

Double discrimination against Christian women due to both their faith and gender

163 Nigerian Chibok girls - predominantly Christians - struggle with trauma of kidnap and sexual abuse

Rape as a weapon of war targeting women specifically for their faith in the Central African Republic

Pakistani women and girls kidnapped, forcefully converted to Islam and married under coercion

Egyptian Coptic girls ordered to cover their heads or have their hair cut, or be excluded from school

A Consultation on 'Christian Women under Pressure for their Faith'* heard about these and other cases, which show that about 215 million Christians experience "high, very high or extreme persecution" in over 50 countries.

More than 50 NGO practitioners, academics and theologians from 19 countries learnt how - under pressure for their faith - women are persecuted in the same ways as men. But women can be doubly vulnerable to discrimination and violence, not only for their Christian beliefs, but also because they are born women, so that the effects are compounded.

Many Churches exist in complex contexts and under intense pressures, where women are violated and marginalised in ways in which men are not. In areas of economic and social deprivation, this vulnerability of Christians is often exacerbated and compounded by their lack of access to services, rights and legal redress.

Women are also subject to discrimination and rejection due to social, legal and cultural norms, inside and outside the Church. For example, kidnapped Christian girls can, on return, be ostracised by their communities in an 'honour and shame' culture.

Christian women can also suffer violence at the hands of their own families. Sometimes church leaders condone, collude and even perpetrate such acts due to their theological interpretations and understanding of male/female relationships.

Participants urge the Church globally to examine existing structures and practices, and call on our leaders, acting counter-culturally, to:

Repent of attitudes and actions which enable such abuses to go unchallenged

Pray for

- justice, mercy, humility and love to define the Church's response to survivors
- survivors to experience physical and spiritual healing
- perpetrators to experience inner conviction, repentance and spiritual healing
- unjust and discriminatory legal and societal norms to be overturned

Break the silence around discrimination and violence against women, inside and outside the Church by:

- raising awareness of these issues
- challenging attempts to conceal abuse in any environment of silence and stigmatisation
- giving voice to abused women, encouraging those still suffering to seek help
- supporting men under persecution so they do not resort to violence within their own families and communities

Support survivors in the following ways:

- ensure they are sustained in the Church community
- challenge internal Church structures that lead to damaging behaviour
- provide safe spaces where domination or exclusion of women have no place
- empower women in self-support, pioneering new services, where needed, to best practice guidelines

Seek justice for women 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 and men to access justice, in order to hold perpetrators to account.

The Consultation celebrated women acting with resilience and faith, and urges the global Church to walk with its women, and to collaborate with women and men actively addressing this double vulnerability of faith and gender.

*Consultation held in Leuven, Belgium, 1-3 June, 2017. It followed a first Consultation (Marcham, UK, March 2016). This produced a Letter to the Global Church, the Marcham Letter, upon whose recommendations this has built.