

Orientation

Roux, Elisabethe; Pertek, Sandra Iman

DOI:

[10.4324/9781003169086-9](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003169086-9)

License:

Creative Commons: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND)

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Roux, EL & Pertek, SI 2022, Orientation: The role of religion in countering violence against women and girls. in *On the Significance of Religion in Violence Against Women and Girls*. 1st edn, Religion Matters, Routledge, London, pp. 87-94. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003169086-9>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

6

ORIENTATION

The role of religion in countering violence against women and girls

Elisabet le Roux and Sandra Iman Pertek

In Part III we explore how religion can play a role in addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG). Two chapters, one focused on Christian settings and one focused on Muslim communities, draw on empirical work conducted by the authors to unpack the positive roles that religion can play in countering VAWG and supporting survivors. Part III concludes with a reflection chapter (Chapter 9).

Conceptual framework: Religious resources in countering VAWG

As motivated in the Introduction, Gerrie ter Haar's four categories of religious resources are used as conceptual framework for organising the discussion in the two empirical chapters in this section focusing on how religion counters VAWG.

Religious ideas can counter VAWG in different ways. The content of people's religious beliefs can directly oppose VAWG (e.g. categorically state that it is wrong), can promote principles that counter VAWG (e.g. gender equality, non-violence and sanctity of

all human life) or can be interpreted/leveraged in opposition to VAWG (e.g. love, respect and charity). Religious ideas can also be the driver behind VAWG response, translating into practical and spiritual support for survivors (Beaman-Hall and Nason-Clark, 1997). Furthermore, religious ideas can motivate and strengthen believers to actively resist and oppose VAWG. For example, Raising Voices and Trócaire developed SASA! Faith, an initiative in which leaders, members and believers of a faith come together to prevent VAWG and HIV. At the core of its approach to ending VAWG, it inspires everyone to live the faith-based values of justice, peace and dignity in their intimate-partner relationships (Raising Voices, 2016). Sisters in Islam, a non-governmental organisation in Malaysia, uses the same approach by claiming the rights of Muslim women by using Islam as a frame of reference, identifying and promoting Islamic ideas that support equality and justice (Basarudin, 2016). In our chapters' exploration of how religious ideas counter VAWG, we unpack what people actually believe and why and how it drives opposition to VAWG and its consequences.

Religious practices refer to the way people behave based on their religious beliefs. These religious practices can directly oppose VAWG or be leveraged as part of opposition or resistance to VAWG. For example, the religious practices of reading scripture and saying prayers can help survivors leave violent relationships and overcome the trauma they have experienced. Bradley (2010), in studying violence against women in Rajasthan, found women using religious ritual as a source of strength and courage in responding to violence. The practice of seeking counselling from religious leaders has the potential to ensure that those experiencing unhealthy relationships and/or violence receive the support that they need. Chalfant et al. (1990) argue that this is as counselling by religious leaders “has something different to offer in terms of (the) spiritual resources undergirding this type of counselling” (Chalfant et al., 1990:310).

People form communal structures with fellow believers, and such **religious organisation** can be an important resource in addressing VAWG. The structure of the religious organisation (e.g. the leaders, the different sub-groups formed, such as women's groups and youth groups) can be leveraged in VAWG prevention

and response. Religious leaders, for example, have status, normative authority and power to influence people's attitudes and behaviours around issues such as intimate-partner violence, sexuality, FGM/C, child marriage, rape and family dishonour (Tomkins et al., 2015). The religious organisation as a whole (e.g. a faith-based organisation) can also be instrumental in addressing VAWG. For example, the Baptist Community in Central Africa (a Christian church) in the eastern DRC runs approximately 10% of all the faith-based schools in the region and decided to launch an intervention to address sexual violence in schools. It trained staff members on how to use the Bible to initiate discussions on power, justice and steps to address sexual violence (Beasley et al., 2010).

Finally, **religious experiences** can form a crucial part of addressing VAWG, especially when it comes to VAWG response and the healing journey of survivors. Prayers, dreams, visions and spiritual experiences, while often an ignored resource in formal VAWG response interventions, can form an important part of a survivor's recovery. These experiences can play a central role in helping survivors from only coping for survival, to resilient self-efficacy and healing (Drumm et al., 2014). In their study of 42 survivors of intimate-partner violence, Drumm et al. ascribed these survivors' resilience dynamics to a "personal, individual understanding of and inner connection to a transcendent higher power God, or even more broadly to a 'search for the sacred', rather than to identification with or relationship to a religious system" (Drumm et al., 2014:391). The value of religious experiences for survivors should not be underestimated. For example, Bowland et al. (2012) found that participants in group psychotherapy that discussed spiritual struggles related to abuse and developed spiritual coping resources had significantly lower depressive symptoms, anxiety and physical symptoms than the control group.

Overview of Part III

In writing Chapter 7 ("A Christian perspective: Drawing on religion to prevent and respond to VAWG"), Le Roux engaged in an inductive analysis process with data from 14 different studies she was part

of over the past 12 years. However, Chapter 7 relies on extensive examples and illustrations from only four of these studies. The background, aim and methodology of two of these studies (the 2018–2019 study of the Anglican Mothers' Union in Zambia and violence against women and children [Le Roux and Palm, 2019] and the 2010 study on the role of African Christian churches in addressing sexual violence against women in conflict-affected settings, conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Liberia [Le Roux, 2010, 2014]) were already discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, more background and methodological details are offered below of only the two studies that were not introduced in Chapter 2.

In 2015, Tearfund and HEAL Africa started implementing a three-year VAWG intervention funded by UK Aid from the UK government under the *What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls?* Global Programme. The aim of the intervention was to mobilise, train and equip religious leaders to become catalysts within their own communities in order to address the underlying root causes of VAWG from a faith perspective. Implemented in 15 villages in Ituri province in the DRC, the intervention trained, mentored and supported 75 religious leaders (Christian and Muslim) and 30 gender champions (community leaders with a willingness to address gender-related matters; almost always also belonging to a church or mosque) to address harmful attitudes, behaviours and social norms that drive gender inequality and VAWG. Both qualitative research (a panel study) and quantitative research (baseline and endline community surveys) accompanied the intervention. Le Roux was part of the team responsible for the research. The panel study (a qualitative, longitudinal study in which data is collected from the same sample at several points in time) consisted of four panel visits at approximately eight-month intervals and was conducted with ethical clearance from Stellenbosch University's Research Ethics Committee: Humanities. The panel visits started in July 2015, with the last one conducted in August 2017 (Le Roux, 2018) and a thematic analysis of qualitative data conducted. The baseline community survey sample comprised 751 respondents, and at endline 1,198 respondents, all from randomly selected households in the 15 villages (Le Roux et al., 2020).

Channels of Hope (CoH) is one of the key methodologies used by World Vision for mobilising religious leaders and local religious communities to respond to the core issues affecting their communities. CoH Gender was developed in 2008, with the gender ‘flavour’ helping participants explore gender and VAWG through using the Bible. In October 2013, World Vision started a five-year, externally funded project entitled ‘Channels of Hope Gender Scale Up Project’, targeting 18 different countries. In 2019, Le Roux was asked to conduct an external evaluation of the Scale Up Project. The study was qualitative and a thematic analysis conducted. It combined 16 virtual key informant interviews, individualised written questionnaires for informants who preferred providing written responses (three in total), survey questionnaires completed by National Office representatives, document review of relevant World Vision documentation and a literature review of key academic literature on gender, VAWG, development and religion (Le Roux, 2019). The study was conducted with ethical clearance from Stellenbosch University’s Research Ethics Committee: Humanities.

Chapter 8 draws on the same studies outlined in Chapter 2, primarily Pertek’s PhD research projects in Turkey (Pertek, 2022a) and her experiences and learning as a practitioner at Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW, 2015; Pertek et al., 2020) and with Islamic Relief Ethiopia (Pertek, 2020). Herein Pertek also includes the analysis from her PhD research in Tunisia (Pertek, 2022b). Overall, the chapter draws on interviews with 27 Muslim women respondents from Syria (21) and Iraq (2) living in Turkey and also four African Muslim women temporarily staying in southern Tunisia, in Medenine and Zarzis: one each from Guinea, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and Sudan. All respondents were survivors of multiple forms of violence and discrimination, across the continuum of forced migration, from pre-displacement, conflict, flight and into refuge. Respondents in Turkey were subjected to multiple incidents of domestic and extended family violence, while interviewees in Tunisia experienced a range of non-partner sexual violence, trafficking, kidnapping and modern slavery along their forced migration routes through the Sahel countries and Libya. Also, key

informant interviews with 16 practitioners working on VAWG/GBV in different regions, local and international organisations are included.

Using an integrated intersectional and ecological analysis, Pertek, in her studies, explored the intersection of VAWG, religion and forced displacement to identify how religion shapes displaced survivors' vulnerability and resilience to the continuum of gendered violence. In in-depth and semi-structured interviews respondents spoke about religion in response to questions concerning their resilience, coping and well-being. Local and skilled interpreters supported the interviews in Arabic and French. Throughout the research, great attention was paid to ethical considerations with regard to working with survivors of violence to ensure that engagement in research does not cause any harm and to minimise any potential emotional risks. Respondents who required material or psycho-social support were referred to local service providers. Furthermore, the safety of the researcher and interpreters was of paramount importance and was ensured by following a security protocol and limiting the number of interviews conducted each day. Ethical approval was acquired from the University of Birmingham Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee. As in Chapter 4, the names of respondents were anonymised and pseudonyms were used. Systematic thematic analyses were deployed to process the data. Data was coded and re-coded following an inductive and iterative process until all themes were verified, merged or broken down into smaller themes, with the help of thematic maps.

The gender policy work at IRW is related to the organisation's global operations. In particular, Pertek reflected on the Gender Justice Policy of IRW (2015) and its organisational journey based on her experience as a gender and social development practitioner. The gender study, previously mentioned in Chapter 4, continues to inform Chapter 8. It was conducted in the Somali Regional State in Ethiopia, Dekasuftu Woreda, in 2015. This gender study, with details outlined in Chapter 2, included focus group discussions, key informant interviews, workshops with staff and project reports of Islamic Relief Ethiopia (Pertek, 2020).

Part III concludes with Chapter 9 (“Joint Reflection”), which uses the two preceding empirical chapters as the starting point for a more general reflection on the positive contribution of religion to VAWG prevention and response.

References

- Basarudin, A. (2016). *Humanizing the sacred: Sisters in Islam and the struggle for gender justice in Malaysia*. Seattle, CA: University of Washington Press.
- Beaman-Hall, L. and Nason-Clark, N. (1997). “Translating spiritual commitment into service: The response of evangelical women to wife abuse”, *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme*, 17(1): 58–62.
- Beasley, M., Ochieng, D., Muyonga, I. and Kavuo, Y. (2010). “Enabling faith-based organizations to address sexual violence in schools: A case study from the democratic Republic of Congo”, *Practical Theology*, 3(2): 191–202.
- Bowland, S., Edmond, T. and Fallot, R.D. (2012). “Evaluation of a spiritually focused intervention with older trauma survivors”, *Social Work*, 57(1): 73–82.
- Bradley, T. (2010). “Religion as a bridge between theory and practice in work on violence against women in Rajasthan”, *Journal of Gender Studies*, 19(4): 361–375.
- Chalfant, H.P., Heller, P.L., Roberts, A., Briones, D., Aguirre-Hochbaum, S. and Farr, W. (1990). “The clergy as a resource for those encountering psychological distress”, *Review of Religious Research*, 31(3): 305–313.
- Drumm, R., Popescu, M., Cooper, L., Trecartin, S., Seifert, M., Foster, T. and Kilcher, C. (2014). “‘God just brought me through it’: Spiritual coping strategies for resilience among intimate partner violence survivors”, *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 42: 385–394.
- IRW. (2015). *Gender justice policy*. Birmingham: Islamic Relief Worldwide.
- Le Roux, E. (2010). *An explorative baseline: The role of the church in sexual violence in countries that are/were in armed conflict, in a preventative sense and as a caring institution*. London: Tearfund.
- Le Roux, E. (2014). “The role of African Christian churches in dealing with sexual violence against women: The case of the democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Liberia”, PhD Dissertation, Stellenbosch University.
- Le Roux, E. (2018). *‘Before they were in darkness, but today things have changed’: Findings from a panel study with VAWG intervention participants*. London: Tearfund.

- Le Roux, E. (2019). *Reflecting on the scale up project: An external study of the scale-up and adaptation of CoH G*. Seattle: World Vision International.
- Le Roux, E., Corboz, J., Scott, N., Sandilands, M., Lele, U.B., Bezzolato, E. and Jewkes, R. (2020). “Engaging with faith groups to prevent VAWG in conflict-affected communities: Results from two community surveys in the DRC”, *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 20(27): 1–20.
- Le Roux, E. and Palm, S. (2019). *Helping families become non-violent spaces: Exploring the roles of the Anglican Mother’ Union in Zambia*. New York, NY: Episcopal Relief and Development.
- Pertek, S.I. (2020). “Deconstructing Islamic perspectives on sexual and gender-based violence, toward a faith inclusive approach”, in A.A. Khan and A. Cheema (eds.), *Islam and International Development: Insights for working with Muslim communities*. Rugby: Practical Action Publishing, 131–152.
- Pertek, S.I. (2022a). “Religion, forced migration and the continuum of violence: An intersectional and ecological analysis”, PhD Dissertation, University of Birmingham.
- Pertek, S.I. (2022b). ““God helped us’: Resilience, religion and experiences of gender-based violence and trafficking among African forced migrant women”, *Social Sciences*, 11(5): 201.
- Pertek, S.I., Almugahed, N. and Fida, N. (2020). “Integrating gender-based violence and child protection, an exploration of Islamic Relief’s approaches”, in K. Kraft and O.J. Wilkinson (eds.), *International development and local faith actors: Ideological and cultural encounters*. Oxon, New York, NY: Routledge, 131–152.
- Raising Voices. (2016). *SASA! Faith: A training manual to prepare everyone involved in SASA! Faith*. Viewed from <https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/sasa-faith-training-manual.pdf> [Date accessed: May 30, 2022].
- Tomkins, A., Duff, J., Fitzgibbon, A., Karam, A., Mills, E.J., Munnings, K., Smith, S., Seshadri, S.R., Steinberg, A., Vitillo, R. and Yugi, P. (2015). “Controversies in faith and health care”, *The Lancet*, 386(10005): 1776–1785.