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OUR VOICES

ems women's network



**ACTING AGAINST
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**



Evangelical Mission
in Solidarity

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Dr Kerstin Neumann

Editorial Board:

Regine Nagel
Dr Rima Nasrallah-van Saane
Dr Kerstin Neumann

Executive Editor:

Katja Dorothea Buck

Address:

Women & Gender Desk
International Women's Network
Evangelical Mission in Solidarity
Vogelsangstraße 62
70197 Stuttgart, Germany
Tel.: +49 (0)71163678-33/-73
www.ems-online.org
neumann@ems-online.org
nagel@ems-online.org

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Translations:

Katharina Goodwin,
Dr Aguswati Hildebrandt Rambe,
Regine Nagel, Bärbel Wuthe,
Nardine Maurice Zarif Zaki

Layout:

keipertext.com | Martin Keiper

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Dear sisters and brothers in the international EMS fellowship,

We celebrate with this issue the 30th birthday of OUR VOICES. Throughout all these years OUR VOICES has been an important platform for the women of the international EMS community to express their views and to tell their stories. It has brought their *voices* together in the folds of its pages and gave them comfort and courage as they experienced solidarity.

The topics it has tackled varied from ecumenical learning to human trafficking, from mothers and daughters to women's strength. And yet one theme seems to run through it like a 'red thread' and that is sexual harassment or violence against women and other vulnerable groups.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about an even stronger resurgence of harassment and abuse. The women in the member churches and missions of EMS described this prevailing situation in OV 2021.

With this issue we take the next step: **ACTING against GBV**. The International Women's Network, advisory board for the work of the unit 'Women and Gender' in the secretariat, launched a survey to screen the situation after two years of Corona pandemic asking for practical steps required to address the problem.

In order to equip churches and fellowship groups to tackle the problem, we offer this issue as a handbook where one can find:

- Definitions and manifestations of GBV
- Finding help – supportive links
- Biblical and theological perspectives
- Best practice models
- Liturgical material

We hope that all members and friends can find in it practical information that can aid them in understanding and improving their ability to speak about GBV. The material can bring spiritual comfort but also give tools for teaching and argumentation. The best practice models are meant for encouragement and as an incentive to act now. Above all, Gender-based violence can only be controlled if clear and adequate structures and procedures to protect women are put in place.

Finally, a word of thanks is due to all those who have contributed during the last 30 years to the journey of OUR VOICES. As we look ahead, we pray that women and men may be supported in handling the challenges that lie before us and that our network for the protection and support of women and vulnerable communities may be expanded and strengthened.

With cordial greetings from Stuttgart and Beirut
Regine Nagel
Rev Dr Rima Nasrallah-van Saane
Rev Dr Kerstin Neumann



Regine Nagel



**Rev Dr Rima
Nasrallah-van Saane**



Rev Dr Kerstin Neumann


Let us speak out!

Why is it so difficult to talk about gender-based violence?
Why is it so important to talk about it?

Since the beginning of the Corona pandemic in March 2020, women in the international EMS Women's Network collect data and discuss the increase in cases of domestic violence the world over. What can we do, effectively and practically, to help the victims, women and children in particular? How can we address the issue in our churches? What can EMS as international fellowship of churches and missions do to help fight the cause of the victims?

Gender-based violence is violence faced by people the world over and throughout human history. It is directed against a person on the basis of biological sex or gender identity. Women are disproportionately harmed with one in three women having experienced physical or sexualized violence in their life. Therefore, the terms domestic violence and gender-based violence (GBV) are used interchangeably in this publication.

In May 2020, UN Women referred to this situation as 'Shadow Pandemic', referring to a dramatic increase of reported cases of gender-based violence during the Corona pandemic across all social classes. Factors that led to this increase are well known: job loss and increasing financial stress leading to frustration and fear, confined domestic circumstances in lockdown or self-imposed isolation, often connected with depression and withdrawal symptoms due to non-availability of alcohol.



«One in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, and the immediate and long-term physical, sexual, and mental consequences for women and girls can be devastating, including death.»

United Nations (www.unwomen.org)

The fact that gender-based violence is one of the most neglected outcomes of the pandemic and largely underreported asks for a closer look and an attempt to see the broader picture. Its prevalence is due to systemic gender inequality, to patriarchal systems in place in most societies the world over with a stereotyping of gender roles and an unquestioned distribution of power in most families and almost all societies. An awareness towards the necessity of preventing gender-based violence is thus undermined. Women and children are disempowered, their voices stifled, their stories not heard.

Speaking about domestic violence is a taboo

The EMS survey supports this impression. Women in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East report alike that cases of gender-based violence are very rarely discussed in public and that there are no appropriate spaces and channels for discussion. Speak-

ing about domestic violence is a taboo. Families tend to keep it 'within the home', not only for fear of gossip but for fear of social stigmatisation. 'Shame and honour issues' play a decisive role in silencing women. Silencing women includes preventing them to ask for help, to report to the police, to take legal steps.

Gender-based violence can take many forms, physical, sexual, psychological; economic harm includes the arbitrary withdrawal of autonomy and educational facilities. Threats of such acts are included, too, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. The survey stresses psychological and emotional violence, shaming, blaming and insulting women. Where tradition and family values are held higher than physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing of family members it is difficult to speak about violence. Gender discrimination, many a time an unreflected part of tradition, creates a low self-esteem in women. Because of the well-established

«At least 155 countries have passed laws on domestic violence, and 140 have legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace. But challenges remain in enforcing these laws, limiting women and girls' access to safety and justice. Not enough is done to prevent violence, and when it does occur, it often goes unpunished.»

United Nations (www.unwomen.org)

culture of male dominance women often enough feel that it is the right of a man to beat a woman, that it must be her fault that she has experienced violence resulting in self-blame.

Breaking through this cycle of violence is a difficult, yet important task to do. Gender-based violence in general, even more so in times of a pandemic, is a crucially important human rights concern, prevailing in all societies, yet with different regional complexities. One message all answer-sheets of the survey have in common: "WE MUST SPEAK OUT!"

'What we need is critical spiritual empowerment!', is a phrase that summarizes the importance of support to victims and measures to help them speaking about gender-based violence. 'The cancer that eats into the moral fabric of our societies' must be rooted out. All need to be part in this endeavour irrespective of gender, age, social status, and position.

Churches can be role models

Critical spiritual empowerment is the task of our churches and missions, first of all in the form of a clear common statement signed by the leaders of all EMS members to commit themselves to end gender-based violence. A strong rejection of violence by the international EMS family must be combined with the commitment to create awareness and to initiate a discourse urging for change in the attitude towards violence against women. Worship material, biblical reflections, theological discussions addressing the topic within our Christian faith help developing a critical spiritual understanding. Churches can be role models for initiating change. Churches can be the space for women to find comfort. Christianity does not sanction male dominance nor violence. Our faith invites us to live the beauty and hope of human relationships to the fullest respecting diversity and equality within the household of God.

The Network of EMS Liaison Women demands: As an international fellowship of churches and missions, bringing partnership to life through mutual empowerment and solidarity as well as through learning together, EMS must:

- take a clear stand against gender-based violence
- speak up and help create awareness about the importance of a correct, matter-of-fact approach to gender-based violence without moralizing
- create space for women, children, people of diverse sexual orientation to voice their concerns
- offer educational programmes for all genders and age groups
- establish reporting procedures to report cases of gender-based violence on congregational and institutional levels
- insist on improvement of governmental help: medical, legal, social, psychological
- network and cooperate with human rights groups, especially those working for women's rights
- invite others beyond the borders of the churches and missions to learn along with us.

Speaking up against gender-based violence as a global justice concern, especially in time of the Covid pandemic, international mission associations can play a crucial role. As a committed global fellowship of members hailing from different local contexts such an association has the potential to initiate change and transform unjust structures as well as discriminatory and violent attitudes, locally and globally.



Rev Dr Kerstin Neumann
is Head of Unit
Intercultural Education and
Theology, Women
and Gender at EMS.



**Domestic violence
can lead to prison
for the perpetrator.**

“No!” means “No!”

Domestic violence is a criminal offence

Domestic violence happens in all parts of society. In clerical and religious communities, in traditional cultures and secular areas, in all social classes and regardless of education or income level. Worldwide, the perpetrators are predominantly men. Unfortunately, acts of violence against women are on the rise worldwide. Especially since the Corona pandemic, the statistics have skyrocketed.

Domestic violence is more than hitting someone. It is understood to be any violence between adults living in a household. Often the perpetrators – be it a man or a woman – come from the immediate family environment, often they are the (ex-) partners or other relatives. Therefore, it often is also called partnership violence. Unfortunately, domestic violence is often only referred to as a “relationship act”. Thus, the act of violence is played down.

Domestic violence has different faces and forms: there is verbal violence and harassment, psychological and economic violence, oppression, controlling behaviour by the partner, physical violence, sexualized violence and rape, inflicting severe injuries up to murder (incl. honor killing).

Women affected by violence suffer deep physical, emotional and psychological inju-

ries from their tormentors. The affected persons feel at the mercy of the perpetrator or his accomplices and powerless in the face of their superiority. This in turn results in loss of self-confidence or self-belief. Often, the affected persons feel utterly lonely and do not speak out for a long time. This is because the perpetrators – be it a man or a woman – often pretend to the outside world to lead a harmonious, caring, loving family life.

This behaviour of the perpetrator makes it difficult for women affected by violence to seek help, because nobody believes them at first. Instead, they hear from neighbours, other trusted persons, but also from the authorities, retorts such as, “You’re imagining things.” Or, “Just be a little kinder to him and do your chores.” “He is a loving father, isn’t he?” Or, “Be glad to have such a good husband.” All of this together leads to the affected women feeling guilty without being so.

It is important that everyone involved understands: The perpetrator is the guilty one! The affected women are not to be blamed! The perpetrator must also answer legally for his deed(s).



Sylvia Dieter
is regional officer in the
Church and Society depart-
ment of the Evangelical
Women in Wuerttemberg.

Zero tolerance applies!

The Code of Conduct in the EMS



EMS

EMS Mission Council meeting in Beirut, June 2019

“Mission Council (MC) condemns any act of unacceptable behaviour and any kind of sexual harassment in word and deed. We assure the affected persons our support including professional counselling.”

With this decision, the General Assembly and Mission Council of the EMS commissioned the office in December 2016 to draw up a code of conduct to prevent sexual harassment. A five-member working group drew up a draft that was adopted in June 2019 after intensive consultation both in the EMS women’s network and among MC members. It was clear to everyone involved that sexual harassment is not an issue that only concerns women. Women and men must take joint responsibility here.

The Code of Conduct contains principles and behavioural patterns that define the framework for joint action. An important part of this is the voluntary commitment to consider the jointly defined principles as binding.

The intention of a Code of Conduct against sexual harassment is to prevent sexual harassment. A clearly negative attitude towards any form of harassment and abuse of power is formulated; a complaints mechanism is named. This positions and commits the EMS member churches and associations to respect and care in their dealings with each other. “Zero tolerance” applies!

The Code of Conduct has been developed considering the theological principles as well as the gender policy of the EMS. Corresponding

documents of international ecumenical organisations were consulted. Gender justice, which is fundamental to the Gender Policy and the Code of Conduct, is seen in the EMS as a cross-sectional task that must be taken into account in all areas. It must be thought of and shaped in an intercultural dimension. After theological justification and a shared commitment to compliance, the Code of Conduct clearly and precisely defines what constitutes sexual harassment:

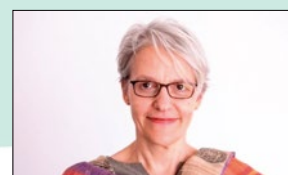
“Sexual harassment is defined by its impact on a person rather than by the intent of the person engaged in the behaviour. Any sexual conduct is unwelcome whenever the person subjected to it considers it unwelcome. Sexual harassment can be done by remarks, gestures or behaviour.”

This is followed by clearly stated guidelines for action and steps in a complaints procedure in the event of harassment.

Having a Code of Conduct is not enough. There is a need for awareness-raising and practical training in the adopted rules of conduct. Sexual harassment and violence happen. Any act of this kind must be condemned. Moralising should be avoided, however, as it risks putting oneself above the matter instead of seeing that everyone should be in the very practical business of dealing with it. It is also clear that sexual harassment is not an issue that only affects women. Women and men must take joint responsibility here.



Rev. Bernd Kappes
is Director of Studies at the Hofgeismar Protestant Academy of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck.

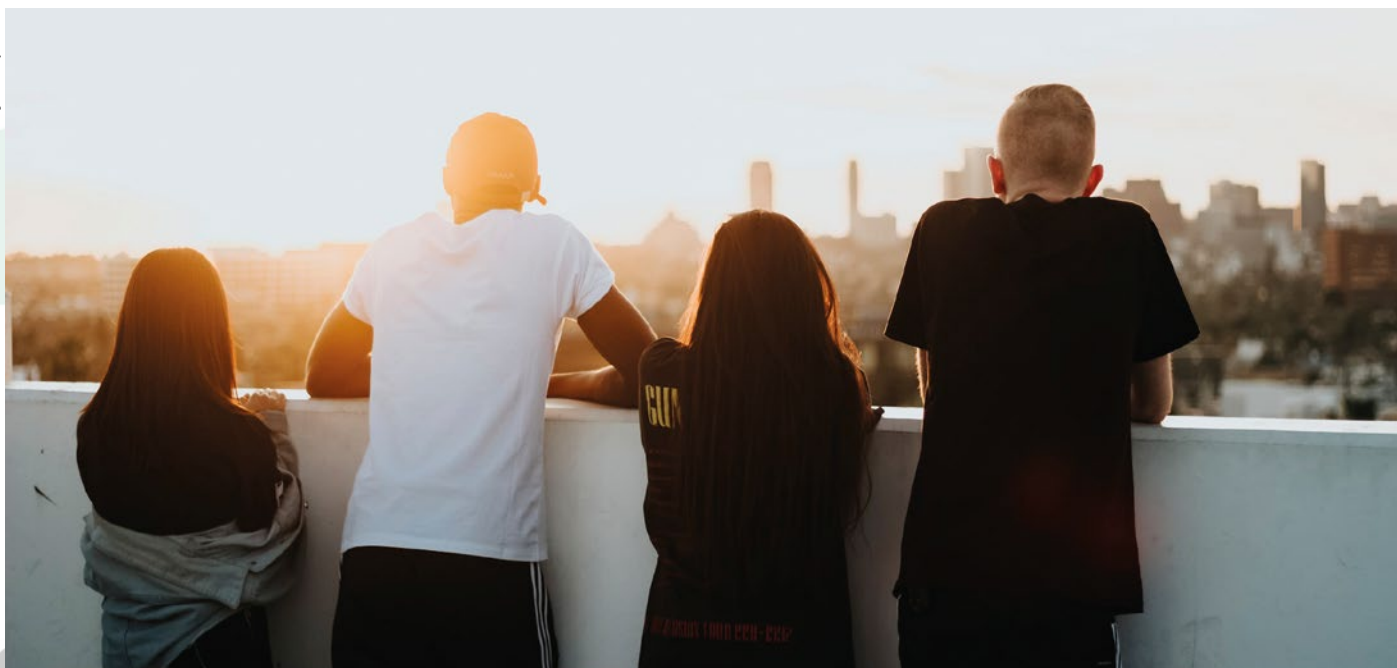


Rev Dr Kerstin Neumann
is Head of EMS Unit Intercultural Education and Theology, Women and Gender.

To step out of the taboo area

What is still needed

Devin Avery/unsplash



At the Women's Pre-Conference of the EMS General Assembly in December 2018, I reported for the first time about North-South volunteers who experienced sexual harassment. I also mentioned the fact that every second female volunteer must experience it. Figures detailing these in an article in the 2019/2020 edition of Our Voices triggered some very concerned reactions and the question: How can we change this?

The sad truth is that we cannot directly influence the experiences volunteers have abroad, nor the experiences they have at home. Even less can we prevent certain experiences. We also cannot put the volunteers in a 'gilded cage' so that nothing will happen to them. Nevertheless, there are measures that can help to create greater sensitivity to the issue of "sexual harassment". We can at least organize our EMS community and meeting places in such a way that people feel comfortable and safe, regardless of their gender. The EMS has already taken a first step with the Code of Conduct for committee meetings. Beyond that, however, further instruments are necessary to build an international basis for discussion on preventing and

dealing with sexual harassment and sexualised violence.

Not only young volunteers experience harassment. Women and men of all ages can be victims of sexualised violence. We need to move away from seeing sexualised violence as problems of individuals but should see it as a problem that affects societies all over the world. To do this, the problem needs to be made visible. And we need a basis for discussion to step out of the taboo area.

From the point of view of the Ecumenical Volunteers Programme, it would be helpful to have a neutral, cross-programme contact point in the EMS to report, document and be available for advice in case of an incident. If figures on the different programmes and social sectors are available, further measures can be developed in a targeted manner. This neutral body should regularly report on developments in the committees. The more the topic is talked about, the greater the sensitivity will be to recognise incidents. This will enable intervention at an earlier stage and ensure that those who are affected are not left alone with what they have experienced.

No one should tell themselves „this doesn't happen here“. Sexual assaults can also happen in organizations in which young people are engaged for religious or altruistic motives.



Kathrin Lehrbach
is Coordinator of the EMS
Ecumenical Youth Volunteers
Programme.

“My hope is greater than my fear”

22-year-old M. is sitting in the living room of a flat rented by the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). Four weeks ago, she fled her parents’ home. For seven years, her mother abused her physically and psychologically. She had top grades in school, but hardly any friends. For a long time, she carried the number of the YWCA hotline with her.

Certainly, there are many cases where women are subjected to more obvious violence than M. But abuse does not begin when women are beaten or physically harmed. No matter how severe the abuse, it is always a very big step to get out of that situation.

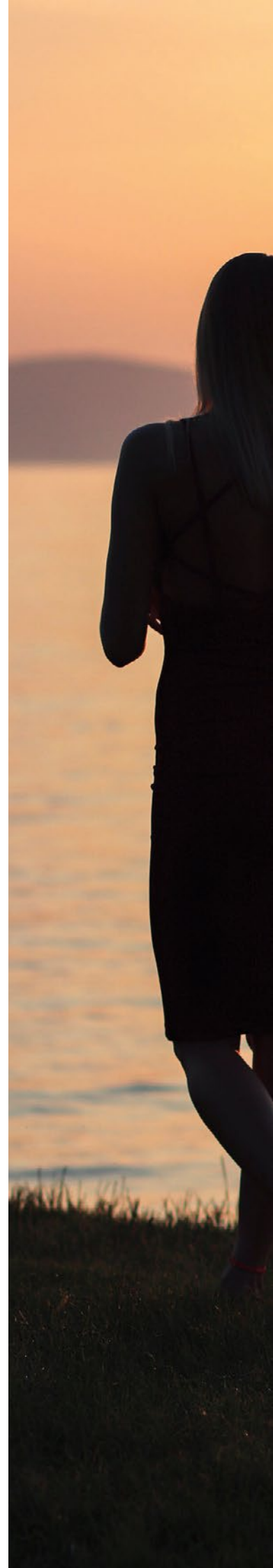
M. was afraid of taking the first step: What will happen - without money, without knowing anyone, without knowing what to expect? “When I took the first step into freedom, I was so excited, my adrenaline went through the roof: A mixture of fear and freedom,” says the young woman with the dark, alert eyes. “I will never forget that.” Every day now, she says, she learns so many new things, including about herself - things that were previously hidden. “You have to give your life a push and go!” she says with passion.

The YWCA has been running this open facility in Beirut for ten years. The flat has three bedrooms with three beds each, a kitchen and a living room. Currently, five women between the ages of 20 and 70 live here. They can go to work or study. In addition to this open facility, the YWCA also runs a second,

sheltered facility for women who are threatened by their families or husbands - mostly for reasons of so-called family honour.

“They are tough!”

In the same open group home, 72-year-old Imman is available to the women around the clock. She lives on the same floor. Elise A. looks after the group as a social worker. “The women stay until they are socially, psychologically and financially ready to take their lives into their own hands,” says the 28-year-old. Her experience is that the situation usually improves quickly for women who leave a hopeless situation. They find jobs and flats, are willing to fight for themselves and learn about their rights. “They are tough!” says Elise. She has a counselling session with each woman once a week. A psychologist also visits the women once a week. For M., psychological counselling is not so important now. She is looking ahead, wants to shape her future and find out what she wants and how she can get there. The YWCA has set up the rooms for women seeking protection in cooperation with the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs.





Tamara Bitter/Unsplash

The reasons why women seek protection vary: sexual violence in marriage, physical and psychological violence by relatives, but also homelessness.

Because one organisation would never be enough to protect women and children from violence, the YWCA works with other organisations, including secular ones, such as KAFA. “Kafa” is an Arabic word meaning “enough”. KAFA has been conducting training for police officers since 2013. Many first learned about the extent of the problem through such training. This was also the case for A., who as a police officer took part in such a course four years ago, although not organised by KAFA, but by another organisation that focuses on child abuse. “I was shocked by the extent of violence in families. I didn’t realise that there was so much violence and abuse within families,” says the 25-year-old. “I also became aware that abuse of children and women happens in secret, and that family members only very rarely make it public.” He said he learned how victims of violence, especially minors, should be treated during investigations. “I advise everyone, victims and witnesses, to contact the police or a hotline immediately. Anything else can be dangerous for the victims.”

A Hotline and an App

Julie El Khoury, KAFA’s programme manager, says that the organisation works with the police, doctors, and lawyers. They make legislative proposals to improve the legal situation of women. KAFA also offers practical help. The organisation has been operating a hotline for some time. And recently it has also developed an app with which women can get help quickly via an SOS button. The app offers women the opportunity to log their stories, there are chats to share with each other and lots of info. “This app is mainly used by younger women,” says Julie El Khoury. “The

most important thing is that all women will get easy access to help and information.” If a call for help comes in, KAFA immediately involves the police.” El Khoury advises relatives and friends of victims to pass on the phone numbers and the app and motivate women to take the first step.

Lebanon has had a law since 2014 to protect women from domestic violence. Until then, a rapist was exempt from punishment if he married his victim. However, when the law was passed by parliament, a clause criminalising marital rape was rejected by the country’s Muslim authorities. Nevertheless, the law contains a number of safeguards, when it is applied. For example, women can apply for a restraining order against an assailant. And few emergency shelters have been provided for victims of abuse. It is very difficult to find a shelter. Let alone a good one.

Nevertheless, there is still much to be done: Since in Lebanon it is not the state but religious confessional courts that decide on disputes concerning personal status, the laws of the respective religion or denomination apply to matters concerning marriage, divorce, custody or inheritance. A general law that applies equally to all citizens would be helpful in the fight against domestic violence. That is why KAFA is fighting for a civil status law.



Martina Waiblinger
is a member of the
EMS Women’s Network.

Dare to act and make decisions!

The Maha Bhoga Marga Foundation (MBM) of the Protestant Church in Bali (Gereja Kristen Protestan di Bali - GKPB) helps women affected by violence in the form of safe shelter, health and legal support. All parties involved try to find common solutions. They listen to the women's stories, encourage them and support them in recovering from the trauma they have experienced. This is not an easy task.



Married women have a dual role in social life and in the domestic sphere. However, society often grants women only one role, that in the domestic sphere. Also, there is often still the view that women are not capable of solving difficult problems. They are seen as weak individuals. Especially after marriage, women are supposed to follow their husbands and their families. Sometimes they do not dare to speak their minds or express their own needs. Often women with low education level are affected by domestic violence. They cannot go to work and live in a broken home environment after marriage. However, all women in Bali are affected by the general gender inequality.

The situation is certainly different today than it was a few years ago. Back then, MBM was more involved in reproductive health. As a foundation that belongs to the Protestant Christian Church in Bali (GKPB), MBM provides social services to the community. When we were first confronted with the case of a woman experiencing domestic violence in 2004, there was no safe house where women like her could “hide”. Nor did people yet know how to help in such cases. But the case at that time was so urgent. The woman had no place to live, let alone a place to talk, no money for

food. She only thought of running away from home and seeking refuge somewhere.

MBM decided to help her anyway. For two weeks she stayed in our office. We listened to her story, her frustration, over and over again for a fortnight. At times she thought about going back to her husband and forgiving him. He had obviously physically abused her. We strengthened and reassured her that the decisions she had made were the right ones and that, of course, every decision taken have risks. By telling her story, she was able to forget her sadness and better express what she had been hiding for a long time. She did not want to turn to the authorities but preferred to make peace with her husband. By running away from home, she had shown him that there are people who can protect his wife. Her husband promised not to beat her anymore. Otherwise, she would press charges against him.

Since 2004, MBM has taken 131 cases at the Safe House. Sometimes it is about HIV and AIDS, sometimes about domestic violence, rape or human trafficking. There are people with psychological problems who have experienced abuse, children who have come into conflict with the law, women who have become pregnant unintentionally and others.



The MBM safe house offers a place for victims of violence against women and children.

Most often, however, it is about domestic violence. The women have usually been beaten or abused several times. For a long time, they preferred to remain silent, not to fight and to surrender to their fate.

A Double Burden

In the case of unintentionally pregnant teenagers, this is perceived as a disgrace by the family and they try to hide their daughters. But the father of the child has also acted irresponsibly. However, sons are given preferential treatment. Women alone are considered the cause of the problem. In the end, the girl bears the shame, the double burden of dropping out of school because she is pregnant and doesn't even have a plan to care for and raise the baby.

HIV/Aids cases also need to be handled and assisted, because women with HIV in addition to being stigmatized and discriminated also receive unfavourable treatment by their husbands' families when their husbands die of HIV/Aids. They feel that they have lost their right to live in their husband's house, even though their husband infected them with the virus.

Currently, the government in Indonesia and the private sector, as well as other so-

cial institutions, are supporting women to speak out boldly and become independent individuals. MBM therefore continues to advocate for the women's movement and work with others. We cooperate with many parties, such as the health sector for medical examinations of victims for initial assessment and treatment if physical injuries occur. In collaboration with Dhyana Pura University, psychologists care for the women. LKSA, the department of the church that looks after the welfare of the children, ensures that they can continue to attend school and be with their peers. But it is also about joint legal care with legal aid institutions and non-governmental institutions working in this field. Finally, there needs to be a network with the police, hospitals and also government agencies involved in the case.

The government does not yet have a place for victims of violence, there is a Memorandum of Understanding that they refer cases of violence against women to MBM to get safe houses. MBM certainly have shortcomings, especially when it comes to food for the women living in a safe house, or the cost constraints of their legal case and others. But of course, a strong network helps MBM to solve all this, including the support from EMS.

The victims we assist often say that MBM is like their home and that we are their 'parents'. It is said that when they are able to determine their future life, they can go back to school and have jobs after they finish school. Indeed, to recover takes a very long time and a tough process. However, with courage and assistance from people who are ready to help them, make them strong figures to solve problems that are still considered "disgraceful" by the community. Women must have the courage to say no to violence and dare to fight for their future happiness.



Verasea Manurung
is Executive Secretary
and Head of Health
Improvement and Village
Advocacy Division at Maha
Bhoga Marga Foundation.

Teaching positive masculinity

The project on positive masculinity is based at Katlehong Primary School. The school is located in one of the poorest townships in Johannesburg, South Africa. Children in the township are generally poor. Some also experience abuse and violence in their own families. Others live in households where adults are absent and children are left to themselves.



The project was launched in 2020 as a support for a needy child who did not receive government grants. In our schools, there are many children who do not have identification papers or birth certificates. However, such documents are an important prerequisite for receiving any subsidies from the state at all.

The support was extended to a second child who was aggressive and angry because he grew up in an environment hostile to children. The father was constantly abusing the mother, in front of the children. The support was also extended to some girls and boys who grew up without parents and had to live in households headed by children alone. We provide them with the basic necessities until they receive their identity papers and can apply for state child allowances. Due to limited funds, we can currently only support 15 children.

As the project grew, it became clearer that the message of positive masculinity needed to be shared with the larger community. Parents and children needed to be educated about positive masculinity so that both girls and boys could grow up to be independent children with options other than speaking out about violence.

The children are taught about positive masculinity in a Christian, biblical way. The children's parents usually do not go to church. Accordingly, the children also do not come into contact with church life. We teach the children in a playful way because we know that some of the children cannot just be children and play at home.

The message of love and peace in the Bible

We look for positive stories in the Bible about love, care and peaceful coexistence and let the children play Adam and Eve in paradise, for example, or the story of Jesus' birth. In these stories, the message of love and peace becomes clear. And we compare this with the situation in which the children live, where there is constant strife and no peace. Then we let the children decide which option they want to choose.

There are separate meetings for parents where we teach them to respect each other and not to use their power and masculinity to get their way. This usually happens at the monthly parents and School Governing Body meetings. We talk with them about behaviors we observe in their children. And we advise



Michael von Aichberger/pixabay.com

To prevent poverty and lack of prospects in the townships from turning into violence, the school works with the children and parents to instill positive role models.

them on how they as parents can support their children through any challenges.

We also encourage parents to support friends of their children who have to grow up without adults and make sure they are doing well. We also address the problem of teenage pregnancy and talk about the psychological impact on children when they are left with grandparents by their birth parents. These children tend to have uncontrolled anger that manifests itself in violence at school. When these issues are brought up openly, it helps both the grandparents and the children.

Children will be tomorrow's adults

The project has had a positive impact on the children and the parents in many ways. It also helps to teach discipline to the girls and boys. Another valuable lesson is the importance of peace and non-violence. For example, siblings came to us who found their mother dead in bed after school one day. The father had killed her. The father was arrested and has been in prison ever since. The children were traumatized and very angry with their father. We talked to them about it, also about the dangers of negative masculinity (what

their father did to their mother), but also about the value of forgiveness. Over time, they began to forgive their father, and today they send him greetings and messages when someone comes to visit him.

We are proud to make a little contribution towards changing the attitude of people to gender-based violence especially by investing in young people who are the future and tomorrow's adults. Working in a school environment, I get to see the hardships that young people are going through. We must always remember that these are going to be tomorrow's adults. If we bring up angry, frustrated, violence-prone young people, we will never see an end to gender-based violence. I believe if we can make a small contribution in our closest area of influence, through teaching love and respect, we will win the battle slowly but surely.



Buyiswa Sambane
is the main coordinator of the project and a teacher at Katlehong Primary School.

Intervention chains

When all official bodies cooperate

Home should be a place of protection, privacy, and trust, where every woman can feel safe. However, the numbers show that unfortunately for many women it is not like that. That is why it is good if the affected women are not left alone but receive support from professional specialized counselling centres against domestic violence, which are integrated into a framework of action under public law.

The issue of domestic violence is very complex. In order to deal with it effectively, a functioning system of assistance is needed in which authorities, specialized counselling centres and nongovernmental organizations work together in an interdisciplinary manner, both at the national level and at the regional and local levels. The goal of any assistance must be: To break the vicious circle of violence, to end domestic violence or to prevent it in advance. In this context, the professional help system has a central task in the acute violence situation, in long-term exit support from the violence system and in prevention.

In order for a public assistance system to be built and then function, basic, national legislation is necessary with its own definition of “domestic violence” as a criminal offense and legal regulations to deal with it. In addition, police laws, family and youth protection laws, social laws, victim protection rights and laws, women’s rights and children’s rights should be compatible with each other.

An international comparison shows that domestic violence is regulated and punished very differently in national laws. Depending on the cultural background and traditional beliefs, domestic violence is not recognized at all as a problem of society or the state in some countries.

“Domestic Violence Intervention Chain”

In Germany, the so-called “Domestic Violence Intervention Chain” exists for acute emergencies. It is still being developed in part, but it already enables public authorities - first and foremost the police - to intervene in acute cases of violence. Due to the different respon-

sibilities of the state and the federal states as well as regional circumstances, there are different alignments for intervention chains in Germany.

People from the following professions form an intervention chain: police, judiciary (public prosecutor’s office), male and female lawyers, clinics and the medical profession, general social services of the youth welfare office, non-governmental organizations (e.g. churches and child/youth protection associations), specialized counselling centres against domestic violence, women’s shelters, women’s emergency centres and perpetrator counselling centres. Success lies in the trusting and reliable interaction of all those who are professionally involved.

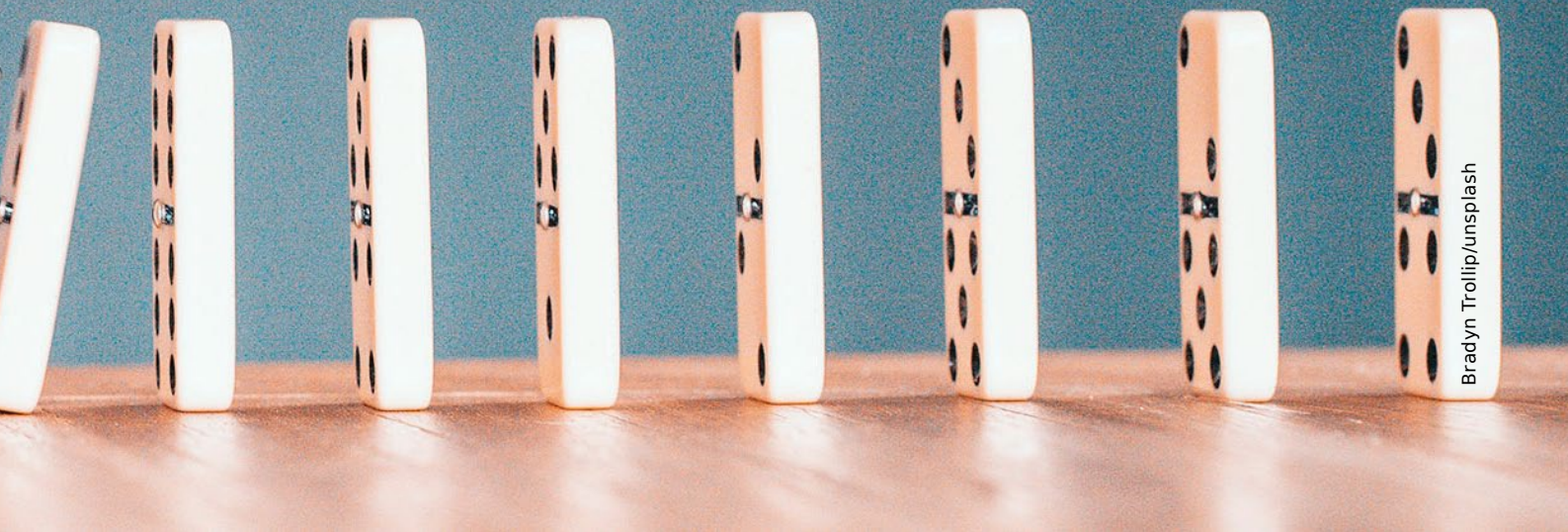
The goals of an intervention chain are:

- immediate ending of the violent situation on the spot
- immediate protection of the affected woman and her children
- early objective securing of evidence
- initiation of the help and counselling system

Key courses of action

within the intervention chain include:

- Emergency call or report to the police (in Germany there is a central emergency call coordinated by the police).
- Temporary separation of the parties involved in the current (violent) situation. This usually takes the form of a temporary police measure, such as a removal from the home, detention of the perpetrator or accompaniment to a women’s shelter. In some cities, qualified experts from the in-



tervention centre are involved in the initial intervention or are called to the scene. Advice on counselling and support services is given to the women, children and perpetrators affected by violence. Objective evidence is collected in cooperation with forensic medicine.

- During this period, the affected women and affected relatives (usually children living in the household) can take advantage of professional specialized counselling services.
- At the same time, the woman affected by violence can obtain a civil intervention via an application for a no-contact order or an order to stay at home in accordance with the legal requirements within the framework of a temporary injunction by the family court.
- Criminal investigations are initiated or continued. The investigations may also include a conviction, punishment of the offender or conditions imposed on the offender. For example, participation in perpetrator counselling in anti-aggression training or therapy.
- Women affected by domestic violence can also have their data blocked by the responsible authority for a maximum of two years at present, thus preventing the perpetrator from finding out their new place of residence.

It makes sense if the women concerned are accompanied in all these steps and proceedings by trustworthy and reliable co-workers of the specialized counselling centres against domestic violence or victim protection organizations.

The role of the churches

Church work touches all areas of people's lives. With its pastoral, social and diaconal services, organizations, and networks, it plays an important role. Thus, also for avoiding violence against women and children. The love of Christ enables us to serve others. It is our mission to the society in which we live, especially towards women affected by violence, regardless of church membership.

In Germany, churches and diaconal organizations organize and finance specialized counselling centres, women's shelters, and legal and psychosocial support in (criminal) court proceedings. They are thus part of the public "domestic violence intervention chain". The churches have employed professionals for this work. In this way, the church as an institution fulfils its responsibility, together with the state, to assist women affected by violence and to help them leave the circle of violence.

In (ecumenical) cooperation, the church can be a mediator and actor together with the state authorities, initiate and help shape processes, networking, or round tables, or inform about the topic in educational work. For this to succeed, it is essential that, wherever possible, the responsible persons in church and state offices, authorities, organizations, and institutions know each other personally. This applies to all levels involved in the intervention chain.

If the individual steps of intervention against violence are precisely coordinated, success is most probable - like well-placed dominoes.



Sylvia Dieter
is regional officer in the Church and Society department of the Evangelical Women in Wuerttemberg.

“We have not yet achieved

Interview on faith, exclusion
and safe spaces for women in churches

“For too long faith has been used to justify exclusion and discrimination of women”, says Elaine Neuenfeldt, Gender Programme Manager at ACT Alliance. Rev. Dr Rima Nasrallah, member of EMS Women’s Network, interviewed her on courage, ownership and the necessity of networking.

ACT Alliance

... is a global faith-based coalition based in Geneva, with more than 140 members in more than 120 countries. Organized in national and regional forums ACT Alliance works on humanitarian aid, gender and climate justice, migration and displacement, and peace and security to support local communities.

How do you define gender-based violence (GBV)?

The ACT Alliance Gender Justice Policy follows the UN definition that GBV “is any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences, like power inequalities, between females and males.”

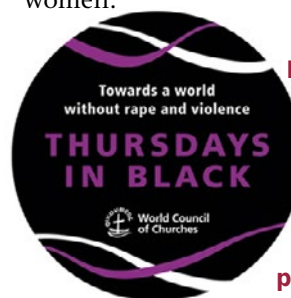
And how would you personally define GBV?

Working in a Faith Based Organization (FBO), based on my Christian convictions, I call GBV by its name: sin. The Lutheran World Federation plan of action “Churches say NO to Violence against Women” rightly

points to the theological approach to GBV: “Sin is a state of bondage that rules over and distorts human life. It is a turning away from God.” As a result, we have a responsibility not only to overcome GBV as an ethical obligation, but also to take action to break the silence and promote human dignity for all. This is the work that a Faith Based Organization or a church must do.

Why do you think they need to tackle this issue?

It is our responsibility as we work on justice and proclaim God’s love. For too long faith has been used to justify exclusion and discrimination. Faith associated with culture has been a dangerous mixture used to restrict women’s human rights. Women and men who proclaim Jesus’ love and compassion should commit to dismantle this pernicious entanglement as a sign of a transformed life. Being silent in situations of injustice means connivence. Therefore, people living and sharing in a faith community must ensure that church and family are safe spaces for women.



Many ecumenical bodies, including but not only the World Council of Churches, have spoken up in the past decades against Gender-based Violence.

A decade was dedicated to overcoming violence (2001-2010) and “Thursdays in Black” has been observed since the 1980s. Add to this the 16 days of activism observed by many around the globe. Do we still need to speak about it?

It is very important to have moments where those situations of injustices are highlighted. In our faith tradition we are used to mark special moments with rituals. Liturgically there are special moments when we remember dates, people, times of the year that are remarkable. These campaigns and special times have this function: to remind us that there is still work to be done. We have not yet achieved full dignified life for all. Women are

Elaine Neuenfeldt (l.), interviewed by Rima Nasrallah.



full, dignified life for all”



A tapestry supporting the “Thursdays in Black” campaign against gender-based violence displayed at the World Council of Churches’ 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. The tapestry is designed as a waterfall with messages and images from around the world.

still victims of violence and cannot enjoy life without fear. We still need these campaigns, these special dates to remind us that the task is ours. Churches and FBOs have a task to speak up and prophetically build communities that are safe for all.

The EMS has developed a Code of Conduct in 2018 in order to prevent GBV. Do you think such codes are helpful?

Extremely helpful. Codes of Conduct, policies and complaints mechanisms are tools to address gender-based violence not as an isolated, individual situation but tackle it as a structural issue. While each person has the right to be listened to and to have her situation

on be dealt with uniqueness and care. Therefore, tools and mechanisms in place have the function to address it as an organizational responsibility, avoiding blaming the victim, or victimizing the person who suffers violence. A Code of Conduct is crucial to clearly state the values of the organization and will provide guidelines on how to address in a systematic way situations of breaches and misconduct. Codes of conduct also provide and equip organizations with an ethical frame to discuss daily life attitudes, behaviours, and work relations.

EMS is made up of many members in various countries. What do you advise the



The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action

“The term ‘violence against women’ means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Accordingly, violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following:

(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

(b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

United Nations: The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing, China, 1995 (www.unwomen.org)

member churches and organizations to do in order to prevent GBV in their own circles?

First, it is important to create mechanisms and tools like a Code of Conduct, policies, check lists, etc. These are providing a broader perspective on values and principles for all members to adhere to. Secondly, these need to be contextualized in the different cultures, contexts, and organizational specificities. To have global statements that are affirming and orienting the management of the network is crucial – this will ensure that GBV is not influenced by some specific contexts.

Can you please give us an example to explain how GBV can falsely be influenced?

There is this bias that people from southern and poor countries are predisposed to tolerate violence, while rich and northern contexts do not allow violence in their families or communities. This myth is deconstructed when we have global approaches based on international standards for all contexts which are then localized in each given reality, with its own local nuances, language, terminologies, and cultural expressions.

How can ownership be stimulated and sustained both within the organization and for the members?

It is through dialogue that mutual understanding and ownership is achieved. It implies an open mind, listening attitude and action-oriented planning in place. In ACT we are using a well disseminated Latin American methodology called *conversatorio*. It is the Spanish word for a space of conversation and dialogue, a safe space to engage in continuous dialogue with different actors, but it also has an intention to create changes in narratives and practices. *Conversatorios* are spaces to engage in conversations on different and often difficult topics emerging from the implementation of the gender policy, as well as the awareness of and campaigning for transformative faith narratives and practices.

If EMS were to establish a structure that would assist in reporting and advising in

KATABAZI/CCT (2)



the cases of GBV, what should that look like?

Very remarkable that EMS is also planning to have structures in place to address GBV. It takes courage to raise the situation of GBV inside churches and FBO. It is important to promote spaces for discussion. By addressing it, it might be that at a first moment it will be seen as if the cases have increased. What might have increased is the level of visibility, or public discussion. Normally, GBV and violence against women is quietly addressed and so, it is just an illusion that this is not happening inside of our faith communities. Therefore, providing safe spaces to talk, to break the silence is a very courageous and necessary step. Another step is to provide spaces to care for the victims, without victimizing the person. Churches can train pastors to have accompaniment, conversations and to direct victims to public/social services, in cases of need.



Tanzania, December 2020: Young women and men participated in the culminating event commemorating the 16 days of activism against GBV. ACT Alliance organized the interfaith event in Dar es Salaam. Together with the Waking the Giant Initiative, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (Catholic-TEC), and the National Muslim Council of Tanzania called for the action.

The fight against GBV needs the cooperation of all faith communities. In Tanzania, this was achieved in 2020.

A very challenging work could also be to bring perpetrators to accountability. It is extremely urgent to start the work with men, addressing violence and ensuring they have spaces to discuss attitudes of toxic masculinities.

And how can we insure sustainability?

It is useful not to work in isolation, but to seek networking and learning from each other. A remarkable direction is given by WCC with the Gender principles and code of con-

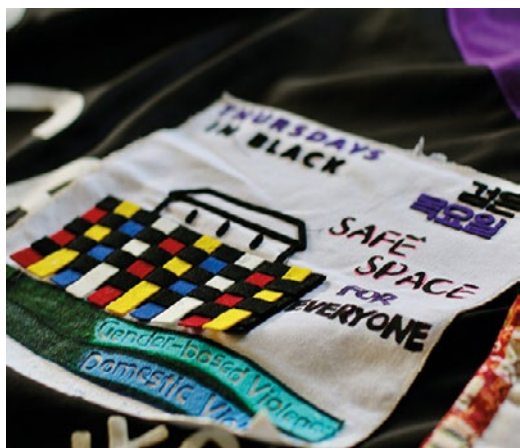


duct, with strong biblical and theological foundations and clear directions for implementation. ACT Alliance has a very comprehensive compilation of policies and mechanisms which also are very helpful to guide and orient the work in advocacy, development and humanitarian interventions.

What can we learn from the work you are doing at ACT Alliance on GBV in this global context?

ACT Alliance works to address the root causes of gender injustice and change those cultural norms and beliefs that devalue women and girls, but also men and boys, and forces them into either a disempowered role or a toxic idea of masculinity that hinders progress and freedom.

Through the Global Gender Justice Programme, ACT Alliance wants to harness its unique position as a Christian faith-based



Marcelo Schneider/WCC (4)



Black fabric squares from all over the globe made up the tapestry for „Thursdays in Black“.

alliance and the potential of its structure that connects local and global levels to achieve transformational change for people of all gender identities and of all ages towards gender justice. Through its membership, forums and its local to global reach ACT Alliance is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between churches and secular civil society. And this is a joint responsibility which is shared among other FBOs. It is critical to strengthen partnerships between faith and secular rights-based organisations, to enable anti-rights rhetoric to be challenged.

Can you please shortly describe the ACT Global Gender Justice Programme?

This programme interacts with churches and faith-based organizations toward preventing and overcoming violence against women, based on an ethic of resistance to injustice. The programme enhances the churches' reflection and diaconal practice as part of a critical approach to faith and religion. Issues of structural abuse of power to subordinate women, as well as femicide, are based on asymmetric power relations between women

and men and are addressed in the programme.

What have you personally learnt in working on this issue?

During these years of working in international ecumenical organizations, I have learned that we are more effective if we work in collaboration. Joining hands among Faith Based Organizations will ensure quality and a broader capacity to work. I really have appreciated in being together with people of faith, committed and engaged to transform the unjust structures that are allowing violence and discrimination. It is a great pleasure to work with courageous women and men who prophetically raise their voices to proclaim justice in the world. The partnership and collaboration with EMS is a place that I cherish a lot, I bring it close to my heart and look forward on how we will continue it in the coming years.



UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1998:

www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-violence-against-women

Lutheran World Federation:

Churches say "no" to Violence against Women – Action Plan for the Churches
www.lutheranworld.org

World Council of Churches:
Gender Justice Principles with Code of Conduct
www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/gender-justice-principles-with-code-of-conduct

ACT Alliance:

www.actalliance.org/about/standards-and-policies/

What can churches do? What should they do?

For many people in church, domestic abuse is a taboo subject. They will say: “It doesn’t happen here, and we don’t like to talk about it.” Yet, people in church will often know, or be, victims. Therefore, it is vital that this subject is regularly on the agenda of the church. Churches can do many things to support women and children in their midst that experience gender-based violence.

Domestic abuse should be a regular topic in the church’s educational activities. Starting with raising the topic for the whole congregation by preaching sermons on the equality of women and men, healthy relationships, the rights of (girl) children and how to deal with conflicts in relationships. Sunday liturgies could include prayers for victims and nearby organizations working with victims. Teachings can be tailored and deepened in the church’s small groups: women’s groups can be places for sharing and mutual support but also for learning about gender justice and specific laws to protect their rights.

Youth groups should explore gender stereotypes in society and church and what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like. Even children should learn about good touch and bad touch and consider what a good friend looks like. In counselling courses, church members should be trained about the signs of abuse and learn about issues of power and control, division of labor and non-violent conflict resolution.

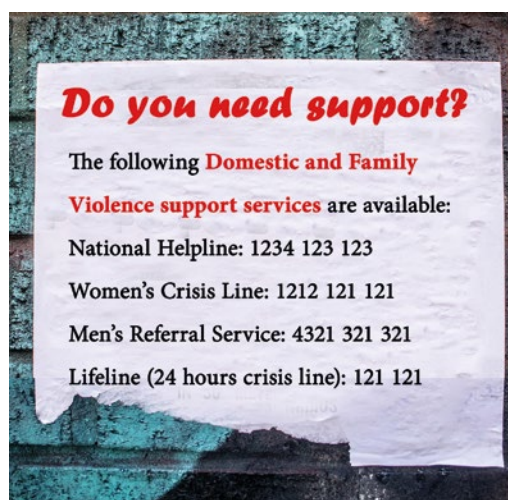
The role of men

A special word about men as they play a vital role in ending violence against women and children. Men’s groups, sports teams etc. can encourage male leadership in promoting respectful and non-violent relationships. Men should learn how to speak up and out where they observe peers being violent to their partner. In many places, there are special courses offered to men to explore the issue.

An important aspect of awareness raising is making domestic violence visual. Church

boards and bulletins etc. could feature leaflets, posters and info material, church libraries can stock books on the topic. Helpline numbers to professional services should be placed where people can access them discreetly, for example at the doors of the women’s toilet.

Church leadership has an important role to play. Their clear stance and condemnation on abuse of church members will be a sign to abusers and victims alike. They can organize that the topic is regularly covered in the



Postersheets with general information on helplines like this example should be placed in the public.

church calendar, for example through preaching series or special Sundays.

Further, they can ensure that they themselves along with church staff and other people in leadership and counselling roles are trained by professionals in the field. Some churches even have the policy that certain ministries can only be taken up once adequate training has taken place.



Sandra Seitamaa/Unsplash

Demonstrations can raise public awareness about the problem of gender-based violence. Practical help for those affected is at least as important. In this context, some do's and don'ts should be observed.



Complete resource tool-kit in a church setting:

<https://bcdaf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/020521-Walk-in-the-way-of-love.pdf>

Helpful online resources for churches:

www.saferrsource.org.au
www.restored-uk.org

Website providing links to resources in many languages:

www.hotpeachpages.net



Regine Nagel

*is EMS-Programme
Assistant Intercultural
Education and Theology,
Women and Gender.*

Support of victims

The most important thing is a compassionate and listening ear when victims of domestic violence bring up the courage to talk about their experience. For some practical do's and don'ts when responding to victims see the following page

Remember that women should be supported to make their own choices – when they are ready.

Practical support

There are many practical ways that will be a great help to victims of domestic violence: help with transport, making appointments, minding the children, offer a place to escape to or use a phone and internet freely.

Churches may also offer financial support and self-help courses so that women will be able to provide for their own financial needs.

Network/ collaboration

Supporting victims of gender-based violence is a sensitive issue. Churches need to be clear about their role and aware of their limitations. If a church is not specialized in this area of work, it could cause more harm than good. That's why it is crucial to establish a network

of specialist services for the following situations: emergency and crises help incl. specialized police unit, intervention services, counselling centers incl. legal support and safe houses. This information needs to be displayed clearly. Each church should assign a person as a responsible contact person for these services and ensure that information displayed is up to date.



Do's

- ✓ Find a safe place to talk.
- ✓ Invite someone else – if they agree.
- ✓ Listen to what she has to say – and take her seriously.
- ✓ Believe her. This is probably the tip of the iceberg.
- ✓ Prioritize her safety and the safety of any children.
- ✓ Empower her to make her own decisions.
- ✓ Support and respect her choices, even if she initially chooses to return to the abuser. However, be ready to overrule this choice if children are unsafe.
- ✓ Give information about available emergency care and other support services. Help her to explore options. If she wants this, offer to make contact on her behalf. Do this in her presence.
- ✓ Use experts who are properly trained.
- ✓ Reassure her that it's not her fault, she doesn't deserve this, and it is not God's will for her.
- ✓ Let her know that the abuser's behavior is wrong and completely unacceptable.
- ✓ Be patient with her.
- ✓ Keep confidentiality.



Don'ts

- ✗ Don't judge her or what she tells you.
- ✗ Don't make unrealistic promises.
- ✗ Don't suggest she should 'try again'.
- ✗ Never minimize the severity of her experience or the danger she is in.
- ✗ Don't react with disbelief, disgust or anger what she tells you.
- ✗ Don't ask why she did not act in a certain way.
- ✗ Never act on her behalf without her consent and/or knowledge (unless children are involved).
- ✗ Don't expect her to make decisions quickly.
- ✗ Never make decisions for her or instruct her.
- ✗ Don't suggest couples counselling, family mediation or marriage courses.
- ✗ Don't encourage her to forgive and take the abuser back.
- ✗ Don't send her home with a prayer or directive to submit to her spouse or be a better Christian wife.
- ✗ Don't contact her at home unless she agrees.
- ✗ Don't endanger her by asking her husband for his side of the story.
- ✗ Don't discuss the situation with church leaders.

Source: Black Church Domestic Abuse Forum: Walk in the Way of Love – Ending domestic abuse in black majority churches in the UK; bcdaforum.org.uk, May 2021

Reacting on misogynistic comments

We asked people in the EMS community how they react when they hear a misogynistic remark from a friend, colleague or relative. Here are some answers.

To be honest, I rarely hear misogynistic comments directly (I think men are now careful with their words), but I certainly feel the misogynistic attitude in various areas of my life. My reaction, depending on the person, is simply to challenge the attitude or walk out.

Reem Haddad, female, Church Member, Journalist, Lebanon

Never reward such comments with silence or laughter. If you do not contradict, you indirectly signal that this behaviour is okay. You can also ask to explain what he meant by the comment. Was it really funny?

Dr Latha Christie, female, India

I hear such comments probably most often at family celebrations – more often from men (and some women) in rural contexts. To be honest, I might roll my eyes or raise my eyebrows, but I usually say nothing. It would be too complicated to enter into a discussion.

Woman, 52 years, Germany

I may react strongly and use harsh words such as „How stupid to think that way,“ „I feel sorry for you,“ or „That is not acceptable in my presence.“ I might leave if the person maintains their attitude. I can be harsh in these situations.

Hala Bitar, female, Chaplain at a Protestant School, Instructor at the Near East School of Theology, Lebanon

I would educate them about the important role women fulfill in our society, and advise them of the need for all of us to promote equality between men and women in all aspects of life, e.g. work, equal pay, etc.

Male, over 50 years, Chairperson of the Church Council in South Africa

I say, „Are you aware of what you are saying? You have crossed a line of respect. No human being deserves to be talked about the way you did. We don't need that kind of thing in the world. Dare to change!“

31 year old man, artist, Germany

In general, gendered comments are far less common than they used to be. I just try to ignore you, and only when the opportunity arises, make a diplomatic remark to counter the comment.

Samer Najm, male,
theologian,
working as Engineer in UAE

Besides nasty comments on social media, I usually experience derogatory remarks about women hidden in a joke. I try to stay on the level of humor, but I emphasize that if you make fun of others, you must also be able to laugh at yourself.

Magdalene Leytz, young woman working in the field of
refugees and migrants, Germany

When I hear a misogynistic comment, I usually reject it. It is not acceptable that jokes are made at the expense of women. Often they are quite subtle or are dismissed with different cultural habits, but I still think that even in our pluralistic society limits must be set.

Dieter Bullard-Werner, male, Germany
Executive Secretary, Basel Mission German Branch

Some men think that women are inferior by creation because man was created first. But women are not second-class products of God. They are equally capable and have different functions with different means to achieve God's goal.

Rebecca Abladey, female,
age 57 years,
Junior Youth Teacher, Ghana



Misogynistic comments and jokes are nothing unusual in Lebanese culture because it is a patriarchal society. When I come across such situations, I don't react directly. I try to understand the reason for such comments, whether it is a judgment or a joke. Overall, we need to be educated not to be too judgmental.

Farah Bou Kheir, male, theologian, Lebanon

Then I usually get angry, but I try to stay calm. But it's not always easy for me. For example, when I hear that the way women dress makes men sin, I would like to say to them: Don't you think it's your mind that makes you sin and not my cleavage?

Maruzella Abboud, female, church member, Lebanon

I would point out to such a person that such behaviour is NOT in keeping with Christian brotherhood/sisterhood. No other human being, let alone a woman, may be belittled or devalued.

Br Lizwi Mtumtum, male,
between 40 and 50 years,
Vice President of the
Moravian Church
in South Africa

I have used my profession to make these people understand that women are the most important instruments of God. The miraculous act of conceiving a child is a mystery of God through the woman. Therefore, women should be appreciated and encouraged.

Beatrice Dedei Ayerson, age 93 years,
retired midwife, formerly
a children's service teacher, Ghana

For all of you are one in Christ Jesus

A bible reflection on images of God

At a crucially important juncture in the Biblical narrative - during the proclamation of the ten commandments - the liberated Israelites are told not to make for themselves an idol or an image of God. In Deuteronomy 4:16, Moses calls such act a sin. Only a voice was heard at Mount Horeb, Moses points out, no shape, not even a shadow was seen "so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure..."

We tend to create images – of people, of God. We need them for our orientation and in our desire to rely on something firm in what we believe and in what we think about someone. The Bible itself contains rich imaginary of God, likening God to a rock, a water source, to light.

Many images, however, are difficult for us women to read. The Bible talks about the God of Abraham, Isaak and Jacob. Were there no women whose God he was? God is the Father of Jesus. Why can his motherly qualities not be related to 'her' as a mother? God is Lord, King, or Judge; every reference to God is made in masculine pronouns.

Images are just like words that help bringing images to life. Both are powerful means to mutilate our female identity. The Bible witnesses to this fact and criticises the identification of God and maleness. God is no male God, however many male images we use. Deuteronomy 4:16 continues: *"... do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure – the likeness of male or female".*

"I am who I am"

Like the image, so the name: Once God did reveal his/her name, to Moses, calling out from a burning bush: "I am who I am". The root is the Hebrew verb 'hayah' which means 'to be', 'to become', 'to happen'. This name does not allow one to express abstract philosophical concepts, it designates concrete beings, all genders included, and happenings in history and today. "I will be there", not in images, not because human words and deeds want God to be there. But "I happen" as someone who remains in the position of facing us. Being present means being active as one who 'sees' the affliction, who 'hears' the cry of women facing patriarchal dominance, who 'knows'



their suffering, who ‘comes down’ to deliver, who ‘called’ and ‘sent’ Moses to lead the people out of slavery (Ex 3:7-10).

God’s being is not a being at the cost of others, but a being that delights in creation, in making room for others to become and to be. It is ‘being with’. It is an outgoing being with those who are threatened by non-being, those who are nowhere in society. According to Jewish tradition, the name is a promise, the promise to be present in the process of liberation, reaching far beyond male language which otherwise dominates. In it we can find the promise and affirmation of being and becoming which is denied to us by patriarchy and patriarchal religion. It creates room in the heart of the Bible to turn against any exclusivist oppressive male God-language and imagery.

Promising ways to explore translations and names

Sovereign, with a name revealed that nobody can manipulate, God is the permanent source of human freedom. We are invited, sisters and brothers, to question and to criticize the images we use when we talk about God. God

calls us to do away with frozen, solidified idols. In faith, we are asked to search for ever new words to tell the story of the God we believe in. That is why feminist theology is important. Women go a step further showing promising ways to explore translations and names which transcend the male-female polarity, such as ‘God of life’ or ‘Source of being’.

Still a long way to go. But if we walk in hope, we see the vision that Paul had:

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:27-29).

We all are truly one when God is not male, not female, but is present wherever women and men fight against apathy and indifference and search for new ways and words of life.

The statue of Christ „Cristo Redentor“ on Corcovado in Rio de Janeiro, erected in 1931.



Rev Dr Kerstin Neumann
is Head of EMS Unit
Intercultural Education
and Theology, Women and
Gender.

“He would not listen to her”

A Bible reflection on 2 Samuel 13:1-22:
The rape of Tamar

We have before us a “text of terror” as biblical scholar Phyllis Trible labelled this narrative over thirty years ago. Indeed, it is a text we do not mention in Church, we do not preach about and we would want to avoid reading at any cost. It is a text that makes us uncomfortable in so many ways.

In what follows, I want to invite you to gather your courage and enter into this narrative of terror as one enters a drama in eight acts and to interact with the characters who, in reality, are people we meet in our everyday life. Through the narrative we can look at our own contexts and deal with the thoughts and emotions it triggers in us personally.

However, before we meet the main characters, the narrator reminds us that there is a backstory to this drama.

Scene 0: Backstory

Some time passed...

This very short connector at the beginning of the narrative takes us back to the time before this event, to a time when this ‘royal’ family experienced a similar scandal. Many years ago, when the children were still young, King David too found himself desiring a woman who was forbidden. Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, became the object of his desire and without hesitation he sent for her and took her. When her pregnancy threatened to expose him, David tried to hide his mistake and when he failed, he plotted and eliminated the husband. Sexual violence was covered by murder. Though this episode was supposed to remain a secret and might have eventually brought about regret, it lingers in the consciousness of the family and sets the stage to what the growing children would soon experience.



This short connector urges us to ask whether sexual violence is hereditary and if children growing up around unpunished predators tend to repeat the family patterns.

Scene 1: Forbidden love, forbidden desire

David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and David's son Amnon fell in love with her. ² Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her.



The Rape of Tamar, interpreted around 1640 by the French painter Eustache LeSueur. In his depiction, the violence of the scene is softened by borrowing from representational forms of classical sculpture. However, the painter depicts the perpetrator with a knife raised in a threatening manner - something that does not occur in the Bible.

And so, we meet three children of King David. Absalom, his beautiful sister Tamar and the eldest brother Amnon. This time it's a family affair! A father and his children and something has gone terribly wrong in the relationships. Amnon 'fell in love' with his sister, or more correctly 'desired' her. But what stood between him and the object of his desire are both his brother Absalom and the fact that she was a virgin. 'Doing anything to her' might result in something that is not easily 'fixed'; unlike what his father tried to do with

an already married woman where a pregnancy can be blamed on the husband. And so, he made himself ill.

Found in a situation of forbidden attraction or impossible sexual relationship the dilemma is: what to do about it? Amnon starts by making himself ill, dwelling about it, letting the desire consume him.

Scene 2: The Plot

³ But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah; and Jonadab was a very crafty man. ⁴ He said to him, 'O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?' Amnon said to him, 'I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister.' ⁵ Jonadab said to him, 'Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, so that I may see it and eat it from her hand.'

Another member of the family gets involved. The cousin and friend Jonadab is known for his craftiness – an adjective encountered in the book of Genesis when we are introduced to the snake! And just like the snake he could understand the desire of his friend and could conjure up a cunning plan: Lie, trap and take.

How chilling it is to realize that the act is not only pre-meditated but carefully laid out by these two men. The victim is to be isolated from any protection, she will not only be put to work but will be placed in a position where she becomes the object of visual lust as her attacker would watch her 'prepare food in his sight' and she would then be brought easily within grasp as she will be forced to feed him with her own hand.

Are these kinds of plans really laid out in reality? Do we see this happen maybe among students or colleagues? Perhaps it is not unlikely that friends conspire in such ways in order to get what they desire.

Scene 3: Ensnaring an Accomplice

⁶ So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, 'Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand.' ⁷ Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, 'Go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him.'

It is not every day that we hear a prince ordering and the king executing. In order to bring his plan to fruition Amnon needs the authority of his father, of one who is more powerful than him to give an order that cannot be negotiated nor refused. But why does the king accept to be part of this? Did he not understand what this request was all about? Or did he not want to understand that his son is walking in his footsteps: Desiring, sending for, and taking?

By issuing his order to Tamar, David seals her fate.

Could bosses or even Church leaders sometimes use similar authority to send women into traps? Do they sometimes not want to see what is happening right under their noses?

Scene 4: The Trap

⁸ So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house, where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. ⁹ Then she took the pan and set them out before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, 'Send out everyone from me.' So everyone went out from him. ¹⁰ Then Amnon said to Tamar, 'Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand.' So Tamar took the cakes she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. ¹¹ But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, 'Come, lie with me, my sister.'

It is striking how many tasks Tamar was forced to perform in the sight of all while her aggressor laid down as a 'voyeur', watching her. And yet, all these witnesses, who by that point have surely understood the intentions of the young man, went out. One could argue that they had no choice, he was after all the prince. They could lose their job if they objected or questioned the intentions of their boss. Or maybe they felt it was none of their business, they were there to serve not judge. After all this is a family affair between brother and sister.

Eventually, not only does he use his status to force the servants out but also his physical power to take hold of her as we – the readers – watch him.



Scene 5: Self-defense

¹² She answered him, 'No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! ¹³ As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.'

Realizing she fell in a trap, Tamar claims her voice. She clearly says NO and then goes on to list all kinds of arguments that might persuade her attacker to relent. She argues based on kinship and culture, she describes the act as vile, she mentions the consequences for herself and for her attacker. Lastly, she begs and pleads that if this inevitable then let it at least be lawful. She speaks reason and wisdom. But sadly, she has no power.

Scene 6: Crime

¹⁴ But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she was, he forced her and lay with her. ¹⁵ Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her. Amnon said to her, 'Get out!' ¹⁶ But she said to him, 'No, my brother for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me.' But he would not listen to her. ¹⁷ He called the young

97 percent of 18- to 24-year-old women said in a survey by UN Women UK that they had been sexually harassed in some way at least once. Women and men joined forces to draw attention to this shocking fact with a „97 percent march“ in London on April 3, 2021.



usplash/Ehimetator Akhere Unuabona

man who served him and said, 'Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her.'

Her words fall on deaf ears. Twice we read in this text: He would not listen to her! He would not listen to her arguments before nor to her reasoning after. And though she was desperately trying to set things straight and cope with the situation in the most honorable and just way, his lust for her turned into hatred. "Come lie with me my sister" becomes "put this woman out of my presence". She is thrown out for the wrong that he has done and the door is bolted after her.

How often do we see this happen? A victim thrown out, expelled, fired, or divorced even as she tries to set an aggressor's wrong straight.

Scene 7: Lament

¹⁸ (Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier time). So his servant put her out, and bolted the door after her. ¹⁹ But Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.

She still would not be silenced. The prized daughter of the king has become a destroyed

woman and she wanted the world to see and hear what has happened to her. Instead of leaving in silence Tamar makes a scene. She laments in the typical fashion of her time by putting ashes on her head and putting her hand on her head. She cries aloud and she tears the symbol of her virginity, the long robe with sleeves as a visible sign of defiance.

Seldom do we encounter women making a scene after experiencing rape. In most culture, hiding rather than crying aloud is the more common reaction. The #metoo movement was an attempt to cry aloud mostly in Western countries. What in our context do we encounter as reaction to sexual violence?

Scene 8: The Silencing

²⁰ Her brother Absalom said to her, 'Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart.' So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. ²¹ When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn. ²² But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had raped his sister Tamar.

The brave, eloquent and expressive Tamar gets silenced by the men around her. Her brother Absalom tells her to be quiet. Her father David would not punish the perpetrator. And no one spoke up!

As a result, she remained a desolate woman in her brother's house and we hear nothing about her for the remainder of the family saga. Her life has stopped!

If one man had stood up for this woman, her life would have been saved: the cousin plotted, the father turned a blind eye, the servants went out, her trusted brother silenced her, while the other raped her.

Discussion:

- Which of these eight (+1) scenes gets to you the most? Why?
- Is there something in your context which intersects with this scene?
- Is there a word of Gospel for this scene?



Rev Dr Rima Nasrallah-van Saane is member of the EMS Women's network and lectures at the Near East School of Theology, Lebanon.

Women are bearers of the image of God

Bible reflection on Genesis 1:27



micheile.com/unsplash

The demonstrator could also have written "Genesis 1:27" on her poster.

So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

The awareness that man and woman are God's creatures brings us to this table of solidarity today. We have fully understood that woman and man are created by God, in His image. Women and men were created to be partners for one another. We realize that men and women are created equally. Therefore, there should be neither superiority nor inferiority.

However, the division of gender roles has relegated women to the "domestic" sphere, while men are present in the public sphere. But the biblical witness states that men and women are God's creatures, made in His image, having a nature and dignity of their own, and are to be partners for one another. This theologically affirms that women are co-bearers of God's image.

As fellow bearers of the image of God, men and women have equal opportunities to play roles in all areas of life. The division of sexual roles that places women in a marginal position is absolutely not biblical. As bearers of the image of God, women are free to develop themselves, by optimizing the gifts that God has given to them, both intellectually and other talents.

Today, this equality is being challenged by discrimination and violence at many levels and in many areas. The Bible text should be an impulse for us to recognize our comfort and step out of our comfort zone to feel more empathy for all women. We are called to do our part every day for equality for all: through support and activism, through writing, and through readings.

We want to surround ourselves with stories that are not our own. Because we believe that the stories are common stories that bring us together at this table of solidarity. As women who are with the men of our time, let us faithfully raise our voices and ask again and again, "how is my neighbor doing?" What help and support must I give so that the image of God in women is equally preserved and protected for the good of all. Women and men are equally co-bearers of God's image with all creation.

May the table of solidarity, the voices raised together, and the actions taken together be abundantly filled with God's blessings today. Amen



Dr Lidya Tandirerung
is member of the
EMS Women's Network
and Principal of
STT INTIM Makassar
(Theological Seminary
of Eastern Indonesia).

Prayer

God of love,
 help me and show me the way
 out of my bitter need, danger, and despair.

God, once born in a stable,
 you came to us human-beings so small,
 so weak and inconspicuous:

Hear me and stand by me,
 with comfort, wisdom, and kind people.

Let me see what is right and recognize
 what has to be done.

Give me courage to overcome fear and shame
 and to seek and accept help.

Give me strength to take the road
 and resist my enemy, the perpetrator.

Give me confidence for the future,
 so that I can leave my misery behind me
 and live a different life.

God, star of Bethlehem,
 lead me and shine on my way, so that I will not stumble and fall.
 come with me, step by step.

Thank you for the people, who are kind to me when we meet,
 who really do mean well
 and support me with help and advice

Amen

Sylvia Dieter
 Secretary,
 EFW Department of
 Church and Society

Intercession

God, we pray for all
who have lost their laughter
and whose trust in you and in people has been lost;
for those in despair,
whose lives are shattered
and who must live with their wounds.

We pray for all who are left restless, angry and sad,
who are distraught in the face of senseless violence,
for those who care about the victims,
for all those who strive to clarify horrific acts
and are often damaged in the process.
Fall into the arms of the perpetrators,
who violate innocent lives and destroy people

Oppose those
who abuse your word and justify violence.
Strengthen and comfort those
who suffer from violence and trauma.
Give us the courage to prevent evil acts.

Show us where we are needed and need to look carefully.
We thank you for all who try to help and heal.
Let us all experience love and care
so that we can laugh and believe, hope and love.

Amen.

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Liturgical Chamber of the
Evangelical Church of
Kurhessen-Waldeck (ed.):
Wunde Punkte – Eine
Andachtenreihe zum Thema
Gewalt
(Wounded Points - A series
of devotions on the issue of
violence);
Kassel 2022, page 18/19*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,

you are a good Father, who loves to give good gifts and who cares for us.

Hallowed be your name.

May you be known as a God of justice and mercy and compassion and truth, by victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence.

Your kingdom come.

Bring the full resources of the kingdom for victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence. Your kingdom upends oppressive powers and exalts the humble and low, brings healing to the wounded, and goes beyond outward appearance and reaches to the heart. Your kingdom brings together people of every culture, tongue and tribe in equality and grace and hope.

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

We trust in your perfect will. Because you are completely good, we trust in the goodness of your will.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Father, we have many needs. Please give us the support we need to escape situations of violence. Please give us the compassion and wisdom to be supporters. Please give us hope through your gospel.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

God, we ask for your forgiveness over our complicity, our apathy, or our involvement in domestic and family violence. God please give us grace to forgive.

Lead us not into temptation.

We are tempted to give up, or despair. Lead us away from that, into perseverance and hope. We are tempted to maintain cultures and habits which oppress and control. Lead us away from that, into respect and freedom.

And deliver us from evil.

You have conquered all evil – all that is wrong within us, and without. There is no power that can stand against you. Please give freedom, healing and protection to all who need it.

AMEN

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Australia*

Blessing

God bless you,
that yesterday's suffering
and the fear of tomorrow
lose their terror
and that the message of the salvation of the world
take shape in you.

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Liturgical Chamber of the
Evangelical Church of
Kurhessen-Waldeck (ed.):
Wunde Punkte – Eine
Andachtenreihe zum Thema
Gewalt
(Wounded Points - A series
of devotions on the issue of
violence);
Kassel 2022, page 21

This is not an empty promise

Blessing wish for women in hard times

"I will never turn away anyone who comes to me." John 6, 37

*May God bless all the people of the earth with peace,
strength, serenity and confidence.*

*This promise and the strengthening power of this blessing
are meant especially for all those women and children
who are going through hard times.*

*Whether it is because of illness or violence and abuse of power
or because they are fleeing,*

*whether it is due to war or other conflicts, poverty,
desperation, grief or loneliness.*

Sylvia Dieter
Secretary,
EFW Department of
Church and Society

KNOW YOUR A-Z

Prevent violence against women - challenge gender stereotypes and promote respect.



ASK

women you know about their experiences of sexism and harassment.



BELIEVE

reports of violence and sexual assault. Offer support, not suspicion.



CHANGE

the conversation to talk about who she is, not what she looks like.



DON'T

ask "Why doesn't she leave?", ask "Why is he violent?"



ENCOURAGE

men and boys to talk about their thoughts and emotions.



FIND

ways to support women's choices, whatever they are.



GIVE

women and men equal opportunities and assume they have equal abilities.



HELP

young people understand sexual consent and free agreement.



INSPIRE

boys and girls to be equally strong, thoughtful and compassionate.



JUST

don't laugh at jokes that put women down.



KNOW

that gender inequality hurts men, women and kids.



'LIKE A GIRL'

isn't an insult; don't use it like one.



MAKE

an effort to talk positively about strong and powerful women.



NOTICE

when a woman is interrupted or spoken over, and call it out.



OPPOSE

gender stereotypes - they disadvantage all of us.



PUSH

yourself to parent equally with your partner.



QUESTION

what it means to be a 'good man'.



RELEARN

your history: Google 'women who changed the world'.



SHOW

children examples of women and men doing non-stereotypical jobs.



TALK

about equal pay at work.



UNDERSTAND

that there are many myths about what causes violence.



VALUE

women's voices and opinions; ask them what they think.



WALK

away from mates who don't respect women.



(E)XAMINE

how women are portrayed in popular culture - don't buy into it.



YOU

have a role in ending violence - speak up and act whenever you can.



ZIP-IT

Don't make that sexist joke or demeaning comment.

Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria

Preventing violence, promoting respect



Our WATCH
End violence against Women And Their Children

We Need Peace and Faith

A Poem

*Men and women
They abuse each other
They abuse their children
People won't get enough relief inside
People are abused out here
Our country will end up dying
Because of the abusers
Children become substance abusers
Children become drug addicts
We just can't keep quiet
This is already affecting our nation
People inject themselves with drugs
People manage their problems by drugs
South Africa has chosen a wrong journey,
"Journey of drug, Dagga"
We cannot let Lucifer play around in our heads,
around in our foreheads,
People are dying outside here
It sounds painful, it hurts
Because these are humans,
They live like us; they breathe as we do
Gender-based violence wasn't right before
Gender based violence isn't right even now
Gender-based violence isn't worth any power
Gender-based violence brings death
Gender-based violence won't be right in the future
We need peace in our nation
And we need faith*

*Mpho Motholo, Grade 7 learner, at Katlehong Primary school.
The school is in one of the poorest townships of Johannesburg, South Africa.*



**Evangelical Mission
in Solidarity**