



**STUDY DAY**  
**26<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2019**  
**EUROPE: BRITAIN &**  
**IRELAND AREA**

**5** GENDER  
EQUALITY



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# INTRODUCTION

## Violence Against Women

This year the Study Day Material focuses on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Number 5, Gender Equality. In particular the emphasis is on two of the UN targets for 2030:

- **Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation**
- **Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation**

Women all over the world are affected by gender-based violence. The World Health Organisation research shows that globally: 1 in 3 women have experienced intimate partner violence; 3 in 4 of all the women and girls who are trafficked have been for the purpose of sexual exploitation; and over 200 million women and girls have experienced Female Genital Mutilation. This is a desperate state of affairs, women all over the world live in fear and pain every single day.

To explore further the issue of violence against women you can use this wonderful interactive resource from the United Nations:

<http://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/violenceagainstwomen/en/index.html>

In this study resource we hope to explore violence against women, especially sexual violation, and how as a church we need to take a stand against it and call for a world where the love of God can be experienced by all regardless of gender.

## Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

In the Britain and Ireland Area we have been focusing on Female Genital Mutilation for the past few years. This is becoming a growing issue in Europe and affects women in many countries around the world. Below are some of the most commonly asked questions and answers as well as links for those who would like to explore this topic more.

### What is FGM?

Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is nearly always carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of children.

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There are three types:

- Type I – Partial or total removal of the clitoris
- Type II – Removal of the clitoris plus part or all of the labia minora
- Type III – Removal of part or all of the labia minora, with the labia majora sewn together – leaving a small hole for urine and menstrual fluid
- Type IV – all other harmful practises including piercing, pricking, cauterisation

### **How many women are affected?**

It is believed 200 million women and girls alive today around the world have undergone FGM and that 3 million girls are at risk each year.

### **Where does it happen?**

FGM happens all over the world to women of many different ethnicities and religious affiliations. The countries in which it is most prevalent are: Egypt, where 91% of women have undergone FGM; Sudan, where 88% of women are affected; Mali, 89%; Guinea, 96%; Sierra Leone, 88%; Somalia, 98%; Djibouti, 93%; Eritrea, 89%; and Ethiopia, where 74% of women have undergone FGM.

### **Why is it practised?**

The most common explanation given for FGM is that it protects the virginity of the girls who undergo it. FGM is believed to curb sexual desire, as women are believed to become sexually immoral if they do not undergo FGM. Virginity and FGM are very closely tied together especially when it comes to marriageability, as mentioned above the woman is expected to be a virgin on her wedding night. FGM is sometimes seen as proof that a woman is a virgin and women who have not been cut are ostracised and unable to marry. FGM is also associated with cultural ideals of femininity and modesty, which include the notion that girls are clean and beautiful after removal of body parts that are considered unclean, unfeminine or male.

Although direct Scriptural links between FGM and both Christianity and Islam cannot be found, there is some use of Scripture and tradition to make a case for the mutilation of female genitalia. In both Christianity and Islam pre-marital sex is strictly forbidden (for example Holy Bible: 1 Corinthians 7:1-5 and Quran: Chapter 23 Surah Muminoon verses 5-7); FGM can be seen as a means of religious observance and, therefore, religion is sometimes used to justify the practise.

### **Why is it still happening?**

By its nature, a problem for women, it is an issue of violence against women which is, firstly, under-reported and, secondly, dealt with notoriously badly by many police and judicial systems. It is a topic which inspires feelings of shame and makes people feel uncomfortable. It is steeped in religion and culture which is complicated and difficult to challenge. All these factors mean that FGM is often not spoken about and not challenged. It is also still legal in a number of countries around the world.

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### **What can you do?**

Talk about it – in your churches in your communities, to your friends to your colleagues. Let them know that this is a problem not just in far-away countries but in your own. By talking about it we can remove the taboo and ensure that women and girls are protected from this violation of their human rights. You can also write to your government representative and ask them what they are doing to tackle this problem and ask if it is not illegal, why is it not illegal.

### **Where can I find out more?**

- <https://www.28toomany.org/>
- <https://www.un.org/en/events/femalegenitalmutilationday/background.shtml>
- <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>
- <http://www.dofeve.org/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKT1MX-RnmU>
- <http://leylahussein.com/the-cruel-cut/>
- <http://www.endfgm.eu/female-genital-mutilation/what-is-fgm/>

### **Resource Pack**

This Study Day material is being presented in the form of a Resource Pack containing suggestions for use in a Worship Service or other gathering:

- An Outline for a Worship Service
- Prayers, including a Call to Worship, a Blessing and a Declaration of Belief or Creed
- Hymns & Songs
- Bible Readings, including three Bible Studies

Where the material has been sourced from other organisations links are given to the respective websites.

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# OUTLINE OF A SERVICE

## For use in a Worship Service

*Choose from the suggestions on the following pages*

Welcome and Call to Worship/Prayer of Adoration

Opening Hymn or Song

Prayers of Confession and Thanksgiving

Bible Reading

Hymn or Song

Sermon or Talk (which might include time for discussion groups)

Prayers of Intercession

Hymn or Song

Offering (which could be received during the singing of the above hymn/song)

*This offering is the Unit's or Area's annual gift to the World Federation and is to be sent to the World Treasurer; bank details can be obtained by contacting Leu Pupulu at [world.treasurer@wfmucw.org](mailto:world.treasurer@wfmucw.org)*

Declaration of Belief or Creed

Closing Hymn or Song

World Federation Prayer and/or Blessing

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## **HYMNS OR SONGS**

*These are only suggestions, please do use any others that you think are relevant and that you prefer*

### **Opening Hymns or Songs**

- And Can It Be – Charles Wesley
- Immortal Invisible – Charles Wesley
- God is Here – Fred Pratt Green
- God of This City – Chris Tomlin

### **Closing Hymns or Songs**

- Pray for a World – Ruth C. Duck
- Let the Flame Burn Brighter – Graham Kendrick
- As for Me and My House – John Waller
- God of Justice – Tim Hughes

### **Other Hymns or Songs**

- In Christ There is No East or West – John Oxenham
- For the Healing of the Nations – Fred Kaan
- God of the Women (tune: Be Thou My Vision) – Carolyn Winfrey Gillette
- There's a Quiet Understanding - Tedd Smith
- God of the Poor – Graham Kendrick
- Do Something – Matthew West
- Christ, Be Our Light - Bernadette Farrell
- Who Can Sound the Depths of Sorrow – Graham Kendrick
- We Come From the Mountains – S.T. Kimsburgh Jr & Jorge Lockward
- The Federation Song – <http://wfmucw.org/download/the-federation-song>

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# PRAYERS

## Call to Worship/Prayer of Adoration

God of Hagar and Sarah,  
women without choice, living in a broken, pained, and divided family,  
yet women You called to give birth to your divine descendants.

God of Shiphrah and Puah,  
women without status, midwives to the Hebrew people,  
yet women You called to defy the powers and principalities of the land, and instead, to trust in You.

God of Ruth and Naomi,  
women without husbands, property, and position, devastated by grief, anguish and anger,  
yet women You called into faithful companionship to care for one another.

God of Tamar,  
a woman without safety, raped by her own kinfolk,  
yet a woman You called to weep and wail at injustice.

God of Mary,  
a woman without fame or fortune, young and pregnant, scared and expectant,  
yet a woman You called to suckle and nurture the Christ child.

God, each of us comes to You with our vulnerabilities,  
and yet, You call each of us by name, to lead and serve in unexpected places and spaces  
transforming our limitations into possibilities.

Today, we honour those women who have come before us,  
who are among us, and who will come after us.  
We speak and pray their names this day.

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## Prayer of Confession

Dear Lord, while we praise you for all the amazing women you have given to the world we must confess that we have not always noticed them or given them the credit they deserve.

We remember all those women in the Bible who are nameless – their stories of courage, love and strength never to be told. We think of the wife and daughters of Noah, Moses' adopted mother, the mother of Samson, the woman at the well, the woman who was healed by touching Jesus' robe and the woman whose faith prompted Jesus to heal her daughter, to name just a few.

Forgive us for not hearing their stories and not giving them even the dignity of a name.

We remember those women who were overlooked and undervalued because of their gender, and those who are painted in a particular light because of society at the time. We think of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Dinah and Mary Magdalene.

Forgive us when we see these incredible women as merely supporting actors in stories dominated by men, remind us of their legacy, power and courage so that they can inspire us every day.

We remember those women who have been abused, violated and killed because of their gender and social standing. We think of Hagar, Tamar, the Levite's Concubine and Jephthah's daughter as well as all those who are unknown to us because their names are not recorded.

Forgive us when we don't tell their stories or we dance around the truth of the crimes committed against them. Help us to cry with them, hurt for them and pledge for an end to gender-based violence.

We remember all those women who no longer feel welcome in church, who think religion is run by men for men. We remember those women who have been abused, hurt and violated in the name of religion and in the name of the Bible. We remember all those who are disillusioned by a church which does not hear their story, does not cry with them in their pain and does not believe their truth.

Lord help us to be a hospital for these women who cry out in anguish and pain, a place of safety for those who are scared, a place of welcome for those seeking you and a place of equality for all.

The stories of many women through the ages have been ignored. God help us to remember and learn from all your people and strive to know all of your Truth.

**AMEN**



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## Prayer of Thanksgiving

*(from World Council of Churches: [www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org))*

**Leader:**

O Living God, we pray for your holy people and for the Church. We ask that every member may be freed to serve you in truth and grace. We remember our foremothers. We remember all women who have recognised that to be a person of faith is to respond in action. We give thanks for Hagar, cast out in the wilderness, Miriam poetess of Exodus, leader through the Wilderness, Deborah a mother and a judge in Israel, the woman who bathed Jesus' feet with her tears, the Samaritan woman at the well, who was the first to spread the good news, Mary Magdalene, the first apostle of the resurrection.

**All: We give you thanks, O God.**

**Leader:**

Let us remember all those women who have faced the unknown in faith and met fear with courage. We give thanks for all those women who have dared to step forward and lead, for all those who have challenged the stereotypes of society and risked standing alone, we pray for . . .

*(insert the names of those women in your county or community who stand up in the name of justice).*

**All: We give you thanks, O God.**

**Leader:**

Let us remember women who have struggled to reform our history, who have sought in their time to minister to the needs of those who are hurt, disadvantaged and alienated in our land. We give thanks for . . . *(lift up the names of women in your countries and communities)*, for all those women whose work helps to fulfil your vision of peace on earth.

**All: We give you thanks, O God.**

**Leader:**

Let us remember those women, whose faces and names are known and unknown, who have laboured in the struggle before us. We give thanks for . . . *(lift up the names of women known to you)*.

**All: We give you thanks, O God. Amen**

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## **Prayer of Intercession**

Lord, we lift up women worldwide who have been the victims of violence. We pray for your restoration and peace for those who have experienced great trauma. We pray for your protection and provision for those who are currently at risk. We ask in faith that you would raise up and equip your local church to provide women with emotional support and practical help.

Lord, we pray for the current generation of girls who have been born into circumstances which make them vulnerable to violence both now and in the future. Be at work in their lives. Provide them with safety we pray. Grant them protection against harmful practices such as forced early marriage or FGM.

We pray that we can be the voice of change and help to eliminate this practice, one step at a time.  
Amen

## **Declaration of Belief or Creed**

### **I BELIEVE IN GOD**

**Who created woman and man in God's own image,  
Who created the world and gave all people the care of the earth.**

### **I BELIEVE IN JESUS**

**Born of the woman Mary.  
Who spoke of God as a woman seeking the lost coin;  
Who spoke of himself as a mother hen who would gather her chicks under her wing;  
Who received anointing from a woman, rebuked the men guests who scorned her,  
And said this woman will be remembered for what she did;  
Who healed a woman on the Sabbath and made her whole because she was a human being;  
Who discussed theology with a woman at a well, first confided in her his Messiahship,  
And motivated her to go and tell her great news to the city;  
Who, resurrected, appeared first to Mary Magdalene and commanded her to GO AND TELL.**

### **I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**As she moves over the waters of creation and over the earth;  
The woman Spirit of God, who counsels us and gives us comfort.**

### **I BELIEVE IN THE WHOLENESS OF THE SAVIOUR**

**In whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female;  
For we are all one in salvation.**

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## **Blessing**

**(from Tearfund: [www.tearfund.org/gender](http://www.tearfund.org/gender))**

God bless you with insight to recognise violence in all its forms,  
and courage to name it, speaking out for justice.

The Lord Jesus bless you with compassion for the vulnerable,  
and grace to stand with them, sharing His strength.

The Holy Spirit bless you with a prayerful heart,  
and power to breathe peace, transforming the world.

The blessing of the holy and glorious Trinity, eternal Wisdom, living Word, abiding Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

## **World Federation Prayer**

**Creator God,**

**Rooted in your loving care,**

**Nurtured through your son Jesus,**

**Challenged by your Holy Spirit;**

**We are in the World**

**To bring peace with justice,**

**Reconciliation in love,**

**And hope for all people.**

**May our lives extend as the branches of our Tree of Life,**

**Bearing fruits of Unity and Love.**

**We offer praise and thanksgiving,**

**Through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**

**Amen**

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## BIBLE READINGS

*Choose one or two of these to read and teach about during your service or gathering (or any other of your own choosing)*

### **Genesis 1: 26-27 – In the Image of God**

- Consider what this passage says about what it means to be made in God’s image, especially as we care for God’s creation and challenge anything that is ‘less than good’.

### **2 Samuel 13:1-22 – The Story of Tamar**

- Explore how this story challenges the Church’s role in speaking out and acting against sexual violence, and each of us in how we view those who are victims of sexual violence.

### **John 8:1-11 – The Woman Caught in Adultery**

- Consider what this passage says about different standards and unequal opportunities for women and men and how we should challenge such gender injustice.

### **John 4:1-30 – The Samaritan Woman at the Well**

- Consider how this story challenges social customs and judgemental attitudes, especially as they relate to gender.

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-27 – The Body of Christ**

- Consider gender issues in the light of the teaching that all are members of the Body of Christ.

### **Galatians 3: 26-29 – No Longer Male and Female**

- Explore what it means to be ‘one in Christ Jesus’ and what relevance, if any, this teaching has on gender issues today.

## BIBLE STUDIES

*On the following pages are three examples of how the above passages could be developed for more in-depth study involving group discussions. These studies have been adapted from Tearfund and the Church of Scotland World Mission Council Bible Studies:*

[www.learn.tearfund.org](http://www.learn.tearfund.org)

[www.churchofscotland.org.uk/serve/world\\_mission/](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/serve/world_mission/)

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## **Genesis 1:26-28 – In the Image of God: male and female he created them**

This passage in Genesis highlights an inbuilt sense of balance and equality in the Creation Story found in Genesis 1: all people are intricately connected and together are called to share in caring for the whole of creation. Before the terms male and female are even mentioned we read once in verse 26 and twice in verse 27 that people were made in God's image. It follows, therefore, that the way in which we care for all of creation should be a reflection of the God in whose image we are made. We all have a responsibility to ensure that each living being is treated with respect and dignity. The power to subdue and dominate is to be used in stewarding the earth rather than trying to control other people.

At the end of the chapter we read that God saw that the world he had created was very good; we all have a responsibility to try to recapture that sense of goodness. The passage reminds us that we should recognise when anything is less than 'very good' in God's eyes. It challenges us not to be blinded by culture, history or traditions (such as Female Genital Mutilation) that would violate any woman, child or man either physically, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. If we read Genesis 1 in the light of the Gospels, where we see Jesus welcoming and affirming people regardless of gender, we can find a basis for living as a community of equals.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What does God empower human beings to do (verses 26 and 28)?
- What does this passage from Genesis 1 reveal about the importance of men and women working alongside each other in relationships of equality?
- What does this tell us about the relationship between men and women in a marriage?
- How important is it to an awareness of gender based violence to understand the cultural context?
- How is the Genesis passage in this study helpful in working out solutions to respond to gender based violence in our society?
- In what ways might the Church help to counter cultural teachings and traditions that contradict the message in this Genesis passage?

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## 2 Samuel 13:1-22 – The Story of Tamar: deceiving the innocent

Tamar, the daughter of David, is a young woman sexually assaulted by a man close to her whom she would have trusted. It is a clear account of a planned act of sexual violence carried out by Amnon, who was full of lust towards his half-sister, and who colluded with another man to trick her into a vulnerable place. Tamar was exploited through her kindness and because she had been socialised into a culture in which her role was to take care of men; she could not disobey her Father's instructions nor refuse to serve and cook for Amnon. She said no, but her refusal was not respected. After raping her, Amnon treated her with hatred and contempt. When she sought help from her brother Absalom, she was told to keep quiet. Despite being the daughter of the king, Tamar was not protected by either her father or brother; in fact she was ordered to suffer in silence and was blamed and shunned. Her story became men's business, part of a power struggle between warring siblings, while she herself was left abandoned, desolate, invisible. No care or compassion was shown to her. This story is hard to read or hear! It is hard for churches to hear the stories of rape and incest which are told by many women and girls throughout the world, including in our own countries and communities. They are painful reminders that sexual violence, in the past and still today, is most likely to be inflicted not by a stranger in a dark street but by a family member in a domestic setting. Tamar's story demonstrates how a man can use his power and authority to get what he wants and highlights ideologies of male supremacy and entitlement, which still exist today. It also reminds us how important it is to raise awareness that survivors are not to blame for the violence. In this way it challenges us to understand the feelings of people who have experienced sexual violence and to explore how we include them in the Church and enable and encourage them to use their skills and experiences to help others. Sexual violence is an abuse of human rights. Together, in partnership with all survivors of sexual violence, we need to speak out against it and stand firm, holding hands in prayer for justice and restoration of broken relationships.

### Discussion Questions

- What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
- What does Tamar say and do? Why does she act in that way?
- Do you think sexual violence can happen within Christian homes and churches?
- How do you think men and women who have been raped feel about themselves?
- What does God say about sexual violence to men and women who have been raped?
- Where can a survivor of sexual violence find support in your community?
- Have you ever heard or read the story of Tamar before now? Have you heard the story told or preached on in your church? Have you ever heard any of the stories of gender violence in the Bible in your church? If so, what was the reaction? If not, why might that be?
- What do you think the church's role is, or might be, in speaking out and acting against sexual violence?
- What will you now do in response to this Bible Study?

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## **John 8:1-11 – The Woman Caught in Adultery: different standards, unequal opportunities**

This story tells of a woman caught in the very act of committing adultery; she is alone, vulnerable accused of a sexual offence and the whole village is against her. As a means of testing Jesus about the law of Moses, the Pharisees bring the woman before him, publicly shaming and accusing her. But, where is the man; why hasn't the man she was caught with been brought before Jesus as well? The Law condemns both the woman and the man to death. Therefore, immediately we are aware there are different standards for the man and the woman in this story.

The woman is being judged. Jesus does not condemn her, instead he challenges the Pharisees' legalistic and judgemental attitudes, pointing out that no one is without sin. He treats the woman with dignity, compassion and love. In doing so, he restores her, healing her brokenness, and asks her to return to her community as a changed person, worthy of God's forgiveness and healing. Jesus is our role model in showing us how to treat those being excluded, stigmatised or persecuted because they are seen as being sexually immoral. Jesus shows compassion and mercy to all.

Different standards for men and women are not just a thing of Jesus' day but are blatantly evident today. As happens in many parts of our world, all too often when a woman is raped the finger of accusation is pointed at her and not her rapist. At the heart of our faith is the belief that all people are created in God's image and possess equal worth, yet we live in a world where men and women are not treated equally. Gender injustice is a scandal, but a greater scandal is to do nothing about it. Jesus calls us from old ways to new life, a life of wholeness and right-relationship.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What do you think the story is really about?
- What do you feel about only the woman caught in the very act of committing adultery being brought before Jesus?
- Why did Jesus answer in the way he did? Why did the Pharisees and teachers of the law walk away?
- What does Jesus teach us here about how to respond to survivors of gender based violence in our context?
- Where do you see examples of different standards and unequal expectations for men and women in your church? Community? In the world?
- Jesus challenges the social customs and laws of the day by not condemning the woman. In what ways might we need to do the same to bring about gender justice in our world?
- What could your church do to challenge gender injustice and to model right-relationship between men and women?