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CHILDREN WEBINAR SERIES

# **SPIRITUAL CAPITAL**

**FEBRUARY 26 AT 10 AM ET**

Presented by Dr Selina Palm,  
Stellenbosch University

# AGENDA

**Introduction to Faith and Ending Violence Against Children Hub** Dr. Carola Eyber, Queen Margaret University and JLI EVAC Academic Co-Chair

- **Guest Speaker:** Dr. Selina Palm, Stellenbosch University
- Q&A
- Interactive Discussion
- Next Webinar: May 26, 2020

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# ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN LEARNING HUB CO-CHAIRS



- Carola Eyber, Queen Margaret University
- Rebeca Rios-Kohn, Arigatou International
- Robyn Hagan, World Vision International
- Neelam Fida, Islamic Relief Worldwide

# ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN SCOPING STUDY OVERVIEW



**Dr. Carola Eyber**  
Queen Margaret University



**Dr. Selina Palm**  
Stellenbosch University

Ending Violence Against  
Children Scoping Study:

**Spiritual Capital: Engaging  
the Mechanisms of Faith**



**26<sup>th</sup> February 2020**

**Dr Selina Palm**

**Joint Learning Initiative  
on Faith & Local Communities**

**JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE on  
FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

# Reasons for the EVAC Hub

- Religious communities are often at the forefront of the care and protection of children – it is a foundational focus for nearly all religious traditions. (Robinson & Hanmer, 2014)
- Faith is a spiritual resource for overcoming the effects of violence, abuse and marginalization.



ANTI-  
TRAFFICKING &  
MODERN SLAVERY



ENDING VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
CHILDREN



GENDER-BASED  
VIOLENCE



REFUGEES



MONITORING, EVALUATION,  
ACCOUNTABILITY AND  
LEARNING



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

LITERATURE REVIEW



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

CASE STUDIES



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April 2019

Collated by the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities

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# JLI ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN LEARNING HUB

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

Findings from Experts Consultation (KII)



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Selina Palm

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# Learning Briefs: released 4<sup>th</sup> Sept 2019

## Learning Brief 2:

***Why faith? Engaging the mechanisms of faith to end violence against children***



# Why faith? Insights from experts

*“Many religious leaders have enormous reach, they see people throughout their lifespan, very few practitioners are able to reach unobtainable communities and see people across their lifespan. So, they have this enormous influence and power, and, conferred on them, whether legitimate or not, a moral authority ...Not only are they teachers, theologians, leaders of worship and chairs of organizations, they are also active in the community. They have even worked **with the theology of a child, they have a unique contribution to make there.**” (Interviewee, United Kingdom)*

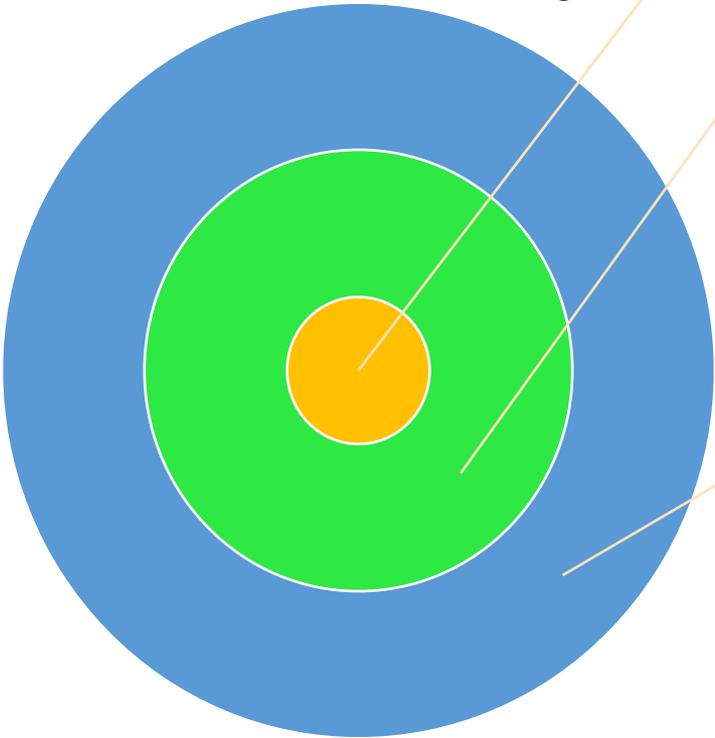
*“We need to involve faith leaders not only because they are influential but first and foremost because of **underlying beliefs** ...in many cases, there are underlying beliefs and social norms and values that are somehow highlighted in or by the religious sector that need to be changed.”(Interviewee,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

## **Brief 2: Why Faith? Engaging the mechanisms of faith to end violence against children**

- **1.** Faith communities' have the potential to promote, challenge, and re-interpret religious beliefs and practices that contribute to violence against children, particularly those with a spiritual foundation or basis in religious texts.
- **2.** Faith traditions often mandate practical social action and service in relation to children, especially within education, care, and social support.
- **3.** Protective religious beliefs around care and protection of children in faith traditions can be harnessed to accelerate ending violence against children.
- **4.** Faith leaders must deal explicitly and constructively with entrenched harmful faith beliefs used to justify or underpin abusive adult/child hierarchies.
- **5.** Faith leaders must break the culture of silence and secrecy on hidden practices of child abuse and maltreatment within religious institutions and families and take steps toward preventative action.
- **6.** Faith actors should seek, where appropriate, to work with intra-faith, interfaith and wider child protection systems to prioritize child's best interests.

# Spiritual Capital - A Unique Contribution

**Spiritual capital** - faith traditions uniquely draw on and engage faith resources and authority e.g. through prayer, meditation, sermons, sacred texts and religious rituals. This can help to transform beliefs and practices that underpin child maltreatment, reaffirm religious imperatives for protection and prevention and stand against the moral normalization or silencing of abuse.



**Social capital** - faith actors bring social influence, organizations, funds, buildings, people and motivation to ending violence against children. However, they are used by secular actors as instrumentally valuable only. This involves limited or no engagement with spiritual dimensions.

**Access capital** - faith leaders as initial gatekeepers to local communities. Employed in token, one off ways by child related services to 'open the gate' only. They are not seen to play ongoing positive roles in ending violence against children. May be seen as a liability.

# Understanding Spiritual Capital

Underpinning faith communities practical contributions are a complex set of beliefs, rituals and ethics that can offer a sustained protective commitment to EVAC. (Palm & Eyber 2019)

- **Religious Organizations** - buildings, places of worship, communities of hope, voluntary, long term presence, weekly contact (e.g the 'umma' or the 'body', being salt and light, moral authority of faith leaders, Sunday school)
- **Religious Ideas** - doctrines, sacred texts, traditions, fatwas,(karma, forgiveness, haram, God as a refugee child, Prophet Muhamad as an orphan, the child at the centre of the Buddhist mandala)
- **Religious Practices** - Rituals, Charity, Fellowship,(baptism, marriage, fasting, circumcision , zakat, compassion, giving to the poor, assisting orphans, visiting prisoners, caring for the sick)
- **Religious Experiences** –.e.g. prayer, worship, meditation, anointing, access, enlightenment, conversion (subjective)

*(Gerrie Ter Haar, 2010, Religion & Development: Ways of transforming the world)*

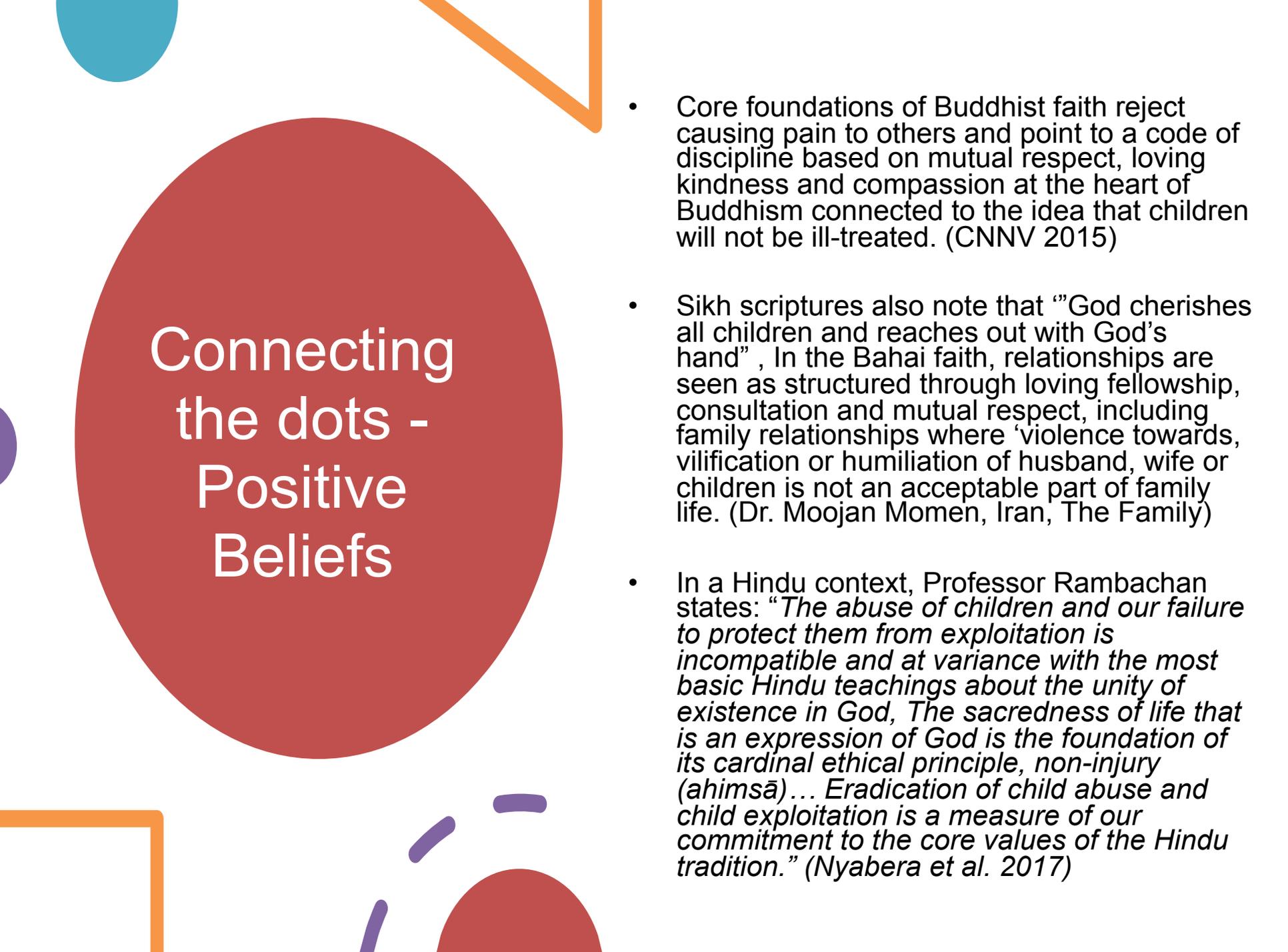
# Spiritual Capital in Action

**ORGANIZATIONS:** Claves, Uruguay – ‘we strengthen ourselves through play’. Seeing children as made in the image of God and developing positive body consciousness in weekly Sunday schools. Church Network for Non Violence (CNNV) – offering worship resources for local faith communities to use in their services.

**IDEAS:** Contextual Bible Study e.g. Tamar’s Rape Campaign - faith based approach on sexual violence is reinterpreting sacred texts in the light of girl child abuse and developing alternative religious and cultural rituals that do not endorse harmful practices.

**PRACTICES:** The Butterfly Project – Researching Christian and Buddhist spiritualities as a form of resilience for teenage survivors of sexual exploitation in Cambodia. Buddhist Monks in Nepal using astrological charts to set an auspicious and appropriate age for marriage.

**EXPERIENCES:** Learning to Live Together– nurturing children's spirituality in El Salvador as part of ethics education for children in schools. WeSeeHope – working with family perpetrators in East Africa using prayer, home visits and counseling by faith leaders.



## Connecting the dots - Positive Beliefs

- Core foundations of Buddhist faith reject causing pain to others and point to a code of discipline based on mutual respect, loving kindness and compassion at the heart of Buddhism connected to the idea that children will not be ill-treated. (CNNV 2015)
- Sikh scriptures also note that “God cherishes all children and reaches out with God’s hand” , In the Bahai faith, relationships are seen as structured through loving fellowship, consultation and mutual respect, including family relationships where ‘violence towards, vilification or humiliation of husband, wife or children is not an acceptable part of family life. (Dr. Moojan Momen, Iran, The Family)
- In a Hindu context, Professor Rambachan states: “*The abuse of children and our failure to protect them from exploitation is incompatible and at variance with the most basic Hindu teachings about the unity of existence in God, The sacredness of life that is an expression of God is the foundation of its cardinal ethical principle, non-injury (ahimsā) ... Eradication of child abuse and child exploitation is a measure of our commitment to the core values of the Hindu tradition.*” (Nyabera et al. 2017)



# Human dignity, Faith & Non Violence

*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. (Interviewee, interfaith, United Kingdom)*

*There 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. (Interviewee, Christian, South Africa)*

# When Spiritual Capital is Abused

Problematic religious beliefs, often entangled with cultural patterns, continue to indirectly shape violence against children. These include beliefs about evil spirit possession, disability or albinism as a curse, a reinforcement of repressive gendered patterns such as son preference, damaging beliefs about sexual purity, physical punishment as essential for education or parental discipline or requirements of child silence or obedience as a form of hierarchical respect for adults. These patterns were found across multiple faith traditions and continue to affect children in each society today. (Palm & Eyber 2019)

# Physical Punishment & Faith

*In 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 & spoil the child or if near your age a child should be treated as a friend.” (Interviewee, Hindu, India)*

*Leaders in the church Biblically establish that they have to discipline children physically. (Interviewee, Christian, Honduras)*

*Some of the children 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. (Interviewee, Muslim, Indonesia)*

*It is also a conflation, particularly in 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, missionaries and colonizers arrived. (Interviewee, Christian, South Africa)*

*They are looked up to in the society. If a faith leader says, whatever is written in the Bible...beating a child is physical abuse. If he explains that to his congregation in such a way so it is not misinterpreting what is in the religious text...that really counts, that is really good. (Interviewee, Christian, Nepal)*

*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.... 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 as 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 assume this is the Word of God. (Interviewee, Christian, South Africa)*

# Transforming Problematic Beliefs

- **Child as cursed, possessed or bewitched**

*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. (Interviewee, Christian/Traditional African religion, Tanzania)*

- **Disability as karma or punishment**

*Children with disabilities 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. (Interviewee, Hindu, India)*

- **Original sin – children as born bad**

*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. (Interviewee, South Africa)*

- **Patriarchy – Abraham's son /Jepthah's daughter**

*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. (Interviewee, Jewish, America)*

- **Unquestioned authority of faith leaders (anointed by Holy Spirit, appointed by God)**

*Religious leaders can sometimes be seen by their followers as God's infallible mouthpieces. In the light of endemic child sexual abuse by faith leaders, this is deeply problematic. (Palm 2019)*

# Asset in Engaging Perpetrators

Religious leaders can play a role in engaging perpetrators within religious frames of reference. Using their spiritual authority, access and tools, such as prayer and sacred texts, they can play an important role in this aspect of child protection by speaking a language that may have resonance for the perpetrators as well. Religious rituals in many traditions include components of change and forgiveness such as the Islamic concepts of *Tawbah & Rahma* or Christian notions of confession and repentance. (Palm & Eyber 2019)

*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" ..., for most believers it has been working very well.*

*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. Children are the ones leading prayers, just simple prayers but a big change to the household. (Interviewee, male, Tanzania)*

# Asset in Detangling Culture & Religion

**EDUCATIVE TASK** - FGM/C, that is massive in Egypt and that is one campaign that 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, perhaps often by religious leaders themselves because part of it is changing the awareness of the faith community. (Interviewee, white female, Christian/Muslim, North Africa region)

**RITUAL TASK** - 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, 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 organized the celebration but without the circumcision**. All the girls will go there and it works very well, both sides were happy. (Interviewee, black male, Christian/Muslim/Traditional, Tanzania)

# Seeing Child Rights as Part of Faith

- Faith leaders can use their spiritual resources and authority to tackle root beliefs and harmful social norms that still underpin many forms of child violence. They can go deeper into the ethical dimensions of life and have trusted access to victims, perpetrators and bystanders. **This requires a critical lens on spiritual beliefs that underpin harmful practices and a reclaiming of protective beliefs.**

*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 their views are not so different.  
(Interviewee, Muslim, Indonesia)*

- Faith approaches can make positive connections between child protection and faith by using a child rights lens that goes beyond the secular to also connect to religious themes and sacred text reflections on dignity and justice.



## Where do you see God?

Like a mother, God teaches her children to walk, holds them in her arms & feeds them.  
(Hosea 11)

Jesus said to his followers “Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. (Mark 10:15–16)

# Find out more

The Full Scoping Study and the two Learning Briefs can be found at <https://jliflc.com/2019/06/evac-scoping-study-published/>

- Faith Actors Involvement in the Prevention, Elimination and Perpetuation of Violence against Children Scoping Study. (English only)
- Brief 1: *A mixed blessing: Roles of faith communities in ending violence against children (English/French/Spanish)*
- Brief 2: *Why faith? Engaging the mechanisms of faith to end violence against children (English/French/Spanish)*

For further information on this study contact Dr Selina Palm ([spalm@sun.ac.za](mailto:spalm@sun.ac.za))

*This research was co-authored by Dr Palm, Dr Eyber & Ms Rutledge as a collaboration between Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh and Stellenbosch University, South Africa for the JLI EVAC Hub.*