they are living double lives as Ann Chand's story reveals. Ann is a Counsellor at the Gender-Based Violence Programme of an NGO, and she was helped by the UCZ. Married for over 12 years with 3 children, she spoke of how after their second child everything changed and her husband started drinking heavily and regularly beat.

'This kept going on for some time. I would ask my family members to come and counsel us as a couple. It would improve for a short period of time, but still go back to the same old habit. One day I went out and he came back home to find that I was not there. He was so upset with me even though I told him I had gone to visit my friend who was unwell. When I got back he started beating me in front of my three kids. It was so bad that the next day I was unable to go for work. Instead I went to the clinic for treatment because I was so swollen. I never reported to the police because I was so shy especially because I am a counsellor who deals with these cases.

The end finally came when my husband, in an alcohol-fuelled rage, told me I was going to die. I decided to separate from him and take the children. Now I am trying to rebuild my life without living in fear.'

Domestic abuse infiltrates many societies and leaves no country untouched. Our Mission Partner in Bangladesh, Pat Jamison has been talking about VAW in her partner plan letters for some time now. In January 2014 she wrote about Bangladesh's first ever national census on women and abuse, which revealed alarming statistics that speak for themselves: 87% of women suffer domestic abuse, 50% of women beaten require medical help and 33% of women are raped by their husbands. Many of the programme areas throughout the Church of Bangladesh Social Development Programme (CBSDP) aim to combat GBV. Women make up 50% of the population, but they do not exercise the same proportion of decision-making power in the family or in society. They are often regarded as mere equipment for sex, for childbearing and as labourers to perform domestic or farm work. Often they are not given adequate food and are certainly the last person in the home to eat. In slum areas in particular many women are being abused by their husbands, family members and/or society. Women often suffer physical and mental violence resulting from demands for a large dowry, divorce and polygamy among other things. All of these forms of domestic abuse demean and oppress women and girls, and the CBSDP recognises that for women to protect and establish their legal rights they need education on self-awareness, self-dependency and legal assistance. One project that provides legal support and advocacy for these distressed women is a Legal Clinic at the project office. This enables women to cope with their situations and provides financial support. A similar project in Meherpur is located beside the main police station and court, where CBSDP staff are involved in arbitration.



Female Genital Mutilation

“ *One woman revealed that she was circumcised although her parents were highly educated. She always thanked God for not having female children, for she was very suspicious about whether FGM is useful or not. But now she stated that, ‘Even if I have girls, I surely will not circumcise them.*

Synod of the Nile, Egypt

Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. It is usually carried out on girls from infancy until the age of 15 (before puberty starts) and often by people with no medical training. Egypt has one of the highest rates of FGM in the world (91% or 27.2 million women and girls).²⁶ For the past 25 years, developmental and national institutions have been fighting female genital mutilation. The Synod of the Nile and the NGOs Coalition against FGM/Cutting (a coalition of over 100 Egyptian NGOs working in the field of women’s rights) have alleged that, since 2011, one of the contributing factors for this high percentage is the sponsorship of a medical convoy by the Muslim

Brotherhood’s political wing the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), which offered medical services, including FGM, to villages for a modest fee in the Upper Egyptian governorate of Minya, which the FJP have denied.²⁷

Recognising the influential role that the religious platform in the Middle East has in affecting public opinion, the Synod of the Nile is committed to ongoing education, awareness and empowerment. Their Council of Services and Development (CSD) was established in 1981, it promotes development services and ministries through the eight presbyteries of Egypt, covering 350 Presbyterian churches. They have engaged in a variety of programmes since 2004 combatting sexual violence and FGM in their communities. Most recently they are running a programme called ‘Advocacy against GBV and FGM’ (2014-2015), which aims to raise awareness against practices that lead to VAW, particularly FGM, and the importance of eradicating it. They aim to reach 2,500 people to educate them and to train 200 to continue this advocacy work.

The advocacy work that has been undertaken has already made an impact on Egyptian women. One programme run in a village in Upper Egypt concluded with a statement that was signed by all of the women in the church:

We, the women of Mansheyet Bedeni, pledge not to subject our daughters or our granddaughters to circumcision. Based on what we have learnt, we will participate in combatting this crime. This is our covenant before God and before the CSD.

Programmes and workshops like this are having a considerable impact among these women and are challenging traditional views on FGM. For one woman, who was prepared to have her young girls circumcised despite painful memories of her own operation, this education changed her mind.

‘I always felt guilty, until I attended this workshop’ said one of the participants. Then she explained that, when she was a child she was accompanied by her mother to the doctor to be circumcised. She was promised that many good things would happen to her after the operation if she obeyed her mother’s instructions. But she was shocked, saying ‘I remember every painful moment I went through.’ After attending the workshop she said: ‘When I was a child I was circumcised. Although I am educated, I was intending to do the same for my daughter according to tradition, until I heard about the dangerous consequences. I entirely changed my mind. I won’t commit this crime to my child.’

“ *When I was a child I was circumcised. Although I am educated, I was intending to do the same for my daughter according to tradition, until I heard about the dangerous consequences.*

The workshops are providing women with scientific information about the physical and psychological impact that FGM has on girls and women, which enables them to educate one another. They also help to break taboos and allow women to talk to one another about their experiences of FGM, the guilt they feel for ‘depriving’ their children of circumcision and build networks of support and understanding.



4. Sexual Violence and HIV

A UN report in 2014 reported that 120 million girls around the world have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts; this means that more than one in ten girls has been raped or sexually assaulted.²⁸ The findings make for grim reading: nearly half of all adolescent girls aged 15-19 who reported having experienced physical and or sexual violence said they never told anyone about it. While the reasons vary, many say that they did not realise what they had experienced was a form of violence. As a result they suffer in silence, traumatised, confused and ashamed of what has

“*Abusive practices are often masked as tradition or as being normal, which our partners are trying to challenge and change through education, self-help and support groups.*”

happened to them – at worst they continue to suffer abuse believing that it is ‘normal’. Abusive practices are often masked as tradition or as being normal, which our partners are trying to challenge and change through education, self-help and support groups. The stories of women around the world reveal the fear of breaking taboos and speaking out about sexual violence, but they also show how through developing networks significant differences can be made in people’s lives and the lives of their children.



Sexual Abuse and Women Living with HIV

The CSD of the Synod of the Nile is engaged in raising awareness about and advocating for an end to sexual violence. Through producing films and resources, as well as working with partners and mobilising communities they aim to bring about great change. Rania, from Banaty Institution (an organisation for protecting girls at risk) was moved by a short film CSD produced and no longer feels able to remain silent about the sexual abuse phenomenon:

‘The video tells real stories; it shows you how sexual abuse victims feel and what they experienced. Moreover, how they have suffered remaining silent, not asking for their rights so they don’t bring shame on themselves. Isn’t that sad? What’s even sadder is that we stand paralysed in front of such crime! It’s time for all of us to stand together against sexual abuse.’

This film is part of an ongoing project, ‘Advocacy against Sexual Abuse 2009-2015’, which aims to mobilise public opinion in all aspects of society to call for deterrent laws regarding sexual abuse. This project began with preliminary counselling schools, where new church leaders were empowered and educated to go into their communities and raise awareness. The second step was a media campaign, which mobilised media professionals and broadcast to millions of people all over the Middle East. The production of the film, ‘In Her Place’ was seen on both public and Christian TV channels. Thirdly, a series of seminars and training courses to raise awareness about sexual abuse were rolled out to families, school teachers, staff of NGOs and children. The fourth stage is to support The Middle Eastern School of (Sexual) Abuse Regarding Pastoral Counselling (MESARPAC). This project has opened up many opportunities including an awareness raising programme with Syrian refugees called ‘Syria Tomorrow School’ in partnership with graduates from MESARPAC. Throughout the conference, which was attended by 420 young people under the age of 18, they used songs, sketches, movies, and open discussions to raise awareness about types of abuse, how to defeat abuse and how to protect women’s bodies.

In Zambia, Mable Sichali told us that GBV is addressed quarterly in congregations during the HIV and AIDS Sundays. They also are trying to incorporate GBV in all self-help groups to empower women to address the issue in their families and communities. They plan to increase their interventions because they have noticed the problem is growing. There is a lot of child defilement, which is exacerbated due to a myth that having sex with a virgin or young girl will cure a man of HIV. There has been a considerable rise in incest due to this and it is not always a safe place for young girls at home or at school. This travesty affected one young woman, in her second marriage. She has three children from her first marriage; the youngest is three and the only girl:

‘My neighbour came to my place of work in hurry; she asked me to rush home to see what had happened to my daughter. When I came home I found my daughter screaming pointing to her private parts saying ‘daddy, daddy, daddy!’ When I asked what dad had done she said he had put what looked like a hard stick into her private parts. Then I realised she had been defiled by her stepfather. When I checked her with my neighbours the girl was badly hurt and she had blood all over her clothes.

Before I realised it the angry neighbours had caught my husband who was later detained in the police cells for further investigation. The Women Lobby and other community women were all involved to make sure justice would prevail. My daughter was not only hurt; she was traumatised and is frightened of older men. He had been an abusive husband and I always forgave him, but this? No I can’t take it.’

The man was subjected to an HIV test and was later jailed for 15 years imprisonment for defilement.

It is not only children who are subjected to sexual violence. Fear, passivity and societal expectations of what it means to be a ‘good’ woman impact many women’s sexual relationships. Afraid to ask questions or voice their concerns about sexual and reproductive health and rights, women are often frightened, even in a consensual relationship, to insist on condom use or refuse unwanted sex.²⁹ Sex becomes an obstacle to gender equality. One Zambian woman’s story puts this into perspective. Forced to marry an older man of high standing in her community when he got her pregnant as a teenager, she speaks of his jealousy and her obligation to have sex with him even when he was sick and she was pregnant, only to find out later she had HIV.

‘Even in his sickness he insisted we have sex. In obedience I agreed because that is what our culture says. I started feeling sick during pregnancy. I did not know that the reason was that I was HIV positive. I gave birth four months after his death to a very unhealthy baby. I was always in and out of hospital with him until he died a year later. I became depressed and very sick such that I almost died. I was diagnosed with TB. I was counselled and was tested for HIV and was found positive.’

Another project run by the UCZ’s community health programme is the Makeni Mother and Child Support Programme, which works with teenage mothers and children, who are often victims of GBV particularly sexual violence. In partnership with the Church of Scotland, it employs a full time Project Officer and plans to build a centre for these victims of GBV with other NGOs and partners.

“ 76% of young people living with HIV aged 15-24 are women.

Women living with HIV are statistically more likely to contract the virus due to sexual violence in their communities or their homes. Women account for 52% of people living with HIV worldwide, and in sub-Saharan Africa, women constitute 57% of those living with the

virus. Shockingly, 76% of young people living with HIV aged 15-24 are women.³⁰ Community experience and research has revealed that this prevalence is not only due to biological reasons, but that it is relationships with men, some of them violent, abusive and unfaithful, which puts women at risk.³¹ There is an increasing recognition that violence is both a cause and a consequence of HIV transmission. Research has shown that vulnerability to HIV among women who have experienced violence may be up to three times higher than among those who have not, and that there is a 1.5 times higher risk of contracting HIV if a woman has experienced intimate partner violence.³² Ida Waddell, a Church of Scotland Mission Partner in Zambia tells us that this is due to gender inequality, poverty and a lack of education among women, something that can be traced across the global south. The Zambian woman in the story above had little to no sexual education when she encountered the man who would become her husband, a man who had a local reputation for womanising. Her story continues:

‘I lamented for days, but I thank God for the Doctor and the church for being there for me. I was put on anti-retroviral treatment and my health has tremendously improved. I am now on my feet again.

I used my husband’s benefits to start a business. Right now I am doing fine. I am a contractor and HIV care giver in my community. I am happy that I have lived this long 19 years after my husband’s death, all because of God. I thank God that my surviving 2 children have all completed school and my son is in college studying mechanical engineering. I therefore pledge my life to the Lord to help other women and girls live positively even with the virus. I am now a chairperson of a widows group.’

Echoing Ida’s experience, Siskone Msimang argues that we have been using HIV and AIDS as an entry point to address women’s rights, but it is now time to use women’s rights as an entry point to HIV and AIDS. She says:

The most effective ways to prevent new infections among women and girls do not, and should not, lie in the domain of AIDS programming. Instead, women’s rights activists and their allies . . . must focus on putting more money, power and sexual choices into women’s hands.³³

While Msimang is speaking for an essential cultural change in the international community, we also see small steps being taken by enterprising people like her and our partners to empower and educate women to gain financial independence. Another good example of this is the United Mission to Nepal’s Start and improve your Business training for income generation activities, which includes GBV training among women, girls and boys. For many women involved in their Anti-Human Trafficking Project this was a further step to building self-esteem and gaining respect from their husbands. The UMN has reported a decrease in domestic violence as a result of such projects.





For many women, however, a diagnosis of HIV results in further discrimination and stigma, which restricts her quality of life through access to healthcare and self-help groups, and through the increase of domestic violence. Usually the first member of a family to be tested for HIV, the woman is often blamed for bringing the disease into the household. Africa is by no means alone in facing the challenges of HIV and GBV: The Church of South India Synod Diaconal Concerns has been running a community based care and support project in the Namakkal area for the past three years, which has been supported by the Church of Scotland HIV Programme. They aim to provide support for the increasing numbers of women and children who are contracting HIV in the area, numbers of women infected rose from 80 to 145 between 2013 and 2014, by encouraging testing and regular medication, providing legal assistance and shelter, and raising awareness in schools. Despite their commitment to raising awareness, stigma and fear remains one of their largest challenges. Home visits are difficult, and they report that many of their clients have lost hope and are suicidal. One woman escaped her husband and came to the project for shelter as he was harassing her and forcing her to go for regular abortions. She was able to stay at the community care centre and both she and her husband were offered counselling, which they accepted and eventually she returned to her family home.

Sexual Abuse and Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a form of modern day slavery in which human beings are bought, sold, and transported within countries, regions and across the world. The purpose of trafficking is always exploitation which ranges from sexual exploitation, forced labour and organ harvesting.³⁴ Women and girls make up an overwhelmingly large proportion of people being trafficked often, but not exclusively, for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Poverty, lack of education and gender inequality are contributing factors to the vulnerability of women and children to human traffickers. The Theodora Project in Negril, Jamaica, was started to help meet the needs of young girls and women, in order to offer them some basic skills and education support so that they are able to make positive choices of their own. Many of these young women had already been exposed to sexual exploitation. Margaret Fowler, Executive Director of the Theodora Project and minister of the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, says that the vast majority were at risk of being drawn into the illegal sex trade and of becoming potential trafficking victims. There is a safe house for the more vulnerable and at risk women, as well as a school which offers education programmes to help young women find employment. Gemma is one young woman who has been helped by the project, and while her life is still difficult it has improved considerably.

Gemma grew up in rural Jamaica where there was little opportunity for education or work. She did not attend school regularly, money was tight and life in general was hard. The vicious cycle of abuse did not pass her. Abused regularly by her stepfather, and having previously been abused by another male relative, Gemma had no choice, but to move at the age of 16. She travelled to Negril to live with friends, hoping to get a job; however, everything went downhill and she ended up working as a prostitute and eventually in a go-go club. She came to Theodora through a friend who noticed she was bruised, cut and generally looked bad. Investigations showed that she had a boyfriend who was not only abusing her, but also pimping her. Gemma proved to be a bright girl and she began to turn herself around with a helping hand. It is still a work in progress; she spent approximately 18 months at Theodora and is now back living in the community. She has a child, but with a new job she can just about manage. Importantly, she now feels much better about herself and has hope for the future.

Gemma is one of many, and sadly it is not possible to keep all of the girls in a residential programme because it is expensive. Margaret Fowler says that with sexual and domestic abuse on the rise the church has a role to play in encouraging women and girls to speak out. She says,

‘The church plays an active role in both rescue and rehabilitation. The task of projects such as Theodora and the Church is not to keep silent but to raise all the issues in the public domain and provide as many services as possible to enable young people such as Gemma to move forward, make good choices and experience the hope of tomorrow.’





5. Restricted Freedoms

“ *As a young girl I'd like to feel secure – we are at the beginning of our lives and the future is ahead, but this takes away our freedom and right to life and security.*

Nadeel, YWCA Jerusalem.

In many of the countries in which our partners work women suffer GBV due to restrictions put on their freedom. These restrictions are manifest in a variety of ways including, but in no way limited to, education, marriage, healthcare and ministry. For the Palestine woman, life under occupation restricts her freedom to education, healthcare and marriage as girls and women are kept from moving across military check points due to harassment from soldiers as well as by protective male relatives. Forced marriage, dowry-related violence, and so-called honour killings increasingly affect women living in Palestine as well as across Asia and Africa. Globally, women

are also restricted in following their call from God to be ministers, and in cases where churches do ordain women as ministers of word and sacrament, often their freedom to work is limited by cultural expectations and restrictions on their freedom to participate at higher levels in church structures. Many of our partners are taking steps to address these restrictions of freedoms as women and men work together to strive towards gender justice for all.

Restricted Freedoms

The YWCA Palestine works hard to empower women and girls so that they have the confidence and the skills to engage civically and politically. Through education, vocational training, awareness raising, opportunities for civic and political engagement at local and international levels, the YWCA Palestine helps girls and women face the difficulties that they face living under occupation. At their first international conference held in Bethlehem in September 2014 there was a panel of individuals from Palestine, Sri Lanka and South Sudan who shared their experiences of being women in conflict or post-conflict situations. Statistically young women under occupation are more likely to suffer GBV. Lara, a feisty 19 year old woman representing YWCA Ramallah, echoed Nadeel's quote above, identifying the relationship between the occupation and the treatment of women in Palestine. She acknowledged that both genders suffer due to the restriction of freedoms, but that women suffer to a greater extent as gender norms are reinforced. She said, 'the occupation oppresses Palestinians; Palestinian men in turn oppress the women who they see as a weaker party.' Research supports her claim that the social reaction to the political violence, displacement and life as refugees has been the social oppression of women, particularly in their struggle to obtain an education and choose a husband.³⁵ Girls are particularly affected as they are often removed from school and encouraged to marry young so that they do not have to pass through checkpoints and encounter harassment from soldiers.³⁶ One woman from Al Khalayleh said:

'My older daughter was in Class 9 when I transferred her sister, but instead of transferring schools when just one year to go, the eldest left school early. Me and her father did not want her to have to go through the checkpoint every day and were afraid for her with the soldiers. I would not let my daughters go alone through the checkpoint.'³⁷

The checkpoints cause a great deal of distress for parents and daughters and result in the restriction of freedoms that are often taken for granted, as another woman from Al Khalayleh says, 'I have encouraged all my daughters to marry young to try and end the situation so they don't have to do that anymore. My daughter N married when she was sixteen.'³⁸ Forced and early marriage, for a variety of reasons beyond the control of a girl herself, is a form of GBV that is found throughout the world. In Bangladesh the legal age of marriage is 18 for females and 21 for males despite recent unsuccessful proposals to reduce the legal age to 16 for females and 18 for males. Regardless of these laws many people disregard them and the penalty for marrying a minor is a mere £10. Many families marry off their underage daughters for financial reasons with 80% of child marriage from very poor families. These families cannot afford to keep their daughters at home, and the dowry is often less when they are younger.

“ *Young women and girls living in conflict and post-conflict situations frequently face oppression at the hands of the soldiers and men in their own communities.*

Young women and girls living in conflict and post-conflict situations frequently face oppression at the hands of the soldiers and men in their own communities. In the Palestinian context this can include being made to undress to be allowed to cross checkpoints, which accounts for harassment and humiliation. Degrading incidents like this only need to happen once for a woman to lose her sense of bodily integrity and reinforce the knowledge that her body is not hers, but the property of someone else.³⁹ This is something that is also faced by women in Sri Lanka as was described by another young woman participating in the conference panel. Susanna from the YWCA Sri

Lanka said: 'The war ended in 2009, but the conflict is not over. Women in the minority still face a problem. The military still occupies the North and the East, which makes women feel insecure. War widows are forced to become sex workers, young mothers have lost their children and no one knows if they are dead or alive. An 11 year old girl was sexually violated by naval officer in North in July.'

The World Mission Council has been working with the Women's Development Centre in Sri Lanka since 2002, which has been working with women who have suffered violence or who are disabled since the mid-1980s. With the aim to create a society where women are actively involved and have equal opportunity and access to resources and control over their lives, the WDC provides education, training and support for women and children. They also provide non-judgmental physical, emotional and economic support for women who have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence. Over the past years the WMC has been involved with the WDC's Vocational Training Centre and shelter Haragama. Designed to help women and children who have suffered violence, they offer love and support, as well as counselling, education and access to good food and health resources.





Responding to God's Call

Women around the world face restrictions on their freedom to follow God's call and take up fulltime ministry of word and sacrament. Even in churches which allow female ordination, female ministers can end up being treated as second class by their colleagues and congregations. Christian missionaries who travelled to Taiwan in the 1800s placed great emphasis on the education of girls and women and established schools, including one that specialised in teaching 'Bible Women' who served as evangelists and lay pastors.⁴¹ The Presbyterian Church of Taiwan has been ordaining women for over 60 years and in this regard sees itself as progressive; however, the actual numbers of female ministers in 2014 is remarkably low. Many men, particularly in rural congregations, are unable to accept female ministers. What is particularly interesting about this is that it is not based on any biblical mandate as might be expected, but because it is perceived that it is a security risk to have a lone female in a manse.⁴² Female ministers also struggle if they marry; this is particularly problematic where they tend to marry another minister. This often means that the couple are given one charge and one salary; it is difficult for the woman to be a minister in her own right. Expectations concerning marriage also have an impact on the lives of single ordained women in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Marriage in Ghana brings respectability to a woman and women who choose to be single are treated with suspicion. As a result many congregations feel uneasy calling a single female minister to their church, and the female ministers themselves feel uncomfortable working closely with male counterparts or elders for fear of being accused of adultery.⁴³

“ I would like to emphasise that God's calling is the most important thing. Women should become ministers and church leaders only because of God's call. Women do not become leaders or ministers in order to threaten men. We do not want to argue and fight about position and authority. But we women want to serve God fully, using all of our talents and strengths. We want men to know that we are not their enemies.

Lily Kuo Wang, Presbyterian Church of Taiwan.⁴⁰

6. Conclusion

“ I do not just wish to hear inspiring messages on GBV, but my strong desire is to hear transformative messages; messages which cause us to change and act in order to build a peaceful Zambia where women, men and children will be able to participate equally without being harassed.
Mable Sichali, UCZ



Women around the world are taking action to put an end to GBV and to fight for gender justice; however, these women do not only want to hear idle promises and well-meaning words; they want and need to hear and share transformative messages that will have a significant impact on their communities and the entire world. Either every human being is made in the image of God, Gen 1:27, or they are not: if we are to take this fundamental understanding of our creation by God seriously, then we cannot rest until all human beings are treated as persons of equal value. In this report we have heard many stories; stories from Bangladesh, Zambia, Egypt and beyond, but GBV is not limited to these countries. While each story is unique and belongs to one individual, we know that each woman throughout the world has her own story and her own experience. This report only touches the surface of GBV, but it reveals the severity and seriousness of the issue and illustrates that we as a global Christian community must listen and act.

Around the world women are suffering GBV in many forms. We've heard stories of physical violence; domestic abuse in Zambia and Bangladesh, FGM in Egypt: we've heard stories of sexual violence; child molestation and rape: we've heard stories of restrictions of women's rights to education, marriage and ministry. We have also heard about the implications GBV has on the spread of HIV. Behind each of these abuses there are considerable commonalities: there is poverty, lack of education

and the cultural expectations of women. The voices of our partners and others advocating an end to GBV reveal the extent to which each of these factors impacts GBV, and their responses are inspiring and proving to be effective. By tackling a lack of education, by raising awareness of GBV issues from pulpits, in self-help groups and through the clever use of media and the arts, the work of our partners is effecting change, from giving women the knowledge to say no to FGM for their daughters to empowering them to stand up for their rights and removing themselves and their children from abusive relationships. Poverty is being addressed by helping women learn skills so that they can become self-sufficient and have a degree of independence. Support services are being provided, including legal services and counselling, free of charge so that women living in poverty have the means to effect change in their own lives. By empowering women and building up self-esteem and self-respect, our partners are helping women and children to see an alternative future, through encouragement to demand equality and gender justice.

The Church of Scotland is involved in projects run by our partner churches in a variety of ways: through financial support, through the support of Mission Partners, with advocacy, and with input from twinning relationships, as well as by offering prayerful accompaniment. Our commitment to ending GBV, based on our understanding of Gen 1:27, means that we must continue to support and learn from our partners around the world. Moreover, it is important that together with our partners we educate women and men at home and abroad that GBV is not simply a woman's issue. Together we are already working hard to secure a safer future for women and children, but often these messages are not reaching men in our communities and churches. This report has shown that women are almost always being helped directly by women. Our challenge now is to engage with and educate men so that they too recognise and understand this issue for what it is so that more of them will be empowered to take a stand against GBV. We must begin to work as a community of God's people, women and men, to challenge unjust practices, to support one another and to put an end not only to GBV, but the conditions that foster this injustice.



Endnotes

- 1 'Living a Theology which counters Violence against Women', Church and Society Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2014.
- 2 There can be confusion between the terms 'VAW' and 'GBV'. GBV is an emerging and developing term initially used interchangeably with or to replace VAW, as it addresses the gender of both the victim and the perpetrator. It is increasingly used to define all forms of violence that are related to social expectations and social positions based on gender, as well as including same sex violence. To date the Church of Scotland has used VAW in part because this is the preferred term of the Scottish Government (the NHS and other organisations use GBV). Many of our partners use GBV and for the purpose of this report we will adopt their usage bearing in mind the wider scope of violence stemming from patriarchal ideologies and gender stereotypes. For further information see: eycb.co.uk/gendermatters/chapter_2/1.html
- 3 Created in God's Images: From Hegemony to Partnership. Patricia Sheerattan-Bisnauth and Philip Vinod Peacock (Eds). World Communion of Reformed Churches: Switzerland, 2010. 115
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Ibid 3
- 7 Ibid
- 8 Kwok Pui-lan. Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology. SCM Press: London, 2004. 166
- 9 Ibid 151
- 10 'Of the Same Flesh: exploring a theology of gender', Christian Aid, 2014. 7
- 11 Ibid. Christian Aid's 2014 report 'Of the Same Flesh' provides a theological framework for exploring the relationship between gender and poverty, and asks 'is 'Why is it that gender is one of the most powerful determinants of poverty?' By combining theological discussion with the experience of Christian Aid's partners around the world who are working in this field, this report brings the issue of gender justice to life within a Christian framework. To read more visit: <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/of-the-same-flesh-gender-theology-report.pdf>
- 12 'Final Statement: Asian Women Speak', We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women. Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park (Eds). Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1990. 148
- 13 Kanyoro, Musimbi R A, 'Engendered Communal Theology: African Women's Contribution to theology in the 21st Century', 19-35, Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology, Kwok, Pui-lan (Ed). Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 2010. 20
- 14 Ibid 22
- 15 Kwok Pui-lan. Introducing Asian Feminist Theology. Sheffield Academic Press: England: 2000. 30
- 16 Ibid 31 Kwok criticises Mary Daly of only being able to imagine Indian women as burned-alive, immolated objects, Chinese women as eroticised foot-bound objects, and African women as genitally mutilated objects. She argues that while these atrocities did and do exist, Third World women are not being presented as capable women who can change their plight and work for a better future.
- 17 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African Woman on Christianity in Africa. Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 2004. 107
- 18 Ibid 99.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Priscilla Papiya, 'Gender Justice Commitment for Women', The North India Church Review Vol XLIV No. 10: October 2014.
- 21 Ibid
- 22 Our partners in Europe are also engaged in projects challenging GBV, but for the purposes of this report have been omitted.
- 23 Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R A Kanyoro, 'Introduction', 1-6, The Will to Arise: Women, Traditional and the Church in Africa. Mercy Oduyoye and Musimbi R A Kanyoro (Eds). Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 1992. 1
- 24 Hidden in Plain Sight, Unite for Children, UNICEF, September 2014. 168
- 25 The Scottish Parliament highlighted this in Motion S4M-12241: Alex Neil, Airdrie and Shotts, Scottish National Party, on 03/02/2015.
- 26 UNICEF, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change, 0. <<http://data.unicef.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-cutting-a-statistical-overview-and-exploration-of-the-dynamics-of-change#sthash.nVYaRMTN.dpuf>> <accessed 24/04/15>
- 27 <<http://www.stopfgmmideast.org/fgm-eradication-in-egypt-since-2011-a-forgotten-cause/>> <accessed 24/04/15>
- 28 Hidden in Plain Sight. Unite for Children, UNICEF September 2014 167
- 29 http://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/001/008/INSIGHT2_SisonkeMsimang_original.pdf?1412944414 <accessed 09/02/15> 10-11
- 30 UNAIDS (2013), Global report: UNAIDS report on the global AIDS epidemic 2013, p.78. Available at: <www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/epidemiology/2013/gr2013/unaids_global_report_2013_en.pdf> <accessed 12 July 2014> 5.
- 31 <http://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/001/008/INSIGHT2_SisonkeMsimang_original.pdf?1412944414> <accessed 09/02/15> 5.
- 32 'Violence Against Women and HIV' UK Consortium on AIDS and International Development, July 2013.
- 33 <www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/001/008/INSIGHT2_SisonkeMsimang_original.pdf?1412944414> <accessed 09/02/15> 5. She continues by positing that as long as women continue to be blamed when they are raped or assaulted, and the violations against them seen as less serious than those against men and boys, gender based violence programmes will not be able to make a significant impact. Rather these programmes need to be seen as key to economic growth and development and women's contributions to society understood as invaluable.
- 34 For more information about human trafficking and the anti-human trafficking work of our partners see the World Mission Council's 2015 report 'Anti-Human Trafficking: Our Partners' Experiences'.
- 35 Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Military Occupation, Trauma and the Violence of Exclusion. YWCA Palestine: 2010. 60
- 36 Life Behind the Wall: Voices of Women from the Seam Zone, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling: Rammallah, 2010. 42
- 37 Ibid 42-43
- 38 Ibid
- 39 Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Military Occupation, Trauma and the Violence of Exclusion. YWCA Palestine: 2010. 63
- 40 Lily Kuo Wang, 'Ecclesiology and Women: A View from Taiwan', We dare to dream: Doing theology as Asian Women. Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park (Eds). Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1990. 30-31
- 41 Ibid 30
- 42 Ibid
- 43 Grace Sintim Adasi, Challenges of Single Ordained Women Ministers in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Canadian Social Science, Vol 9, No5 (2013). <accessed 11/02/15>

