

2021 GSRP Methodology

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Sources

For the 2021 GSRP Report, the GSRP analytical team gathered and analyzed data using a mixed methods approach, comprised of both qualitative and quantitative elements. During the reporting period (October 1, 2019, to September 30, 2020), Open Doors World Watch Research monitored religious persecution dynamics in more than 100 countries. GSRP analysts studied data from the 74 countries where persecution is high, very high or extreme.¹ This report primarily presents analysis of the top 50 countries on Open Doors’ 2021 World Watch List. However, some findings additionally draw from countries that rank 51 – 74 in the pool of countries monitored by Open Doors, particularly in describing regional trends.

The data GSRP specialists use comes from Open Doors’ field staff and field contributors, external experts and WWR persecution analysts. As a part of the data collection process, regionally based experts collected qualitative data from trauma specialists, church leaders, focus groups and experts. Additionally, the report offers information based on interviews with Christian men and women who have experienced violence for their faith.

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

¹ Complete WWL Methodology, <<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Complete-WWL-Methodology-October-2020-FINAL.pdf>>, p.106.

GSRP specialists consolidated this research with desk research, drawing from publications by the media, UN and governmental institutions and NGOs.

Changes in WWL top 50 countries

In the study of gender-specific religious persecution, the sample of 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian is adjusted yearly based upon World Watch Research persecution scores. In 2021, it includes Mexico, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique and Comoros, whereas the 2020 WWL and correlated GSRP Report included the Russian Federation, United Arab Emirates, Niger and Sri Lanka.

Method

The GSRP analytical team analyzed the resulting data to reveal how often Christian men and women experience the various Pressure Points, including qualitative descriptions of these incidents in specific contexts. Qualitative input was filtered through a framework of 30 Pressure Points. This framework has been refined over the last four years of conducting the research and publishing the GSRP Report. The statistics allow researchers to observe and track overall trends in the patterns and dynamics of global religious persecution and discrimination.

‘Pressure Point’ is the term used to refer to both the pressures and violence faced in the course of religious persecution. In WWL methodology, “pressure” usually denotes non-violent persecution experienced in all areas of a Christian’s life and “violence” is defined as “the deprivation of physical freedom or as serious bodily or mental harm to Christians or serious damage to their property” (and related incidents), which can potentially occur in all areas of life.² Pressure Points are areas of particular sensitivity or vulnerability for men and women within a religious community. Researchers borrowed the term from the martial arts context, where a Pressure Point is a “point that, when pressure is applied, produces crippling pain.” They are “used to exploit a weakness or vulnerability in the human body to gain an advantage over an opponent.”³ These Pressure Point categories provide a means to establish the frequency with which a particular form of pressure is associated with each gender.

GSRP researchers also captured per tactic, via qualitative descriptions, variations across countries in how this pressure is brought to bear in different contexts. Where the information was available, the researcher captured the frequency at which the Pressure Point was occurring, which age group was primarily affected, the religious background of victims, wider contextual information and severity level.

The scale used to measure frequency was:

Frequency level	Description
Isolated incident	A single case
Several incidents	2-10 cases
Moderately widespread	11-50 cases

² For further discussion concerning this distinction, see: Complete WWL Methodology, <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Complete-WWL-Methodology-October-2020-FINAL.pdf>, pp.20-29.

³ *Martial Arts Pressure Points: Medium Range*, John Gahan, LCGI, 2017 < <https://www.scribd.com/book/355164891/Martial-Arts-Pressure-Points-Medium-Range> > [Accessed 11 Feb 2021].

Widespread	50+ cases (and in several areas across the country)
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The scale used to measure severity was:

Severity level	Description	Example of Pressure Point in this severity level
Low	Low impact to daily life	Enforced religious dress code.
Moderate	Medium impact on daily life, causing moderate mental harm	Discrimination/harassment via education
Severe	Non-fatal, but significant physical or mental harm	Violence – physical
Very severe	Fatal to life, or extremely traumatic	Violence – death

Limitations

By nature, qualitative research is limited, and respondents' open-ended feedback allows for subjectivity that can limit the quality of the response and ease with which it can be analyzed. Further, limitations on the collection of gender-specific information stem from stigma and feelings of shame surrounding gender-based violence. For many Christian men and Christian women, reporting sexual violence is unspeakably difficult or dangerous. Not only is speaking out often too risky for survivors, but interviews can also present grave dangers to their mental health, re-traumatizing victims.

In particular, the use of the frequency and severity scale involved subjective interpretation. While questionnaire correspondents often gave a numerical estimate for forms of persecution, these were not given for every answer (and notably, not for the questions that specifically related to gender). In particular, the use of the frequency and severity scale involved subjective interpretation. While questionnaire correspondents often gave a numerical estimate for forms of persecution, these were not given for every answer (and notably, not for the questions that specifically related to gender). Questionnaire contributors employed various terms to describe frequency, however it is recognised that their interpretation of these terms may have varied from the scale above. As such, the resulting data is not presented in detail, instead including the general trends, and the scale will be refined for future use.

Conversely, increased awareness of GSRP dynamics among those who contribute information to the questionnaires (due to training sessions and the publication of these reports over the past four years) may drive an increase in reporting of related issues. As such, identified rises in the prevalence of Pressure Points may, in part, reflect increased reporting, rather than an increase in actual cases.

Definitions

a) Persecution

There is no international, legal definition of persecution. Situations can be defined as persecution, where persons experience the denial of the rights listed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, WWL methodology has opted for a theological rather than a sociological

definition, “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians.” This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.⁴

b) Gender equality

This term is used according to the definition provided by UN Women, namely, “Equality between women and men (gender equality): refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.”⁵

c) Pressure Point definitions

The following table provides definitions and simplified definitions for the thirty Pressure Points (two with sub-categories) that are identified and analyzed in Open Doors’ Gender-specific persecution report.

Pressure Point	Definition
Abduction	The act of making a person go somewhere with you, especially using threats of violence. ⁶
Denied access to Christian religious materials	The denial of access to Christian religious material, such as Bibles, study notes and Christian symbols.
Denied access to social community/networks	The denial of access to social community or networks.
Denied citizenship	The intentional act of denying or removing citizenship from nationals.
Denied communal resources	The intentional act of denying or removing access to communal resources, such as communal organizations, buildings or other public goods, services or programs
Denied custody of children	The act of denying a person of the legal and/or physical custody of their child/children, or the right to have a relationship or direct contact with their child/children.
Denied food or water	The act of deliberately denying another person of food or water.
Denied inheritance or possessions	Denying a person of their inheritance rights or their possessions.
Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse	The act of denying a person the legal right to marry a Christian spouse.

⁴ Complete WWL Methodology, <<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Complete-WWL-Methodology-October-2020-FINAL.pdf>>, p.7.

⁵ UN Women, *Concepts and Definitions* <<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>> [Accessed 22 Feb 2021]

⁶ “Abduction”, Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/abduction>

Denied/restricted healthcare	Discrimination affecting users of health care services. It serves as a barrier to accessing health services, affects the quality of health services provided, and reinforces exclusion from society for both individuals and groups. ⁷
Discrimination/harassment via education	Distinguishing, excluding or limiting access to education. Specifically, by: a) depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level; (b) limiting any person or group of persons to education of an inferior standard; (c) establishing or maintaining separate educational systems or institutions for persons or groups of persons; or (d) by inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are incompatible with human dignity. ⁸
Economic harassment via business/job/work access	Targeting or boycotting a business to its economic disadvantage, or distinguishing, excluding or limiting a person's access to work or jobs due to their Christian faith. Specifically, by: a) preventing Christians from obtaining or retaining gainful employment; (b) limiting any person or group of persons to working conditions of an inferior standard; (c) by inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are incompatible with human dignity; or d) forced labor, including subtle means such as accumulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities, but not extending to slavery. ⁹
Economic harassment via fines	The act of disadvantaging another person through inappropriately applied fines.
Enforced religious dress code	The act of forcing, or applying significant pressure on someone, to wear religious clothing.
False charges	Legal charges against a person that are unproven and untrue, made in the spirit of deliberateness or deceit.
Forced divorce	The act of terminating a marriage or marital union without the consent of the spouse
Forced marriage	A marriage in which one party has not personally expressed their full, free and informed consent to the union. ¹⁰ This includes child marriage, or early marriage, where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. It also includes unannounced and disadvantageous polygamous marriage with the intent to subjugate for religious reasons.
Forced out of home – expulsion	The act of suddenly and forcibly expelling a person from the residence they have been living in, or applying such pressure that they feel they have no freedom to stay.
Forced to flee town/country	The act of suddenly and forcibly expelling a person from the town/country they have been living in, or applying such pressure that they feel that they have no choice to stay.

⁷ Adapted from the Joint United Nations statement on ending discrimination in health care settings, 2017, retrieved from:

<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-06-2017-joint-united-nations-statement-on-ending-discrimination-in-health-care-settings>

⁸ Adapted from Article 1 of the Convention against Discrimination in Education, UNESCO, 1960

⁹ Adapted from International Labor Organization. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/news/WCMS_237569/lang--en/index.html

¹⁰ Adapted from OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/ChildMarriage.aspx>

Incarceration by family/house arrest	The obligation upon an individual that she/he be forbidden to leave his or her place of residence except for limited, specified circumstances. ¹¹
Imprisonment by government	The act of being imprisoned in a prison, or place used as a prison, by a government body or agent.
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience	Serving in the military forces of a country against a person's conscience, being ill-treated (denied Freedom of Religious Belief) in the service of the military, or being forced to carry out specific acts in military service that are against a person's conscience.
Targeted seduction	The act of seducing someone (here with a sexual connotation) with the intent purpose of leading them away from their Christian faith.
Trafficking A) Sexual exploitation not explicitly mentioned B) Sexual exploitation explicitly mentioned.	The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploiting a person. ¹²
Travel bans/restrictions on movement	Preventing a person from travelling somewhere, or restricting their movement against their will.
Violence – death	The cause of loss of life.
Violence – physical (including torture)	Bodily harm inflicted by one person on another person. Researchers limit the designation of this Pressure Point to instances which clearly indicate instances of physical harm (such as beatings/ acts of torture) but which do not result in death. Instances of sexual violence are excluded. ¹³
Violence – psychological	Any intentional conduct that seriously impairs another person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats. ¹⁴
Violence – sexual A) Rape not explicitly mentioned B) Rape explicitly mentioned	Any sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationships to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. ¹⁵
Violence – verbal (including harassment and insults)	Harsh and insulting language directed at a person, intended to cause them emotional harm.

¹¹ Adapted from Duhaime. Retrieved from: <http://www.duhaime.org/LegalDictionary/H/HouseArrest.aspx>

¹² Adapted from Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons

¹³ Adapted from the Law Dictionary. Retrieved from <https://thelawdictionary.org/physical-violence/>

¹⁴ Psychological violence", European Institute for Gender Equality, <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1334>

¹⁵ Adapted from the World Health Organization. Retrieved from:

https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap6.pdf

Changes in 2021 regarding the methodology

In 2020 additional research resources were committed to broaden the scope of WWL data, resulting in more extensive data analysis. This was carried through to 2021. Few changes were made to the methodology, although two Pressure Points were removed from the Pressure Point list as were recorded very rarely in the previous data set. These were: ‘Incarceration in mental asylum’ and ‘Forced Abortion.’ The table below additionally captures previous changes made in the past two years of research.

Pressure Point (PP) changes	
PP removed in last two reporting years	PP added/replaced
Incarceration in mental asylum (removed in 2021)	No replacement. Too few incidents.
Forced abortion (removed in 2021)	No replacement. Too few incidents.
Forced labor or slavery (removed in 2020)	Counted among ‘trafficking’
Sexual violence and rape as separate categories (removed in 2020)	Combined category of ‘Violence – sexual’
Violence – domestic (removed in 2020)	No replacement. Now recorded under other types of violence
Shaming and shunning (removed in 2020)	Denied access to social community/network
Forced conversion (removed in 2020)	No longer categorized as a PP, but as a goal of persecution
Forced marriage – targeted seduction (Removed in 2020)	‘Targeted seduction’ and ‘Forced marriage’ separated
Forced marriage – polygamy (Removed in 2020)	Counted among ‘Forced marriage’