JLI ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN LEARNING HUB

Faith actors' involvement in the prevention, elimination and perpetuation of violence against children

Findings from Experts' Consultation

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JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE on FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Acronyms

CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
CSE	Commercial Sexual Exploitation
CEFM	Child Early and Forced Marriage
CoH	Channels of Hope
EVAC	Ending Violence against Children
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting
FBO	Faith-Based Organisation
FL	Faith Leader
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HTP	Harmful Traditional Practices
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LFC	Local Faith Community
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RI	Religious Institution
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UN	United Nations
URDR	Unit for Religion and Development Research
VAW(G)	Violence against Women (and Girls)
VAC	Violence against Children

Acknowledgements

This consultation with experts is the final part of three of the JLI EVAC Hub scoping study. It presents a summary of insights from in-depth interviews with fourteen key practitioners working with diverse faith communities on EVAC in multiple regions of the world in regard to the unique contributions of faith actors to eliminating violence against children as well as how faith actors have been involved in perpetuation thereof. Evidence of faith actors' involvement in formal and informal child protection systems is reviewed. A great deal of thanks to all the experts who agreed to be interviewed for this study, who for confidentiality purposes remain nameless and for whom anonymous initials have therefore been used.

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1. Introduction

This report presents findings from the consultation component of a three-stage Scoping Study commissioned by the End Violence Against Children (EVAC) Hub of the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities (JLI) conducted with expert practitioners (henceforth 'the experts'). This Hub is dedicated to a better understanding of the role of religion and faith actors in protecting children against violence. The UN defines violence against children (VAC) as all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse[1]. 'Child protection' is directly linked to this, and refers to preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children, acknowledging that these violations occur in every country and inhibit child survival and development. In a world where 84 per cent of people are religious, (Pew Research Centre, 2012), faith communities have a unique and indispensable role to play in ending violence against children (Hackett and Grimm, 2012). However, there remains a lack of substantial evidence to indicate the multiple roles that faith actors play in preventing and responding to violence against children or to examine faith complicity in VAC. This is an emphasis of the EVAC JLI Hub[2] and forms the focus of this scoping study.

In many parts of the world, religious leaders[3] have significant moral authority and profound, trusted relationships with their communities. They can act as gatekeepers to these communities and frequently have holistic, sustainable influence in promoting or challenging ideologies and behaviours, for better or for worse (Palm, Le Roux and Bartelink, 2017). They can also play a fundamental role in changing harmful practices, establishing child protection systems, providing services and serving as advocates at many levels (Hanmer and Robinson, 2014). They are key role-players across people's lives with influence in many major life events. At the same time religious leaders, faith actors or faith communities may perpetuate violence against children through overt abuse, justification using religious teachings or silence in the face of abuse. This is an additional reason why engaging faith and faith communities is critical if complicity with perpetration is to be reshaped. As a result, local faith communities hold a unique position in relation to efforts to end child violence. Religion can be used to defend or hide child violence but can also be an ally to end child violence.

This scoping study offers an initial contribution to exploring existing evidence in two specific areas:
- Firstly, the unique contributions of faith communities both in relation to ending, as well as contributing to, violence against children, to understand their involvement in this sphere.
- Secondly, the role of faith actors in influencing wider child protection systems to prevent and respond to EVAC to understand the potential that their engagement has here.

The study examines existing evidence, analyses trends, identifies key gaps and highlights examples of faith actors working to end violence against children. This data is crucial to help policymakers, religious leaders and practitioners inform policies and advocate for programmes and prevention efforts with faith communities to end violence against children. It will help set a future research agenda for the EVAC Hub and support evidence-based work with faith communities to end violence against children. Three cross-cutting issues were identified by Hub leaders and were built into the study: child participation, gender and interfaith engagement. This report shares findings from the third stage of the study only. It is based on evidence that all religions contain protective aspects, which offer important contributions to the EVAC task. Religious actors such as leaders, scholars, educators and faith-based organisations can play critical roles in behaviour change, service delivery, referrals and advocacy, by offering a unique entry point (Hanmer and Robinson, 2012).

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[1] UN General Assembly, Article 19, Convention on the Rights of the Child. www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

[2] The *JLI* is a global collaboration to bring forward evidence on faith engagement for development and humanitarian goals. In 2017 they launched an End Child Violence Hub comprised of over 100 members working with children in some capacity. *JLI* commissioned the *Unit for Religion and Development Research* (URDR) at Stellenbosch University, South Africa to carry out this third component of this study and to deliver briefing papers.

[3] Religious leaders are people in roles of formal or informal authority within a specific religious community or tradition.

1.1   Methodology

The 2018 scoping study aimed to investigate the existing evidence around faith communities and ending child violence. It combined a review of relevant literature,[4] case studies submitted by Hub practitioners[5] and consultation with experts. This report summarises findings from the consultation phase only. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were carried out across diverse faith traditions and geographic regions with experts with extensive practitioner experience with local faith communities around child violence and protection. It built on promising approaches, gaps, trends and evidence identified in the two prior stages of the study.

Interview guides (Appendix A) were developed with Hub leadership. Potential participants were identified by JLI membership and the researcher. The interviews were conducted via Skype, with 14 expert practitioners from various geographic regions who had experience working with Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, and Hindu faith actors on child violence as well as one with experience with African traditional leaders. Some of these experts are religious leaders and could reflect with insider/outsider positioning. One was a self-described 'atheist' with significant FBO experience and could comment from 'outside' the faith sector. The priority was to engage KII participants with insight into the *practicalities* of engaging religious actors around ending child violence in relation to local faith communities. International ethical clearance for the study was received from the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Humanities (THE-2018-8425).

The literature review highlighted significantly more documented evidence from Christian and Northern perspectives. Therefore, the consultation with experts specifically included those working within other faith contexts and targeted regional diversity identified as under-represented in literature. Experts in the interface between faith communities and ending child violence were selected using a snowballing technique from within Hub membership and a call for recommendations as part of the case study submission process. All had practical experience of working with local faith communities in the child violence space with knowledge of areas such as corporal punishment, orphans, psycho-social support, survivor support, child labour, disabilities and family-based models, many not so well represented in the literature. Diverse types of organisations were selected with male and female participants from thirteen countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, the UK and the USA. All had knowledge in one or more faith perspectives, and some were religious experts in their fields. However, they are not official representatives of any faith tradition and their contribution is made in a personal capacity. For confidentiality, all individuals are given anonymised initials and their respective organisation's names are not shared. However, an indication is given in the quotations as to the main region and faiths which they work with. All interviews were recorded, professionally transcribed, and coded thematically using Atlas.ti8 software. In this report, they will be termed henceforth 'the experts'.

This report outlines key findings from this third component of the scoping study. It is designed to be read in conjunction with the literature review report and the submitted case studies. Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010) suggest that consultation with expert stakeholders in the field through interviews forms an important component of scoping study methodology. It can lead to a better understanding of a complex topic, validate other findings and refine future research enquiries. It adds methodological rigour and builds on preliminary findings to offer a higher level of meaning, probe deeper and offer diverse perspectives. By engaging practitioners in the research process, it enhances validity with stakeholders. The methodology is evolving around how to synthesise this component into analysis and a decision was made by the Hub to retain the distinctive contributions of each stage and to provide three reports. The report is structured in five parts: Types of VAC connected to faith communities; positive faith contributions and beliefs; negative faith contributions and beliefs; challenges, gaps and trends; and three cross-cutting themes. It concludes with five recommendations.

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[4] Rutledge, K. and Eyber, C. (2019) 'Scoping Study on Faith actors' involvement in the prevention, elimination and perpetuation of violence against children.' Washington DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities Ending Violence Against Children Hub.

[5] Palm, S. and Colombo, F. (eds.) (2019) 'Scoping Study on Faith actors' involvement in the prevention, elimination and perpetuation of violence against children. Case Studies.' Washington DC: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities: JLI Ending Violence Against Children Hub.

2. Types of Child Violence

2.1   The inter-related nature of VAC

A significant number of the experts suggested that at the heart of many diverse forms of VAC lies the legal and social status of the child which often underpins many forms of inter-related violence. One expert highlighted that violence against children violates a child's physical, psychological and spiritual integrity. A number noted that legislating against corporal punishment is often the beginning of a wider process of change in culture and in attitudes towards children. The need was expressed for faith communities to play an important role in changing these underpinning legal and social attitudes towards children.

A number of the experts suggested that faith actors, therefore, need to take an intersectional lens which avoids seeing VAC as a 'hierarchy of harms' but sees their diverse forms as often connected by similar root drivers. This also enables a programmatic focus on one type of violence in a specific context, e.g. sexual abuse, to also help to make intersectional progress towards reducing other forms of child violence if these connections are taken note of. One expert highlighted:

> Child sexual abuse does not exist in a vacuum, kids who are sexually abused are often abused in other ways. There is a tremendous intersection with other kinds of violence. It becomes a baseline for conversation while looking at the broader spectrum (WX, Jewish, USA)

At the same time, there was a related concern noted about merely collapsing distinct forms of child violence together into one EVAC container when in reality the types may have diverse contextual drivers. One expert noted the danger that when you begin to talk about all forms of violence against children generally rather than focusing on its particularities, different forms of violence can get lost. Another expert pointed to the fact that when children are subjected to one type of violence this can make them more likely to feel helpless in the face of violence and to accept other forms of violence in a different space with less resistance or questioning. This was noted by him as especially true when the initial violence is carried out by someone that is trusted by the child.

This theme of fatalism in specific relation to religious beliefs emerged from the experts as something that could be internalised by both adults and children. Fatalism can be tied to the belief that one's social or economic status is divinely pre-determined and therefore cannot or should not be challenged by people. It can be seen in aspects of many faith traditions, religiously shaping static notions of caste, class and social status. In many instances, it is held in tension with other aspects of faith that require followers to act for social change. It was raised as a concern by two experts, both from Asian contexts, as potentially abused to justify human inaction in situations of child abuse:

> One of the challenges with any violence against children is this learned helplessness they can develop … if they experience one particular form of violence it makes them more vulnerable to another kind of violence. For example, if they experienced corporal punishment at home then it makes them more vulnerable to corporal punishment at school or sexual violence…. I think fatalism really feeds that. It can really contribute to that feeling and it is not good. (YZ, Christian/Buddhist, Cambodia)

Some of the experts noted emerging evidence around the long-term consequences and costs of VAC across economic, social and psychological domains, the human cost across the lifecycles of failing to end violence against children. They made arguments for allocating more resources to upstream prevention. Similar arguments are noted within, to and by religious institutions to demonstrate the urgent need for prevention strategies in light of the 'damage repair' being encountered and to break intergenerational and institutional cycles of abuse. It was noted that children are also the future of local faith communities and therefore need to be placed more intentionally at their centre by religious leaders.

Finally, the experts suggested that the drivers of VAC were contextual and diverse, often related to a wide number of overlapping factors including the *political* (conflict as a trigger), *economic* (poverty and parental pressures), *psychological* (mental health of family), *socio-cultural* (the normalisation of abusive social solutions such as child marriage), *legal* (the status of children under the law)*,* and *religious/cultural* (moral norms around VAC). Religion often played dual roles, both by offering specific religious justification and pressures but also by increasing or decreasing the other factors. As a result of this, emerging EVAC responses by local faith communities pointed to consultative community-based approaches that decide what to address contextually and not a non-participatory imposition from outside by a donor, network or faith body. One expert based in the UK noted that every community has its own history, culture and traditions and suggested that it is important when working with communities to consult with them and understand the drivers of violence in their particular communities. This recognises the value of community knowledge.

Despite this focus on the interrelated nature of types of VAC, two particular types of violence stood out from the experts as having connections to faith communities; physical abuse and sexual violence. It is to a more detailed exploration of these two aspects as well as other specific forms noted that this report now turns.

2.2   Physical Abuse

The experts noted many forms of physical abuse of children as prevalent in their contexts, in line with literature review findings. However, corporal punishment emerged as the primary intersection between faith communities and physical violence against children, raised by all the experts as a current site of religious contestation. They noted that this issue is contested across all faith traditions and geographic regions explored and tied primarily to home, family and school settings. Corporal punishment was seen as frequently still 'normalised' in practice as both a tool of parental discipline and of educational methodology. Religious justifications, sacred texts and faith beliefs were identified as employed publicly (by some within all faiths) to defend these practices, but also by others in the same faith to contest it. One expert gave an example of ways in which Hindu sacred texts could be used to legitimate patterns of parenting:

> *(I)n the Bhagavad Gita there is a verse that says the child should be cuddled and loved until the age of five, then from the next ten years, spare the rod and spoil the child or if near your age a child should be treated as a friend. (GH, Hindu, India)*

While the literature review showed many examples of faith actors who were contesting the legitimation of physical punishment, consultation with experts in the field highlighted the possible gap between 'elite' formal evidence, often from primarily Western faith-based sources and many attitudes and practices still existing at grassroots levels. This area was one example where culture and religion can entangle as 'tradition' in people's minds to reinforce normalisation. One expert, who works on child protection standards across his faith-based organisation worldwide, noted:

> *The argument is like, "well this is how we do things and no one has told us anything different." It is not necessarily always a Biblical justification, it is a cultural thing as well, "this is what we do, we hit our children, that is how we have always done it and no one has taught us different so now if you are going to start telling me I have done something wrong then I need to know how I am to control these 50 children in front of me." (AB, Christian, United Kingdom)*

The experts suggest that corporal punishment is often a focus rather than other forms of physical abuse because it is a current site of struggle directly tied to the status of a child under the formal legal system. Therefore, it can be seen as state-sanctioned violence. Many religious groups were seen to remain complicit here in a range of ways; contesting or holding back legal and political reforms or promoting patterns of parenting that endorse forms of physical punishment as religiously required. For example, a legal expert from a Christian organisation in Central America noted that '*leaders in the church Biblically establish that they have to discipline children physically*'. In the current South African context, a 2018 case has gone all the way to the

Constitutional Court to contest the current loophole in laws banning corporal punishment which still allow for 'reasonable chastisement' by parents in the home.[6] Religious organisations sit publicly on both sides of this, with faith-based organisation *Freedom of Religion South Africa*[7] arguing formally for the parental right to physically discipline children as a Biblical mandate, while other religious organisations and leaders, such as the *Quaker Peace Centre,*[8] are involved in bringing the case for legal reform in this area. Corporal punishment was seen by the experts to shape relations between caregiver and child in ways that affect a child's social status with one noting that in countries such as Sweden, where children are legally protected against corporal punishment, children have a completely different and higher status in their society where they are respected and accorded equal rights, which then reduces their susceptibility to other forms of violence. Public education for parents and further research on how to discipline children without violence is seen as part of the whole movement to end all forms of violence against children.

In some contexts, many religious schools still exist where physical modes of punishment often remain standard practice. At the same time, faith-based organisations (FBOs) are also developing promising models for change from within. Corporal punishment in homes and schools was named as a concern across multiple faith traditions and not just within one faith or region. The experts note that it emerges consistently in training around EVAC with diverse faith leaders. This is seen in the following comment exploring whether various sacred texts that point to the need to use physical punishment ('the stick') in child raising are to be taken literally or symbolically;

> *It has become a debate in each [organisation's] workshop with Imams and religious leaders…So what comes up from the debate is that there is a teaching within the Qur'an to raise and provide care and protection for children, so is hitting (to be seen as) a symbol for the guidance that adults and caregivers are supposed to provide in terms of education and care towards children. It (the stick) is used to provide motivation. (The discussion is often about if we can interpret) using the stick as a symbol (and not just literally). (KL, Muslim, Indonesia)*

A number of the experts suggest that the justifying of corporal punishment matters as it can often lead to other forms of physical abuse. It can also build a public culture of justified violence by adults against children. Both secular and faith experts highlighted this area as forming a unique problematic nexus between faith and violence against children. This needs sensitive engagement to dispel an aura of religiously infused morality that still often surrounds it:

> *We work in some Muslim communities and you will find that some of the children who are going to the Muslim schools…they can be beaten up, they cane them if they cannot read the Qu'ran well or be taught, they will be punished. Some don't want to go back, but the parents pressure them to go back, so they go back and you find these children who do not know whether to go or report because they end up going back because the parents say that is where they can learn. (UV, Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)*

A number of the experts suggested that corporal punishment may sit at the root of all other child violence, forming the dark heart of VAC where the corporal punishment of those viewed as 'lesser than' becomes religiously and culturally justified and may not even be named as violence. Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Christian experts all pointed to ongoing "wrong beliefs and assumptions" regarding the provision of care to children that they suggest underpin the continuation of violence. The experts also noted that children are often most vulnerable to violence within the home and family. A model which sees corporal punishment as an accepted form of discipline as part of a patriarchal household model was explicitly named by the experts as underpinning endemic patterns of VAC with close root links to VAW, especially domestic violence in the home.

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[6] See *YG v The State* 2017. Case Number A263/2016. The full case can be accessed at http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAGPJHC/2017/290.html
[7] https://forsa.org.za/
[8] https://www.saferspaces.org.za/organisation/entry/quaker-peace-centre

However, at the same time, it was noted that women can also be perpetrators of VAC. This was described by a number of experts as the 'Talonic effect'[9], where men are 'allowed' to punish 'women' and then women, in turn, are 'allowed' to punish children in a cycle of retribution including legitimised patterns of violence as punishment. This can also perpetuate a complex cycle of violence in the home where men first punish women and then women punish children in ways that become internalised by the one being punished. It can shape an intergenerational cycle where violence normalised in the home at an early age then shapes new generations. The focus on this form of violence may target what a number of the experts saw as a root cause of VAC, namely children's lower social and legal status, as well as the idea that VAC can be state-sanctioned by laws and social norms which should be protecting children. They suggest that changing this lower status of children (legally, politically, religiously and socially) in specific relation to adults may be an essential part of what lies strategically beneath tackling all forms of EVAC as a form of child justice. One expert noted:

> (W)e have focused on corporal punishment in particular as we believe it to be fundamental to all other forms of violence. It is so commonplace that it has become normalized as a parenting tool. So many children in so many societies are physically punished as children. This says something as it is normally state-sanctioned violence so it affects the status of the child and the whole problem of [child] violence in society is because of their very low status in society. They are the last to receive the justice which adults take as their right. We have managed to move forward with violence against women, slaves and servants, and children are…the most vulnerable but the very last to receive this form of justice. To receive equal protection under the law. (CD, Christian, South Africa).

In this nexus between faith communities and physical VAC, the experts suggest that faith communities, their sacred texts and long-held religious beliefs, often entangled with culture and colonialism, are currently playing an ambiguous range of roles, in both reinforcing and in challenging the practice. Its status as a 'root cause' of other forms of violence offers some clues to this emphasis. It was seen to be ubiquitous across all regions and religions. Aspects of VAC may remain entrenched partly because they retain an 'aura of morality' for both those perpetrating and receiving them. This issue emerged across all faith traditions and regions as an area essential for faith communities themselves to engage critically, especially if they are to work with other actors.

Discussion of other forms of physical violence was limited specifically in relation to faith, however, some mention was made of the fact that wider public violence against children by adults was also rarely questioned. A personal example was given by one expert in Asia who had tried to stop an adult male publicly beating two small children on the streets (who had been falsely accused of stealing) with no one else intervening. He notes:

> (T)he thing was it wasn't done by the family, these were street kids and they were being accused of stealing…These kids were terrified and this man was so angry that anyone would dare stop him. We are talking about ages four and six. (YZ, Christian/Buddhist, Cambodia)

2.3   Sexual Violence

The second form of VAC identified as a large concern by the experts in direct relation to faith communities was sexual violence (20% of all direct perpetration reported in the literature stage also focused on this area). They noted that this took a number of forms. First, child sexual abuse (CSA) within religious institutions of care and education, but also within families. Second, the wider topic of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) was raised as a related area of concern, most notably in Asian contexts. Child trafficking (for sexual exploitation) was noted as an issue in multiple continents and one which was often prioritised by Christian organisations in particular. Concern was expressed that this often drew on a 'rescuer' lens, which some of the experts highlighted as problematic for effectively tackling root causes.

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[9] This is based on the Latin *lex talionis* or the law of talion found in Judeo-Christian sacred texts meaning a retaliation authorized by law, if the 'punishment' corresponds in kind and degree to the injury. It can describe the legal and social justifications behind some VAC but also the idea that when one party cannot retaliate directly to other violence they experience, retaliation can then be displaced onto a weaker party such as a child.

A global focus on VAWG has led to increased research in this area, where the girl child is bundled into a VAWG lens. Some gender bias was noted here with a concern that a focus on this form of violence can prioritise only girls and may overlook the needs and vulnerabilities of boys, especially in relation to sexual violence. Also connected to this area were a number of other gender-related harmful practices such as child marriage and forced genital mutilation/cutting. These were primarily excluded from this study to avoid duplication, due to being the focus of a recent report produced by the GBV Hub of JLI[10]. These specific themes are receiving global attention and are often an emphasis for faith community interventions. Child marriage was named by one expert as the top violence issue for children in India and Nepal. Recent research has documented its complex entanglement with a range of different religions[11]. However, a focus on sensationalised practices alone may reduce attention from more commonplace forms of VAC in the world.

Overt sexual abuse by individual religious leaders was the main issue raised by the experts as a concern, as was sexual abuse within religious institutions, often connected to residential care and education. Religious leaders, in particular, were seen to often hold special coercive power, as well as other staff and volunteers. These religious spaces for care and education were seen as potential 'havens' for abusers, who may target the space due to its access to children. Significant media coverage and legal evidence are emerging of both perpetrations of abuse as well as complicity in covering up abuse allegations by religious leaders and institutions. This was identified by all the experts, across all the faith traditions, denominations and regions explored as a concern even if public revelations to date have been more strongly weighted to one tradition.

Another area was a failure to respond to abuse happening to children within families, with religious leaders aware, but often not equipped, to engage effectively. Another dimension noted was child pornography, both by involving and targeting children, but also by children being increasingly exposed to it in public spaces at young ages especially through its online dimensions, something particularly noted in certain Asian contexts:

> (R)esearch that we have done on pornography there…a lot of children think that it is a way of learning sex. So rather than fantasy, it puts a whole different emphasis on their expectations (YZ, Christian/Buddhist, Cambodia)

This can become a new, unregulated area of grooming for sexual abuse by trusted adults, including by religious leaders and was noted as an area of concern. However, sexual abuse is clearly not only confined to religious institutions. It has become a nationwide political issue in many countries due to levels of sexual violence being found in homes and schools. One expert from Indonesia noted that in 2015 a State of Emergency was declared around child protection conditions due to so much sexual violence happening to children in families and schools. However, he also noted that it was only when incidents involved 'international' children that the issue received more political attention. The experts noted repressive patterns around the sexual 'protection' of the girl child. Under cover of parental protection, forms of VAC can be partially normalised by religious ideas or rituals. An example given in India was a married girl going to live with her husband for the "girl's chastity to be protected meaning that it then becomes the responsibility of the in-laws, not the parents" (GH, Hindu, India).

Finally, the urgent need for faith communities to take the lead across faiths in breaking the silence around this issue was highlighted by the experts with silence seen as a form of complicity. Peru and Ecuador were noted by an expert in the Latin American region as choosing this area as their main interfaith focus at a national level:

> (T)hey organised a conference on the faith-based organisations and the sexual abuse of children and the engagement and they called it "breaking the silence" with the intention of bringing a strong message that we need to end the silence around this topic because there was a feeling that in Peru it is still very much a taboo and that faith leaders don't want to talk about it (ST, Interfaith, Panama)

[10] Le Roux, E. & Bartelink, B.E. 2017. *No more 'harmful traditional practices': working effectively with faith leaders*. London: Tearfund UK.
[11] Le Roux, E. & Palm, S. 2018. *What lies beneath? Tackling the roots of religious resistance to ending child marriage.* Girls Not Brides. UK.

2.4   Structural forms of violence

Six other forms of VAC were identified by the experts that faith communities were engaging with. Most of these can be seen as types of structural violence in some way and may remain disputed in certain settings as to whether they should be seen as VAC in their own right or as underlying structural drivers. These were:

- Gang-related violence - highlighted as a concern especially for youth in Latin American contexts
- Children on the streets, often identified as a result of children escaping abuse or poverty at home
- Religious radicalisation of children was noted as a specific concern in Middle Eastern contexts
- Gendered forms of violence around harmful practices where religion and culture were often blurred
- Child deaths including child homicide, and rising child suicide rates, often related to abuse by peers
- Religious practices such as dedicating a child to the monastery or endorsing son preference
- Early marriage and child labour emerged as significant but often normalised community issues

One expert from East Africa noted that religion and culture combine to normalise patterns of structural VAC:

> *You will find a girl at 14 and she is already pregnant, no one says anything because they see it as a normal thing and if you try saying anything…they will bring you a chicken or a goat so you can discuss and you cannot take it further to the police… it is a community accepted thing…it is the tradition for some tribes, it allows them to marry and no one will question because they will see it as normal. It is accepted… if some of the girls do not get married when they are fourteen or fifteen they start asking themselves, what is wrong with us, why are we not married? They think that is the role of the girl in their community….Also for the boys, to be taken out of school to look after the cattle, so you are now ten to twelve years old, you have to go…it is seen as normal (UV, Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)*

Various structural forms of violence often emerged indirectly in consultation with the experts. These can be seen either as forms of VAC in their own right or as underlying root drivers for more explicit forms of VAC. Some other examples given included child poverty, noted as often driving child engagement in armed conflict and in child labour; child neglect in the home, identified as a feeder system for children going to the streets; family breakdown and orphanhood as triggers potentially shaping both ongoing psychosocial challenges and lack of access to basic services for these children, especially in rural areas. Recent evidence from secular global sources[12] has highlighted the need for a socio-ecological model in addressing VAC that takes these structural dimensions raised by the experts more seriously. This need was reflected in complex realities shared by the experts who highlighted a struggle to get local faith communities to work on these systemic issues and to not just deal with visible or immediate symptoms. Underlying dimensions of violence can become normalised and then confront FBOs with dilemmas of how to respond. The experts suggested that many faith-based responses to EVAC seemed to focus more on 'exceptional' cases of explicit violence by an identifiable perpetrator, rather than on tackling underlying structures. This may be because these structural forms are named as ending child poverty or child protection and not directly as ending child violence. Whether child violence is seen as a separate programmatic area or a cross-cutting theme engaged across multiple sectors, is a question raised by this scoping study. The experts consulted often see these structural dimensions as forms of VAC that need preventative engagement by faith communities and contain gendered discriminations as one expert noted:

> *(T)here are different types of child labour which are very common, for example, children, boys will be taken to work on the farm looking after cattle… girls will be taken from rural areas to cities to work as*

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[12] See Mathews S, Jamieson L, Lake L & Smith C (eds) 2014. *Child Gauge: Preventing Violence Against Children*. Children's Institute, University of Cape Town. Also Centres for Disease Control (CDC). 2018 *The Social-Ecological Model: A Framework for Prevention*.

a maid, some will be taken to work in the bars as a bartender. Some will be taken to work in a brothel (UV, Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)

The experts noted that some forms of VAC caught children up in the same forms of violence as those facing adults. However, other forms of violence were child specific. This suggests that forms of child-based violence (CBV) exist that are shaped by wider social norms. The child is often the most vulnerable member of the family or community and at the bottom of a hierarchy of violence that is passed down and normalised as part of their formation. One expert from Honduras noted that the structures and cultures in her context meant that violence was so commonplace that it was seen as natural. The intergenerational cycle of violence was recognised, by some of the experts consulted, as critical for local faith communities to bear in mind. This may still be a relatively new lens for LFCs. However, it was highlighted in emerging evidence from faith-based models where one of the experts had been directly involved:

> *(W)e know that people who have been abused are more likely to be abused in the future. Or that they are more likely to become perpetrators….the statistics are the kids that grow up in house seeing bad things are more likely to identify with the victim or the perpetrator and they are more likely to repeat these dynamics over and over in future relationships (WX, Jewish, USA).*

The experts highlighted that particular groups of children are disproportionately affected by or vulnerable to violence, especially to patterns of neglect, stigmatisation and abuse. These groups were also far less visible in the literature review, which is also concerning. This discrimination may be because they are part of marginalised adult groups, e.g. albinos, migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, females, homeless, lower castes, or indigenous groups. Or it can be because they do or reflect something as children that is feared or judged by adults or by religion. This can include pregnant adolescents, child-headed households, street-children, orphans, gang members or children with disabilities:

> *Children with disability are looked at as freaks of nature and because we believe in the theory of karma so the actions in this life, they influence our next life so they would say perhaps the person did not do good deeds in a past life, so the child has been punished. That is a very negative attitude (GH, Hindu, India)*

Children living on the streets were noted as one specific example of a group that often encounters further marginalisation by the agencies who ought to assist them. Government or religious social policies can assume a narrow normative pattern of family life that excludes these children from accessing services or forcibly returns them into abusive contexts. Endemic patterns of child neglect and poverty may drive them to the streets and also further marginalise child groups, such as orphans, who often encounter increased risks of abuse in the home. Some of the experts pointed to children living on the streets as increasingly shaped by underlying patterns of parental neglect. If these children exercise their limited agency by leaving abusive families or abusive shelters, they often merely enter a new cycle of abuse and discrimination on the streets. Engagement with structural drivers is essential:

> *The other one that comes strongly is this child neglect, it has been there for some time but it is still a big problem…so far there is no prevention mechanism for it. We have seen an increased number of children affected by child neglect. We have this program with street children…before it was an issue with orphans because parents passed away.[But now] we are seeing some with parents but being neglected, so as a result of that most of them end up in streets and cities or they decide to involve themselves in unacceptable behaviour, drugs and what not. The main contributing factor, if you speak to these children you find…neglect by the parents. (UV, Christian/Traditional/Muslim, Tanzania)*

The experts related this category of 'left out' children to religion in two ways. They note positively that religious communities have often had a strong historical focus on reaching out to marginalised groups of children, e.g. orphans, as part of their faith commitment. Second, negatively that some religious communities can unwittingly perpetuate and reinforce beliefs or actions regarding these groups that contribute to their

marginalisation. For example, by insisting that the family model acceptable to God is that of children living with their biological parents, street children can be sent back into abusive homes.

2.5 Emerging forms of VAC

The experts noted three emerging trends in relation to forms of violence against children in their diverse contexts. These were:

Online or cyber violence against children.

The internet has fuelled this new form of abuse with a rise in child pornography. Sexual predators using social media and cyberbullying were both identified specifically. Trusted predators within many religious institutions were seen to be using social media and the internet to access children. One Buddhist expert in Thailand noted, "For example, there are so many monks using Facebook sometimes they can use Facebook to get children to come in for sexual things." Parents and faith communities, especially in rapidly modernising areas, were often not equipped to respond to this new threat.

Children as perpetrators.

Child to child abuse was also identified as a concern by some of the experts. Physical, emotional and sexual violence between peers, older and younger children, boys and girls were noted as needing urgent further research and was often hidden from sight in current EVAC programs. One expert suggested up to a third of his work on VAC may be related to peer abuse. Violence in various spaces was noted as taking place between children, from children to adults as well as from adults to children. Group bullying was also seen. The multi-directional nature of violence may need to be further examined. One insight was that sexual violence happens within same-sex groups, but religious taboos can prevent this from even being acknowledged as one expert within a Muslim context admitted:

> (S)ome boys are sleeping together with other boys in the [religious school] context. It is a very common practice that boys sleep with boys and see each other and are separated for sleeping [in dormitories] as boys and girls. In the research, one respondent said he experienced being grabbed by the older boys, teenagers and they tried to engage in a sexual way. (KL, Muslim, Indonesia)

Narratives of witchcraft related to children.

This was noted as a rising phenomenon, including the mutilation of children for body parts. It often targets children who are vulnerable, already discriminated against or seen as different. This is an example of VAC perpetuated within a wider harmful community narrative which contains both spiritual and cultural elements. Children perceived to be 'demon-possessed' are also particularly vulnerable to abuse. This area needs further research as to how certain children become seen as disruptive to the religious social order. This theme was reinforced by an expert who operates in the same area:

> One of the things I have learnt, which was not there for some time, is the killing of young albino children. It is connected to witchcraft …in some of the areas we are working with that, this child who was albino was killed or some of the body parts were taken. This is a new thing coming up very strongly in areas where we are working and it is related to witchcraft… we are losing a lot of albino children as a result of that…in parts of Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda. (UV, Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)

Summary: Types of Violence and Faith Communities

- Violence by many adults against children is being normalised and can also be internalised by children. Faith actors are both reinforcing and challenging this normalisation today.

- Physical violence is still used across multiple religions and regions as an 'acceptable' tool of punishment, discipline and learning for children by parents, teachers and other adults. Despite religious declarations, there remains an aura of religious morality attached to it at the grassroots.

- The most prominent types of VAC from the interface between faith and VAC were corporal punishment and sexual abuse, often embedded in the vulnerable legal and social status of the child.

- While children were mainly referenced as victims, they were also seen to be perpetrators, primarily against other children. Positioning children only as victims in need of rescue and 'protection' is common in many faith-based responses but this may fail to take account of children's own agency.

- The intersectional nature of VAC suggests a common root which normalises acceptance of the violation of a child's bodily integrity. Low social and legal status can shape and be shaped by this.

- Witnessing wider forms of social violence may disproportionately affect children. VAC can have long term implications over a lifespan unless constructive responses disrupt intergenerational cycles of violence. Faith communities have an important role here as they are often present over the full life-cycle.

- VAC was primarily identified by experts as hidden within homes and schools and often carried out by trusted adults who hold a specific duty of care to children. Community and religious beliefs play an important role in these spaces and can reinforce or reshape patterns of parenting and teaching.

- Wider pressures placed on family and school spaces by poverty and macro factors play a role in VAC. A socio-ecological model on VAC can better equip faith communities to also tackle underlying causes.

- Drivers of VAC are complex, often tied to structural and social factors including neglect, poverty, family breakdown. Religious and cultural beliefs were entangled in complex ways regarding children and need to be carefully disentangled at the local level by those perceived to have the authority to do so.

- Emerging VAC issues were often related to rapid modernisation, exposing children and parents to more complex and isolated lifestyles including access to the internet and its dangers for children.

- Emotional abuse was rarely mentioned, however, the value of providing psycho-social support emerged from selected faith practitioners in Africa as an important area in building child resilience.

- Refusing to allow a child a voice was named by some as an act of violence itself, suggesting that child participation and child protection need to be more explicitly linked in local faith interventions.

- A VAWG lens raises important gendered issues but can unwittingly mean that boys get lost programmatically. There is a need to carefully integrate responses between VAW and VAC in terms of engaging with root patriarchal drivers but also to take a child-centred lens directly.

3. Positive faith contributions and underlying beliefs

The experts agreed that faith communities are providing a range of interventions across the continuum of prevention and response. These are not always discrete activities as providing care and support to parents and children is often simultaneously also a violence prevention mechanism. They noted the multi-level engagement of faith actors, from trans-national to local and the significant reach which religious institutions have across the lives of millions of people. However, they suggested that it is local faith communities that are often most relevant to preventing VAC and yet they are currently under-recognised, informal and undocumented.

Local faith communities often tend to start with care and support due to a faith-driven 'pastoral care' remit and can initially focus on immediate needs. As a result, some of the experts suggest there has often been less historical focus on prevention or on root causes. However, in recent years the rise of FBOs and networks has led to a rise in faith activities focused on VAC prevention and the use of religious leaders here, at times as part of wider campaigns. It was suggested by the experts that they have a unique role to play on beliefs and values with a specific role around 'theologies of the child' noted as a unique contribution to child non-violence by faith communities. One expert who works globally across multiple faiths noted that:

> *Many religious leaders have moral standing, power and influence in their communities, and they are in touch with people throughout the lifespan. They often have access to isolated communities not served by others. Most religious leaders profess respect for the human dignity of the child, compassion, equality, justice and non-violence. These values are incompatible with violence against children and can form a unifying base for working towards ending violence against children. Religious leaders have unique opportunities to promote non-violence through their diverse roles as teachers, theologians, leaders of worship, chairs of organisations and as community activists (AZ, Interfaith, United Kingdom).*

The following section explores four key findings that emerged from the experts with regard to positive faith contributions in relation to EVAC; care and support provision, VAC prevention, system-wide engagement in child protection and positive faith beliefs around children. It then concludes with a short summary.

3.1   Provision of Care and Support

Local faith communities have often responded to the needs around them and projects have then emerged from the bottom up. Often, as part of their faith mandate, LFCs target vulnerable child groups left out of early systems of care, such as those with disabilities or orphans, and try to find ways to respond to their visible immediate needs. However, one expert noted that this need-based methodology of faith communities, whilst important, could unwittingly lead to requests for high-risk models of care, failure to build in minimum standards or a lack of strategic continuity across projects. As a result, a range of diverse faith-based responses to children emerged, from trafficking rescue centres to children's homes and community OVC projects. This uncoordinated diversity could at times pose challenges for developing consistent evidence-based responses and was therefore identified as both a strength and a weakness. Tensions were noted by one expert between their faith-based organisation's strategic projects-driven approaches and the more immediate need-based responses of some local churches that can at times fail to address root causes:

> *(I)t is a total strength to the whole thing as you have loads of places where they are just responding to local need… The trouble is when you look into some of the models, how much thought has really gone into this? (AB, Christian, England)*

It was also noted that children could form a project 'hook' for securing funds from faith communities worldwide who often see children as a worthy group to support. As a result of these funding opportunities,

the experts pointed to a range of care and support projects that have mushroomed as a result and are now being run by faith communities, often involving volunteers and paid staff. These included the types below:

- Support access to key services by playing a formal role in providing child care, health or education
- Provide victim support especially for trafficked or abused children, offering a perceived place of safety
- Offer a grassroots presence as a first responder in many hard-to-reach communities to report/refer
- Equip religious leaders within seminaries to see social action as part of their vocational mission
- Develop global child sponsorship funding models which offer an entry point for local child protection

Many of these activities have been carried out for decades by local faith communities and have a long history, frequently tied to complex power-laden missionary patterns between Northern and Southern contexts. Modern FBOs often build on or replicate in new ways, these historical projects. This can be a strength, as they are often well established in the community and may be trusted. But without careful support, some of them can model outdated styles of child care, hire unqualified staff and even be seen as a side concern to the core business of evangelism:

> *Essentially it is doing the stuff no one else would do…. disability, blindness, leprosy and albinism. Those are the big ones in Africa whereas other NGOs were not so sure what to do about that. It was just apparent, back in the 1940s or whatever, that someone had to do something. So, everyone came out to be a missionary but ended up doing social work. (AB, Christian, United Kingdom)*

3.2   Prevention of VAC

VAC prevention activities were also noted as taking place on multiple levels involving local faith communities. Six promising levels emerged organically from the experts consulted. These levels are explored below:

Family Level - The most significant level of engagement for local faith communities with VAC prevention was seen to be at the family level, focused on parental support, capacity building, family safety nets and strengthening of the family unit. The experts situated within FBOs often highlighted that this was already happening, while those outside the FBO sector saw it as a potential role for which there was limited evidence to date of effective action. This suggests that perceptions vary regarding effective involvement from faith actors in this area:

> *(O)ne of the most important roles that churches can play, or faith groups can play, is prevention. They can support new parents, they can support parenting by helping people, parenting is a difficult thing to do…there is no manual of how to do this…. If parents can be supported …to create nurturing and caring environments for themselves and their children, then we will go a long way to preventing abuse and neglect. I think that is a key role. However, once abuse and violence have occurred, the church has a role in providing a restorative counselling approach, family counselling to help people find better ways to deal with their problems. These are all things that pastoral councils should be able to do, but I do not see much evidence that they are doing it. (CD, Christian, South Africa)*

Local faith communities play ongoing direct and indirect teaching roles in many contexts with families (especially around parent/child relationships) and also in shaping their religious and ethical beliefs over a lifetime. The images used to describe God were noted by a number of the experts as often indirectly shaping human patterns of parenting, especially in Judeo-Christian traditions where God is often imaged as a loving yet also violent and punishing parent. Reimagining how parents engage with their children to develop trust and not fear can be essential for EVAC. Some promising models were seen, often requiring capacitating faith institutions first. One expert from the Orthodox church in Egypt noted that in their program, "(W)e teach parents to look for symptoms, how to talk about things if something has happened, how to trust them and believe them [children reporting sexual abuse]." (OP, Christian, Egypt)

Working with parents and with children to change their mindsets about childhood, and in this way to reshape interpersonal engagement, was seen as a key and potentially unique role for local faith communities to play:

> *(T)he real thing that we need to do is change childhood to being a place where children are nurtured and cared for and helped to grow to their full potential. Not beaten, denigrated, put down and humiliated and made to feel small and stupid and useless which is what punishment does. (CD, Christian, South Africa)*

Child Level - A second important level where local faith communities played a role in prevention was at the level of the child. Models were shared of campaigns and workshops held directly with children, as well as programs that surrounded children with trusted adults and safe spaces and aimed to build their spiritual resilience, as well as educate them about violence and their rights. Models such as kids clubs, recreational sports, pre-schools and child rights clubs often used faith-based spaces and volunteers. For example, one East African expert shared information about a local model of churches and school-based child rights clubs that remains undocumented. It builds long term relationships between secular child rights organisations, local faith communities and government services to offer a community-based prevention model from below. It has been replicated over 10 years in multiple countries. Informal models like this often fly under the 'evidence' radar and are not documented formally. Yet they offer collaborative grassroots models that mobilise local faith communities for prevention, capacity building and work with traditional leaders:

> *(T)he good prevention model is … a child rights community-based approach. You involve both parents and the children, so you have a group of children where you teach about the four key areas of child rights, protection, development, and you do the same to the parents so they know that the children need to participate and be developed and protected. The entire community of parents, guardians, for the children and the other stakeholders in the community [is reached]... What I am learning now, they do not know about this issue of child rights. For them, neglect is normal and children in early marriages because of the influence of tradition, they think that is normal….So you should work at the community level and recognise some of the traditional beliefs but try to get them to understand. To teach that there are country laws we need to respect…. (UV, Christian/Muslim/ Traditional, Tanzania)*

Empowering children directly is often possible for LFCs because of the trust which parents and communities have in faith institutions. One of the lessons learned from the approaches shared by the experts was the need for targeted age-specific campaigns for children and simple child-friendly tools, such as the 'good touch, bad touch' child toolkits being used by FBOs in Cambodia[13]. This type of faith intervention equips children to protect themselves and also helps tackle rather than reinforce internalised feelings around guilt and shame:

> *It is specific to sexual violence. It also teaches them [children] how to protect themselves in critical situations, how to scream, how to say no. Also, when they have this problem who can help them to speak up. Sometimes the children feel guilty as if it is their fault. That is what we are trying to change, these beliefs. (YZ, Christian/Buddhist, Cambodia)*

Some of the models shared as having most impact had gone beyond doing campaigns *to* children to having programs *with* them as agents of change, utilising even young children to become active peace-builders within families, communities and schools. All the experts saw child participation as a key aspect of child protection:

> W*hen we engage with faith leaders to address violence against children, we need to educate them to work with the children. They really have to understand the meaning of the participation of children, not just participation in an event for the sake of it (IJ, Hindu/Christian, Nepal)*

Faith-based spaces also became places that equip children to have the confidence to know their rights at the individual level and also to take some leadership roles within their family by, for example, leading prayers in

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[13] Miles, G. Good Touch, Bad Touch Toolkit. Access at http://www.goodtouchbadtouchflipchart.org/content/contributors

the house or talking together as a family as alternatives to home violence. Some of the experts shared evidence of adults changing behaviour because of what children had said to them:

> *Some of the parents, when we meet them they will give testimonies, 'I used to abuse my children a lot, not giving them food or this, but as soon as they asked us to pray more often…', you will find the parents changed. The way they are abusing their children, or not giving them food. And that is how prayer changed the household, even to stop violence in the home because children were insisting to pray. They are the ones leading prayers, just simple prayers but a big change to the household.* (UV, Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)

Local religious leaders often see themselves as having a special role in the spiritual development of children. One expert pointed to existing approaches like the Arigatou Prayer and Action for Children program[14] that also connects this role to enabling children to recognise and challenge abusive patterns in their own environment.

Community-level - A third level where religious leaders are seen to hold significant moral authority, trust, respect, and influence is at the community level. This can vary between different settings, but in almost all regions where the experts were based, religious leaders hold this influence. This puts them in an important position to change mindsets and influence social norms. This is a long, slow process, and is not achieved through once-off training. It often requires a relational approach to endemic patterns of child abuse and exploitation that often do not turn to the law or police as a first resort but utilises FBOs and their grassroots relationships to work for systemic change. This can be particularly true for the many children caught up in wider patterns of commercial sexual exploitation where one of the experts working across multiple Asian countries highlighted that in Thailand the government tends to focus on police raids on brothels to rescue underage children. He contrasted this with a 'relational' approach in Cambodia between faith-based rehabilitation services, police, the government and club owners to bring long term change to patterns of child sexual exploitation.

This requires faith communities being willing to also work with perpetrators of VAC and not just with victims. This was identified by some of the experts as a key role for faith leaders, who often have the moral authority to work with perpetrators. They can make home visits to challenge and help change patterns of abuse. Previous perpetrators speak of the belief that the pastor is brought by God to challenge their behaviour:

> *All the religious leaders are here so most of the time they are calm and listen, then they introduce the issue, you will see people repent. They say I know it is God who has opened your heart to come to me today and from today I will stop….they ask for forgiveness and they change easily….they are not using force, they are not bringing the police, they are just a Christian approach. They know these people, they are church leaders and God has sent them to my house today about this issue. So if I am a Christian I need to change because God has seen what I am doing is wrong…People will stand up, they say, "I was doing this and this before ….but the pastor came to me, talked to me and I am now changed" …while it is not working for everyone, for most believers it has been working very well.* (UV, Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)

Religious and traditional leaders working together can often take the lead to develop alternative religious rituals and ceremonies for communities that retain some of the desired practices whilst reshaping them so they are no longer harmful. An example was given around FGM/C in Masai communities in Kenya:

> *In one of their communities, they [religious and traditional leaders] stopped the tradition of FGM/C and they came up with a modern FGM/C whereby, because what they were saying is the girls want that celebration and say, if they grow up and get married without going through that celebration people in the community will say, you are not a real woman. So what they did, they organised the celebration but without the circumcision. All the girls will go there and it works very well, both sides were happy. (UV, Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)*

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[14] This is a global initiative of Arigatou International. See https://prayerandactionforchildren.org/

Institutional level - One of the most important factors identified in response to the evidence of abuse by and within religious spaces, is the need for all local faith institutions to speak out, to own their complicity and to break the silence on the issue. A number of the experts suggest this may then require a commitment to a detailed process to be implemented at the institutional level, including a number of structured steps (accept/admit problem; want to change; be capacitated to change; be held accountable for the change; have monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to show evidence of change). The danger is that that many religious communities may still be hiding historical and current evidence of abuse, often from a desire to protect their own religious community from bad publicity. This can lead to a refusal to engage constructively with other sectors and services such as legal, police and medical, and rather to create a separate internal mechanism for handling complaints, which can be abused. Because of this, faith communities can become havens for abusers.

A shift in this damaging pattern of silence requires admitting the issue and recognising the ongoing risks of some of their historical child-centred work. Developing alternative models of response, being willing to close high-risk residential programs if needed, but also by developing and implementing minimum standards of care consistently, even in the face of resistance, were suggestions made by the experts. Without this change, it is unlikely that they will become, in the words of one of the experts, "a place that takes complaints seriously – to be a recognised voice for children to go to". Faith communities may need to take a long hard look at the social values and beliefs they may still perpetuate if they are to have ongoing credibility in the wider child sector on the many other issues where they do provide needed support and care:

> *(T)he religious sector is a mixed blessing, when they are supportive of non-violent child rearing then it can be very helpful but to get them there is difficult…. my honest feeling about faith organisations is that they should be playing a much more critical role than they are playing, but before they can do that they have to acknowledge, and really acknowledge, their contribution to the problem and their complicity in making it as bad and awful as it is. (CD, Christian, South Africa)*

Prominent training programs that highlight child protection standards for new volunteers are key for ongoing prevention. Once this process is instituted, it also serves as a deterrent for potential perpetrators. One faith leader, who is part of a pioneering evidence-based child sexual abuse prevention model, noted:

> *(P)erpetrators by-and-large go undetected in communities, not every perpetrator is on a sex-offenders registry. It is the most underreported crime, the most under-prosecuted crime. If a community is training their adults, those who are seeking to harm a child will go looking for a less aware congregation*. (WX, Jewish, USA)

National Level - The fifth level of intervention noted was that some religious leaders can, and have, supported law and policy reforms on VAC at the national level. Once legal changes have taken place, religious leaders can also help translate them for implementing at the local level. One of the biggest challenges raised in many places was the gap between the law and the escalating rate of legal prohibition of corporal punishment. Momentum for legal change was tied to churches coming on board to support this by a number of the experts. One expert noted that faith leaders hold a unique role in reshaping public opinion on corporal punishment by saying "it certainly makes a difference to how people think about all this... The person in the pulpit isn't telling me it is fine to do this" (CD, Christian, South Africa)

Faith level – This final level is related to the others as a cross-cutting domain. Religious leaders can speak about faith and ethics, as they often have an impact on how people behave in multiple domains of their lives including their families and workplaces. In places of worship, each week sit presidents, political leaders, teachers, parents, children, perpetrators and lawmakers. Religious beliefs, sacred texts, and images of the divine can be used in ways that relate to children in certain ways. They can either connect faith and child protection or disconnect them. A faith-based approach that engages the original sacred texts and its intent has been used as an effective strategy by both faith actors and child right activists where words like 'rod' which have translated as 'chastising' actually mean 'reasoning together' and can, therefore, be rethought:

I talk about how words have been mistranslated …that the word used in Proverbs for chastising children "the rod" is also used in Psalm 23 where it is a thing that comforts…the word for "rod," actually means leading or guiding. There are places where mistranslation has been embedded into the religious text for years and people just assume this is the Word of God (CD, Christian, South Africa)

The experts consulted were from different faith traditions and could all offer concrete suggestions for ways that religious leaders could use the unique spiritual tools at their disposal. These tools, if harnessed authentically, can help reshape the ethical perceptions of millions of citizens who sit in spaces of worship every week across many countries and faiths, if the religious leader is a credible witness to what is being preached:

They are looked up to in the society, for example, if a pastor speaks about disciplining the child and uses a reference from the faith perspective like if you want to discipline a child you have to beat them. You have to thrash them according to a Bible verse. So, if a faith leader says, whatever is written in the Bible, it may be written that way but beating a child is physical abuse. If he explains that to his congregation or society in such a way so it is not misinterpreting what is in the religious text. If faith leaders come from the religious perspective that really counts, that is really good (IJ, Christian/Hindu, Nepal)

3.3   Child Protection System Strengthening

The experts agreed that local faith communities can and should play an essential role in strengthening the wider system around child protection and ending child violence. However, they also pointed out the dangers of expecting religious leaders to try to do everything or to become VAC experts. One expert noted that "we cannot be all things to all people, you cannot rescue every vulnerable person, every child with a disability or that has been abused, we cannot do everything". Instead, a recognition of their limits is also recommended.

Suggestions were made to see religious leaders as playing potential 'triage' roles, as local first responders to recognise, report and refer, as well as to cascade important information on EVAC into congregations. This is an important role in its own right, but it also requires religious leaders to be connected into other child protection systems in the community. A multi-sectoral approach enables religious leaders, including youth and child leaders in faith spaces, to play certain roles well without becoming overwhelmed. They can provide important informal roles to bridge the gap between a child and the formal system. They may also hold an ongoing role with perpetrators regarding counselling and accountability; they form a safety net for those children who may fall through other formal systems, and they can play an active role in building resilience in children over many years as a regular presence in childhood. In these different ways local faith communities have various windows of opportunity to engage and help disrupt a vicious cycle of abuse:

(T)he kids that grow up in a house witnessing abuse are more likely to identify with the victim or the perpetrator and they are going to re-play out... in all relationships these dynamics….It has been found that children respond in three ways. The child who is resilient and goes on to be healthy with normal relations and behaviours. The ones who identify with the perpetrator or victims, having no idea how to treat people, they are either going to be abusive or victimised in their family role. Lastly, there is the child who is aware of what is and what is not normative and is constantly striving to do better, they may not be perfect but they have self-awareness…. Now if we start talking about it in those terms…in our Sunday schools and our congregations, we can really change things. (WX, Jewish, USA)

A number of insights regarding ways in which local faith communities have been playing, and could be further equipped to play, both formal and informal roles in the wider child protection system sometimes without even realising it, are noted below in relation to both prevention and in referral to wider service.:

Building religious leader capacity on prevention and referral

Steps to equip local faith institutions to prevent child abuse, and not only to respond to it, were seen as essential by the experts. Further research to build evidence around programmatic approaches emerging from

different contexts is needed in this area, which still remains new for many faith communities. This is where larger FBOs can play an important capacity building role in helping local faith institutions to develop practical and contextual action plans that go beyond just 'speaking out'. Unless this takes place, it is likely that evidence of abuse will remain hidden and abuses may continue. To prevent further abuse in the future, faith communities must rethink and restructure approaches that perpetuate unaccountable power as well as existing social and religious beliefs that may underpin patterns of abusive power. This requires equipping religious leaders to understand that they are not the solution on their own, but that they can form part of a wider system that ensures that they do not focus so much on only providing care, that they fail to think about how to pro-actively cooperate with other agencies that can help long term with systemic prevention:

> *(T)hey [religious leaders] are doing great works in faith communities where they are working but they need more capacity, as most of them are doing it from their experience…(t)hey will refer to the Bible, this is what it says, but they also need to know that there are cases they need to refer to other stakeholders…to know their countries laws about child abuse and neglect. They can do their bit... Most of the victims they can be willing to open up to the faith leaders because of trust and they cannot open up to others like the police or other stakeholders (UV, Christian/Traditional/ Muslim, Tanzania)*

Some promising signs of emerging approaches of collaboration around this were shared by the experts[15]. A faith leader who works on a collaborative prevention program notes that evidence of what works and what does not are being collected and show results but need to be shared across faiths and regions:

> *I facilitate a third-party evaluated child sexual abuse prevention program and I add a faith component. I only do this in houses of worship, so that is my role, I provide this education which is five steps to protect your kids, raising awareness, reacting responsibly, identifying, creating communities of safety and it works in real time. We know that from the evidence that people, six months, one year or five years, we know that they remember what they have learnt in this program (WX, Jewish, USA)*

There is a danger also of unrealistic expectations being placed on faith actors, to be the solution on EVAC, rather than part of a wider system. Religions can reflect wider society, often mirroring these issues. Some religious leaders themselves were seen in many different regions and across faiths to often have a lack of wider knowledge:

> *(W)ithin the Buddhist community the monks…they come from poor families and sometimes they are not understanding much…They are just amongst us in that kind of position, without any training… other monks who have passed through training, this kind of thing needs updating, to have enough understanding before they can be agents of change, working for children (EF, Buddhist, Thailand)*

There is a need to capitalise on the different players within the faith sector. It is not homogenous but contains diverse strengths and weaknesses. This recognition can form part of developing more collaborative models within the faith sector itself. Faith-based networks can offer connection, share lessons and mobilise campaigns. FBOs can commission research, secure resources, help develop toolkits and provide capacity building. Local faith communities are often first responders at the grassroots level and build relationships of trust. Many have both hard and soft resources to offer. They can play a role in programs being delivered by other stakeholders at many levels if they can step out of their 'own box' and work together. One expert suggests that the Nepalese experience on EVAC in the last 10 years is opening up this space for collaboration:

> *(E)ngaging with faith leaders can make a big difference. Yet it cannot be for a short time or just an organisational agenda, it should be an agenda of the government because countries like Nepal, India, the religious leaders, they take a vital role and have a unique, special place in the society so they should be even more involved. They can bring a lot of changes. The other thing is that they are so much inside their own box, even when we talk to our pastors in the church they see it as NGO work not "our" work,*

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[15] The program referred to as a promising multi sectoral approach here is From Darkness to Light. See https://www.d2l.org/

so how are we going to change the mindsets amongst the faith leaders within their own society, that is something. It has changed a bit but there is so much more to do. I feel this has created space for NGOs to partner with and governments to take this seriously. (IJ, Hindu/Christian, Nepal)

There was, however, also a danger noted that religious leaders and faith actors are instrumentalised and merely brought on in a token way, as ceremonial gatekeepers or as an afterthought by secular actors. One expert noted that it is important to involve religious groups at the outset of campaigns to end VAC rather than as an afterthought. Religious groups should also be resourced and given opportunities to take the lead in initiatives to end violence against children. This involvement from the beginning takes their spiritual capital seriously within multi-sectoral models and offers them a positive role to play as part of the solution.

3.4   Underlying Positive Beliefs

The experts reinforce a sense that religious leaders can nurture unique spiritual capital[16] in their followers that can underpin the protective dimensions of relationships between human beings including between adults and children. This requires drawing contextually on both the unique dimensions of specific traditions but also on common principles shared by many faiths such as respect for human dignity as the below expert makes clear:

(T)here are a huge number of people for whom their faith is a critically important part of their lives. I think that it is the role of leaders within different faiths to set an example above all else but also to talk about things like respect for human dignity, appreciation of diversity, your obligations, we all have rights…We need churches and faith leaders to search their texts and their hearts for ways to make humankind nicer to each other. To forget about power and control and dominance (CD, Christian, South Africa)

Direct beliefs focus on specific references to children in sacred texts and how they are being interpreted. This is particularly influential in monotheistic traditions who have one authoritative text. There is a need for verses that are shaped by wider problematic views of children to be reinterpreted in the light of current VAC. While the experts noticed some examples where this has been done by scholars, it still forms a minority perspective and has not been mainstreamed into the training of new religious leaders. Faith traditions that do not revolve around a central sacred text are in urgent need of more detailed research in terms of harnessing their positive beliefs and tackling their abuses.

A focus on 'sacred texts' as the main vehicle by many larger FBOs for engaging with religion in a faith-based approach is important but may unwittingly marginalise faiths that do not have a single central sacred text at their core, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. This approach may also have some limits in engagement with rapidly emerging neo-Pentecostal religious movements, seen in both South America and sub-Saharan Africa. These often place less direct emphasis on sacred texts and formal teaching and grant more spiritual authority to religious experience and grassroots leaders seen as appointed directly by God as so-called 'anointed Prophets'. This 'anointing' by the divine spirit can be presented as unchallengeable by their followers. Critical interaction with these new religious movements needs to develop different theological techniques to engage these sources of religious authority and recognise the complex entanglement around culture and religion.

The experts also emphasised the need to explore specific doctrines regarding the 'theology' of the child in each tradition. Children are often depicted in different ways within religious teaching and tradition and this can influence how they are treated socially and religiously in the society. This depiction of children is framed differently in each faith tradition. However, themes of the child as 'made in the image of God' (Christian) or placed in the centre of the mandala (Buddhist) were two entry points suggested by the experts. One specific practical example was given from Bhutan where Buddhist leaders used this idea of putting the child in the

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[16] For the concept of 'spiritual capital', see Ter Haar (2011:8) who points to religious resources in the form of practices, ideas, experience and organisations. She suggests development organisations must go beyond using faith's social capital to also engage its spiritual capital.

centre of the mandala where the deity normally goes[17] and partnered with the government to place the child in the centre with the articles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child around that as an example of a collaboration between child rights and religious teachings.

The need to revisit religious stories about key faith persons and children in religious traditions was noted and how they can be used to reinforce or to challenge practices of child violence within faith communities. Specific examples given of these religious figures included Aisha, Mohammad, Tamar, Isaac, Rama, Mary and Jesus. Mainstreaming child issues into the interpretation of faith values like justice, peace, human dignity, equality, compassion, and commitment to life are seen by some of the experts as an emerging movement across faiths:

> *They all profess respect for the human dignity of a child and compassion, equality, justice and non-violence and how do these square up with violence against children. If they are able to preach these particular beliefs and values and they have enormous potential to do that…. the religious themes that people have been happy with, like peace and justice, which have never included violence against children in the past, are now doing so. In fact, recently in a conference in Rome, someone stood up and said, you cannot have peace and justice and still be violent towards children and they included sexual violence and the Catholic church. People are looking at the themes and they are looking at the sustainability goals, you cannot have sustainability and goals for society without including children and for the first time, children's rights are included. (AZ, Interfaith, United Kingdom)*

As well as direct connections to beliefs about children, the experts pointed to the role of god images, stories, myths, and doctrines as shaping the container of society and family and the urgent need to delink religion and patriarchy. This is relevant for children because it can reinforce the hierarchical model of the family as divinely ordained. The experts also pointed to the relevance of religious rituals for children, around birth, baptism, naming, blessings, coming of age, marriage, which offer opportunities for engagement with child rights. Key religious themes can also be used to reinforce the value of the child, such as the divine presented in the child in the Christian tradition. Religion plays a role in the whole lifecycle from before birth to after death and therefore has a unique presence. It is seen by many as expected to speak about morality, especially around issues of the family, child rearing and education. Whether a child is seen as inherently bad, a view noted by some as underpinned by certain Christian doctrines of original sin, or as inherently pure or capable of being religiously enlightened, may shape the form of education a child is expected to be given and the model of teaching demonstrated. One example given by an expert in the Buddhist context was a belief that a child can be enlightened because the Buddha was enlightened as a child. So, therefore, children are valuable. Another example given was the positive relationship of Jesus to children where one expert notes, "there is no recorded instance of Jesus being violent against anyone, particularly not children".

These can be used to shape protective norms for children that explicitly draw on concrete existing religious beliefs to do so. Rethinking how places of worship are shaped and what the ideas about that space are can make a contribution to how children experience places of worship and whether they have a voice there. Finally, attitudes regarding whether the world can and should be changed, which have often shaped missionary engagement, can exist in tension with fatalistic beliefs that suffering is deserved or to be accepted as God-ordained. This can shape different faith communities' willingness to develop EVAC responses. For example, a belief that you 'deserve what you get' can shape the level of commitment to social engagement within religions. Questions of caste, class and culture often all play a role in what is normalised or challenged.

Religious leaders can sometimes be seen by their followers as God's infallible mouthpieces. In the light of endemic child abuse, this is deeply problematic. While this power can and has been abused and needs to be checked, the same pulpit power can also be used in positive ways to protect children, to denounce VAC and

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[17] Mandala means "circle" in Sanskrit. It is a spiritual ritual symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism that represents the universe. For a full description of this example, see the CNNV report *Ending Corporal Punishment of Children: Working with and within religious communities* 2011 p. 23.

by using special days to build momentum for change such as the World Day of Prayer and Action for children. All religious traditions contain protective elements, usually focused on the marginalised and vulnerable, and generally, children are seen as part of this grouping. These protective dimensions can be nurtured and reclaimed, as can many religions' focus on family, as long as the wide diversity of actual families can be acknowledged in ways that ensure that children who do not fit into a particular model are not left out;

> *In certain parts of Southern Africa there are certain problems of children with albinism, and here refugee children are particularly vulnerable and we have a particular problem with children orphaned by the HIV epidemic….children heading households, they need a lot of support and faith groups could be providing that support. I think children who are disabled are often very disadvantaged and more vulnerable. Children who are migrant or refugees or unaccompanied in some way and just children living in homes where there are high levels of violence, substance abuse, poverty, not much caring or nurturing for anybody, never mind the children. Those are the things that faith programmes could be specifically looking to support and help. (CD, Christian, South Africa)*

Overall, the experts strongly suggest that religious leaders are essential players in challenging misinterpreted religious beliefs and being able to help faith communities to unlearn and relearn patterns and pass that information on to others. They suggest that this goes beyond head knowledge to engage their emotional response about how they feel, essential for sustainable behaviour change and countering fanaticism. It was noted that in any religion, there exist, what some experts termed, 'fanatics' who try to force everyone to follow all the literal rules of their religious texts as "words from God". However, a promising strategy seen was that if most religious people were shown inconsistencies in the translation of sacred texts, they can begin to feel differently. One example given from within the Christian tradition was to show Christians that Jesus was not only not cruel to children but was particularly respectful of children.

Other concrete examples were given that are beginning to build an evidence base around the use of credible religious scholars and leaders to correct these misinterpretations of sacred texts. These had often been entangled with culture in relation to specific harmful practices of child violence in particular contexts, as this example below shows:

> *FGM/C, that is massive in Egypt and that is one campaign that they both, Muslim and Christian communities, have been working united on as a lot of that is cultural and not rooted in any scriptural reality but is thought to be rooted, and that is where they can have a huge impact, in sort of combating a lot of those stereotypes and messaging that perhaps often by religious leaders themselves because part of it is changing the awareness and part of the faith community (MN, Christian/Muslim, MENA region)*

Key historical milestones also exist in the public journey of global faith communities around VAC on which current evidence must build and which the experts noted generated momentum for initiatives. These include the Kyoto Declaration in 2006 and the Panama Declaration in 2017. Faith-based toolkits and manuals were developed in 2010-2013 across multiple faiths. The question is whether this trend has peaked and then gone away or have there been sustained rollouts with these materials into the contexts where they are needed. The experts insist that more detailed documentation of the longer-term effects of these approaches is needed. Key religious leaders around the world, such as South African Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, have become high profile ambassadors on child violence issues like child marriage and corporal punishment. This offers evidence of an emerging global movement for change within faith spaces that faith leaders are invited to join. However, the proof of a Declaration is in its sustained grassroots implementation in practice.

Summary - Promising Faith Practices on EVAC

The experts suggest that faith communities are responding, often informally, as part of solutions in ending child violence. However, these are in urgent need of formal, rigorous documentation sector-wide to impact the wider EVAC sector, where faith perspectives remain limited. Three main practical responses can be seen:

1. Informal small-scale grassroots local responses – emerging from visible needs, often care and support driven and part of community-based approaches. They focus on families or communities. These urgently need more rigorous documentation to demonstrate causality and are not always strategic regarding root causes.

2. Semi-formal top-down approach often with a prevention focus - These approaches often employ a capacity building model that utilises the social networks of faith communities, often driven by an international FBO or a UN project. There has been a rise in these approaches in the last 10 years with a proliferation of high-level research, toolkits, global campaigns etc. in some areas. However, they often have a limited time frame and further research post-intervention may be needed to build sustained EVAC evidence of change.

3. Formal provision of social services - especially in fragile, conflict or rural areas. Often this is tied to a historical missionary agenda, especially in Christianity. Religion can hold long-established social roles in many societies of service provision to the poor and vulnerable. Over time this has given them significant institutional power with religious schools, health facilities and care institutions reaching many children. Sometimes new and old approaches to children may clash creating dilemmas regarding how to synthesise new and old styles.

Sometimes these first two approaches connect and there can be good synergies, but sometimes they do not. The second model is more likely to be documented but is less likely to be sustainable. The third often holds significant established power but it is also here that many child abuse scandals have been seen. Underpinning all the contributions lies a complex set of beliefs, rituals and ethics that could hold together a sustained protective commitment to action and pass it on to new generations. Maintaining those positive beliefs and practices in relation to EVAC must be seen as an essential component of a faith-based response.

Promising faith practices noted by the experts across multiple regions and religions included:

- Sacred text rebuttal/reinterpretation is an effective strategy, often focused on specific forms of VAC.
- Engage with theological training colleges to equip religious leaders with awareness on issues early.
- Faith-based approaches can make positive connections between child protection/rights and faith.
- Interfaith approaches can build unity over time but must be sensitive to the distinctive faith aspects.
- Campaigns can mobilise the social role of faith leaders in breaking silence on sensitive issues.
- Need multi-sectoral models, not 'silo' approaches but integrative. Both secular and faith to engage.
- Network models can build horizontal collaborations of unity but still needs to reach grassroots level.
- Equip religious actors to deliver accountable child services differently (standards/safeguarding).
- Consistent faith leadership is required for minimum standards of care to become institutionalised.
- Faith actors can play an important role in bottom-up identification of VAC issues in varied contexts.
- The Kyoto Declaration 2006 is a crucial document to build on to work with religious groups on EVAC.

4. Negative faith contributions and underlying beliefs

4.1 Perpetration of abuse within religious institutions and by religious leaders

The issue of child abuse, especially its sexual forms, by religious leaders emerged from the experts as a significant issue and was noted earlier. Substantial evidence of historical abuse by individuals and cover-ups or failure to act by religious institutions had been encountered by many of their faith institutions with victims coming forward with claims of historical abuse. Although some have faced this more publicly than others to date, all the experts suggest that this is something that all faith communities, especially those involved in institutional care, will have to face. Religious leaders and institutions often hold particular power within communities and families. One expert pointed to "people in a position of trust and authority [who hold spiritual and social power] abusing children who do not have the voice to protect themselves or do anything about it."

Historically, it was noted that religious institutions have at times been exempt from enforcing minimum standards of care, due to their voluntary or spiritual nature. One expert from Egypt who works with churches notes that sexual abuse often remains hidden and religious institutions can use their power for good or bad.

The experts also highlighted a frequent disconnect between what is preached and what is practised. One Hindu expert from India noted that "some religious leaders have a personal agenda and they will do the opposite from what they talk about in their personal lives". Religious spaces then become vulnerable to abuse as one faith expert in this area noted:

> Any potential perpetrator is going to seek out ways to work with children and one of the most common places they go are faith communities who are always welcoming of people and seeking volunteers, they are looking to build membership and involve people. (WX, Jewish, USA)

Any setting which forms a closed community heightens risks, making religious institutions more vulnerable to perpetrators, ironically often due to their long-term institutional commitment to assisting children. Monasteries, residential schools and orphanages were all named by the experts as high risk for hidden abuse:

> (T)he perpetrator of the violence against children, almost 70%, is someone who is close to children in any setting, in school, education and even religious settings, which we assume is the most safe environment. The evidence is that violence towards children, particularly sexual violence could happen in any setting so if you ask if instances (in religious settings) happen, yes, it happens a lot. Also in the educational religious setting as well, because it is closed….there is trust built and there are activities going on… in a room, field, anywhere…it has happened not only with girls but also with boys. (KL, Muslim, Indonesia)

4.2 Cover-ups and silence by faith institutions leading to a failure to act

The experts also pointed beyond acts of direct perpetration to systematic historical complicity with abuse by many religious institutions and leaders that they suggest remains in many places to this day. They point to a wider failure to take collective responsibility or to speak out and complicity in a culture of shame and silence:

> The church needs to take responsibility for its own complicity, the "name of denomination" church, in particular, has a long, terrible history of abusing children; "name of denomination" churches have a similar track record…it is like the #MeToo movement made clear that if you don't say something you are automatically complicit in sexual harassment and abuse... To the extent that faith organisations do not stand up against violence against women and children, they are part of the problem. (CD, Christian, South Africa)

A number of the experts pointed to a desire by some faith leaders to protect their particular faith community by avoiding formal reporting or going to the police. This can also be tied into fears that the (often female) victim will then be shamed within the community and her reputation damaged. However, this can lead to patterns of defensive avoidance where abusers are moved within the system rather than reported externally:

> *They hide the evidence of wrongdoing and they do very little to make it right. So when a paedophile priest gets simply moved to another parish without anybody doing anything to deal with the consequences of that, all that happens is more children are hurt. (CD, Christian, South Africa)*

This secrecy leads to a lack of accountability and checking systems noted by the experts across a range of religious traditions. This failure to act can be due to ignorance. Some of the experts across faiths highlighted that religious leaders are rarely equipped in their religious training to grapple effectively with issues of child violence in their congregations. One faith leader interviewed noted that in five years of training to be a religious leader no one had even mentioned domestic violence to her. The experts from both Asian and African contexts noted that some religious leaders do not receive any formal theological training and some can come from poor, rural, uneducated families. If they are to play a positive role in EVAC, they will need first to be capacitated for when the trust placed in them results in them being local first responders to those abused. One expert noted that unless this capacitating takes place, faith actors can fail to respond appropriately to victims, resulting in a broken trust that compounds the abuse. This failure to act then creates a cycle of missed opportunities. One expert, who encountered systemic abuse in her home as a child pointed to the regular visits by her faith leader to the hospital but yet his failure to ask or understand what was going on. As an adult when she challenged him about his failure to act, he said he always knew something was very wrong but he didn't know how to ask. This inspired the expert to train to be a faith leader that could respond.

4.3   Endorsement of VAC at community and family levels

Religious endorsement of parenting and teaching approaches that legitimate violent practices of discipline were identified as common by many of the experts as was discussed earlier. Pulpit power was identified as frequently used to endorse a punitive model of parenting. This was also reflected in the use of punitive and violent parent God images, which could be used to create fear in children. These divine images were also embedded in religious commands, rituals and songs as well as in the (mis)interpretation of sacred texts. Examples from different faith traditions were given by the experts and included Jewish, Christian and Muslim texts that justify corporal punishment and Hindu texts that point to marrying a daughter off at puberty. At the same time, other religious principles can require children to be silent, obedient to adults, and honouring of all elders. These were identified as potentially dangerous in a context of widespread adult abuse.

4.4   Resistance of EVAC legal reforms by religious leaders

Some religious leaders and others using religious arguments negate efforts to end some forms of child violence by resisting law reforms around VAC in areas such as corporal punishment, marriage age, and sexuality education (Le Roux & Palm, 2018). Examples were noted by experts of a backlash by some faith organisations, and conservative religious political movements around the world who have taken a public, legal and political stand on these issues in the name of religious freedom, as in the earlier South African example. At the same time, other religious actors have countered this narrative, offering a reminder that faith is not homogenous. Some have been strong allies in law reform at national, regional and global levels. One expert gave the specific example of religious leaders in South Africa who were very influential across multiple denominations. They highlighted the similarities between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and religious teachings. She notes that during an address on children's work to the South African Synod, a former Anglican Primate stated: "Holy Scripture will be our light and inspiration and the Convention on the Rights of the Child will be our guide." (AZ, Interfaith, United Kingdom)

4.5   Faith communities promoting inappropriate practical responses

The experts pointed to tension in certain responses by local faith communities. Their genuine desire to respond to the immediate needs of children is not always strategic or evidence-based. Traditional responses of care and support that only ameliorate symptoms can stand in tension with approaches that identify and tackle root causes. One example given was a 'rescuer' approach with little awareness of underlying driving factors:

> I see some (church) organisations …that have a cowboy mentality [outside the system]. It has changed over the years, but at first, it was, we have just got to rescue the girls out of the brothels and they did not think about what would happen to them afterwards (YZ, Christian/Buddhist, Cambodia)

If social change is not engaged structurally, rescue may be counter-productive in the long term. One expert from Tanzania noted a situation where married girls ran away from faith-based centres back to their husbands.

4.6   Underlying Negative Beliefs

The experts pointed to the need for deeper engagement with various negative religious beliefs around VAC:

> We need to involve faith leaders not only because they are influential but first and foremost because of underlying beliefs…in many cases, there are underlying beliefs and social norms and values that are somehow highlighted in or by the religious sector that need to be changed (ST, Interfaith, Panama)

Diverse interpretations of sacred texts were shaping religious beliefs that could either harm or help children. The experts identified some specific harmful faith beliefs in need of more engagement, summarised below.

4.6.1 Connection of punishment, discipline and learning

Across religions and regions, sacred texts were used by some to reinforce divinely ordained hierarchies of adults and children and punitive god images with a complex entanglement between patriarchy and religion:

> The way that certain patriarchal religions conceive the world is that there is a hierarchy… someone at the top…in charge, they are punitive, powerful, in control and if you don't do what they say you are going to get thumped in one way or another. Cockroaches, floods, caning, something punitive will happen. …the church and parenting need to move away from punishment to discipline….I think children need discipline, they need to know where the boundaries are. They do not need it to be thumped into them, they need it to be discussed and explained. They need to see consequences and to learn about self-discipline and self-control, spanking and hitting do not teach those things…Faith groups should be helping parents see that and raise their children in caring, nurturing environments (CD, Christian, South Africa)

4.6.2 Beliefs about (female) sexuality

Messages about sexual purity shape religious mindsets around adolescent girls especially and can underpin practices and ceremonies such as child marriage. While reinterpretation may take place at global workshops, at the grassroots level these beliefs may persist. Religion has often been part of a complicated set of social taboos about gender, sex and sexuality which can become a source of harmful beliefs. Engaging religious leaders to disentangle these taboos both personally and communally can be an important part of change. One expert noted that religious law loopholes may be used to justify harmful sexual practices with children. Religious taboos on areas such as LGBTQI issues can make some children vulnerable and needs further research. Religious resistance to comprehensive sexuality education can be fuelled by a refusal to discuss this area. Finally, a focus on the girl child or family unit by faith organisations can reinforce gendered assumptions of her role. Faith-based responses must take care that girl protection approaches support protection and agency.

4.6.3 Harmful beliefs about the child

Specific harmful beliefs may include indirect religious justifications which lie beneath practices of punishment or exclusion due to disability or albinism, which was seen as a distortion or curse across multiple faiths. Themes of witchcraft or evil spirit possession related to children were often tied to these visible signs:

> (T)he killing of young albinos, the children who are young. It is connected to witchcraft, so we see in some of the areas we are working with here that this child who was albino was killed or some of the body parts were taken. This is a new thing that is coming up very strongly (UV, Christian/Muslim/Traditional. Tanzania)

A belief of children as inferior to adults or as their property was noted as latent in violence against them as well as a religious hierarchy of the family where children are to be seen and not heard. Children can be religiously required to honour and obey adults with a punitive model. Promising approaches such as the Tamar Campaign in Kenya[18] were given to show that religious scholars can reengage these texts contextually.

4.6.4 Indirect beliefs that can shape VAC

Other beliefs were seen to play a role in shaping patterns of power between adult and child. These included themes that see suffering as divinely-ordained or redemptive, filial piety, or a punitive male parent god. This was described by one expert as a theological understanding of both women and children as male property. This belief is then tied to a legitimation of modelling God by punishing others that forms a fundamental set of religious assumptions. These assumptions must be challenged if the roots that underpin violence against women and children in the family, in particular, are to shift.

Religious themes such as karma (you get what you deserve), fatalism (things cannot be changed), or retribution (God as punishing parent) could be problematically interpreted in order to perpetuate the power of abusers. One expert noted, "sometimes the children feel guilty, as if it is their fault, that is what we are trying to change, these beliefs". Children's religious duties to 'always honour your father and mother' were seen to be interpreted at times in ways that become harmful. Family is also often seen as sacred in religious traditions, creating unregulated spaces for abuse. Stories of VAC by divine forces exist in many religious teachings such as the story of God requiring the sacrifice of Isaac by his father, a key story for Judaism, Christianity and Islam. One faith expert noted an urgent need for reinterpretation here:

> It is the most disturbing story in the Bible. It can be understood either as a paradigm for child sacrifice or as a polemic against child sacrifice. It speaks directly to the core issue of ending violence against children as you can take this text and say it is okay after all God told Abraham to sacrifice His son for a greater purpose. Viewed widely in Judaism as a polemic against child sacrifice, it lays the foundation of, who are we? How do we deal with this? (WX, Jewish, USA).

Parents are often pressurized to fulfil religious moral duties regarding their children, often premised on a patriarchal model of the family. Religious rituals can also reinforce harmful social preferences, such as son preference, for example, the religious blessing of the womb so the child born will be a boy. A Hindu expert in India also noted beliefs that dedicating a child to the monastery secures blessings. Finally, beliefs in the religious leader as a direct reflection of the divine were noted in many traditions. This makes their words and actions authoritative. One Buddhist expert notes "If the monk tells you something you will believe them" and this can silence possible complaints by children who are confronted by this spiritual authority in the form of someone who may also be providing them with care, food or education.

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[18] For more information on The Tamar Campaign in Kenya, see http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/TAMAR_CAMPAIGN/campaigns_inside.aspx

4.6.5   Complex entanglement of religion and culture

The experts note that in many contexts there remains a problematic conflation of religion and culture, also tied at times to a history of colonialism that can then translate into ongoing patterns of legitimised VAC:

> *It is also a conflation, particularly in Africa, although not unique to Africa, there is a conflation of "God says I must" and "it's my culture."…there is no history of corporal punishment of children in Africa until the slave traders and the missionaries and the colonisers arrived (CD, Christian, South Africa)*

While some faith approaches could demonise local culture as bad by polarizing it with good faith, others could uncritically provide religious justifications. Both were seen as problematic. At the same time, some cultural practices are often named as religious (such as FGM/C) but also some religious ones are dismissed as cultural, such as beliefs about ancestors or spirit possession. Experts from India, Honduras, Tanzania and Thailand all referenced the entanglement of sacred texts with cultural traditions. One noted that some practises assumed to be Buddhist are cultural and do not originate in Buddhist teachings. However, another expert points to the responsibility of religious institutions to be clear and not become complicit, noting critically that "other cultural practices that are harmful have been naturalised by the church" (QR, Christian, Honduras). Due to entanglement, a perceived Western imposition of cultural categories of the child can lead to a backlash:

> *This concept of child rights is a new concept in Africa and rural areas, so you will find religious leaders who also behave like other people in the community, children should have no rights. Children are there to listen, to be told what to do. So, they cannot participate in anything or be involved in decision making, or like that. Even some of the preachers, they will say that. You will see a strong, "No, no, traditionally this is what has been happening in our areas, and you are coming here to distort that". (UV Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)*

Rising religious fundamentalism can reject child rights as western and secular, increasing risks for organisations in certain contexts. It was noted that engagement with progressive faith leaders can be important here:

> *It is a common response that we get from any religious element... that child rights is a Western concept …we (must) first look at what our religion says about children and then we try to explain about child rights and what normally comes up is that assumption and views are not so different (KL, Muslim, Indonesia)*

5. Reflecting on Child Protection, Gender and Interfaith themes

Three cross-cutting themes were identified at the study start: Child Participation, Gender and Interfaith engagement. This section highlights the insights that emerged from the experts on these three themes.

5.1   Child Participation

This was highlighted by all the experts as a critical component of EVAC with a dual task. It enables children to learn directly how to protect themselves including faith-based campaigns that address children directly. However, it also reshaped an understanding of the child as a social subject to be heard and engaged, not property to be owned. Involving children can recognise their agency. Sensitizing faith leaders and adults to understand why meaningful child participation is important to EVAC is needed. Lessons learned were:

Involving children in decisions at community and family levels and challenging patriarchal family models. Religion and patriarchy are often entangled in complex ways with concerning implications for child agency. Faith communities could engage parents to counter and not reinforce narratives such as "children must be seen and not heard". Some promising approaches have been instigated by local faith organisations here:

> *In Thailand, there is a school…they have a parliament and children and teachers have an equal vote… if you believe in democracy you have to let children participate and build that in them. Not only chanting "democracy… Whether right or wrong, they have to dare to make decisions. (EF, Buddhist, Thailand)*

Child empowerment to break the silence on child abuse. Experts noted that children can blame themselves for the violence, creating shame, silence and survivor stigma, especially with sexual violence. Empowering all children so they know they have a voice and creating safe adult containers for response. Recreational community programs run by faith groups were identified as spaces for children to speak out:

> *If there was any sexual violence the girl was not encouraged to speak about it…earlier, if they talked the victim was further victimised…they are told it was them that asked for trouble* (GH, Hindu, India)

It was noted as important that campaigns on violence were done in age-appropriate ways to raise awareness that what may be happening to them is not okay. Children can be sensitised on different kinds of violence and to know where to report. A focus on children knowing their bodily rights and on developing child rights networks moves away from a victim-led paradigm. It requires further research that engages children as subjects and also as potential perpetrators, an area also highlighted by some as a gap.

Children as agents of moral change. Some faith-based training methodologies are beginning to include child participation due to seeing its power to enable change in adult behaviour, by sharing concrete experiences. Introducing children to faith practices can potentially help them become agents of change in their families, communities and nations. Faith spaces that target children and offer them non-violent tools have seen this translate into family change where children can find their voice and help reshape parent/child interactions.

Building child-friendly spaces within religious institutions. The experts note this goes beyond the absence of violence, to also change the hierarchical paradigm of an adult over a child. One example given was that a child-friendly madrassa is "not only about (not) hitting children" but is also "different pedagogies and ways of participatory teaching…being more creative and involving the children a little bit more" in the educational process. Lack of violence is seen as one step in a change that moves towards child rights and participation.

Reinterpret sacred texts where children are voiceless. Experts insisted that child stories in sacred texts need to be re-imagined. The child story of Isaac was given as one Judeo-Christian example. In the story he is voiceless and becomes a parental sacrifice, requiring faith actors to engage critically. A Hindu expert pointed to engaging childhoods of divine beings to remind people that a child has divine power to shake up evil.

Potential role of faith in nurturing voice and dialogue. Faith traditions were seen to have the potential to nurture children's voices and participation as part of developing spiritual responsibility and to nurture a participatory intergenerational approach between adults and children, especially in families. However, much current religious engagement with children was noted as revolving around passive, respectful behaviour.

5.2   Gender

Experts highlighted a number of gender-related points. A strong programmatic focus on girl children was frequently identified, drawing attention to the vulnerabilities and threats that girls face. However, the experts also problematised this trend in faith communities. While girls and women do face some shared threats, especially around sexual exploitation, there is a danger that issues that affect women become the primary focus and a gender lens becomes the primary frame of reference. A 'save the girl child' narrative that utilises a victim/protector framework can without care, re-inscribe girls' disempowerment. Girls' empowerment can even be seen as a 'magic bullet' for upstream prevention of VAW. The boy child can get lost in a VAWG framing or targeted only as potential perpetrators. Their own vulnerabilities to gendered abuse or VAC can go un-investigated and they can become systematically marginalised across the many programs that focus on girls.

The experts noted that local faith communities must be equipped to engage gender critically in relation to EVAC and in a way that sees gendered formation within a child-centred lens, engaging with both boys and girls and the gendered abuses and assumptions that can be reinforced for both. Without critical interrogation, some religious rituals and beliefs can reinforce problematic gendered patterns, often entangled with cultural practices and cause a disconnect with other EVAC work. Experts recommended that instead of a VAWG focus, or separate program silos for VAW and VAC, an integrated approach between VAW and VAC was recommended at both programmatic and research levels. This can take account of a complex entanglement around shared root drivers particularly when it comes to the patriarchal family, where extending autonomy rights like bodily integrity in the home to children is still tied to faith's gendered views of the family unit.

5.3   Interfaith engagement

Interfaith engagement is a growing trend in relation to EVAC. Two kinds of momentum emerged from the experts. First, a drive from above for diverse religious communities to present a united front on VAC. Other sectors may place pressure here because they do not want to be seen to be favouring one religion. Donors encourage collaborative engagement with interfaith approaches seen to achieve this. Global consultations and declarations were noted as often encouraging a multi-faith approach. Second, grassroots momentum was seen in local contexts where an interfaith programmatic approach is needed to avoid re-inscribing religious conflicts, tension or scapegoating certain practices. This can be essential where religion is politicised, entangled with culture or has multiple religious traditions prominent. Faiths working together could build credibility on EVAC messaging with some emerging bi-lateral faith collaborations also noted by the experts.

However, more attention should be paid to the complex power dynamics of interfaith engagement. In practice, many local religious communities still work within a single faith structure. Surface alliances to secure funds should be avoided. The experts point out that securing interfaith agreement locally can be a slow and intensive process. At times this can only be done once agreement within one tradition has been secured. For example, in Egypt, scholars worked independently within their own structures to develop manuals prior to collaborating on a joint manual. In some communities, existing wider polarities between religious groups may make interfaith engagement unrealistic. In practice, some can be too divided to work together:

> *Within this small community, you have one half that is Muslim and one half is Christian...using different shops and there is a complete division... [we] have the intention to work inclusively ...but often if you do a project, they are doing a lot of activities on the church grounds....it is difficult... and takes a long time, you cannot just go into the community and work across faith. (MN, Interfaith, Middle East)*

Specific practices and beliefs need to be engaged for change, which can be harder in an interfaith space. Documenting what works and what has been challenging in each faith but also across faiths will be essential for effective multi-faith engagement. There can be a danger that Christian approaches are 'adapted' to other faiths but remain based on Christian assumptions, noted as a concern by Buddhist and Hindu experts. Detailed adaptation work by recognised scholars within each faith tradition is essential. Western Christianity, in particular, remains entangled in power-laden contexts due to its missionary history. Indigenous faiths were often denigrated and punitive images of religion served colonial violence. This can elicit a backlash today. Experts suggest faith-based interventions must engage the majority spirituality in their context and reflect what is defined as a religious tradition. Simplistic binaries that polarize faith traditions must be avoided.

6. Challenges, gaps and emerging trends

Experts were invited to share their impressions of challenges, gaps and emerging trends in this area, building on what had already been seen in the case studies and literature review. The following nine points emerged:

Evidence of Cover-ups. A rise in abuse scandals involving faith communities was noted as a challenge to which an urgent response by faith communities is needed. Despite other good work being done, this negative evidence has the potential to negate those positive contributions if not addressed credibly from within. There is a willingness from parts of global faith communities to interrogate this complicity. However, recent scandals are in danger of negating these global declarations. There is an urgent need for minimum standards to be enforced. This requires many religious communities to rethink social taboos on discussing sexuality so that children are taught to protect themselves. At the same time, some of the experts pointed to the organisational risks of research on sensitive issues of sexuality. =This could cause a backlash and jeopardise other work.

Lack of Accountability for Religious Leaders. In contexts of rising religious fundamentalism, a challenge is that religious leaders can be seen as God's direct representatives and evidence of abuse is ignored or hidden. Unregulated churches are growing in many places, claiming religious freedom from secular rules. Many faith spaces have leaders with low levels of education but high levels of popular influence. At the same time, some FBOs doing good work may still have a care mandate disconnected from wider systems of accountability:

> (T)he FBO will take a victim who has been abused and get all the information because the girls open up to them but they will end it there. They will say their role is care and then they will bring the child back to the normal situation but they are not involved with the person who did all that. They will keep all that information to themselves... If the police come they will just say they are looking after her, we cannot do more than this... I think they should go a step further (UV, Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)

Longer term sustainability and scale. Practitioners pointed to challenges around going beyond a one-off campaign or a 'project' mentality. Examples were shared of valuable programs that closed when funding ended versus those that had built in local sustainability from start and could be sustained. The danger of 'hit and run' models on EVAC was noted and the need for continuous support and mentoring for faith leaders.

Small-scale faith-related approaches on EVAC were identified to be working in various places. One example was the capacity building of religious schools in Myanmar. It is currently reaching 30 schools a year but there are 2500 in total. There is a need to take these models to scale, but collaboration with larger partners is required. Documenting evidence that these models work is an essential first step to scale up, a current gap in practice.

Gaps between laws and lived grassroots realities. Significant global rhetoric and focus on legal reforms on EVAC alone is not often translated into changed grassroots practice. There is an urgent need for further research to understand this better. There was also a gap between what elite religious scholars say and the

practices and beliefs of some local leaders on the ground. One faith expert from Egypt noted that "you can say whatever you like at the top, but what matters is what the practitioners are doing," with a concern that despite campaigns, many practitioners haven't got it. This point was strongly reinforced by an expert from South Africa who pointed out that what is decided by people at the top and what actually happens on the ground often look different. She notes that this is seen with regard to the legal prohibition of corporal punishment, which is escalating but may not be translating effectively into the elimination of the practice on the ground. While most of the experts identified a level of momentum on EVAC within faith communities, this reached a peak around 2006-9 and that over a decade later it still only remains an active minority. Faith leaders could play a potentially important role here to bridge this gap between the global campaign and lived realities.

Handling Perpetration. Faith communities grapple with the reality of how to deal with perpetrators of child abuse and neglect when they are also congregants and also may pay your salary. This is a significant gap that emerged from the experts. There is a need for further research around handling perpetrators in faith spaces:

> *(H)ow do we put parameters around offenders that want to worship (with us) because they have harmed not necessarily [church]children but children in the community, but of course the risk is heightened that they might target children at the [church]* (AB, Christian, England)

Resistance to change. Many older faith institutions can be reluctant to change established patterns and resist new ideas, especially if seen as imposed from the West. Some of the experts suggest using a tandem approach to both shift old models and bring in minimum standards, but also bring in new ways of working differently that are lower risk and more collaborative. However, a backlash to changes by some is a concerning trend:

> *There is still a foot in the past and [people say], "why would anyone want to close down an institution?...we are still doing good work, we are still looking after children". It is convincing them we are not getting off the plane from London saying, "Institutions have had their day." And in a piecemeal way begin to point out that there are other models to do this. That is moving very slowly. (AB, Christian, United Kingdom)*

Joining the dots on Child Protection - Despite most of the experts noting the value of an integrated approach, they suggest that child protection approaches often remain in silos, with government departments not talking to each other or civil society. Disconnects were specifically seen between faith-based and secular agencies. How to translate evidence into policy remains a concern. While there is a trend to support integration and some promising models of collaboration emerging, this appears to be the exception not the rule in practice.

Using a VAWG lens - A focus on VAWG and the girl child was noted and often shapes the issues that receive funds. Some groups are in danger of getting left out by these trends in faith funding e.g. ending sex-trafficking, ending child marriage. Faith groups can make a valuable contribution but can also unwittingly exclude groups by using a rescuer paradigm focused only on girls. The experts point out that boys can be victims too and that while a focus on women and girls may be needed, this can lead to a research and program gap around boys and a VAWG lens over an intersectional lens on VAW and VAC that was recommended by many of the experts.

Engaging the Direct Mechanisms of Faith - Negative beliefs can be challenged using secular arguments. Yet, because they are beliefs, a number of experts noted that they are best tackled using the mechanisms of faith. How this is done may vary significantly between different faiths and regions, but experts suggest promising approaches to find ways to draw on patterns of 'spiritual power' from within their traditions in relation to EVAC, the critique of abusive practices and the development of positive norms.

Mechanisms of faith may include religious rituals, sacred texts, religious leaders or religious spaces. Spiritual power may be manifested in various ways in local contexts e.g. exorcisms, leaders anointed by God, prayers, religious stories, divine commands, etc. The experts suggest that the interpretation of sacred texts is beginning to be taken seriously as a shaping mechanism for many faith communities in relation to VAC. However, more work is needed as it is in formative stages only, especially beyond the Christian tradition. Some religious leaders are being engaged here, but it has rarely become a part of standardised formation training. The experts

suggested the need for positive engagement with religious community rituals such as baptism, births, parenting affirmation days and coming of age ceremonies.

Potential points of connection between faith traditions and children still require further research. Faith takes on a key role in the lives of many believers who are not literate and can rely mainly on rituals. Both negative and positive beliefs emerged strongly from experts as a significant and unique contribution made by faith communities. Positive framing of protective norms for EVAC was seen as important, but the experts also insisted that faith communities must also engage directly with the ongoing persistence of many problematic beliefs as well. These beliefs about children can be deeply embedded in the mechanisms of faith themselves and require nuanced challenge from within each faith tradition by drawing on alternative resources of faith:

> *Religion, particularly patriarchal religion, and the three monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, are particularly hierarchical... We set up a pattern where men are dominant, a patriarchal construction of reality, a devalued worth of women and children, and where children are at the bottom of the pile. And people think that they own their children…the Christian Bible…the Jewish Torah and the Islamic Qu'ran… Men are the ones in charge who make decisions. Women need protection, someone to look after them and children must be seen and not heard, and they are ours to do whatever we like with them. We say things like, "I brought you into this world I can take you out."* (CD, Christian, South Africa)

7. Conclusion

This consultation with experts formed the final stage of the scoping study. It offered a deeper understanding of the existing evidence around faith communities' roles in both perpetuating and in ending child violence. While the experts point to many positive roles played by local faith communities across the world, at the same time, they highlight ongoing concerns showing that faith communities remain a mixed blessing on EVAC.

Experts suggested local faith communities are often playing important roles in the lives of children within society and may have a particular vocation around vulnerable children. However, many of these roles remain undocumented with a concerning lack of rigorous evaluation. Formal documentation has often been confined to specific one-off funded projects by selected organisations, often tackling high profile issues. Some promising studies and research collaborations are emerging, but to date, many innovative approaches shared by faith-based practitioners and their potential remains hidden and informal within the wider EVAC sector.

Local faith communities were seen by the experts to have a unique contribution to make on EVAC issues especially where faith is currently being used to justify or to cover up patterns of child violence. Local religious actors also play a role in the wider system as first responders and moral influencers present in the lives of families and communities where children often remain most vulnerable. They have significant potential to bridge the gaps between children and a wider raft of formal child protection processes but need to be systematically equipped to do so appropriately. Faith communities often play practical roles alongside many others to strengthen child protection systems at various points across the prevention/ response continuum. However, it is only a vocal minority who are beginning to embrace their unique role in relation to challenging faith complicity and cover-up of child abuse within religious spaces and beyond. Creatively reinterpreting harmful sacred texts, as well as traditional and ritualised practices around VAC was deemed essential by the experts but was far less developed. There is a need to go beyond global conferences to translate, evaluate and document long term scale-able faith approaches to transform social norms and reshape attitudes on children that work towards faith communities' role in upstream prevention and not only victim care.

Some emerging approaches shared suggested that ordinary local faith communities can be supported to offer a raft of simple, yet accountable interventions at a low cost tied into their existing interactions with children earlier on in the system rather than just at crisis point. Religion offers motivation for involvement in both perpetuating and ending child violence across many different contexts. The experts highlight the complexity of this engagement, as well as the role religious leaders can and are playing in upholding harmful or helpful beliefs, social norms and practices around the status of children. At the heart of many forms of child violence lie questions of power which religious institutions need to find ways to engage:

> *I see a role for faith communities but for them to fulfil that role would have to be a lot more honest and open about what they have done wrong… [and]… about their complicity in fostering an environment and ideology and a way of thinking that it is possible that women and children can be controlled by somebody and it does not matter what you do to them to exercise that control. (CD, Christian, South Africa)*

Understanding what the evidence shows around diverse faith communities' current involvement is a critical first step in acknowledging its current ambiguity. The next step is to lay out future research needs and enable the Hub and faith communities to play a role in building a critical mass around the positive roles of religious actors and the various commonalities seen across religious traditions and regions. The persistence of ideas that view children as parental property across various religious traditions is beginning to be challenged. However, it leaves faith communities with an uncomfortable question – can faith contribute to EVAC without also tackling the implications of underlying religious beliefs that may offer VAC moral authority? Context also remains key. Local communities of faith need to be able to respond in ways that avoid a universalised one-size-fits-all strategy if the contextual drivers and social norms underlying VAC are to be sustainably changed.

8. Recommendations

1   Faith communities to break the silence on child abuse

Experts point to a combination of factors and attitudes which make it difficult for faith communities to break the silence surrounding child abuse within their own congregations, especially in relation to sexual abuse in homes, family and religious spaces and accepted practices of corporal punishment. A need to protect their own organisations from attack and criticisms, especially from secular groups, plays a strong role in this. Further research is needed to investigate these factors in more depth, to understand exactly how faith communities can be encouraged to engage with VAC perpetrated within their ranks, as well as to take proactive steps to prevent this and safeguard children in other spaces where faith plays a legitimating role. Faith practitioners need to be equipped to break this silence voluntarily in light of the evidence and to collaborate. Significant commonality across religions offers some opportunities here.

2   Faith communities to engage mindsets and beliefs for change

Experts point to a range of practical roles being played by faith communities. However, they also insist that faith communities are uniquely qualified to address challenging harmful beliefs and mindsets about children. They can reinforce healthy, protective beliefs, including a vision of the child as a valuable subject and not just an object of rescue. Entrenched views of children as property and at the bottom of a hierarchy of value, with God at the top, can be entrenched. Further investigation into mechanisms used to challenge and reshape these beliefs in different faiths needs to document how, when and why some of these approaches result in positive changes. Examples are available but have not been systematically analysed to identify evidence-based processes that allow engagement on a faith basis with grassroots communities and demonstrate sustained behaviour change. Research is needed into the interrelated roots of forms of violence against children and the entanglement of religion and culture if interventions are to also engage with its root causes.

3   Child participation to form a core part of all faith approaches

Experts across faiths and regions pointed to child participation as making a material contribution to EVAC. This offers opportunities to faith communities who form intergenerational spaces with regular interaction between trusted adults and children. Rituals, storytelling and religious institutions can form spaces for building child resilience and empowerment as well as becoming safer spaces to report abuse. However, if this potential is to be realised, further research must document promising models and integrate child protection and meaningful participation more consistently. Guidelines are needed with regard to the ethical participation of children in research and program spaces. Faith communities must find alternatives to traditional ideas of 'rescue' or 'respect' that may silence children. Approaches that amplify children's engagement must be prioritised.

4   Improved documentation of local faith community engagement

Experts all shared promising approaches at the programmatic level. However, few had been formally documented. There was often an assumption of causality and sustainable impact rather than a demonstrable evidence base. This lack of robust M&E on the role of faith is a concern. Promising grassroots initiatives on EVAC were rarely shared in detail outside the implementing organisation or across regions or faiths. Further research that documents multiple practical faith responses, shaped by robust indicators, form an essential plank to inform sector-wide EVAC conversations where faith can be marginalised. This requires organisations to share lessons of failure as well as success and build relationships of trust that pay attention to the power dynamics between large and small players in the sector. This may offer a role for the EVAC Hub to document lessons across faiths and regions in the light of commonalities identified as well as research gaps and emerging trends that need sector-wide engagement. A tendency for larger well-resourced faith organisations to

dominate the space can also drown out smaller grassroots contributions. Current evidence shows bias toward certain faiths (Christianity), certain regions (USA, Sub-Saharan Africa) and certain types of violence (VAWG).

5 Multi-sectoral collaboration that challenges the faith/secular divide

Experts concurred that effective responses to VAC need to be multi-sectoral but that silo-ed responses often remain. There is a need to further investigate how secular and faith initiatives to EVAC can engage more constructively to combine their efforts, spheres of influence, skills and knowledge. Significant challenges often exist in promoting approaches that allow this engagement to take place, for example, mistrust on both sides, lack of mutual understanding, different prioritisation, and approaches to working with adults and children. Further analysis needs to be done of ways in which successful, and mutually respectful, partnerships between initially reluctant groups have been developed and what lessons can be learnt from this. Engagement with faith communities often also focuses only on religious leaders as senior gatekeepers. However, those in informal leadership positions related to children in local faith communities need more research. Secular practitioners must also engage faith for accountability and capacity building.

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Appendix A: Key Informant Interview Guides

Scoping Study on Unique Contributions of Faith Communities to Ending Child Violence Questions (were adapted to suit individual expert):

1. How would you describe your organisation/institution/network? What activities are you/have you been involved with in specific relation to EVAC? Probe: Which faith communities do you represent/work with. Who within them is involved & why?

2. Based on your experiences, what unique contributions have you/faith communities in your context made to EVAC? Why and in what way do you see these as unique? Any examples. Probe: how do you know this is effective or working in the way your organisation intends?

3. Have you seen faith communities contribute to stopping and/or preventing violence against children? Do they provide care/support for child survivors of violence? How? Are any particular groups of children included/excluded from this – e.g. with disabilities, OVC, gangs, streetkids? What groups might need to be targeted by FCs in EVAC. e g parents?

4. Have you seen faith communities in your context involved (perpetrating or complicit) on any forms of violence against children? How do you know about this? Probes – corporal punishment, sexual/physical abuse, child neglect, early marriage, gender roles.

5. In your opinion, what underlying beliefs, values and assumptions drive these (unique) contributions to E/VAC by faith communities in your context? Probe: Please be specific to share positive beliefs that can shape ECV and negative ones that might perpetuate harm. Do you think these differ depending on the specific faith or are there common threads?

6. To what extent and through what mechanisms have you been or seen faith actors involved in formal/informal child protection systems? Please give examples. Probe: How effective is this involvement and how could it be enhanced? Do you work with non-faith actors?

7. Do you have any suggestions for ways in which EVAC is being or could be built into existing activities or teachings of ordinary local faith institutions in a sustainable way? Are there areas where existing faith practices will need to be changed/rethought to prevent VAC?

8. In your opinion, how well are FC doing overall in regard to EVAC in your context. What can they do to improve? Probe: Any capacity building needs, undeveloped potential, concerns?

9. We have identified some trends, gaps and area of focus in our study. What are you seeing around trends, gaps and focus areas for faith communities on ECV in your context?? Probe: At what levels (individual, family, community, national) & at what areas of the prevention/response continuum do you see FCs as best or badly placed to engage on EVAC?

Appendix B: Key Informant Interview expert participants list

Person (anonymized initials used)	Organisation type (research ethics requires that the names of the organisations remain confidential)	Main faith community served	Country of focus
AB (male, British)	*Senior role in Global Safeguarding program of global medium sized Christian faith-based organisation*	Christian	United Kingdom (global remit)
CD (female, South African)	*Child Rights Consultant. Former Director of local child protection organisation. Non-believer who works closely with FBOs*	Christian	South Africa
EF (male, Asian)	*Senior role in faith-based Buddhist Network across Asia*	Buddhist	Thailand (holds Asia wide remit)
GH (female, Asian)	*Academic expert in Hindu scriptures. Also involved in VAW/VAC community projects in India*	Hindu	India
IJ (female, Asian)	*Child Protection Consultant to large global faith based Christian organisation in Nepal. Also part of Nepalese Interfaith Network*	Interfaith (mainly Christian. Hindu)	Nepal
KL (male, Asian)	*Senior role in large global faith based Islamic organisation*	Muslim	Indonesia
MN (female, European)	*Senior role in medium sized global Christian organisation. Responsible for Egypt and Middle Eastern desk*	Muslim & Christian	Middle East region focus
OP (female North African)	*Senior role in Development wing of the Orthodox Christian Church in Egypt*	Christian (partnered with Muslim)	Egypt
QR (female, Latin American	*Senior legal role in large faith-based global Christian organisation in Honduras.*	Christian	Honduras
ST (female, Latin American)	*Senior role in large Interfaith global Network focused on children*	Interfaith	Panama - Latin America region focus
UV (male, East African)	*Senior role in small OVC donor organisation working with partners in East and Southern Africa*	Christian/Muslim/ Traditional	Tanzania East/Southern Africa focus
WX (female, American)	*Jewish faith leader (Rabbi). Also involved in Child Sex Abuse Prevention Project in her community*	Jewish	United States of America
YZ (male, British)	*Researcher from a faith-based program on child trafficking. Independent expert on child sexual abuse and Christian Buddhist spirituality*	Buddhist/Christian	Cambodia
AZ (female, British)	*Senior role in a faith-based global network focused on child related non-violence*	Interfaith	United Kingdom – now global