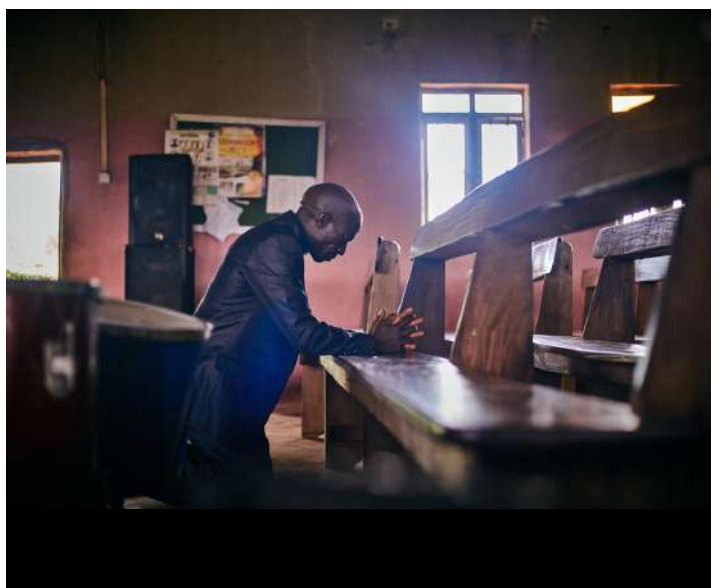


Overview of Gender Specific Religious Persecution (GSRP)

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

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



Top pressures: Christian men and boys

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

Top 5 Male Pressure Points



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

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

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

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

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

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

* Why Do Soldiers rape? Masculinity, Violence and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC). Baaz, M.E. & Stern, M., International Studies Quarterly, 53(2).



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

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

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

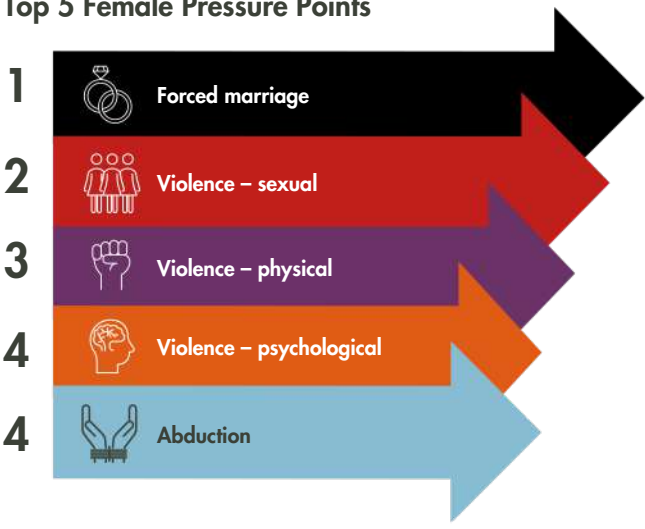
Top pressures: Christian women and girls

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

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

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

Top 5 Female Pressure Points



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

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

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

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

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