

2022 Gender-specific religious persecution (GSRP) Methodology

Contents

Sources.....	1
Changes in WWL top 50 countries.....	2
Method	2
Limitations	3
Definitions.....	4
a. Persecution	4
b. Gender equality.....	4
c. Pressure Point definitions	4
Changes in 2022 regarding the methodology.....	7

Sources

For the 2022 Gender-specific Religious Persecution (SRP) Report, the SRP Unit of Open Doors International’s World Watch Research (WWR) gathered and analyzed data using a mixed methods approach, comprised of both qualitative and quantitative elements. During the reporting period (1 October 2020 – 30 September 2021), WWR monitored religious persecution dynamics in over 100 countries.¹ SRP analysts studied data from the 76 countries where persecution is high, very high or extreme. This report primarily presents analysis of the top 50 countries on Open Doors’ World Watch List (WWL) 2022. However, some findings additionally draw from countries that rank 51 – 76 in the pool of countries monitored by Open Doors, particularly in describing regional trends.

The data the SRP Unit studies comes from in-country networks, Open Doors country researchers, external experts and WWR persecution analysts. As part of the data collection process, regionally based experts collected qualitative data from trauma specialists, church leaders, focus groups and experts. Additionally, the report offers information based on interviews with Christian men and women who have experienced violence for their faith.

In the WWL 2022 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the

¹ Complete WWL methodology, <<https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Complete-WWL-Methodology-November-2021.pdf>>

need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2022 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability, as in the previous reporting period.

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

Changes in WWL top 50 countries

In the study of Gender SRP, the sample of 50 countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian is adjusted yearly based upon WWR persecution scores. In 2022, it includes Cuba and Niger, whereas the 2021 WWL and correlated Gender SRP Report included Kenya and Comoros.

Method

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

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

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

² Complete WWL methodology, p.29 <<https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Complete-WWL-Methodology-November-2021.pdf>> [password: freedom]

³ Martial Arts Pressure Points: Medium Range, John Gahan, LCGI, 2017 <<https://www.scribd.com/book/355164891/Martial-Arts-Pressure-Points-Medium-Range>> [Accessed 4 February 2022].

The scale used to measure frequency was:

Frequency level	Description
Isolated incident	A single case
Several incidents	2-10 cases
Moderately widespread	11-50 cases
Widespread	50+ cases (and in several areas across the country)

The scale used to measure severity was:

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

Limitations

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

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

Year to year, there are some fluctuations in the capture of Pressure Points. These may be driven by trends in persecution, difficult contexts exacerbating gender SRP, the number of respondents and/or increases of gender awareness (or lack thereof). To draw substantiated conclusions from the data, a strictly numerical approach is avoided. Instead, SRP analysts take a holistic and balanced approach to the data set, recognizing the specific influences of shifts in data collection and using internal audit processes to confirm trend analysis.

Definitions

a. Persecution

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

“Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians.”

This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.⁴

b. Gender equality

This term is used according to the definition provided by UN Women, namely:

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

c. Pressure Point definitions

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

Pressure Point	Definition
Abduction	The act of making a person go somewhere with you, especially using threats or violence. ⁶
Denied access to Christian religious	The denial of access to Christian religious material, such as Bibles, study notes and Christian symbols, teachings, such as from churches, youth groups, Sunday schools and Christian parents, and rites, such as baptism.

⁴ Complete WWL methodology, p.7 <<https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Complete-WWL-Methodology-November-2021.pdf>>

⁵ UN Women, *Concepts and Definitions* <<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>> [Accessed 7 February 2022]

⁶ Cambridge English Dictionary, *Abduction* <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/abduction>> [Accessed 7 February 2022]

materials, teachings and rites	
Denied access to social community/networks	The denial of access to social community or networks.
Denied citizenship	The intentional act of denying or removing citizenship from nationals.
Denied communal resources	The intentional act of denying or removing access to communal resources, such as communal organizations, buildings or other public goods, services or programs.
Denied custody of children	The act of denying a person of the legal and/or physical custody of their child/children, or the right to have a relationship or direct contact with their child/children.
Denied food or water	The act of deliberately denying another person of food or water.
Denied inheritance or possessions	Denying a person of their inheritance rights or their possessions.
Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse	The act of denying a person the legal right to marry a Christian spouse.
Denied/restricted healthcare	Discrimination affecting users of health care services. It serves as a barrier to accessing health services, affects the quality of health services provided, and reinforces exclusion from society for both individuals and groups. ⁷
Discrimination/harassment via education	Distinguishing, excluding or limiting access to education. Specifically, by: a) depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level; (b) limiting any person or group of persons to education of an inferior standard; (c) establishing or maintaining separate educational systems or institutions for persons or groups of persons; or (d) by inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are incompatible with human dignity. ⁸
Economic harassment via business/job/work access	Targeting or boycotting a business to its economic disadvantage, or distinguishing, excluding or limiting a person's access to work or jobs due to their Christian faith. Specifically, by: a) preventing Christians from obtaining or retaining gainful employment; (b) limiting any person or group of persons to working conditions of an inferior standard; (c) by inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are incompatible with human dignity; or d) forced labor, including subtle means such as accumulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities, but not extending to slavery. ⁹
Economic harassment via fines	The act of disadvantaging another person through inappropriately applied fines.
Enforced religious dress code	The act of forcing, or applying significant pressure on someone, to wear religious clothing.
False charges	Legal charges against a person that are unproven and untrue, made in the spirit of deliberateness or deceit.
Forced divorce	The act of terminating a marriage or marital union without the consent of the spouse.

⁷ Adapted from the Joint United Nations statement on ending discrimination in health care settings, 2017, retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-06-2017-joint-united-nations-statement-on-ending-discrimination-in-health-care-settings>

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

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

Forced marriage	A marriage in which one party has not personally expressed their full, free and informed consent to the union. ¹⁰ This includes child marriage, or early marriage, where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. It also includes unannounced and disadvantageous polygamous marriage with the intent to subjugate for religious reasons.
Forced out of home – expulsion	The act of suddenly and forcibly expelling a person from the residence they have been living in, or applying such pressure that they feel they have no freedom to stay.
Forced to flee town/country	The act of suddenly and forcibly expelling a person from the town/country they have been living in, or applying such pressure that they feel that they have no choice to stay.
Incarceration by family (house arrest)	The obligation upon an individual that she/he be forbidden to leave his or her place of residence except for limited, specified circumstances. ¹¹
Imprisonment by government	The act of being imprisoned in a prison, or place used as a prison, by a government body or agent. ¹²
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience	Serving in the military forces of a country against a person’s conscience, being ill-treated (denied Freedom of Religious Belief) in the service of the military, or being forced to carry out specific acts in military service that are against a person’s conscience.
Targeted Seduction	The act of seducing someone (here with a sexual connotation) with the intent purpose of leading them away from their Christian faith.
Trafficking a. Sexual exploitation not explicitly mentioned b. Sexual exploitation explicitly mentioned.	Trafficking: The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploiting a person. ¹³
Travel bans/restrictions on movement	Preventing a person from travelling somewhere, or restricting their movement against their will.
Violence – death	The cause of loss of life.
Violence – physical (including torture)	Bodily harm inflicted by one person on another person. ¹⁴ Researchers limit the designation of this Pressure Point to instances which clearly indicate instances of physical harm (such as beatings/acts of torture) but which do not result in death. Instances of sexual violence are excluded.
Violence – psychological	Any intentional conduct that seriously impairs another person’s psychological integrity through coercion or threats. ¹⁵
Violence – sexual a. Rape not explicitly mentioned b. Rape explicitly mentioned	Any sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationships to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. ¹⁶

¹⁰ Child, early and forced marriage, including in humanitarian settings. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/ChildMarriage.aspx> Retrieved November 27, 2019

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

¹² Adapted from the Cambridge English Dictionary

¹³ Article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons.

¹⁴ Adapted from the Law Dictionary. Retrieved from: <https://thelawdictionary.org/physical-violence/>.

¹⁵ European Institute for Gender Equality. Retrieved from: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1334>.

¹⁶ Adapted from the World Health Organization. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/global_campaign/en/chap6.pdf

Violence – verbal (including harassment and insults)	Harsh and insulting language directed at a person, intended to cause them emotional harm.
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Changes in 2022 regarding the methodology

The Pressure Points framework has been refined over the last five years of GSRP research. No Pressure Points were added or removed since the 2021 report. However, there were some minor changes. The Pressure Point ‘Denied access to Christian religious materials’ was expanded to include Christian teachings and rites, becoming ‘Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites’. As such, instances of denied access to religious trainings have been reclassified from ‘Travel bans/restrictions on movement’ or ‘Discrimination/harassment via education’ to ‘Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites.’ Three subcategories were also added to ‘Violence – psychological’ to included extra detail of violence type. These were: coercion, threats and psychological harm. This subcategorization revealed the gender-specific nuance that correlated with the top Pressure Points for each.

See the table below for previous changes to Pressure Points.

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