

NIGERIA:

Compound structural vulnerabilities facing Christian women under pressure for their faith

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List of acronyms and abbreviations used

FGM – Female Genital Mutilation
 GBV – Gender-based violence
 HIV/AIDS - Human immunodeficiency virus/
 Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
 IDP – Internally displaced person

NCSAN - Nigerian Conflict Security Analysis Network
 NGO- Non-Governmental Organization
 STDs -Sexually transmitted diseases
 VVF - Vesico-vaginal/rectovaginal fistula

Preface to in-depth series: Rationale and structure

Why a special in-depth country series on Women and Persecution dynamics?

Throughout history, women have been targeted in order to destroy whole societies. The means by which they are under pressure for their faith can become such a normalized part of culture and daily discrimination that they may be overlooked as an effective method of slowly, invisibly and sometimes legally undermining an entire community. Whether attacks are through structural inequalities or outright violence, as documented in Open Doors' World Watch List 2019,¹ they almost always occur in a wider context of violence against women and the inferior status of women: The lower the status of women in a society, the worse will be the violence against women in persecuted groups.

Dr Mariz Tadros provides a recent example of these intersecting vulnerabilities in Iraq:

the suffering of women from religious minorities has reached proportions greater than that of the general female population on account of their systematic targeting. It is distinct from the assault on Iraqi women on account of the politics of the intersection of gender with religious identity....

We may choose to see the sexual enslavement of women belonging to religious minorities, whether sold as slaves, detained for ISIS fighters' sexual exploitation, or in forced marriages as part of a broader spectrum of gender based violence.

True, it is. But it also needs to be seen as targeted genocide.²

While each of the reports in this series focuses on the situation of Christian women, this targeting is not unique to them: It happens to women in almost every religious minority, from Hindus and Ahmadis in Pakistan and Yazidi women under Islamic State, to Muslim women in the West. It is also not to say that all attacks or discrimination against minority Christian women are persecutory: Motives are complex and difficult to prove. However, at the core of religious persecution lies the unequal power relationship between people of different faiths: At the core of violence against women lies the unequal power relationship between men and women. For someone who belongs to two vulnerable groups (a minority religion and female), the compounded vulnerabilities can make life doubly difficult, even deadly.

Global patterns exist in how women are persecuted, primarily focused on their differences to men and what they represent in their community and family. These attacks utilize culturally-enshrined notions of inferiority, purity and honor. Often, they are not reported or measured as persecution, especially if they are viewed as normal within the culture or not seen as 'typical' persecution. Underpinning them are deep-rooted societal assumptions regarding women's

¹ Open Doors World Watch List 2019 documentation is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/WWL-2019-Compilation-of-main-documents-excluding-country-dossiers-WWR-1.pdf> (password: freedom).

² Tadros, Mariz. "International Women's Day: Solidarity & Iraqi Religious Minority Women." *Institute of Development Studies*, 8 Mar. 2015, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20180328132609/https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinion/international-women-s-day-solidarity-and-iraqi-religious-minority-women>.

identity and nature: Crimes committed against women are more likely to engender shame and ostracism than those committed against men, and attackers rely upon this community response. Men are not blamed for being tortured: If a woman is raped she is far more likely to be blamed by both men and other women. Her whole family may be dishonored and fractured by her perceived loss of purity. Her family or community (even her church) may indirectly add to the persecution and trauma she has suffered through their response to her. Shame, coupled with lack of voice and resources, stops many women from reporting violence, discrimination or persecution, including to (largely male) church leaders, so even the Church may not hear about persecution which affects women.

Spheres of pressure³

The reports are split into three sections reflecting the domestic, societal and state spheres. However, the complex and interwoven nature of these spheres means that no section or sub-section can be seen outside the context of the others. The complexity will be mapped for each country in a diagram of pressures.

Categories of pressure

The pressures faced by women fall into three broad categories, which are integrated into each of the sections mentioned above:

1. *The direct targeting of Christian women for persecution.* These are not intended by aggressors purely as an attack on an individual woman, but on the men who are supposed to protect her, on the children who rely on her, and on the community of which she is an inextricable part.
2. *A) The areas in which all women within a culture face challenges,* but in which Christian women are particularly vulnerable. Many women may face sexual violence, but Christian converts are more likely to face it. Women's voices may not be listened to in court: Christian women's particularly not, creating complete impunity for attackers. These are areas in which persecution is a matter of the differential between the experience of all women and that of Christian women.

B) The areas in which Christians are discriminated against, but which have a disproportionate effect on women (and thus the whole family). Women disproportionately use public systems and community resources: It is women who collect water and food and access medical services either for their children, or, much more than men (and in different ways to men) for themselves during their reproductive years.
3. *The harmful factors all/many women in a country face,* and in which the Church is, sadly, sometimes complicit, but which cannot be seen as persecutory factors in and of themselves

³ Please note that the term "pressure" in this paper is used in a broader sense than in standard WWL methodology and includes violent acts targeting women. In WWL methodology, "pressure" denotes non-violent persecution experienced in all areas of a Christian's life (Private, Family, Community, National and Church 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. For further discussion concerning this distinction, see: WWL Methodology, updated November 2017, pp. 17-21, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/WWL-2018-Methodology-LONG-VERSION-November-2017.pdf> (password: freedom).

(such as child marriage or lack of education). They do, however, create compounded disadvantages which impact women's ability to thrive, as outlined in *Gendered Persecution: World Watch List 2018 Analysis and Implications*.⁴ Exposing half (or more than half, given global statistics) the members of a church to these difficulties means that when persecution does come, the whole Body is less resilient. These issues may not appear to be related to persecution, but they are pressure points which weaken the whole Church. Persecution reinforces the social, cultural and institutional discrimination that women face in their daily lives and vice versa.

The reports focus on the intersecting vulnerabilities of women, however this is not to present them as 'natural victims' nor to reinforce ideas of the inevitability of violence against them. Nor is it to deny their agency – either in their ability to survive, find means to overcome persecution and be contributing members of their churches, or their complicity in perpetuating the hardships suffered by other women. Recognition and reinforcement of women's agency and resilience is key to healing and overcoming the challenges they face.

The distinct nature of how women are put under pressure for their faith ought not to be fatalistically accepted or ignored as inevitable or culturally neutral: Its strategic nature, and the incremental difference between *how* it happens to Christian as opposed to non-Christian women, needs to be taken into account if the whole Church is to tackle the persecution and daily discriminations which undermine women and, by extension, the Church.

Please note:

- 1) The symbol * indicates that names are hidden or changed for the purposes of security.
- 2) WWL is the abbreviation for the annually published Open Doors World Watch List.

⁴ Fisher, Helene and Miller, Elizabeth. "Gendered persecution: World Watch List 2018 Analysis and Implications." *World Watch Monitor*, 2018, available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Gendered-persecution-WWL-2018-analysis-and-implications.pdf>.

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1. Introduction: The situation in Nigeria

Women in Nigeria have benefited in recent decades from growing government and NGO awareness of their daily hardships. However, they continue to face exploitation, marginalization and daily hardships in relation their gender, and a second minority status only compounds this. In areas of Nigeria where Christian women are under pressure for their faith, they face the dual disadvantage of membership of two pressured groups. The implications of Sharia law implemented in 12 northern states, as well as inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions and outright violence all play their part. Christian women are caught at the intersection between these and the wider societal inequalities based upon their gender.

In this report, the compound structural vulnerabilities facing Christian women are highlighted. It shows how social vulnerabilities and the subordinate position of women at home and in wider society are frequently exploited and provide avenues for religious persecution. By studying these vulnerabilities carefully, the primary areas become visible that need to be tackled, in order to build the resilience of Christian women in particular, and the Christian community in general.

The report concentrates predominantly on the north(eastern) and Middle Belt regions where Christians face most pressure and persecution because of their faith. Although the focus of this report is on Christian women and their communities, no denial or under-estimation is intended of the hardships suffered by non-Christian women and communities who are heavily impacted by the above-mentioned challenges in the country.

1.1 Broader context for Christians in Nigeria⁵

With a population size of 195,875,000,⁶ Nigeria is the largest on the African continent and notably diverse with about 200 ethnicities and 500 languages. It is one of the key players in worldwide oil production and is familiar across Africa for its sizable media market.

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing Sharia states and Boko Haram hotbeds (Source: Open Doors)
Note: In Yobe, Borno and Gombe states, Sharia applies in personal status issues only; in the other northern states Sharia is fully implemented, also in criminal law.



⁵ "Nigeria Country Dossier: January 2019" World Watch Research, 2019, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/country-dossiers/> (password: freedom).

⁶ Estimate as published by: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018).

At the same time, Nigeria is associated with corruption, ethno-religious fanaticism, extreme poverty and was ranked third on the Global Terrorism Index of 2018.⁷

Ethnicity and religion coincide to a large extent. In the north of the country, Muslim Hausa-Fulani make up the vast majority, whereas the Igbo people in the southeast are predominantly Christian; among the Yoruba in the southwest both Christian and Islamic faiths are present. Additionally, there are many indigenous beliefs practiced in several parts of the country. Figure 1 shows the religious division and Table 1 the number of Christians in the country, see [Appendix B](#) (table 3) for the religious division for each state.

Region	Population 2019	Christians #	Christians %	Muslims #	Muslims %	Ethno religionists #	Ethno religionists %
Abuja	2.012.000	804.800	40,00%				
North	76.390.000	11.398.600	14,92%	60.778.120	79,56%	4.213.280	5,52%
Middle Belt	29.312.000	14.645.310	49,96%				
South	93.249.000	65.827.840	70,59%				

*Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019)
The available data does not allow to give the details for Muslims, Ethno-religionists and Agnostics in the Middle-Belt and South
Lagos is the only state where Agnostics are mentioned (no Ethno-religionists)*

Table 1: Religious division per region (see detailed table per state in [Appendix B](#), table 3)

In theory, there is freedom of religion in Nigeria, as stated in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria ([Chapter 4](#)). Nevertheless, over the past years, Nigeria has been in the top 15 countries that face most Christian persecution worldwide ([Table 2](#)) and is ranked 12th on the World Watch List of 2019.⁸

Year	WWL Points	WWL Position
2019	80	12
2018	77	14
2017	78	12
2016	78	12
2015	78	10
2014	70	14

Table 2: Open Doors World Watch List scores and global ranking of Nigeria, 2014-2019

Discrimination, persecution and pressure from Muslim communities/families and religious leaders are an everyday reality for many Christians, especially converts from Islam to Christianity, in the north(east) of the country. Especially in the twelve northern states that adopted Sharia law in 1999/2000, Christians face severe persecution because of their faith. Despite the claim that Sharia law would only be applicable for Muslims, it is often illegally applied to entire populations in the states. As a result, Christians in those regions are heavily impacted by Islam and Sharia law in their daily lives.⁹ Christians who convert from Islam face the highest

⁷ World Watch Research, 2019; Brookings. (2018, 6 19). *The start of a new poverty narrative*. Retrieved from Brookings, [accessed 12-4-2019]; *World Poverty Clock*. (2018, 12). Retrieved from World Poverty Clock, [accessed 12-4-2019]; Vanguard. (2019, 2 16). *91 million Nigerians now live in extreme poverty – World Poverty Clock*. Retrieved from Vanguard, [accessed 12-4-2019]; Vision of Humanity and Institute for Economics and Peace. (2018). *World Map*. Retrieved from Global Terrorist Index, [accessed 12-4-2019].

⁸ Based on the data collected between 1 November 2017 and 31 October 2018

⁹ Note: in Yobe, Borno and Gombe state, Sharia applies in personal status issues only, in the other northern states, Sharia is fully implemented, also in the Criminal Law

risk of persecution, since conversion from Islam is considered illegal by Sharia law and the risk of being killed by family or community members is real.¹⁰ In addition, Boko Haram, a radical Islamic group, has been a significant force in Christian persecution since 2009 and is responsible for many attacks on Christians and churches in the north(east).

Moreover, tensions in the Middle Belt region between Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsmen and Christian farmers have led to extreme levels of violence. Data shows that Christians are the primary targets and victims of the attacks, whereas the Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsmen are the main perpetrators.¹¹ The raids on Christian farmer communities are becoming more frequent and result in killings, forced displacement, land grabbing and destruction of properties. These atrocities are overshadowed by Boko Haram activities in the media and are often portrayed as being simply a “clash between farmers and herders.”¹² Often the motives behind the tensions are claimed to be based on migration, as well as social and environmental justice, while the religious component of the conflict is ignored or denied. However, the Nigerian Conflict Security Analysis Network (NCSAN) concludes that the conflict in the Middle Belt region is “inspired by Islamic religious propaganda to dominate Christian territories and bring them under the *darul Islam* (house of Islam).”¹³ It is in this context that Dembele claims that there are serious signs of ethnic cleansing in this region.^{14 15}

1.2 The situation of women in Nigeria

In general, across the country, the value of a woman's life lies in marriage and bearing her husband children, sons in particular. Women fall under the authority of their male relatives or husband and have little to say in the domestic sphere or wider community. The subordination of females is meant to maintain stability in the domestic and, consequently, societal spheres of life.¹⁶

Especially in Muslim dominated northern (Sharia) states that are regulated according to an Islamic, females have less access to education, employment, and healthcare, as well as they have

Barkindo, A., Gudaku, B., & Wesley, C. (2013). *Our Bodies, Their Battleground: Boko Haram and Gender-Based Violence against Christian Women and Children in North-Eastern Nigeria since 1999*. Netherlands: World Watch Research Unit of Open Doors International.

¹⁰ Gilbert, 2015; World Watch Research, 2019; Questionnaire, 2019, 1.1 and 4.1; Interview 4

¹¹ See reports of World Watch Research on the states Southern Kaduna, Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa and the reports ‘*Ethnic cleansing in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria*’ and ‘*Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies: Non-Boko Haram violence against Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria*’ available at Open Doors Analytical, Focus Nigeria: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>(password: freedom).

¹² World Watch Research, 2019; Bewarang, S. (2018, 6 29). *Statement by church leaders in Plateau State*; Dembele, Y. (2015). *Ethnic cleansing in the Middle-Belt Region of Nigeria*. World Watch Research.

¹³ NCSAN. (2015). *Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies: Non-Boko Haram violence against Christians in the Middle-Belt region of Nigeria*. World Watch Research, p. 4.

¹⁴ Dembele, Y. (2015). *Ethnic cleansing in the Middle-Belt Region of Nigeria*. World Watch Research.

¹⁵ The tensions between Christian farmers and Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsmen are concentrated in the so-called Middle Belt region (officially part of northern Nigeria) and Boko Haram is predominantly causing unrest in the northeast. However, distinctions between members of the two groups are sometimes hard to make and make little difference in the eyes of the population since both groups are destructive in their methods. The northern state of Zamfara (the first state to introduce Sharia law in 1999) has also been heavily under attack by Muslim Fulani herdsmen causing suffering also among the Muslim population (Dr. S. D. Dali, 2019, CCEPI research team). Furthermore, attacks and abductions have been reported in southern Nigeria as well, indicating that the pressure on Christian communities is likely to spread further southwards (Interview 9).

¹⁶ Barkindo, Gudaku, Wesley, 2013.

limited rights in comparison to men, for they are "not considered as of equal value as men."¹⁷ As a result, Nigerian women often find themselves in inferior and difficult positions.

Figure 2 highlights some of the issues faced by women in the domestic, societal/cultural, and the state sphere of Nigeria. In areas where Christians are the minority or under pressure for their faith, Christian women, including female converts from Muslim families/communities, face the double impact of gender and faith.

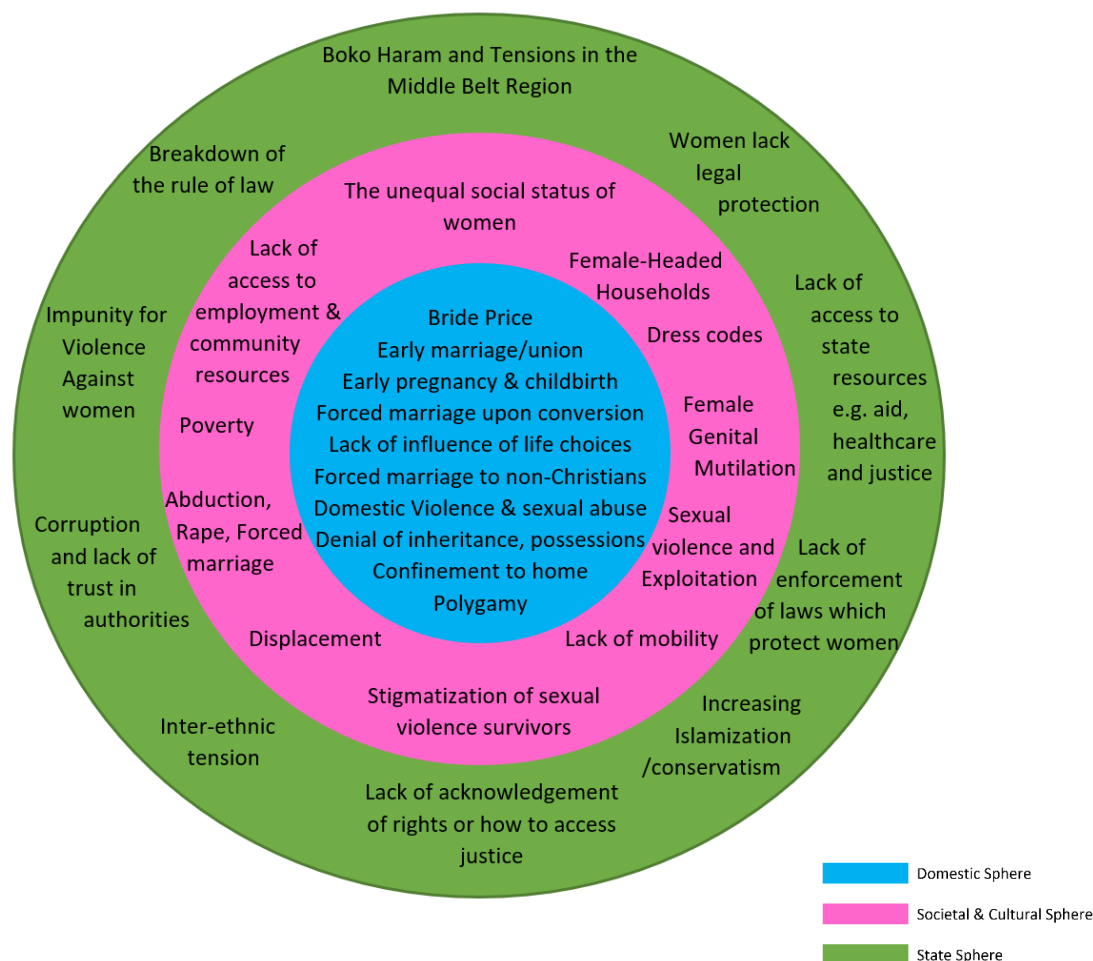


Figure 2: Areas of pressure faced by Nigerian women in general and Christian women in particular

This study was predominantly based on intensive desk research and documentary/literature analysis of numerous internal and external sources [databanks, reports, (peer-reviewed/academic) articles and (World Watch Monitor) news articles]. The collection of data was complemented with interviews with experts on religious persecution, gender and/or the West-African/Nigerian context ([Appendix A](#)). Also, World Watch Research's annual WWL-Questionnaire and country dossier on Nigeria was consulted for more insights on gender-specific persecution dynamics in the Nigerian context. In addition, data was collected and cross-checked during the sessions on gender-specific persecution at the 2019 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63) of the United Nations in New York, USA and the Religious Liberty Partnership and Gender and Religious Freedom conferences in Abuja, Nigeria [*participatory observation*,

¹⁷ Questionnaire, 2019, 7.9; Orisaremi, T., & Alubo, O. (2012). Gender and the reproductive rights of Tarok women in central Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 16(1), 83-96; Gilbert, 2015.

attending presentations, informal talks and interviews]. The report was proof-read by the research team [Dr. R.S. Dali, Dr. S. Dali, Dr. J. North, Dr. Kathryn Jacobsen, Ms. P. Krabacher, Dr. N. Hosler] of the Centre for Caring, Empowerment and Peace Initiatives (CCEPI), to whom we express our deep gratitude.¹⁸

2. The domestic sphere

Marriage and childbearing culturally determine the status of Nigerian women and are of great importance for their position in and outside the domestic sphere.¹⁹ Many girls are forced to grow up quickly because they are married off at a very young age (as discussed below). This is particularly challenging when linked with domestic violence, which severely undermines the security of the domestic sphere for many women across all religious groups and ethnicities.²⁰ Hardships and vulnerabilities for Christian women in the domestic sphere negatively impact their ability to practice their faith. Furthermore, it counteracts individual and corporate resilience when facing persecution pressures. Since it is widely accepted that families are a core part of church life, tensions at household level risk weakening the broader Christian community. Further, for women who convert to Christianity from their family's faith, the domestic sphere can become a hidden arena of religious persecution.

2.1 Marriage

The pressure to get married weighs heavily on many young Nigerian women.²¹ This is reflected in data that shows that 44% of Nigeria's female population marry before their 18th birthday and 18% before they reach the age of 15,²² which makes Nigeria one of the countries with the most child brides worldwide in absolute numbers.²³ Christian women and families are not immune to societal expectations concerning marriage, nor to the social stigma attached to remaining unmarried or childless.²⁴ Hence, although the Church opposes child marriage, early marriage is not uncommon among Christian girls.

Within Christian families and communities, early marriage can be seen as a way to keep a girl safe and pure.²⁵ Girls can be understood to disgrace their families when having sexual relations or becoming pregnant before marriage. In response, she is often expected to marry the father of the child to protect her family from shame and avoid stigma.²⁶ However, this is an open invitation for Christian girls to be impregnated by Muslim men against their will.²⁷ This is

¹⁸ CCEPI is a humanitarian organization working among the most vulnerable victims of [Boko Haram] violence in northeast.

¹⁹ Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012; Fapohunda, B. M., & Orobato, N. (2013). When women deliver with no one present in Nigeria: who, what, where and so what? *PLoS one*, 8(7), e69569, 1-12; Chinwuba, 2015; Interview 1; Girls Not Brides, 2018; Chika, 2012; Arthur, et al., 2018.

²⁰ David Young (US Embassy), 29-0-2019, "Religious Freedom in Nigeria and supportive actions" at the Gender and Religious Freedom Conference in Abuja.

²¹ Interview 8.

²² Girls Not Brides. (2018). *Nigeria*.

²³ Walker, J. (2013). *Mapping Early Marriage in West Africa: A scan of trends, interventions, what works, best practices and the way forward*. Nassarawa, Nigeria: Ford Foundation.

²⁴ Interview 8.

²⁵ Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012; Chinwuba, 2015; Interview 1.

²⁶ Interview 8.

²⁷ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013.

especially because any resulting children are understood to belong to their father and therefore automatically to the Muslim community.²⁸

Poverty and a lack of (quality) education ([Section 4.2](#)) are also known factors both contributing to and resulting from child marriage.²⁹ Low-income Christian families have more incentive to arrange marriage for their daughters with wealthy (older) men, as it reduces the financial burden on the family and ensures her financial care by another family.³⁰ However, this financial need can be exploited by wealthier Muslim families vis-à-vis destitute Christian families by the promise of a better life, a high bride price or gifts to the parents.³¹ As such, marriage can be used as a form of “acquisition” of Christian girls in Muslim communities who are either abducted for or lured into marriage by Muslim men.³² Moreover, abduction and forced marriage are frequently used tactics of Boko Haram and Muslim Fulani Herdsmen ([Section 3.3](#)) that depletes Christian communities of their women.³³

Early marriage can have far-reaching negative consequences for Christian girls, especially in combination with adolescent pregnancies,³⁴ which poses a severe threat to their own and babies’ health ([Section 4.1](#)).³⁵ An unequal power-balance between young brides and their husbands leaves them with limited negotiation power and independence and exposes them to domestic violence ([Section 2.3](#)).³⁶ This unequal power-balance can also be a weak-point within the Christian community and is all the more critical when the church encounters persecution and is under severe pressure.

Despite the devastating impact it can have on their health and mental well-being, there is a lack of legal protection for young girls at risk of early marriage. There is no mention of a minimum age in the Nigerian Constitution³⁷ and an effort to set the minimum age of marriage at 18 by introducing the Child Rights Act of 2003, turned out to be ineffective in at least ten Northern states that have not adopted the act, meaning that this Act is not legally binding in these states.³⁸ Child marriage from the age of 9 is commonplace, condoned and legitimized under Sharia in Islam dominated northern parts of the country. This places young female converts to Christianity

²⁸ Interview 8.

²⁹ Walker, 2013; Girls Not Brides. (2018). *Nigeria*.

³⁰ Interview 1.

³¹ Interviews 8 and 9.

³² Interview 9.

³³ Barkindo, Gudaku, Wesley, 2013; World Watch Research, 2019; Interview 1; Open Doors. (2016). *Crushed but not defeated: The impact of persistent violence on the Church in Northern Nigeria*. Open Doors. (2017). *Nigeria: Assessment of Christian situation in four north-eastern states* (June 2017). World Watch Research.

³⁴ Interview 11; Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012; Fapohunda & Orobato, 2013

³⁵ Including obstetric fistula, which is a disability in which an opening between the vagina and bladder (vesicovaginal fistula) or between the rectum and vagina (rectovaginal fistula), resulting in incontinence of urine and feces. This condition is associated with social stigma and violence, and it could even be considered a legitimate reason for a husband to leave his wife: Onolemhemhen, D., & Ekwempu, C. (1999). An investigation of sociomedical risk factors associated with vaginal fistula in northern Nigeria. *Women & health*, 28(3), 103-116. Melah, G., Massa, A. A., Yahaya, U. R., Bukar, M., Kizaya, D. D., & El-Nafaty, A. U. (2007). Risk Factors for Obstetric Fistulae in North-Eastern Nigeria. *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 27 (8), 819–23; Chika, 2012; OECD, 2018; Rai, Singh, 2012; Barkindo, Gudaku, Wesley, 2013; Walker, 2013.

³⁶ UNICEF. (2014). *Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects*. New York: UNICEF; Chika, 2012; Girls not brides, 2018

³⁷ Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*; OECD, 2018.

³⁸ State level autonomy makes that the northern states, Sokoto, Adamawa, Bauchi, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Borno, Gombe, Yobe and Zamfara did not adopt the Child Rights Act of 2003, because the act was considered to go against the Islamic culture: The Guardian. (2018, 7 6). *The Nigerian child and national policies* - Checked by Arome Oswori, President of the Christian Lawyers’ Fellowship of Nigeria (CLASFON) on 27-3-2019; Y. Bawa, 27-3-2019, ‘Legal Overview Nigeria’ during the Religious Liberty Partnership conference in Abuja.

particularly at risk of forced marriage to Muslim men.³⁹ Obstructing the right to freedom of religion through forced marriage is the second most common strategy to control female converts on a global scale ([Section 2.4](#)).⁴⁰

2.2 Bride price

In Nigeria, the so-called 'bride price' is a common practice that consists of payment by a husband (or husband's family) to the bride's parents for marrying her. Although this is sometimes reduced to a symbolic act, when it is taken seriously the amount of the bride price may be understood to indicate the presumed worth and purity of the bride. A low price might suggest that the girl is worth less because she is for instance not a virgin anymore.⁴¹ In this context, compromising a girl's virginity is seen as a way of lowering her value for her family and community. This can be used against Christian communities because a girl does not have sole agency over her virginity in Nigerian society.

A high payment is an honor, yet also increases the pressure on a woman to live up to her bridal value. It can feed into the idea of a wife being the possession of a husband (or husband's family) and cause tensions at the household level ([Section 2.3](#)).⁴² Since families are seen as being fundamental to church life, the whole Christian community is weakened if one of the marriage partners is viewed as being a mere commodity.

The custom of payment for a bride is widespread among religious and ethnic groups, but especially in eastern Nigeria the bride price is most often exorbitantly high. This causes an increase in the age-gap between husband and wife and means that newly-wed couples potentially find themselves in financially weakened positions.⁴³ At the same time, the bride price can be an economic incentive for poor Christian families to agree with early and/or interreligious marriage with a Muslim man ([Section 2.1](#)). Especially in the context of the current economic hardships in the country, the bride price provides an opportunity for destitute Christian families to obtain money to survive.⁴⁴

Additionally, in Muslim communities, the bride price is sometimes paid when a girl is still a child, in order to settle the marriage and 'claim' the bride far in advance.⁴⁵ A female convert to Christianity who has been 'paid for' by a Muslim family is still obliged to honor the contract made on her behalf as a child. As a result, she will be restricted in her religious practice, freedom of association and child-raising for her whole married life.

³⁹ Barkindo, Gudaku, Wesley, 2013; Interview 5.

⁴⁰ Fisher, H., & Miller, E. (2019). [Gender-specific Religious Persecution: Analysis and Implications](#), World Watch Research, p. 13.

⁴¹ Farahmandian, H., & Ehsaninia, S. (2012). Dynamics of tradition and modernity in bride price by Buchi Emecheta. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 1(4), 191-196; OECD, 2018.

⁴² Adegoke, T., & Oladeji, D. (2005). Community norms and cultural attitudes and beliefs factors influencing violence against women of reproductive age in Nigeria. *Editorial Advisory Board e*, 20(2), 265-273; Interview 8.

⁴³ Interviews 8 and 12.

⁴⁴ Interview 2.

⁴⁵ Interview 4.

2.3 Domestic violence

Domestic violence crosses cultural, ethnic and religious boundaries and is frequent and often socially accepted across the country.⁴⁶ Hence, homes are more often than not a place of oppression, violence and inequality for women. This socially taboo (yet prevalent) practice undermines Christian communities in two ways.

The first way is that domestic violence can be inflicted on female converts from Muslim families to force them to renounce their faith ([Section 2.4](#)). Since the local community will not protest against the treatment and may even support it, the female convert can be abused with impunity in her father's or husband's house.⁴⁷ Under the Penal Code Law of Northern Nigeria (Cap 89, Laws of Northern Nigeria 1963) which is still applicable in some states in the north and Middle Belt region, 'wife battering' is even explicitly condoned as long as a woman does not get 'seriously injured'.⁴⁸

The second way is the extent to which domestic violence is a destabilizing factor in many Christian households, weakening the family unit further in times of direct attack. The prevalence within Christian households is confirmed by research which shows that domestic violence is more common in the Christian dominated south (52.1%) than the Muslim dominated northwestern part of the country (13.1%).⁴⁹ Such relational patterns within the domestic sphere have a significant impact on women's mental, physical, sexual and reproductive health and constrain her ability to function in daily life.⁵⁰

Christian women have virtually no option but to endure abuse by their husbands. Most often this is because of cultural and religious pressure to stay with the husband (because of the shame associated with divorce) or because of dependence on the husband for survival and status. Some women are afraid they will lose their children and others simply believe that their husband is justified in beating them.⁵¹

Domestic violence is commonly seen as a private matter, meaning that women cannot rely on protection from their communities, including the Church.⁵² The Nigerian legal system is often unable to protect women from domestic violence, as it is not criminalized by Federal law and the police are even reluctant to intervene.⁵³ Despite some laws challenging domestic violence in a number of states, women are often ill-informed about their rights or able to enforce them.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ OECD, 2018; Interview 1; Antai, D., & Adaji, S. (2012). Community-level influences on women's experience of intimate partner violence and terminated pregnancy in Nigeria: a multilevel analysis. *BMC pregnancy and childbirth*, 12(1), 128.

⁴⁷ Fisher, 2019.

⁴⁸ Chika, 2012; OECD, 2018; Checked by Arome Oswori, President of the Christian Lawyers' Fellowship of Nigeria (CLASFON) on 3-4-2019.

⁴⁹ OECD, 2018.

⁵⁰ Interview 4.

⁵¹ The World Bank. (2013). *Women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife Nigeria*. Retrieved from The Worldbank Data.

⁵² Akanle, Adesina, & Nwaobiala, 2018; OECD, 2018.

⁵³ Oladepo, Yusuf, & Arulogun, 2011; OECD, 2018.

⁵⁴ Such as a Gender Unit of the Police and the Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence Laws in the Lagos and Ekiti State: Oladepo, Yusuf, & Arulogun, 2011; OECD, 2018.

In addition, spousal rape is not considered domestic violence and is even implicitly condoned under Section 357 in combination of Section 6 of the Criminal Code.⁵⁵ This means that in the case of a forced marriage ([Section 3.3](#)) of a Christian girl to a non-Christian man, the Christian girls are not protected, making it a powerful tool of coercion.⁵⁶ In the context of child marriages ([Section 2.1](#)), the danger is only exacerbated and can result in a high incidence of what is effectively statutory rape, for it is considered a husband's 'right' to have sexual relations with his wife.⁵⁷

2.4 Conversion within the family/marriage

Female converts from Islam to Christianity are among the most vulnerable in the context of religious persecution. Their family and community become main actors, because of the betrayal and shame that a convert brings upon them ([Section 1.1](#)).⁵⁸ They put enormous pressure on converts to make them revoke their conversion, by using verbal and physical abuse. Female converts to Christianity risk being forcefully married off to non-Christian men by their family, as discussed in [Section 2.1](#). In this case, the woman falls under her husband's authority and remains in the mainstream religious community. Within marriage regulated by Sharia law, men have the right to control their wives and are therefore able to restrict and punish behavior that is not Islamic.⁵⁹ The fact that the abuse of female converts takes place behind closed doors means that she can be oppressed, isolated and beaten with impunity.⁶⁰

1. THE PRICE TO PAY

WHEN HER HUSBAND CONVERTED TO ISLAM, A CHRISTIAN WOMAN FROM BAUCHI STATE WAS PUT UNDER PRESSURE TO RECAPT HER CHRISTIAN FAITH. WHEN SHE REFUSED, SHE WAS EXPELLED FROM THE FAMILY HOME AND HER CHILDREN WERE TAKEN AWAY FROM HER. SHE WOULD ONLY BE ALLOWED TO SEE THEM AGAIN, ONCE SHE CONVERTED TO ISLAM.

EXAMPLE PROVIDED BY DAVITA DANJUMA

Additionally, Christian female converts can essentially be held under house arrest by their Muslim husbands, families or in-laws. By literally restricting the freedom of movement of converts, Muslim communities can prevent them from practicing their faith and apply intense pressure on them to return to Islam.⁶¹ This pressure strategy easily fits in with northern culture, where the women's sphere of operation is domestic and her moves are more strictly monitored by family and community members in comparison to men.⁶² As a result, it is complicated and risky for female converts to attend church activities secretly ([Section 3.7](#)). Hence, female converts find themselves in an extremely vulnerable and isolated position. However, they are the ones most difficult to reach and support by the Church, because of the risks of repercussions from Muslim communities/families or radical Muslim groups involved.⁶³

⁵⁵ Criminal Code.

⁵⁶ OECD, 2018;

⁵⁷ Kunnuji & Esiet, 2015; Interview 4; spontaneous responses during session on GSRP at RLP conference Abuja, 28-03-2019.

although the age of consent is set at 18, Section 29 of the Constitution states that "any woman who is married shall be deemed to be of full age": [Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria](#), 1999.

⁵⁸ World Watch Research, 2019.

⁵⁹ World Watch Research, 2019.

⁶⁰ Interview 5.

⁶¹ Questionnaire, 2019, 1.10; Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Interview 12.

⁶² Interview 4; Interview 5.

⁶³ World Watch Research, 2019; Interview 4; Interview 3; World Watch Research, 2019; Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013.

Other ways of putting pressure on female converts are to deprive them of basic necessities and benefits previously enjoyed (e.g. home, finance, wealth, a car) or to obstruct their access to employment and education. Alternatively, they are compelled to divorce or are denied the right to see their children.⁶⁴ The same forms of pressure are faced by Christian women whose husbands convert to Islam (see Textbox 1).

Although the Constitution guarantees freedom to declare and change your religion, conversion from Islam to Christianity is strictly forbidden in Muslim communities in the north and often means death as punishment for the converts.⁶⁵ This means that converts are often left with no other option than to flee, leaving their families behind. Aside from the social and emotional costs, this has devastating safety and economic consequences, leaving them destitute.⁶⁶

2.5 Polygamy

Polygamy remains a common practice in Nigeria to the extent that in 2013, one out of three Nigerian women was part of polygamous marriages.⁶⁷ Although polygamy is not acknowledged in civil marriage, it is legal under customary and Islamic law.⁶⁸ Polygamous marriages are generally not conducted or supported by the Church, yet informal polygamous relationships are quite common among Christians. A man can marry one wife in Church and take another as an 'informal wife', which is often considered a personal choice by the faith community.⁶⁹ The perception that the worth and status of a woman lies in marriage places women in a position where they may be forced to accept and sometimes even request polygamous marriage.⁷⁰

As such, agreeing to polygamous relationships can become a survival choice for Christian women.⁷¹ For access to resources, protection, status or for tasks around the house, women - widows and single mothers in particular - might feel they need the support of a man.⁷² A polygamous (informal) relationship can be a solution, although this arrangement makes demands on the woman in exchange ([Section 3.2](#)) and frequently undermines her well-being.

Polygamy, however, can also cause tensions in Christian households and a weak relational structure for the Church. If a husband has his favorite(s), then his other wives and children find themselves in subordinate positions and incur a greater risk of becoming victims of domestic violence or neglect.⁷³ Other potential negative impacts which weaken the Church fabric related to polygamous relationships are sexual health risks or unwanted pregnancies, as well as

⁶⁴ Interviews 7 and 11.

⁶⁵ Questionnaire, 2019, 1.1; Interview 4; Bawa, 2019.

⁶⁶ Interview 3; Interview 4.

⁶⁷ National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] and ICF International. (2014). *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2013*. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NPC and ICF International., OECD, 2018 .

⁶⁸ Sharia allows a man to take up to four wives at a time, while customary law does not restrict the number of wives a man can marry: OECD, 2018; Chinwuba, 2015; Chika, 2012.

⁶⁹ Interview 1; Interview 3; Interview 4.

⁷⁰ Nasimiyu-Wasike, A. (2005). Polygamy: A Feminist Critique. In M. Oduyoye, & M. K. (Eds.), *The will to arise: Women, tradition, and the church in Africa* (pp. 101-119). Egeene: Wipf and Stock Publishers; 28 Too Many. (2016). *FGM in Nigeria: Executive Summary*; 28 Too Many; Interview 3; Interview 4.

⁷¹ Interview 5.

⁷² Nasimiyu-Wasike, 2005; Interview 1.

⁷³ Nasimiyu-Wasike, 2005; Interview 5.

“rivalries, jealousies, envies, favoritism, quarrels over inheritance, succession feuds, injustices, hatred, and murders.”⁷⁴ Even when a woman is aware of the (in)formal relations of her husband, it is dangerous for her to address the issue, as it can trigger abuse.⁷⁵ The taboo around the relationship between men and women makes it difficult for women to object to the (in)formal polygamous relations of their husbands.⁷⁶

Moreover, families are sometimes paid to give their female members to polygamous marriages or they force them into these marriages in order to maintain friendship with the polygamous husband.⁷⁷ This places female converts in particular at risk of being forced into polygamous marriages by their Muslim relatives ([Section 2.4](#)). Alternatively, Boko Haram/Fulani Herdsmen coerce Christian women to enter polygamous marriages with Muslim men ([2.1](#) and [3.3](#)).⁷⁸ In exchange for food and shelter, they lose the freedom to practice their faith or raise their children accordingly, especially when becoming a wife of lower status.⁷⁹

3. The societal (and cultural) sphere

In the societal sphere, women tend to be seen as less valuable than men. Their marginalization and subordination can be translated into customs like female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual abuse and restricted movement among others.

In the context of violence by Boko Haram and Muslim Fulani Herdsmen, Christian women face tremendous hardship. Their bodies have become battlefields, for they are targeted for abduction, forced marriage and used to ‘produce Muslim babies.’

However, on top of their trauma, women are often the ones blamed, stigmatized or rejected by their own (faith) community for what has happened to them. Widows, female household heads and displaced women are amongst the most vulnerable in a patriarchal environment that is predominantly designed by and for men.⁸⁰ When these women are unable to find support and healing in their own Christian communities, the Church as a whole is standing less strong when confronted with persecution.

⁷⁴ Nasimiyu-Wasike, 2005, p. 110.

⁷⁵ Chika, 2012; Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Chinwuba, 2015; OECD, 2018; Munro, A., Kebede, B., Tarazona-Gomez, M., & Verschoor, A. (2011). *The lion's share: An experimental analysis of polygamy in northern Nigeria*; Fisher, & Miller, 2018; Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012.

⁷⁶ Nasimiyu-Wasike, 2005.

⁷⁷ Comment Dr. S.D. Dali, 11-4-2019, CCEPI Research Team.

⁷⁸ In the context of the conflict in the north-eastern and Middle-Belt regions many men have been killed in attacks on Christian communities. Widows left behind may be forced to enter a polygamous relationship for survival and protection: Interview 1; Interview 4; Open Doors, 2017.

⁷⁹ Fisher, H., & Miller, E. (2018). *Gendered Persecution: World Watch List 2018 Analysis and Implications*, p. 5; Interview 5; Interview 9.

⁸⁰ Interview 2.

3.1 Female Genital Mutilation

Approximately 10% of FGM worldwide takes place in Nigeria.⁸¹ Data from 2013 shows that nearly a quarter of Nigeria's female population, about 20 million women and girls, are circumcised.⁸² This practice is carried out among Nigerian women from all religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including the Christian population.⁸³ The prevalence of FGM among Christian women in the South is 31.4% and in the Middle Belt region 29.3%.⁸⁴ Some argue the practice is “dying out” among Christians and is generally less common in comparison to Muslims and traditionalists.⁸⁵ Yet, taboos around FGM make it a sensitive topic to discuss in church circles and might result in an underestimation of the occurrence.⁸⁶

Besides the extreme physical suffering women and girls experience during FGM, the practice exposes many Christian women to serious health risks. This is especially the case since the ‘operation’ is most often performed by traditional practitioners in unhygienic circumstances with unsterilized instruments that are used multiple times - increasing the likelihood of infections and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS.⁸⁷ It further increases the risk of maternal and infant mortality and impinges on the woman’s physical strength in what are, for most, demanding life circumstances. The Church can express love for its already at-risk female population by upholding the law against FGM wherever it exists.

FGM is considered an extreme human rights violation of women and girls and is illegal in 13 of the 36 Nigerian states.⁸⁸ It is also illegal under the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) of 2015: Section 6(1) *“The circumcision or genital mutilation of the girl child or woman is hereby prohibited.”*⁸⁹ However, Section 47 states that *“This Act applies only to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja”* and so far, only Anambra State domesticated the Act.⁹⁰ Hence, enforcing laws against FGM turns out to be difficult.

It is therefore crucial for church leaders to be involved in combating FGM by giving support to anti-FGM and awareness-raising campaigns.⁹¹ The Church has a significant influence in the lives of Christians and can therefore operate as an agent of change.⁹² As FGM is most often performed to gain social acceptance and relies heavily on social and cultural norms, the Church can counter

⁸¹ 80-95% of the FGM carried out considers girls below the age of five: UNICEF, 2013; Chika, 2012; 28 Too Many, 2016

⁸² World Bank Group. (2018a). *Female genital mutilation prevalence (%)*. [accessed 12/10/2018]; UNICEF. (2013). *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*. UNICEF; 28 Too Many, 2016; UNICEF. (2017). *Country Programme Document*. UN Economic and Social Council; Nnamdi, 2018.

⁸³ Chika, 2012; UNICEF, 2013; Interview 1, 4 and 9.

⁸⁴ Whereas the prevalence among Muslims in the northwest and northeast is 20,1% and among women from traditional beliefs 34,8%. The prevalence of FGM somewhat corresponds with ethnicities in the country: the Hausa-Fulani (16.3 %), Yoruba (54.5 %), and Igbo (45.2 %): 28 Too Many, 2016.

⁸⁵ Interview 2, 3 and 7.

⁸⁶ Interview 1; Interview 4.

⁸⁷ UNICEF, 2013; 28 Too Many, 2016; Chika, 2012.

⁸⁸ These States includes; Lagos, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Bayelsa, Ogun, Delta, Ebonyi, Oyo, Imo, Edo, Cross-River and Rivers State: Nnamdi, 2018.

⁸⁹ *Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (2015)*.

⁹⁰ *Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (2015)*; Girls Not Brides, 2018; Nnamdi, 2018.

⁹¹ 28 Too Many, 2016; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 4.

⁹² The same goes for Muslim faith leaders, who can counter misconceptions and convictions that promote FGM: 28 Too Many, 2016.

these values and denounce the belief that FGM is necessary to reduce promiscuity among women, enhance the sexual performance of men or decrease the chance of stillbirth.⁹³

3.2 Sexual abuse and harassment

*If you don't have a husband, something must be wrong with you. You become an object to be played with sexually: it means you are free, you are just available.*⁹⁴

Sexual harassment, violence, and abuse, including rape, are widespread in Nigeria.⁹⁵ In 2013, 11% of the women between the age of 15 and 49 experienced some form of physical/sexual violence.⁹⁶ Women are abused both in times of crisis and (relative) peace, although it occurs more often in times of crisis. They are susceptible to this form of violence in both the domestic sphere ([Section 2.3](#)) and public domain. They are at risk of sexual abuse, harassment or exploitation while fetching water and collecting firewood, but also at (or on their way to) school, their farms or workplaces ([Section 3.9](#) and [4.2](#)).⁹⁷ The dangers for internally displaced women are exceptional, which is further elaborated upon in [Section 3.5](#).⁹⁸

In the context of persecution, sexual violence has become a weapon.⁹⁹ The Christian identity of a woman is presented as justification for sexual violence to be inflicted upon her and rape is an explicit tactic to 'deflower Christian girls.' The aim is to 'intimidate and terrorize' Christians as well as to 'eliminate and overrule' Christianity ([Section 3.3](#)).¹⁰⁰

Sexual abuse against Christian women has an enormous destabilizing impact on the Church and can destroy Christian families, often because of how the church responds to the abuse. Trauma is frequently compounded by stigma, shame and cultural barriers which make it extremely difficult for victims to speak up or seek much-needed support.¹⁰¹ As a result, there arises a 'culture of silence' and many cases go unreported, making it difficult for the Church to tackle this pressing problem.¹⁰² At the same time, sexual abuse and exploitation are rooted, normalized and culturally accepted to the point that it is not always recognized as a problem, not even by the Church.¹⁰³

⁹³ Chika, 2012; Gilbert, 2015; UNICEF, 2013; UNICEF, 2017; Interview 1.

⁹⁴ Interview 8.

⁹⁵ OECD, 2018.

⁹⁶ The actual number of victims is much higher when women who fall outside this age-box are included and underreporting is taken into consideration.

World Bank Group. (2018h). *Proportion of women subjected to physical and/or sexual violence in the past 12 months*; Questionnaire, 2019, 6.6.

⁹⁷ Abdulbarkindo, Ben, & Gloria, 2018; Kunnuji & Esiet, 2015; OECD, 2018; Open Doors, 2017; Interview 8.

⁹⁸ Ojengbede, O., Babawarun, T., Olayiwola, O., Ogun, M., Kongnyuy, E., & Adorin, O. (2019). Sexual and gender-based violence in camps for internally displaced people and host communities in northeast Nigeria: a mixed methods study. *The Lancet Global Health*, 7, S6.

⁹⁹ Gilbert, 2015, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Sometimes literally because when a Christian woman gets pregnant by a Muslim man, her child is considered a Muslim: Questionnaire, 2019, 7.8; Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Gilbert, 2015; Segun & Muscati, 2014; Arisi, R., & Oromareghake, P. (2011). Cultural Violence and the Nigerian Woman. *African research Review, An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 5(4), 369-381, p. 369 via Adamu, A., & Ben, A. (2016). *Nigeria: Investigating common narratives of violent conflict in Nasarawa State: An Examination of the hostilities against Christians in the period January 2013 – May 2016*. World Watch Research.

¹⁰¹ Especially since women are expected to remain virgin before marriage and risk being judged or blamed for the sexual abuse inflicted upon them and the fact that, culturally speaking, women cannot talk about their sexual experiences with men (including their pastors): Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012; Interview 1.

¹⁰² Adegoke & Oladeji, 2005; Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Kunnuji & Esiet, 2015; Questionnaire, 2019, 6.6.

¹⁰³ As explained previously, many Christian females are forced into situations of sexual exploitation due to their subordinate position in society and their lack of access to resources ([Section 2.5](#)): Interview 1.

3.3 Abduction, rape and forced marriage

Christian women in northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt region are increasingly at risk of abduction, sexual violence, and forced marriage. This was brought to the attention of the world stage with the 2014 abduction of 276 mainly Christian girls from their school in Chibok which was rightly shocking, all the more so as it was not an isolated incidence. Amnesty International estimates that Boko Haram kidnapped at least 2000 women in 2014 alone.¹⁰⁴ The organization, as well as Human Rights Watch, state that most of the abductees are female Christians and that it is apparent that religion is an important motive.¹⁰⁵ Other drivers for abduction are Western education and revenge on Christian women for the fact that their children reject Islam.¹⁰⁶ Sometimes abduction is portrayed as a noble deed that saves women from gender inequality and Christianity:

*You are no longer in Nigeria. You are now in an Islamic kingdom. Here, women's rights are respected, not like in Nigeria where women are made to work, farm, fetch water and firewood, and where you have all types of discrimination. This is the reason why we are rescuing Christian women like you. In our Islamic kingdom, there will be no discrimination because everyone will be Muslims.*¹⁰⁷

Although both Muslim and Christian women are targeted by Boko Haram, there is often a clear distinction made between them:

*When the men in military uniform separated the Muslims from the Christians, we knew then they were Boko Haram. [...] Christian women wearing pants were shot in the leg and left to die. Older Muslim men and women wearing Muslim veils were released to go, while the rest of us were driven to their camp in Sambisa forest.*¹⁰⁸

There are more cases in which Christian women were kidnapped and Muslim women were free to go. Also, abducted Muslim women are also often released within a shorter period of time than Christian women.¹⁰⁹ In Dapchi, Yobe, 110 schoolgirls were kidnapped on the 19th of February 2018 by ISWA.¹¹⁰ Five of them did not survive and the remaining 104 Muslim girls were released after approximately one month, except for Leah Sharibu (15), the only Christian. She remains in captivity because she refuses to renounce her faith and convert to Islam.¹¹¹ Her

¹⁰⁴ The exact number of abductions is unknown, estimations range from 500 to 1000 from 2013 onwards and even 2000 in the year 2014 alone, this has to do with underreporting: Gavin, H. (2015, 5 11). *Violent crime as old as the Bible: Boko Haram uses rape as a weapon of war*. Retrieved from The Conversation. [accessed 19/02/2019]

¹⁰⁵ Segun & Muscati, 2014; Gavin, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Segun & Muscati, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Words of a Boko Haram commander to a Christian mother (19) who was kept captive in Sambisa forest: Segun & Muscati, 2014, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Words of a woman (20) abducted in May 2013: Segun & Muscati, 2014, p. 25.

¹⁰⁹ Segun & Muscati, 2014.

¹¹⁰ Islamic State West Africa (ISWA) a break-away faction of Boko Haram that is linked to ISIS

¹¹¹ World Watch Monitor. (2018, 10 16). *Nigerian Islamist extremists kill aid worker 'for work for Red Cross'; Christians 'slaves for life*. Retrieved from World Watch Monitor. [accessed 23/10/2018]; International Crisis Group. (2018, 4 12). *Preventing Boko Haram Abductions of Schoolchildren in Nigeria*. Retrieved from International Crisis Group. [accessed 24/1/2019]; The Guardian. (2018, 3 24). *Boko Haram kept one Dapchi girl who refused to deny her Christianity*. [accessed 15/4/2019]; BBC. (2018, 3 25). *Nigeria Dapchi abductions: Schoolgirls finally home*. [accessed 15/4/2019]

2. CONVERSION AS A SURVIVAL STRATEGY

A MARRIED PREGNANT WOMAN (23) AND HER MOTHER (47), BOTH CHRISTIAN, WERE ABDUCTED IN NOVEMBER 2013 BY BOKO HARAM. THEY WERE TOLD: 'TODAY WE'RE GOING TO CONVERT YOU TO ISLAM, THEN YOU CAN CHOOSE ANY ONE OF US TO MARRY, AND WE'LL GIVE YOU A PLACE TO STAY.' THEY FELT LIKE THEY HAD NO OTHER OPTION THAN TO CONVERT BY CITING ARABIC WORDS AND LEARNING HOW TO PRAY. THEY PROMISED THE ABDUCTORS TO CONVERT THEIR HUSBANDS TOO AND WERE RELEASED AFTERWARDS.

A MUSLIM ABDUCTOR BEAT ANOTHER CHRISTIAN FEMALE ABDUCTEE WHO REFUSED TO CONVERT TO ISLAM WITH A PLASTIC CABLE UNTIL SHE FAINTED. SHE TESTIFIES: "AN INSURGENT WHO I RECOGNIZED FROM MY VILLAGE CONVINCED ME TO ACCEPT ISLAM LEST I SHOULD BE KILLED. SO I AGREED."

SEGUN & MUSCATI, 2014, P. 29

bravery is exceptional, as conversion is often the only survival strategy for Christian women (Textbox 2).¹¹²

Most abducted girls are forcefully married, converted and used for procreation or as a sex slave. Many are trained as soldiers or suicide bombers ([Section 3.4](#)), or are forced to carry ammunition, clean and cook. Some are (claimed to be) radicalized and are now unwilling to leave the organization.¹¹³

Additionally, abduction and sexual violence, including rape, is a frequently used tactic by Muslim Fulani herdsmen.¹¹⁴ Fulani herdsmen systematically attack Christian communities, killing Christian men and subjecting Christian women to (sexual) abuse, including rape, and abduction ([Appendix B](#) tables 4, 5 and 6). Husbands have been killed before the eyes of women, after which these women are abducted, killed or forced to marry the perpetrators.¹¹⁵

Men are often the primary targets of attacks by Boko Haram and women are the ones who are most often abducted. Although Fulani herdsmen also abduct women, their tactics and purpose seems to be slightly different, as they often make less distinction between men, women and children in their targeting and killing. Reverend Para-Mallam explains that their primary aim is to 'purify' and occupy the land, whereas Boko Haram is more focused on increasing their numbers [*and are therefore more often abducting and forcefully marrying women for reasons of procreation*].¹¹⁶ Thus, women are also among the casualties and sometimes they even make up the highest number of casualties when Christian villages are invaded by Fulani herdsmen.¹¹⁷ In fact, women are generally more vulnerable and less able to escape than men, since they are

¹¹² Yet, while married women could be released upon conversion to Islam, unmarried women are less likely to be released upon conversion and are often married-off to Boko Haram combatants: Segun & Muscati, 2014.

¹¹³ World Watch Monitor. (2016); David Young, 2019, Prof Oluwafunmilayo J. Para-Mallam, 2019.

¹¹⁴ To indicate the severity of the situation a list of examples of (sexual) violence against Christian females by Fulani Herdsmen in Benua state¹¹⁴ is given in table 4 ([Appendices](#)).

¹¹⁵ Adamu, & Ben, 2016; Abdulbarkindo, A., Ben, B. A., & Gloria, C. (2018). *Nigeria: Southern Kaduna and the atrocities of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen (May 2016 – September 2017) VOLUME 1*. World Watch Research; NCSAN, 2015; Adamu & Ben, 2017; Open Doors 2017; Segun & Muscati, 2014.

¹¹⁶ Interview 8.

¹¹⁷ Although men are the primary targets of the attacks and the ones killed first, women are not spared. If not killed, they are often abducted and/or (sexually) abused. There are even attacks that are specifically directed against the most vulnerable, including women children and elderly: Adamu, & Ben, 2016; Abdulbarkindo, Ben & Gloria (2018); NCSAN, 2015; Adamu & Ben, 2017; Open Doors.

3. ABDUCTION AND FORCED MARRIAGE

HABIBA ISYAKU (14) FROM KATSINA DID NOT RETURN HOME FROM SCHOOL ON THE 16TH OF AUGUST 2016. SHE WAS KIDNAPPED AND FORCED TO MARRY JAMILU LAWAL, ONE OF HER ABDUCTORS. THE EMIR OF THE STATE VALIDATED THE MARRIAGE. HER FATHER'S ATTEMPTS TO RELEASE HIS DAUGHTER HAVE BEEN FRUITLESS, AS THE EMIR STATES THAT: "HIS DAUGHTER HAD BEEN CONVERTED FROM CHRISTIANITY TO ISLAM AND THAT THERE WAS NO LONGER ANY RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIM AND HABIBA." HE CLAIMED THAT HABIBA HAD LEFT HER FAMILY AT OWN WILL AND VOLUNTARILY CONVERTED TO ISLAM.

WORLD WATCH MONITOR, 2016

usually physically weaker (especially when pregnant) and less familiar with their environment than men (including the attackers), and they are often the ones carrying/looking after their children while trying to escape.¹¹⁸

Likewise, Christian girls are also at risk of abduction by Muslim men in northern Nigeria in times of (relative) peace ([Section 2.1](#))¹¹⁹ - in their communities, homes, farms, on their way to school or while fetching water or firewood.¹²⁰ In most cases, abduction goes hand in hand with forced marriage and compulsory conversion to Islam ([Section 2.1](#)).¹²¹ They are often sexually abused, indoctrinated and 'spiritually hypnotized', resulting in a loss of self-worth and mental instability.¹²² Traditional leaders and imams sometimes pay Muslim boys for marrying Christian girls.¹²³ What exactly happens to these girls often remains unknown (Textbox 3).¹²⁴ Table 7 of [Appendix B](#) provides a list of cases of abducted

Christian girls and some of their testimonies are included in [Appendix C](#).¹²⁵

Abduction, rape, forced marriage and conversion physically and emotionally impact whole Christian communities, tearing them apart. The faith of Christian victims is under enormous pressure: Besides being denied the right to live out their faith when forcibly converted, victims and returnees are generally severely traumatized and unable to function in all facets of their physical and psychological lives, let alone their spiritual lives.¹²⁶ The grief and trauma scar their lives as well as the broader Christian community. Women (and their children) who escape (or are released) frequently face stigma and rejection by their family and communities due to the fear and judgment for their (forced) involvement with Muslim militants. Because of the forced marriage or sexual abuse inflicted upon them, women are often rejected by their husbands.

¹¹⁸ Interview 4 and 8.

¹¹⁹ Interview 2 and 6; Bawa, 2019; Barnabas Fund, 19-3-2019, *Over 300 Nigerian Christians slain in merciless killing spree by Fulani militants since February* [accessed 11-4-2019]; Interview 8.

¹²⁰ Abdulkarkindo, Ben, & Gloria, 2018; Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Segun, & Muscati, 2014; *World Watch Monitor*, 2016b; *Open Doors*, 2016.

¹²¹ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Segun, M., & Muscati, S. (2014). *"Those terrible weeks in their camp": Boko Haram violence against women and girls in Northeast Nigeria"*; *World Watch Monitor*. (2016, 11 24b). *Nigerian girls abducted, forced to convert, marry*. Retrieved from World Watch Monitor; Open Doors, 2016.

¹²² Ambs. J. Danlami Jydsen Founder & President Hausa Christians' Foundation (FACFO), 'Gender and Religion: The effects on young Christian Girls in northern Nigeria, 29-3-2019, presented at the Gender and Religious Freedom Conference, Abuja.

¹²³ The reward for the pastor's daughter is especially high because marrying her would visibly destroy the entire family and affect the wider Christian community: Interview 1 and Danlami Jydsen, 2019 .

¹²⁴ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Segun, & Muscati, 2014; *World Watch Monitor*, 2016b; *Open Doors*, 2016.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Copy and Distribution Permitted-Based on Dr. Rebecca S. Dali's remarks at the Gender and Religious Freedom (GRF) conclave in Abuja, March 28-30, 2019.

Their perceived 'loss of value' haunt them for the rest of their life. These attitudes isolate the victim, exacerbate her trauma and make re-integration extremely complex (Textbox 4).¹²⁷

4. LIFE-LONG STIGMA

CHARITY WAS KEPT HOSTAGE BY BOKO HARAM FOR THREE YEARS. SHE RETURNED TO HER HUSBAND WITH A BABY FROM A FIGHTER TO WHOM SHE WAS FORCEFULLY MARRIED IN THE CAMP. UPON RETURN, HER HUSBAND BEAT HER AND REJECTED HER SON. SHE HAD NO OTHER OPTION THAN TO FIND RESORT IN AN IDP CAMP WHERE SHE CONTINUES TO FACE STRUGGLES OF ABUSE, REJECTION AND ISOLATION.

OPEN DOORS, 2018

3.4 Suicide bombers

Of significant concern is the manner in which the rise of female 'suicide' attacks¹²⁸ has gone hand in hand with an increase in abduction and forced recruitment of women by Boko Haram. The numerous abductions of women over the years have given Boko Haram the necessary resources for their suicide missions: *"There is ample evidence that lends credence to the concern that Boko Haram has been operationalizing the abducted girls and women in suicide operations."*¹²⁹

The first suicide attack carried out by a woman took place on the 8th of June 2014 in Gombe.¹³⁰ By June 2016, no fewer than 200 women and girls were used to carry out attacks in Nigeria and beyond its borders [Niger, Chad, and Cameroon], claiming the lives of at least 1000 people.¹³¹ This makes Boko Haram accountable for at least 95% of the female suicide attacks worldwide since 2014.¹³²

Using women and children as suicide bombers has had a serious impact on Nigeria's society, especially the Church. First, Christians and churches are among the primary targets of suicide attacks, and secondly, there is a probable connection between the abduction of girls [*who are mainly Christians*] (Section 3.3) and the use of female suicide bombers. This means that Boko Haram could be deliberately using Christians as an instrument of persecution against their own community.

3.5 Displacement

There are currently approximately two million internally displaced persons in Nigeria, because of the violence in the northeast and Middle Belt regions. Among those forced to leave their homes are many Christian women (see Appendix B, table 8) who face severe discrimination and pressure in IDP camps. Female household heads often bear the brunt, as they are generally

¹²⁷ Segun & Muscati, 2014; Interview 4; Interview 9; Dr. Rebecca S. Dali, 2019.

¹²⁸ Although these attacks are usually referred to as 'suicide attacks,' the 'suicide' element is disputable when the attacker is in fact forced or manipulated to sacrifice him/herself: comment Dr. N. Hosler, Research team CCEPI, 12-4-2019.

¹²⁹ Nnam, Arua, & Otu, 2018, p. 37.

¹³⁰ Nnam, M., Arua, M., & Otu, M. (2018). The use of women and children in suicide bombing by the Boko Haram terrorist Group in Nigeria. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 42, 35-42; Onuoha & George, 2015; Dachia & Kyauta, 2018; World Bank, 2015

¹³¹ Barkindo, A., & Bryans, S. (2016). De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria: developing a basic prison based de-radicalisation programme. *Journal for Deradicalisation* 17, 1-25.

¹³² Adamu & Ben, 2017.

discriminated against in their access to vital resources according to Amnesty International.¹³³ For Christian women, this is only compounded by their religious identity, as Christians are often the minority and are treated accordingly.¹³⁴

*While there are several displacement camps set up throughout the country to aid those vulnerable, displaced and hungry families, there are many camps where Christians are being discriminated against and, in some instances, being told that the food and relief 'is not for Christians.'*¹³⁵

Discrimination on the basis of religion and gender is particularly critical in the context of the widespread (sexual) abuse and exploitation by authorities, (Boko Haram) insurgents, members of security forces, displacement camp staff, relatives, host community members and other IDPs.¹³⁶ The compound vulnerability for Christian women is evident in the survival choices they face to submit to sexual exploitation in exchange for resources, protection, and assistance.¹³⁷

3.6 Dress codes

In Muslim-dominated areas where there are strict expectations of how Muslim women should dress in public, Christian women bear the brunt of the most simple, visible identification as being out of sync with the approved religion of their society if they do not comply with the Islamic customs.¹³⁸

5. VIOLATING ISLAMIC DRESS CODES

"CHRISTIAN GIRLS ARE PHYSICALLY ABUSED IN SOME PLACES FOR NOT COVERING THEIR HEADS OR OTHERWISE WEARING 'PROVOCATIVE' CLOTHING IN MIXED NEIGHBORHOODS OR COMMUNITIES. THE CONSEQUENCES OF WOMEN'S UN-ISLAMIC DRESS MAY INCLUDE BEATINGS, RAPES OR HAVING ACID THROWN IN THEIR UNVEILED FACES, WHICH IS BECOMING A COMMON FORM OF ASSAULT."

BARKINDO, GUDAKO & WESLEY, 2013, P. 18

Especially in northeastern Nigeria, displaying Christian symbols is extremely risky as it may trigger discrimination or abuse.¹³⁹ Christian women, and converts in particular, who dress inappropriately according to Islam, risk severe punishment (Textbox 5).¹⁴⁰ Inappropriate

¹³³ Amnesty International. (2018, 2 22). *Amnesty International Report 2017/18 - Nigeria*. Retrieved from RefWorld, [accessed 17 January 2019] World Watch Research, 2018; Freedom House. (2018). *Nigeria Profile*. Retrieved from Freedom House, [accessed 16/10/2018]; Moaveni, 2019.

¹³⁴ CIA. (2018, 10 17). *Nigeria*. Retrieved from The World Factbook, [accessed 10/10/2018]; IDMC. (2018). *Mid-Year Figures Internal Displacement in 2018*, [accessed 12/10/2019]; World Watch Research, 2018.

¹³⁵ The Christian Post. (2017, 3 24). *Christians Victimized by Boko Haram Denied Food, Aid in Nigerian Displacement Camps*. Retrieved from Christian Post, [accessed 23/10/2018].

¹³⁶ Interview 4; Ojengbede et. al., 2019.

¹³⁷ Amnesty International. (2018, 2 22). *Amnesty International Report 2017/18 - Nigeria*. Retrieved from RefWorld, [accessed 17 January 2019].

¹³⁸ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013.

¹³⁹ Questionnaire, 2019, 1.5 and 4.12.

¹⁴⁰ Converts to Christianity are especially vulnerable when they no longer comply with Islamic dress codes. It would make their conversion visible and expose them to extortionate punishment or death: Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Questionnaire, 2019, 3.1.

dressings can evoke judgment or even be seen as inviting sexual violence¹⁴¹ as can be seen most clearly during attacks when they are quickly identifiable as Christians by their dress ([Section 3.3](#)).

Consequently, World Watch Research found that *“an increasing number of Christians (not just converts) dress like Muslims to hide any Christian articles or materials on them and to escape being lynched.”*¹⁴² This forces Christian women to compromise their personal choice of modest dress in accord with their Christian faith in order to protect themselves in some small measure from being frontline targets.

3.7 Restricted movement

The unrest in the northeast and Middle Belt region is also inhibiting the freedom of movement of Christian women. The risk of abduction and sexual abuse is real and hinders women from feeling that they can move around freely and safely ([Section 3.2](#) and [3.3](#)). The impact on Christian family life can be great, as women are often the ones who fetch water or go to the market to buy necessities. In female-headed households, this is extremely detrimental as the whole family is dependent on them to survive ([Section 3.8](#)).¹⁴³

Some Muslim-dominated areas in the far-north [e.g. Zamfara, Kano and Sokoto] as well as in the Middle Belt region are *“high danger zones for Christians,”* explains Samdi Puldi, a Nigerian woman lecturing at the University of Jos and president of the LEAH foundation.¹⁴⁴ She adds that just passing by these areas as a Christian woman when ‘not properly dressed’ according to Islamic interpretation [wearing trousers, for instance] ([Section 3.6](#)), can provoke being stoned to death, especially when being blamed for insulting the Islamic Prophet Mohammed.¹⁴⁵

In Nigerian society, and in Muslim communities in particular, it is customary that men have the right to control the movement of their wives/daughters and women often need permission to leave the house.¹⁴⁶ Because of these limitations, it can be difficult for Christian women to go alone to church or visit (secret) religious gatherings.¹⁴⁷ This is especially the case for female converts, who can be confined to the home by their Muslim family to restrict their practice of faith ([Section 2.4](#)).¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ Interview 1.

¹⁴² Particularly in Bauchi, Gombo, Yobe and Borno States, Christians increasingly find themselves under pressure not to display Christian symbols or the Bible in public. In fact, around Ganye, Jada and most parts of Borno and Yobe States many Christians dress like Muslims: World Watch Research, 2018, p. 13-14.

¹⁴³ World Watch Research, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Interview 9.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 9.

¹⁴⁶ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013, p. 10; OECD, 2018; Gilbert, 2015.

¹⁴⁷ Questionnaire, 2019, 1.2; Interview 1 ; Interview 3.

¹⁴⁸ Questionnaire, 2019, 1.10.

3.8 Female-headed households

*The northeast Nigerian state of Borno is now a vast patchwork of towns and villages with few men, a whole sub-society of single mothers trying to cope as breadwinners in areas with collapsed economies without their husbands' protection and support.*¹⁴⁹

The deliberate targeting and killing of Christian men by the Muslim Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram results in a situation where many Christian widows being left to fend for themselves (Section 3.3).¹⁵⁰ This has an enormous impact on Christian families, neighborhoods and church communities, since:

*In Nigerian culture, the man is typically the breadwinner. They [the attackers] know they can destroy basically the entire family if they take out the man.*¹⁵¹

When the primary breadwinner of the household is killed or abducted, the family that remains is permanently disadvantaged.¹⁵² Since the birth rate is very high in Nigeria, the families in this situation are frequently large, which makes the task for a widow to take care of her family hard and sometimes even impossible.¹⁵³ It also increases the pressure on churches, since church communities rely financially on its members to keep running and be able to offer support.¹⁵⁴

Female-headed households can be a result of the displacement, migration, disappearance, imprisonment or death of a husband.¹⁵⁵ In 2015 at least 14.6% of Nigerian households were headed by women.¹⁵⁶ Paradoxically female household heads are often socially stigmatized, not to mention overburdened because of their responsibility for the family's income on top of their duty to run the home and take care of the children.¹⁵⁷

Moreover, widows in particular are vulnerable to marginalization and exploitation because of dehumanizing and discriminatory widowhood practices. When a wife loses her husband, she can be confined to the house or forced to live with extended family on her own side or her husband's. In some cases, she will be married off to a member of her deceased husband's family.¹⁵⁸ As such, Christian widows can be forced to live with their (husband's) Muslim relatives and are subsequently unable to freely retain their Christian identity, practice their faith or gather with other Christians.

¹⁴⁹ Moaveni, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ World Watch Research, 2018; Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Fisher & Miller, 2018; Questionnaire, 2019, 7.7; Adamu & Ben, 2016.

¹⁵¹ The Christian Post. (2017, 3 24). *Christians Victimized by Boko Haram Denied Food, Aid in Nigerian Displacement Camps*. Retrieved from Christian Post, [accessed 23/10/2018].

¹⁵² World Watch Research, 2018.

¹⁵³ The Christian Post, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Interview 4.

¹⁵⁵ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013.

¹⁵⁶ World Bank Group. (2018). *Female headed households (% of households with a female head)*. Retrieved from The World Bank Data, [accessed 21-1-2019]; OECD, 2018.

¹⁵⁷ Chinwuba, 2015; Akanle, Adesina, & Nwaobiala, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ OECD, 2018; Chika, 2012.

In a society that is designed for and dominated by men, gaining access to employment and financial resources is especially challenging for women ([Section 3.9](#)). This makes it even more difficult for Christian female household-heads, widows or divorcees to have a roof over their heads, take care of the children and guarantee the family's survival. This is especially the case since there are significant variances in inheritance rights for men and women.¹⁵⁹ When inheritance is regulated via customary or Sharia law, many widows are evicted from their homes and land and lose their property to the relatives of their deceased husband. When the landlord is Muslim, this is even more likely to happen ([Section 3.9](#)).¹⁶⁰

3.9 Access to employment

Barriers to female employment and (financial) resources make Christian families less resilient when faced with persecution. This becomes especially evident when the tactic is discrimination in her or her husband's access to employment and the general destruction of livelihoods by Muslim radicals.¹⁶¹ Yet, as long as men are the sole or main breadwinners and providers of the family, there are incentives for the direct targeting and killing of Christian men as a persecution strategy, for it can ruin an entire Christian family and seriously weaken church membership and leadership.¹⁶² [Section 3.8](#) amply describes the likelihood that a household will be female-headed at which point the need to gain access to employment is a matter of survival both for her and her children.

6. CHRISTIAN WOMEN ARE SOFT TARGETS FOR ATTACK

COMMERCIAL BANKS EMPLOYING CHRISTIAN WOMEN HAVE BECOME SOFT TARGETS FOR TERRORIST ATTACK. DURING THESE ATTACKS, IT IS THE FEMALE PERSONNEL WHO ARE MAINLY TARGETED. IN WUKARI, AN ATTACK COST THE LIVES OF THREE CHRISTIAN FEMALE SECURITY OFFICERS. IN THE ATTACK ON A BANK IN GOMBE STATE, CELINA KUJU, HEAD OF THE DIVISIONAL OFFICE, WAS THE PRIMARY TARGET. SHE EXPLAINS THAT THIS WAS BECAUSE OF HER CHRISTIAN IDENTITY, HER GENDER AND THE FACT THAT SHE WAS WORKING FOR SECURITY.

Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013

The number of factors compounding the difficulty of being employed is almost overwhelming. Low education levels, early marriage, gender role divisions in households, and women's childbearing nature, all play their part.¹⁶³ On top of this, discrimination against Christians in applications for loans, permits and access to financial resources or certificates of origin [*often needed for job applications*] make it particularly difficult for Christian women to access employment.¹⁶⁴ At each step in the process, there are hurdles: Christian women can be rejected for job applications or asked to renounce their faith and/or offer sexual favors in exchange for

¹⁵⁹ Questionnaire, 2019, 7.9; OECD, 2018.

¹⁶⁰ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013.

¹⁶¹ Questionnaire, 2019, 4.5; World Watch Research, 2018; Open Doors, 2016.

¹⁶² Fisher, H. (15-3-2019). *Panel on Human Trafficking and Christian Persecution*. Panel presented at Olivet University, Dover, NY

¹⁶³ Although there are laws that prohibit the dismissal of pregnant women and guarantee 100% paid maternity leave, women are frequently forced by employers to sign contracts that forbid them to get pregnant in the first years of their employment: OECD, 2018.

¹⁶⁴ Questionnaire, 2019, p. 4.5; Adamu & Ben, 2016.

employment or promotion.¹⁶⁵ The following quote explains how the limited access to employment for women can become part of a persecution dynamic, in which Christian women are exploited in exchange for employment:

*So it's a very negative way, they're given an employment, in exchange for sex. So many Christians compromise their Christian beliefs: it's another form persecution. [...] joy for you because you have an employment, but you are tormented mentally in your conscious and your emotions. It's a very complex one.*¹⁶⁶

Moreover, a lack of collateral impedes women's access to loans and the permission of a husband is often needed for loan-application [and if they are granted loans, their husbands are generally in control of the money].¹⁶⁷ There is also a large gender gap in land and property ownership, especially in the northeast where women own only 4% of the land in contrast to at least 52% that is owned by men.¹⁶⁸

Alternatively, if women do obtain employment, the insecurity and high risk of abduction in the Middle Belt region and northeast can prevent Christian women from traveling safely to work or to work on their farms (Section [3.3](#) and [3.7](#)).¹⁶⁹ Additionally, cultural and religious norms discourage female employment. The Islamic principle that 'the role of the woman is in the home' has led to frequent attacks being made on Christian working women (as well as their businesses) in the northern states and Middle Belt region (Textbox 6), as seen in the bombing of shops belonging to Christian women in Maiduguri, Borno, by Boko Haram.¹⁷⁰

A lack of means to be self-sufficient reinforces women's dependence on men; women thus feel compelled to stay in situations where there is domestic violence, polygamy and sexual exploitation (Section [2.3](#), [2.5](#) and [3.2](#)).¹⁷¹ The economic dependence of Christian female converts can make escaping their hostile religious environment impossible and place them at serious risk.¹⁷² Their economic dependence is also one of the main reasons why so many of the other tactics of religious persecution used against them are effective.

¹⁶⁵ Questionnaire, 2019, 4.5; World Watch Research, 2018; Open Doors, 2016; Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013.

¹⁶⁶ Interview 8.

¹⁶⁷ OECD, 2018.

¹⁶⁸ In practice, women merely gain access to land via family ties, yet they often grant their land rights to male family members as a gift to safeguard support and protection in the future when needed: OECD, 2018.

¹⁶⁹ Questionnaire, 2019, 4.4.

¹⁷⁰ Both gender and religious motivation behind this operation are suggested as property belonging to Muslim men was not affected: Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Segun & Muscati, 2014.

¹⁷¹ Onah, M., & Horton, S. (2018). Male-female differences in households' resource allocation and decision to seek healthcare in south-eastern Nigeria: Results from a mixed methods study. *Social Science & Medicine*, 204, 84-91.

¹⁷² Interview 3.

4. The state sphere

In general, Christians face systemic discrimination in the context of political participation. Especially in the north of the country, Christians are denied contracts for governmental functions or participation in elections.¹⁷³ On top of this, women are a tiny minority in Nigerians politics, and as a result, the voice of women is limited, as they are excluded from decision-making processes and positions of influence.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, the interaction of gender and religion is highlighted at the state level in the lack of recourse to justice which women face following acts of religious persecution.

Discrimination on the basis of sex and religion is considered illegal in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria:

*38. (1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.*¹⁷⁵

*42. (1) A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person:-
(a) be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions are not made subject; or
(b) be accorded either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any such executive or administrative action, any privilege or advantage that is not accorded to citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions.*¹⁷⁶

Enforcement of these clauses requires both the capacity and willingness of the Federal State, the police and the authorities at state and local levels. Yet, in a context of legal pluralism, where civil, customary and religious [*Sharia*] laws overlap and contradict each other, freedom of religion or gender equality seem challenging to guarantee.¹⁷⁷

An attempt to promote gender equality in Nigeria was turned-down when the ‘Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill’ was rejected in 2016. This bill aimed to:

Provide legislation that seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination on the basis of sex and gender in private and public spaces, affirm women's rights to equal

¹⁷³ Questionnaire, 2019, p. 4.5.

¹⁷⁴ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013.

¹⁷⁵ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.

¹⁷⁶ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999.

¹⁷⁷ Questionnaire, 2019, 4.1; OECD, 2018; World Watch Research, 2018; Chika, 2012.

*opportunities to realize their full potential and to provide protection for their bodily integrity.*¹⁷⁸

Motives for the rejection of the bill were predominantly based on the idea that it contradicted cultural and religious norms and values of both Christian and Muslim faith. Also, the bill was considered “*too lopsided and in favor of women.*”¹⁷⁹ Other instruments that promote gender equality have been ratified but never formally adopted by the National Assembly.¹⁸⁰ In addition, states often have the autonomy to either adopt or reject these instruments. Consequently, several regulations that could protect women are rejected and not implemented by the northern states (e.g. CRA 2003, VAPP 2015).¹⁸¹

4.1 Healthcare

Even though women are highly dependent on (maternal and reproductive) healthcare, their access is complicated in several ways.¹⁸² Besides barriers like high costs, distance and lack of transportation, lack of information and (maternity) healthcare facilities in the neighborhood [especially when living in rural areas],¹⁸³ women face additional barriers in receiving good quality healthcare in comparison to their male counterparts because of lower education levels and a lack of decision-making power, autonomy and access to (household) resources.¹⁸⁴

For Christian women in Muslim dominated areas, accessing healthcare can be an even bigger challenge. For instance, because preferential treatment is given to Muslims, whereas Christians have more trouble entering health facilities:

*This has been a long term strategy to frustrate the church with the intention of converting believers to Islam in the region. All the Christians in the entire sharia states are victims of this, the aim is to discourage believers from following Christ.*¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁸ Makinde, O. A., Onyemelukwe, C., Onigbanjo-Williams, A., Oyediran, K. A., & Odimegwu, C. O. (2017). Rejection of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill in Nigeria: A setback for sustainable development goal five. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 32(3), 234-240, p. 235 (The Law Pavillion, 2016 via Makinde et al., 2017).

¹⁷⁹ Makinde et al., 2017, p. 237.

¹⁸⁰ Like the ‘Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)’ and the ‘Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa’: Chika, 2012; OECD, 2018; “No treaty between the Federation and any other country shall have the force of law except to the extent to which only such treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly”: Section 12 of the 1999 Constitution.

¹⁸¹ Bawa, 2019.

¹⁸² Domestic violence, female genital mutilation, sexual intercourse, childbearing [*at a young age*], polygamy and sexual violence/rape expose many women to serious health risks (see Sections **2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3**), including sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/Aids, vesicovaginal/rectovaginal fistula and maternal complications/mortality: Kunnuji&Esiet, 2015; UNAIDS. (2019). *Nigeria*. Retrieved from UNAIDS. [accessed 18/1/2019]; World Bank Group. (2018). *Prevalence of HIV, female (% ages 15-24)*. Retrieved from The World Bank Data. [accessed 21-1-2019]; World Bank Group, 2018.

¹⁸³ World Health Organization. (2019). *Nigeria*. Retrieved from Global health workforce alliance. [accessed 21-1-2019]; Meessen, B., Hercot, D., Noirhomme, M., Ridde, V., Tibouti, A., Bicaba, A., . . . Gilson, L. (2009). *Removing user fees in the health sector in low-income countries: a multi-country review*. New York: UNICEF; Open Doors, 2017; Yaya, S., Bishwajit, G., Uthman, O., & Amouzou, A. (2018). Why some women fail to give birth at health facilities: A comparative study between Ethiopia and Nigeria. *PLoS one*, 13(5), e0196896., 1-11; Rai, Singh, & Singh, 2012; Fapohunda & Orobato, 2013; Al-Mujtaba, M., Cornelius, L., Galadanci, H., Ereka, S., Okundaye, J., Adeyemi, O., & Sam-Agudu, N. (2016). Evaluating religious influences on the utilization of maternal health services among Muslim and Christian women in North-Central Nigeria. *BioMed Research International*, 1-8; OECD, 2018; Ibadin, Adam, Adeleye, & Okojie, 2016.

¹⁸⁴ Austin, A. (2015). Unmet contraceptive need among married Nigerian women: an examination of trends and drivers. *Contraception*, 91(1), 31-38; Yaya, Bishwajit, Uthman, & Amouzou, 2018; OECD, 2018; Onah & Horton, 2018; Fapohunda & Orobato, 2013; Orisaremi & O. Alubo, 2012; Rai, Singh, & Singh, 2012; Al-Mujtaba, et al., 2016.

¹⁸⁵ Questionnaire, 2019, 3.8.

Also, one's religious identity has become a requirement for registration in several healthcare facilities. This leads to discrimination against Christians, who are singled out and receive delayed healthcare or are even denied access to (maternity) healthcare at all.¹⁸⁶

In some regions, government-owned hospitals were even withdrawn from Christian communities and moved to Muslim communities by local Muslim authorities.¹⁸⁷ Additionally, many hospitals in Christian communities have been destroyed or became collateral damage during Boko Haram/Fulani herdsmen attacks or were closed-down by the local government for security reasons.¹⁸⁸ This is especially detrimental for female victims of attacks and abductions, who are often in immediate need of care because of injuries, trauma or sexual and physical violence inflicted upon them ([Section 3.3](#)). Thus, the intersecting challenges of religion and gender faced by Christian women in gaining access to healthcare, literally have life-or-death consequences.

This is especially worrisome in a context of generally poor health statistics: Nigeria has one of the highest maternal mortality rates worldwide and accounted for no less than 14% of the maternal deaths in 2013.¹⁸⁹ This makes the mistreatment of Christian women during child-delivery for faith-related reasons even more critical, as it turns out to be a reason for Christian women to avoid seeking much-needed healthcare.¹⁹⁰

The risks of childbirth are even higher for the 23% of Nigerian females who have their first baby between the age of 15 and 19, which is further complicated if vital healthcare is denied or abusively administered.¹⁹¹ Losing the life of a mother or child is a fundamental loss with high impact on church communities, both in the present and future.

In addition, young mothers are very vulnerable to VVF. Nigeria accounts for 20%-40% of the (mostly young) girls and women suffering from this condition.¹⁹² VVF is associated with stigma and exclusion and can further damage church relational networks through shaming and social exclusion of Christian female VVF patients. The negative and undermining influence on the social structure of church communities is substantial.¹⁹³

Thus, discrimination or destruction that form obstacles for Christians in their access to healthcare is detrimental in the extreme for Christian women. The importance of this single vulnerability cannot be overstated, as the physical health of its members fundamentally helps to increase the resilience of whole church communities, especially in the face of persecution.

¹⁸⁶ Reported in Yobe State for instance: Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Open Doors, 2017.

¹⁸⁷ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Questionnaire, 2019, 3.8.

¹⁸⁸ Interview 11; Closing of hospitals in Kaduna, Taraba, Benue, and Plateau states among others.

¹⁸⁹ GSMA. (2014). *Analysis Country Overview: Nigeria*. GSMA; Austin, 2015; OECD, 2018; Rai, Singh, & Singh, 2012; Fapohunda & Orobato, 2013.

¹⁹⁰ Dembele, 2015; Bohren et al., 2017.

¹⁹¹ "Abusively administered" refers to ill-treatment and discrimination on the basis of religion, or because of stigma towards young pregnant /HIV positive girls or VVF patients. See: Rai, Singh, & Singh, 2012.

¹⁹² Walker, 2013.

¹⁹³ Melah, G., Massa, A. A., Yahaya, U. R., Bukar, M., Kizaya, D. D., & El-Nafaty, A. U. (2007). Risk Factors for Obstetric Fistulae in North-Eastern Nigeria. *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 27 (8), 819–23; Yaya, et. al., 2018; Rai, Singh, & Singh, 2012.

4.2 State education

Christian girls face barriers to accessing education, because of both their gender and faith and are therefore doubly affected in their rights to education. Yet, girls' access to education is of great importance for the development, survival, and strength of Christian women, their families and the wider Christian community. Hence, when access to education is made difficult, the pressure on Christian communities increases in general.

Female education and literacy increase the resilience of Christian families as it benefits women's access to information and the labor market, as well as it contributes to the battle against GBV and child/maternal mortality.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, from a faith perspective, literacy makes it possible for women to read the Bible, grow in their faith and pass it on to the next generations. Hence, the longer-term consequences of limited access to education feed the spiral of vulnerable uneducated female-headed households and mothers unable to study the writings of their faith and pass what they have learned on to their children.

However, investment in girls' education is commonly seen as a waste of money, as girls are perceived as less economically productive than boys.¹⁹⁵ Especially since they are supposed to marry and bear children at a young age, making it exceptional for them to complete higher levels of education.¹⁹⁶ Hence, male enrollment rates are 35.4% higher than those of girls.¹⁹⁷ For female students with a Christian identity, difficulties in gaining access to education are compounded by discrimination for faith-related reasons. Students with Christian names are often denied admission, especially at higher education levels. Within this persecution dynamic, Christian women can again be sexually exploited in much the same way as described above in the section on finding access to employment ([Section 3.9](#)).¹⁹⁸

7. 'BOKO HARAM'

A FEMALE STUDENT (19) WAS ABDUCTED IN KONDUGA WHEN SHE AND FOUR OTHER GIRLS WERE ON THEIR WAY HOME AFTER SCHOOL. THERE WAS A ROADBLOCK AND EVERY PERSON PASSING THROUGH HAD TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES.

WHEN THE GIRLS EXPLAINED THEY WERE STUDENTS, THE ATTACKERS SHOUTED: "AHA! THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WE ARE LOOKING FOR. SO YOU ARE THE ONES WITH STRONG-HEADS WHO INSIST ON ATTENDING SCHOOL WHEN WE HAVE SAID 'BOKO' IS 'HARAM [WESTERN EDUCATION IS A SIN]. ' WE WILL KILL YOU HERE TODAY."

SEGUN AND MUSCATI, 2014, P. 20

¹⁹⁴ Open Doors, 2017; Makinde et al., 2017; Walker, 2013.

¹⁹⁵ Girls Not Brides, 2018; Rai, R., Singh, P., & Singh, L. (2012). Utilization of maternal health care services among married adolescent women: insights from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2008. *Women's Health Issues*, 22(4), e407-e414, 404-414; Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012.

¹⁹⁶ 28 Too Many, 2016; Chika, 2012; Isokpan & Durojaye, 2016.

¹⁹⁷ Segun & Muscati, 2014.

¹⁹⁸ Interview 8.

Whether a girl is allowed to go to school often depends on the decision of her family and community.¹⁹⁹ Although the Christian-dominated south is generally more in favor of female education, Christian girls (including converts) in the north are far less likely to receive education.²⁰⁰ This is not surprising when looking at strict Islamic interpretations that discourage female education. The influence of Boko Haram is persuasive, as the movement is strictly opposed to Western education in general and girls' education in particular (Textbox 7).²⁰¹ In 2012, members of Boko Haram distributed leaflets in Yobe *"calling for girls to be denied modern education and promising to abduct 'infidel' women as slaves."*²⁰²

Moreover, in the Middle Belt and northeastern regions, schools are frequent targets (or collateral damage) of attacks by Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen.²⁰³ Attacks often go along with killings, sexual violence, abduction and abuse.²⁰⁴ The government and local (Muslim) authorities have closed-down schools in Christian communities for security reasons on a large scale and sometimes relocated the schools to Muslim communities, further obstructing Christian girls from following education.²⁰⁵ It is even argued that insecurity is used as an excuse to deny Christians access to education and force them to go to Muslim schools:²⁰⁶ In Tafawa Balewa, secondary boys and girls school were closed by the authorities of Bauchi, all Christian children were transferred to Muslim schools where they can be monitored.²⁰⁷

Although all schools are under threat, schools for girls might be increasingly at risk because of the religious opposition to female education.²⁰⁸ Female students are scared away from school or forced either to stop attending school, to attend a Quranic school or to get married.²⁰⁹ This tactic of spreading fear and discouraging female education seems to work, as Christian parents are reluctant to allow their daughters to go to school (and some schoolchildren are themselves reluctant),²¹⁰ because Christian faith and following Western education are the two main motives for women being abducted ([Section 3.3](#)).²¹¹ Therefore, Christian female students can be considered double targets and therefore twice as vulnerable at school and on their journey to

¹⁹⁹ Walker, 2013, p. 9.

²⁰⁰ The enrollment rates and literacy among girls in the north(east) is excessively low and only 4% of female students complete secondary school: 28 Too Many, 2016; Interview 3.

²⁰¹ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Questionnaire, 2019; Isokpan & Durojaye, 2016.

²⁰² Agbiboa, D., & Maiangwa, B. (2014). Why Boko Haram kidnaps women and young girls in north-eastern Nigeria. *Conflict trends*, 2014(3), 51-56, p. 1.

²⁰³ In 2015, more than 512 schools Borno state were destroyed during attacks, which makes it the most affected state: Isokpan & Durojaye, 2016.

²⁰⁴ Segun & Muscati, 2014.

²⁰⁵ In Yobe, Borno, Bauchi and Southern Kaduna State among others: Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2014; Segun & Muscati, 2014; Abdulbarkindo, Ben, & Gloria, 2018; Walker, 2013.

²⁰⁶ In Tafawa Balewa, a Christian community in Bauchi state, secular schools were closed by the local government and the only secondary school for girls was relocated to Bununu, a Muslim community: Open Doors, 2016.

²⁰⁷ Open Doors, 2016, p. 142.

²⁰⁸ In an attack on the Government Girls Secondary School in Mamudo, 42 girls were executed, of whom most were Christian: Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; The abduction of the Chibok and Dapchi girls are other cases that had a massive impact on girls' education: Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2014; Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Isokpan & Durojaye, 2016.

²⁰⁹ The Dapchi girls had to promise they would stop attending school before their release and are indeed afraid to do so: Interview 1; Isokpan & Durojaye, 2016; Open Doors, 2017; Segun & Muscati, 2014.

²¹⁰ In Tafawa Balewa town for instance: Open Doors, 2016; Open Doors, 2017; Danlami Jydsen, 2019; Interview 9.

²¹¹ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013; Segun & Muscati, 2014; Open Doors, 2017.

or from school.²¹² In an attempt at self-preservation, the Christian community then becomes complicit in depriving half their population of education.

4.3 Impunity

As previously enumerated, violations of Nigerian women's rights are widespread.²¹³ Whether in the private or public domain, the subordinate position of women means that they are not only at the receiving end of oppression and felonies committed against them, but are also the ones less likely to find justice. Lacks of awareness of their rights, as well as ways/knowledge on how to enforce them, hinder many women in finding justice.²¹⁴ This - in addition to low bargaining power and limited access to education, information and (financial) resources - means that women are often powerless and voiceless in the context of the gross human rights violations perpetrated against them. Any inability of a woman in general to find legal redress for infringement of her rights is an open invitation to further violate those rights with impunity. When this is coupled with the targeting of a religious minority, then the females of the religious minority are a low risk target for persecutors.²¹⁵

Therefore, in addition to the difficulties for women to find justice in general, Christian women in Muslim and/or Sharia dominated areas face greater challenges because they are an oppressed religious minority. Corruption, partiality and impunity result from the significant influence of ethnicity and religion in the political domain. Muslim judges are more likely to be loyal to their own community and follow Islamic laws.²¹⁶ Even though Sharia theoretically only applies to Muslims, it is, in fact, a significant contributor to discrimination of Christians in the north.²¹⁷ For women, this is aggravated by the fact that a female's testimony is often considered worth less than the statement of a man in Sharia courts.²¹⁸ This is particularly worrying in the context of Section 138 of the Evidence Act that places the full responsibility to 'present proof beyond reasonable doubt' on the shoulders of the victim in case of a crime committed against them.²¹⁹

In addition, a weak legal system, corruption, overlapping and contradicting laws [*Religious (Sharia) law, Customary law and Civil law*], and inadequate/conflicting allegiances to ethnic and religious communities by security forces are factors that result in a failure to protect (the rights of) women.²²⁰ Crimes committed against women are seldom investigated, let alone followed by prosecution.²²¹ Moreover, the discriminatory nature of laws exemplifies a weak legal response to violence against women: When a man commits a crime against a man, the penalty is generally

²¹² In Tafawa Balewa town for instance: Open Doors, 2016; Open Doors, 2017.

²¹³ Think of domestic violence, early marriage, sexual violence (statutory and spousal) rape, FGM, abduction and forced marriage and house arrest among others (Section [2.1](#), [2.3](#), [3.1](#), [3.2](#), [3.3](#), [3.7](#)).

²¹⁴ Interview 1.

²¹⁵ Miller and Fisher, Open Doors USA magazine, April 2019.

²¹⁶ World Watch Research, 2018; Interview 1.

²¹⁷ World Watch Monitor, 2016.

²¹⁸ Barkindo, Gudaku, & Wesley, 2013.

²¹⁹ *Evidence Act, 1990*; OECD, 2018.

²²⁰ Nnam, Arua, & Otu, 2018.

²²¹ For instance in the case of domestic violence, early marriage, statutory and spousal rape, FGM, abduction and forced marriage of Christian girls to Muslim men, confinement to the house, and (sexual) violence (Section [2.1](#), [2.3](#), [3.1](#), [3.2](#), [3.3](#), [3.7](#)).

three years. However, if it is a crime against a woman, the crime is perceived as a ‘misdemeanor,’ which is only sentenced by a maximum of two years imprisonment.²²²

The climate of impunity encourages members of Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen and even security personnel in the oppression of (and atrocities against) Christians in general and women in particular.²²³ Corruption and bribe-taking lead to a slow response or even total absence of the army during attacks, even though the authorities often know about the (threat of) attacks on Christian villages.²²⁴

*There are even very painful cases when people called for help during attacks, and security forces delayed in coming till after the attack (or even worse: facilitating the work of the perpetrators or even collaborating with them). Returnees in the North East have asked for security in their villages, and people in the Middle Belt have begged the government to intervene, to no avail.*²²⁵

This confluence of vulnerabilities is particularly devastating regarding abduction and forced marriage ([Section 3.3](#)): *"Parents seeking the release of abducted daughters are generally informed they have converted, married and are in the custody of local traditional rulers."*²²⁶ Especially in regions where Sharia is implemented, Christian families have little chance of achieving justice, as the abducted girl falls under Islamic law once married to a Muslim and her parents lose the right to interfere (Textbox 3).²²⁷ At other times, the forced marriage is accepted by the girl's family as a justification for the abduction and rape or to avoid the shame the daughter can bring upon them.²²⁸

Where the federal government is falling short, church communities are often stepping in to provide support, justice and protection for the victims. However, this places an enormous burden on the churches and can exceed their capacities. It takes a critical mass of actors with courage and integrity to redress this single factor in the complex persecution dynamic in which Nigerian Christian women – and their families and church by association – are caught.

5. Conclusion

In both the public and private domains, Nigerian women suffer because of their gender. They face oppression in a society where their voices are silenced and where they are exposed to severe human rights violations, both in times of crisis and (relative) peace.

Although all women in Nigeria are exposed to forms of gender-based violence or discrimination, for many Christian women in the north(east) and Middle Belt region these hardships are

²²² Section 353 and 360 of the [Criminal Code](#).

²²³ Segun & Muscati, 2014.

²²⁴ Nnam, Arua, & Otu, 2018.

²²⁵ Questionnaire, 2019, 4.5.

²²⁶ World Watch Monitor. (2016, 11 7). [UPDATE: Another Chibok schoolgirl escapes with baby](#).

²²⁷ Interview 1; World Watch Monitor. (2016, 11 15a). [Child marriage becoming a 'cloud of crisis' – N. Nigerian Christian leaders warn President](#). Retrieved from World Watch Monitor [accessed 23/10/2018].

²²⁸ Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012; Interview 1.

compounded by religious pressure. The double vulnerability of Christian women at the intersection of religious and gender-based oppression in a context of corruption, impunity, economic stress and inter-ethnic and religious tensions greatly increases their daily challenges and ultimately affects their chances of survival.

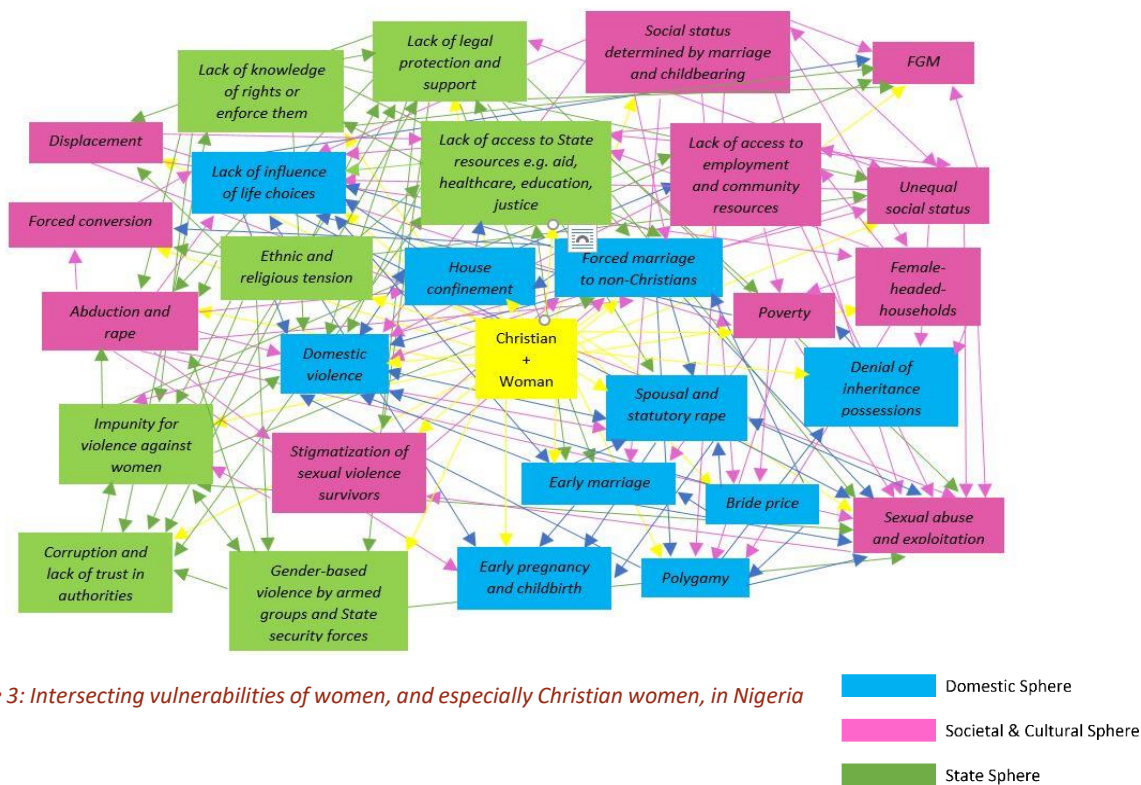


Figure 3: Intersecting vulnerabilities of women, and especially Christian women, in Nigeria

Figure 3 gives an overview of the compounded vulnerabilities faced by Christian women under pressure for their faith in Nigeria. The diagram shows the overwhelming complexity and interrelatedness of the different pressure points faced by Christian women in the Nigerian context (and specifically in the northeastern and Middle Belt regions). It is clear that no single aspect can be understood separately from the others and that, by being interwoven, these factors translate into lifelong hardship and complex experiences of persecution. When persecution from any source is added to already-burdened women within a Christian community, it must necessarily undermine the Church as a whole.

The pressure on Christian communities increases when under direct attack from Fulani herdsmen or Boko Haram and this often results in disastrous outcomes for women who become victims of abduction, forced marriage and sexual abuse etc.. The general impunity with which Christian women can be attacked is a critical enabling factor in the dynamic. It results in great numbers of widows bearing the brunt of the conflict only to find themselves in precarious circumstances with little means for survival – both for them and their families.

In the northern regions of the country, Christian women are profoundly impacted by the effects of Sharia law or other strict Islamic interpretations in their everyday lives, whether it concerns their freedom of movement, the way they dress or their access to education and employment. In this regard, the cultural and societal vulnerabilities of (Christian) women can provide avenues

for religious persecution. This is especially detrimental for female converts who most commonly lack legal and community support.

The oppression of and discrimination against female members of the Church create compounded disadvantages which severely impact their ability to thrive, let alone their ability to practice and live out their faith. This makes the Christian community less resilient to external and internal pressures (including persecution). Churches, therefore, have a vital role to play in ending violence and discrimination against women and girls - both for the sake of the women and also for the sake of the Church's long-term survival.

In addition to the role the Church could play in enhancing the position of Christian women and girls in Nigerian society, there is need for an inclusive approach by both the Muslim and Christian population in peace-building. Peaceful coexistence of members of both faiths must be achieved and sustained in order to tackle the root causes of many issues Nigeria (and its female population) are currently facing. As an example, CCEPI has issued the following call:

Intentional healing of the broken Christian-Muslim community relationships and then to implement peace building activities through intercultural dialogue, sensitization, mobilization, and community activities.

Second is a call for advocacy visits by government leaders, church and mosque leaders, and NGOs with the traditional and religious leaders of communities affected by violence, trauma, and persecution [...]. Advocacy creates opportunities for partnerships, and partnerships are necessary to achieve the seemingly unachievable healing and rebuilding in the NE [northeast].²²⁹

Most crucially, it has been widely acknowledged by the international community, United Nations (Resolution 1325, of the UN Peace and Security Council, 2000)²³⁰ and the Nigerian government that women can be agents of positive change and play key roles in sustainable peacebuilding. Therefore, their voices must be heard and their participation in formal and informal peace processes must be guaranteed. To obtain reconciliation, healing and sustainable peaceful coexistence in the northeastern and Middle Belt regions of Nigeria, equal participation of women, both Muslim and Christian, is necessary in order to change the very environment, the dynamics of which have been described in this paper. In order for their participation to be meaningful, capacity building is vital, making the investment in women in terms of education, economic empowerment, political inclusion and health all the more critical.²³¹ These are avenues which the Church, NGO's and governments can all embrace and collaborate together to speedily bring relief to a suffering people.

²²⁹ Input Research team CCEPI, 2019.

²³⁰ United Nations Security Council. (2000). *Resolution 1325*. UNSCR.

²³¹ Garba, G. K. (2016). Building women's capacity for peace building in Nigeria.

Appendices

A. List of interviews

#	Name	Gender	Nationality	Expertise	Date
1	*	F	Dutch /NL	Field expert Africa Services, Research and Advocacy Manager West-Africa, Open Doors International	23-1-2019
2	*	M	Nigerian /NG	Field expert Africa Services, Base Manager Field Nigeria, Open Doors International	7-3-2019
3	*	M	Nigerien /NE	Field expert Africa Services, Advocacy and Campaign Coordinator, Open Doors International	23-1-2019
4	Barkindo, A.	M	Nigerian /NG	Executive Director - The Kukah Centre: Faith, Leadership and Public Policy Research	21-1-2019 and 29-1-2019
5	Fisher, H.	F	American /US	Global Gender Persecution Analyst, Open Doors International	31-1-2019
6	Okwori, A	M	Nigerian /NG	President of the Christian Lawyers' Fellowship of Nigeria (CLASFON)	27-3-2019
7	Funmi Para-Mallam	F	Nigerian /NG	Professor of Gender and Development at University of Jos, and member of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies. National Coordinator of Christians Women for Excellence and Empowerment in Nigerian Society (CWEENS)	29-03-2019
8	Gideon Para-Mallam	M	Nigerian /NG	Reverend Continental Church and Mission leader in Africa. Regional secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES)	31-03-2019
9	Gloria Samdi Puldi	F	Nigerian /NG	Senior lecturer at the University of Jos. President of the Leadership, Improvement, Advocacy and Humanitarian (LEAH) Foundation.	28-03-2019
10	*	F	Nigerian /NG	Project manager at a Foundation working among persecuted Christians in Muslim dominated areas in Nigeria	30-03-2019
11	Andow Davita Danjuma	F	Nigerian /NG	Communication and Fund raising officer of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW)	28-03-2019
12	*	F	Nigerian /NG	Project Manager Stefanos Foundation	29-03-2019

B. Data

Table 3: The number of Christians, Muslims, Ethno-religious adherents (and Agnostics – only in Lagos) for each state

Province	Population 2019	Christians #	Christians %	Muslims #	Muslims %	Ethno religionists #	Ethno religionists %
Abuja							
Abuja	2.012.000	804.800	40,00%				
North							
Bauchi	6.659.000	998.850	15,00%	5.327.200	80,00%	332.950	5,00%
Borno	5.969.000	1.193.800	20,00%	3.581.400	60,00%	1.193.800	20,00%
Gombe	3.384.000	1.015.200	30,00%	1.861.200	55,00%	507.600	15,00%
Jigawa	6.241.000	624.100	10,00%	5.492.080	88,00%	124.820	2,00%
Kaduna	8.749.000	3.062.150	35,00%	4.374.500	50,00%	1.312.350	15,00%
Kano	13.454.000	1.210.860	9,00%	12.243.140	91,00%	0	0,00%
Katsina	8.302.000	581.140	7,00%	7.554.820	91,00%	166.040	2,00%
Kebbi	4.660.000	466.000	10,00%	4.100.800	88,00%	93.200	2,00%
Niger	5.659.000	1.414.750	25,00%	3.961.300	70,00%	282.950	5,00%
Sokoto	5.299.000	264.950	5,00%	4.981.060	94,00%	52.990	1,00%
Yobe	3.322.000	332.200	10,00%	2.890.140	87,00%	99.660	3,00%
Zamfara	4.692.000	234.600	5,00%	4.410.480	94,00%	46.920	1,00%
TOTAL	76.390.000	11.398.600	14,92%	60.778.120	79,56%	4213280	5,52%
Middle-Belt							
Adamawa	4.549.000	1364700	30,00%	2.956.850	65,00%		
Benue	6.087.000	4443510	73,00%				
Kogi	4.743.000	2371500	50,00%				
Kwara	3.385.000	1523250	45,00%	1.692.500	50,00%		
Nassarawa	2.675.000	1203750	45,00%				
Plateau	4.589.000	2753400	60,00%				
Taraba	3.284.000	985200	30,00%	985.200	55,00%		
TOTAL	29.312.000	14645310	49,96%				
South							
Abia	4.072.000	3257600	80,00%				
Akwa Ibom	5.584.000	4188000	75,00%				
Anambra	5.979.000	4783200	80,00%				
Bayelsa	2.439.000	1829250	75,00%				
Cross River	4.140.000	2980800	72,00%				
Delta	5.885.000	4472600	76,00%				
Ebonyi	3.115.000	2087050	67,00%				
Edo	4.627.000	3655330	79,00%				
Ekiti	3.433.000	2059800	60,00%				
Enugu	4.676.000	3507000	75,00%				
Imo	5.620.000	4496000	80,00%				
Lagos	13.042.000	10824860	83,00%				
Ogun	5.368.000	3220800	60,00%				

Ondo	4.953.000	2724150	55,00%
Osun	4.890.000	2885100	59,00%
Oyo	7.986.000	4392300	55,00%
Rivers	7.440.000	4464000	60,00%
TOTAL	93.249.000	65827840	70,59%
<i>Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019)</i> <i>The available data does not give details for Muslims, Ethno-religionists and Agnostics in the Middle Belt and South. Lagos is the only state where Agnostics are mentioned.</i>			

Table 4: Examples of gender-based abuse (GBA) of Christian women and girls through physical torture and rape
[based on extensive field research in Benue State over the period January 2014 – September 2016].²³²

Date and place	Status victim	Description
30/04/2015 Aganyi, Gwer-West LGA	Widow	This woman was forcefully taken and kept in the bush by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen for 3 days during which she was flogged with 21 strokes of the cane 3 times daily.
04/09/2015 Mbalom, Gwest East LGA	Married	This woman was tied to a tree in the bush and abandoned there for 2 days without food. She was eventually rescued by local hunters.
18/02/2016 Alegoga, Agatu LGA	Married	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
15/03/2015 Kudi, Makurdi LGA	Married	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
26/08/2015 Tiza, Makurdi LGA	Married	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
08/01/2016 Iorza, Logo LGA	Married	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
21/12/2015 Wachin, Logo LGA	Widow	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
16/05/2015 Genyi, Logo LGA	Widow	This woman was tied in the bush facing downwards and left. She would have spent days in that position if the community's local vigilante group had not heard her cries in the night and come to the rescue.
13/01/2016 Ibav, Logo LGA	Married	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
23/09/2015 Uge, Guma LGA	Married	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
28/02/2016 Iye, Guma LGA	Married	This woman was forced to carry the herdsmen's cache of arms and follow them trekking in the bush for days.
12/03/2015 Sumaka, Guma LGA	Married	This woman was taken by force by herdsmen who used their guns to hit her on the head and other parts of her body. She was not shot probably only because the herdsmen had run out of ammunition.
19/01/2016 Anbua, Guma LGA	Married	This woman was taken by force and kept in the bush by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen for days during which she was flogged.
05/01/2016 Ella, Agatu LGA	Married	This woman was forced to carry the herdsmen's cache of arms and follow them trekking in the bush for days.
30/08/2015 Okoloko, Agatu LGA	Married	This woman was forced to carry the herdsmen's cache of arms and follow them trekking in the bush for days.
22/07/2015 Effu, Agatu LGA	Widow	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.

²³² Adamu & Ben, 2017.

17/11/2015 Enahem, Agatu LGA	Married	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
19/10/2015 Enogaje, Agatu LGA	Widow	This woman was forced to carry the herdsmen's cache of arms and follow them trekking in the bush for days.
11/04/2015 Engila, Agatu LGA	Widow	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days
23/12/2015 Ojntele, Agatu LGA	Widow	Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kept this woman in the bush without food and beat her with a cane for days.
08/11/2015 Ehungba, Agatu LGA	Married	This woman was forced to carry the herdsmen's cache of arms and follow them trekking in the bush for days.
25/05/2015 Asuku, Katsina-Ala LGA	Married	This woman was forcefully taken and abused after an attack on the village where she lives and farms. 5 herdsmen raped her in one day.
07/12/2015 Bam, Guma LGA	Widow	This woman was gang raped when the herdsmen stopped her fetching water in the evening.
16/01/2016 Pakema, Guma LGA	Married	This woman was abused by herdsmen who lay in ambush on a market road.
31/03/2015 Agagbe, Gwer-West LGA	Married	This woman was forcefully taken and abused after an attack on village.
02/08/2015 Utim, Gwer-West LGA	Married	This woman was forcefully taken and abused after an attack on village.
29/12/2015 Ologbagishu, Agatu LGA	Married	This woman was abused on the farm.
12/07/2016 Olegadekele, Agatu LGA	Widow	Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsmen abused this woman sexually after inflicting her with injuries and cuts.
22/08/2015 Bino village, Guma LGA	Child	A 13 year old girl was gang-raped and abandoned in the bush for hours before local vigilante group came to her rescue. (There are no indications whatsoever that the victim has been rehabilitated from the trauma of this experience. She is still living with hurtful memories of this experience.)
29/03/2015 Vaase, Ukum LGA	Child	A 14 year old girl was kidnapped after an attack and was taken to the Sev-Av axis of neighboring Taraba State where she was raped and abandoned. She was discovered in the bush and returned to her family
09/05/2015 Mbakyya, Tarka LGA	Child	A 14 year old girl, simply identified as Kpadoo, is reported to have been tortured and gang-raped when she was returning from the stream where she went to fetch water.
30/04/2015 Agoo, Katsina-Ala LGA	Child	An 11 year old girl was gang-raped and sustained severe injuries. Medical attention was required to save her life.
01/03/2016 Obishu, Agatu LGA	Child	A 13 year old girl, simply identified as Ada, was raped and abandoned in the bush. Her cries attracted attention and led to her rescue. (She is still traumatized.)

Table 5: Christian men, women and children killed in Taraba, Southern Kaduna, Nasarawa and Benue states. *

State	Christian Men		Christian Women		Christian Children		Source
	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured	
Taraba*	532	1069	507	817	445	502	Violent Conflict in Divided Societies: The Case Study of Violent Conflict in Taraba State (2013 – 2015)
Southern Kaduna*	494	91	215	39	**	**	Nigeria: Southern Kaduna and the atrocities of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen (May 2016 – September 2017) VOLUME 2
Nasarawa*	560	362	149	327	117	189	Nigeria: Investigating common narratives of violent conflict in Nasarawa State: An Examination of the hostilities against Christians in the period January 2013 – May 2016
Benue*	103	**	28	**	8	**	Nigeria: Benue State under the shadow of “herdsmen terrorism” (2014 – 2016) (with update: 1 January – 31 August 2017)
Total	1689	**	899	**	**	**	
<p><i>* This data has been collected during field research in Taraba, Southern Kaduna, Nasarawa and Benue States. The aim is to give an idea on the magnitude and severity of the situation in the Middle Belt region. However, it is important to state that this data portrays a very incomplete picture of number of people displaced and that the situation is in all probability far worse than the data suggests. This has to do with a lack of access to certain areas for security reasons amongst others.</i></p> <p><i>** Missing data</i></p> <p><i>*** See the above-mentioned reports for more information and the build-up of the data</i></p>							

Table 6: Examples of gender-based abuse (GBA) through abduction in Benue State *²³³

Date and place	Category	Description
24/04/2015 Gbise, Katsina-Ala LGA	3 Christian women abducted	These women were abducted after an attack on the village that claimed many lives. The attack took place in the early hours when the women had gone to the stream to fetch water for house chores. They were abducted from near-by bush where the women had been hiding from the attackers.
07/10/2015 Abako, Katsina-Ala LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	She was ambushed and abducted while coming from the farm, where she went in the morning to collect yams for the family's meal.
29/11/2015 Tse- Jonyi, Guma LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was abducted after her home was raided in the night. Her husband was killed.
23/03/2015 Oleje, Agatu LGA	2 Christian women abducted	The Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen kidnapped the women on the farm. It is gathered from the villagers that one of the women, Eneh Ojika eventually died in the hands of the herdsmen 2 weeks after the kidnap. Her corpse was eventually found in the bush and buried. The other woman, simply identified as Justina is nowhere to be found till date.
09/05/2015 Ogam, Agatu LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was ambushed and abducted on her way from the stream where she had gone to fetch water.

²³³ Adamu & Ben, 2017

17/01/2016 Obaji, Agatu LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was ambushed and abducted on her way from fetching fire wood.
11/03/2016 Alokpa, Agatu LGA	2 Christian women abducted	These women were abducted after night raid on the village of Obaji by the suspected Muslim Fulani- Hausa herdsman.
27/06/2015 Ekaida, Agatu LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was kidnapped while working on her maize farm.
30/02/2016 Shaorga, Makurdi LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was kidnapped while returning from a neighbouring village market.
08/01/2015 Orkpe, Makurdi LGA	2 Christian women abducted	These women were abducted while fleeing an attack on their village by the suspected Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsman.
21/08/2016 Mbaayo, Tarka LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was abducted after her home was raided in the night. Her husband was killed.
13/10/2015 Binev, Buruku LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was abducted after suspected Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsman attacked the Binev community.
19/11/2015 Tyonongu, Kwande LGA	1 Christian woman abducted	This woman was kidnapped while returning from an evening Christian programme that took place in Yogbo.
<i>*based on extensive field research in Benue State over the period January 2014 – September 2016 (Adamu & Ben, 2017)</i>		

Table 7: Christian girls abducted, forcefully converted to Islam, married as minors and rescued by Hausa Christians' Foundations (HACFO) June 2017-December 2018

#	Name	Age	Abducted	Converted	Forced to marry and have sex	Abuse*	Ethnic heritage	Held for	Date of return	Where
1	Aisha Bala Mazadu	14	YES	YES	YES	YES	Hausa	40 days	July 2017	KADUNA (Gidan Mato Sambirni, Soba)
2	Alheri Garba	19	YES	NO	NO (about to be)	YES	Hausa	2 months	Aug 2017	KATSINA (Bakori)
3	Christiana Jacob Abimaje	15	YES	YES			Igala	5.5 months	Aug 2017	KADUNA (Bomo, Zaria)
4	Blessing Eze	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	Igbo	3 months	Nov 2017	KADUNA (Ikara)
5	Lois Haruna	16	YES	YES	NO	YES	Hausa	3 months	Dec 2017	KADUNA (Markarfi)
6	'Mummy' Bonat	17	YES	YES	YES		Baju	1 month	Jan 2018	S. KADUNA (Gangaridalka ra)

7	Jennifer Yohanna	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	Kurama	8 months	Jan 2018, freed Aug, returned to husband Oct 2018	KADUNA (Pambegua Kubau)
8	Asabe Hassan	15	YES	YES	NO	YES	Hausa	1 month	Feb 2018	KADUNA (Taba)
9	Asabe John	17	YES	YES	YES	YES	Kurama	18 months	Mar 2018	KADUNA (Pambegua)
10	Pricilla Ayuba	17	YES	YES	NO	YES	Hausa	3 months	April 2018	KADUNA (Kurmin Kogi)
11	Zainab Bulus Bawa	16	YES	YES	YES	YES	Hausa	7 months	July 2018	KADUNA (Kugawa Kubau)
12	Parmata Adulkarim Misari	15	YES	YES	NO	YES	Babur	1 month	Aug 2018	KADUNA (Kongo Zaria)
* <i>physical, emotional, verbal, psychological</i>										

Table 8: Christians displaced from Southern Kaduna, Nasarawa and Benue states

State	Christian Men		Christian Women		Christian Children	Source****
	Lost Property	and Displaced***	Lost Property	and Displaced***	Displaced	
Southern Kaduna*	3075	2799	384	334	**	Nigeria: Southern Kaduna and the atrocities of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen (May 2016 – September 2017) VOLUME 2
Nasarawa*	**	7953	**	8432	3047	Nigeria: Investigating common narratives of violent conflict in Nasarawa State: An Examination of the hostilities against Christians in the period January 2013 – May 2016
Benue*	**	18.412	**	2409	2327	Nigeria: Benue State under the shadow of “herdsmen terrorism” (2014 – 2016) (with update: 1 January – 31 August 2017) SHORT VERSION
Total	**	29.164	**	11.175	**	
<p>* <i>This data has been collected during field research in Southern Kaduna, Nasarawa and Benue. The aim is to give an idea on the magnitude and severity of the situation in the Middle-Belt Region. However, it is important to state that this data portrays a very incomplete picture of number of people displaced and that the situation is in all probability far worse than the data suggests. This has to do with a lack of access to certain areas for security reasons amongst others.</i></p> <p>** <i>Missing data</i></p> <p>*** <i>The amount of people who have lost properties include the number displaced people</i></p> <p>**** <i>See the abovementioned reports for more information and the build-up of the data</i></p>						

C. 4 Case studies

Case Study 1: Aisha Bala Mazadu (#1 of Table 7)

On 25 June 2017, 14 year old Aisha Bala Mazadu left her home for nearby Sambirni to buy some medicine. On her way home, a Muslim married man in his thirties, Bello Chiroma, kidnapped her with the support of his brother-in-law, the 'King' of Sambirni, Sarki Haruna and local Islamic clerics. Chiroma had earlier threatened to marry Aisha by force after her parents had told him to stop visiting her; now he took Aisha to the palace of the Hakeemi of Maigana, about 45 minutes' drive away.

After four days, the Hakeemi sent for her parents to come to the palace. To their great shock, they saw Aisha in full Islamic dress. The Hakeemi told them he had summoned them to let them know that their daughter was not 'lost', but now in good hands, that she was now a Muslim and would be married to her kidnapper the following Friday (6 July 2017) and that she would not be able to return to them, because 'a Muslim cannot live with a Christian', so she would be provided with Muslim parents to replace her 'infidel' biological parents.

The parents (who lived in Gidan Mato, Soba Local Government Area, Kaduna) and their pastor made a reported to the police about this plan to have Aisha married, but the police - saying they could take no action - told them they should take the case to the Local Government Chairman (who would be very difficult to access).

On 30 June 2017, staff from Hausa Christian Foundation (HACFO) visited Sambirni to verify the facts. They found that the man was moving about freely, bragging that he had done something commendable in Islam because Aisha was an 'infidel'. Instead of punishing the kidnapping* of a minor, the local ruler denied knowing what had happened, associating it with Islamic custom and practice.

Meanwhile, Aisha's mother was in anguish, weeping night and day.

HACFO staff went back to Maigana on 3 July 2017 for a day-long meeting with all involved from the Soba LGA, namely the Sole Administrator and his team, the Chairmen of both Christian and Muslim associations (CAN and the JNI), the Council of the Hakeemi's palace, the police and others. At the end of the meeting, they concluded that Aisha should be brought to the police station.

Her captors went away for about 3 hours, but then returned without Aisha - on the grounds that it was late and if they returned Aisha to her parents, their people could turn violent. But they promised to give her back to her family by noon the next day (4 July).

On 4 July, after another intense discussion, the Muslim captors brought Aisha as if they would give her back, but Hakeemi's secretary, quoting the Sole Administrator, said they could not do so until after a security meeting had taken place (which the Sole Administrator had summoned for 5 July).

Aisha's family patiently waited, out of respect for authority. On 5 July, the Muslims phoned around to find out who she was with (pretending that they would return her), but from 9am to

7pm refused to release her; the Sarki of Sambirni repeated that this would give rise to serious uproar from his people. Instead, Aisha's captors said they would hand her over to the Social Welfare services for two weeks, after which they would check if she wished to return to her parents or remain with her captors.

The Department of State Services (DSS) and the Social Welfare Department then went to the boy's village for a meeting with him and his parent. Then they called in Aisha's parents - in her absence. According to the social services officials, they had been sent from local government to *not* give Aisha back; so they pleaded with the parents to allow Aisha to be married to her kidnapper. Her parents unwaveringly responded that they wanted Aisha back. (Meanwhile, the Social Welfare Department - where she was supposed to be staying securely - returned her to the JNI (the local Islamic religious leaders).

While the DSS and Social Welfare Department were meeting with Aisha's parents, Chiroma, his parents and others left for the wedding. Aisha was brought too, to become his second wife.

When HACFO staff found out that Aisha had been married - despite all the promises - they petitioned the Kaduna State office of the National Human Rights Commission. Three days later, they had an interview there and were directed to the State Police Commissioner. Finally, after all involved had met again for 8 hours at Police Command, Aisha was allowed to return to her parents.

Case Study 2: Alheri Garba (#2 of Table 7)

Alheri Garba, 19, a Christian woman from Bakori attended the Federal College of Education in Zaria, Katsina State. She was on her way home for a mid-term break when an unknown Muslim man kidnapped her and kept her in his house in Zaria (as Alheri reported later). She was with him for more than two months. When her phone number was called, he answered but refused to allow her to speak, or to disclose where he was keeping her. He finally switched off her phone, but used another number to taunt her family and supporters.

A formal report was submitted to the Authority of the Federal College of Education, Zaria Area Command of the Nigerian Police Force, the Department of Social Services, the DPO of Zaria LGA, but no-one showed any concern or acted on it, perhaps because Alheri was an adult in Nigerian law.

After Alheri returned to her family, her HACFO rescuers said she had been held in the cruellest form of captivity they had ever seen: "He brought her out in a really terrible condition. She doesn't know where she is, she has completely lost her senses. She could not even stand on her own feet. There is no form of abuse that she has not been subjected to...This man almost killed Alheri. She has been under intensive medical care and a total rehabilitation program ever since she was released."

Case Study 3: Christiana Jacob Abimaje (#3 of Table 7)

Christiana, 13, daughter of Jacob and Blessing Abimaje, was a Government Secondary School student whose family lived on the campus of the well-known Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Kaduna State [one of the top educational institutions in Africa]. In early 2017, her young brother had half his body burned in a fire; his parents spent almost two months in Zaria's Shika Hospital.

One day in March 2017, as Jacob was about to go to Samaru market to buy food to take to his wife in the hospital, a girl arrived, saying she was Christiana's classmate. The father had no time to question her as he dashed off; but local Muslims had sent her to facilitate Christiana's disappearance.

When Jacob returned, he could not find Christiana; she had been taken to the Hakeemi* of Bomo and kept there. After Jacob had searched for almost a week, the Hakeemi ordered him to come to his palace, where they brought out a girl dressed head to toe in Islamic dress - even her eyes were covered with a veil. The Hakeemi asked the girl to remove the veil; it was only then that her father recognized her. The Hakeemi told Jacob that Christiana, now a Muslim, would be staying with him, and denied Jacob's request for her to return home.

Jacob and Blessing were in double agony - their son was still in hospital and now their daughter had been abducted and forcibly converted to Islam.

Blessing could not bear to stay in the hospital; so she came home - with her son - to fight for her daughter. She went to the Hakeemi, who warned her to stop coming to his palace. She went to the man in charge of the girl, a Mallam (Islamic scholar) on the staff of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Ahmadu Bello University, who also refused to give Christiana back.

Both parents found it very difficult to attend to their usual business; they were scared because the Hakeemi was involved. Despite the fact that he had lost his job with the Kaduna State government, he kept causing trouble, and - since they were Igala, from southern Nigeria - they felt that taking the case to the police would make no difference. Indeed they feared they would be killed.

Blessing, however, kept going to visit Bomo for her daughter - to the point that whenever the locals there saw her, they laughed and mocked her. Once, when the Hakeemi saw her persistence, he said Christiana was too scared to return and might run away, so her parents should follow her gently. However, when the parents did ease off, Christiana's captors went to court with an affidavit to change her name to Aisha Yakubu (Jacob) Suleiman.

This meant the Mallam, Suleiman, became her 'legal' father, with the right to decide anything for Christiana. She was then engaged to be married, even though she was still only 13.

Christiana was finally returned to her family after 5 months, on 29 July 2017, the week that she was due to be married to a Muslim. Her rescuers had to trek deep into the heart of Bomo town; the roads were too narrow for vehicles. Mallam Suleiman kept them waiting for about 30 minutes while local men and women formed a crowd around her parents and their supporters. After the crowd had gathered, he then brought Christiana out. She was crying out loud that she would not follow her parents. All the women around her began to cry aloud as well, causing

tension. A mob of youths came from nowhere shouting: “Nobody will force her to go, and nobody will arrest Mallam Suleiman with abusive language”.

The parents decided to go to speak to the Imam. While they were doing that, her captors asked Christiana to run away; as she ran, Mallam Suleiman ran after her. For more than an hour, the two refused to come back until her parents had left.

The captors eventually went to Samaru Police station, apparently anticipating things would go in their favor. The parents noticed that the ‘senior officer’ seemed to act very strangely: He blamed Christiana’s parents and said that what the Hakeemi did was the right thing. When the parents expressed their suspicion, they discovered that the policeman was not the ‘senior officer’ and was, in fact, a junior member of staff; it appeared that her captors had already connived with him to keep Christiana. When the real senior officer arrived, Christiana was finally handed over to her biological parents.

The Constitution of Nigeria says that a minor is in the custody of their biological parents, and no-one has the right to forcefully take them from those parents, even in the name of religion.

On 25 December 2019 Christiana will be exactly 16 years old.

**‘Hakeemi’ – an honorific title in Hausa meaning ‘wise’ or ‘learned, given to an Islamic local ruler.*

Case Study 4: Jennifer Yohanna (#7 of Table 7)

Matthew Dan Azumi and his wife were born into the Catholic community of the tribe of Kurama in Kaduna State. They had at least 3 children: Yohanna, Blessing and Kabiru: Kabiru converted to Islam.

In 2016, Blessing was kidnapped - with Kabiru’s connivance - and forcefully converted to Islam. Yohanna reported this to the police, with whose help his sister returned after 21 days. Her kidnappers then came after her to kill her, claiming she had committed apostasy (going back to her original Christian faith from Islam). In the face of many threats, Yohanna stood his ground and the family was left in peace for 2 years. However, Blessing’s kidnappers vowed to deal severely with Yohanna for being opposed to Islam.

On 1 January 2018, Yohanna’s 15 year old daughter Jennifer was kidnapped from their home. Her parents heard that a local youth was responsible and so went to his house. In front of his parents he denied it. Yohanna reported it to the Divisional Police Station of Pambegua, and then, higher up, to Zaria Area Police Command. After 15 days, during which Jennifer was detained and abused, she was released back to her father on condition that he allow her to practise Islam.

When Jennifer - whose name had been changed to Zainab - returned to her parents, she was spiritually disturbed to the point of running mad; threatening to attack her mother, because - she said - that was what her captors had asked her to do. Yohanna took her away to get local support. The night she went for rehabilitation, a Muslim cleric from Zaria, Mallam Abdullahi Baba of JIBWIS*, mobilized more than 30 militants to storm Yohanna’s residence, shouting until

around 2am through a public address system to return Jennifer, or face the consequences. When they discovered Jennifer was not home, they returned to Zaria.

Jennifer stayed away for local rehabilitation for two weeks. On 1 February 2018, after she returned, her Muslim uncle Kabiru connived with others to get her out again in the middle of the night. Sleeping in her grandmother's room in the family compound, Jennifer left through the window. Even when Yohanna found out where his daughter was and reported it again to the police, the authorities did not do anything.

Jennifer came home on 14 June 2018, now clearly pregnant. However, some Muslim women came and forced her back to her 'husband'. When her mother - who was also (heavily) pregnant - heard that, she went to see her. When she entered where Jennifer was detained, she saw Jennifer - who was willing to follow her home! However, a crowd of youths came to prevent Jennifer leaving, and they beat up her pregnant mother. Yohanna rushed to the house to rescue his wife and daughter. The youths overpowered and beat him up as well, and forced Jennifer back into the house. Her parents had no option but to return home without her, the youths following them, throwing stones.

Some youths also had weapons; they threatened to kill Yohanna for touching his own ('Muslim') daughter and - as an infidel - for entering a Muslim's house. When Yohanna's father came to plead for calm, they beat him up too.

Yohanna then had to leave his own house to escape for his life with his wife and other children.

Hausa Christians Foundation contacted the authorities and the Kaduna State police helped to reunite Jennifer with her family in August 2018. She agreed to continue her studies, with a view to becoming a doctor. However, her captors had given her a phone with some numbers and told her she could call them anytime. One day, in October 2018, her family think she disappeared through a gap in the fence, while the friend who was looking after her was sleeping, and she went back to her 'husband'. Some time after that, Jennifer phoned her parents and told them not to contact her again; they are heartbroken.

**Salafi movement originally set up in northern Nigeria to fight 'innovations' practised by Sufi brotherhoods. It has links to Wahhabism and is said to be influential at local, state and even federal levels.*

D. Policy recommendations

To ensure the respect of the fundamental rights and dignity of women and girls of all faiths in Nigeria, the Religious Liberty Partnership task-group on Gender and Religious Freedom recommends:

1. The **Nigerian National Assembly** should immediately domesticate into law the “*Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*” and the “*Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*”, to ensure that these key international treaties will have the force of law in Nigeria. Efforts must be taken also to press individual States to adopt these conventions at the state level.
2. The **International Community** should create channels of collaboration with State Governors and urge those who have not yet adopted the 2003 Child Rights Act to enact it into law, and promote an enforcement and monitoring mechanism for the law implementation to ensure the decrease of under-age marriages.
3. The **International Community** should support and promote projects providing access to specialized medical and mental health services for doubly vulnerable women and girls, victims of abduction and other forms of sexual violence, with a special focus on post-trauma services. Community-based approaches aimed at addressing stigmatization should be an integral part of such projects.
4. The **UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict** should investigate how sexual violence is used as a means of persecution in the herder-farmer conflict and the extent women and girls are targeted because of their faith and gender. The Special Representative should engage in advocacy efforts with representatives of the Nigerian Government to tackle this issue and to ensure that the use of sexual violence against women of faith in this conflict is properly addressed with a survivor-centered approach.