

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

A Tearfund resource for prayer,
reflection and action

tearfund

PRAYING AND STANDING WITH US

Trigger warning: Please be aware that these reflections reference sexual and gender-based violence. All of the names in these stories have been changed to protect identities and the images used are not of the actual people involved.

How can something that so often remains hidden pose such great challenges to social and economic development? And yet, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) does just that. It's a threat with a reach as wide as the coronavirus pandemic – a pandemic which has seen a sharp increase in the incidence particularly of domestic violence. People being isolated and confined, the added stress on households, and the fact that normal social networks have been disrupted have all contributed to make this problem even more prevalent.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence is a global campaign that runs from **25 November 2020** (*International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*) to **10 December 2020** (*International Human Rights Day*).

Please will you pray with us and be encouraged to stand up and speak out against injustice that robs women and girls around the world of their dignity and, often, their lives.

25 NOVEMBER 2020

Day one: Breaking the silence



'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.'

Martin Luther King

Today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. It also marks the first day of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence.

One in three women, worldwide, will suffer some form of violence in their lifetime. Of these women, one in five will become a survivor of rape or attempted rape. The coronavirus has made the situation even worse. We, the church, have a significant role to play in speaking out against SGBV

and in challenging the silence that too often surrounds issues of sex and gender inequality. The Bible teaches us that women and men are created equal in the eyes of God, and that all people should be treated with love and respect. Through sharing this teaching, the church can help to change attitudes in our societies. As the church, we can also respond to the needs of survivors – creating a safe and supportive environment where they can regain their dignity.

Please pray

- Ask God to help us better understand the issue of gender-based violence in our own context – whether that be in our church, family or community.
- Pray that he will help us to open our eyes and hearts to those who are affected by gender-based violence and give us wisdom in how to respond with compassion and love.

26 NOVEMBER 2020

Day two: Maya's baby girl

Maya had a blissful marriage with Hari and they were blessed with a baby girl.

Like many other people, a lack of employment opportunities in Nepal forced Hari to leave the family and go to find work in India. Earlier this year, the pandemic forced him to return home. The reunion with his family should have been joyful, but it took a tragic turn. Facing the stress of joblessness, Hari began physically hurting Maya. Sadly, she found no support from her own father, much less the rest of her family. In addition to Hari being violent, Maya has been enduring physical and emotional abuse from her in-laws. Because of her beloved baby girl, she has felt unable to leave and has continued to face the violence and abuse.



Please pray

- Pray that women like Maya will find safe spaces where they can heal.
- Pray for women who are in relationships where they are completely reliant on abusive spouses and relatives – that they will be able to find support and have access to justice.
- Pray for the safety and mental well-being of children whose mothers are affected by violence.

27 NOVEMBER 2020

Day three: Sabo's awakening

'I never knew that rape existed among married people. I thought it was my right to have sex with my wife anytime I wanted, not minding how she feels. After all, I am the head, the man of the house and my decisions are final. I now know better; sex should be mutual. This is also violence.'

These words were from Sabo, a 28-year-old man, during community dialogues facilitated by Tearfund in Nigeria. Sabo has taken part in training which uses Tearfund's approach, Transforming Masculinities, to challenge harmful social and gender norms which are at the root of SGBV.



Please pray

- Pray for a reduction in the number of cases of SGBV in Nigeria – which have been rising as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.
- Pray that SGBV survivors will have the courage to speak out. Pray that the perpetrators will face justice, and that there will be a reduction in harmful cultural practices.
- Pray for the grace for our partners and communities working to end sexual and gender-based violence to continue the work. Pray that they will not grow weary even in these uncertain times. Ask God for more open doors for funding to carry out interventions.

28 NOVEMBER 2020

Day four: Speaking out for girls

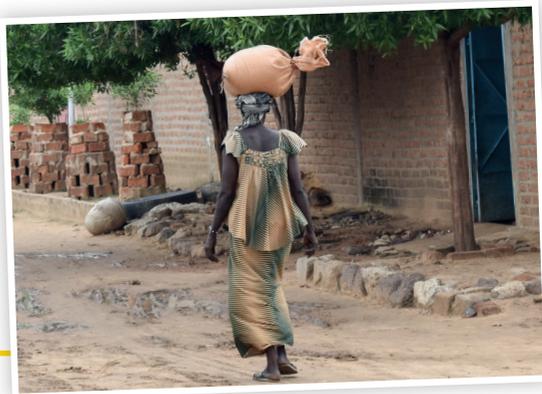
The coronavirus pandemic has brought with it many challenges – particularly in the communities where we work, which were already vulnerable.

Globally, we have seen an increase in violence against women and girls and, sadly, as a result of the lockdowns intended to save lives, young girls have been exposed to greater levels of sexual violence.

In August 2020, Tearfund partners in the south of Chad discovered that over

3,000 girls had been subjected to female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) in the space of only one week. Tearfund, along with our local partner and a group of survivors who had been through Tearfund's support process called Journey to Healing, responded to this emergency.

They engaged church leaders, traditional leaders and government officials to speak out against FGM/C and support girls who had undergone this practice.



Please pray

- Pray for continued protection for girls at risk of FGM/C.
- Pray for survivors who are advocating and speaking out against this practice for continued protection.
- Pray for the church to break the silence on this issue and support survivors.
- Pray for our partners and staff as they continue to engage in advocacy efforts with the government on FGM/C.

29 NOVEMBER 2020

Day five: Support for Ma Mon Mon



After learning of the incident, Ma Mon Mon's community in Myanmar blamed her for the abuse she had experienced. She lost her friends and so she stopped joining social gatherings. She felt like an outcast. When Ma Mon Mon learned about a survivor support group in a local church, she decided to give it a try. It was there that she found a safe space to talk about her experiences, to regain her confidence, and to connect with people and build meaningful relationships again.

'I was happy and content with my family until I was abused by my stepfather when my mother was not at home. I lost my hearing after the incident and have problems remembering things in the past.'

Ma Mon Mon, Myanmar

Please pray

- Pray for existing support networks for survivors of SGBV in Myanmar – for resources and trained staff to support trauma healing.
- Pray for survivors, like Ma Mon Mon, who are facing stigma – that they will be accepted and supported to recover and have renewed hope for the future.

30 NOVEMBER 2020

Day six: Dealing with judgmental attitudes – a Bible study

Survivors of sexual violence are not to blame for the trauma that they have experienced – and the church needs to be a place for the excluded and the broken to find their healing.

In some places, churches have spoken out against judgmental attitudes shaped by harmful cultural norms within their community. These attitudes are barriers to survivors of sexual violence participating in church activities and seeking the support they need. Sadly, there are many cases where the church has not stood up to these damaging attitudes. This has fuelled stigma, especially around those who have experienced sexual violence.

Indeed, the church is called to be countercultural, marked out by the selfless love that Christians have for one another. Where judgement is an opportunity to consider ourselves as better than others, we are urged 'in humility to consider others more significant than ourselves.' In the story we are going to read today, we have an opportunity to see Jesus treating somebody, in humility and love, as worthy of his care and attention - even though this went against what the expectations of others may have been.

Read John 4:1-30

Jesus deliberately chose to travel through Samaria on his way to Galilee. Other Jews would not have used this route due to the

difficult relationships between Jews and Samaritans. They would have chosen a longer route. But there was a meeting with a Samaritan woman Jesus needed to have, so he took that road. It was not just by accident, but because of God's will.

In the story, we read how the woman comes to draw water at noon, during the midday heat. Because of her shame and her past, she's there when she knows no one else will be – avoiding others. She has been stigmatised by her community and judged because her life does not reflect their social norms. But Jesus – perfect, sin-free, son of God Jesus – does not cast her out or treat her as less than valuable.

When Jesus asks her about her past and her various husbands, she doesn't deny it. The love apparent in Jesus' treatment of her makes her feel safe to receive that living water that he offers – that new hope.

All of us are in need of salvation, regardless of our past life – irrespective of what we've done, or, as in the case of SGBV survivors, what has been done to us. We all need to come to Christ in order to receive the living water.

As the church, our calling is to imitate Jesus in his great love for each person – even those marginalised by our society – and bring restoration to people and relationships.



Discussion

1. Why do you think the woman came alone to draw water from the well at noon when it was very hot?
2. Why was the Samaritan woman so surprised that Jesus asked her for water?
3. What does Jesus mean when he tells the women he will give her 'living water'?
4. What lesson do we learn from the passage about Jesus' contact with the Samaritan woman who the Jews considered 'unclean'?
5. In what ways can the church make people who feel unworthy and excluded, feel personally welcomed?
6. What are some of the things that we do in the church that exclude others? How can we change these?

Please pray

- Pray for ourselves – that we are challenged to really love everyone as Christ did, following biblical principles, and to be good witnesses in representing God and sharing his unconditional love with all people.
- Pray that families and churches will do all they can to help survivors of sexual violence feel accepted and loved.
- Pray that judgmental attitudes in the church will change, so that people who have survived sexual violence can find love and support and share their gifts within the church.

1 DECEMBER 2020

Day seven: Survival and healing

Huawa is a survivor of SGBV and now she is living with HIV.

At 35, Huawa is married and has four children. She's a farmer and her husband works as a labourer. She has faced trauma and violence at the hands of her husband and her relatives – the very people who should have been her support.

Fortunately, Huawa was able to take part in Tearfund's trauma healing programme where she was able to meet with other survivors, share her experiences and benefit from training on livelihood support, entrepreneurship. She was also able to be a part of the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA), which meant she could access financial support to start up a small business.

'As a survivor and living with HIV,' says Huawa, 'participating in the survivor peer support group helped me to cope with my trauma and HIV status. VSLA has empowered me in many ways and my life has changed for the better.'



Please pray

- Pray for women living with HIV, for the reduction of stigma and that the church will continue to be a safe space for them where they can find refuge.
- Pray for God's provision – especially for women who are providers for their family during this pandemic where their livelihoods have been affected.

2 DECEMBER 2020

Day eight: Esther's new hope

Esther, 58, was born into a family in Liberia that did not value girls. Her father's views were that girls shouldn't go to school, but get married and care for their husbands and children.

When Esther was eight years old, she went through FGM/C. At age ten, she was raped. When she told her parents what had happened, they said she should marry the man who had done it. Esther refused and ran away. A man she met took her into his home, where she lived for two years. Then, at age 12, she was told to marry his son. He was 25. They started a family and Esther bore seven children. War broke out in Liberia and life was difficult for them.

Despair overwhelmed Esther. Hopeless, helpless and without any self-worth, she turned to drink.

Transformation started when Esther was invited to a Journey to Healing workshop and shared about her childhood trauma for the very first time. She met other women who had stories of suffering and pain, and of



abuse too, and who also felt they had no self-respect or value left. As they shared their stories, they found love and care. They began to hope again and even dared to think of a future.

Esther stopped drinking and became an active member of a peer support group that meets monthly to encourage each other and work on emotional healing. They also save money together and have some income-generating projects producing soap and bleach. The work brings them some financial freedom and a sense of self-worth too.

Please pray

- Pray that women and girls are given the same value in society and seen as equal to men and boys.
- Thank God for the transformation taking place in the lives of many women through the survivor support groups.

3 DECEMBER 2020

Day nine: Safety for Sapana

Sapana is a survivor of sexual violence. She also has a mental health condition.

She and her seven-month-old baby girl were found in a small village in Nepal by a Tearfund partner. Both tested positive for coronavirus. A women's group in the village, with the support of a Tearfund partner, managed to send Sapana to the National Mental Health Organisation in the capital, Kathmandu, for treatment. The partner has also prepared a safe space for both mother and daughter once the treatment is over.

Sapana and her daughter are now physically healthy again, but there is still a long way to go in healing deeper emotional wounds.



Please pray

- Pray that Sapana and her daughter will find good care and support from individuals and organisations in their journey to healing. Pray that Sapana will be able to live in conditions that allow her to deal with her mental health, obtain justice and be a mother to her daughter within a caring community.
- Pray for protection for women and girls with disabilities who are at risk of SGBV.

4 DECEMBER 2020

Day ten: The worth of Yelshime's wife – a discussion

In Yelshime's community, it's normal for men to be regarded as superior to women in the home. When he got married, that was his belief and he never discussed issues with his wife. Any suggestions she put forward for their family were turned down – because, as a woman, she was considered inferior. She had no say in decisions about the family.

Yelshime saw himself as boss and so his wife suffered in silence. That didn't bother him as it was the norm in his community. However, when he took part in the Masculinities, Faith and Peace project in Nigeria, things changed. His wife is now valued and her contributions are sought and appreciated.

'In my community, men are regarded as superior to women in all households and that also applied in my home as I used to see my wife as an object. However, with the coming of the Masculinities, Faith and Peace project, my perspective has changed. [My wife] is valued and her contributions are sought and appreciated. I am now transformed!'

Yelshime, Nigeria

Reflection and discussion

1. How easy is it to recognise injustice embedded in the structures of our society?
2. Can you think of examples of how you might accept gender inequality as 'normal'?
3. Is there a temptation to use the Bible to support SGBV and other gender injustices in our society today?

Please pray

- Pray for the transformation of harmful gender norms and practices in our churches and societies.
- Pray that religious leaders and communities of faith, who have influence in shaping beliefs about the worth of women and girls, will speak out and help to bring justice and equality.

5 DECEMBER 2020

Day eleven: Changing the story for Julia

Due to lockdown restrictions, the self-help group Marie in Rwanda was a member of had to stop meeting. It meant that her social support and income were drastically reduced and she needed to find an alternative income. She did this through working in the fields, ready for harvest.

As part of lockdown restrictions, Marie's 19-year-old daughter, Julia, wasn't able to attend school. She was forced to stay at home with her mother's new husband, Charles.

While Marie was out working, Charles raped Julia and she became pregnant. Charles threatened Julia that he would throw her out of the house if she revealed what had happened.

This story is difficult to hear, and Tearfund, with its partners, are committed to changing the story for women like Julia.

In Rwanda, Tearfund and its partners, AMU and HDI, are working alongside churches to fight against SGBV. Through our Transforming Masculinities programme, we address harmful concepts of gender and masculinity, to promote gender equality and protect women like Julia. Men and women participate in weekly community dialogues in which topics of power, decision-making and equality are discussed. Group members are supported by their church leaders, who provide biblical justification for gender equality. Together, men, women and church leaders work to envision and create communities that are free from violence, recognising that everyone has a valuable role to play.

Please pray

- Pray for many women and girls who have experienced much higher levels of violence during the pandemic lockdowns in Rwanda and across the world.
- Pray for the many girls who have been sexually abused during this period without the protection of regular school attendance.
- Pray for more opportunities for Tearfund to engage in positive social gender transformation.
- Pray for the restart of self-help groups, which enable women to gain income – meaning they do not have to be financially dependent on their husbands in situations of violence.

6 DECEMBER 2020

Day twelve: Taara's new life

Taara is 20. She's tried to take her own life several times. As a child from her father's second family, she was not valued as much as her other siblings. Her father refused to send her to school, despite her mother's pleading. Her father also beat her, leaving Taara feeling alone and depressed.

'I ate poison many times to end my life, but I was taken to the clinic and I didn't die.'

Taara, Afghanistan

Then her father died. With the economic hardships in the aftermath of his death, Taara's family arranged for her marriage to a cousin – without her consent.

Recognising that she was facing a future full of gender-based violence, Taara's mental health deteriorated. The stigma attached to mental health struggles made it even more difficult for Taara to seek support.

Fortunately, a persistent neighbour cared enough to eventually convince her to see our local partner.

Taara has been participating in counselling sessions, which have had a positive impact on her. Suicide is no longer an option. She says, 'I feel that I am leaving my past and entering a new phase of life.'



Please pray

- Thank God for the presence of health and social workers who tirelessly care for people in mental distress.
- Pray that the conditions which nearly pushed Taara – and many more women and girls in similar situations – to the edge of suicide, would come to an end.

7 DECEMBER 2020

Day thirteen: Bushra's strength

Bushra was forced to marry at 14.

Her husband belittled her – often making fun of her inexperience in marriage and sex. On occasions, he would force himself on her against her will. Bushra's trauma found an outlet in violence. The young mother began beating her own children.

Through the psychosocial support services of Tearfund's local partner where Bushra lives in Iraq, she revealed the difficulties she faced from her husband. In the safe space they provided, Bushra was able to let her anger and frustration out. Through the conversations she had with social workers, she has found pockets of strength in her marriage and family life. Among the changes she has been able to make, is a new, positive approach to rearing and disciplining her children. She has also managed to stand up for herself when communicating with her husband.



Please pray

- Pray for Bushra's continued journey to healing and for her relationship with her husband.
- Pray for healing and restoration of the relationship between Bushra and her children, who have also sustained emotional wounds from their mother as she struggles with her own pains and obligations.

8 DECEMBER 2020

Day fourteen: Khushi's courage

Khushi is a young woman from the outskirts of India. Her friend had convinced her to move to Mumbai with the promise of a lucrative job.

Upon arrival, 20-year-old Khushi realised that her friend had sold her into the sex trade in Mumbai's red-light district. Khushi felt devastated and hopeless. As months and years passed, her will was broken and she resigned herself to the situation.

Some years later, Tearfund's local partner started providing support services to women and children living in the red light district. Khushi was one of those who

received counselling and livelihood support.

The counselling made her more engaged in her child's well-being and enabled her to make an informed decision on having her child admitted to a children's home. Khushi was living with an abusive partner – an alcoholic, who would beat her up every day. With the help of counselling, she mustered the courage to walk out of the abusive relationship and, eventually, make an escape from the sex trade.

Today, Khushi works as a saleswoman for a health and wellness company.



Please pray

- Thank God for Khushi's life and that she has been able to leave the sex trade and is slowly able to rebuild her life and has a sense of hope for the future.
- Pray for protection of women and girls who are sold into the sex trade – that they will find justice and healing from the horrors they have endured, and that they will recover their sense of purpose.

9 DECEMBER 2020

Day fifteen: Transforming power

In Myanmar, Transforming Masculinities workshops with church leaders have enabled more discussion on the harmful norms and practices being perpetuated in the church.

Crucially, church leaders have realised how power has been negatively used in their churches, and how they, as male pastors, have abused their powers. One male pastor said: 'I have never thought about intimate partner violence as a kind of violence, and now I see it as an issue to address.' Another

church leader said: 'We use lots of power in our church without noticing – it is also very harmful and violating.'

The pastors have started using Tearfund Bible studies to respond to sexual violence as part of their weekly sermons. During this global campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, they have committed to holding a series of events in their churches entitled Reduce SGBV, Increase Church Participation.



Please pray

- Thank God for what the pastor is doing in the church in Myanmar, and pray that many more pastors will start to address SGBV in their churches.
- Pray for an understanding among the church leaders of how the misuse of power can lead to violence.

10 DECEMBER 2020

Day sixteen: 'In the image of God he created them...' – a Bible Study

Read Genesis 1:26–28

This passage looks at the relationship between men and women in Genesis. It shows them having an equal partnership, while Genesis 2 discusses their roles.

Paul draws on this second account later in 1 Corinthians 11:7–9.

In reading the Bible, we recognise that men and women are intricately interconnected. We can reflect on how to relate to each other in a positive and mutually supportive way.

Discussion

1. In reading the story of the creation of men and women, what are some of the roles for male and female?
2. What does God empower human beings to do in verses 26 and 28?
3. What does this passage from Genesis 1 reveal about the importance of men and women working alongside each other in relationships of equality?
4. What does this tell us about the relationship between men and women in a marriage?
5. How is the Genesis passage in this study helpful in working out solutions to respond to SGBV in our society?
6. Name five things you will do to restore relationships within your family and church.

Please pray

- Pray for the courage for both men and women to challenge unhelpful stereotypes about male and female roles and to encourage biblical reflection on the subject of gender.
- Pray that the gifts of women will be fully released to benefit our churches.
- Pray for wisdom and leadership in responding to issues around SGBV.



If you would like to do further Bible studies on this topic, we suggest these passages for you to look at:

- Judges 19:1–30: A Levite and his concubine
- Mark 5:24–34: The woman who bled
- 2 Samuel 11:1–26: David and Bathsheba
- Psalm 139:13–16: Each of us is precious and valued by God
- 1 John 4:7–12: God's love and our love for each other

Further resources

Tearfund

[For more information on Tearfund's work on sexual and gender-based violence](#)

Restored

[COVID-19 and domestic violence – a toolkit for churches](#)

[Ending Domestic Abuse – a pack for churches](#)

Anglican Communion

[Domestic Abuse and COVID 19: How churches can respond](#)

Events

Anglican communion: webinar series

1. **Addressing gender-based violence around the communion**
Wednesday, 25 November 11:30am GMT/6:30am EST

2. **Engaging men in ending gender-based violence**
Friday, 27 November 2pm GMT/9am EST

3. **Theology and prayer: how our theology engages us and motivates us to act**
Wednesday, 2 December 12:30pm GMT/7:30am EST

4. **Advocacy and gender justice**
Thursday, 10th December 2pm GMT/9am EST

5. **Domestic abuse: identifying the signs**
Thursday, 26 November 6:30am GMT/ 1:30am EST
Friday, 27 November 10:30am GMT/5:30am EST
Monday, 30 November 7pm GMT/ 2pm EST

CONFIDENTIAL HELPLINE

If you have been affected by any of the information above and would like to speak to someone confidentially, contact your church leader or please call **National Domestic Violence Helpline (UK): 0808 2000 247**

If you are based overseas, please go to www.hotpeachpages.net to find a helpline.

tearfund

Following Jesus where the need is greatest

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