SVRI: Faith & Gender CoP

Evidence Building Working Group

RESEARCH REPORT

SVRI sexual violence research initiative

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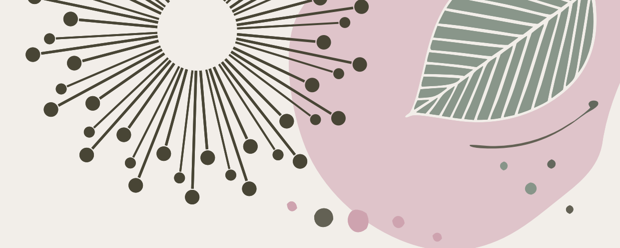

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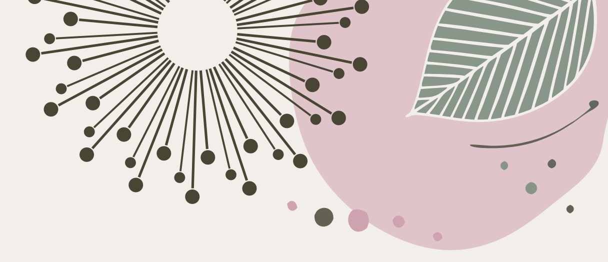
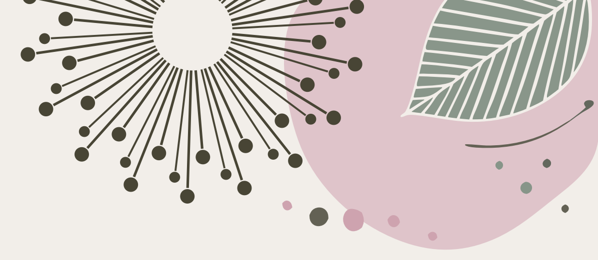


LIST OF ACRONYMS

SVRI	Sexual Violence Research Initiative
CoP	Community of Practise
WG1	Working Group on Evidence-Building (Working Group 1)
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
EGD(s)	Expert Group Discussion(s)
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and others
FGD(s)	Focus Group Discussion(s)
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
CBO(s)	Community Based Organisation(s)
LGBTQI+	An initialism for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other people with sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics that are perceived not to conform to social norms.
SOGIESC	A framework for understanding shared traits by humans: sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and sex characteristics; a reframe of LGBTQI+ commonly used in public advocacy.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Working Group 1 on Evidence-Building was initially created in October 2024 by an executive research team: Rafael Cazarin, Sinethemba Makanya, Nobantu Shabangu and Leonardo Andrade. Led by the intention to build a Community of Practise that would speak back to the ideals of the Sexual Violence Research Initiative, the CoP was informed by the main goal to connect practise-based narrative evidence from experts to inform policies on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention with faith actors and religious communities in the Global South. In the months following the CoP inception about 150 members joined the Working Group 1 CoP on LinkedIn. Members from various organisations contributed to building empirical evidence for GBV prevention in faith and religion contexts through a series of monthly online activities, including roundtable discussions, focus groups, a virtual learning webinar and a special blog series for the SVRI blog page.

This report presents key findings from five focus groups with members of Working Group 1 (WG1), focused on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention in faith-based and religious settings. The discussions pursued two main goals: first, to identify region-specific challenges and methodological gaps across the Global South, while also highlighting opportunities and sustainable practises at the intersection of faith and GBV prevention; and second, to explore critical themes—such as SOGIESC, youth and masculinities, and local cultural and religious dynamics—to support the development of more inclusive and context-sensitive policies and practises.

Building on this the research questions were:

- What are the perspectives of young people of faith on gender-based violence within their communities? What are the key insights and experiences on engaging youth?
- What are the key insights and views with regards to power in minorities (e.g. LGBTQI+ individuals, indigenous belief systems) in faith-based approaches to GBV?
- How can faith-based communities be mobilised more effectively to address gender justice and contribute to long-term prevention of GBV, particularly focusing on youth?
- What are the key differences and similarities between African and Latin American experiences of youth engagement in GBV prevention in faith-informed contexts?

These questions provided a consistent thread throughout the research process, while the flexible, semi-structured format ensured that local nuances and priorities could surface.

The focus groups included 23 participants who represented a diverse set of constituencies including researchers, activists, demographers, pastors, and practitioners from civil society organisations across Latin America, Africa and South Asia. The results are organised into 3 core thematic areas:

1. Perspective and insights on youth and GBV in faith and leadership contexts.
2. Emerging themes: SOGIESC, masculinity, and cultural-religious intersections.
3. Evidence-building for GBV prevention in faith-based settings.

The focus groups revealed a range of structural and practical challenges in GBV prevention within faith settings. These included persistent stigma against survivors, the tendency to treat GBV as a private or moral issue rather than a systemic one, the lack of standardised tools to track social and behavioural change, and fragmented data systems, especially in rural or conservative areas. Alongside these, participants highlighted promising strategies such as survivor-centred models, discreet reporting technologies, cross-sector partnerships, and training faith leaders in theological reinterpretation to support gender justice.

Discussions also surfaced deeper social, spiritual, and theological dynamics. Key themes included transforming masculinities through accountability and healing among men and boys, and the exclusion of LGBTQI+ individuals from faith spaces—exacerbating their invisibility and vulnerability to GBV. Youth emerged as both a vulnerable

group and powerful agents of change. Crucially, the dual nature of faith—as both a source of harm and healing—was underscored, with particular emphasis on dissident theological frameworks such as feminist, queer, Black, and Afro-Indigenous interpretations that reclaim sacred texts to affirm dignity and justice.

The following recommendations should guide future work for more responsive and relevant faith-based GBV prevention:

- Prioritise community-led, survivor-centred research that reflects lived experience and validates local knowledge systems.
- Develop standardised yet adaptable tools to monitor behavioural change- such as shifts in gender attitudes, reductions in harmful practises, or increased support for survivors- and evaluate programme impact, particularly for male engagement and faith leader training.
- Equip religious leaders with theological and practical tools to challenge GBV-supportive norms that enable the reinterpretation of sacred texts in ways that affirm gender justice.
- Ensure faith-based GBV programme design includes LGBTQI+, Afro-Indigenous, and youth voices in decision- making processes, and leadership roles.
- Invest in cross-regional and intergenerational learning platforms that foster shared knowledge systems, collective reflection, and ongoing collaboration across the Global South, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.
- Design and sustain digital community-building spaces that nurture collaboration, reciprocity, and peer-to-peer learning, especially among young people of faith, faith leaders and GBV-prevention practitioners.

An expanded set of policy recommendations for funders, researchers, and policymakers is provided in the policy brief attached to this report. It builds on these findings to support more effective, inclusive, and context-driven approaches to GBV prevention in faith-based settings.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Youth, Diversity and Faith: African and Latin American Trends

Addressing the interplay of gender-based violence (GBV) while considering religion and spirituality is crucial for fully embracing the goal of gender justice. GBV occurs within faith communities worldwide, yet these spaces can also serve as critical sources of support, healing and advocacy for survivors[1]. Women survivors often turn to faith and spiritual groups and leaders for counsel during their experiences of intimate partner violence[2]. In many contexts, faith-based actors are among the first responders, offering pastoral care and shaping community responses to violence[3]. They interpret religious doctrine, influence moral norms, and hold considerable social authority, giving them the power to either perpetuate or prevent GBV.

In this context, the involvement of young people is particularly important. Youth are the experts on the lived realities within their local contexts[4], they often challenge traditional norms and advocate for equality and inclusion[5], bring fresh perspectives to faith spaces, and are critical to shaping the future of religious and

1 Pertek, S. (2025). Integrating Faith Sensitivity into Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Work. Learning Network Brief 45. London, Ontario: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children. Integrating Faith Sensitivity into Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Work- Learning Network- Western University
2 Landman, C. and Mudimeli, L.M. (2022). The spiritual experiences of women victims of gender-based violence: A case study of Thohoyandou. HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 78(3), a7528. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i3.7528
3 Shriduth, M. A. (2024). Silent no more: Religion engaging with gender-based violence in South Africa – A case study on the "We Will Speak Out South Africa" coalition (Master's thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa). Silent no more: religion engaging with gender-based violence in South Africa: a case study on the "We Will Speak Out South Africa" Coalition.
4 Haffejee, S., Treffry-Goatley, A., Wiebesiek, L., & Mkhize, N. (2020). Negotiating girl-led advocacy: Addressing early and forced marriage in south africa. Girlhood Studies, 13(2), 18-34. doi: https://doi.org/10.3167/ghs.2020.130204
5 Makokha, D. (2025). Youth perspective and the role of religion in accelerating gender justice. Citizen Digital. https://www.citizen.digital/news/youth-perspective-and-the-role-of-religion-in-accelerating-gender-justice-n358836

community leadership[6]. Their involvement can catalyse more inclusive, rights-based approaches within faith traditions- especially when addressing issues such as SOGIESC, consent, and gender equality. Mobilising young people alongside faith leaders creates opportunities for intergenerational dialogue, theological reimagining, and community transformation.

Africa's youth population is expanding rapidly, projected to double from 226 million in 2015 by 2055. In contrast, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are experiencing stabilised youth populations, reflecting slower growth[7]. Women's empowerment, improvements in access to family planning services, and advancements in socioeconomic development have all played a significant role in shaping these demographic changes.[8]

Cultural and religious diversity further shapes these demographic changes. Africa's 54 nations and over 2,000 languages reflect a tapestry of traditions where indigenous and colonial influences coexist[9]. By 2050, sub-Saharan Africa is projected to host 38% of the world's Christians, and Islam is also expected to see considerable growth, reflecting the region's dynamic religious transformations[10].

Meanwhile, in LAC, Christianity remains the dominant faith. 91% of the population identified as religious in 2010, though its landscape is evolving, with Protestant denominations gaining prominence and the proportion of unaffiliated individuals slightly increasing[11]. The 34 countries in the region are home to indigenous populations, comprising about 58 million people across more than 826 distinct groups, who have long advocated for self-determination and the preservation of their unique identities and rights[12].

It is therefore essential to develop and use new methods that promote social justice and create real change in societies across the LMICs. In this context, development aid and international cooperation ecosystems must be able to link global frameworks to grassroots solutions while overcoming taboos on religion and faith. Examples of such global frameworks include RESPECT, the WHO's framework for preventing violence against women; INSPIRE, a set of strategies to end violence against children; and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Over the past decade, research on religion and spirituality in the high-income countries has shifted the focus from institutionalised religions to faith-based, holistic, and lived experiences[13]. Such research transitions drive an approach that acknowledges the diversity of religious expressions and highlights the importance of non-organised religion and indigeneity.

Decolonial approaches to religion and faith currently lead the way across LMICs. Following the ideas of decolonial thought developed in Latin America in the 1960s, these approaches emphasise the need to recognise the value of diverse and localised forms of knowledge production. While in Latin America decoloniality was a key driver of theologies concerned with social justice[14], in the African context the wave of decoloniality was more apparent in academic milieux, particularly, made visible through Anglophone literature across South Africa, Ghana and Nigeria, which allowed for critical public engagement though limited in challenging theological frameworks.

Decolonising knowledge necessitates confronting the historical and ongoing effects of Eurocentrism on cultural and religious gender relations, particularly societies across the majority world. In the context of GBV and

6 O'Malley, D. L., & Johnson, R. (2014). Young feminists: Resisting the tide of fundamentalisms. 50.50 openDemocracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/young-feminists-resisting-tide-of-fundamentalisms
7 Youth population trends and sustainable development | Population Division. (n.d.). Retrieved 9 January 2025, from https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/content/youth-population-trends-and-sustainable-development
8 Mark R. M. (2008). The Urban Transformation of the Developing World. Science 319,761-764. doi:10.1126/science.1153012
9 Nachum, L., Stevens, C.E., Newenham-Kahindi, A. et al. Africa rising: Opportunities for advancing theory on people, institutions, and the nation state in international business. J Int Bus Stud 54, 938–955 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-022-00581-z
10 Wormald, B. (2015, April 2). The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050. Pew Research Centre. https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/
11 Ibid.
12 Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean: 2014: Challenges to Sustainable Growth in a New External Context. United Nations Publications.
13 Ammerman, Nancy T. 2016. "Lived Religion as an Emerging Field: An Assessment of Its Contours and Frontiers." Nordic Journal of Religion and Society 29(2): 83–99.
14 Mignolo, W. (2002). Colonialidad global, capitalismo y hegemonía epistémica. Indisciplinar las ciencias sociales. Geopolíticas del conocimiento y colonialidad del poder. Perspectivas desde lo andino, 215-244.

religion, this means building a research agenda that amplifies the voices and experiences of practitioners, activists, faith leaders, and researchers from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), and reflects locally grounded realities and priorities. While there is a growing interest in this area, empirical research on GBV and religion from a decolonial perspective remains scarce, and South-South comparative studies are even rarer. Strengthening this body of work is essential to shifting power in knowledge production and advancing more equitable, contextually relevant approaches to faith-based GBV prevention.

Religious and spiritual leaders, along with youth leaders and faith-based practitioners, have a crucial role to play in fostering dialogue and collaboration on gender justice. Yet young people of faith, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, often face significant barriers to participating in GBV prevention efforts. Although they are frequently among those most affected by violence, they remain underrepresented in decision-making spaces within religious institutions. Interestingly, many of them serve as lay leaders, peer educators, and community facilitators; roles that uniquely position them to engage with their communities in transformative ways.

Evidence-building for GBV in faith contexts requires creating spaces where experiences, insights, and leadership magnify South-to-South research nodes through collaborative efforts. This is critically important in regions where local knowledge, spiritual practise, and social justice work intersect to form powerful but often overlooked strategies for change. Responding to this need, the SVRI Working Group 1 (WG1) Faith and GBV Community of Practise was established to explore how evidence, policy, and practise can better reflect these realities.

Through a process rooted in decolonial thinking and participatory practise, WG1 sought to centre voices and themes that are often excluded, namely, youth, indigenous belief systems, and LGBTIQ+ issues, and to build knowledge that is grounded, inclusive, and relevant to the lived experiences of those on the front lines of GBV prevention. The following sections outline the structure of the WG1 and the context in which the initiative is inserted. It follows by a methodological design of the research, and an intersectional reflection on such techniques. In other words, it explores how the group was structured, how participants were engaged, and how the team facilitated the focus group discussions to identify and discuss strategies and challenges in evidence-building across different themes raised by participants.

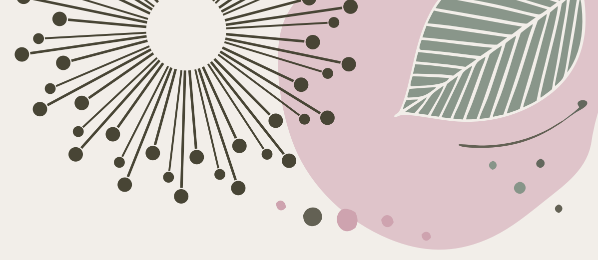
1.2 Context: Building Collective Knowledge on Faith and GBV

Between October 2024 and May 2025, the SVRI Faith and GBV Community of Practise (CoP) led an international initiative bringing together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and donors committed to understanding and strengthening the role of faith and faith actors in preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV). The CoP was designed to foster inclusive collaboration across regions, disciplines, and traditions, with over 660 members registered across its three working groups (WGs).
Each group focused on a specific theme:

- Working Group 2 explored faith and violence against children.
- Working Group 3 addressed faith-based communication and advocacy with policymakers.
- Working Group 1- the authors of this report- delved into the intersection of gender, religion, and spirituality, with a special interest in decolonial approaches and the lived experiences of young people within faith communities.

Within the field of faith-based GBV prevention, the WG1 aimed to:

- Encourage critical reflection on how evidence is built, shared, and used by stakeholders.
- Facilitate South-South knowledge exchange, particularly between participants from LMICs in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Support policy-oriented research grounded in locally grounded experiences and pressing issues concerning the youth.



The WG1 Executive Committee comprised four members with diverse expertise across research, policy, creative communication, and community engagement. They were responsible for designing, facilitating, and documenting all WG1 activities, including learning events, roundtables, and discussion groups. Their leadership ensured the process was participatory, inclusive, and grounded in the lived realities of the participants. Together, the team shaped WG1's direction and methodology, ensuring that each activity supported open dialogue, mutual learning, and meaningful reflection on faith, gender, and violence. WG1 sought to engage participants based or working in the Global South, prioritising a mix of languages, cultures, genders, and faith traditions. A key part of the group's methodology was to design activities that invited open participation, reflection, and co-learning across different professional and personal contexts.

2. METHOD AND TECHNIQUE

In line with the project's learning and reflection goals, WG1 adopted a qualitative, participatory, inclusive approach to knowledge generation. Central to this process was a series of five online group discussions, conducted via Zoom, designed to gather diverse perspectives on GBV prevention within faith-based youth communities across Africa and Latin America.

These sessions were initially conceptualised as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), but the term was later reframed to **Expert Group Discussion (EGDs).** This shift was intentional and reflected a commitment to disrupting traditional research hierarchies. Rather than treating participants as subjects of inquiry, the EGD format recognised each person - regardless of academic background or institutional affiliation- as a knowledge-holder. The term "expert" in this context acknowledges the value of lived experience, grassroots insight, and community-based practise, positioning participants as active contributors to collective learning.

A semi-structured discussion guide, informed by the project's overarching research objectives and key thematic areas, was developed to steer the conversations. This approach provided a flexible framework for engagement, allowing each group to explore issues most relevant to their context. As a result, while the guiding questions ensured coherence across the EGDs, the discussions could not be fully standardised. This flexibility was critical for surfacing locally grounded insights but also introduced complexity into the analysis, as thematic patterns emerged in diverse and sometimes unexpected ways.

2.1 Research Objectives and Questions

This research project was developed with the aim of generating grounded, comparative insights into gender-based violence (GBV) prevention within faith-based youth communities across Africa and Latin America. The study sought to contribute to decolonial, community-led approaches to GBV prevention in contexts of faith by exploring key issues, lived experiences, strategies, and reflections of practitioners, leaders, and activists operating in faith-informed contexts.

More specifically, the objectives were threefold:

I. To examine how youth perceive and experience gender-based violence within faith and GBV contexts, and to identify key insights for engaging youth meaningfully as partners in prevention.

II. To deepen understanding of underexplored or emerging thematic areas, particularly those related to youth engagement, masculinities, SOGIESC, and the local intersections of culture and religion.

III. To examine how evidence is produced, mobilised, and legitimised within faith-based GBV prevention efforts in Africa and Latin America.

These objectives guided the formulation of key research questions that explore diverse perspectives on gender-based violence within faith communities. Informed by a comparative methodological approach, the study deliberately engaged with experiences from both African and Latin American contexts. It valued local knowledge and solutions to highlight context-specific challenges and strengths. This approach enabled a nuanced exploration of regional differences and commonalities in how gender-based violence is perceived, addressed, and prevented within faith and community settings. Building on this the research questions were:

- What are the perspectives of young people of faith on gender-based violence within their communities? What are the key insights and experiences on engaging youth?
- What are the key insights and views with regards to power minorities (e.g. LGBTQI+ individuals, indigenous belief systems) in faith-based approaches to GBV?
- How can faith-based communities be mobilised more effectively to address gender justice and contribute to long-term prevention of GBV, particularly focusing on youth?
- What are the key differences and similarities between African and Latin American experiences of youth engagement in GBV prevention in faith-informed contexts?

These questions provided a consistent thread throughout the research process, while the flexible, semi-structured format ensured that local nuances and priorities could surface. Resultantly, although these questions shaped the design of the Expert Group Discussions (EGDs), the discussions generated rich but non-uniform data generated across diverse settings. This required an iterative and context-sensitive approach to thematic analysis.

2.2 Sampling and Consent

Participants were initially recruited by the WG1 team through a convenience sampling approach, whereby an open call was circulated among CoP members via email and online platforms. Interested individuals self-selected by responding to a voluntary survey expressing their willingness to participate in various Working Group 1 (WG1) activities, including the Expert Group Discussions (EGDs). To enhance representation from Latin America, the Executive Committee employed a snowball sampling technique, inviting trusted colleagues and partners to register on the CoP platform, join WG1, and participate in the discussions. This combined approach aimed to ensure both accessibility and diversity within the participant pool.

All participants, regardless of recruitment method, were provided with a consent form prior to their involvement (attached as Annex 1). The form detailed the objectives of the WG1 process, clarified how participants' contributions would be used (including anonymised or credited quotations), and emphasised the collective and exploratory nature of the documentation. Participation was completely voluntary, and all individuals received a modest incentive as a token of appreciation for their time, expertise, and emotional labour.

2.3 Overview of Groups and Participants

With a total of 5 sessions, each EDG included three to six participants and was facilitated by two members of the Executive Committee. In total, 23 participants took part in the five discussion groups (see Annex 4). The sessions were hosted on Zoom, allowing participants from different countries to join remotely while creating space for synchronous conversation Their backgrounds were diverse in multiple dimensions:

- Gender identity:
  - 19 participants identified as female, including 2 trans women.
  - 6 participants identified as male.
- Regional representation:
  - Participants came from 11 countries, spanning East, West, and Southern Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, including: Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, Cameroon, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
- Professional roles and experiences:
  - In the African context, the group comprised faith leaders, gender justice advocates, NGO practitioners, researchers, and community facilitators, mirroring the broader CoP membership. In contrast, respondents in the Latin American EGDs were drawn largely from academic settings, including professors, doctoral scholars, and researchers, whose work intersects with activism in diverse fields of social justice (i.e.: Afro- Brazilian rights, feminism, LGBTQI+ rights)

- Religious traditions:
  - Whilst the dominant faith identity was Christianity for the larger WG 1, the EGDs provided an opportunity for more nuanced and diverse perspectives including Catholic, Muslim, Afro-Diasporic faiths[15] in Latin America, as well as interfaith and non-denominational approaches.

This diversity was not only a demographic strength but also a thematic one. It allowed for conversations that wove together different ways of knowing, believing, and resisting harm.

2.4 Participatory Strategy

Each EGD was designed to allow participants to reflect critically on the intersections between faith, gender, and violence in their own contexts. The sessions were structured around guiding questions, but facilitators allowed for flexibility, encouraging participants to steer the conversation in ways that felt meaningful to them. Following each session, participants were invited to submit a short, written reflection (approximately 500 words) in any language of their choosing. They were encouraged, but not required, to reflect on their experience focusing on:

- What stood out to them in the session?
- What issues felt unresolved or needed further exploration?
- How the conversation made them feel, including any discomfort or moments of connection

This approach placed strong emphasis on emotional honesty and care, recognising that the topics discussed were often sensitive and could be personally triggering. Participants' written reflections, combined with session notes and feedback, were used to shape the shared insights presented in the thematic sections that follow. Instead of generating a fixed or formal dataset, the WG1 process created a collaborative space for learning; one grounded in trust, relationships, and the practise-based knowledge.

2.5 Limitations

This study was guided by a participatory and relational approach, which prioritised depth, dialogue, and contextual nuance over statistical representativeness. While this allowed for meaningful engagement and rich insights, there are some limitations to keep in mind:

- **Sample size:** With 23 participants across five discussion groups, the study offers in-depth qualitative reflections but does not aim to capture broader trends or represent all regions, religions or cultures.
- **Language barriers:** English was used as the main language during the discussions. While participants were invited to submit written reflections in Portuguese, French, or Spanish, the use of English in real-time sessions may have limited fuller contributions from those less confident in the language. In many African contexts, participants were also unable to speak in their vernacular languages because available AI tools did not adequately support translation of African languages. As a result, some participants had to "self-translate" their thoughts into English, which for many was not their first or even second language, resulting in the loss of cultural nuance or locally rooted concepts.
- **Transcription, translation, and interpretation:** This study faced challenges associated with the transcription and translation of participant contributions. The use of Zoom's automatic transcription function, while efficient, did not always accurately capture speech, particularly in instances of overlapping dialogue, accents, or technical terms. Additionally, translation software was employed for participants who spoke in vernacular languages; however, automated translations have inherent limitations, including

15 Afro-Diasporic faiths, also known as African diaspora religions, are spiritual traditions that originated in Africa and were carried to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade. These faiths involve the blending of African traditional religions with other belief systems, primarily Christianity and sometimes Indigenous American beliefs, resulting in unique syncretic practises. They are diverse and include traditions like Candomblé, Santería (Lucumí), Vodou, and others. See: Tsang, M. (Ed.). (2023). Spirited Diasporas: Personal Narratives and Global Futures of Afro-Atlantic Religions. University Press of Florida.

potential loss of nuance, cultural meaning, and contextual subtleties. Furthermore, not all members of the Executive Committee were present during the expert group discussions and thus relied on transcriptions and summary reports for contextual understanding. This increased the risk that subtle meanings, cultural cues, and important context may have been missed in the analysis. These factors may have affected the depth and accuracy of data interpretation and should be considered when evaluating the study's findings.

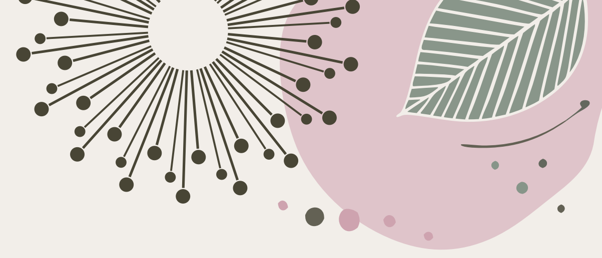
- **Non-homogeneity of samples across regions:** As the Executive Committee members were primarily based in academia, their academic networks shaped participant recruitment in Latin America. As such the Latin American participant pool reflected this orientation. Contrastingly, the African sample, recruited through self-selection, comprised mainly community-based practitioners deeply engaged in grassroots and local faith settings. Academic participants tended to focus more on theoretical frameworks, policy analysis, and institutional dynamics. In contrast, community practitioners emphasized lived experience and localised strategies. Consequently, direct comparisons between the two regions should be approached with caution, as observed differences may reflect sample composition as much as contextual realities. This non-homogeneity limits the generalisability of cross-regional findings and underscores the need for future research to engage more comparable participant groups to deepen understanding of faith-based GBV prevention across diverse settings.

- **Underrepresentation of some groups:** Not all regions or faith traditions were equally represented. For instance, participants from Francophone Africa, Southeast Asia, and traditions such as Judaism or Buddhism were not part of this round of research. Additionally, there was underrepresentation of custodians of indigenous knowledge systems within the African context. While some participants from Latin America reflected Afrodiasporic and other non-Christian spiritual traditions, the African sample was largely shaped by monotheistic religions perspectives, particularly Christian ones. This imbalance meant that participants in the LAC context were better positioned to explore how gender-based violence is experienced and addressed within faith frameworks beyond conventional church structures, whereas references to cultural-religious intersections in the African discussions remained mostly within dominant institutional or doctrinal lenses. These gaps are not only methodological but also shaped by wider geopolitical dynamics that influence which regions and knowledge systems are more easily accessed, funded, or legitimised in global spaces. It highlights the need to reflect critically on how "faith" is conceptualised and whose spiritual knowledge is legitimised or overlooked within our networks. It also points to opportunities for broader engagement with indigenous knowledge holders to deepen understanding of how diverse belief systems shape responses to GBV.

- **Digital access:** As the conversations were held online, people without reliable internet or adequate digital tools, especially those in rural areas or marginalised contexts, were likely excluded. This limited participation from voices we had hoped to include.

- **Youth:** One important limitation relates to the study's focus on youth and its relationship to the actual age profile of participants. While the African Youth Charter defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35, only six participants clearly fell within this age range. Five participants were between 30 and 39, six were between 40 and 49, and four were between 50 and 59, two between 60 and 69, with one participant's age unspecified. As such, although youth were a central focus, the perspectives presented here largely reflect how a range of actors- including older practitioners, leaders, and faith actors- understand, interpret, and engage with youth experiences and needs within faith-based GBV prevention efforts. This means that the findings should be read as insights about youth shaped through the lenses of those who work with or advocate for them, rather than being predominantly driven by youth voices themselves.

Despite these limitations, the study's collaborative and iterative nature allowed for grounded and honest conversations. The insights shared are valuable for informing context-sensitive, faith-aware approaches to GBV prevention- especially for practitioners, donors, and policymakers working across the Global South.



3. FINDINGS

This section brings into focus the complex, often contradictory realities of GBV prevention within faith-based communities across African and Latin American contexts. Rooted in the voices and lived experiences of participants, these insights illuminate how silence, stigma, and deeply embedded cultural-religious norms sustain cycles of harm- yet also reveal the radical possibilities that emerge when individuals and communities resist, reclaim, and reimagine.

Three interconnected themes shape the analysis that follows. First, the findings trace the dual position of youth as both vulnerable to GBV and as critical agents of change when equipped with knowledge, support, and spaces to lead. This theme unfolds through nuanced regional perspectives. African contexts emphasise supported agency and intergenerational solidarity. Latin American examples foreground informal, creative, and digital forms of mobilisation that challenge machismo and spiritual conservatism.

Second, the findings highlight emerging themes that complicate and deepen the landscape of GBV prevention in faith spaces. Highlighted within the emerging themes, firstly, were the tensions faced by LGBTQI+ (SOGIESC) individuals. These individuals navigate belonging and exclusion within faith communities. Findings illustrated how these communities confront doctrinal hostility, stigma, and silencing while forging fragile yet profound acts of radical listening, spiritual care, and community-building. Secondly, findings emphasised the entanglement of cultural and religious frameworks that shape whether silence and harmful masculinities are sustained or disrupted. Participants illustrate how spiritual authority, traditional norms, and cultural practises can legitimise violence and impunity. These same frameworks also become sites for reimagining faith as a source of justice, relational accountability, and moral renewal.

Finally, a cross-cutting thread throughout these findings is the role of evidence-building as an ethical, relational, and political practise. Participants made clear that producing and mobilising evidence within faith-based GBV prevention is not merely technical. It is a courageous act that exposes hidden harm, confronts cultures of silence, and challenges the spiritual authority that too often shields perpetrators. The findings show how trust-based, survivor-centred, and culturally grounded approaches to evidence-gathering can amplify silenced voices. In contexts where fear and resistance are strong, evidence plays a crucial role in shaping more just interventions and in holding communities and leaders to account.

These insights advance an understanding of GBV prevention in faith settings as more than a technical or policy matter. They frame it as a deeply relational, cultural, and spiritual struggle. The sections that follow reveal how communities are working to dismantle the cultures of silence and impunity that sustain GBV. These sections illuminate new practises of resistance, solidarity, and hope within and beyond faith-based spaces.

3.1 Perspectives and Insights on Youth and Gender-Based Violence: Vulnerability, Supported Agency, and Self-Mobilisation in Faith-Based Settings

In many faith-based communities across both African and Latin American contexts, youth occupy a complex space of expectation and constraint. They are seen as the future bearers of faith and moral values. Thus, they are often held to rigid standards shaped by purity culture, traditional gender roles, and deeply rooted hierarchies. Purity culture uses religious language and moral teachings to idealise sexual innocence, especially for girls, while often neglecting honest discussions about consent, bodily autonomy, or protection from harm[16]. Simultaneously, the language of spiritual obedience, honour, and submission becomes a mechanism of silence. This mechanism discourages young people from speaking openly about gender-based violence or questioning harmful norms[17]. For many young people, especially girls and LGBTQI+ youth, as will be shown in later sections, these moral frameworks create an environment where acknowledging or challenging abuse feels taboo, and silence is maintained in the name of family honour or religious duty.

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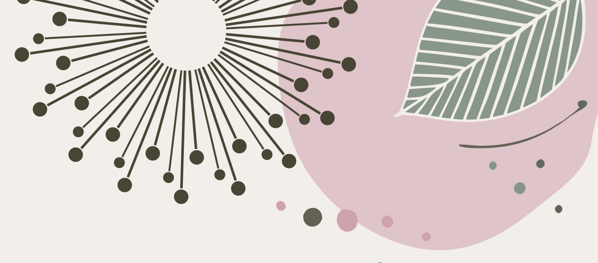
16 Owens, B. C., Hall, M. E. L., & Anderson, T. L. (2020). The Relationship between Purity Culture and Rape Myth Acceptance. Journal of Psychology and Theology, 49(4), 405-418. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091647120974992
17 Ndlovu, S., Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H., & Baloyi, M. E. (2024). Gender-based violence in some Pentecostal churches—A South African study. Religions, 15(6), 679. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060679



This section examines how participants from across regions described youth engagement in resisting GBV. Participants highlighted the complex position faced by young people in GBV contexts. On one hand, they are themselves direct targets of violence in spaces such as schools, churches, and homes. And on the other hand, they are socialised to remain silent about this violence or even perpetuate harmful norms or violence themselves. This dual role, as both those at risk and those shaped by prevailing norms, underscores the urgent need to engage youth in prevention efforts.

The analysis unfolds through African and Latin American perspectives. Each illustrates different yet overlapping dimensions of these dualities. In the African contexts, participants spoke of a clear shift from seeing youth only as “vulnerable” to recognising their potential role as community custodians and educators. With the right support from families, faith leaders, and community structures, young people can help break cycles of silence and normalised violence. When they are equipped with knowledge about consent, rights, and gender equity- alongside safe spaces, peer support, and enabling environments- they are better positioned to question and resist harmful beliefs. Engaging them from an early age builds confidence and skills. Participants’ reflections and quotes below demonstrate that young people can become powerful advocates for justice and model new ways of being together. This is often achieved through peer-to-peer education, participatory methods such as community theatre, and collaboration with religious and community leaders to reach otherwise closed spaces.

In contrast, participants’ reflections and quotes from Latin America highlight how youth mobilisation often takes on more informal and creative forms. Participants described how young people use art, social media, and grassroots networks to reclaim public spaces and everyday discourse. They elucidated how youth is challenging machismo, religious dominance, and other barriers that sustain silence around gender, sexuality, and violence. This includes building alternative communities outside formal institutions. It also demonstrates how youth are working within traditional spaces to create more inclusive environments that explicitly address issues often considered taboo.

These perspectives, across these regions, show that youth engagement in resisting GBV is not uniform; rather it is shaped by cultural, generational, political, and institutional contexts. They also underline that meaningful change depends both on individual awareness as well as on broader conditions that enable young people to speak out, organise, and be heard. This section highlights the importance of intergenerational support, early education, and the ongoing work of making faith communities places where young people’s safety, voice, and leadership can be fully realised.

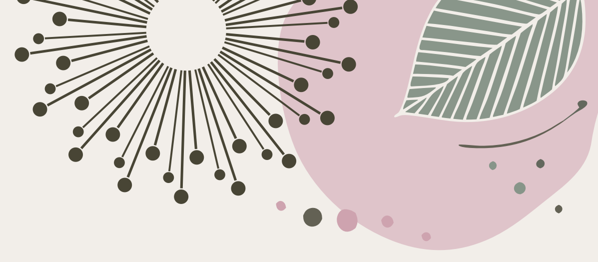
3.1.1 The Dual Nature of Youth in GBV: Victims and Unwitting Perpetrators

Within community and faith-based contexts, participants highlighted how young people experience gender-based violence in everyday settings such as schools, universities, churches, and community spaces. They carry the burden of secrecy and shame, with limited avenues for support or redress. In some cases, they internalise the same norms that perpetuate violence, continuing cycles of silence, shame, stigma and harm into the next generation. In the Latin American context this reality was expressed by Olívia Bandeira, who described a form of suppression she called a “dual silence” which leaves young people isolated, often navigating danger without allies. As she described:

> “*Youth face a dual silence: one from the family, which often refuses to believe or talk about violence, and one from the church, which insists on purity without ever explaining what protection really means. So, youth navigate these threats alone.*” (O.B, Brazil, EGD5, 22 April 2025)

This description of a “dual silence” exemplifies how youth can be left exposed to harm in contexts where both family and church discourage open conversations about violence or protection. This sense of isolation is echoed in other regions, where harmful cultural practises, shame, and fear of stigma make it difficult for young people to seek support or justice. These practises become a double-edged sword that simultaneously silences survivors and fails to hold the perpetrator accountable.

In Nigeria, for example, Aisha Aminu Marafa described how survivors of sexual violence are often forced into silence by community norms that prioritise family honour over the survivor’s wellbeing. In these cases, harmful traditional responses further entrench girls’ vulnerability while silencing their voices:



"When a child or when a girl is being violated, if it is a part of the gender-based violence, if it is a rape aspect and the girl happens to be pregnant, the community has made it a mandate that the person that [she] is raped by is the person that is going to marry her and is going to take that responsibility...even if the girl likes it or not, she has to marry that person. She doesn't have an option." (A.A.M; EGD 2, 29 November 2024)

This excerpt illustrates a profound double bind. On the surface, this practise is presented as a community mechanism to ensure that perpetrators 'take responsibility' and that children born of rape- and out of wedlock - are acknowledged within the family structure. Yet in doing so, it entrenches the girl's lack of choice, forcing her into a lifelong bond with her abuser and prioritising family honour over her autonomy and safety. Such practises not only silence survivors but also expose them to further harm and re-traumatisation, as they are forced to remain with their abusers and denied any real sense of justice or healing. Aisha continues to illustrate how boys, too, can be exposed to sexual violence. This insight broadens the conversation beyond only girls and women as recipients of harm. She asserted:

"It's not only adolescent girls that are being raped, but even the adolescent boys are being violated. But in the process of the intervention, the girls are now, after identification and everything, the girls don't want to take any of our intervention. Why? Because of fear of stigma and discrimination among the community. Because if we give them this kind of intervention. People, the community, may come to know [and say] 'oh, that girl has been raped. Oh, that girl has been violated. Oh, that boy has been raped'. So our survivors are now shying away from the service provision that we are giving them." (A.A.M; EGD 2, 29 November 2024)

This insight reveals how gender-based violence can persist unchecked when community shame and purity discourses override care, justice, and accountability. Such conditions leave youth, girls and boys alike, doubly vulnerable. They are silenced as victims and unsupported as they face stigma, isolation, and the possibility of repeated harm. The burden of silence disproportionately impacts girls, who are often subjected to social expectations of purity and family honour that prioritise concealment over justice. In many instances young women avoid reporting GBV due to fears of being of being perceived as 'impure' or 'tainted', with reputational concerns deeply rooted in cultural norms that prioritise women's chastity and morality[18]. Meanwhile, boys face societal pressures that discourage expressions of vulnerability, leaving male survivors under-recognised and underserved. An example of this can be seen in settings such as South Africa, where cultural proverbs such as "a strong man must suffer in silence" reflect norms that stigmatise male victimisation, preventing disclosure and access to support[19] . This stigma, fear, and blame prevent many from seeking help or accepting services meant to support them. This example illustrates how the shame attached to gender-based violence is not only enforced by the community but also deeply internalised by survivors themselves. Rather than risk further scrutiny or ostracisation, young girls and boys may choose silence, thus reinforcing the same cycle of isolation and harm described as a "dual silence" that leaves youth navigating such threats alone.

This culture of silence- sustained by stigma and fear- also obscures the ways in which young people may themselves contribute to harm, sometimes without fully recognising it. Participants described how many young people grow up in environments where subtle forms of harassment or gender-based violence are normalised. Without comprehensive education on consent, respect, and rights, they may internalise and reproduce these behaviours, becoming unintentional perpetrators of the very violence they are also vulnerable to.

"As a young person, I have lived within a school environment. I live within a university setting. And I see, usually, sometimes, I see firsthand the ways in which GBV is woven into everyday lives of young people. And unfortunately, it is not uncommon to see my peers either engaging in or being victims of GBV. And it is a whole spectrum, ranging from subtle forms of harassment to even more overt acts of violence. And this personal exposure to GBV is troubling to me, especially when I reflect on the cultural and social norms which enable behaviours to persist. As a young person myself, I know the importance of involving the youth in this conversation and empowering them to lead the fight against GBV." (G.O; EGD 1, 28 November 2024).

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18 Malatjie, T. and Mamokhere, J. (2024). The Intricacies and Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: Forms, Causes and Mitigation Measures. E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences 5: 1059–70. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.2024571
19 Majola, K., Mkhize, S. and Akpan, U. (2023). Gender-Based Violence: Sociocultural Barriers to Men speaking up and Seeking Help in South Africa. African Journal of Gender, Society and Development (formerly Journal of Gender, Information and Development in Africa). 12. 27-42. DOI: https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2023/v12n1a2

This excerpt reflects how patterns of harassment and GBV are sustained by cultural and social norms. Cultures of silence and everyday socialisation normalise behaviour that should be questioned. Such ignorance allows seemingly minor acts of harassment to go unchallenged, blurring the line between victim and perpetrator. Veronica also described this phenomenon:

> *"(...) when you work with the youth, when you [are] talking to them, they understand that [GBV] is what they even perpetrate, but in an ignorant manner. Like a boy will not know that tapping a girl on the butt is violence. You are tapping her on the butt because it's a woman. You don't tap a boy like you on the butt. So, boys, they get to have awareness when we teach them about the different types of GBV."* (V.N.N; EGD 3, 18 March 2025)

These extracts elucidate the pervasive nature of gender-based violence within everyday spaces, underscoring that such violence is both normalised and embedded within social and cultural norms. This normalisation is perpetuated through silence and ignorance, where harmful behaviours often go unrecognised as violence due to gendered socialisation and lack of critical awareness. These insights must be understood in tandem with the gendered dynamics discussed earlier, where silence and social norms shape youth experiences in profoundly unequal ways. Girls and boys are both impacted by these norms but are differently silenced, differently overlooked, and differently constrained. Young people simultaneously experience and enact violence, often without understanding its impact or origins.

This cyclical pattern suggests that addressing GBV among youth requires more than raising awareness. It demands transformative education that confronts the gendered scripts underpinning both complicity and victimhood while also challenging deep-seated cultural norms. Such education must socialise youth towards empathy, consent, and respect. Only through this kind of engagement can they transition from unwitting perpetrators and victims to conscious, empowered agents of change within their communities.

3.1.2 Youth Mobilisation through Supported Agency in African Contexts

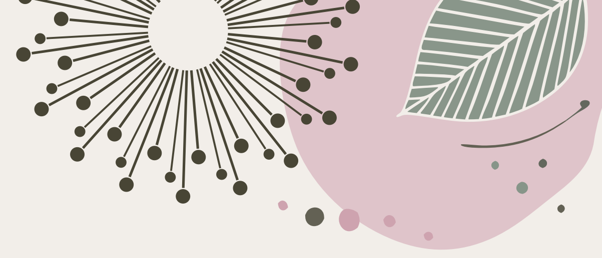
While youth are often positioned as vulnerable, and as shown above; caught in cycles of harm and silence; they also hold tremendous potential as powerful agents of change when provided with support and education. Recognising their capacity to challenge entrenched norms and lead community transformation is crucial. When young people gain awareness of gender-based violence, consent, and gender equity, they begin to disrupt harmful behaviours within their peer groups. There is potential for them to become advocates, educators, and mobilisers who can influence broader social attitudes. This section explores how youth, supported through targeted programmes and inclusive spaces, are actively reclaiming their voices and leadership roles in faith-based and community contexts to combat GBV and foster more equitable futures.

Many participants described how youth, when sensitised and supported, can shift from being passive bystanders to protectors and advocates within their communities. Aisha captured this emerging strength:

> *"We now saw that there is a strength when it comes to youth groups. When we sensitise youth groups, they [become] the custodians of their community and the adolescent girls and the adolescent boys...So now we are training the youth groups for them to be able to take ownership of this community and see how they will be able to support the government structures. We have seen a little bit of drastic change when it comes to issues of GBV."* (A.A.M; EGD 2, 29 November 2024)

This excerpt illustrates the power of training and collective responsibility. It illustrates how sensitising youth groups locates them as custodians of their communities. It empowers them to take responsibility for supporting each other. This, according to Aisha, has contributed to tangible change in GBV issues. Other participants emphasised that real transformation happens when young people internalise this knowledge and actively pass it on. This then multiplies its impact through peer-to-peer education and community mobilisation. This idea is deepened by Veronica who maintained:

> "*We realised that in our actions we need to involve youth so that we build a foundation from the ground. So as they are growing up, it can be sustainable and that message can be transferred...we teach them...We make them to understand that there are various ways of GBV...So they should be supportive to be able to*



teach their community members…So the youth are easy to work with because they are willing to move forward. They are willing to pass on the message. They are willing to even be community mobilisers and ambassadors to talk about GBV in their context. And the knowledge is more useful to them because they are learning and they are still progressing." (V.N.N; EGD 3, 18 March 2025)

Veronica's perspective highlights how early, sustained engagement builds sustainability. By involving young people before harmful norms become deeply rooted, they grow up equipped to challenge inequality and speak out against violence. When youth take on the role of ambassadors and mobilisers, they multiply the impact of prevention efforts, seeding new norms across peer groups and communities. In this way, prevention must start with young boys and girls in their earliest years, shaping their growth and development as future generations to see non-violence and equality as a shared social responsibility. Similarly, Solange reiterated the importance of early intervention:

"How do we achieve a world free of violence? That is where engaging these young boys you know, like Nigeria, where they are emphasising on working with youth. It's a good strategy. But we shouldn't wait for youth age. We should start from those boys at the age of five, six and upward to train them to become better humans. And together with the boys, with the girls, I'm referring to everyone's responsibility in contributing towards the reduction or the world free from violence…I came there with one survivor who is also a champion on transforming masculine. In her presentation, she was talking about how the families are the ones now contributing towards the protection of the children and everyone, which was not the case before. Child marriage in Zimbabwe is being challenged by families now, which before was the opposite." (S.M; EGD 2, 29 November 2024).

This extract foregrounds how early gender socialisation, particularly of boys, is a crucial site of intervention in the struggle against gender-based violence. The call to begin engaging boys from a young age reflects a recognition that dominant masculinities are not innate but taught and therefore can be unlearned and reimagined. Solange's reference to "transforming masculinity" points to the radical potential of cultivating alternative models of boyhood and manhood that are rooted in empathy, care, and accountability.

Simultaneously, her reflections highlight the power of families and intergenerational networks to shift deeply embedded norms. The example of families in Zimbabwe beginning to resist child marriage highlights a significant transformation from passive complicity to active protection. As child marriage primarily targets young girls, it undermines their autonomy, disrupts their education, and reinforces the view of girls as exchangeable within patriarchal systems. Challenging such practises therefore requires not only community will but also the empowerment of girls as agents of change in their own right.

These perspectives illustrate that youth agency cannot emerge in a vacuum. It depends on intentional investments in early socialisation, sustained mentorship, and supportive community structures. Crucially, such interventions must recognise that the struggles of young girls and boys are not the same. While girls often face restrictive gender roles, sexual violence, and practises like child marriage, boys are typically socialised into harmful ideals of masculinity that suppress vulnerability and valorise control. Equipping youth to address gender-based violence therefore requires differentiated, gender-conscious strategies that both empower girls to assert their autonomy and support boys to critically unlearn patriarchal norms.

Equally vital is the recognition that young people are not passive recipients of change but experts in their own lived realities. Effective mobilisation acknowledges their insights, amplifies their voices, and invites them into co-designing solutions. In this way, participants call for a shift from viewing young people merely as 'vulnerable' to recognising them as pivotal actors capable of interrupting cycles of harm. In African contexts, where intergenerational hierarchies often entrench silence, these examples, of practitioners' work and interventions, elucidate how building collective youth agency can plant the seeds for lasting change.

While these perspectives emphasise the potential of empowering youth as agents of change, Dorine Okoth adds another dimension. She highlighted how youth can also act as vital gendered intermediaries, bridging generational and gender divides, and working with community and religious leaders to overcome stigma and resistance. She described:

> *“We had a certain programme. And then when we were starting it, we had a problem. For instance, people will start asking you as a woman, how is this related to you? Why are you interested in men? And then you are a woman. People start judging you… Since I had to go to the churches and to other leaders…since women, there is certain places that they are not required to go…And then again, we recruited some of the youths and men so that they can help us in spreading the word about GBV.”* (D.O; EGD 2, 29 November 2024)

Dorine’s reflection elucidates how gendered expectations constrain access to power and space. In many religious and community contexts, women are perceived as inappropriate messengers on issues seen as male concerns. Especially when those issues, like transforming masculinities, challenge dominant gender hierarchies. Her account reveals how female leadership is often times policed and the act of entering certain spaces as a woman is itself a transgression.

This example also demonstrates how youth mobilisation can operate as a form of strategic navigation. Rather than abandoning inaccessible spaces, Dorine’s team recruited male and youth allies to step into them, using their social legitimacy to challenge silence from within. In doing so, they leveraged gender dynamics not to reinforce patriarchal norms, but to subvert them through coalition-building. Youth here, are not only change-makers among their peers, but also bridge-builders across lines of gendered power, amplifying women’s leadership by extending its reach into places where it is otherwise barred. This echoes gender-transformative frameworks that challenge patriarchal norms which argue that engaging men and boys not as gatekeepers, but as co-agents of change is essential to shifting power dynamics from within[20 21].

David Rabour illustrated how the youth can be mobilised through participatory and creative forms. Their reach may extend beyond church walls into markets and community spaces, drawing broad public involvement and making the message accessible and engaging. David described such engagements:

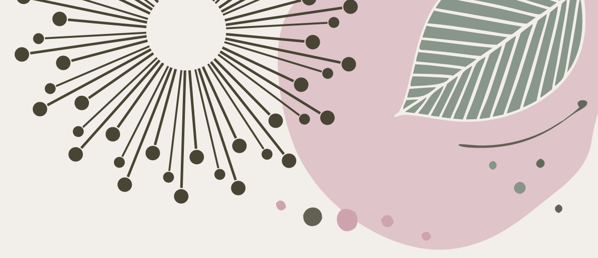
> *“Participatory education where we use those youths within the church institutions…So we normally have like a club, small clubs in those churches…we have within the church that they organize themselves. And normally like every Friday and Saturday or Sunday when they meet, they talk about issues with GBV, about participatory educational theatre, where now they do it in forms of poems, they do it in forms of a play or like a theatre…and you see people really enjoy. And this is something that they normally even do during the market days, we can organize that forum, we go to the market, have a skit about GBV, and then you get people get involved.”* (D.R, Kenya, EGD 3, 18 March 2025)

David’s example highlights that youth-led interventions don’t simply replicate adult-driven messaging but adapt it into creative, participatory forms that resonate with local culture. This approach does more than raise awareness, it reclaims community spaces that might otherwise remain governed by silence or taboo. It also shows how youth, when trusted as organisers, can transform passive audiences into active participants in the conversation. Youth have the potential to challenge the normalisation of violence and making prevention a shared responsibility. In doing so, these youth become cultural intermediaries who can shift the boundaries of what can be said about GBV in everyday public life. Read alongside each other, these extracts demonstrate the critical role youth play as custodians and mobilisers within their communities, effectively bridging faith and social action. Through culturally resonant, participatory approaches, young people transform spaces that might otherwise silence them into platforms for advocacy and change.

These perspectives and experiences across the African context, illustrate a multifaceted and dynamic vision of youth engagement that transcends traditional notions of passive victimhood. Youth are shown as not only recipients of knowledge but active shapers of community norms and guardians of social change when they are given the tools to achieve this. By becoming custodians of their own communities, they challenge entrenched power structures and cultural taboos that have long silenced conversations around gender-based violence.

20 Jewkes, R., Flood, M., & Lang, J. (2015). From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: a conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. Lancet, 385(9977), 1580–1589. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61683-4

21 Doyle, K., Levtov, R. G., Barker, G., Bastian, G. G., Bingenheimer, J. B., Kazimbaya, S., Nzabonimpa, A., Pulerwitz, J., Sayinzoga, F., Sharma, V., & Shattuck, D. (2018). Gender-transformative Bandebereho couples' intervention to promote male engagement in reproductive and maternal health and violence prevention in Rwanda: Findings from a randomized controlled trial. PloS one, 13(4), e0192756. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0192756



The emphasis on early intervention, especially starting with boys, reflects an understanding that lasting transformation requires addressing the roots of harmful masculinities and gender norms before they calcify into adulthood. Equally, the specific struggles of girls, such as resisting child marriage or navigating restricted access to public and religious spaces, reveal how empowering girls as leaders and experts in their own lives is equally essential. This kind of change suggests what becomes possible when youth of all genders are supported as leaders whether in civic or potentially in religious settings.

Additionally, the role of boys and girls as communicators and allies, particularly in navigating spaces traditionally controlled by older generations and religious authorities, illuminates their strategic importance in expanding the reach of GBV prevention efforts. Their ability to mobilise peers, engage with authority figures, and translate complex issues into accessible community dialogues makes them indispensable agents in the broader struggle against gender-based violence. These examples within African contexts illuminate the potentials when young people are positioned not just as learners, but as promulgators of new knowledge that makes positive social change easily transferable to other community members. In this way, inclusion must be understood relationally, and youth cannot be seen only through their function in one domain. They must be empowered across the interwoven spaces of faith, culture, and public life. This collective approach affirms that empowering youth is not a peripheral strategy but a central pillar in dismantling systemic violence. It calls for sustained investment in education, mentorship, and platforms where young people can lead, collaborate, and innovate. This ensures that the fight against GBV is both rooted in lived experience and propelled by intergenerational solidarity.

3.1.3 Youth-Led Mobilisation and Creative Transformation in Latin American Contexts

Across diverse regions, youth engagement with faith and gender-based violence takes varied forms shaped by cultural, social, and institutional contexts. These forms are also deeply gendered, with young women, men, and gender-diverse youth experiencing and responding to faith and GBV in distinct ways. In parts of Africa, as noted in the preceding section, youth groups are often intentionally supported and trained to become custodians and mobilisers within their communities, reflecting an organised approach to youth-led change.

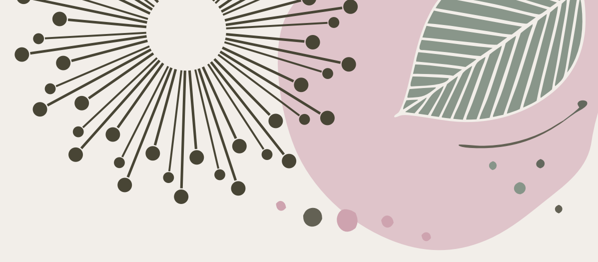
By contrast, the Latin American context presents a dynamic but less formally structured landscape of youth mobilisation within faith spaces. Here, young people are actively forging new paths, often outside or alongside traditional institutions. They achieve this through creative, digital, and grassroots means that challenge entrenched machismo, misogyny, and religious conservatism. In doing so, young women in particular often take the lead in confronting patriarchal norms, while queer and gender-diverse youth navigate overlapping layers of exclusion. Voices from this region highlight how youth-led platforms and networks are reshaping what it means to live faith authentically and to carve out spaces that embrace diversity and resist exclusion.

This section explores these innovative expressions of youth agency, illuminating how Latin American women and men are mobilising by creating new forms of spiritual and social engagement that respond to their realities. These efforts frequently centre on gender justice, challenging harmful gender roles within both faith communities and broader society.

Participants expressed how youth are actively reshaping how faith is lived, expressed, and mobilised to challenge gender-based violence, exclusion, and oppressive norms. Many youth-led platforms are already contesting harmful gender norms and racism within and beyond religious spaces, crafting new ways of living their faith that remain deeply rooted yet critically transformative. Based on her experience in Brazil, Olivia proposed:

> *"Some of these youth-led platforms actively oppose machismo, misogyny, and racism, inside and outside religious spaces. So maybe instead of asking how we can mobilise young people, we should look at how youth are already mobilising, how they're creating new ways of living their faith without abandoning it".*
> (O.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

This insight illustrates youth agency, portraying young people as proactive initiators who are self-mobilising to challenge prevailing norms and create change within their communities. They do so not just through formal structures but by reclaiming everyday spaces for dialogue, disruption, and transformation. Lucas expanded on this dynamic, highlighting how youth blend art, faith, and protest to challenge religious dominance in ways



that meet young people where they are. She described a youth-led intervention that challenged the taken-for-granted religious dominance of public space and subverted the everyday Christianisation of communal life:

> *"Here in São Paulo, there is a young man who has been conducting public interventions on public transport. He began with a simple video. As you know, there are often evangelical preachers on the metro reading from the Bible. He started to loudly sing traditional Umbanda chants (ponto de Jexu) inside the metro and record people's reactions. The videos went viral, and now he produces many. He rides the metro with people from Candomblé and starts singing these chants. It's a performance that directly confronts religious dominance - these spaces have all been Christianized. To reach today's youth, we may need to break from our traditional, rigid methods. We must adapt in order to connect with them."* (L.D, Brazil; EGD4, 28 March 2025)

This example also illustrates the transformative power of the arts and public performance to reclaim spaces and provoke new conversations. It illuminates how young people often know best how to reach their peers and can design interventions that speak directly to their own realities. While Lucas's example does not address GBV explicitly, it demonstrates how youth-led actions can disrupt dominant cultural and religious narratives that sustain multiple forms of oppression. Such performances also reflect resistance to gendered expectations and reclaim agency over bodies, voice, and public presence—especially for young men and women breaking with traditional gender roles. It also reminds us that collective, peer-to-peer mobilisation can subvert silence and create new pathways for solidarity. Olívia 's reflection builds on this insight by showing how, in Latin America, youth and young leaders are going further, using popular and digital platforms to oppose patriarchy and harmful gender norms. She asserted:

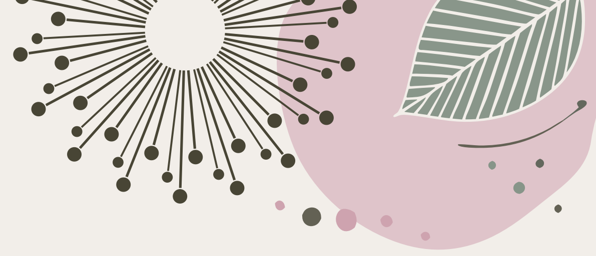
> *"We also see this among young people and new, younger leaders. There are now Christian YouTubers, podcasters, even in Afro-Brazilian religions, producing content that makes room for diverse forms of religiosity. Religious practise no longer happens only in institutional spaces. It's also present in informal settings, on social media, in digital platforms. These are also important spaces for religious experience. I think we need to pay attention to these new forms of discourse, these new narratives, and this struggle around gender within religious environments."* (O.B, EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

Both these examples exemplify how youth are redefining spiritual and cultural spaces on their terms. They illustrate how through self-mobilisation, young people are creating alternative structures of engagement and carving out new roles through creativity, technology, and peer connection. However, other participants also illustrated how youth enact resistance even within more traditional or formal faith spaces. Iasmin dos Santos Rodrigues, for instance, described how her youth community was able to cultivate radically inclusive spaces that centre belonging and collective care within an institutional religious setting. She maintained:

> *"I used to participate in a Christian university programme here in Brasília. We met once a month on Saturdays for activities and discussions on all imaginable topics. We would attend liturgy at the Centro Cultural de Brasília, a Jesuit centre. Everyone knew we were queer, gay, and lesbian couples, everyone from our community attended, and everyone knew. In many churches, everyone knows who's queer, but here it was open and accepted. During the community prayers, we'd pray for an end to homophobia, among other things. It was a broad and meaningful practise."* (I.S.R, EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

This account exemplifies that even within institutional religious settings, youth can carve out radically inclusive spaces that name and challenge the stigma others fear to speak aloud. These inclusive practises also contest traditional gender roles, offering more expansive, affirming understandings of femininity, masculinity, and identity within faith. Through practises like collective prayer for an end to homophobia, they subvert the silences that so often cloak gender and sexuality in shame. In accordance with Iasmin, Silvia Badim affirms that youth are engaging with similar themes within Afro-Brazilian faith contexts. Her reflection shows how, across Latin America, young people are forging new paths even within traditional settings. She confirms: "Yes, I think I've also seen similar initiatives, like Iasmin mentioned, particularly among the youth. I think younger generations are bringing these themes into the *terreiros*."

Silvia's observation extends this possibility, pointing to how younger generations are carrying these same conversations into Afro-Brazilian spiritual spaces. In doing so, these youth push the boundaries of what is



acceptable or possible within traditions often seen as fixed or resistant to change.

These insights illustrate that youth agency is not only expressed through outright dissent or exit from religious institutions, but also through the slow, intentional work of transforming them from within. Youth are forging communities rooted in radical acceptance, care, and truth-telling. This includes reimagining what it means to be masculine or feminine within faith traditions, challenging rigid binaries and reclaiming gendered identities as sources of strength and spiritual expression. In this way, they model a faith practise that holds space for difference without sacrificing belonging. They reveal how new solidarities can emerge at the heart of even the most conservative spaces. These interventions highlight the power of youth-led creativity, collective care, and spiritual agency to resist oppressive norms and build more compassionate, liberatory communities.

3.2 Emerging Themes: SOGIESC, Masculinities and Culture–Religion Intersections

Building on the previous section, participants in both African and Latin American contexts surfaced a set of deeper, cross-cutting issues. These issues expose tensions and contradictions in how gender-based violence is experienced, resisted, and prevented within faith communities. While perspective and insights on youth and GBV as well as evidence building practises were the core questions of this study, within GBV discourse, these do not unfold in a vacuum. Instead, they are shaped and informed by complex intersections of identity, culture, and power. These intersections both challenge and expand what prevention can look like in practise. Prompted by the EGD questions, participants reflected that to fully understand GBV and its prevention, it is essential to grapple with broader questions. Those of SOGIESC realities and the cultural-religious beliefs that both sustain and contest silence around GBV.

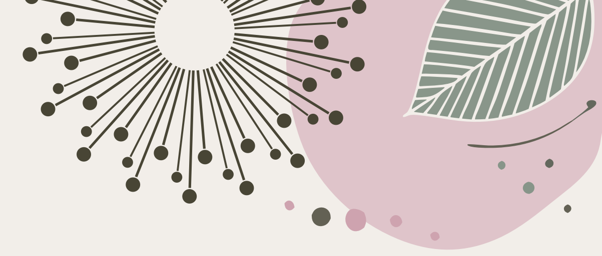
Across both regions, the theme of SOGIESC surfaces powerfully. Participants across regions centred the contradictions faced by LGBTQI+ individuals who navigate belonging and exclusion within faith settings. Reflections included queer individuals within faith spaces and the tension between belonging and marginalisation. In Latin America, more notably, SOGIESC is considered alongside intersectionality and the structural nature of exclusion. Within both contexts, participants illustrated how queer faith actors and communities respond, resist, and reclaim.

Masculinity does not stand alone as a separate theme in this analysis. Rather, it emerges, within African contexts, as a crucial aspect of how cultural and religious systems interact to reinforce or resist harmful norms. Within these contexts, dominant masculinities are tightly woven into faith teachings and communal traditions. In contrast, participants from Latin America described cultural–religious intersections in ways that illuminate other tensions. These include anti-gender ideology, religious pluralism, and the reclaiming of spiritual spaces through syncretic or Afro-diasporic practises.

This section therefore surfaces two core emerging themes. The first theme encompasses the ongoing struggles and creative strategies of LGBTQI+ communities as they claim space within or beyond traditional faith communities. The second theme focuses on cultural–religious intersections that shape whether taboos are reinforced or disrupted. Crucially, these emerging issues reveal gaps in existing evidence and intervention practise. By drawing attention to what is often left unspoken- whether around patriarchal hierarchies, silenced identities, or cultural taboos- participants underscored the need for more intersectional and contextually rooted approaches.

3.2.1 Faith, SOGIESC and the Tension of Belonging in Africa and Latin America

In both Africa and Latin America, LGBTQI+ individuals often face deep contradictions. While faith communities may offer spiritual meaning and belonging, they also frequently uphold doctrinal and cultural norms that marginalise and silence them. These tensions render these individuals especially vulnerable to stigma, exclusion, and even violence. Despite these risks, many still turn to religious spaces, in search of care, recognition, and connection. The reflections in this section explore how participants make sense of these dynamics. They illustrate how, in some cases, people are reclaiming faith outside formal religious institutions by listening deeply, welcoming everybody and through creating new forms of spiritual spaces.



3.2.1.1 Structural Exclusion and Silence in African Faith Contexts

The experience of LGBTQI+ individuals varies widely across different African contexts. While legal frameworks in regions such as South Africa permit a degree of openness, LGBTQI+ individuals in regions such as Kenya and Nigeria exist in environments steeped in hostility. Here, they are rendered them invisible by religions institutions, excluded not only from leadership or worship but even from basic conversations about identity, safety, and belonging. Despite this exclusion, many remain present in religious spaces, seeking affirmation without abandoning their faith. Their persistence, coupled with the growing presence of empathetic faith actors and youth-led spiritual movements, reveals both the harm faith can perpetuate and its potential to heal. The conversations held within the EGDs illustrated the layered vulnerabilities LGBTQI+ communities face, and the emergent practises of resistance, care, and transformation within these spaces.

Participants emphasised that exclusion is not only personal, but also deeply structural, and embedded in doctrine, language, and community norms. David Rabour reflected on this structural invisibility in Kenya:

> *"I wanted to talk about the power dynamic in amplifying the voices of the underrepresented groups, and more specifically, the LGBT community. They are our community, they are our members, they are our children, they are our brothers, and they are among us. This has to do with the legal and policy frameworks that are affecting both LGBT and rural indigenous healers, because the policy parameters that are put in place, any policy and any constitution, any act, if it is not captured among those key people, then they are l eft and excluded."* (D. R.; EGD 3, 18 March 2025)

In this excerpt, Rabour reclaims the LGBTQI+ community as rightfully belonging within the wider social fabric. This counters narratives that cast queer identities as external or deviant. His reference to policy frameworks illustrates how the law can both marginalize and invisibilise when those most affected are not included in its design. This theme resonates across contexts where legal recognition remains partial or absent. Building on this, Solange Mbonigaba illustrated how varying legal and community contexts create divergent conditions of safety or precarity for LGBTQI+ individuals. She asserted:

> *"In South Africa, we don't have any challenge around that, and it's because of the level of democracy in the country, you know, everyone has a space, regardless of the way the members of the LGBTIQ were not easily accepted, but the law came into play to protect them. But when I move to different contexts, like Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nepal, and Myanmar, I find it's an area that is untouchable. Meaning when someone is victimized because of his or her identity, the community normally plays a role in protecting it before law enforcement. But when the community is not ready to protect you, you are at high risk until the rule can come and play its course."* (S.M; EGD 2, 29 November 2024)

Solange's insight brings into sharp relief the uneven geography of queer safety and belonging. Her words illustrate that even robust constitutional protections, such as those in South Africa, do not automatically translate into full acceptance. In this context, although the law protects, community norms lag behind. Conversely, in contexts where legal recourse is absent or ineffective, the burden of protection shifts to communities themselves. When these informal safety nets fail, queer individuals are left doubly exposed. They are unprotected by law and unsupported by those around them. This dynamic shows how legal, social, and cultural forces interact to shape their everyday vulnerability.

Where Solange underscores the role of legal and community frameworks, other participants emphasised how silence, especially in faith spaces, compounds these vulnerabilities by denying even the basic vocabulary needed for care, affirmation, or resistance. Modupe Adelanwa maintained:

> *"Society is not accepting. Even in the churches, they don't talk about it. So, how do we help people when even the language is forbidden...I don't think going back to religion will work because they are not talking about it in the churches. They are not ready to deal with it. So how do we now navigate this journey when the people that a lot of people look up to are not ready to talk about it?* "(M.A; EGD 1, 28 November 2024)

This excerpt illuminates the violence of silence. When doctrines and congregations refuse to name or acknowledge queer realities, they render suffering unspeakable and unaddressed. This 'forbidden language'

acts as a powerful tool of exclusion. It shapes external discrimination as well as internalised shame and isolation. When spiritual leaders remain silent, they close off pathways for transformation that faith could otherwise make possible. Within these silences, however, moments of radical care emerge. Modupe gestured toward what it means to practise presence and accompaniment when formal structures fail:

> *"And some [trans individuals] will come crying and say to me I'm like a man in the body of a woman, a woman in the body of a man. In fact, it is their human rights and they should be taken care of - it is not as if they are criminals. In situations like this, all I can do is listen and get a feel of what the person is going through."* (M.A; EGD 1, 28 November 2024)

This pastoral response embodies what participants described as "radical listening": an ethic of accompaniment grounded not in doctrinal authority but in human dignity[22]. This practise resists the normalised silencing by offering space for queer people to speak their truths and be met with presence rather than prescription. It suggests that healing does not always hinge on immediate institutional change but can begin in the intimate act of being heard and recognised.

These extracts illustrate that in African faith communities, the marginalisation of LGBTQI+ individuals is neither accidental nor isolated. It is woven through policy, doctrine, and culture in ways that sustain silence and invisibility. It denies LGBTQI+ individuals not only visibility, but also the language and legitimacy required for healing and justice. Amidst these interlocking forms of harm, however, the persistence of radical acts of listening and care points to how faith can be reclaimed as a fragile but vital resource for affirmation and healing. Through these radical acts, LGBTQI+ individuals may feel moments of presence, recognition, and dignity.

3.2.1.2 Compounded Marginalities in Latin America

In Latin America, participants illustrated not only theological and gender-based exclusions but also to how these intersect with entrenched racial hierarchies. Black queer individuals, in particular, endure compounded forms of marginalisation- racial, gendered, and theological- which are often overlooked even in feminist and faith-based spaces. In Colombia, for example, Sandra Mazo, observed:

> *"Religious rhetoric is used to legitimise violence and deepen the stigmatisation of groups that have fought for social and cultural transformation- particularly the women's movement, the LGBTIQ+ movement, and progressive religious communities. In this context, demands and rights agendas for women and LGBTI people are increasingly met with violence and persecution."* (S.M; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

This exclusion is not only cultural or interpersonal, but also structural and ideological, embedded in educational and legal systems. Participants also described a profound tension between inclusive human rights discourses and the doctrinal conservatism of many faith communities. As Olívia observed:

> *"Feminism is labelled as an ideology; gender discourse is framed as something threatening. These narratives are pushed at all levels - from international platforms like the UN to national educational and legal frameworks. However, churches actively campaign to exclude gender-related content from national education plans, resisting any policies that aim to guarantee the rights of women and the LGBTQIA+ community."* (O.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

As with the African contexts, this illustrates how structural exclusion is reinforced at multiple levels, where the absence of inclusive theology is mirrored in state policy, education, and law. Such resistance fosters a climate in which LGBTQI+ youth are systematically erased from conversations about rights and protection. This doctrinal and societal silence speaks to the anthropological function of taboo – that which is ritually forbidden in each society often associated with people in a state of liminality[23]. Taboos operate not only to prohibit but to contain what societies find culturally ambiguous or threatening. Such silences can be understood as mechanisms for preserving symbolic boundaries. LGBTQI+ identities are treated as a form of symbolic pollution[24] that threatens

22 Rowell, J. (2014). Thinking, listening, being: A Wesleyan pastoral theology (192 pp.). Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City.
23 Hamilton, C. (2012). Silence and taboo (pp. 191–213). In Sexual revolutions in Cuba: Passion, politics, and memory. University of North Carolina Press. https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807882511_hamilton.12
24 Douglas, P.M., & Douglas, M. (1996). Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315015811

established moral and religious order. In the case of LGBTQI+ individuals, taboo functions not just as a moral prohibition but as a systemic barrier to empathy, care, and recognition. This silence is especially harmful in the context of gender and sexual based violence. When issues related to sexuality and gender identity are silenced, the violence that targets these communities is rendered invisible as well. The taboo prevents open discussion and restricts access to care, justice, and solidarity.

As noted previously, despite this exclusion, LGBTQI+ youth continue to show up- often silently- in religious spaces. The visibility of queer youth within hostile environments is both a silent protest and a cry for connection. Despite fear and rejection, many continue to seek spiritual community. This persistence reveals a deep yearning not to abandon faith, but to reclaim it.

Iasmin, a transfeminine person and former Catholic seminarian, shared her story from Brazil. Describing this reclamation as a deeply embodied and political act, she recounted how she survived abuse within the Catholic Church and later found healing in Afro-Brazilian spiritual traditions. Her journey redefines the resilience of survivors through the ostensible divergent ways in which faith is lived and reclaimed beyond institutional boundaries. Transfeminine narratives in faith contexts are admittedly rarely affirmed so for many, like Iasmin who is auto ethnographer and anthropologist, spiritual healing does not lie solely in doctrine, but in cultural memory, personal history, and collective resistance:

> *"It's impossible to conduct serious research in sociology, anthropology, or cultural studies without taking religion into account. That may seem obvious to us, but it isn't to everyone. My work always touches on themes like family, politics, gender, education, institutions, decoloniality, and liberation—but somehow it always comes back to religion."* (I.S.R; EGD 5)

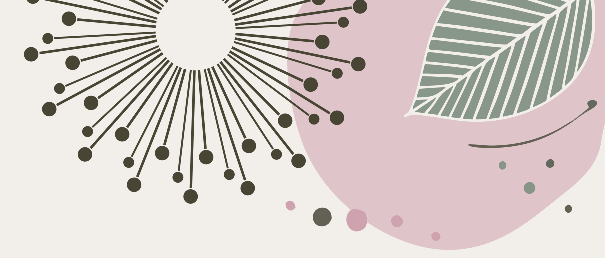
Instead of returning to traditional religious rules, Iasmin is rebuilding faith in ways that are more just, inclusive, and true to their lived experiences. Iasmin represents a broader movement among participants who did not seek to reform hostile religious institutions but to create new spiritual homes where care, dignity, and rage can coexist. This view echoes Olívia 's earlier sentiments on how the youth and young leaders recreate "a new way of living their faith"- she reminded us of the following: "*In Brazil and across Latin America, the secularisation thesis doesn't hold. People haven't become less religious. On the contrary, they continue to seek faith, even if in more diverse ways.*" (O.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025).

Ultimately, discussions of LGBTQI+ youth and GBV reveal that faith-based communities operate within a fragile balance between harm and healing. Many survivors do not leave their religious affiliations despite exclusion; they stay because faith offers meaning, identity, and a sense of belonging. Yet these same communities can retraumatise if they fail to affirm the dignity and humanity of all members.

3.2.2 Cultural-Religious Intersections: An Entangled Terrain

Across both African and Latin American contexts, participants consistently emphasised that culture and religion cannot be easily disentangled. These forces often co-construct moral norms, social expectations, and everyday practises, shaping how gender, power, and violence are understood and regulated. In many communities, cultural traditions are expressed through religious language, while religious authority draws legitimacy from cultural heritage. This entanglement complicates efforts to address gender-based violence, as harmful practises may be defended as sacred or traditional. Within this complexity, participants also identified opportunities for transformation, where cultural expressions of care, spiritual healing, and collective memory become sites for resistance and renewal.

The following section explores how cultural and religious frameworks are both upheld and contested in the struggle to prevent gender-based violence. Drawing on reflections from Africa and Latin America, participants described distinct approaches to challenging exclusion. In some African contexts, tradition is reinterpreted or reclaimed as a resource for care and justice. In contrast, many Latin American participants emphasised resistance through the creation of new spiritual and cultural spaces beyond dominant institutions.



3.2.2.1 Masculinities, Faith, and Gendered Power: Contradictions and Change in African Contexts

In an interview, Thantaswa Tunzi, Transformation Office Social Inclusion and Diversity Manager at Nelson Mandela University, in South Africa[25], asserted that:

> *"Religious and historical traditions have sanctioned the physical punishment of women under the notions of entitlement and subjugation of women…Patriarchal and sexist views legitimise violence to ensure the continued dominance and superiority of men within our communities…Other cultural factors include gender stereotypes and prejudice, the socialisation of gender to conform to normative expectations of femininity and masculinity while promoting the understanding that the family sphere is private and under male authority."*

Such views draw attention to how gender-based violence is often justified in the name of religious or cultural traditions. These justifications shape the kinds of conversations that are permitted and determine who is granted authority to speak. Within many faith-based communities, the very beliefs that form the foundation of identity and belonging also regulate power, dictate gender roles, and normalise harm. From scriptural interpretations that sanctify suffering[26] to cultural norms that define masculinity through control[27], the moral landscapes in which gender-based violence unfolds are deeply structured by unequal power dynamics.

These same landscapes also become spaces of resistance and possibility. When theology is reclaimed to centre justice, and when men begin to interrogate the roles they were socialised to inhabit, new pathways for transformation begin to emerge. Despite inherited norms and institutional silences, participants described both the challenges and the openings that arise. Healing, they noted, can be found through spiritual language, while transformation is nurtured through practises of listening, trust, and the collective forging of new ways of being. Participants from Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa described a deeply entrenched patriarchal order that spans family structures, religious hierarchies, and state institutions. Within Christian churches, in particular, male-dominated leadership models often silence survivors, strip them of their rights, and inhibit accountability. Faith communities are frequently sites of both spiritual meaning and social oppression, creating a conflicted space for women and survivors[28].

Josephine Kanyiva, a theologian, pastor and researcher on women abuse in church leadership, described the impact of scripture when wielded in ways that sustain patriarchal power:

> *"I realised that one of the key contributions of violence is how the scriptures have been interpreted. They've been interpreted to oppress and not to liberate people in the faith communities. This is very evident in the religious spaces and faith communities and leaders too, where power structures are also put in place to oppress and silence people... There is a lot of fear in speaking out. Power structures have been put in place to make sure that people don't talk and just pretend that all things are working well, but people are bleeding in our faith communities, and we need to speak up as far as this issue is concerned."* (J.K; EGD 1, 28 November 2024)

This insight highlights the theological paradox faced by many survivors, where sacred texts intended for liberation are instead used to justify the endurance of suffering. Ms Tamara Braam, Senior Gender-Based Violence Specialist in the Office of the President of South Africa, suggested that "*to end GBV, faith leaders need to ensure their voices are heard for advocacy and working towards solutions, but also for examining themselves as leaders and structures so they don't inadvertently hide or normalise GBV*". [29]

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25 Gower, P. (2024, November 26). Culture and religion are no excuse for gender-based violence. Nelson Mandela University. https://news.mandela.ac.za/News/Culture-and-religion-are-no-excuse-for-gender-base
26 Shriduth, M. A. (2024). Silent no more: Religion engaging with gender-based violence in South Africa: A case study on the "We Will Speak Out South Africa" coalition (Master's thesis). University of KwaZulu-Natal. https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/bitstreams/28ef7343-409a-4715-b20e-0ddafe7a055c/content
27 Mshweshwe, l. (2020). Understanding domestic violence: Masculinity, culture, traditions. Heliyon, 6(8), Article e04834. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e04834
28 Ndlovu, S., Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H., & Baloyi, M. E. (2024). Gender-based violence in some Pentecostal churches—A South African study. Religions, 15(6), 679. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060679
29 WWSOSA. (2022) The Second Presidential Summit on GBVF—What Does Accountability Mean for the Faith Sector? Available online: https://www.wwsosa.org.za/the-second-presidential-summit-on-gbvf-what-does-accountability-mean-for-the-faith-sector/

In this way, religious leaders, revered as moral authorities, can either enable silence or open the door to justice, depending on how they interpret and apply the doctrine. Recognising religion's institutional power is therefore crucial to addressing gender-based violence within faith communities by challenging patriarchal interpretations and fostering leadership committed to accountability and survivor-centred advocacy.

Reflections from participants in Kenya and Nigeria, elucidate the deeply embedded fear and secrecy that surround abuse within religious communities. This is more evident in the case of women in positions perceived as spiritually subordinate, such as ministers' wives. Kanyiva described the complex and often risky process of collecting testimonies from women who were emotionally and spiritually abused, but unable to speak openly due to pressure from church leadership and community scrutiny:

> *"These women came to me secretly. They were ministers' wives. They were suffering abuse but could not say a word publicly. Some husbands even demanded to be present during the interviews. I had to meet some women in marketplaces and others in their homes, away from prying eyes. This silence, enforced by religious hierarchy, is killing our women."* (J.K; EGD 1, 28 November 2024)

Aisha reiterates a similar challenge in the Nigerian context, illustrating how cultural norms often silence women and girls who have experienced sexual violence:

> *"So our challenge is, number one, we have cultural beliefs, which says if a girl is sexually violated, [it] is a cultural belief that the family doesn't want to open up. So that when the girl is about to marry…it won't tarnish her image, her family image. 'I don't want to marry from a family that a girl has been raped' and so on and so forth. So that is number one challenge. We have the cultural norms and beliefs of our people."* (A.A.M; EGD 2, 29 November 2024)

These testimonies from Kenya and Nigeria reveal how cultural norms, religious authority, and community expectations converge to produce environments where survivors are pressured into silence.

The enforced secrecy- whether through fear of stigma, control by abusive partners, or cultural pressures to protect family honour- effectively marginalises women, obstructs access to justice and support, and also reflects how spiritual and cultural systems can be mobilised to protect abusers rather than survivors.
In South Africa, while policy and legal frameworks are more progressive, social norms continue to hinder their implementation. Luzuko expressed this dissonance:

> *"We have the best constitution. We have laws. But if you go to the rural communities, to the churches, nothing has changed. Women are still not allowed to speak. And men are still taught that leading means controlling. So we have to do more than write policies. We have to change hearts*." (L.M; EDG 1, 28 November 2024)

He described how traditional teachings continue to silence women and promote control as a model of male leadership, reinforcing a culture of gender-based violence passed down through generations. "*The violence... becomes a culture in that family affecting the children," he explained, "and that culture then comes out to the community."*

Luzuko's reflections went beyond critique, offering insight into the emotional and social impact of dominant masculinities[30]. He spoke about his own transformation: "There has been [a] change from the man that I was... how my culture has taught me to treat women." Through his involvement in community work with men and boys, he began confronting what he called "toxic masculinity," advocating for workshops that address men's mental health and challenge inherited norms of male dominance. For him, shifting attitudes requires "more than writing policies"- it means "changing hearts" and fostering a sense of responsibility among men, rooted in accountability and relational care.

The concept of "transformative masculinities" touched upon by Luzuko, was also articulated by another participant from South Africa, Solange Mbonigaba. She emphasised the importance of emotional safety and

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30 Connell, R. W. 1995. Masculinities. Cambridge: Polity.

support for faith leaders themselves. She maintained that this approach to transforming masculinities could also by extension, ensure that churches do not remain complicit in the silencing of women.

> *"Faith leaders have their own challenges. Somehow, they have their challenges in their home, but they don't know who to talk to as faith leaders, you know. By giving them that safe space for them even to talk about themselves, and that is the key of the approach, transforming masculinities, it is creating a space for faith leaders also to come as individuals, not just the leaders, as individual and come with [their] baggage in the space."* (S.M; EGD, 29 November 2024)

Solange's reflection deepens the understanding of transformative masculinities and emphasises the need to transform gender norms and promote more gender-equitable relations between men and women[31]. It encourages men to embrace values such as accountability, empathy, and relational care. These shifts, however, are not automatic, they require intentional engagement, often beginning in youth[32].

Recognising this generational cycle of harm, African faith actors are not only naming these injustices but actively seeking to disrupt them from within. Their interventions combine systemic critique with culturally grounded strategies, often working inside religious structures to transform them. Across the dialogues, participants shared examples of how faith-based efforts are beginning to reshape the landscape of GBV prevention.

These include:

1. Engaging men and boys, faith leaders, and couples through transformative masculinity programmes[33]
2. Reframing sacred texts to centre compassion and gender equity[34]
3. Building alliances between faith institutions and advocacy networks[35]

These efforts reflect a growing shift from doctrinal rigidity toward moral renewal grounded in empathy, ritual, and collective healing.

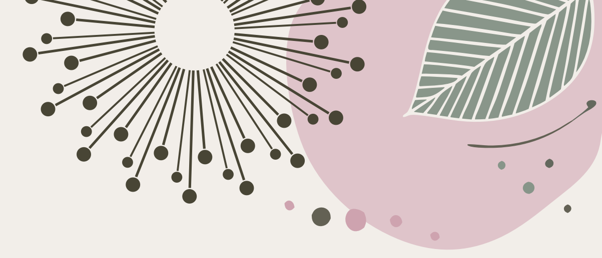
Patriarchal religious and cultural structures continue to entrench gender-based violence across Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. Despite this, faith actors and survivors are refusing silence. From exposing the complicity of religious hierarchies and cultural taboos to reframing sacred texts and transforming masculinities, participants across these contexts are engaging in multidimensional resistance. In other words, participants in these contexts are resisting in many ways and pushing back on many fronts: challenging religious leadership, breaking cultural silences, reimagining sacred stories, and transforming what it means to be a man.

The shift occurs in multiple domains, the institutional, the moral, the emotional, and the relational. It requires confronting long-standing interpretations of gender roles, challenging generational patterns of harm, and investing in sustained culturally grounded interventions. What emerges is a vision of faith that no longer defends violence through silence, but offers spiritual and social pathways toward accountability, healing, and justice. As participants made clear, transformation is possible through collective action, deeper self-reflection, and a willingness to reimagine the very foundations of religious authority and gendered belonging.

3.2.2.2 Spiritual Resistance and Cultural Memory in Latin America

Across regions, participants expressed concern over how cultural and religious institutions, intended as sources of moral guidance, often become mechanisms that reinforce silence, submission, and impunity. Religious teachings and traditional norms can be manipulated to legitimise harmful practises and discourage survivors from seeking justice[36][37]. In this context, religion is not merely a personal belief—it operates as a sociological

31 Jewkes, R., Flood, M., & Lang, J. (2015). From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: A conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. The Lancet. 385(9977), 1580–1589. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61683-4
32 Ibid
33 Cf. Luzuko Melapi, South Africa; EGD 1, 28 November 2024; Solange Mbonigaba, South Africa; EGD, 29 November 2024
34 Cf. Veronica Ngum Ndi, Cameroon; EGD 3, 18 March 2025.
35 Cf. Mat Lowe, Gambia; EGD 3, 18 March 2025.
36 Ndlovu, S., Mavhandu-Mudzusi, A. H., & Baloyi, M. E. (2024). Gender-based violence in some Pentecostal churches—A South African study. Religions, 15(6), 679. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15060679
37 Luvo, K., & Saunders, Y. U. (2022). The role of culture in gender-based violence and its impacts on the lives and wellbeing of women: Implications for social work. PONTE: International Multidisciplinary Journal of Sciences, 78(12), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.21506/j.ponte.2022.12.3



institution of power that shapes gender roles, influences authority and defines moral boundaries[38].

In Latin America- particularly Brazil and Colombia- participants described a social and religious climate increasingly shaped by anti-gender ideology. Conservative theological narratives dominate both public discourse and policy arenas, often casting gender justice work as an existential threat to faith and family values [39]. This climate produces ideological hostility toward even the language of gender.

In Colombia, participants reported limited governmental support, noting that political leaders are often unwilling to challenge religious conservatism. Conservative religious groups, including evangelical and Catholic networks, have mobilised against gender-inclusive policies, using "gender ideology" rhetoric to frame gender justice as a threat to traditional family values [40].

In this line, Sandra explicated the political and social reconfiguration in which the country's landscape shifted from deeply conservative governments to a more progressive one, resulting in changes in economic, social, and cultural policies:

> *"Along with this shift, we have also seen a reorganisation of the political right in Colombia. These right-wing forces are deeply connected with economic, military, and religious powers. This reconfiguration has led to increasingly conservative narratives and political-economic power struggles, masked by seemingly secular discourse. Beneath the surface, however, these discourses are profoundly religious and fundamentalist. This has intensified social and political polarization across the board."* (S.M; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

Adding that the political landscape is becoming increasingly religious and fundamentalist:

> *"Catholic and evangelical groups are gaining significant social and political legitimacy, transforming into political parties and movements. As the boundaries between church and state blur, a single moral framework is being imposed. Religious rhetoric is used to legitimise violence and deepen the stigmatisation of groups that have fought for social and cultural transformation—particularly the women's movement, the LGBTIQ+ movement, and progressive religious communities. In this context, demands and rights agendas for women and LGBTI people are increasingly met with violence and persecution."* (S.M; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

The observed entanglement of religious and political power in Colombia reflects a wider regional trend. One that has become even more pronounced in Brazil over the past decade, where at least 21 laws directly or indirectly banning gender and sexuality education remain in force[41] . Social researcher Olívia reflects further on this phenomenon:

> *"(...) there is a tendency for churches to address such issues internally- within the family, within the religious space- rather than allowing them to reach the public sphere or become subjects of public policy...From this view, such issues are not for the State or schools to deal with but instead fall under the purview of religious and family morality. This logic weakens public policies. We've seen campaigns against sex education in schools, with arguments that it should be left to families- not the State or educational system."* (O.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

An additional layer of this challenge is churches have developed and institutionalised a doctrinal framework that portrays sexual difference as both natural and divinely ordained:

> *"The church, alongside the State, helped to normalise and naturalise the division between men and women,*

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38 Woodhead, L and Partridge, C. (2016). Religion and gender. In H. Kawanami, C. Partridge, & L. Woodhead (Eds.), Religions in the Modern World: Traditions and Transformations (3rd ed., pp. 19–36). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694443
39 Vaggione, J. M. (2020). The conservative uses of law: The Catholic mobilization against gender ideology. Social Compass, 67(2), 252-266. https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768620907561
40 Bohorquez Oviedo, Á. M. (2024). A political opportunity: The build-up of the Colombian campaign against 'gender ideology' in the 2016 Peace Plebiscite. Política. Revista de Ciencia Política, 62(2), 163–198. https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-5338.2024.76056 accessed from (PDF) A Political Opportunity: The Build-Up of the Colombian Campaign against 'Gender Ideology' in the 2016 Peace Plebiscite 13 June 2025
41 Human Rights Watch. (2022). "I became scared": Efforts to ban gender and sexuality education in Brazil (Report). https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/05/brazil_lgbt0522_web.pdf

refusing to engage in gender discourse and instead upholding a rigid binary in the name of divine order... This thinking persists today and is deeply embedded in anti-gender campaigns. Feminism is labelled as an ideology; gender discourse is framed as something threatening. These narratives are pushed at all levels- from international platforms like the UN to national educational and legal frameworks. Churches actively campaign to exclude gender-related content from national education plans, resisting any policies that aim to guarantee the rights of women and the LGBTQIA+ community." (O.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

While this institutional conservatism poses significant challenges, it is not confined to Christian spaces alone. Queer youth activists and teacher Lucas Dantas explains that exclusion and discrimination can also emerge within Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and other local religious traditions, spaces often assumed to be more inclusive:

"So, the first challenge is fighting this conservatism, which aims to annihilate our bodies and lives. That's the first fear I carry as a researcher. The second challenge...relates to Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and Brazilian religious traditions, which are not free from gender and sexual prejudice. When we speak out against transphobia or LGBT-phobia within these practises, we are often attacked by members of our own communities- by conservative individuals who hold titles like priest or priestess and who perpetuate colonial violence without realising that their actions are fundamentally racist and colonial." (LD; EGD4, 28 March 2025)

This tension between tradition and transformation is equally evident in Argentina. Pablo Maximiliano Ojeda, lecturer and researcher at the University of Buenos Aires observed, religious conservatism there intersects with racial and cultural marginalisation in ways that deepen the silencing of alternative worldviews:

"So I constantly find myself navigating a space marked by prejudice. In Argentina, any religion that is not Christian-centreed is heavily stigmatised. Anything related to or influenced by non-Christian religions- especially when it intersects with race- is deeply buried and marginalised." (P.M.O; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

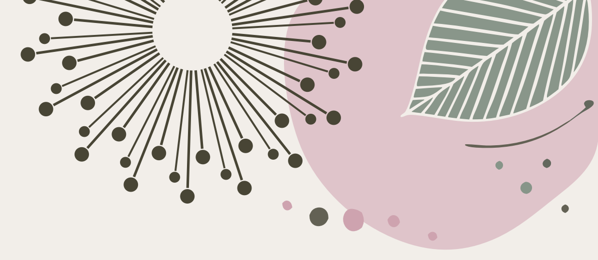
Despite efforts to promote religious diversity, these initiatives remain in tension with a dominant national identity shaped by whiteness and official Catholicism:

"Argentina is not truly a secular country- it is officially Catholic- and it perceives itself as white and Europeanised...Other efforts were made too, particularly by public agencies and progressive public policies, to promote respect for religious diversity and reclaim the country's African roots." (P.M.O; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

Together, the testimonies from Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina reveal that religious conservatism remains a powerful force shaping gender and sexual politics across Latin America. Although these contexts differ in their political structures and histories, there remains a common thread: the entrenchment of religious moral frameworks within state and cultural institutions that restrict rights, erase pluralism and resist change. Within these constraints, however, Latin American actors are developing creative, context-specific responses and forging spaces of resistance. Theologies rooted in feminism, queer identity, Black consciousness, and decolonial critique are offering powerful alternatives. These theological movements do not only resist patriarchal interpretations, but they also actively create new spiritual narratives rooted in equality and care. Sandra highlights how grassroots women's movements both within Afro-Colombian and progressive church contexts form these spaces. She explicates:

"These groups are generating resistance, building narratives, and supporting social and cultural processes with youth, encouraging leadership and engagement. They are generating new conversations and debates. We are recognising the need for social and cultural transformation as forms of resistance to many pressing issues." (S.M; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

Spaces of resistance warrant further observation as they signal emerging dissident theologies which incorporate feminist theologies, queer theologies and Black theologies. This view is further reiterated by Silvia's experience of how Candomblé, though rooted in ancestral tradition, adapts, with a willingness among elders to update



practises. She illuminated:

> *"When issues of gender violence arise, I see that the mães de Santo are eager to learn. My spiritual leader, for instance, asked me to explain to everyone what it means to be trans. She had questions like: "Do I need the person's legal name? Which name do I ask for?" And I would explain, "Ask for the name on their updated legal documents, not the birth certificate." She genuinely wanted to understand...Despite the strong emphasis on ancestry and respect for elders, I see a willingness among leaders to update practises... Candomblé terreiros are spaces of resistance".* (S.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

Illustrating this dynamism of the traditions, Iasmin recounted:

> *"(...) speaking from my specific experience with a terreiro, my house, for instance, has a group of older women that functions like a commission, if we can call it that: a commission to protect other women who might feel threatened or uncomfortable, etc. That sort of thing is new - even within our house - but it exists."* (I.S.R; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

Resistance in these regions of Latin America is not only oppositional but also generative. It cultivates new ways of knowing, being, and organising within existing religious and cultural frameworks. These emergent dissident theologies and evolving practises are not simply reactions to conservative backlash, they are proactively reshaping their spiritual and social worlds. Rather than discarding faith, many activists are reclaiming and reinterpreting theology to centre dignity, compassion, and human rights.

Participants cautioned, however, that even these liberatory, generative, African-derived spaces of resistance do not exist within a vacuum and are thus not immune to patriarchal backsliding. Silvia positioned the *terreiros* as both religious and cultural spaces and emphasised that they are not pure or untouched traditions. Furthermore, her critique alludes to the infiltration of Western, patriarchal, and capitalist logic into these spaces, a concept Lucas Dantas (EGD 5) referred to as 'whitening'. Silvia reminds the group that they too are deeply shaped by Brazil's colonial and Christian culture:

> *"Unfortunately, machismo has also entered these religious spaces. Even though these religions originated with matriarchal structures and female-centred worship- where, for instance, until the late 19th or early 20th century, only women held leadership roles- men eventually began to be initiated and assume positions of power within the terreiros....within the Brazilian Umbanda tradition, there are two topics people often assume are already addressed and don't require further discussion: gender, sexuality, and race...Yet many terreiros have experienced little decolonisation. Umbanda has become significantly whitened in many ways."* (S.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

Resultantly, even within these spaces of resistance, certain topics are still considered taboo and are therefore silenced:

> *"Even Afro-urban religions in Argentina- which are often perceived as the most open and inclusive- continue to struggle with this topic. Alongside abortion, the issue of trans childhood and adolescence generates the most tension."* (P.M.O; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

Pablo's example exemplifies Silvia's earlier assertion that these religions, too, are embedded in the broader sense of silence and shame. She further elucidates:

> *"In my interviews, one zeladora de Santo told me she had helped women who had survived sexual violence. Others shared that terreiros often serve as shelters for women experiencing domestic violence- women who have nowhere else to go often turn to the terreiros for refuge. This came up frequently in my research- the idea of the terreiro as a space of care and protection for women...However, what didn't appear as often were accounts of violence taking place within the terreiro itself- such as between filhos and filhas de Santo, or between leaders like pais de Santo and assistants (zeladores, ogãs). These cases were rarely mentioned in my research. The focus remained on terreiros as protective spaces, especially for women with children who are fleeing domestic abuse."* (S.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

The Latin American expert discussion explicated the complex entanglements between religion, politics, and gendered oppression in the region. Participants highlighted how conservative Christian movements have increasingly embedded themselves in state institutions, shaping public discourse and policy to suppress gender and sexual rights. This form of institutional conservatism has gained traction through formal political channels as well as cultural and educational campaigns that frame feminist and queer movements as ideological threats. Lucas and Pablo remind us, however, that these conservative dynamics are not confined to Christian spaces.

Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous, and Afro-urban religious traditions are also marked by gender and sexual prejudice, shaped by the broader systems of colonialism, patriarchy, and racialisation. Silvia's critique of how machismo and "whitening" have entered the *terreiros* illustrates that these liberatory spaces are not immune to the contradictions of their context. Even as they offer care, protection, and resistance, they may simultaneously reproduce silence around taboo issues such as gendered violence and trans inclusion. The challenge, then, lies in holding this tension: recognising the liberatory potential of these spaces while remaining vigilant to the ways colonial and patriarchal logics persist within them. Across these landscapes, the work of transformation is ongoing, grounded in resistance, but requiring deep introspection, critique, and the reimagining of more inclusive spiritual and political futures.

3.3 Building Evidence for GBV Prevention in Faith-Based Settings: Insights from African and Latin American Contexts

Across all contexts in this study, participants spoke about the power of evidence. For many working at the intersection of faith and GBV prevention, evidence is far more than statistics or reports. It is a deeply relational practise that exposes hidden harm, confronts cultural and spiritual silences, and challenges power. In faith-based settings spiritual authority shapes moral norms, community trust, and the legitimacy of survivors' voices. The production and use of evidence become fundamentally ethical and political acts.

This section examines how participants from diverse regions described evidence as a double-edged tool. It can disrupt silence and make hidden violence visible. Simultaneously, it can be marginalised, ignored, or confined to closed spaces, which ultimately sustains silence around gender-based violence in faith contexts. It highlights how the act of documenting lived experiences operates on multiple levels. First, it can amplify survivor voices. Second, it can transform institutional responses. Finally, it can reconfigure the moral authority that often shields perpetrators or normalises harmful practises. These same acts of making violence visible, however, frequently provoke resistance, fear, and backlash, especially when they unsettle entrenched religious and cultural norms.

The analysis unfolds through African and Latin American perspectives. Each illustrates different yet overlapping dimensions of this tension. In African faith-based and community organisations, participants emphasised how building robust, community-rooted evidence is essential for advocacy, policy change, and survivor-centred programmeming. They insisted that such evidence must be gathered through trust-based, relational, and culturally sensitive methods to avoid deepening harm. In Latin America, participants consisted of researchers, activists, or practitioners embedded within academic and religious institutions. They highlighted how research can make visible the often-silenced intersections of gender, faith, and power. Here, evidence is cast as both an activist practise and a political intervention that resists anti-gender ideology and institutional complicity, while carrying significant personal and collective risks for those who speak out.

This section demonstrates that evidence is not a neutral or purely technical tool. It is a site of moral and spiritual negotiation. A relational practise that can help reclaim voice, confront cultures of silence, and challenge the spiritual authority that too often sustains violence and stigma. The insights that follow demonstrate how, across contexts, survivors, practitioners, and researchers alike navigate these complex terrains. And how they forge pathways that root evidence-building in trust, accountability, and the collective courage to name what many would prefer to remain unspoken.

3.3.1 Evidence, Silence, and Spiritual Authority in African Faith-Based GBV Prevention

3.3.1.1 Evidence as a Tool for Change

Participants unanimously affirmed the critical role of evidence in raising awareness and driving effective GBV

prevention efforts. Discussions around evidence building revealed that participants viewed evidence not only as a technical tool, but as foundational for influencing policy, informing practise, and legitimising community voices. Whether in legal responsiveness, faith-based programmeming, or grassroots mobilisation, participants emphasised that building robust, context-sensitive evidence is essential to move beyond rhetoric and deliver tangible change. EDG discussions reflect a collective recognition that, without evidence, advocacy efforts stall, policies remain ineffective, and survivors' needs go unmet. The value of different forms of evidence was also noted- ranging from academic research to qualitative insights and practise-based knowledge – with each playing a vital role, depending on the context and purpose.

Several participants elucidated the importance of evidence in influencing legal and policy frameworks that are more responsive to community realities. In contexts where legislation is often detached from lived experience, participants highlighted that evidence could function as both an assessment and a transformative tool[42]. From a legal and governance perspective, Kenyan-born Juliet highlighted that building evidence is essential for identifying unmet needs and shaping more effective frameworks so to understand, also from a legal perspective, what needs there are in society, or how policies need to be tweaked or changed to affect GBV (J.W.M; EGD 1, 28 November 2024)

This sentiment was also reiterated by Oluwafemi, who articulated the link between evidence and change in both policy and practise, asserting:

> *"We actually need to do more on collection of evidence and data and carry out research that will lead to policy and to practise…and if we don't have evidence, we can actually not affect change. Policies cannot totally come into full play."* (O.A; EGD 1, 29 November 2024)

These reflections suggest that evidence-building is a cornerstone of advocacy and reform. This resonates with calls in the broader literature for evidence-informed activism that bridges lived experience and structural transformation[43]. As such, evidence informed by local contexts is imperative to making legal and policy frameworks more responsive and transformative.

Participants also elucidated the role of evidence in strengthening their practises, programmeming and interventions. They maintained that building evidence through research, enabled them to fully understand community needs and informed how best they respond to these. For these actors, evidence was a necessary foundation for meaningful, context-specific action. Aisha exemplified this idea:

> *"To be able to understand any project, any intervention I want to do. I should be able to have a baseline. What are the community needs? What are their priorities? Those issues in the community. So as when I come back, because they were part and parcel of the research, and this is the outcome of the research, we are using the outcome of the research to implement this kind of a project."* (A.A.M; EGD 2, 29 November 2024)

In a similar vein, Solange emphasised that the voices of survivors themselves guide her organisation's response to their needs, stating:

> *"As Tear Fund, we have data on what is needed for the women or survivors of sexual gender-based violence to better their lives. We have data. The roadmap, it has been given by them to us."* (S.M, EGD, 29 November 2024)

These reflections affirm that evidence is integral to organisational learning and emphasise the critical role it plays in shaping their systems of care and accountability. The reflections above also exemplify that when communities contribute to the evidence that guides interventions, they help co-create responses that are contextually relevant and rooted in lived experience. This, in turn, makes programmes more relevant and more likely to succeed.

42 Merry, S. E. (2011). Measuring the world: Indicators, human rights, and global governance. Current Anthropology, 52(S3), S83–S95. https://doi.org/10.1086/657241
43 Cornwall, A. (2016). Women's Empowerment: What Works? Journal of International Development, 28(3), 342-359. https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3210

Building on this, Gideon highlighted that evidence not only strengthens practise internally. It also supports organisations to measure, communicate, and legitimise their impact to wider stakeholders. He asserted: *"(…) understanding how to collect and analyse data stories will help me and even my organisation, to measure the impact of our work and also communicate it effectively."* (G.O, EGD 1, 28 November 2024).

In this sense, evidence also enables quality control and increases the visibility of organisations, allowing them to showcase the work done in and with communities and its impact. Juliet further highlights that strong, community-rooted evidence also enables FBOs to collaborate across sectors and influence broader systems. She stated that *"By improving data collection and collaboration with government and civil society, FBOs can help close critical gaps in Kenya's justice system, creating a safer society for survivors"* (J.WM, EGD 1, 28 November 2024).

These participants demonstrate that robust, community-grounded evidence may serve multiple roles. It helps organisations understand real community needs, co-create interventions with those they serve, and build credibility for their work. This credibility, in turn, enables them to collaborate more effectively with governments, civil society, and other faith-based networks. This potentially extends their impact far beyond individual programmes and may amplify their voices in policy space. In this way, evidence becomes a vital thread connecting community needs, co-created solutions, organisational legitimacy, policy advocacy, and wider systems of change.

3.3.1.2 Ethical and Relational Approaches to Evidence Building

The previous section highlighted why evidence is essential in GBV prevention efforts. In this vein, participants repeatedly emphasised that meaningful, actionable evidence depends on ethical and relational ways of gathering it. This inquiry into evidence building in faith and GBV prevention begs the question 'evidence of what, exactly?' In this context, participants spoke primarily about evidence of lived experience. This included the emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual forms of violence, often hidden by stigma or theological silence. Importantly, it also extended to the conditions under which violence is disclosed, such as fear, shame, or relational risk. In contexts where disclosure carries risks, where stigma silences survivors, and trust is easily broken, gathering stories and testimonies must be done with great care. Ethical, survivor-centred approaches are essential, as these narratives often form the foundation of a meaningful and credible evidence base. It is through these narrative fragments, shared cautiously, ethically and relationally, that broader trends are pieced together to inform policy, practise, and systems of change.

In this regard, the question of how ethical review is conducted in faith-based contexts remains crucial but underexplored. Given the strong spiritual and moral authority held by faith leaders and institutions, there is a pressing need to examine whether existing ethical review mechanisms are adapted to safeguard inclusive, non-coercive, and accountable research practises. In settings where stigma, hierarchy, and fear may affect disclosure, traditional research ethics processes may fall short of protecting participants or ensuring meaningful participation. Future inquiry should explore how ethical protocols are being reshaped—or need to be—to reflect the unique relational and spiritual dimensions of evidence-building in these settings.

However, many GBV researchers grapple with how to connect 'evidence for advocacy and programmeming' with 'evidence of lived experience' [44] [45]. More than just numbers, accurate data can allow for a more in-depth understanding of the severity, frequency, and forms of violence. It can assist in identifying those most at risk as well as the common perpetrators. It can pinpoint where violence occurs and assesses the impact on the lives of survivors' and societal well-being[46]. Against this backdrop of tensions around what kinds of evidence are needed, participants reiterated that while evidence is necessary, how it is gathered matters just as deeply. Where faith communities hold significant spiritual and moral authority, data collection must be ethical, relational, and rooted in cultural relevance.

44 Merry, S. E. (2011). Measuring the world: Indicators, human rights, and global governance. Current Anthropology, 52(S3), S83–S95. https://doi.org/10.1086/657241
45 Shrestha, S., Patel, P., Longchar, S., & Xavier, A. F. (2025). Enhancing Gender-Based Violence Research: Holistic Approaches to Data Collection and Analysis. Women, 5(2), 19. https://doi.org/10.3390/women5020019
46 UN Women Africa. (2024, December). Gender data is not just valuable – it is essential in preventing and responding to gender-based violence. But there are gaps. Retrieved from https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/op-ed/2024/12/gender-data-is-not-just-valuable-it-is-essential-in-preventing-and-responding-to-gender-based-violence-but-there-are-gaps

Participant reflections on gathering evidence for GBV awareness and prevention, illuminate four key insights. First, evidence-gathering must foreground trust-building rather than extraction. Second, tensions often arise when donor-driven demands for numbers clash with survivor-centred care. Third, that community-led and culturally relevant approaches enable genuine disclosure and finally, that data must be used safely and strategically to drive change without causing further harm.

Solange powerfully captured how trust-building must be at the heart of any evidence-gathering process:

> *"The aspect of trust was much more supporting what we were trying to do…We did not come in as researchers to collect data and go. That is a key issue that was raised by many community leaders, faith leaders, even project participants or survivors or beneficiaries. They all wanted to see if we are coming as like anyone who came before us. Then we took a stand of saying that we are here with you, we want to learn from you. We did not come as experts, we came with the people who wanted to listen to them."* (S.M; EGD 1, 29 November 2024)

This insight reveals that in faith-based GBV prevention, data is never just data. The collection thereof must be ethical and relational, not an exploitative or extractive experience for participants. Building trust, then, is not only essential, but also foundational. In its absence, gathering quality data is fraught with suspicion. Oluwafemi affirmed the relational practise of building trust within faith and gender-based violence contexts. He captured the repercussion of the trust deficit in such situations highlighting that "*People say, 'Why are you asking these questions? Are you trying to shame our leaders?' There is mistrust, and unless we build relationships first, there is no data.*" (Oluwafemi Abe, Nigeria; EGD 1, 29 November 2024).

Engaging with the local community and survivors, therefore, should not be seen as optional or a one-time event. Rather it should be a continuous process of ethical, transparent, and accountable research collaboration. This will help build trust and create more equal relationships[47]. Within the African, and indeed many other contexts, it is well known that GBV statistics are high. However, demonstrating the true extent of violence remains difficult because of the cultures of silence described throughout this report. Josephine's experience vividly illustrates this complexity. She shared the delicate and often painful work of collecting stories and testimonies from GBV survivors whose disclosures carry immense risk. Although her observation is broadly relevant to all survivors, she highlighted how these tensions were further amplified in her work with ministers' wives. Women, whose voices are arguably among the most silenced in fear of being stigmatised and losing their roles in the community. She recounted:

> *"To collect data on emotional abuse among ministers' wives here in Kenya. It was a difficult exercise to carry through…Number one, what I observed from the participants is, there was a lot of fear. In disclosing their narratives and telling their stories. They could tell me that 'we are being abused, we are being violated', but now they fear exposing their stories to me. Obviously, there was informed consent because they fear if it is known by their husbands, if it is known by the judge, if it will be documented, that would bring stigma to them as individuals. No one would want to hear their stories being told. But I observed there was a lot of fear, even in religious spaces, women and even girls would not talk about their experiences as far as violence is concerned. And so I did narratives, I recorded them with their consent and…I have those stories in store with me…And so the deepest challenge is how do they come out of such situations? How do they speak out now? How can they be empowered to bring their experiences to the public and save the [situation][48] in our spaces?"* (J.K; EGD 1, 29 November 2024)

Josephine's reflection reveals an uncomfortable truth. Even when trust has been built enough for survivors to share their stories privately, the deeper ethical tension remains. Survivors may consent to speak, but not to have these stories become formalised data, fearing exposure, shame, or retaliation. This paradox elucidates how cultures of silence are not only the absence of testimony. They are actively sustained by social and doctrinal structures that render some stories too dangerous to be told publicly.

47 Ibid
48 The original word captured by the AI transcription was 'scenario', which did not align with the context of the participant's reflection. It is unclear whether this was a transcription error or the exact word used. The term has therefore been changed to 'situation' based on the writers' interpretation of what best conveys the intended meaning.

This highlights a critical challenge for evidence building in faith-based GBV prevention. Without survivor trust and informed consent, there is no meaningful evidence. Without that evidence, interventions remain partial and survivors, unsupported. Josephine's account reminds us that building trust takes time and requires deep engagement with community dynamics and spiritual worldviews and can have profound effects on both the interviewer and interviewee. Thus, anchoring data collection within a trauma-informed and ethical framework is of paramount importance when engaging with survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) from displaced communities[49].

As such, trust is not a guarantee but an ongoing, relational negotiation. Solange Mbonigaba reiterated the delicate work of building trust. She described how survivors' stories often emerge in fragments that can only be gathered ethically when trust is steadily built. She maintained:

> *"(...) they don't come in a straight line. They come in pieces. They give you a piece of information, and what you do with that piece of information will build trust with them or destroy trust. But when you gain trust with them, then they can add more to what they have shared. Then, the evidence gathering on qualitative, it's easy to get them once you have gained trust with the survivor."* (S.M; EGD, 29 November 2024)

This insight reaffirms that the gathering of qualitative evidence is not merely about 'collecting data'. It is about sustaining relationships of trust and care. This approach stands in stark tension with target-driven funded research, that may very often result in extractive research practises. Solange continued to reflect on the competing demands of donor accountability and the pressure of producing the metrics required by them with survivor protection, and ethical and relational integrity. She noted:

> *"(...) But quantitative data is still a challenge. You know, when we are speaking to donors...they want to see how much more...how many people you are reaching. But when it comes to survivors, I think it's not about the quantity. It's about the quality of information you get from there and how you are going to use that information to be able to gain more from them...Then that has been a challenge in the work of NGOs, where we are relying on the...prescription of the donors and everything. That has been a challenge to meet the target of saying they need 5,000 women speaking, breaking the silence. But I've been really challenging the process, saying, remember, we are dealing with human beings. We are not dealing with the project."* (S.M; EGD, 29 November 2024)

Solange's reflection makes clear that local actors must constantly navigate a double bind. On the one hand they need to meet donor demands for standardised data or lose vital resources. However, in doing so, they may undermine the trust and care that survivor-centred prevention depends on. This calls for funders and researchers alike to rethink what counts as 'valid evidence' in these contexts.

In contexts where deeply rooted cultural practises can inadvertently cause harm, researchers must be mindful not to alienate the very communities they wish to engage. Framing research in ways that immediately label these practises as rights violations can provoke defensiveness and close off dialogue. Instead, presenting the issues in language that resonates with local priorities can help communities feel respected and more willing to participate. Mat Lowe described such an interaction:

> *"When we started our research on the intersections between child marriage and female genital mutilation, in order to get access to the communities, to the research communities, we presented the issues as both a health and a development problem that needs to be addressed. And with this approach, we were able to collect the data with meaningful participation from community members, because we presented the issue not as a rights issue, but as a health and development issue, that female genital mutilation can be a contributing factor to the high rate of maternal mortality that we're seeing in the country, that child marriage is also a contributing factor to the high maternal mortality rate. This approach, communities were highly accommodative and they were willing to give us the data that we needed. So that approach facilitated our data collection with community members."* (M.L; EGD 3, 18 March 2025)

49 Diab, J. L. (2024). Inclusive inquiry: A compassionate journey in trauma-informed qualitative research with GBV survivors from displaced communities. Frontiers in Psychology, 15, 1399115. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1399115

This extract shows how strategic framing can help shift evidence-gathering from a process that risks alienating communities to one that invites their ownership and agency. By framing sensitive practises in ways that speak to local priorities, researchers can reduce the stigma attached to discussing them and open space for change without reinforcing cultural shame or fear. This may also make communities more willing to participate fully and enable evidence to emerge in a context of shared purpose, rather than coercion. Ethically, this strategy also reduces potential harm to participants, as it avoids labelling the study explicitly as a violence against women study, thereby offering greater protection in settings where such identification may carry risk.[50]

In contexts where formal research methods may not align with local cultural practises, researchers have found that participatory approaches grounded in dialogue can foster more inclusive and respectful engagement. Written surveys can exclude community members with limited literacy or feel alien to local ways of sharing knowledge. Alternatively, community dialogue reflects cultural norms of communication and collective reflection. Solange highlighted this approach:

> *"(…) when we are gathering data, we don't give paper for people to answer. We do it through community dialogue. Community dialogue, focus group discussions, that is where always we gather…That is how we gather information from what the community themselves, community participants, or project participants are doing, not us doing.* (S.M; EGD, 29 November 2024)"

This method not only creates safer spaces for disclosure but also respects cultural forms of expression and inclusivity. It shifts the research relationship from extractive to collaborative and reduces the risk of alienating participants. This ensures that evidence is built through culturally relevant and community-driven processes. By centreing community dialogue, Solange enabled participants to lead the conversation and share their own experiences. She did not impose external frameworks or extract data in a top-down manner. This participatory approach respects local ways of knowing, promotes ownership of the research process, and helps avoid alienation. This potentially makes evidence-gathering more meaningful and empowering for those involved.

Taken together, these reflections suggest that alongside trust-building and relational ethics, there is a broader structural gap in how ethical review is conceptualised and operationalised in faith-based GBV research. Addressing this gap requires not only resourcing local ethical frameworks but also engaging with faith actors to co-develop review processes that are spiritually respectful, survivor-centred, and contextually grounded.

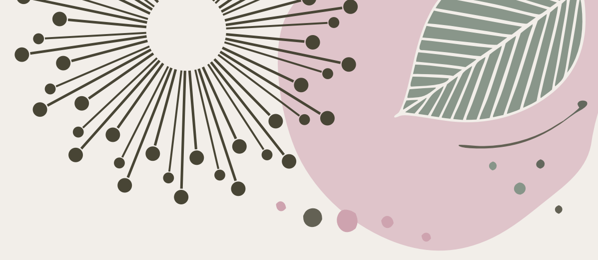
3.3.1.3 Methodological and Capacity Gaps

Despite these promising relational approaches, significant methodological and capacity gaps persist that hinder the development of robust, community-informed evidence. Participants highlighted multiple, interlinked challenges. These range from difficulties engaging certain faith leaders, to deep-seated barriers that prevent survivors from speaking out, to limited resources and fragmented data systems within faith- and community-based organisations. These obstacles restrict what evidence can be gathered and how it can be meaningfully used to shape policies and prevention strategies for various issues. The following excerpts illustrate these persistent gaps, and the structural conditions that must be addressed for ethical, effective evidence-building within faith communities.

One central obstacle lies in the difficulty of engaging a full spectrum of faith leaders. Engaging with more conservative views is critical to understanding and transforming harmful norms, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). This challenge is described by Mat:

> *"I just wanted to talk about the difficulties that we currently face in engaging faith leaders in the development of evidence-based recommendation for the prevention of child marriage in the Gambian FGM. One of the major challenges is that it is easier to find progressive leaders, religious leaders, than to find leaders who are conservative. And that, you know, makes it rather complicated for you to gather the relevant data that you need. Usually, progressive religious or faith leaders are very much closely aligned with the political system in the country, but you find out that faith leaders who are highly conservative usually are*

50 Ellsberg, M., & Heise, L. (2005). Researching violence against women: A practical guide for researchers and activists. World Health Organisation, PATH. https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9241546476/en/



not close friends with the government. So that makes it difficult for you to engage them in research, but also to ensure that they participate meaningfully when it comes to discussions around abandonment of FGM. And child marriage." (M.L; EGD 3, 18 March 2025)

Mat's observation highlights the importance of engaging conservative faith leaders whose interpretations and endorsements often sustain harmful practises. In Mat's full reflection, he maintained that over time, practises that are fundamentally cultural have become framed as religious obligations. These have gained legitimacy and protection through sermons, religious texts, and the authority of respected leaders. This makes these leaders' perspectives both challenging to access but critical to include. Without their voices and willingness to re-examine entrenched beliefs, evidence-gathering risks being incomplete and any resulting interventions risk being rejected by the very communities they aim to reach. Engaging conservative leaders is therefore essential not only for building evidence that truly reflects these norms but also to transform them from within.

Closely connected to the entrenchment of harmful religious norms is the persistent barrier of survivors' reluctance or inability to speak out. This culture of silence, reinforced by stigma, power dynamics, and community pressures, continues to complicate evidence-gathering and raises ethical tensions about how and when to intervene. In the preceding section, participant excerpts- many of which come from women practitioners- emphasised the promise of building trust and relational accountability as a pathway to ethical, survivor-centred data collection. Gideon's experience, however, reminds us that trust-building alone does not always overcome fear, stigma, or deeply rooted norms of silence. He noted:

"I find one of the greatest challenges is for victims to come up and speak out, to give their stories, to share their stories. And I can give one scenario where I have just recently approached someone who I was aware is being violated by their partner. They don't want to speak out, they do not want to raise their issues, they don't want to raise their concerns, often live with other people and so it becomes a bit difficult even to, you know, help because it feels quite intrusive when you're engaging and they're not willing, you know, to give feedback. It feels quite intrusive and so I'm stuck at the point between what is the right thing to do and what interventions can we offer if the victim does not seem to want to talk about what is going on, you know? And I found that as a very, very great hindrance towards even gathering evidence and, you know, trying to alleviate the situation…Also, being that we are heavily reliant on qualitative data, cultural sensitivity, issues of inclusivity also sometimes can be a challenge to people even speaking up or even coming forth to report such cases." (G.O; EGD 1, 28 November 2024)

This pervasive challenge, as elucidated by Gideon, illustrates how relational, survivor-centred approaches- so strongly championed by many women practitioners in this study- can still run up against deeply rooted silences, stigma, and fear. Moreover, Gideon's reflection as a male practitioner alludes to the gendered dynamics in survivor disclosure. This highlights that female survivors may be less willing to open up to men, which further complicates efforts to build trust and gather authentic narratives. This gendered aspect of relational engagement highlights how ethical tensions may cut across gendered positions of care and intervention. This insight calls for careful consideration of who leads data collection and how survivor comfort and safety are prioritised. Such tensions convey that ethical and relational approaches are necessary but insufficient on their own. They must be underpinned by organisations that have the capacity, time, and practical resources to sustain trust, build safe pathways for disclosure, and respond meaningfully when survivors do come forward.

Participants primarily emphasised that community-based and faith-based organisations often lack the resources, tools, or sustained support needed to follow up and measure impact. This impinges on their ability to build evidence systematically. Luzuko reflected on this challenge, asserting:

"I would say that the lack of, in terms of resources of CBOs…the evidence-based, it's in the data that we want to collect. And then when you're having this data…and then you don't have tools or systems that are in place to do follow-ups, and also to make sure that if you are talking of impact or results, which tools to be able to put into place and which measurements will be used. So, I think for us it's that, because even if we would want to say that we are helping the men we need to also say that we are helping the men for the sustainability of making sure that men are changing their behaviour." (L.M; EGD 1, 28 November 2024)

Building on this, Gideon reflected on the practical reality that even when data is gathered, many faith-based

organisations remain heavily reliant on narrative accounts. As shown above, this can be a strength for the kinds of evidence faith-based organisations gather and the trust they build with communities. However, it often competes with donor demands for standardised, quantifiable proof of impact. Even so, Gideon asserts he would have limited capacity to analyse or translate quantitative data into compelling evidence for impact:

> *"My perspective would be, and from experience this is, most of the data that we handle or that we deal with, even as a faith-based organisation, mostly is qualitative and narrative. So to speak. And so there's no tangible figures that we have been able to collect…And so we rely mostly on qualitative data, which are narratives, stories, lived experiences. And that is what mainly comes to us. And you know, this can be, I would say, can be hindering our effectiveness as such. And we also have a very limited capacity, you know, for analysing data, even as a small FBO, if we were to even have statistics, quantitative data to begin with. Our capacity for data analysis, I would say, is still limited. Generally, this undermines greatly our efforts even as we try to mitigate issues of GBV within the community and especially in faith circles. And I would say that while this, I would see it still as a strength that there's still the space to consider quantitative data even within faith-based circles*." (G.O; EGD 1, 28 November 2024)

Furthermore, while practitioners are often rich in insight and local knowledge, this lack of formal reporting mechanisms means that much of this understanding never translates into sustained learning or evidence of long-term change. This is echoed by Aisha: "*We have a lot of insight, even though we don't have a standardised template. We don't have a standardised reporting mechanism*" (A.A.M; EGD 1, 29 November 2024).

Moreover, these localised gaps reflect a persistent global pattern, as Oluwafemi emphasised:

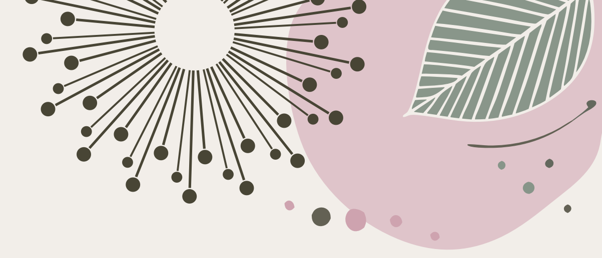
> *"…that the lack of comprehensive data on GBV prevention [in the faith sector] remains a global issue, particularly at the grassroots level. This data gap hinders the development of effective policies and targeted prevention strategies. There is a clear need to address this gap to strengthen local-level prevention efforts."* (A.O; EGD 1, 29 November 2024)

These extracts suggest that faith-based and community-based organisations often hold deep and rich contextual knowledge and relational experience. Constraints from fragmented data systems, resource limitations, and the absence of standardised tools to monitor, evaluate, and share their work greatly undermine their ability to demonstrate sustained change and impact. The result is often fragmented reporting, missed learning opportunities, and limited evidence to inform future practise or policy and secure additional funding. Without better-resourced systems for consistent data collection, follow-up, and shared learning, even the most ethical and community-informed evidence risks being overlooked or undervalued.

These challenges are further compounded in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where structural inequities often constrain researchers' ability to contribute to the global evidence base on violence against women and children. Among these, navigating ethical review processes stands out as a critical hurdle. Researchers in LMICs frequently face barriers such as limited or inaccessible Research Ethics Committees (RECs), lack of funding for ethics review fees, and tensions between international ethical standards and local research practises.[51] These constraints can delay or prevent the generation of essential knowledge, particularly on sensitive topics like VAW and VAC.

This underscores that trust-based and relational evidence-building must be matched by sustained investments. Investments in capacity, training, and practical tools. This also includes the development of accessible and contextually grounded ethical review mechanisms which are vital to ensure that local knowledge can be transformed into actionable evidence for meaningful, lasting change.

51 Dartnall, E., Homan, S., Lalor, K., Silima, M., & Undie, C.-C. (2025). Is ethical review a barrier to the publication of research on violence against women and children for low- and middle-income country researchers? Child Protection, Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chipro.2025.100120



3.3.2 The Role of Evidence in Resisting Silence and Reclaiming Voice in Latin America

3.3.2.1 Evidence as Visibility and Activist Practise

The preceding section from African contexts consisted of reflections that illustrated how evidence is gathered and mobilised. This was described from the perspectives of faith-based and community-based organisations working directly with survivors and local leaders. Insights from Latin America highlighted a distinct perspective. Here, many participants were themselves researchers and academics based in universities. Resultantly, they spoke of evidence in ways deeply connected to academic research, institutional critique, and the need to bridge scholarly work with activism. This section explores how participants in Latin America described both the current realities and the urgent possibilities for how evidence can and should be mobilised to resist silence and reclaim collective voice. Participants argued for research as a political and relational practise.

Participants agreed that research could play a crucial role in promoting visibility and connecting academic work with public activism. This is captured in Olivia's observations:

> *"I think it is essential to acknowledge the various efforts already being made within institutions themselves toward violence prevention. Helping to narrate these cases is important. Additionally, research can contribute to increasing public awareness. Too often, our research remains confined to the academic sphere, and we tend to resist making public interventions. But when we conduct this kind of research, we are engaging with the present, and this requires us to consider how researchers can also intervene in the public sphere. We need to reflect more seriously on how to give visibility to the issues we investigate - whether by analysing how gender is treated within churches, or by examining how this impacts public policy. Raising awareness about these dynamics is crucial."* (O.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

She also stressed the significance of highlighting alternatives emerging both inside and outside institutions that can drive change, reminding us that research inevitably carries an activist dimension:

> *"At the same time, we must also highlight the alternatives already being built within institutions - or by individual believers outside of them - that are less institutionalised but still capable of driving change and contributing to the fight against violence. Perhaps this is the primary contribution: recognising that research is not solely about analysis - it doesn't need to be divorced from activist practise."* (O.B; EGD 5, 22 April 2025)

Similar to African contexts, here too we are invited to consider research not merely as the collection of data but as a dynamic, relational practise. In the Latin American reflections, this practise takes on a unique dimension, one that is deeply rooted in making violence visible and aspires to bridge academic and activist spaces, nurturing solidarity within and across communities. Olívia 's provocations challenge the idea of research as a private or apolitical act. She highlights that as a political and moral act, research must be an intervention which confronts systems of silence, stigma, and structural inequality.

Extending this idea, Sandra reflects on the urgent need for academia to transform, to move beyond bureaucracy and become an active partner in social and political change. She argued:

> *"Academia can contribute a great deal to political advocacy. Yet often, those of us engaged in activism and political action feel distant from academic institutions. Sometimes, academia seems too bureaucratic or timid when it comes to initiating or facilitating change. I believe this is a key moment - an opportunity for academia to become more active and participatory in driving transformation. We have the data, the theories, and the frameworks that are extremely valuable to social movements, but we need a less detached academia - one that places its knowledge and insights at the service of the people and communities. In the religious sphere, specifically, there are grassroots initiatives taking shape - especially among marginalised social groups. We need to return to methodologies grounded in popular education, in collective participation, in research-action approaches."* (S.M; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

Her reflection highlights that this shift is especially vital for religious spaces, where grassroots faith initiatives among marginalised groups are already driving change from below. By reconnecting academic research with

popular education[52], collective participation, and action-oriented methods, universities can become true partners in resisting violence and advancing gender justice alongside local communities.

Silvia, in her post discussion group reflection, then adds yet another layer. She emphasises how multi-sector collaboration is essential to transform this kind of evidence into concrete public policies, stronger services, and community-led support. She wrote:

> *"It is essential that universities, public authorities, and organised civil society join forces to conduct research aimed at improving public policies, public services, popular education initiatives, and support networks for victims of sexual violence."* (S.B; individual feedback report, EGD 5)

This excerpt reinforces that this activist form of evidence-building should be equally about generating knowledge, and ensuring that it fuels tangible, accessible change. Several participants noted that this also requires academics to translate research into formats that ordinary people and communities can understand and utilise. Pablo exemplified this call, reminding us that evidence must move beyond static reports:

> *"As academics, we need to find ways, despite all the difficulties, to translate our research into formats that people can access. Podcasts, videos, animated content like Catolicadas - these are powerful tools. We need to get our work out there, to reach the public, to engage beyond academia."* (P.M.O; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

These insights reveal that, in the Latin American context, evidence-building is understood not just as the production of data but as an ongoing, activist commitment to transforming knowledge into social action. Participants highlighted how this kind of evidence must be narrated, shared, and translated into forms that communities can use. This would ensure that this evidence fuels change in policy, practise, and everyday life. Importantly, these insights can be read as pointing toward a normative aspiration. That research and evidence-building should not remain neutral or detached but serve as active tools for resistance, visibility, and collective action. It is to the tensions and risks that come with this aspirational commitment to visibility and voice that we now turn.

3.3.2.2 Risk, Exposure, and the Politics of Silence

As concluded above, participants in Latin America recognised that evidence-building should never just an academic or technical task. It should be deeply political. As illustrated through the cultural-religious intersections in Latin America, the growing force of anti-gender ideology and resurgent political conservatism across the region creates a climate in which speaking about gender, sexuality, and rights can provoke hostility, surveillance, and backlash. This context means that for many researchers and activists, the very act of gathering and sharing evidence becomes fraught with personal and collective risk. Fear of exposure, harassment, and violence is a persistent reality. The following excerpts illustrate how this climate of fear and political targeting shapes the conditions under which research is carried out. They elucidate how this climate can produce silences and demonstrate the strategies people use to resist and continue their work.

For some participants, the risk is not only professional but deeply personal. It is carried in their bodies and daily movements as they navigate hostile social and political terrain. This idea is evoked by Lucas who expressed:

> "*(...) a major challenge I face is fear - fear of exposure...recent reports on violence in Brazil, compiled by the Grupo Gay da Bahia, show that the profession most targeted for murder within the LGBT community is sex work...the second most frequently murdered profession is teaching. So, as a teacher, LGBT activist, and practitioner of urban religions, whenever I conduct training sessions, leave my home, or visit schools, I'm always extremely fearful - fearful of something happening, fearful of exposure - both in terms of my life and my activism. Especially with the internet, we know that many far-right activists and conservative politicians target our work, amplify it, and subject us to a wave of attacks. So, the first challenge is fighting this conservatism, which aims to annihilate our bodies and lives. That's the first fear I carry as a researcher."* (L.D; EGD 4, 28 March 2025)

52 Footnote- Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum.

This testimony illustrates that in this climate, the simple act of producing and sharing evidence is a radical and risky intervention. In this context, Lucas is exposed to multiple, intersecting forms of harm. She is targeted not only as a teacher and an LGBT activist, but also as a researcher who insists on making uncomfortable realities visible. In contexts where silence and erasure are actively enforced by anti-gender movements and political conservatism, generating evidence about violence and inequality becomes an act of defiance. This transforms research into an embodied and deeply relational practise of resistance, where fear of exposure is ever-present. So too is the commitment to break silences that enable harm to persist.

This tension is reiterated by Lilian, who highlights that the threat extends beyond the individual researcher to their students, colleagues, and the wider academic community. Lilian maintained:

> *"I believe the central challenge lies in the issue of exposure. Of course, it's not as extreme as the kind of exposure Lucas described earlier, but when one publishes academic work or enters the political realm where legislators are using this category, which they falsely consider scientific, to block or undermine reproductive rights and public gender policies - this inevitably leads to exposure. And this exposure is not limited to me. I have doctoral and master's students who are researching these topics and are afraid. Afraid because some have already appeared on lists created by far-right groups that target individuals for persecution. These lists create a climate of fear, which serves to block research, suppress knowledge, and silence activism through constant threats."* (L.S; EGD 4, March 28, 2025)

As such, the production of knowledge about gender, faith, and rights is systematically targeted as part of wider anti-gender campaigns. This climate of fear is designed to stifle the evidence base that could hold political and religious actors accountable, and to discourage the next generation of researchers from asking critical questions. Even when researchers persist despite political hostility, they face barriers of chronic underfunding, institutional resistance, and entrenched prejudice. This structural and economic marginalisation that compounds this risk is summed up by Pablo in his post-discussion reflection on the main takeaways of the discussion. Pablo wrote about the:

> *"(...) recognition of economic obstacles, such as the lack of funding for this type of research, as well as the marginalisation of these studies within academia. Religious and racial prejudices contribute to the stigmatisation of the communities and practises under study, making it difficult both to access vulnerable populations and to communicate effectively with them. This context presents a dual challenge: a scarcity of resources and institutional resistance."* (P.M.O; individual feedback report, EDG 4)

These excerpts reveal that evidence-building in Latin America is a deeply political, relational, and contested practise. It is not simply the accumulation of data but the active work of rendering visible hidden violence, amplifying marginalised voices, and bridging scholarly inquiry with grassroots activism. This vital work unfolds amid significant challenges, however. These include institutional barriers, economic marginalisation, and persistent ideological hostility that seek to silence critical knowledge. The commitment to producing and mobilising evidence thus carries profound stakes. These are not only intellectual but also personal and collective.

It is precisely this ever-present risk that can create a persistent sense among researchers and activists that their work is never enough. The fear of being silenced, or of not reaching the audiences who need to hear these truths, weighs heavily. These conditions also reveal the remarkable resilience and courage at the heart of this work. Researching gender, faith, and violence becomes a form of resistance that demands solidarity and innovative strategies for engagement beyond academia. Evidence-building in these contexts is deeply entangled with the realities of power, resistance, and risk. Exposing violence and challenging entrenched inequalities invites hostility and danger, yet it also embodies hope and an unwavering commitment to keep speaking out. Recognising this tension helps us appreciate that what often feels partial or precarious is, in fact, a powerful act of reclaiming voice and pushing back against silence. It also reinforces the importance of embedding self- and collective care[53] into every stage of the research process- including ensuring it is properly resourced and budgeted for.

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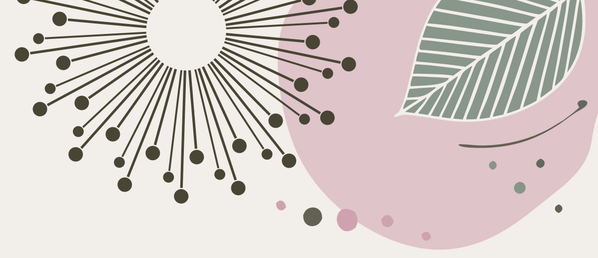
53 https://www.svri.org/we-care-project/



4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Towards Inclusive and Contextual Approaches in Faith-Based GBV Prevention

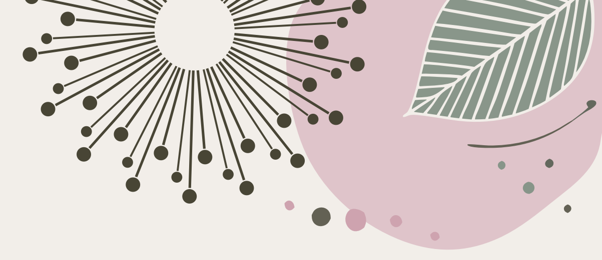
Based on the objectives and research questions that framed the expert group discussions, this report illuminates the intricate realities of preventing gender-based violence within faith communities through three interwoven lenses. First, it examines the perspectives and possibilities of youth agency. Second, it explores the emerging intersections of sexuality, gender, culture, and faith. Third, it considers the fraught but vital role of evidence-building- not as a guaranteed bridge to structural change, but as a means of making lived experience visible in ways that can support transformation, if taken up and acted upon by those with power and influence. It shows that faith-based contexts across Africa and Latin America are neither inherently protective nor wholly harmful when it comes to sexual and gender-based violence. Rather, they are complex moral and cultural landscapes; deeply contested, shaped by histories of power, community authority, and diverse theological interpretations. Within these spaces, the capacity for both violence and transformation sits side by side. What emerges from this analysis is a nuanced understanding of faith not as a fixed category, but as a living, evolving site where harm and healing are negotiated daily.

Participant perspectives on youth illustrate that young people occupy a profoundly paradoxical position. They are simultaneously vulnerable and powerful. On one hand, they are vulnerable to violence and silence within schools, churches, and homes, at the same time either knowingly or unknowingly perpetrating this harm. On the other hand, they hold remarkable potential as critical agents of change. Illustrations demonstrated that youth were forging alternative platforms of influence and redefining the boundaries of faith-based activism. Their actions challenge adultist norms, disrupt purity culture, and demonstrate that prevention work must not only include youth voices but be shaped by their experiences and leadership. How this potential is supported or constrained varies across both African and Latin American contexts.

The emerging issues around SOGIESC and cultural-religious intersections highlight how questions of belonging, identity, and power run through every effort to shift faith communities toward greater justice. These intersections surface in ways that are deeply shaped by broader social structures. Participants described LGBTQI+ experiences of spiritual exclusion, stigma, and invisibility within faith communities. They emphasised the silences that keep queer individuals tethered to harmful spaces in search of family, faith, and meaning. Despite this hostility, however, many continue to claim space within religious traditions, reinterpreting spirituality on their own terms. The persistent presence of queer and trans youth in these faith spaces is itself an act of resistance.

Across African contexts, participants illuminated how dominant ideals of manhood were often sanctioned by spiritual authority and cultural tradition. They demonstrate how these ideals can sustain silence, entitlement, and impunity. These insights illustrated that confronting harmful masculinities is an essential dimension of reimagining the moral, cultural, and spiritual fabric of faith communities. In Latin America, the findings reveal how machismo and anti-gender ideologies intertwine with conservative religious discourses to resist gender justice. In the same thread, what also surfaces, was the vibrant grassroots, artistic, and spiritual practises that challenge these orthodoxies from within and beyond formal institutions. In this way, transforming masculinities and opposing anti-gender ideologies, through dissident feminist and Afro-indigenous theologies, becomes a strategy for interrupting cycles of harm and a profound act of moral renewal that expands what faith communities can stand for and become.

Finally, the insights on evidence-building underscore that what counts as evidence, and how it is gathered, is far from neutral. In African faith settings, participants revealed how cultures of silence, stigma, and spiritual authority often conspire to keep violence hidden. This makes evidence itself a site of moral struggle. Herein, evidence-building emerges as a practise rooted in trust, community accountability, and survivor voice. In Latin America, participants highlighted how evidence becomes a dissident practise. One that confronts institutional complicity, exposes the intersections of gender, power, and faith, and resists anti-gender ideologies that threaten to erase hard-won gains. Whether produced through participatory research, grassroots narrative work, or academic-activist bridges, evidence holds transformative potential when it amplifies survivors' truths and grounds policy in lived realities.



4.2 Regional Differences

Against this backdrop, regional contrasts illuminate how these dynamics play out differently across the African and Latin American contexts. These differences are not incidental. They reflect the enduring legacies of religious hegemony, legal frameworks, cultural norms, and the intimate relationship between faith, identity, and community. These intertwined forces come into sharper focus through four dimensions explored below:

4.2.1 Religious Hegemony and Plurality

In many African contexts, dominant Christian traditions remain strongly intertwined with colonial legacies[54]. This preserves conservative hierarchies where youth who question doctrine may risk exclusion from family and communal life. This makes mobilisation an 'inside job', requiring permission, adult endorsement, and structured support. In contrast, Latin America's religious landscape is more visibly plural and syncretic[55], shaped by liberation and feminist theologies, Afro-diasporic spiritualities, and centuries of grassroots dissent. Here, young people feel freer to exit rigid church spaces, remix faith with cultural roots, and craft rebellious, informal interventions beyond institutional walls.[56]

4.2.2 Legal and Policy Contexts

In much of Africa, the criminalisation of queer identities[57] and the weak enforcement of GBV[58] protections mean youth often rely on tight-knit, formal community structures for survival and change-making. This nurtures a culture of sensitisation and cautious negotiation. In Latin America, more progressive legal frameworks co-exist with backlash from conservative religious-political blocs. Feminist movements such as Ni Una Menos illustrate mass youth mobilisation for gender justice and against femicide, shaping political and religious debates across the region[59]. The strong history of protest, artistic resistance, and human rights mobilisation sustains a youth culture ready to challenge both state and church in the streets, markets, and digital spaces.

4.2.3 Cultural Norms and Generational Hierarchies

African societies are often characterised by deeply hierarchical intergenerational norms. Elders are seen as custodians of morality and youth are expected to remain respectful, making overt resistance a delicate, negotiated act. This sustains the importance of youth groups and adult mentorship within faith settings. However, it is important to recognise regional differences within Africa. In contexts such as South Africa, a legacy of youth-led resistance, such as from anti-apartheid student uprisings to contemporary intersectional movements such as #FeesMustFall[60], has created more visible pathways for dissent. Here, young people have leveraged rights-based discourses and public protest in ways that mirror some of the activist traditions seen in parts of Latin America. However, they continue to navigate the constraints of conservative religious communities. By contrast, in many Latin American contexts, youth draw on a vivid legacy of student movements, feminist protests, and countercultural performance[61].

Many of these use satire, pop culture, and "culture jamming" to subvert machismo, racism, and authoritarian faith structures[62].

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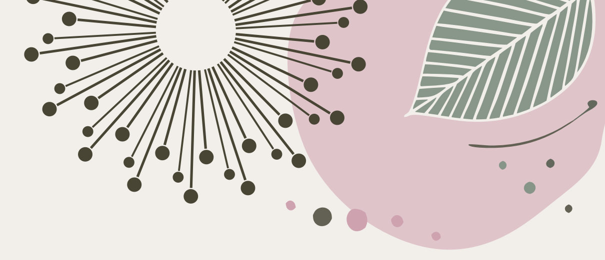

4.2.4 Faith, Identity, and Community Belonging

For many African youth, faith is inextricably bound up with family, community, and belonging, even when it harms. Staying “inside” the church, despite its failings, often feels safer than the total rupture of leaving. Radical listening, subtle reform, and pastoral accompaniment become lifelines for survival[63]. In Latin America, the rise of Afro-diasporic and syncretic faiths enables alternative spiritual homes. Here, leaving the institutional church is not always abandoning faith, but reclaiming it. Through festivals like Festival Latinidades, Afro-descendant women and youth claim cultural and spiritual belonging as political resistance[64]. Resultantly, more apparent is the remixing ritual and memory into collective survival, cultural continuity, and bolder dreams of spiritual freedom.

The findings remind us that the struggle to prevent gender-based violence within faith contexts is inseparable from the wider struggles over identity, belonging, and power that shape how faith is lived every day. They caution us against easy solutions. They urge us to recognise that youth agency is scaffolded or stifled by the social contracts that hold communities together- that evidence cannot be disentangled from the risks of exposure- and that efforts to shift norms must navigate the profound tensions between faith, culture, and the right to live free from harm.

Ultimately, this research calls for an approach that embraces plural pathways, holds contradiction without flattening difference, and invests in the creative, relational, and contextually rooted practises already emerging. If young people are to thrive as agents of justice, if faith communities are to become sites of safety and solidarity, and if evidence is to drive meaningful change, then it must be made and mobilised in ways that honour both the silences that protect and the voices that must break through. In that tension lies the quiet, persistent work of transformation.

4.3 Towards an Ongoing Decolonial Praxis

The Expert Group Discussions (EGDs) offered a rich space for learning, while also revealing some of the challenges involved in creating inclusive and equitable dialogue. As previously stated, this study was guided by a clear commitment to decolonial ways of seeing and doing. This approach shaped not only what was explored, but how knowledge was gathered, held, and shared. By centring local perspectives and lived experiences, the research challenged the idea that faith communities are simply “subjects” of study. Instead, these communities were positioned as co-creators of knowledge, offering insights grounded in their realities. This shift moved authority away from distant ‘experts’ and towards those directly engaged in the struggle to prevent gender-based violence.

Still, power imbalances- both visible and subtle- emerged throughout the process. Language was one of the clearest barriers. English dominated the discussions, making it difficult for non-English speakers to participate fully. Although facilitators encouraged use of the chat function in local languages, these contributions were often overlooked or didn’t enter the main conversation. As a result, many important perspectives remained in the background.

Gender dynamics also played a role. While men were in the minority, they tended to speak less and only when directly invited. This helped create a more reflective and less hierarchical space, but also raised questions: Was their silence a sign of discomfort, uncertainty, or fear of saying the wrong thing? These moments remind us that the topic of gender-based violence is emotionally and socially complex, especially in mixed-gender and faith-informed spaces[65].

The online setting brought further challenges. Reliable internet access, digital literacy, and confidence in virtual

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63 Jones, T., Power, J., Jones, T. W., Pallotta-Chiarolli, M., & Despott, N. (2022). Supporting LGBTQA+ peoples’ recovery from sexual orientation and gender identity and expression change efforts. Australian Psychologist, 57(6), 359–372. https://doi.org/10.1080/00050067.2022.2093623
64 See more on Latinidades webpage: https://www.latinidades.com.br/
65 Tawana, X., & Romm, N. (2023). Reflections on the Value of Mixed Focus Groups with Adult Learner Research Participants: Exploring Gender Disparities and Gendered Relationships. Participatory Educational Research, 10(1), 290-309. https://doi.org/10.17275/per.23.16.10.1

spaces varied widely. Some participants were unable to join or engage meaningfully due to lack of resources or comfort with the format. In many cases, this meant that people from rural areas, grassroots organisations, or with limited formal education were underrepresented, despite having crucial insights to share.

Those from more well-resourced institutions, especially those fluent in the language of international development, were often more visible and confident in shaping discussions . This points to a wider issue: who feels entitled to speak, and whose voices are more likely to be heard in global spaces. The research team made efforts to reduce these barriers, using warm, inclusive communication and avoiding jargon, but inclusion requires more than good intentions. It demands careful attention to the structures that shape who can participate, and how[67 68].

This reflection connects directly to the study's decolonial commitment. In rejecting universal, Eurocentric models of knowledge, the process aimed to elevate plural and locally rooted ways of knowing[69 70]. At the same time, it made visible the structural forces- from rigid religious hierarchies and purity cultures to laws that criminalise difference- that sustain silence and harm[71]. These systems must also be confronted if change is to be meaningful.

This report does not claim to fully achieve decolonisation. Rather, it acknowledges that some elements remain unfinished, and that deeper work is still needed to name and undo the ways colonial power continues to shape faith, gender, and research itself. Local spiritualities must be recognised as valid sources of healing, care, and transformation.

Ultimately, this study is both an offering and a provocation. Preventing gender-based violence in faith contexts requires a fundamental shift in how knowledge is created and shared. It means rejecting extractive research models, recentring marginalised voices, and nurturing solidarities across differences. These solidarities- across geographies, disciplines, and belief systems- are what make epistemic justice possible. In this sense, decolonisation is not a fixed goal, but a shared and ongoing horizon—one that must be reimagined collectively through accountability, learning, and hope.

Link to Policy Recommendations

This report has presented key findings on gender-based violence prevention within faith-based settings, highlighting both challenges and promising approaches. To support stakeholders in translating these insights into effective action, a comprehensive policy brief is attached. This brief offers detailed recommendations tailored for funders, researchers, and policymakers working in the field. It builds on the evidence shared here to promote more inclusive, context-sensitive, and impactful strategies that address the complex dynamics at the intersection of faith and gender justice. Readers are encouraged to consult the policy brief as a practical guide to inform their work and strengthen collaborative efforts toward sustainable change.

67 Korzenevica, M., Lemma, E.F., Grasham, C.F., Anmol, K.T., Esukuku, D.E., Hossain, F., Musyoka, M.M., Nowicki, S., Omia, D.O. and Bukachi, S.A., 2025. Participation, inclusion and reflexivity in multi-step (focus) group discussions. Area, p.e70008.
68 Igwe, P.A., Madichie, N.O. and Rugara, D.G., 2022. Decolonising research approaches towards non-extractive researcCuriel, O., 2022. Constructing Feminist Methodologies from the Perspective of Decolonial Feminism. Decolonial Feminism in Abya Yala: Caribbean, Meso, and South American Contributions and Challenges, pp.43-59.h. Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, 25(4), pp.453-468.
69 Zavala, M., 2013. What do we mean by decolonizing research strategies? Lessons from decolonizing, Indigenous research projects in New Zealand and Latin America.
70 Boer Cueva, A.R., Giri, K., Hamilton, C. and Shepherd, L.J., 2024. A decolonial feminist politics of fieldwork: Centreing community, reflexivity, and loving accountability. International Studies Review, 26(1), p.viae003
71 Almeida Junco, Y., & Guillard Limonta, N. R. (2020). The importance of Black feminism and the theory of intersectionality in analysing the position of afro descendants. International Review of Psychiatry, 32(4), 327–333. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540261.2020.1772732.

ANNEX 1 – Consent Form

Hello! Thank you for considering joining our online experts' discussion group. Please read this consent form carefully before participating:

Project Information

- This discussion group is part of the SVRI CoP Working Group 1 – Evidence Building project.
- We will talk about experiences, challenges, and ideas related to preventing gender-based violence in religious communities and organisations.
- The discussion group is planned to last for approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, but it may be extended if all participants agree to continue the conversation.

Information for Participants

- You received an invitation with details about this discussion group at least 72 hours before the activity.
- By joining the activity, you agree to participate in the group discussion and complete two tasks:

  1. Participate in the discussion group (approximately 1 hour).
  2. After the discussion, write a short report (about 500 words or 1 page) in your preferred language, sharing your thoughts and feelings about the discussion.

- You will receive an incentive of up to 50 USD after completing both tasks, but the final amount may vary due to international transfer fees.
- After completing the discussion group and submitting your report, you will be able to provide your bank account details and any additional information required by the SVRI's model invoice to receive the incentive.

Consent for Recording and Data Usage:

- We will record the discussion to help us write a summary report.
- Your personal information will be kept confidential, and only the project team will have access to it.
- We will use the information from the discussion and your report to improve our understanding and work on evidence building for gender-based violence prevention.

Rights and Withdrawal:

- Taking part in this discussion group is voluntary, and you can stop participating at any time without any consequences.
- If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Chair Rafael Cazarin at cazarinrafael@gmail.com & Co-Chair Sinethemba Makanya makanyasinethemba@gmail.com

By participating in this discussion group, you confirm that you have read and understood this consent form and agree to the terms mentioned above.

Thank you for your valuable contribution!

ANNEX 2 – Email with Ground Rules for Expert Discussion Group Participation

Subject: Discussion Group Rules for Our Online Meeting

Hello Everyone,

We're excited to talk with all of you in our online meeting soon! Let's make sure our conversation is friendly, respectful, and helpful for everyone. Here are some simple rules to follow:

1. Keep Things Private: Don't share personal stories or private information from our talk with others outside our group.

2. Be Nice: Treat everyone with kindness and listen to different ideas. We all have different experiences, so let's learn from each other.

3. Pay Attention: When someone is talking, listen carefully. Wait for your turn to speak, so we don't interrupt each other.

4. Stay on Topic: Our time is limited, so let's focus on the main topic to make the most of it.

5. Share Your Thoughts: Speak from your own experience and feelings. Be honest and open!

6. It's Okay to Pass: If you don't want to answer a question or join an activity, that's okay! Respect others who choose to do the same.

7. Use Kind Words: Avoid saying things that could hurt others' feelings. We want everyone to feel welcome and safe.

8. Give Helpful Feedback: If you want to give feedback, make sure it's friendly and helps others learn and grow.

9. Be Patient with Tech Problems: Sometimes, we might have issues with the internet or other technology. Let's be understanding and work together to solve them.

10. No pressure! Enjoy our conversation and get to know each other's work and ideas.

If you have any questions or concerns, please ask!

We're looking forward to a fun and successful discussion.

Best wishes,

Rafael Cazarin & Sinethemba Makanya
Chair / Co-Chair SVRI Cop WG1

ANNEX 3 – Guidelines for the Facilitation of Expert Discussion Groups

1. Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

- Opening Remarks:
  - o Hi everyone and thank you for being here! I'm [Moderator Name], and I'll be facilitating today's con versation with [Co-Facilitator Name].
  - o We're here to learn from your unique experiences with GBV prevention in faith communities. A big focus will be on how we build evidence: identifying effective strategies, spotting gaps, and sharing good practises. We'll also dive into real-life scenarios to explore how different stakeholders—like policymakers, survivors, funders, and faith leaders—can work together in these efforts.
- Ground Rules:
  - o As per the ground rules sent over email, this is a safe, respectful, and confidential space. Feel free to share openly—there are no right or wrong answers. We're here to learn from your perspectives.
- Participant Introductions (10 minutes)
  - o Let's start with introductions. Please share your name, the work that you do, and what motivated you to focus on religion and GBV.

2. Perspectives on GBV in Faith and Community Settings (15 minutes)

Main Question:

1. Let's begin with your experiences:
   How is GBV viewed or addressed in the religious communities you're familiar with? What role do faith leaders play in shaping these responses?

Probing for Evidence and Stakeholder Involvement:

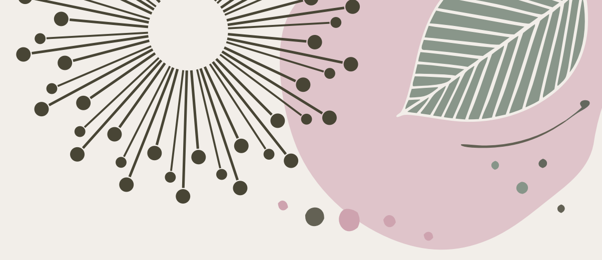
- How do young people are affected or involved in this? And LGBTQ+ individuals, is there any talk about it? Why?
- How evidence is being used to inform how GBV is understood or addressed in your context?
- What role do policymakers, funders, or other external stakeholders play in shaping these conversations?"

3. In your work or experience, what strategies are being used to prevent GBV in faith-based or community settings? What's been effective, and what challenges persist?

Probing for Evidence and Stakeholder Collaboration:

- How do you gather evidence to show what's working or to convince others—like funders or faith leaders—to support GBV prevention initiatives?
- What challenges do you face in coordinating with stakeholders, such as policymakers, NGOs, or faith-based organisations?
- Are there gaps in how evidence is collected or used? What's missing?

4. How can faith communities, especially young people, be better mobilised to prevent GBV and promote gender justice? What role does evidence play in this process?"



Probing for Evidence-Based Strategies and Stakeholder Engagement:

- What kinds of stories, data, or examples resonate most with different stakeholders—like faith leaders, policymakers, or funders?
- How can young people, LGBTIQ people, and survivors be empowered to lead these efforts while ensuring their safety and inclusion?
- Are there strategies to make GBV prevention more inclusive of marginalized groups, like LGBTQ+ individuals or migrants?

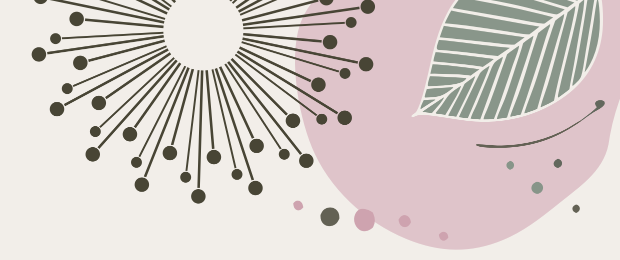
5. Recommendations and Next Steps (10 minutes)

Main Question:

Looking ahead, what do you think needs to happen to strengthen GBV prevention in faith-based settings? How can evidence help make that change happen?

Probing for Actionable Insights:

- What kinds of research, tools, or partnerships are most urgently needed?
- Who should take the lead in building evidence and implementing strategies—faith leaders, NGOs, funders, young people? How can they work together?
- What practical steps could help bridge the gaps between different stakeholders, like policymakers, survivors, and activists?



ANNEX 4: Tabulated Data from Expert Discussion Groups

EGD 1 (Total of 6 participants) - 28th November 2024 - (11am to 12pm SAST)			
Gender	**Name**	**Country**	**Initials for quotes**
Male	Gideon Odiwuor	Kenya	G.O
Male	Luzuko Melapi	South Africa	L.M
Male	Abe Oluwafemi	Nigeria	A.O
Female	Josephine Kanyiva	Kenya	J.K
Female	Juliet Wanja Maina	Kenya	J.W.M
Female	Modupe Adelanwa	Nigeria	M.A

EGD 2 - (Total of 6 participants) 29 November 2024- (11-12pm SAST)			
Gender	**Name**	**Country**	**Initials for quotes**
Female	Betelhem Ketema	Ethiopia	B.K
Prefer not to say	Yangueu Blondel	Cameroon	Y.B
Female	Solange Mbonigaba	South Africa	S.M
Female	Dorine Anyango	Kenya	D.A
Male	Ramesh Poluru	India	R.P
Female	Aisha Aminu Marafa	Nigeria	A.A.M

EGD 3 (Total of 5 participants) 18 March 2025- (10:00am-11:30)			
Gender	**Name**	**Country**	**Initials for quotes**
Female	Sanuum Kabooro	Pakistan	S.K
Female	Veronica Ngum Ndi	Cameroon	V.N.N
Female	Helen Akinyemi	Nigeria	H.A
Male	David Rabour	Kenya	D.R
Male	Mat Lowe	Gambia	M.L

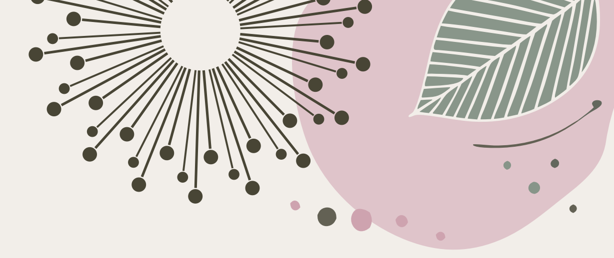
EGD 4 (Total of 4 participants) 28 March 2025 (11am to 12pm (SAST)			
Gender	**Name**	**Country**	**Initials for quotes**
Female (trans)	Lucas Dantas	Brazil	L.D
Female	Veronica Ngum Ndi	Brazil	L.S
Male	Pablo Maximiliano Ojeda	Argentina	P.M.O
Female	Sandra Mazo	Colombia	S.M

EGD 5 (Total of 3 participants) - 22 April 2025 (3pm to 4:30pm SAST)			
Gender	**Name**	**Country**	**Initials for quotes**
Female (trans)	Iasmin dos Santos Rodrigues	Brazil	I.S.R
Female	Olívia Bandeira	Brazil	O.B
Female	Sílvia Badim	Brazil	S.B

ANNEX 5 Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Decolonial Approach	A framework that seeks to dismantle Eurocentric and colonial knowledge systems in favour of local, Indigenous, and lived epistemologies. In the report, this approach underpins both methodology and analysis, emphasizing South-South dialogue and locally rooted cultural and religious perspectives.
Evidence-Building	The process of generating, interpreting, and communicating knowledge to inform GBV policy and practise. In this report, evidence-building includes both conventional data and alternative forms of knowledge, such as testimonies, theology, and ritual practise.
Faith Leaders	Individuals in formal or informal positions of religious authority within a faith community—such as pastors, priests, imams, rabbis, or elders. Their interpretation of doctrine and use of moral authority strongly shape community responses to GBV, either reinforcing silence or enabling transformation.
Faith-Based Actors	A broad category that includes individuals, groups, or networks operating within religious frameworks to influence social and moral behaviour. This encompasses not only clergy and theologians, but also lay leaders, spiritual practitioners, faith-based service providers, and faith-based advocacy groups working to address or respond to GBV.
Faith-Based Organisation (FBO)	An organisation affiliated with a religious tradition or inspired by spiritual values, often engaged in community development, service provision, or advocacy. In this report, FBOs are recognized as both potential allies and gatekeepers in GBV prevention.
Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Violence directed at individuals based on gender identity or expression, encompassing physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm. In faith settings, GBV may be condoned or obscured by theological justifications, patriarchal norms, or institutional silence.
Knowledge	More than formal or academic information, knowledge in this context includes embodied, relational, spiritual, and narrative-based forms of understanding. The report emphasizes diverse ways of knowing, particularly those rooted in lived experience, oral tradition, and theological reflection.
Knowledge Translation	The process of making research findings accessible and meaningful to diverse audiences. This report includes the use of spiritual language, visual methods, and storytelling to bridge secular and faith-based discourses.
Majority World	A term increasingly used to describe countries that constitute the majority of the global population and landmass, often overlapping with those historically colonized. It challenges the Eurocentric bias of terms like “Third World” or “Developing World” by emphasizing demographic and geographic realities.
Moral Authority	The perceived legitimacy and influence religious leaders hold in defining right and wrong. This authority can uphold harmful norms or become a resource for transformation, depending on its use.

Participatory Research	A methodological approach that includes community members—especially those most affected—as co-creators of knowledge. WG1 applied this in its emphasis on mutual learning, open dialogue, and contextual relevance.
Practise	Refers to how individuals and communities enact faith, care, resistance, and transformation in daily life - often through ritual, relationship, or community involvement. It is also a site of learning and knowledge generation.
Practitioner	A practitioner is an individual who applies specialised skills and knowledge in a particular field through hands-on work. Practitioners may gain their expertise through academic study, on-the-job training, or both. Their work often involves solving real-world problems by working directly with people, organisations, or communities.
Radical Listening	A relational practise of deeply attending to others with empathy, especially in contexts of trauma and exclusion. It resists judgment or doctrinal correction and centres presence and care, often used in pastoral responses to LGBTQI+ individuals.
Sacred Text Reinterpretation	The practise of revisiting religious texts to uncover justice-oriented, gender-equitable meanings. A key strategy used by participants to challenge GBV-supportive doctrine and reclaim faith as a source of dignity.
South-South Dialogue	Exchanges across people´s groups and regions in the Global South to share strategies, reflect critically, and build solidarity. WG1 prioritised these interactions to disrupt Northern dominance in GBV and faith research.
Space	Refers not only to physical settings like churches or homes but also to emotional, spiritual, and institutional spaces where GBV is either enacted, perpetuated or contested.
Spiritual Harm	A form of trauma that damages an individual's sense of connection to their faith, community, or the divine. This is often experienced by survivors whose suffering is denied, blamed, or made invisible by religious institutions.
Survivor-Centred	An approach that places the needs, agency, and safety of survivors at the forefront of programmeming and research. In the WG1 context, it also means respecting the spiritual dimensions of healing.
Term	Definition
Theological Resistance	Faith-based critiques of dominant religious norms that reinforce gender hierarchies. This includes feminist, queer, and Black theologies that reinterpret doctrine to affirm bodily autonomy and community accountability.
Transformative Masculinities	A framework that engages men and boys in questioning and reshaping dominant norms of manhood, often rooted in control or emotional suppression. In faith spaces, this involves theological rethinking and peer-to-peer learning grounded in accountability and care.



Keep in touch with us

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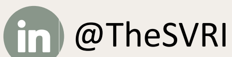 @TheSVRI @thesvri.bsky.social thesvri @TheSVRI

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