Accompanying Survivors of Sexual Harm

A Toolkit for Churches

EDITED BY EMILY COLGAN
AND CAROLINE BLYTH

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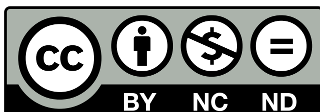

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EDITED BY EMILY COLGAN AND CAROLINE BLYTH

Endorsements

Johanna Stiebert,
Professor of Hebrew Bible,
University of Leeds,
co-director of
the Shiloh Project.

The vast extent of sexual harm inflicted, facilitated, ignored, and suppressed in church communities is abundantly clear—if still sinking in. Here now is a clear, research-based, trauma-informed, and purpose-driven practical toolkit to guide churches through understanding what has happened and to create supportive and empathic environments and prevent abuse going forward. The dedicated collaboration underlying this toolkit has produced a set of strategies that interrogate the language we use, how we interact within our religious communities, how we read biblical texts and think about theological concepts. If the steps in this toolkit are followed, there is a real prospect of significant change for the better—in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond.

Reverend Dr Nāsili Vaka'uta,
Principal of Trinity
Methodist Theological
College, Te Haahi
Weteriana o Aotearoa.

In a time when faith communities are complicit in different forms of abuse, this is an excellent guide for leaders and members alike on how to offer appropriate support and create a safe space for victims/survivors of sexual harm. It is a "must-have" resource for theological institutions that do formation for ministry. The insights from each of the seven scholars behind the work are informative, transformative, uplifting, and life-affirming.

The Most Reverend
Philip Richardson,
Anglican Archbishop
of New Zealand.

I am very pleased indeed to endorse this Toolkit for accompanying survivors of sexual harm. It provides extremely helpful resource material, prepared by experts in this field at a time when the church critically needs to enhance our professional development of all in leadership, whether lay or ordained, to ensure the safety of the vulnerable in our communities. At its heart, this resource is a commitment to a culture where the flourishing of every individual, according to their gifts, is encouraged and any form of harm is not tolerated. How we respond to, and support, survivors of sexual harm is a critical part of our response as a church. This toolkit has much to assist and support us in meeting these commitments.

Reverend Tara Tautari,
General Secretary of the
Methodist Church, Te Haahi
Weteriana o Aotearoa.

Accompanying Survivors of Sexual Harm: A Toolkit for Churches is a must-have resource for churches in Aotearoa. Through powerful group Bible and theology studies, the toolkit looks unflinchingly at the issue of sexual harm, offering ordained and lay participants an ecumenical training resource that is contextual and embedded in this whenua. Participants are challenged and empowered to ensure our churches are spaces that are welcoming and safe for all people, offering pathways for support and accompaniment of survivors. If you provide no other training for your church leadership this year, let it be this one.

Te Aroha Rountree
(Ngai Tuteāuru, Ngāpuhi),
Tamaki Rohe, Te Taha Māori,
Te Haahi Weteriana o
Aotearoa; Senior Lecturer in
Moana Studies,
Trinity Methodist
Theological College.

This is a comprehensive guide for facilitators seeking to "walk alongside" survivors of sexual harm. The workshop-style focus is engaging and allows for flexibility and adaptation for varied contexts. The pastoral approach to creating safe space and using appropriate terminology is reinforced throughout the workshop brief. The Bible studies provide opportunity for robust and in-depth interpretation, and theological reflection of problematic issues of atonement and forgiveness. Churches should consider this toolkit to enable and empower responsiveness to/with survivors of sexual harm.

Rev Clare Barrie, Vicar at St Luke's Anglican Church, Anglican Diocese of Auckland

The team of contributors to this toolkit have offered an invaluable resource for people in pastoral ministry in our churches, applicable across a range of denominational and cultural settings. Our communities include survivors of sexual harm. But at times, the responses they've encountered in our churches have only deepened their trauma and suffering. We need to do better. The wealth of practical, pastoral, and theological resources made available here are a great gift and will equip ministers to support survivors in their courageous journeys towards reclaiming their lives.

Monsignor Dr Brendan Daly, Lecturer in Canon Law in Catholic Theological College and Judicial Vicar of the Tribunal of the Catholic Church for New Zealand.

Accompanying Survivors of Sexual Harm is a powerful collection of procedures, advice, and information to assist facilitators educating Christian communities on appropriate responses to those who have experienced sexual harm. The Bible studies of the rapes of Tamar and David's concubines, and the stripping of Jesus powerfully facilitate understanding what happens to victims and why they were subsequently treated the way they were. The accounts are powerful challenges to Christians today, since Jesus came to do justice and free people from unjust bonds (Luke 4:18) such as the effects of sexual abuse.

The Very Rev Dr Graham Redding, Lecturer in Chaplaincy Studies at the University of Otago, and former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

The production of this excellent resource for churches on the subject of sexual harm is both important and timely. Rather than wait for the release of the final report of the Royal Commission into Abuse in Care, scheduled for 2023, the authors and compilers of this research-based toolkit have front-footed the issue and given us something that will help us get on with the task of addressing the shocking reality of sexual harm in faith-based institutions across Aotearoa. Supporting survivors of sexual harm and doing everything in our power to prevent sexual harm and make our faith communities safer places must be a high priority for us all. To that end, what a taonga this resource will prove to be.

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Emily Colgan is Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Trinity Theological College. Her research focuses on the relationship between the Bible and contemporary contexts—particularly representations of gender and violence. Emily's publications include a multi-volume work, which she co-edited with Caroline Blyth and Katie Edwards entitled *Rape Culture, Gender Violence, and Religion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

Rocío Figueroa is a Peruvian Catholic theologian. She is currently a lecturer in systematic theology at the Catholic Theological College in Auckland. Rocío has previously lectured and worked in Peru, Italy, and Mexico. She worked in the Holy See as head of the Women's section in the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Rocio's present research focus is theological and pastoral responses for survivors of Church sexual and spiritual abuse.

Lisa Spriggens is a counsellor and Head of Counselling at Laidlaw College in Auckland, New Zealand. As a counsellor she has worked with survivors of sexual harm, particularly young women. She is currently undertaking a PhD at the University of Melbourne researching trauma counsellors and their stories of self-care.

David Tombs is a lay Anglican theologian and the Howard Paterson Chair Professor of Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago, Aotearoa New Zealand. His work draws on liberation and contextual theologies to address public issues in transformative ways.

George Zachariah currently serves as the Wesley Lecturer in Theological Studies at Trinity Methodist Theological College in Auckland. His publications include the edited volume *Disruptive Faith, Inclusive Communities: Church and Homophobia* (ISPCK, 2015).

Preface

This toolkit began as a seed, first planted in 2018.

Since then, it has grown into something that we hope will bear much fruit, both in Aotearoa New Zealand and further afield. We would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to all the individuals, institutions, and communities who have offered their support, feedback, and endorsement of this toolkit. Thanks also to the Shiloh Project, whose Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK) funding contributed to the toolkit's finished form.

Each of the seven contributors took the lead in authoring the different sections of this toolkit; nevertheless, each section has, in many ways, been a collaborative effort, involving everyone's advice, words, and wisdom.

The toolkit is free for anyone to download and use. Under the Creative Commons 4.0 International Licence, it can be copied and distributed in its original format as long as appropriate credit is given. However, it cannot be used for commercial purposes, and if changes are made to the toolkit, it cannot be distributed outside the group it is used in without permission. If you have any queries about this licence, or about the use of the toolkit, please contact us at assh.toolkit@gmail.com.

While the toolkit is free, we encourage those who use it to consider making a koha (contribution) to a support service in their area for survivors of sexual harm. A number of such services in Aotearoa New Zealand can be found on the Rape Prevention Education website, and others are listed throughout the toolkit.

Introduction

Emily Colgan

This resource is the fruit of our collaborative efforts: we are seven academics, all of whom work broadly at the intersection of sexual harm and Christian faith traditions in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Through our work in this area, we have long been aware of the distressingly high rates of sexual harm in our communities. The statistics paint a bleak picture (see the section "Statistics around sexual harm" in Chapter 1), and it is important for churches to recognise that these trends we see in society more generally are reflected in church communities as well. Moreover, it is also important to acknowledge that sexual harm is perpetrated *within* church communities—at times by those in positions of authority—and the primary response of church leaders has far too often been one of self-preservation and concealment. It seems our churches have not yet found a voice to address adequately the issue of sexual harm, which is endemic in our faith communities and in our society at large. We (as a country, generally) have a problem with sexual harm and, for the most part, we (the churches, specifically) continue to keep silent on this issue.

These dynamics—both general and specific—have come into sharper focus since February 2018, when the New Zealand government announced a Royal Commission of Inquiry into abuse in state care. In November of the same year, the inquiry expanded its scope to include abuse of those in the care of religious institutions.[1] The harrowing testimonies of victims and survivors who experienced horrific sexual harm while in the care of religious institutions reveal that, for many people, our churches have not been places of welcome and safety; they have not been places of good news. We have failed in our duty of care for the most vulnerable in our midst. As this resource goes to publication, the Commission's work is still ongoing.[2] But it has highlighted the urgent need for churches to be ***proactive*** in their support of victims and survivors, as well as in their efforts to ensure that church communities are no longer spaces where sexual harm can flourish.

This need has been reinforced by clergy and lay leaders who, anecdotally at least, report feeling ill-equipped to respond pastorally to disclosures of sexual harm. They also describe lacking the tools to discuss sexual harm sensitively in a theological context. Moreover, they do not feel confident about reflecting critically on aspects of the Christian tradition which may (inadvertently) negate or minimise the experience of survivors and/or enable sexual harm to go unchecked in church communities. It has thus become clear to us that there is an urgent need for a trauma-informed resource that offers education and support of Christian clergy and lay leaders as they respond to sexual harm in their communities.

Over a number of years, our group has canvassed stakeholders from within the Anglican, Methodist, and Roman Catholic traditions, seeking feedback about the educative needs of these churches in confronting the issue of sexual harm.[3] We have also piloted this resource material with various church groups, seeking comment on the relevance and usefulness of its content for those in ministry.[4] So, the resource you hold in your hand today is the culmination of this process. It reflects scholarship by experts in their respective fields, consultation with church leaders and those in frontline ministry positions, and insights and input from victims and survivors of sexual harm.

It is important to state at the outset that this resource is by no means exhaustive, nor does it claim to be the full and final word on an appropriate Christian

[1] Visit www.abuseincare.org.nz for more information.

[2] To read the Royal Commission's interim findings please visit www.abuseincare.org.nz/our-progress/reports.

[3] Stakeholders included Anglican Ministry Educators (Tikanga Pākehā), senior Anglican clergy and lay leaders, Methodist clergy and Connexional leaders, and Anglican, Methodist, and Roman Catholic ordinands and newly ordained clergy.

[4] This was most extensively carried out at a weekend pilot workshop in November 2019 with a group of senior Anglican clergy and lay leaders, all of whom had pre-existing knowledge about, and skills related to, sexual harm. The group included survivors and people who worked with survivors in a professional capacity. Their feedback was crucial to the final form of this resource.

response to the issue of sexual harm. So, it is useful here to outline explicitly what this resource is, and what it is not.

What this resource is

This resource functions as a handbook to help facilitators lead educative workshops on appropriate responses to the issue of sexual harm. The primary aims of this material include educating clergy and lay leaders about

- Understanding the nature of sexual harm and its prevalence in New Zealand society.
- Being alert to and responding in a pastorally sensitive manner to people within their community who have experienced/are experiencing sexual harm.
- Identifying and articulating some of the scriptural and theological foundations that work to justify/legitimise/enable sexual harm while silencing the voices of victims/survivors.
- Identifying and articulating some of the scriptural and theological foundations that work to challenge and resist sexual harm.
- Exploring how their church might work to create a safe space for victims/survivors of sexual harm.

It is anticipated that those participating in workshops will have had basic exposure to contexts of Christian ministry, as well as a level of familiarity with mainline Christian theologies and pastoral training. Participants are by no means expected to be experts in any of these areas, but a rudimentary knowledge of these broad contexts will be helpful. The resource content will be relevant to those training for Christian ministry as well as those who have extensive ministry experience. It is intentionally ecumenical in nature and does not require knowledge of any one denominational tradition. While the format of this resource requires reflection and discussion in an "intellectual" sense, the aim of this work is to enable tangible, practical action in our communities that will support victims and survivors, and to make our churches spaces that are welcoming and safe.

What this resource is not

This is not a boundaries workshop. Different churches carry out boundaries training in different ways, but in essence, these courses broadly outline appropriate conduct in ministry. Typically, boundaries workshops include content on behavioural standards, interpersonal relationships, power dynamics, appropriate social media presence, and healthy ministry practices generally. This resource, however, focuses specifically on sexual harm and the practice of accompanying victims and survivors. It should be seen as supplementary to any boundaries training.

It is also important to acknowledge that this resource is necessarily limited and cannot attend to the particular nuances which characterise the cultural and contextual realities of individual church communities. There are, of course, several important factors that intersect with sexual harm, such as culture, ethnicity, gender, disability, and sexuality. While we touch very briefly on some of these intersecting dynamics, they are not the primary focus of this toolkit. The resource content primarily reflects the work of cisgender, tauiwi scholars and thus may need to be appropriately adapted to suit the needs of individual faith communities. That said, there is space offered throughout most of the sessions for participants to discuss how issues pertaining to sexual harm relate to their own communities. Participants will also have opportunities to consider how their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and languages will help shape their role of accompanying victims and survivors.

It is also necessary to make clear that this resource does not provide detailed advice about organisational procedures related to disciplinary action. While facilitators may choose to include procedural information specific to their denominal tradition, it is not included here. Nor does the resource contain information about redress processes or how to handle complaints.

Finally, this resource does not train participants to be experts in the area of sexual harm. Such training involves extensive study and attaining relevant qualifications from a registered provider. The resource educates clergy and lay leaders about providing a safe and supportive space for victims and survivors to come forward; it also encourages participants to explore those aspects of the Christian tradition which enable sexual harm to go unchallenged. It will equip participants with the baseline skills to ***recognise*** and acknowledge with empathy the experience of sexual harm survivors, to ***respond*** to survivors' disclosures of sexual harm in order to help determine what they need in that immediate moment, and to know where and how to ***refer*** survivors to services that offer relevant professional support and care. It therefore contributes to churches' ongoing response to the issue of sexual harm. It does not, however, train participants in professional counselling techniques. It will be useful to remind participants of their role (to ***recognise***, ***respond***, and ***refer***) at the beginning and end of each session.

How to use this resource

Before using this material in a workshop, it is imperative that facilitators read through the whole resource, cover-to-cover. This will provide a good sense of the overarching trajectory of the material and how it all fits together. It is also important that facilitators have covered the toolkit material as ***participants*** before they facilitate a workshop themselves. We strongly recommend that facilitators have experience of

(1) leading group discussions/workshops and (2) providing pastoral care, particularly to survivors of sexual harm and/or other forms of trauma. We acknowledge that this may not always be possible, but it is important that facilitators feel comfortable and capable of leading these workshop sessions and that they are committed to the goals of this toolkit.

Facilitators will need to work out how much time is available for the workshop they are planning to lead and what the group will reasonably be able to cover in that time. It is important that enough time is allocated to the material that will be covered (see the next paragraph). The content of this resource is heavy and requires time for delivery, discussion, reflection, and processing. It cannot be rushed.

Ideally, the workshop should be run over two full days, but it could also be run in shorter sessions across consecutive weeks. While Chapters 1 and 2 should be followed in their entirety as the first part of any workshop, there is more flexibility in Chapters 3 and 4. If possible, participants should work through each chapter comprehensively, but for the sake of time, facilitators might choose to limit the number of group biblical studies (Chapter 3) and studies of theological concepts (Chapter 4). Groups may, for example, choose to focus on just one biblical study and one theological concept. Finally, we strongly recommend that workshops include a session on inclusive language (Chapter 5) and end with a session that gives participants time to reflect on the work they have done during the workshop and to think about its practical applications going forward (Chapter 6).

Ideally, a workshop should be run by at least two facilitators who work together to cover the toolkit material. It is recommended that at least one of the facilitators is a woman. In addition to these facilitators, we recommend that each session is attended by someone who is able to support the group (and the facilitators) should the need arise—this could be a trained counsellor, chaplain, or an an extra facilitator with experience of providing pastoral support to survivors of sexual harm. We acknowledge, however, that this may not always be possible.

We, the contributors, hope this resource is a useful and meaningful tool for all those who accompany victims and survivors on their journey. This is an important role—a sacred role—and a response to Jesus's call for us all to love one another and to help each other flourish (John 13:34–35).

CHAPTER 1

Setting the Scene

Introduction

This introductory session "sets the scene" for the chapters that follow. **Part I** offers facilitators some basic, practical advice about how to run this session and other sessions in the toolkit. It is, of course, advice only, and facilitators should be attentive to the appropriate cultural requirements of the group.

Part II of this chapter covers important foundational material that should be presented to the workshop participants. These sections are important for understanding sexual harm and why a response from Christian leaders is so urgently needed. As such, it is crucial that this content is covered first, before any subsequent sessions.

The length of this session will vary, depending on the level of discussion and the number of participants, but will likely be between one and two hours. Depending on the group size and time available, you could treat it in a single session or cover the material in two separate hour-long sessions.

PART 1

Notes for Facilitators

Making a safe space

Sexual harm is difficult to talk about. It might be distressing or triggering for some, or uncomfortable and threatening for others. Talking meaningfully about sexual harm in our communities involves a level of openness, vulnerability, and sensitivity for those involved in the conversation. Setting up a space for this conversation to happen is important as it sets the tone for the interactions that follow. The space that is created (in both a literal and figurative sense) needs to be safe for participants. It is important that this safe space is established at the beginning of any gathering.

1. The literal space

The physical space used should communicate welcome and safety.

Group size: an appropriate group size would be between 8–10 people. It is also important to consider the make-up of the group: Do the group members know each other already? What is the nature of the relationships between group members (e.g., manager/employee, parent/child, siblings)? It is better to avoid having groups whose participants have a hierarchical or familial/intimate relationship with each other, as this could impact the ability of participants to speak openly and honestly. It is also important to consider the gender ratio of group participants. Ensuring a balance of different genders in the group may help support a sense of safety for participants. However, we appreciate that in some contexts, it might be more appropriate to run separate group sessions for men and women, and facilitators should take this approach if they think it will be beneficial.

Room size: this will depend on the size of the group, but we recommend you hold the sessions in a room that is spacious, airy, and at a comfortable temperature, ideally with windows and easy access to exits. It should be a private space where conversations won't be overheard by passers-by. Chairs should be set up so that participants can discreetly leave the room if needed (i.e., they don't have to walk in front of the group to exit the room). It's a good idea to arrange chairs into a circle or semicircle (rather than in rows) so that everyone can face each other (rather than having to look at the back of someone's head!). Providing things such as tissues, water, food/snacks, and comfortable seating are also effective ways to offer hospitality and comfort for your participants.

2. The figurative space

It's important that workshop participants feel safe and comfortable with each other. Unless all the participants know each other well, or regularly work together, it can be helpful to start each session with a quick "ice-breaker" exercise. This could be as simple as asking everyone to introduce themselves and to share a minor detail about themselves (e.g., their favourite food, favourite colour, etc.). Facilitators can devise an ice-breaker that they think will best suit the participants' cultural expectations—the important thing is that the exercise makes people feel comfortable and connected to the group, rather than causing them discomfort or embarrassment. Another idea would be to offer refreshments **prior** to the workshop starting, so that people have the chance to meet each other and chat more informally.

It is common at the beginning of any presentations about sexual harm to give a "trigger warning" to participants. A trigger warning identifies the topics being discussed and acknowledges that these may be distressing for those present. It acknowledges and normalises effects of trauma, with the intent of creating a safe space for participants. It lets them know that there is an understanding that they can, if required, take steps to care for themselves during the workshop. Even though, in this instance, the topic will be clear for anyone attending, it is still important to make this acknowledgement and talk through the following points.

Before entering into a topic covered in this resource, the facilitator needs to explain to the group that respect and a willingness to listen and understand each other is essential for creating a safe space. Openness, humility, and acceptance from all participants is imperative, so that everyone will feel confident enough to speak and share their thoughts and experiences. It is also important for everyone to have the opportunity to speak and for their perspectives to be heard. In the event that a participant in the group makes inappropriate comments or interacts in inappropriate ways during the conversation, your role as facilitator necessitates that you know how to manage this effectively. Strategies might include interrupting, redirecting, or even ending a particular conversation, directly asking a participant to limit their contributions, or, if necessary, asking a participant at an appropriate moment to leave the group.

Sexual harm is a difficult topic to talk about and can be especially difficult for people who have experienced or are experiencing it. We recommend that each session is attended by someone who is able to support participants (and the facilitators) should the need arise—this could be a trained counsellor, chaplain, or another facilitator with experience of providing pastoral support to survivors of sexual harm. Facilitators need to ensure participants feel welcome to leave the workshop at any time if they feel distressed. Perhaps there is a quiet room nearby that you could make available for them to take some time out. If a participant becomes very distressed, you can invite them to take some time away from the group and offer them some pastoral support. It is important to be discreet in these moments, not drawing unnecessary attention to the participant, but also taking care of their wellbeing. The sessions will ***not*** be an appropriate space to explore the cause of their distress; rather, facilitators should support the participant in the immediate moment and offer to assist them in making a plan for how they might be supported. It will also be useful to provide the whole group with a list of phone numbers/email addresses of free counselling services in your area.

Additionally, please reassure participants that there is no expectation for them to share any personal stories as part of this workshop. You may find that participants want to say something about their own experience. This needs to be managed carefully to ensure that what is shared is appropriate.

As you introduce a topic and note the potentially distressing nature of the content, it might be useful to share this grounding exercise with participants.

Grounding exercise

There might come a time in our workshop today where you notice your mind disconnecting, or you feel strong emotions in response to hearing distressing stories or information which connects strongly to an experience that is a part of your own life, or of someone close to you. This experience is called triggering and can feel very upsetting if it is unexpected. If you notice yourself disconnecting from the conversation that is happening around you, you may wish to try the following exercise to support yourself and to feel safer and able to emotionally and psychologically remain present in the room.

- Place your feet flat on the floor.
- Sit back in your chair.
- Take some deep, slow breaths and notice the feeling of your feet on the floor and your body in the chair.
- Keep your eyes open, rather than closed.
- You may wish to focus on a particular object in the room; notice what it looks like, what you like about it.

These small activities remind your body and your mind that you are in the room, in the present, rather than back at the distressing memory. Keep reminding yourself that you are safe. You may still feel like you need to step out of the room for a few minutes, but try to return to the room, so that you can continue to ground yourself in the present experience, rather than in the past distress.

As facilitators, you should also be aware that there may be participants in the group who have perpetrated sexual harm and who have chosen to participate in the group. This can be uncomfortable knowledge to hold, but it is important to be mindful of this and to always be aware of group dynamics and interactions between participants.

Overall, the safety of all participants is a key priority, and group confidentiality is vital. What is said in this space stays in this space. This means that participants do not share any of the personal stories or experiences discussed at this gathering with anyone outside the room. It also means that participants respect each other's stories by not discussing them with each other outside the session.

PART 2

Group Session

The challenges of terminology

Notes for facilitator

Language is important so it is useful to reflect on the words and labels that will be used in this resource and the discussions that flow from it.

There are a number of words and phrases used to talk about this issue, including "sexual abuse," "sexual violence," "sexual assault," "sexual harm," and "intimate partner violence." Different words are also used to refer to people who experience these forms of victimisation, including "victim" and "survivor." Some words may have negative connotations—there is no way of knowing in advance what words may unsettle or trigger a survivor of sexual harm. It can be helpful to check with people in the group to find out whether they are comfortable with particular terms, especially if you notice a reaction to something you have said. Showing respect for language choices is essential.

We have listed below some terms and brief definitions. We also explain why we (the creators of this resource) have settled on our terminology. Take time to discuss these terms with the group and find out from them which terms they feel most comfortable using.

1. Sexual abuse

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care (2020) defines "abuse" as "physical, sexual, and emotional or psychological abuse and neglect," which includes "inadequate or improper treatment or care that resulted in serious harm to the individual (whether mental or physical)" (p. 157, sect. 17.1). Sexual abuse may be defined as unwanted sexual contact with a person using threat or coercion and/or when the person is below the age of consent or is otherwise incapable of giving consent (due to mental or physical incapacity). The term is frequently used in relation to sexual harm experienced by children and/or within families and institutions, although it can be adopted in wider contexts too.

2. Sexual assault

The United Nations defines sexual assault as

> Sexual activity with another person who does not consent. It is a violation of bodily integrity and sexual autonomy and is broader than narrower conceptions of "rape," especially because (a) it may be committed by other means than force or violence, and (b) it does not necessarily entail penetration. (United Nations 2017, p. 6)

3. Sexual violence

The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as

> any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (World Health Organization 2002, p. 149)

4. Sexual harm

When someone has a sexual experience they don't want, or are forced into any kind of sexual act by another person, they've experienced sexual harm. This may refer (but is not limited) to

- The use of physical force to perpetrate a non-consensual sexual act.
- The use of threat, emotional blackmail, control, or repeated pressure to coerce someone into participating in a sexual act.

- Unwelcome touching and/or sexually explicit conversations.

Sexual harm can happen in lots of different ways:

- It might involve physical contact, or it could be via online channels (e.g., sexually explicit texts, emails, revenge porn).
- It might have happened only once or lots of times.
- It may have happened a long time ago or it may have happened recently.
- It might involve one, two, or more people.

Sexual harm can happen to any of us at any time in our lives. It doesn't matter what age, gender, sexual orientation, or background you come from.

Here are some examples of sexual harm:

- Having an unwanted sexual experience.
- Being pressured or physically forced by someone to perform or receive sexual behaviours when you don't want to.
- Having someone pressure or expect you to have sex in ways that you don't want during a consensual sexual encounter.
- Having someone touch parts of your body that you do not want touched.
- During sex, wanting to stop but the other person not stopping.
- Having a sexual experience with someone only because they wore you down by repeatedly asking you.
- Experiencing rape, or attempted rape.
- Having someone threaten your personal, professional, social, or academic reputation unless you have sex, or unless you perform sexual behaviours or receive sexual behaviours from them.
- Being the recipient of sexual experiences/behaviours when you are unable to give consent (e.g. if you are under the age of 16 years, asleep, intoxicated, or otherwise incapable of giving informed consent).
- Having sexual experiences about which you now feel anxiety, fear, shame, anger, guilt, disgust, depression, or some other bad feeling.
- Being forced to watch porn or to participate in sexual activities influenced by porn that you don't want to be involved in.

5. Intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to a pattern of behaviours that cause physical, psychological, or sexual harm to a partner or former partner. While many people associate IPV with physical violence, it can also take the form of psychological and emotional abuse, sexual harm, and controlling behaviours (coercive control) that seek to frighten, threaten, intimidate, manipulate, and entrap the victim. Intimate partner violence is always used by perpetrators to gain or maintain power and control over their victim.

Intimate partner violence may also be referred to by other terms, such as "domestic violence," "domestic abuse," and "family violence."

Anyone can be affected by IPV, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. But statistically, most victims are women, and most perpetrators are men. Intimate partner violence can also impact people of every race, ethnicity, age, religion, and class. It can occur within a range of relationships, including couples who are married, cohabiting, or dating, or who have separated or divorced. Intimate partner violence may also impact other family members, including children, relatives, and pets.

The United Nations has a helpful web page that defines and explains IPV in more detail. We have included the link in the "Further readings and resources" list at the end of this chapter.

6. Victim/Survivor

Some people who have experienced sexual harm prefer to be referred to as a "victim," while others choose "survivor." The word "victim" can imply powerlessness and passivity, whereas "survivor" can denote strength and resilience.

Notes for facilitator

In this resource, we recognise the multiplicity of terms available and note that these terms refer to a broad spectrum of experiences. We have chosen to use the phrase "sexual harm" in the hope that it points towards this spectrum of experiences. The term sexual harm also reminds us that these issues do not pertain only to physical violence but include other forms of coercion and unwanted sexual contact.

During the sessions, it will be helpful to ask participants what terminology they are familiar with and how they understand the term "sexual harm" in light of their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and language. While we have chosen to use the term "sexual harm" throughout the toolkit, your participants may feel more comfortable using other terms. Ask them what they think and be guided by their responses. The most important thing is to use language that is meaningful to yourself and the participants.

The term "survivor," however, may also assume a degree of recovery that feels unobtainable for some people. It is important to show respect to those who have experienced sexual harm by asking them which word they prefer.

In this resource, we mostly use the term "survivor" when referring to people who have experienced sexual harm, but there are a few places where we have chosen to use the term "victim" because it feels more appropriate.

Notes for facilitator

During the sessions, it will be helpful to ask participants what meaning the words "victim" and "survivor" have for them in light of their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and language. While we have chosen to mostly use "survivor" throughout the toolkit, your participants may feel more comfortable using other terms that are more meaningful to them. Again, ask them what they think, and be guided by their responses.

Statistics around sexual harm

Notes for facilitator

These statistics are intended to raise awareness about the extent of sexual harm in Aotearoa New Zealand and to invite group participants to think about the impact (social, cultural, and spiritual) this may have on the country as a whole and within their faith communities. If at least one in four women and one in twenty men experience sexual harm during their lifetime, then it is inevitable that faith communities will include multiple survivors. That is to say, sexual harm is a phenomenon that directly impacts the church and its members.

Facilitators can choose how to present the material in this section to the group (e.g., on PowerPoint slides, in a handout, etc.) They could invite group members to take turns reading out one of the points listed below, so that the group as a whole collaborates in sharing this information with each other. We have also included some questions at the end of this section that encourage participants to reflect on these statistics together.

It is also worth noting that the statistics outlined in this section are taken from a 2019 report (which was the most recent report at the time this toolkit was published). Facilitators may wish to check if there are updated statistics available prior to running this session.

- As of 2019, conservative estimates suggest that, in Aotearoa New Zealand, 24% of women and 6% of men will experience at least one incident of sexual harm during their lifetime.
- Young people are statistically at the highest risk of experiencing sexual harm; they are four times more likely to be sexually harmed than any other age group.
- Bisexual women are almost three times more likely to be raped than heterosexual women; and gay, bisexual, and lesbian people also experience much higher rates of IPV than heterosexual people.
- People with a disability experience higher rates of sexual harm and IPV compared to the rest of the population. It is estimated that 28% of disabled adults will experience sexual harm within their lifetime.
- Māori women experience sexual harm and IPV at rates significantly higher than the New Zealand average. This reflects the historical and intergenerational trauma caused by patriarchal institutions of British colonising culture, which, even today, continue to undermine and erode Māori social structures, traditional practices, and cultural identity (see Shine, "Safer Homes," p. 18).

On 1 November 2019, the Ministry of Justice released a report that breaks down some of these statistics in more detail for us. It is entitled *Attrition and Progression: Reported Sexual Violence Victimisations in the Criminal Justice System* (the link to the full report is in the "Further readings and resources" section at the end of the chapter). A large-scale analysis of this type hasn't previously been undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand. The report analysed tens of thousands of cases over four years. It makes for sobering reading. Here are some of the findings:

- Between July 2014 and June 2018, 23,739 claims of sexual harm were reported to police.
- Young people are statistically at the highest risk of experiencing sexual harm. Of all cases, nearly two-thirds (63%) involved a child (under 17 years), and more than three-quarters (77%) occurred when the victim was aged 24 years or younger.
- Women experienced 87% of the reported victimisations and men 13% of the reported victimisations.
- In 74% of cases, the perpetrator was known to the victim.
- It is estimated that only about 10% of sexual harm incidents are reported to police. So, the frequency of sexual harm is actually much, much higher than these figures suggest.[5]

[5] A 2020 report released by the Ministry of Justice estimates that only 6% of sexual offences are reported to the police, suggesting a worrying trend of reporting rates **decreasing** in the past few years. See Ministry of Justice (2020, p. 85).

Of those cases that were actually reported to the police,

- 31% resulted in a perpetrator being charged.
- 11% resulted in a conviction (or 89% resulted in no conviction).
- 6% received a prison sentence.

So, for every 100 cases of sexual harm reported to the police, 31 reached court, 11 led to a conviction, and six resulted in a jail term.

If we take into account that only about 10% of sexual harm incidents are reported to police, this means that the statistics are even grimmer. Doing the maths, only 3% of perpetrators of sexual harm are ever charged; only 1% are convicted; and less than 1% receive a prison sentence.[6]

Research strongly demonstrates that physical and mental health problems resulting from sexual harm and rape can be significant. Untreated effects of abuse can impact survivors in the form of depression, anxiety, impaired interpersonal relationships, parenting difficulties, eating difficulties, and/or drug and alcohol misuse to cope with negative emotions.

It's fair to say that Aotearoa New Zealand is a society in which sexual harm is particularly pervasive.

Notes for facilitator

It might be useful to give participants a little bit of time to reflect on and process these statistics. Participants could do this individually or they could reflect in pairs before sharing their thoughts with the main group. Below are some questions which can guide the group reflection.

Questions for the group

- Was there anything in these statistics that stood out for you?
- Were you surprised by any of these figures?
- How do these figures match with what you know about the prevalence of sexual harm in your community?

[6] It is not uncommon for people to raise the issue of false rape accusations when confronted with the seriously high rates of sexual harm. Contrary to the popular myth that women are highly likely to make false claims about being raped, most studies estimate that only between 2–8% of claims are false (similar to the rate of false reporting of other crimes). A rape claim can also be labelled "false" for reasons other than deliberate deception, including when authorities decide there is insufficient evidence, or if they deem that the complainant lacks "credibility," or if the complainant later withdraws their complaint (often as the result of social harassment, trauma, or self-blame). And even when taking this 2–8% of "false" rape allegations into consideration, the conviction rate for perpetrators of sexual harm remains scandalously low.

How society perpetuates sexual harm

Notes for facilitator

This section encourages participants to think about the different ways sexual harm is discussed and represented in social and cultural contexts, including in the news media, social media, film, TV, music, political rhetoric, and everyday language. It also covers some common "rape myths" that serve to diminish the seriousness of sexual harm and misrepresent both survivors and perpetrators. For this part of the session, encourage participants to share their own thoughts, examples, and questions about the way sexual harm is spoken about and portrayed in their own cultural contexts (including in their faith communities). Give them space to explore what these issues mean for them in light of their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language.

Within our communities, sexual harm is reinforced and perpetuated in a number of ways:

1. **Through hegemonic masculinity.** In many societies and cultures around the world, men are taught that to be a "real man," they must be dominant, in control, sexually aggressive, and powerful. They are also taught that men are ***entitled*** to be in control of women and weaker men, and to have their dominance respected. This pattern of masculinity (often referred to as "hegemonic masculinity") is considered the most acceptable way for boys and men to behave; if they stray from this behaviour, they are teased, punished, or made to conform to these traditional, accepted ideals. Such pressure creates an environment that fosters the idea that sexual harm is part of being a "real man."
2. **Through the media.** The media (including news reports, film, and TV dramas) often reinforces the notion of hegemonic masculinity by depicting men as dominating and aggressive and portraying sexual harm as a "natural" part of (hetero)sexual relationships. From *Gone with the Wind* to *Game of Thrones*, film and TV dramas regularly depict their male heroes as sexually aggressive and powerful figures who "overwhelm" their female conquests. This only serves to downplay the seriousness of sexual harm, reframing rape as "just sex," and portraying rapists in a positive light.

   There are also many examples of newspaper reports of sexual harm, which minimise the offence, blame the victims, and valorise or excuse the perpetrators. Violent sexual assaults are reframed as "stormy

relationships," "drunken mistakes," or "sex games gone wrong." Victims' levels of intoxication and/or prior sexual history are frequently brought up, as though these were somehow the "cause" of their sexual violation. Perpetrators are valorised as "good blokes," promising young men, esteemed sports stars, or beloved celebrities. Overall, the media appear reluctant to take sexual harm seriously.

Notes for facilitator

News headlines are an effective way to illustrate the points being discussed here and can serve as useful discussion starters among the group. Have a look at Jane Gilmore's website "Fixed It" (included in the "Further readings and resources" list) to find examples that you could use during this session.

Additionally, the media often objectifies the human body (particularly women's bodies) in TV shows, movies, advertising, and magazines. This sends a message to audiences that bodies are "objects" which can be violated, even for entertainment.

3. **Through social media.** Social media also reinforces cultures where sexual harm can flourish. We frequently see Twitter feeds and Facebook groups making fun of rape, valorising rapists, and degrading survivors. Two relatively recent examples from Aotearoa New Zealand include:

   a. **The Roast Busters:** The Roast Busters scandal became public knowledge at the end of 2013. It involved a group of young men based in Auckland who deliberately intoxicated underage girls in order to gang rape them. The men's apparent "bragging" about their actions on social media, as well as the police response (or perceived lack of response) to the complaints of alleged victims, caused public outrage. Later, in 2019, the media gave airtime to the leader of the gang of young men, granting him two one-hour slots on prime-time TV to tell his story.

   b. **Wellington College:** In 2017, two Wellington College students posted comments on a private Facebook page about having sex with unconscious, intoxicated girls. The students were suspended for five days by Wellington College. One of their posts simply said, "f*** women," while another said, "If you don't take advantage of a drunk girl, you're not a true Wc [Wellington College] boy."

   These examples both highlight the way that sexual harm can be trivialised on social media to the extent that it becomes little more than an expected part of young men's (hetero)sexual behaviour.

4. **Through misogynistic language.** Language also fosters cultures where sexual harm can flourish. For example, "rape" is often used to describe success (e.g., "I raped that test"). In films, TV shows, and popular music, sexual harm can be spoken about in ways that trivialise or normalise it—sometimes even reducing it to a source of humour or titillation. For example, in his song "Blurred Lines," Robin Thicke sings about sexual coercion using language that glamorises and normalises this behaviour.

   Public figures and politicians also draw on misogynistic language that normalises and minimises the trauma of sexual harm. Former US president Donald Trump was infamously overheard telling a TV presenter that he can "do anything" to women (without securing their consent) because he is famous.[7] And in 2016, New Zealand's then prime minister John Key was criticised for participating in a stunt organised by The Rock radio station, where the hosts joked about prison rape (see Hume 2015). These are just a few examples of the way that sexual harm is trivialised through misogynistic language used in everyday public discourse.

5. **Through rape myths.** Rape myths are stereotyped and incorrect beliefs about sexual harm. These myths are often used to excuse perpetrators of sexual harm and blame the victims. They are pervasive in wider society, and may also influence the police, judiciary, and media in how they respond to reports of sexual harm and treat/represent survivors. The negative impact of these myths on our communities cannot be underestimated.

Notes for facilitator

You could begin the discussion here by asking group members if they are familiar with any common myths or beliefs about sexual harm. These rape myths are incredibly common, so it is likely that participants will be familiar with at least some of them. Encourage them to explore the meaning and significance of these rape myths in light of their own cultural contexts and faith traditions.

Examples of rape myths include the following:

- **If a woman says "no," she really means "yes"** (she is just "playing hard to get"). This myth perpetuates the harmful idea that what women say shouldn't be taken seriously.

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[7] "Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything ... Grab 'em by the p***y. You can do anything." For the full transcript of this conversation, see BBC News (2016).

- **Victims were "asking for it" because**
  - They are promiscuous.
  - They were wearing inappropriate clothes at the time.
  - They were drunk/high.
  - They were spending time with the "wrong crowd."
  - They were in the wrong place at the wrong time (e.g., out at night, in a "bad" part of town).
  - They were flirting.
  - They are strong enough to resist sexual harm—they obviously wanted it to happen if they did not stop it from happening.
  - They have no obvious physical injuries, so they mustn't have fought "hard enough" against their attacker.

  Victim blaming emphasises the victim's supposed role in their sexual harm and places responsibility on them for their own victimisation. It is important to be clear here: sexual harm is ***never*** the victim's fault. There is ***nothing*** a victim does that invites sexual harm. Sexual harm is always the sole responsibility of the perpetrator.

- **Rape victims are "damaged goods."** This myth suggests that sexual harm has somehow rendered survivors less "pure" because their rapist has violated their virginity or chastity. This is related to the way that some people view survivors and victims as having lost some of their social or cultural "value" because of their rape.
- **Victims tend to falsely report sexual harm.** In other words, victims (particularly female victims) cannot be trusted. This is a particularly insidious myth, which renders victims' testimony less likely to be believed from the outset (see footnote 6 for a debunking of this myth).
- **Men just can't help themselves.** In other words, men are "hardwired" to want sex whenever they encounter a woman. Men "can't stop" once they initiate a sexual encounter. These claims are untrue, as is the belief that perpetrators of sexual harm are driven primarily by sexual desire (see the next point).
- **Rape is "just sex."** This myth frames sexual harm as primarily a sexual act, and therefore nothing to get too bothered about.[8] This is patently incorrect. Rape is experienced first and foremost by victims as an act of violence, which can sometimes be life-threatening. Rape has nothing to do with sexual desire—it is all about the perpetrator exercising power and control over the victim in order to hurt and humiliate them.
- **Sexual harm is committed by strangers.** This is untrue. Statistics consistently demonstrate that sexual harm is more often perpetrated by someone known to the victim (see p. 16).
- **A person cannot sexually harm their spouse.** Again, this is incorrect. Under New Zealand law (and the laws of many other countries), sexual harm is still illegal if it is perpetrated by a spouse.
- **Men can't be sexually harmed.** This myth is shaped by the misperception (mentioned previously) that men always want to have sex. This leads to the false belief that men can't be sexually harmed because they will "naturally" welcome ***any*** sexual advance. This is simply not true. People of all genders can be victims of sexual harm and people of all genders can be perpetrators of sexual harm.
- **Sex workers cannot be sexually harmed.** This is patently untrue. Sex workers have the same rights to their bodily integrity as anyone else. The transactions they negotiate with clients are for ***consensual*** activities, not acts of sexual harm.
- **"Rape doesn't happen that often."** Unfortunately, statistics tells us that this simply isn't true. Most of us will have either personally experienced sexual harm or know someone who has experienced sexual harm.

All of these myths about sexual harm operate to blame and shame victims, exonerate perpetrators, and keep sexual harm flourishing "in plain sight" within our communities, including our faith communities. It is partly due to these myths that victims are so reluctant to report incidents of sexual harm; they often fear retaliation, public shaming, not being taken seriously, having their honesty questioned, and living with the knowledge that the perpetrator is unlikely to be punished.

It's important to note here that although these myths are prevalent in secular society, they are present in church communities as well. When they appear in Christian contexts, however, an additional spiritual element is added to these myths. For example, the myth that "she was asking for it because she is promiscuous" becomes "God disapproves of promiscuity; promiscuous women are asking for trouble!" The myth that men "just can't help themselves" is reframed as, "God designed men to be hardwired to enjoy sex, so they cannot be blamed if women 'tempt' them." These messages hold extra weight because God is involved. But it is our duty as members

[8] According to the Ministry of Justice's *New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey* (2020), sexual offences were "significantly less likely to be described by the victim as a crime, and more likely to be described as 'just something that happens'." This, coupled with the high rates of sexual harm reported elsewhere in the survey, provides "evidence of sexual violence behaviour being normalised in New Zealand communities" (2020, p. 120).

of the Christian community to play our part in tackling sexual harm by challenging these dangerous myths—we need to reassure victims that God does ***not*** blame them, and we need to let perpetrators know that they ***are*** accountable for their harmful behaviour.

Notes for facilitator

These myths are, of course, not the only reason why sexual harm is so prevalent or why the experiences of victims and survivors are often dismissed by individuals and institutions who are supposed to offer them help and support. Social inequalities (such as colonisation, poverty, racism, sexism, queerphobia, ableism, and agism) also play a role in sexual harm not being taken seriously and victims not being believed. Group members might like to discuss how some of these social factors might impact survivors of sexual harm in their own communities.

Questions for the group

- Are any of these myths commonly communicated in your community? How do you feel about these ideas being reframed as "myths" that work to excuse sexual harm and blame and shame survivors?
- Are you aware of social inequalities which may intersect with sexual harm in your community? How do these inequalities further complicate the experiences of sexual harm survivors?

The role of the church in perpetuating sexual harm

Notes for facilitator

This section covers material that may be confronting for group members. It will be important to give everyone time to digest each discussion point and to share their thoughts and questions with the group in light of their own experiences, cultural contexts, and traditions. We have included some questions at the end of the section which encourage participants to reflect on this material together in ways that are meaningful to them.

In 2017, #MeToo went viral on social media, beginning in North America and quickly spreading to other parts of the world. This soon became a huge global movement, gathering a variety of alternative hashtags as it travelled:

- #BelieveSurvivors
- #MyDressMyChoice
- #TimesUP
- #HeForShe

One of the other hashtags that featured predominantly was #ChurchToo.

#ChurchToo linked the #MeToo movement to the stories of abuse in the church and other religious communities, with people sharing their experiences of religious communities perpetuating sexual harm through inaction or further victimisation. Within the #ChurchToo movement, young people shared stories of being raped and sexually harmed by religious men in positions of leadership, and when they reported it to the church, they, the survivors, were silenced or told to "repent."

For many within the church, this didn't come as a huge shock. Christianity has, throughout its history and up to the present day, played a significant and often contentious role in shaping our thinking about sexual harm.

- Church teachings (and church leaders) have counselled women to remain within violent marriages and forgive their abusers. The church has often communicated to women who are victims of IPV that they should stay in abusive relationships, try to be better wives, and "forgive and forget." The teachings of Jesus on forgiving "not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matt 18:22) have been (mis)used to encourage victims to keep forgiving their abusers without calling for repentance on the part of the abuser, ensuring that the offending stops or that the abuser seeks help.

Notes for facilitator

The theology study in Chapter 4 ("Forgiveness", pp. 67–72) spends more time exploring themes of forgiveness in the context of sexual harm.

- The concept of Jesus as a victim and a sacrifice has been used to reinforce structures of violence. People who have been sexually harmed are reminded that they do not suffer as much as Jesus did. They are told to persevere and endure, and to sacrifice like Jesus did. Related to this are theologies of atonement which affirm suffering as redemptive. These theological concepts are used (implicitly and explicitly) to reinforce structures of violence where sexual harm can flourish, and experiences of abuse are re-framed as redemptive.

Notes for facilitator

Two theology studies in Chapter 4 ("Sacrifice" and "Theologies of Atonement," pp. 61–66, 73–77) delve deeper into the issues of sacrifice and atonement theologies in the context of sexual harm.

- Churches have also promoted intolerance and negated the full humanity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. They have sustained chronic levels of heteropatriarchy[9] within church hierarchies, all in the name of the Christian faith. Ironically, Christian churches have expended significant energy decrying LGBT relationships as "sinful," while simultaneously failing to name, acknowledge, and appropriately deal with the sin of widespread sexual harm perpetrated in Christian communities.
- In instances where sexual harm has come to light, church leaders have often prioritised reconciliation between perpetrators and survivors without recognising or acknowledging the needs of the survivors.
- People of faith have often been strongly committed to stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity that pave the way for sexual harm. Biblical texts on the relationship between men and women have been interpreted to reinforce male authority and female submission. The New Testament Household Codes (e.g., Ephesians 5:22–6:9; 1 Timothy 2:11–15) have been used to uphold the ideology that the family as a unit is more important than the lives of individual family members. Women have been subjected to untold (and sometimes lethal) violence because of the ways biblical texts like these have been interpreted.

Notes for facilitator

The Bible study in Chapter 3 on the New Testament Household Codes (pp. 52–58) considers the harmful rhetoric about gender roles and relations that these Household Codes promote.

- Ideas of purity and modesty strongly characterise Christian thinking about men and women, particularly (though not exclusively) in younger generations of Christians. Messages about the importance of virginal purity, dressing modestly so as not to tempt someone of the opposite sex, and saving yourself for God and marriage have become increasingly common over the past few decades. These messages are directed particularly towards girls and women. By obsessively emphasising purity, a person's moral and spiritual worth is measured according to their sexual status. This often escalates into girls' and women's behaviour being policed and controlled. Purity theology establishes gendered interactions that understand women as passive and submissive, while men are active and authoritative. This kind of theology provides a foundation for sexual harm to flourish.

Notes for facilitator

The Bible study on the Household Codes in Chapter 3 (pp. 52–58) also offers the opportunity for participants to reflect on the harmful nature of Christian purity teachings.

All of these theological ideas and beliefs mean that churches have at times been unsafe places—places where sexual harm has occurred, where survivors are inadequately supported or even silenced, and where perpetrators are "shielded," excused, or prematurely forgiven. This has been very publicly borne out in the past few decades, where horrific levels of child abuse carried out by Christian individuals and institutions have come to light, despite systemic and self-preservatory attempts by these institutions to cover up this abuse. And often, when victims of sexual harm speak out about their experience, they encounter shame and rebuke from their Christian leaders and their church. Sexual harm is often thought of within faith communities as a source of embarrassment and something that should remain hidden under a cloak of silence and denial. It's fair to say that, oftentimes, the church has been complicit in stigmatising victims/survivors of sexual harm and has failed to make safe spaces in our communities where victims/survivors can find shelter and begin their journey towards some form of healing.[10]

However, church leaders (lay and ordained) also have the potential to play a vital role in eradicating sexual harm, both within church communities and wider society. Church leaders often hold positions of moral authority in Christian communities—people listen to them and take guidance from them. These leaders can ask difficult questions and challenge long-held traditions. They can question problematic biblical texts and theological teachings. For this reason, it is imperative that church leaders are well equipped to address the issue of sexual harm in their communities. It is vital that these leaders are able to respond appropriately when a disclosure is made to them,

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[9] Heteropatriarchy refers to the social, political, and cultural dominance of heterosexual males, and the concomitant subordination and marginalisation of other gender identities and sexual orientations.

[10] Throughout this toolkit, we use the language of "journeying" when we refer to the process that survivors go through in their efforts to heal from their trauma. For some survivors of sexual harm, the journey towards healing is long and arduous, and they may never feel that they have reached their final destination. Other survivors prefer to use the term "re-making" rather than "healing"; this stresses that, after experiencing sexual harm, they can never "heal" in the sense of going back to being the person they once were. When we accompany survivors of sexual harm, we cannot dictate what route they may or may not take on their journey towards some sense of healing or "re-making," nor can we insist that they travel at a certain speed. They alone determine their destination and how long it will take them to get there—our task is to accept their invitation to accompany them.

but also, that they are able to draw on biblical and theological resources to ensure that their community is a safe space for survivors—a space where sexual harm has no place.

Questions for the group

- What are your thoughts on the material in this section? Does anything particular stand out to you as surprising, troubling, or thought-provoking?
- What are the key issues you will **take away** from this session—things that you believe are particularly important to remember when you participate in other sessions during this workshop?
- What did you **bring** to this session, in terms of your own wisdom and experience? How can you use these to work within your church to support survivors of sexual harm?

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the session into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include some or all of the following:

- A short debrief and/or sharing what has been most helpful and/or most challenging.
- Ask group members to reflect on some initial steps that church leaders and church members could take to ensure church communities are places of safety and healing for sexual harm survivors.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

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CHAPTER 2

Understanding and Supporting Survivors of Sexual Harm

Lisa Spriggens

Notes for Facilitators

- It is important to start this session with a content warning, as discussions of this nature can be difficult to listen to for those who have lived experience of sexual harm. E.g., “In this session, we will be discussing sexual harm and abuse. I acknowledge that this can be a distressing topic to talk about.” Alongside this warning, please reassure participants that there is no expectation for people to share any personal stories as part of the session. You may find that participants want to say something about their own experience. This needs to be managed carefully to ensure that what is shared is appropriate.
- Participants should be reminded that the group is a space where members treat each other’s voices with respect and care, and that discussions taking place in the group must be kept confidential (“what we say in the group stays in the group”). You can also remind group members that they can leave at any time during the meeting if they are feeling uncomfortable (ideally, it would be useful to organise for another facilitator to check in with the person who has left, either during the meeting or afterwards).
- This workshop will take between one to two hours. There is a lot of content for the facilitator to cover in this session. The content is likely to provoke conversation, so it is important to allow space for this, while ensuring, as previously noted, that it is appropriate. Depending on the group size and the time available, the material could be covered in a single session or over two separate hour-long sessions.
- There are specific questions and discussion points where group participation is invited and encouraged. Facilitators may also wish to include additional questions and discussion points that they feel will be particularly meaningful in light of group members’ contexts, cultures, traditions, and language.
- Some parts of the discussion in this chapter make reference to other chapters in the toolkit. We encourage the facilitator to familiarise themselves with the full toolkit before running this session.
- The “Further readings and resources” section lists sources cited in this chapter as well as some additional readings that may be of interest. Facilitators are ***not*** expected to read all these resources prior to the workshop session.

A brief overview of trauma

Notes for facilitator

This initial section introduces the group to definitions of trauma. You may want to start this part of the session by asking participants for their own understandings of what trauma means, before taking them through the definitions given on the following pages. Encourage participants to explore what trauma means to them in light of their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and language—there is no one definition of trauma, and it will have different meanings for different individuals and communities.

The effects of sexual harm can be extensive for those who have experienced it, and for those in relationships with them. Church communities can be a key site of

care and support for survivors. It is important, however, to have some understanding of what trauma can do to a person and to their relationships. It is also important to know how to support survivors well, so that they are able to move forward in their journey towards healing and wellbeing.

There is a great deal of research on trauma and its treatment. What follows is a very brief outline of one definition of trauma.

The DSM-V (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) defines trauma as being caused by stressful events such as "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (American Psychiatric Association 2013). Trauma has also been described as any events that are "out of the ordinary and are directly experienced as threats to survival and self-preservation" (Janoff-Bulman 1992, p. 53). The effects that trauma can have on a person's everyday experience of life are significant and varied. It is important to be aware of these effects, as well as the diverse ways that people respond to traumatic events, including sexual harm. In other words, there is no single way (or "right" or "wrong" way) that people may respond to trauma.

Research shows that trauma has a significant impact on our brain, and we often experience this through different bodily responses. In the moment of trauma, our bodies respond with what is commonly known as the "fight, flight, freeze" response: we might try to fight back against an attacker, or flee/run away from the source of danger, or we might freeze and be unable to respond at all. These are subconscious responses over which the person encountering trauma has little or no control. They are the brain's way of activating the body into survival mode, where the sole goal is physical safety.

These responses and the bodily sensations that they cause can linger long after the trauma event, even when the survivor is physically safe again. These effects of trauma can be long lasting and pervasive, and survivors can find themselves experiencing physical sensations which feel like they are reliving the event over and over, as if it were happening right in the moment.

> Being traumatized means continuing to organize your life as if the trauma were still going on—unchanged and immutable—as every new encounter or event is contaminated by the past. (Van der Kolk 2015, p. 53)

Trauma is not just experienced physically, it affects mental health and relational connection. Trauma has been described as beyond language (Weingarten 2003). It may be impossible for the survivor to feel like they can adequately describe their experience. Other factors, such as feelings of shame, not being believed, and not being able to stop the harm, also serve to isolate the survivor from their relationships with others.

Trauma can have a neurological impact on the sexual harm survivor. Some people can process the event in a "normal" way, however, a number will develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as the result of experiencing sexual harm. PTSD is generally treated with a combination of medication and counselling/therapy; however, for some survivors, PTSD develops into Complex PTSD (which can happen after suffering prolonged and repeated trauma) or chronic PTSD (which can continue years after the event).

Common responses to sexual harm

What follows are some of the common responses you might see in a person who has experienced the trauma of sexual harm, either recently or in the past.

1. Common responses to a recent experience of sexual harm

- Initial shock/trauma symptoms. These can include high levels of fear, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping.
- Denial of event/effects: "I just want to pretend it never happened."
- Flashbacks: sensory re-experiences of the event.
- Hypervigilance: extreme alertness to their environment.
- Feelings of being overwhelmed, emotionally and psychologically.
- Suicidal thinking/feeling.
- Disconnection from relationships, isolation.
- Mental health issues, including depression and anxiety.
- Physical health issues.

While many of these symptoms are reflective of general trauma symptoms, experiences of sexual harm can cause particular effects. These can include fundamental shifts in a person's sense of physical and psychological safety, as well as sensitivity towards physical touch. These effects can be felt more acutely if the survivor is experiencing them in an environment which does not feel safe, such as when they are not believed, when they feel judged, or if the offender belongs to the same community.

2. Common responses to a historic experience of sexual harm

The effects of sexual harm can be felt for an extended period of time and pervade all areas of a person's life. For some, this can lead to a diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These effects include:

- Post-Traumatic Stress symptoms (including flashbacks, hypervigilance, triggering, and intrusive thoughts, images, perceptions, dreams).

- Physical health problems (e.g. headaches, chronic pain, urinary tract infections).
- Difficulty in relationships.
- Difficulty in sexual functioning.
- Substance abuse, eating disorders.
- Mental health diagnoses (depression, anxiety, panic attacks).
- A sense of hopelessness, irritability, emotional overwhelm, numbing, feeling disconnected, difficulty concentrating, shame, feelings of worthlessness.
- Loss of interest, loss of sense of self.

Notes for facilitator

Before moving onto the next section, here are some questions that group members can discuss as a way of summarising some of their thoughts about the material in this section.

- Do you have any questions or comments about our discussion so far? Is there anything that you've found particularly interesting or surprising?
- How might the culture, context, history, traditions, and language of your own community shape the way you make sense of trauma—or experience trauma?
- What are some of the ways that we might become more aware of the signs of trauma among members of our faith community?

It is important to be mindful that the difficulties people are experiencing in their life and relationships could originate from experiences of trauma; recognising this serves as an invitation to members of church communities to hold a more compassionate stance towards each other.

It is also important to recognise that there are certain factors which create situations of higher risk—both the risk of experiencing harm as well as the level of impact the harm has on the person. These can include vulnerabilities such as age, disability, a past history of sexual harm or other trauma, and the survivor's internal and environmental resources (such as resilience, support networks, culture, demographic). These risk factors do not predetermine what a person will experience in their lifetime, nor their ability to respond to it. But it can be helpful for us to be aware of them and to recognise them.

How to respond if someone discloses sexual harm

Notes for facilitator

This section offers practical advice about responding to a disclosure of sexual harm. This is very important, as a sensitive and empathic response can make a significant and positive difference to survivors. The advice offered here ought to help participants feel more confident and equipped to receive disclosures. We recommend that you give group members a handout of the information in this section so that they can re-read it and refresh their memories when required.

Allow space for participants to think about the material in this section in light of their own cultures, contexts, communities, traditions, and language.

It is normal to feel a little anxious about what it might be like to respond to someone who discloses an experience of sexual harm. This anxiety could be for a number of reasons, including concern about holding your own story of harm while supporting another person. Small actions can make a big difference to a person as they begin their journey towards healing following an experience of sexual harm. Here are some things to keep in mind.

Recognise:

- **What it took to tell this story.** It can take weeks, months, years, or sometimes decades, before someone discloses an experience of sexual harm. The survivor has likely been considering sharing the story for some time and thinking about who they would feel safe enough to tell. They have chosen to speak to you, so it is important you acknowledge the courage it may have taken for them to do this.
  - "I'm glad you told me, thank you."
- **What it might be like for them to be surviving with this.** Regardless of how long ago the event was, it is likely that it has had a significant impact on the survivor's quality of life and relationships. It can be very validating for the survivor to have this acknowledged.
  - "I am so sorry to hear this has happened to you. This will have been a very difficult time for you."

Respond:

The following are examples of questions that you may choose to ask survivors as part of your response to them. The purpose of these questions is to uncover what the survivor needs the most ***in this moment*** in light of the story they have just shared. You do not need to ask ***every*** question—use your judgment with regard to what feels most relevant.

- **"Given what you've just shared, what are the things that you need?"** It is important that the survivor is given the opportunity to say what they need. This may lead to the questions below, or this may be the only question you need to ask.
- **"Are you safe?"** Is there an immediate threat to the person's safety and wellbeing that needs to be responded to? It will be helpful to be aware of any processes or policies that your church or organisation has in relation to supporting people when they are feeling unsafe.
- **"Do you need medical care?"** If the survivor is disclosing a recent event, this may be something they would like to access. This care can be accessed through their GP or specialist services in the area. Supporting them to make this initial contact might be something you feel able to offer.
- **"Do you want to speak to the police?"** It is important not to pressure people to go to the police. While this may feel like one of the most important responses to sexual harm it is also a very challenging one, with limited hope of an outcome that feels like justice. Also, in some communities, the police are (justifiably) regarded with suspicion and fear, rather than as an empathic and helpful presence. Sexual harm is about an abuse of power over another person, therefore it is important that the survivor is given the power to decide how they respond and care for themselves in the aftermath of this harm. Survivors can report an experience of sexual harm to the police at any time, regardless of how long ago the event happened.
- **"What support do you have?"** Talk with the survivor about the support systems they have in place (e.g., family, close friends, church community). It is important that the survivor is well supported and these pre-existing relationships can be a great source of support, often without others even having to know about the sexual harm. Again, do not pressure people to disclose their sexual harm to (or seek support from) a particular person or group, including their family. For some survivors, family relationships may be difficult, and it is important that you allow the survivor the agency to choose their own sources of support.

Refer:

- **Referral to specialist medical and support services.** Support the survivor to access specialist services, should they wish. This ensures that you are not the only source of support for the survivor, easing any sense of over-responsibility you might feel; it also means that the survivor will receive care from experts in this field. If a child or young person discloses an experience of sexual harm you should consider carefully the adults you disclose this to. Aside from any legal requirement to disclose, other adults who are told need to be considered safe by the survivor. It is also crucial that you do not question the child/young person to gather more details about their disclosure—it is ***not*** your role to investigate their claims. Rather, you should follow the "recognise, respond, refer" model (outlined in this section and also in the introduction, p. 10) and ensure the discloser has access to specialist support. Some very helpful advice about receiving disclosures of sexual harm from children and young people can be found on the Child Matters website (also listed under "Further Readings and Resources").

Notes for facilitator

There is no law in New Zealand which makes reporting of sexual harm mandatory for the public generally; however, there are laws which place this obligation on certain people by virtue of the professional obligations of their job. Some organisations also have employment policies which mandate reporting. Facilitators will need to make themselves familiar with the policies of the denominational traditions(s) of the group.

How you can support survivors

There are key things that you can do to support survivors in their journey towards healing.

- **Believe them.** Perhaps the most critical experience for the survivor is that of being believed. If a person does not experience being believed then they are likely to not tell anyone further.
  - "I believe you."
  - "I'm so sorry this has happened to you."
- **Listen.** Listening without judgment or advice is an important gift you can offer to survivors.

Notes for facilitator

Here, you could ask the group what they think this form of listening means, why it is important, and how to practise it.

- **Validate their experience.** Trauma is disruptive, and a person's feelings and behaviour in response to an experience of sexual harm can be unpredictable and distressing. It is important to normalise and validate their experience. However they are feeling, it's okay, given the experience they've had.
  - "What you are feeling is understandable. You did not deserve this."
- **Know where they can access support.** Know what services are available in your local community. It can be helpful to keep a list of services to hand, so that you have them readily available when the need arises. (See "Resources" section for links to some national and local support services).
- **Know when to refer on.** If you are someone who has been trusted with a story such as that of sexual harm, it can feel like you have a responsibility to provide all the support. This is absolutely not the case, and because you are not trained appropriately you also risk causing further harm to the survivor. It is very important that you help a survivor access appropriate professional support, if that is what they would like.
  - "I'm not a specialist in this area, but I do know of some support services that could help you. Would you like me to give you their contact details? Would you like me to call anyone on your behalf?"

Research shows that these acts of support are the most significant things that survivors find helpful when they disclose an incident of sexual harm.

What to avoid

Just as there are useful responses to have when someone discloses an experience of sexual harm, there are also actions which can cause harm and are therefore best avoided:

- **Digging for information.** It is not necessary for you to know the details of the story, and asking questions to draw out details can cause harm to the survivor, and to any police inquiry that may result.
- **Sympathy and pity.** Expressions of sympathy and pity might show ***some*** understanding of what someone is experiencing, but they will not help build any meaningful emotional connection between the listener and the person disclosing. Empathy, in contrast, means you have a ***shared*** sense of experience. Brené Brown describes empathy as "feeling with people." Empathy means accepting the other person's perspective as "truth," not judging them, and letting them know that you recognise the emotions they are going through. Empathy creates a "sacred space" which fosters a sense of connection between the survivor and the person they are disclosing to. No response that you offer to a survivor will make "everything better" for them; but forging an empathic connection with them and letting them know they are not alone can make a difference.

Notes for facilitator

Brené Brown presents a really helpful short animation that explains the difference between sympathy and empathy. You may want to show this to participants at this stage of the workshop. The link is listed under the "Further readings and resources" section at the end of this chapter.

- **Inserting your own story.** When receiving a disclosure of sexual harm, your focus should remain on the survivor, ***their*** story, and ***their*** needs. Even when you have experienced something similar or relatable to what the survivor has gone through, it's not helpful to share that with them, or to say something like, "I know how you feel" or "I know what you're going through," because this can sound as though you are undermining their experience by putting yourself at the centre of their story. It is important that the survivor feels they have control over their disclosure and can be assured that you will listen actively to what they are saying.
- **Physical touch.** Sexual harm includes a violation of personal space, so it is important that the survivor regains a sense of bodily autonomy. Any physical touch (such as a hug or even just touching someone on the arm to express care) must be initiated by the survivor.
- **Pushing your agenda.** You may hold some strong opinions about what should happen next after someone discloses an incident of sexual harm. It is very important that you do not try to influence the decisions a survivor makes. Sexual harm is an abuse of power, and similar to regaining bodily autonomy, it is crucial that the survivor regains a sense of control and power over their life.
- **Judgements.** We know that rape myths and preconceptions of how people should live their lives are hugely influential in how we respond to stories of sexual harm (see the discussion of rape myths in Chapter 1, pp. 18–20). If a survivor experiences judgement then it is possible they will choose not to seek any further support from ***anyone***. This

exacerbates the harm caused to them. We need to be aware of our own judgments and to address them (in a context like supervision), so that they don't cause harm in these ways.

We also need to bear in mind that there is not a "one size fits all" approach to responding to disclosures of sexual harm. Survivors come with their own unique needs, which are shaped by factors such as their gender, their sexuality, their (dis)ability, their ethnicity, their age, and their cultural and faith traditions. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore each of these factors in depth, a very helpful suite of videos has been created by TOAH–NNEST ("Good Practice Guidelines for Crisis"), which offer practical advice about offering appropriate support to survivors of sexual harm who belong to a range of communities and cultures. The link to the videos are listed under the "Further readings and resources" section at the end of this chapter.

Notes for facilitator

You may wish to show a section of one of these videos during the session, depending on the group's particular needs and interests.

Take some time at the end of this section to allow group members to ask questions and/or make comments on the content. Ask them if there is anything they are unclear about; invite them to raise other issues that they feel are important to include (or to avoid) when receiving disclosures of sexual harm (particularly in light of their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and language).

It is likely that some group members will feel less comfortable about engaging with disclosures of sexual harm. Please reinforce the key skills to recognise, respond, and refer. It is important that participants recognise the limits of what they can do, acknowledging the limits of their own capacities and also the importance of supporting a survivor to connect with appropriate professional support.

Resources in the community

There are national and local organisations which provide support to survivors. It can be very useful to have a list of local contacts available. Below are websites which you may find useful—many of them include lists of local and national support services.

- Sexual Abuse Education
- Rape Prevention Education
- TOAH-NNEST
- Ministry of Justice
- Dear Em
- Another avenue of support is ACC, which provides counselling support for survivors of sexual harm.

Notes for facilitator

You may wish to collate details for local support services in preparation for this workshop and to include these in a handout that you can give out during the session. Group members may know of additional local services so you can invite them to share these during the session.

Witnessing

"Witnessing" describes an aspect of the work that is done by those supporting survivors in the aftermath of a traumatic event. This term identifies a particular response to survivors which is deeper than hearing the details of their story. The act of witnessing connects with particular theological responses to trauma, which might inform how we accompany survivors as they move forward.

Witnessing is not only the act of hearing a story, but involves allowing that story to change us and to elicit a response in us. In pastoral care roles, we have the privilege of witnessing the stories of people's lives. Sometimes these stories are immensely painful. Witnessing does not require you to comprehend fully or understand another's experience, but it does involve you having empathy towards it.

In response to the long-debated tension between God as a removed or separate observer of suffering and God as passive and unable to intervene, Jürgen Moltmann and Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel (2003) suggest that Christ actively suffers with us. In Christ's active suffering with us, God is witness to our suffering.

Drawing on the story of the haemorrhaging woman in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 5:25–34), Shelly Rambo (2010) develops the example of Christ as witness. In this story, the haemorrhaging woman reaches out to Jesus, who senses something as her hand touches his cloak. In this moment, he is not fully aware of what has happened, only that something has. His response, "Who touched my clothes?" (Mark 5:30, NIV), attests to this partial awareness. This is the moment of witnessing, where he does not fully understand, but turns towards the woman, acknowledging her faith, and declares that this is the source of her healing. Rambo (2010, p. 246) identifies this as a moment where Jesus is witness, rather than healer. As a witness, Jesus acknowledges the pain of the woman's experience and is with her in the space that trauma creates—where death and suffering continue to

exist in the midst of life. In this story, witnessing is not "passive," but involves actively noticing, quietly, the life that continues after a trauma experience. Implicit in this Gospel story is relationship, connection, and hope—all essential to the continuation of life. As witness to those who have experienced profound trauma, this is a powerful way in which you can support those who have experienced sexual violence.

Notes for facilitator

At this point in the session, you may want to read out the story of the haemorrhaging woman from Mark's Gospel and ask the group to respond to it in light of the concept of witnessing. How do they understand this concept? Do they have any questions about it, or examples of their own witnessing that they are willing to share? How do participants' own traditions, cultures, and contexts shape the significance of witnessing for them?

What our church communities can do

Church communities have the potential to be influential sites of support for survivors by providing pastoral care and, perhaps even more importantly, by creating safe, hospitable environments where healthy relational styles are promoted, safety is prioritised, and the church community has a commitment to justice, love, and compassion. Our church communities can serve as witness to survivors and their stories, walking with them as they move forward in the aftermath of trauma. As outlined in Chapter 1 of this toolkit (pp. 20–22), there may be a need for some uncomfortable reflection on how the church—both in the past and the present—has contributed to the harm of others by not responding in a timely or appropriate way to survivors and their experiences.

Questions for the group

- Given the discussion so far in this session, what practical steps could your church community take to support survivors of sexual harm? How can your church community serve as a witness to survivors' experiences?
- What are the particular strengths (and weaknesses) of your own church community in terms of its ability to support and witness to sexual harm survivors?

Care for the carers

Notes for facilitator

This section focuses on recognising the importance of self-care when we take on a supportive role with survivors of sexual harm. Allow plenty of time for group members to ask questions and voice any anxieties they have during this part of the session. Encourage the group to discuss these issues in light of their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and language.

1. What happens if we don't take care?

It is important to recognise the emotional cost experienced by those who care for survivors of sexual harm. Stories can weigh heavily and we need to discern and acknowledge the effects this can have and to be intentional in responding to them.

Some common experiences you may notice after working with a survivor and hearing their story include an increase in anxiety, low mood, irritability, paranoia, suspicion about the world around you, and changes in your appetite or sleep patterns.

There are terms/labels/conditions which are commonly used to describe what can happen to those who accompany survivors of sexual harm when it all "gets too much."

- **Stress.** Stress is a normal part of life that we all experience from time to time. It may be that you experience additional stress as you support survivors. This can lead to physical symptoms (e.g., aches and pains, exhaustion, headaches, digestive problems) and emotional symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression, panic attacks). If not addressed this can further develop into some of the conditions listed below, or be recognised as long term (or chronic) stress.
- **Triggering.** This occurs when another person's story connects to an aspect of your own life or relationships in ways that cause distress or discomfort (see discussion of triggering on p. 30).
- **Compassion fatigue.** This is experienced as a loss of empathy towards the people you work with.
- **Vicarious PTSD.** This is an immediate response following exposure to stories of trauma. It may be hard to predict, as responses to trauma stories can vary from person to person. The symptoms look similar to PTSD.
- **Burnout.** Burnout is cumulative and predictable, experienced as exhaustion, disengagement from work, dissatisfaction with work, and feelings of pressure. It can lead to physical health problems.

Notes for facilitator

Encourage group members to explore how their own cultures, traditions, and contexts might shape their emotional responses to working with survivors.

2. Overview of triggering

Triggering can occur when you experience a connection between your own experiences and memories and the stories of others. Both our happy memories ***and*** our distressing memories can be triggered. This might happen in response to particular parts of a story, or certain people, or stressful/crisis situations. You may experience strong physical and emotional responses and find yourself remembering past events. This can be distressing, especially if it is unexpected. It is important to be aware of what might be triggering for you, especially if you have your own story of trauma.

Examples of triggers might include:

- **Stories of relationships.** You might hear someone describe their own difficult or damaging relationship which reminds you of a similar one in your own life.
- **Similar stories/experiences you've had.** There might be elements of their story which are similar to distressing or traumatic experiences you have had.
- **Reminders of how your family dealt with emotions.** If you have a family history which includes difficulty expressing or accepting certain emotions, you might recognise this in another person's story.
- **Stories which shape how you manage emotions.** A person sharing their own struggles with expressing emotion might connect with a similar experience you have had.

It is important to understand and recognise triggering, because survivors' disclosures of sexual harm may be triggering for you.

Here are some things you can do.

- **Develop strategies** to disconnect your story from theirs in your mind, to remind yourself that it is ***their*** story and not yours.

  It is important to pay attention to yourself and what is happening when you notice yourself responding this way. Common signs that you are being triggered include feeling a rush of emotion through your body; a change in your heart rate or breathing; getting distracted; and struggling to focus on what the other person is saying. If you don't recognise these signs that you are being triggered, you risk reacting to your ***own*** story and needs, rather than remaining focused on the person you are with and ***their*** needs.

- **Develop awareness** of yourself and notice what's going on in your body.

  By developing an awareness of what your triggers are and how you react to these, you will be better able to manage them appropriately. This might mean that you need to attend to yourself and address some issues in order to decrease the likelihood of being triggered when journeying with survivors of sexual harm. Seeking counselling yourself can be helpful for this.

It is very important for us to be aware of how we respond in these kinds of situations and to recognise our own vulnerabilities. This is particularly relevant if we are experiencing stress or pressure in our own lives.

Question for the group

- What do you notice happening when you feel triggered?

Notes for facilitator

Reassure participants that they don't need to disclose what the trigger is, but they can speak to how they notice something has been triggered.

3. How to care for yourself

a. Noticing the effects

There are a number of reasons why we might be affected by the survivors we accompany and the stories they share.

- **It can be hard journeying with people** who are in pain or facing difficult circumstances.
- **It can be hard letting go of control,** particularly when you feel the desire to "fix" the situation and ease pain.
- **It can be hard when you lack knowledge,** feel out of your depth, or are not sure about what to do next.
- **It can be hard when you lack support**, and feel like the people around you don't understand the support you are offering survivors and the personal cost it is having on you.

You might notice some of the signs of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, or burnout (mentioned previously). It is important that you act quickly to address these. There are no rewards for people who try to soldier through without paying attention to themselves. Remember, these are issues that trained professionals find stressful to work with, so it is not a sign of weakness or inability if you experience any of these symptoms.

Question for the group

- What effects have you noticed in your life as the result of working with people who are suffering? How did you become aware of these effects? What did you do about them?

b. Responding to the effects

We cannot support others if we do not support ourselves. It is also useful to hold in mind that caring for ourselves in the present is also investing in the work we will do with others in the future. Boundaries, support, and appropriate training are all essential parts of caring for yourself in the course of your work.

c. Boundaries

Often, when working in a church context, we find ourselves doing more than what our job "officially" entails.

This can happen for a number of reasons.

- We're human beings. Our work might meet our own relational needs—community, friendship, family, intimacy. It's nice to feel needed!
- We're empathic. We care about who we're working with.
- There is an unspoken expectation from our community that we will go above and beyond what our job "officially" entails.

Question for the group

- Can you think of a time when you have experienced an invitation to step outside your "formal" job description? How did this make you feel?

Boundaries are important for several reasons.

- Clear and consistent boundaries within any relationship can help both us and the survivors we accompany feel stable and secure.
- A structured, safe relationship may be "a buoy in stormy, chaotic seas; that is, the only stable object to cling to for miles" (Borys 1994, p. 229).

When your role, and your function within this role, are clear, ***everybody*** feels safer—both you ***and*** the survivor you are supporting. Some boundaries may be flexible and others more concrete. It is hard to rein in boundaries once they're loosened, so it is important to think carefully when you are considering shifting a boundary you already have which supports you as someone who is accompanying a survivor.

Question for the group

- How do you maintain the boundaries you have in your work? How do you manage this when you feel you're being asked to shift them?

d. Looking after yourself

Laurie Pearlman and Karen Saakvitne (1995) outline the ABCs of maintaining wellbeing, which are important when we accompany survivors of sexual harm.

- **A – Awareness:** of your needs, limits, and resources.
- **B – Balance:** between responsibility and fun.
- **C – Connection:** to others, your spirituality, self, and meaning.

Question for the group

- Where do you see the ABCs present in your own life? Are there aspects which you think need more attention? How can you be intentional about making space for these things?

Notes for facilitator

Encourage the group to explore what these ABCs mean to them in light of their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and language.

Working in community

Trauma, and particularly sexual harm, isolates people from relationship and community. This effect is felt not just by the survivor but also by those in relationship with them and those who support them. It is important to work in environments which counter this harm.

Question for the group

- Reflect on your pastoral care context. How do you experience community in this? What could increase this sense of connection?

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the session into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include some or all of the following:

- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging.
- A reminder of the grounding exercise described in Chapter 1 (p. 16).
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

Further readings and resources

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CHAPTER 3

Group Bible Studies

Notes for facilitator

This chapter contains four separate Bible studies. Regardless of how many of these studies you plan to lead in group sessions, we recommend that you take the group through this initial activity and discussion before starting the first study. The activity will encourage group members to share their knowledge of the biblical texts and to think about the different forms of sexual harm that are depicted in the Bible, including those that are not always recognised or noticed by readers.

The discussion that follows this exercise makes clear why studying biblical stories of sexual harm is an important step to take in our efforts to tackle sexual harm within our own faith communities. We encourage you to go through it with the group, inviting their comments and questions, and encouraging them to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language to make this topic meaningful.

The group Bible studies in this chapter continue (and stand on the shoulders of) the seminal work of the Ujamaa Centre's Tamar Campaign (based at the University of Kwazulu-Natal), which highlights the potential for Bible study to foster social transformation and justice for survivors of oppression and violence, including sexual harm.

Group exercise

The Bible is a violent book. Within its pages we find an abundance of traditions that bear witness to the pervasiveness of sexual harm within the worlds of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Before beginning the first group Bible study, ask group members if they are familiar with any biblical stories that portray or discuss sexual harm. You may want to write these up on a whiteboard or on sticky notes that can be placed somewhere in the room.

Below is a list of biblical texts depicting sexual harm—this might be helpful to get the discussion started, but it is by no means an exhaustive list, and participants may well offer their own additional examples:

- Stories of sex slavery (Genesis 16 and 30).
- The story of Sarah being "given" to foreign leaders (Genesis 12 and 20).
- The story of Dinah's rape by a stranger (Genesis 34).
- The story of Joseph's sexual harassment at the hands of Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39).
- Stories of gang rape—both threatened and actualised (Genesis 19; Judges 19).
- Stories of rigidly prescriptive and proscriptive control of women's (and sometimes vulnerable men's) bodies (Leviticus 20:13, 18; 21:9; Numbers 5:11–31).
- Stories of forced marriage (Deuteronomy 21:10–14).
- The story of Lot being raped by his daughters (Genesis 19:30–38).
- Stories of wartime rape (Numbers 25, 31; Judges 21).
- The story of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).
- The story of Tamar's rape (2 Samuel 13).
- The story of Vashti (Esther 1).

- Stories of spousal abuse and intimate partner violence, which are perpetrated (or at least sanctioned) by Israel's jealous deity (Hosea 1–3; Ezekiel 16, 23).
- The story of Susanna's attempted rape by religious elders (Daniel 13).
- The stripping of Jesus (Matthew 27:26–31).
- The Household Codes which affirm male dominance over women (Ephesians 5:21–6:9; Colossians 3:18–4:1; 1 Timothy 2:9–15; 1 Peter 2:18-3:7).
- The punishment of the prophet Jezebel (Revelation 2) and the "Whore of Babylon" (Revelation 17).

You might like to ask participants whether they have heard these texts being preached in church, particularly with reference to their themes of sexual harm. If so, how were they addressed by the preacher? If not, why do you think these texts (and the themes of sexual harm) are not heard so often in worship settings?

Why do we need to recognise stories of sexual harm in the Bible?

When we look at these stories, we can say that, in lots of ways, the Bible is not a safe space for women (and some men). As we have seen, within the pages of the Bible, we find an abundance of traditions that bear witness to the pervasiveness of sexual harm within the biblical world. Now, these are ***ancient*** depictions of sexual harm, but because they appear in sacred scripture, they have gained authority and power across space and time— this power remains undiminished today. It is important we recognise that they have the potential to validate and sanction ideas and attitudes towards sexual harm within the communities in which they are read, even today. And when these ideas and attitudes support sexual harm, then their power to impact contemporary readers' lives and worldviews cannot be underestimated. The sexual harm evoked in these ancient biblical texts extends beyond the words on the page to have real-life consequences within contemporary contexts and communities. So, biblical texts have the potential to scaffold and support sexual harm.

The flip side of this, of course, is that biblical texts can also provide opportunities to discuss sexual harm, which remains such a taboo topic within many Christian communities. The fact that the Bible ***does*** depict sexual harm can empower people to talk openly about this issue. As sacred scripture, the Bible can break the silence around sexual harm, offering a point of entry for discussions around contemporary instances of sexual harm. In this way, the Bible ceases to be an "otherworldly" text and becomes instead a means by which social practice is fostered and enacted.

For some participants who themselves have been impacted by sexual harm, reading texts that evoke the trauma of biblical rape victims like Tamar (2 Samuel 13) and Dinah (Genesis 34) can be both healing and affirming, as it allows them to see something of themselves within these texts. These biblical stories are an affirmation that their experiences and their stories ought to be heard and taken seriously within their faith communities. Meanwhile, other participants may be struck by the injustices evoked in some of these biblical traditions. This, in turn, encourages them to think about such injustices in their own culture, to understand sexual harm from the survivor's perspective, and to critique their own complicity in the perpetuation of a culture where such harm continues to flourish.

Part of the role of Christian leaders, then, is to deepen our examination of biblical texts and explore new interpretations so that we minimise their damaging potential and maximise their therapeutic and justice-driven possibilities.

The Rape of Tamar
(2 Samuel 13:1–22)

Emily Colgan and Caroline Blyth

Notes for facilitator

- This Bible study gives participants the opportunity to think about several issues relating to sexual harm:
  - How sexual harm impacts victims.
  - Common myths and misperceptions about sexual harm.
  - The role of bystanders and enablers of sexual harm.

  As with other chapters in the toolkit, the issues are sensitive and can be confronting, so take time to gauge whether the group feels ready to have this discussion, and make sure that professional support will be available if needed.
- This study allows for consideration of what are often described as "rape myths"—misperceptions about sexual harm that minimise its harmfulness, blame the victim, and attempt to exonerate the perpetrator (for further details about rape myths, see Chapter 1, pp. 18–20). These myths are deeply entrenched in our cultural consciousnesses, so people may be used to hearing them and may hold them to be true themselves. Care needs to be taken to facilitate the discussion so that a diversity of views can be offered and discussed in an inclusive and sensitive way.
- The chapter includes information and questions that the facilitator can present to the group, as well as additional notes and suggestions that the facilitator may want to draw on when leading the discussion and responding to participants. Facilitators can also include additional questions and discussion points that they feel will be particularly meaningful in light of group members' contexts, cultures, traditions, and language. Throughout the session, participants should also be encouraged to raise questions of their own.
- Some parts of the discussion refer to other chapters in this toolkit. It will be helpful if the facilitator familiarises themselves with this material beforehand.
- It can be valuable to start the session with a content warning about the challenges of discussing sexual harm and incest. E.g., "In this session, we will be discussing sexual harm, including incestuous sexual harm. I acknowledge that this can be a distressing topic to talk about." The facilitator should remind participants that the group is a space where members treat each other's voices with respect and care; furthermore, discussions taking place in the group must be kept confidential ("what we say in the group stays in the group"). The facilitator can also reassure group members that they can leave any time during the meeting if they are feeling uncomfortable (ideally, it would be useful to organise for another facilitator to check in with the person who has left, either during the meeting or afterwards).
- The length of the session will vary, depending on the level of discussion and the number of participants, but will likely be between one and two hours. Depending on the group size and the time available, the material could be covered in a single session or over two separate hour-long sessions.
- The "Further readings and resources" section lists sources cited in this Bible study as well as some additional readings that may be of interest. Facilitators are ***not*** expected to read all these resources prior to the workshop session.

Group Bible Study

Notes for facilitator

The story of Tamar's rape may or may not be known to the group participants. It could be useful to begin the session by asking the group if they are familiar with the story. Then, once people have shared what they know, you can begin by reading the text itself.

Read the text the whole way through first, before focusing on the various sections. You may want to read it aloud yourself, or you can invite a group member to volunteer. Alternatively, group members could read a verse each and progress round the room/circle to read the whole passage (but do remind everyone that they can "pass" if they would rather not participate in the reading). The text included here is taken from the NRSV, but other translations can also be used. The group will find it helpful to have a copy of the text that they can refer to throughout the session (either in a handout or on a PowerPoint slide).

2 Samuel 13:1–22

[1] Some time passed. 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. [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.'" [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." [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 her brother Amnon. [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." [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." [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 man who served him and said, "Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her." [18] (Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times.) 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.

[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.

Scene One: 2 Samuel 13: 1–5

Notes for facilitator

The group may want to take a moment to reflect on the story they have heard and offer their initial responses. Encourage participants to keep this full story in mind as you move to examine the text closely, section by section. As a group, you might want to read verses 1–5 again before exploring the following questions.

Questions for the group

- What are your initial thoughts about Amnon?

Notes for facilitator

It is worth noting that—at the start of this story at least—Amnon knows he has feelings for Tamar (he "loves" her), but he also recognises that he cannot do anything about these feelings because they are inappropriate. Given the way Amnon later treats Tamar, you could invite the group to reflect on the nature of Amnon's "love" here.

- What do you make of Jonadab and his involvement in Amnon's plans to be alone with Tamar? Do you think he is enabling Amnon to sexually harm Tamar?

Notes for facilitator

Jonadab doesn't sexually harm anyone in this text, but he does encourage and enable it. Prior to Jonadab's involvement, Amnon seemed unprepared to act on his feelings for Tamar. Jonadab would also have recognised that Amnon's feelings were inappropriate, yet he still encouraged him to find a way to act on them. Jonadab may also have been aware that Tamar would not have welcomed her brother's sexual attentions, yet this does not stop him enabling Amnon to find a way to be alone with her.

- Can you think of any examples today where someone might (even unintentionally) enable sexual harm to occur?

Notes for facilitator

It could be useful to make connections with other kinds of behaviour which, while not perpetrating sexual harm, certainly enable it. Some examples you may want to discuss include misogynistic language, rape "jokes," "lad humour," and "locker-room banter" (see examples discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 16–18). Another example would be when a person recognises someone as being vulnerable to sexual harm, but does not intervene to protect them (i.e. they are not being an active bystander). While these behaviours do not perpetrate sexual harm in themselves, they normalise sexual harm and enable a culture where perpetrators' behaviour can go unchecked.

Scene Two: 2 Samuel 13:6–14

Notes for facilitator

Before you move on to discuss the next section of the text, you might want to read verses 6–14 aloud again so that this section of the story is at the forefront of the group's mind as they think about the next questions.

Questions for the group

- What are your first impressions of Tamar? What do you think about her relationships with her father and her brother?

Notes for facilitator

Tamar clearly trusts her father and her brother Amnon—she obeys them both when they tell her to do things for them. As her response to Amnon indicates, she appears totally unaware of his motives for being alone with her.

- What does Tamar say and do when Amnon asks her to "lie with" him? What is she communicating to Amnon here?

Notes for facilitator

- She says a clear "No" (v. 12).
- She reminds him that he is her "brother" (v. 12).
- She names what he is doing: "forcing" her (v. 12).
- She reminds him of their communal values (v. 12).
- She declares that his intentions are vile and evil (v. 12).
- She appeals to her situation (v. 13).
- She appeals to his situation (v. 13).
- She offers him a way out (v. 13).

Tamar makes clear to Amnon that she does not consent to his request for sex. Yet some biblical interpreters suggest that she was "asking for it" by allowing herself to be alone with her brother. Many victims of sexual harm also make their non-consent clear to their abuser through their words or their actions. But this does not stop them being blamed, or held accountable to some degree, for the sexual harm they experience. It could be helpful here to remind the group about the myths and misperceptions around victim blame, which were outlined in Chapter 1 (p. 19).

- How do you think Tamar is feeling at this moment? It can feel uncomfortable to put ourselves "in her shoes," but try to think of the scene from her point of view.

Notes for facilitator

Participants might find it less challenging to compare Tamar to a rape victim they've seen portrayed in film, TV dramas, or fiction, or a real-life case they've heard about in the media.

One of the key issues about Tamar's rape is that it is committed by a close family member—her half-brother Amnon. Her experiences as a victim of incestuous sexual harm will impact her sense of trauma. She has been violated and betrayed by someone whom she may have previously loved and trusted, someone whom she would have expected to protect her, rather than hurt her. While Amnon claims to have "loved" Tamar, incestuous sexual harm always involves the perpetrator exercising power and domination over their victim—it is **never** part of a loving or consensual relationship, but is a form of sexual harm that thrives in the privacy and dependency of the family (see ŌCASA website).

Victims of incestuous sexual harm often experience strong feelings of shame and self-blame, with the result that this crime is even less frequently reported than other forms of sexual harm. Given this fact, it is difficult to ascertain precise rates of incestuous sexual harm within our communities. But recent studies carried out in Aotearoa New Zealand suggest that one in eight women experience incest during their lifetime, and in half of these cases, the perpetrator is a close family member (Rape Prevention Education). More then 23% of women who participated in a recent Auckland study reported experiencing sexual abuse when they were children; most often, the perpetrator was a male family member (see HELP and ŌCASA websites). Incestuous sexual harm is recognised as having significant long-term, negative effects on the physical and mental health of victims and survivors.

- How does Tamar try to convince Amnon that his intentions are very wrong? And why does she suggest they ask their father for permission to get married?

Notes for facilitator

Some readers may feel perplexed by Tamar's response here. Initially, she seems to understand his intentions as a threat to her sexual purity and to her honour; if they have sex, she will no longer be a virgin, which would be a huge source of shame for her as an unmarried woman. So, her suggestion is a way that they could circumvent such shame. But there is also a question of whether brother-sister marriage was even allowed—the laws of Leviticus prohibit various forms of incest, including brother-sister incest.

After the group have shared their thoughts about this question, the following question offers one other possible explanation for Tamar's suggestion to Amnon that they ask their father's permission to marry.

- What do you think of the suggestion that Tamar is "fawning" here in response to the imminent threat of rape? Have you heard of "fawning"?

Notes for facilitator

One possible way of understanding Tamar's response is that she is trying to calm the situation down by offering a solution (even one that she knows won't be possible). This is sometimes referred to as the "fawning" response that victims of trauma do instinctively to survive a threatening situation. "Fawning" is a built-in defence mechanism that occurs involuntarily when a person feels threatened, either physically or psychologically. This process can happen with rape victims too. At any point during the rape event, a victim might "fawn," which means that she tries to please her attacker in the hope that this will make him less likely to harm her. Tamar could be "fawning" here to convince Amnon that she is trying to find a compromise, hoping that this will stop him using force against her. The group might find it helpful to discuss possible interpretations of Tamar's words in verse 13, or to come up with their own suggestions about what she was trying to do here.

Scene Three: 2 Samuel 13:15–19

Notes for facilitator

Before you move on to discuss the next section of the text, you might want to read verses 15–19 again so that this part of the story is at the forefront of everyone's mind as you think about the next questions.

Questions for the group

- What do you think about Amnon's response to Tamar here and the way he gets her thrown out of his house? Why do you think his "love" for Tamar turned to such a deep loathing following his rape?

Notes for facilitator

Rape is never about "love" or "desire." It is always about the rapist exerting power and control over the victim; it is always a sign of the rapist's contempt for the victim. We could say that Amnon's loathing, rather than his "love," reveals the **real** emotions that underpin rape and other forms of sexual harm.

- How do you think Tamar is feeling at this moment? Why does she tear her robe and put ashes on her head?

Notes for facilitator

Some victims of sexual violence can feel "used" and "dirty" after their rape, because their abuser has treated them with contempt and ignored their right to sexual agency and bodily integrity. Tamar's acts of tearing her robe and throwing ashes on her head are signs that she is in mourning—group members might want to reflect on what she is mourning here, and to think more deeply about how she is feeling.

Scene Four: 2 Samuel 13:20–22

Notes for facilitator

Before you move on to discuss the next section of the text, you might want to read verses 20–22 again so that this part of the story is at the forefront of everyone's mind as you think about the next questions.

The rest of 2 Samuel 13 (vv. 23–39) outlines Absalom's eventual revenge on Amnon for the rape of Tamar. After waiting two years, Absalom persuades David to let Amnon join him for some festivities taking place away from the royal palace. David eventually agrees, and Absalom gives instructions to his men to kill Amnon when he is "in high spirits from drinking wine" (v. 28). The men follow these orders, and when David hears about Amnon's death, he "wept very bitterly" (v. 36). Tamar is never mentioned again in this chapter.

It will be helpful to summarise this for the group before moving on, as they may want to reflect on it when answering the following questions.

Questions for the group

- What do you make of Absalom's response to Tamar? Do you think it was helpful for her? How might she have felt when he told her to be quiet?

Notes for facilitator

Encourage group members to think about the connection between victim silencing and the pressures of family honour. There is a great deal of stigma and shame associated with rape and incestuous sexual abuse, which can impact how families respond to a family member's disclosure. It might also be useful to talk about the role of the church in the silencing of victims (see discussion in Chapter 1, pp. 20–22). Just as Absalom provided welcome and shelter for Tamar but required her silence, so churches can be places of welcome and shelter but expect victims to keep silent about their experience of sexual harm.

- What do you think of David's response on hearing of Tamar's rape? How might he be enabling Amnon by failing to take action? And what do you think Tamar would have thought about her father's (lack of) response?

- Do you know of women like Tamar in your communities (your neighbourhood, family, church places of work)?
- If Tamar had come to you after her rape, what would you have said to her? What support would be available to her and to women like her in your community?

Notes for facilitator

Tamar is someone whose story is still very modern:

- Tamar was sexually assaulted, not by a stranger, but by someone she knew and trusted.
- The violation did not occur in a desolate, remote place at the hands of a stranger, but by a close member of her own family in his home.
- Tamar said "No" and her "No" was not respected.
- When Tamar sought help, she was told to hush it up.
- The process for achieving justice and restitution was taken out of her hands entirely and carried forward by her brother.
- In the end, Tamar's father mourned for Amnon, the perpetrator, but not for her. In fact, the end of Tamar's story happens without her even being present.

Notes for facilitator

The response people give to victims who disclose their assault can be a very important part of their first steps on their journey towards healing. You will find some helpful guidelines on appropriate responses in Chapter 2 of this toolkit (pp. 25–28).

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the bible study into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include some or all of the following:

- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging.
- Inviting the group's initial thoughts about how their churches could become places of safety and shelter for survivors of sexual harm.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

Further readings and resources

Rachel Adelman. 2021. "Tamar 2." *Jewish Women's Archive*. https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/tamar-2#:~:text=Triangulated%20between%20powerful%20men%2C%20Tamar,13%3A23%2D38

Bible Society #SheToo podcast series. Episode 5. "The Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13)." https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/shetoo/

The Bloody Bible podcast. 2022. Episode 5, "#MeToo." https://www.bloodybiblepodcast.com/episodes/blog-post-title-four-ma4yw-a66t4-4bkf3-wsr96-km6bm

HELP. Sexual Abuse Statistics. https://www.helpauckland.org.nz/sexual-abuse-statistics.html

Ōtepoti Collective Against Sexual Abuse (ŌCASA). Child Sexual Abuse. https://www.ocasa.org.nz/child-sexual-abuse.html

Ujamaa Centre's Tamar Campaign. University of Kwazulu-Natal. Accessed 11 August 2022. http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/TAMAR_CAMPAIGN.aspx.

The Ten Concubines of 2 Samuel 15–20 and Secondary Victimisation

David Tombs

Notes for facilitator

- This study allows for consideration of what has been described as "secondary victimisation" or "secondary harm." Secondary victimisation refers to the further trauma experienced by victims of sexual harm which results from others' subsequent responses to them. King David is usually revered as a biblical role model, so questioning his response to the rape of the concubines can raise challenging issues for some readers. Care needs to be taken to facilitate the discussion so that a diversity of views can be offered and discussed in an inclusive way.
- As with other chapters in the toolkit, the issues to be discussed in this Bible study are sensitive and can be confronting, so take time to gauge whether the group feels ready to have this discussion, and make sure that professional support will be available if needed.
- The chapter includes information and questions that the facilitator can present to the group, as well as additional notes and suggestions that the facilitator may want to draw on when leading the discussion and responding to participants. Facilitators can also include additional questions and discussion points that they feel will be particularly meaningful in light of group members' contexts, cultures, traditions, and language. Throughout the session, participants should also be encouraged to raise questions of their own.
- Some parts of the discussion make reference to other chapters in this toolkit. It will be helpful for the facilitator to familiarise themselves with this material beforehand.
- We recommend that facilitators start the session with a content warning about the challenges of discussing sexual harm. E.g., "In this session, we will be discussing sexual harm. I acknowledge that this can be a distressing topic to talk about." Remind participants that the group is a space where members treat each other's voices with respect and care; furthermore, discussions taking place in the group must be kept confidential ("what we say in the group stays in the group"). The facilitator can also reassure group members that they can leave at any time during the session if they are feeling uncomfortable (ideally, it would be useful to organise for another facilitator to check in with the person who has left, either during the session or afterwards).
- The length of the session will vary, depending on the level of discussion and the number of participants, but will likely be between one and two hours. Depending on the group size and the time available, the material could be covered in a single session or over two separate hour-long sessions.
- The "Further readings and resources" section lists sources cited in this Bible study as well as some additional readings that may be of interest. Facilitators are ***not*** expected to read all these resources prior to the workshop session.

Group Bible Study

Notes for facilitator

This Bible story is not well-known, so if time permits you might start by asking the group to briefly share what they already know about King David's relationships with women (i.e. his wives, his daughter Tamar, etc.) and what their initial impressions of David are. The discussion here can then be linked to later conversations about David's treatment of the ten concubines.

Introducing the texts: 2 Samuel 15:13–16, 16:20–23, and 20:3

The story of David and the ten concubines has not received much attention. It is quite short and is spread over three passages. The focus of discussion in this session will be on one particular verse (2 Samuel 20:3), but it will also be helpful to look at the two short passages that are related to it (2 Samuel 15:13–16 and 2 Samuel 16:20–23).[11]

To offer a brief background to these texts, Absalom, the son of King David, has been conspiring to usurp his father from the throne. The two men had become estranged after Absalom arranged the murder of his brother Amnon, following Amnon's rape of their sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13). In 2 Samuel 15, David learns that Absalom's political support is growing, so the king decides to flee Jerusalem, fearing that his son wishes him harm.

Each of the three texts refer to David's concubines. During the biblical period, a "concubine" (*pilegesh* in Hebrew) was regarded as a "secondary" wife—men could have both wives and concubines and this was regarded as an accepted part of Israelite culture (e.g. Genesis 25:6; Judges 19; 2 Samuel 5:13). Concubines were a legitimate part of the Israelite household and were provided for according to the customs of the day. But they likely did not enjoy the same degree of social status as a primary wife. In the biblical texts, some kings amassed large numbers of concubines in their harem (e.g., David had an untold number of wives and concubines, and his son King Solomon apparently had 300 concubines along with his 700 wives)—this may have served as an outward sign of their status and wealth.

One of the issues this Bible study focuses on is "secondary victimisation" (sometimes referred to as "secondary harm"). This refers to people's insensitive behaviours and attitudes towards victims of sexual harm which can cause victims further trauma. These behaviours and attitudes include blaming the victim, not believing them, showing a lack of empathy towards them, and not taking their experiences of trauma seriously (Deosthali, Rege, and Arora 2021). Secondary victimisation can seriously impede a victim's ability to begin their journey towards recovery and healing.

Secondary victimisation may be experienced by victims because of the responses of family and friends, but it is more commonly associated with the attitudes and behaviours of service providers and institutions that victims encounter in the aftermath of their assault, including the police and judicial system, healthcare providers, employers, educational facilities, and leaders of faith communities. Institutional practices and values that put the needs of the organisation above the victims' needs play a significant role in perpetuating secondary victimisation (Deosthali, Rege, and Arora 2021).

In this Bible study, the group will be invited to reflect on the possible ways that their own faith community might (intentionally or unintentionally) contribute to the secondary victimisation of sexual harm survivors and what they can do to challenge and change this.

[11] Insights and ideas from the Bible study on this passage by Lynne Taylor and David Tombs (in Makoka and West 2022) have been incorporated into this Bible study.

Studying the texts

Notes for facilitator

If group members are comfortable reading these passages aloud, invite three volunteers to read one passage each, or invite members of the group to read a verse each (reminding everyone that they can "pass" if they would rather not participate in the reading). The version below is from the NRSV, but you are welcome to use another Bible translation. The group will find it helpful to have a copy of the texts that they can refer to throughout the session (either in a handout or on a PowerPoint slide).

2 Samuel 15:13–16

[13] A messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the Israelites have gone after Absalom." [14] Then David said to all his officials who were with him at Jerusalem, "Get up! Let us flee, or there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Hurry, or he will soon overtake us, and bring disaster down upon us, and attack the city with the edge of the sword." [15] The king's officials said to the king, "Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king decides." [16] So the king left, followed by all his household, except ten concubines whom he left behind to look after the house.

2 Samuel 16:20–23

[20] Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give us your counsel; what shall we do?" [21] Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to [rape][12] your father's concubines, the ones he has left to look after the house; and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself odious to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened." [22] So they pitched a tent for Absalom upon the roof; and Absalom went in to [raped] his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. [23] Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the oracle of God; so all the counsel of Ahithophel was esteemed, both by David and by Absalom.

2 Samuel 20:3

[3] David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to look after the house, and put them in a house under guard, and provided for them, but did not go in to [have sex with] them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood.

Questions for the group

- Is this a story you have heard before?
- What are your initial thoughts about this story? Does anything in particular stand out to you?

Notes for facilitator

Encourage participants to discuss their initial responses to these texts and to ask any questions that they have, drawing on their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and language to bring meaning to these texts.

- What do we learn about the different characters mentioned in the first passage (2 Samuel 15:13–16)?
- Why do you think David left his concubines behind when he fled Jerusalem?

Notes for facilitator

Ask the group to reflect on whether they think David's actions show his disregard for the concubines, or whether it suggests that he held them in high esteem (e.g., by trusting them to look after the royal house in his absence). Regardless of his motives, do group members think that his decision to leave them was wise? What might David's decision reveal about his character?

- What do you think of Absalom's actions in the second passage (2 Samuel 16:20–23)? How would you describe what he did to the ten women and what do you think motivated him to do this?

Notes for facilitator

Most commentators describe Absalom's actions here as rape, although a few commentators suggest that he effectively "married" the ten women (albeit without their consent) by laying claim to them sexually. Yet framing Absalom's actions as a form of "marriage" only serves to conceal the violent and non-consensual nature of what he did to these women. This might remind us of the rape myth (discussed in Chapter 1, p. 19) that rape is "just sex," rather than a coercive and aggressive act.

Absalom appears to be using the concubines to demonstrate his superior power and control over his father and to thus make a claim to the throne. The concubines would have been regarded as David's sexual "property," so by laying claim to these women through rape, Absalom shames and dishonours his father—he is effectively stealing his father's "property" and showing David up as a man who is incapable of protecting "his" women. Rape thus becomes a political weapon in this story; the women are caught in the crosshairs of battles fought between men. This is something we continue to see today in both military conflict and acts of terrorism, where rape (particularly of women and girls) is used to terrorise, humiliate, and subdue the enemy.

The sexual harm done to the women in this passage should be obvious, though it is often overlooked by biblical interpreters. Invite the group to discuss why this might be the case, and why it is important to recognise Absalom's behaviour here as an act of sexual harm.

[12] For the most part, the Bible doesn't speak about sex in direct terms, but rather uses euphemisms. Thus, the Hebrew phrase "to go in to" can often mean "to have sex with" or "to rape." Translators have to rely on context to guide their translation of this Hebrew phrase. We have chosen to translate it as "rape" in vv. 21–22, because this captures the sexually aggressive action of a powerful man towards women who do not have the agency or authority to withhold their consent.

- How do you interpret what is happening in the final passage, 2 Samuel 20:3?

Notes for facilitator

This question offers the group a chance to share how they understand this verse. Are the women being protected, or imprisoned, or both? As always, encourage participants to draw on their own contexts, cultures, traditions, and language to respond to this question.

- Why do you think David secluded the women in this way? Was his treatment of the women intended more for their well-being or for his own interests? In other words, was he protecting them or imprisoning them?

Notes for facilitator

The statement that David "did not go in to" the women most likely refers to him no longer having sexual relations with them. Invite the group to consider why he made this decision. It might be helpful to raise the issue of another rape myth discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 19)—that victims of sexual harm are "damaged goods"—their social "worth" is diminished because their chastity and "purity" have been compromised by their rape. Could this rape myth have influenced David's decision?

The text does not tell us what David's motivations are, so we can only guess. Group members may have different opinions about whether David thought he was acting in the women's best interests or whether his motivations were more self-serving.

Whatever David's motives, one result of his actions is that the women are effectively silenced and unable to tell others their stories of trauma when they are secluded in David's house. It might be helpful to remind the group about Absalom's sister Tamar who was raped by her brother Amnon (2 Samuel 13—see the first Bible study in this chapter, pp. 35–40). Tamar was also silenced after her rape—she went to Absalom's house, but he "shut her up" by telling her to be quiet, and she remained "shut up" in his house, living as a "desolate woman" (v. 20) for the rest of her life. Ask participants if they see any resonances here between Tamar and David's concubines—all these women are "shut up" in multiple ways. Can we draw connections between this and the ways that survivors of sexual harm today might also be "shut up"—by friends, family, the police, judiciary, healthcare providers, employers, educational institutions, and faith communities?

- Would it be fair or unfair to say that David "abandoned" the women? To what extent is David causing further harm to the women on top of the harm done by Absalom? Is David contributing to their secondary victimisation through his actions here?

Notes for facilitator

The suggestion that David "abandoned" the women might also be asked in relation to 2 Samuel 15:13–16. Remind the group what secondary victimisation means and encourage them to explore 2 Samuel 20:3 in light of this. Issues to consider include:

- Would the women feel their trauma is being taken seriously?
- Are they being blamed in any way for their victimisation?
- Are they being given the time and space to talk about their experiences in a way that they might find healing?
- Are they being offered adequate support following their trauma?
- Secondary victimisation is sometimes described as "adding insult to injury." To what extent could David's actions be seen as adding insult to injury?

These questions will lead the discussion on to the following question.

- The text tells us nothing about these women's lives in the aftermath of their rapes and enforced isolation—how can we as readers fill this gap in order to give them a voice with which to tell their story of trauma?

Notes for facilitator

Encourage participants to read the story from the women's perspective and to think about how the women would have felt—not only about their rape, but also the king's act of cloistering them "until the day of their death."

Other issues to think about in relation to these women's untold stories could include:

- Their sense of self-worth following their rape and David's rejection (did they see themselves as "damaged goods"?).
- Their mental health and emotional wellbeing—might they have been feeling anxious and depressed? Might they have experienced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (see Chapter 2, pp. 24–25)?
- Their physical responses to their rape (see Chapter 2, pp. 24–25)—how well were these women looked after and cared for after they were shut away by David? Did they suffer any physical symptoms as the result of their assault?
- Their ability to talk about what happened to them—would they have shared their stories with each other? Could their companionship have served as a healing presence in these women's lives?

- How might churches contribute to secondary victimisation of sexual harm survivors? How can this be challenged and changed? And what lessons do you see in this Bible story for how the church can better accompany survivors of sexual harm?

Notes for facilitator

Invite participants to reflect on their own church communities, as well as the church more widely. Participants might like to think about the times when faith communities have provided shelter for victims and survivors of sexual harm but demanded their silence, effectively "shutting them up." The group might also want to reflect on how their church might become a space for safely sharing (giving voice to) the trauma of sexual harm. You may want to connect this discussion to the material in Chapter 2 (pp. 25–28) on how to respond when someone discloses sexual harm.

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the Bible study into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include one or more of the following:

- Recalling the understanding of "witnessing" offered in Chapter 2 (pp. 28–29), and offering or inviting any final thoughts on what it means to be a witness to this biblical text.
- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

Further readings and resources

Padma Bhate Deosthali, Sangeeta Rege, and Sanjida Arora. 2021. "Secondary Victimisation of Rape Survivors: Adding Insult to Injury." *The Leaflet*, 22 June 2021. https://theleaflet.in/secondary-victimisation-of-rape-survivors-adding-insult-to-injury/

Suzanne E. Caster. 2020. "Resisting Rape Culture: The Ten Concubines of 2 Samuel 15-20 and #MeToo." *Review and Expositor* 117 (2): 281–87.

Mwai Makoka and Gerald West, eds. 2022. *Promoting Churches Volume III: Contextual Bible Studies on Health and Healing*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.

Susanne Scholz. 2010. *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible*. Fortress Press.

Ken Stone. 1996. *Sex, Honor and Power in the Deuteronomistic History*. Sheffield Academic Press.

David Tombs, "Abandonment, Rape, And Second Abandonment: Hannah Baker In *13 Reasons Why* and King David's Concubines In 2 Samuel 15–20," The Shiloh Project, 18 October 2017. https://www.shilohproject.blog/abandonment-rape-and-second-abandonment-hannah-baker-in-13-reasons-why-and-king-davids-concubines-in-2-samuel-15-2/

This Shiloh Project piece by David Tombs offers an extended discussion of the 2 Samuel passages discussed in this Bible study, and explores how they might be viewed alongside the story of Hannah Baker in the Netflix series 13 Reasons Why. The series and Jay Asher's (2007) novel of the same name can be a good opportunity to adapt this Bible study for work with older teenagers and young adults. Care should be taken to ensure the discussion is age-sensitive and that any discussion of Hannah's death by suicide is appropriate. The Netflix series has a RP18 film classification in New Zealand and a 15 rating from the British Board of Film Classification.

The Stripping of Jesus (Matthew 27:26–31)

David Tombs

Notes for facilitator

- This session raises particularly sensitive and challenging questions about Jesus as a victim of sexual harm. Take time to assess whether the group is ready for this topic, and let the group know in advance that the session will address sensitive issues. Aim to facilitate the discussion so that a diversity of views can be offered and discussed in an inclusive and sensitive way. Also, make sure participants know where to access further professional support if needed.
- There is an optional group activity included in the session notes—this activity invites conversation about the ways that the stripping of Jesus is depicted in Christian art. If you choose to include it, the activity should take around 20 minutes, although you may wish to spend longer on it if time allows.
- It can be valuable to start the session with a content warning about the challenges of discussing sexual harm. E.g., "In this session, we will be discussing sexual harm. I acknowledge that this can be a distressing topic to talk about." Remind participants that the group is a space where members treat each other's voices with respect and care; furthermore, discussions taking place in the group must be kept confidential ("what we say in the group stays in the group"). The facilitator can also reassure group members that they can leave any time during the meeting if they are feeling uncomfortable (ideally, it would be useful to organise for another facilitator to check in with the person who has left, either during the meeting or afterwards).
- The chapter includes information and questions that the facilitator can present to the group, as well as additional notes and suggestions that the facilitator may want to draw on when leading the discussion and responding to participants. Facilitators can also include additional questions and discussion points that they feel will be particularly meaningful in light of group members' contexts, cultures, traditions, and language. Throughout the session, participants should also be encouraged to raise questions of their own.
- Some parts of the discussion refer to other chapters in this toolkit. We recommend that the facilitator familiarise themselves with this material beforehand.
- The length of the session will vary, depending on the level of discussion and the number of participants, but will likely be between one and two hours. Depending on the group size and the time available, the material could be covered in a single session or over two separate hour-long sessions.
- The "Further readings and resources" section lists sources cited in this BIble study as well as some additional readings that may be of interest. Facilitators are ***not*** expected to read all these resources prior to the workshop session.

Group Bible Study

Overview

Matthew 27.26–31 will probably be very familiar to participants, but this Bible study considers some disturbing details that are often overlooked by readers.[13] The session includes study and discussion of four elements of this biblical tradition:

1. The Gospel text.
2. The stripping of Jesus.
3. The soldiers present when Jesus is stripped.
4. The language of stripping.

1. The Gospel text

Notes for facilitator

You may want to suggest a group reading of the biblical text if group members feel comfortable doing this. You could invite people to read a verse each and progress round the room/circle to read the whole passage (reminding everyone that they can "pass" if they would rather not participate in the reading). The version below is from the NRSV, but other translations can also be used. The group will find it helpful to have a copy of the text that they can refer to throughout the session (either in a handout or on a PowerPoint slide).

[26] So he [Pilate] released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. [27] Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. [28] They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, [29] and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" [30] They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. [31] After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Question for the group

- Does anyone want to share anything about this passage which you have previously noticed and thought about, and/or anything that is new to you as we read it in this group?

[13] Insights and ideas from the Ujamaa Centre (2019) Bible study have been incorporated into this Bible study.

Notes for facilitator

Encourage participants to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language to discuss what they find meaningful in this biblical passage.

The next part of the session looks at the text in more detail to focus on Jesus' subjection to public stripping.

2. The Stripping of Jesus

Questions for the group

- How many times is Jesus stripped in this passage?

Notes for facilitator

It is common for the group to notice the two explicit strippings in verses 28 and 31. Verse 26 also suggests a stripping, since Jesus would most likely have been stripped before he was flogged. Verse 31 implies a fourth stripping to come at the crucifixion, because Roman custom was to crucify prisoners naked; this is confirmed in v. 35, where we are told the Roman soldiers divided up Jesus' clothes between themselves. So, in this passage, there are at least two different reports of Jesus being forcibly stripped (vv. 28 and 31), plus most likely a third (v. 26) and the implicit allusion to a fourth stripping still to happen at the cross (v. 31). The fact that these six verses reference four different instances of stripping is notable. These details can get lost in such a familiar passage, so it might be helpful to highlight the four references to stripping, either on a PowerPoint slide or in a handout, to emphasise these references as well as the involvement of the whole cohort:

[26] So he released Barabbas for them; ***and after flogging Jesus****, he handed him over to be crucified. [27] Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and* ***they gathered the whole cohort around him.*** *[28]* ***They stripped him*** *and put a scarlet robe on him, [29] and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" [30] They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. [31] After mocking him,* ***they stripped him*** *of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away* ***to crucify him****.*

- Have you noticed these different mentions of stripping in this text before?
- Have you heard Jesus' stripping being spoken about or preached about in your own faith community? If so, how was it discussed? If not, why do you think it is not commonly mentioned in worship settings?
- Does the focus on stripping make you look at the text in a new light?

Notes for facilitator

Again, encourage group members to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language to explore the meaning that this biblical passage has for them.

3. The soldiers present when Jesus is stripped

The mocking of Jesus in Matthew's gospel takes place in the governor's headquarters or *praetorium*. Most commentators believe that this was a palace built by Herod the Great which Pilate used as his Jerusalem residence. Verse 27 says, "they gathered the whole cohort around" Jesus.

Questions for the group

- How many soldiers are involved in the stripping of Jesus?

Notes for facilitator

A cohort would probably have been about 500 soldiers and both Mark and Matthew say that the "whole cohort" was gathered. Some commentaries suggest the number might have been less than this, but in any case, it would have been a significant gathering. Also, the Greek word *epi* (v. 27), translated in the NRSV as "around," suggests the soldiers were standing very close to Jesus.

- Have you previously noticed the number of soldiers present in this scene?
- How does the number of soldiers present in the scene affect your interpretation of the events taking place? How do you think it would impact Jesus' experience of being publicly stripped?

4. The language of stripping

Notes for facilitator

This section outlines the sexually harmful nature of enforced strippings and invites group members to consider this in relation to Jesus' enforced strippings in Matthew 27:26–31. It also clarifies the significance of enforced stripping as a means of punishment and control. Language is very important when it comes to talking about (or staying silent about) sexual harm. Jesus' strippings are rarely named as occasions of sexual harm; it is important to consider how this could play a role in sustaining the silence and stigma surrounding sexual harm today.

It may be helpful to begin this part of the session by going over the definition of sexual harm (included in Chapter 1, pp. 14–15) before asking group members if and how they understand enforced stripping as a form of sexual harm. Then, talk through the information provided below and encourage the group to discuss this in light of the questions that follow.

As always, encourage the group to ask their own questions and to find meaning in this conversation by drawing on their own contexts, cultures, traditions, and language.

Forcibly stripping someone (whether privately or in public) is a form of sexual harm. It is a horribly "effective" way to shame and humiliate a person because it emphasises how vulnerable and powerless they are (see Tombs 2023). The forcible stripping of male prisoners (like Jesus) allows their captors to reinforce their own dominance and power. This practice has been reported during times of conflict in recent history (e.g., at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq during the Iraq war), but it is a very ancient practice and we read about it in other ancient Near Eastern texts and inscriptions. Assyrian relief sculptures from the eighth century BCE depict prisoners from the Judean city of Lachish who have been stripped by the Assyrian army and are being led away into exile. And several Old Testament texts also use the imagery of public stripping as a means of shaming the enemy (e.g., 2 Samuel 10:4; Isaiah 47:2–3; Hosea 2:3).

Like other forms of sexual harm, forcible stripping is not motivated by any sense of sexual desire on the part of the perpetrator—rather, it allows the perpetrator to exert their power and control over the victim by dominating, shaming, and humiliating them. Forcibly stripping someone renders that person an object of powerlessness and vulnerability, not to mention a source of derision and contempt. As with other forms of sexual

harm, forcible stripping heaps shame and stigma onto the victim, by exposing the victim as a person who is incapable of protecting the integrity of their own bodily boundaries. When the victim is male, enforced stripping also undermines their masculinity, by highlighting their "weakness" and lack of control (both of which are the antithesis of idealised, or hegemonic, masculinity). This emasculating effect of enforced stripping operates as an additional source of shame, stigma, and humiliation for the victim.

Questions for the group

- How do you understand Jesus' experience of being forcibly stripped? What were the soldiers' motives for doing this to him in the *praetorium* and at the crucifixion?
- Is Jesus' enforced stripping during his Passion something that you have heard spoken about in your own faith communities? If so, how is it framed? If not, why do you think there may be less conversation about this than other aspects of the Passion narrative?
- How might the language of sexual harm be used in a sensitive way to discuss Jesus' experience of being forcibly stripped during his Passion? Do you think this is an important step to take in church conversations about the Passion narrative?

Optional group activity: Jesus in Christian art

Notes for facilitator

The following optional group discussion focuses on the ways that the stripping of Jesus is depicted in Christian art. This activity should take around 20 minutes, although you may wish to spend longer on it if time allows. It offers the group a useful way to "visualise" this part of the biblical story and to see how artists have interpreted it.

Following this optional activity, there is a final set of questions for the group to consider on Matthew 27:26–31 and sexual harm. Whether or not you choose to include the optional activity, we recommend that you end the session with these final questions, as they offer a useful way to reflect back on the session and to look ahead to further exploration of this topic.

Matthew 27:31 points ahead to Jesus' crucifixion and his being stripped at the cross (v. 35). Unlike the stripping in the *praetorium* before the whole cohort, the stripping at the cross is a popular tradition in Christian art. This tradition, known as "The Stripping of Jesus," is also featured as the Tenth Station of the Cross. In many (but not all) images, the stripping at the cross is portrayed as more akin to a calm disrobing. In addition, there are often only a small number of people directly involved in the stripping, rather than a crowd or cohort. By contrast, there are very few depictions in Christian art of the stripping in the *praetorium* by the whole cohort.

Notes for facilitator

Share some images of this artistic tradition with the group and ask participants to talk about how the artists are interpreting the biblical scene. Below are some links to possible images, or you are welcome to use your own examples. Some images:

- Theophile Lybaert, "Jesus is Stripped of His Garments" (1886–1887)
- Gebhard Fugel, "Jesus wird seiner Kleider beraubt" (c. 1910)
- El Greco, "Jesus Christ Stripped of His Garments" (c. 1600)
- James Tissot, "Jesus Stripped of His Clothing" (c. 1886–1894)

Questions for the group

- Why was Jesus stripped at the cross? Is it similar or different to the stripping in the *praetorium*?

Notes for facilitator

Crucifixion was seen as deeply shameful in the ancient world. The Roman orator Cicero describes the crucifix as "the tree of shame." The early Christian writer Origen spoke of crucifixion as the "most shameful death on the cross." Hebrews 12:2 says Jesus "endured the cross, disregarding the shame." Stripping a person at the cross and crucifying him (or her) naked was an important part of the intentional humiliation and shame of the cross.

- How much does the representation of the stripping of Jesus in art influence how we usually think about the biblical story of Jesus' crucifixion?

Notes for facilitator

The group may ask about the loincloth commonly worn by Jesus in artistic depictions of the crucifixion The biblical text does not mention a loincloth, so this could lead to further discussion of what is behind this convention, and why it is so common in Christian art.

- Has this Bible study, and the images you've looked at, made you think differently about the stripping of Jesus in the *praetorium* and/or at the cross?

Final group discussion: Matthew 27:26–31 and sexual harm

Notes for facilitator

Reading Matthew 27:26–31 with attention to the sexual harm depicted therein can raise lots of broader questions about why sexual harm is an issue that's not always spoken about in our churches and the wider community. The following questions encourage the group to draw on the discussion you've had throughout this session and use it to think about what churches can do to better support and accompany survivors of sexual harm.

Whether or not you choose to include the optional activity, we recommend that you go over these questions with the group near the close of the session.

Questions for the group

- **Sexual Harm and Stigma.** How might the acknowledgment of Jesus as a victim of sexual harm make a difference to the perceived stigma that is wrongly attached to contemporary survivors of sexual harm?

Notes for facilitator

Stigma is a common experience for victims and survivors of all genders, owing to the myths and misperceptions that surround sexual harm. You might find it helpful to refer to the material in Chapter 1 on rape myths (pp. 18–20) to explore with the group why sexual harm is so stigmatised (e.g., consider the myths about victim blame and the victim as "damaged goods" to think about how these might lead to the victim being stigmatised). Male victims may also experience stigma owing to popular western ideals of masculinity, which expect men to be strong, dominant, and in control. "Real men" should be strong enough to fight off an attacker. "Real men" are meant to be sexually aggressive, not submissive. In other words, "real men" are not victims or survivors of sexual harm.

Being stigmatised can cause further trauma to victims and survivors of sexual harm. This additional trauma is often referred to as "secondary victimisation." Group Bible study 2 in this chapter (pp. 41–45) offers further insights into secondary victimisation.

The notion of Jesus as a victim of sexual harm can be a very sensitive and discomfiting topic for people to talk about, especially when he is connected or compared to contemporary victims and survivors. If you think the group will feel comfortable doing so, the following additional questions might foster discussion:

- Why is there sometimes a reluctance to name Jesus' experiences of forcible stripping as a form of sexual harm?
- If Jesus' experiences of enforced stripping are not identified as sexual harm, how might this contribute to the continued stigma, shame, and silence that survivors and victims experience today?

The article "#MeToo Jesus" by Jayme Reaves and David Tombs listed in the "Further Reading and Resources" can offer some additional ideas for the discussion.

- **Exploring further.** This session may have raised some hard questions about theology and beliefs. If there were further sessions like this one, what questions would you like them to address? Questions might include one or more of the following, or you might wish to suggest your own:

- Where is God in the context of sexual harm?
- How has theology been used (explicitly or implicitly) to support and/or sustain the foundations of sexual harm? How can some theologies lay the groundwork for sexual harm to flourish?

Notes for facilitator

The group theology studies included in Chapter 4 of the toolkit cover material relevant to this question, including discussions about theologies of atonement, forgiveness, and sacrifice.

- What kind/s of theology might challenge or resist sexual harm?
- How and why should we talk about sexual harm in church (in sermons, and/or liturgies)?

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the bible study into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include one or more of the following:

- Recalling the understanding of "witnessing" offered in Chapter 2 (pp. 28–29) and offering or inviting any final thoughts on what it means to be a witness to this biblical text.
- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

Further readings and resources

The Bloody Bible podcast. 2022. Episode 6, "#HeToo: Sexual Violence against Biblical Men." https://www.bloodybiblepodcast.com/episodes/blog-post-title-four-ma4yw-a66t4-4bkf3-wsr96

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David Tombs. 2022. "Strip Searches, Abuses of Power, and 'Stepping into the Room.'" The Shiloh Project. https://www.shilohproject.blog/strip-searches-abuses-of-power-and-stepping-into-the-room/

David Tombs. 2023. *The Crucifixion of Jesus: Torture, Sexual Abuse, and the Scandal of the Cross*. Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/oa-mono/10.4324/9780429289750/crucifixion-jesus-david-tombs

Michael Trainor. 2014. *The Body of Jesus and Sexual Abuse: How the Gospel Passion Narrative Informs a Pastoral Approach.* Morning Star Publishing; Wipf & Stock, 2014.

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The Household Codes
(1 Peter 3:1–7)

Caroline Blyth and Emily Colgan

Notes for facilitator

- This Bible study offers participants the opportunity to explore how coercive control and purity culture impact survivors of sexual harm and intimate partner violence (IPV). As with other resources in this toolkit, the issues are sensitive and can be confronting, so take time to gauge whether the group feels ready to have this discussion, and make sure that professional support will be available if needed.
- This study focuses on coercive control (patterns of controlling behaviours that create an unequal power dynamic in a relationship) and purity culture (gender expectations underpinned by a strict, stereotype-based binary) specifically within the context of marriage. These ideas can be deeply entrenched in our understanding of Christian relationships, so people may experience relationships where coercive control and purity ideals are present. Indeed, group participants may want to affirm aspects of purity culture and coercive behaviour themselves. Care needs to be taken to facilitate the discussion so that a diversity of views can be offered and discussed in an inclusive and sensitive way.
- The chapter includes information and questions that the facilitator can present to the group, as well as additional notes and suggestions that the facilitator may want to draw on when leading the discussion and responding to participants. Facilitators can also include additional questions and discussion points that they feel will be particularly meaningful in light of group members' contexts, cultures, traditions, and language. Throughout the session, participants should also be encouraged to raise questions of their own.
- Some parts of the discussion refer to other chapters in this toolkit. We recommend the facilitator familiarise themselves with this material before this session.
- Facilitators should start the session with a content warning about the challenges of discussing sexual harm. E.g., "In this session, we will be discussing sexual harm and intimate partner violence. I acknowledge that these can be distressing topics to talk about." Remind participants that the group is a space where members treat each other's voices with respect and care; furthermore, discussions taking place in the group must be kept confidential ("what we say in the group stays in the group"). The facilitator can also reassure group members that they can leave any time during the session if they are feeling uncomfortable (ideally, it would be useful to organise for another facilitator to check in with the person who has left, either during the session or afterwards).
- The length of the session will vary, depending on the level of discussion and the number of participants, but will likely be between one and two hours. Depending on the group size and the time available, the material could be covered in a single session or over two separate hour-long sessions.
- The "Further readings and resources" section lists sources cited in this BIble study as well as some additional readings that may be of interest. Facilitators are ***not*** expected to read all these resources prior to the workshop session.

Group Bible Study

Notes for facilitator

This Bible study will focus on 1 Peter 3:1–7, which is one of a group of texts known as the Household Codes. You might want to start the session by asking the group if anyone is familiar with this text. Invite them to share any initial thoughts about it, and encourage everyone to draw on their own contexts, cultures, traditions, and language to express what the text means to them.

You may want to read out the text yourself or invite someone from the group to do so. Alternatively, you could ask group members to read a verse each and progress round the room/circle to read the whole passage (reminding everyone that they can "pass" if they would rather not participate in the reading). The text below is from the NRSV, but other translations can be used if you prefer. The group will find it helpful to have a copy of the text that they can refer to throughout the session (either in a handout or on a PowerPoint slide).

After reading through the text, there are questions that will help to foster discussion about what is happening in the text and how the text might remain relevant today. Remind group members that they are welcome to ask their own questions during the session.

1 Peter 3:1–7

[1] Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, [2] when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. [3] Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. [4] Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. [5] For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, [6] like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. [7] Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Questions for the group

- Can you think of other texts that sound a bit like this one?
- In what contexts have you heard this text read? (E.g., at a wedding, during a church service.)
- What are the key messages that you can discern in this text?
- 1 Peter 3:1–7 is part of a group of texts known as the Household Codes. Have you heard of these? What do you know about them?

Notes for facilitator

The Household Codes (sometimes called the Domestic Codes) are a collection of New Testament texts associated with Paul and Peter, which consist of instructions related to Christian relationships (husband/wife, parent/child, enslaver/enslaved). The other Household Code texts are found in Ephesians 5:22–6:9; Colossians 3:18–4:1; 1 Timothy 2:8–15; 3:1–13; 6:1–2; and Titus 2:1–10. The author of this text, 'Peter' (1 Peter 1:1), was probably influenced by the writings of Paul and shares similar ideas to those we find in Ephesians and Colossians.

Relationship dynamics in this text

Questions for the group

- What is the relationship between the husband and the wife in this text?

Notes for facilitator

The woman is told to "submit" to her husband. This word is used twice, and Peter upholds Sarah (from the book of Genesis) as a subservient wife who calls her husband "lord." In this text, the husband is meant to be considerate and respectful towards his wife, although he is not instructed to submit to her. There is a double standard here. The wife is described as the "weaker partner," thus implying that the husband holds the strength/power in the relationship. In verse 6, the woman is told to do what is right (submit) and "not give way to fear." This final phrase is slightly obscure, which leaves it open to troubling interpretations. For example, it might imply that a wife should submit to her husband regardless of how badly he treats her or how much he frightens her.

- What do you think about the idea of wifely submission? What do you think submission involves? Can you think of times where it might go "too far"?

The submission of one partner to another in a relationship can take many forms, but it is always related to power and control. Power and control can be expressed in a range of different ways. Sometimes it is overt, as in the case of a husband using physical violence to control and dominate his wife. But at other times, it is harder to identify and name. This Bible study will focus on a particular kind of control—coercive control. Coercive control is the "flip side" of submission and is a form of intimate partner violence (IPV).

What is coercive control?

Notes for facilitator

We suggest you start this part of the session by asking the group if they have heard of coercive control and what they know about it. Then, take the group through the definition of coercive control, giving them plenty of opportunity to ask questions and make comments about this topic. As usual, encourage everyone to draw on their own contexts, cultures, traditions, and language to bring their own meanings to this topic.

Coercive control is part of a spectrum of behaviours associated with IPV. It involves a regime of tactics that perpetrators use to control and manipulate their victim's thoughts, beliefs, or behaviour. A perpetrator of coercive control will seek to entrap his victim by convincing her that she is dependent on their relationship and can do nothing to escape it. He will also attempt to "train" his victim to do and be whatever ***he*** wants by using various threats of punishment if his victim refuses to comply—in other words, the victim is left in no doubt that her resistance will come at a cost.[14] Through her repeated experiences of fear, correction, humiliation, surveillance, and the threat of punishment, the victim may lose a sense of her own autonomy, as her victimiser attempts to control her thoughts, microregulate her everyday life and activities, and redefine her reality. In this way, her sense of agency and autonomy are gradually eroded. Coercive control is a malignant form of IPV. It drains victims of their personhood, knocks their legs from under them, and ties them even tighter to the person who is causing them so much harm. Studies also show that coercive control can increase the likelihood of other forms of IPV occurring in a relationship, including emotional abuse, physical abuse, and sexual harm (Beck and Raghavan 2010).

Coercive controllers use a number of tactics:

- **Threats:** The perpetrator may use verbal threats, threatening behaviours, and intimidation to instil fear, shame, and anxiety in their victim.
  - E.g., he might threaten to harm the victim, or himself, or things that are precious to the victim (such as children, pets, and possessions) if she fails to do what he wants or tries to resist his control.
- **Humiliation and degradation:** The perpetrator may criticise and shame his victim (sometimes in front of others), overstating her insecurities, treating her like a child, denying her ideas and opinions, and denigrating her strengths and achievements.
  - E.g., If his victim says she is applying for a new job, he may tell her, "You're wasting your time, there's no way you're good enough for that job—you couldn't handle the pressure."
- **Love-bombing (or "acts of love"):** The perpetrator may at times intersperse their threats and humiliation with occasional flourishes of love language and reassurances of devotion. This behaviour is never carried out with the intent of nurturing mutual love and commitment, but is designed to manipulate the victim so that she stays in the relationship. Love-bombing also gives the victim the sense that she is "walking on eggshells," never sure of what to expect next.
  - E.g., the perpetrator will send his victim a text message saying, "You're the love of my life, I adore you," then later that same day, he will complain about her appearance, lose his temper with her, or refuse to speak to her because she's done something to displease him.
- **Gaslighting:** Perpetrators may use gaslighting to make their victim feel as though they are going "crazy" or to make her appear crazy to others. Gaslighting involves the perpetrator manipulating the environment and denying reality. Techniques may include hiding things, denying that events happened, or blaming victims for things they did not do.
  - E.g., a perpetrator may hide his victim's phone, and when she accuses him of hiding it, he will tell her that she is being paranoid. He will insist that she must have put the phone somewhere and can't remember where because she has a terrible memory, or that she's lost it because she is always so careless with her possessions.

[14] Intimate partner violence can affect anyone, regardless of their gender or sexuality. But statistically, most victims are women, and most perpetrators are men; this is particularly true in cases of coercive control. Throughout this Bible study, we refer to victims of coercive control as female and perpetrators as male because this reflects the gender dynamic found in 1 Peter 3:1–7; nevertheless, we fully acknowledge the experiences of coercive control victims who do not identify as women or girls.

- **Isolation:** The perpetrator will try to isolate his victim from family, friends, and significant others. This is to ensure that the victim will lose access to her support networks and will have little opportunity to disclose her abuse and thus get the help and support she needs. Isolation is also used to reinforce a victim's sense of dependence on her controller.
  - E.g., a perpetrator might tell his victim that her family and friends don't like him, or that they are saying nasty things about her, or he will complain to her that she is "neglecting" him by spending too much time with others.
- **Microregulation and microsurveillance:** A perpetrator will keep his victim under tight control, by regulating her life (e.g., what she wears, who she sees, where she goes, how she spends her money) and surveilling her (e.g., constantly calling her throughout the day to check what she's doing; reading her emails, texts, and social media posts). Although the perpetrator may frame this as evidence of his love or his desire to keep his victim safe, in reality, these tactics are designed to erode the victim's sense of freedom and autonomy, tying her more tightly to the relationship and not allowing her space to breathe.
- **Economic control:** A perpetrator may control his partner's finances in an effort to further limit her freedom and entrap her in the relationship. The perpetrator may also control and restrict his partner's access to other resources, including food and transportation.
  - E.g., a perpetrator may prevent or prohibit his partner from having a job, making her rely on an "allowance" that he regulates. This allowance may be withheld if his victim does something "wrong," tries to resist his control, or displeases him in some other way.

Overall, the idea of submission lies at the heart of coercive control. A coercive controller's ultimate aim is to manipulate his victim into submitting to ***his*** will, ***his*** needs, and ***his*** desires at the expense of ***her own*** agency, freedom, needs, and desires. Through her submission, he can reassert ***his*** authority and ***her*** subordination in the relationship and convince her that this hierarchy of power is natural and desirable, even God-given.

Questions for the group

- How might 1 Peter 3:1–7 (and other texts like it) be used to support coercively controlling relationships?
- Is coercive control something that you are familiar with in your faith communities (explicitly or implicitly)?
- How might this biblical endorsement of wifely submission impact women's lives, including their family lives, relationships, and spiritual lives?

Notes for facilitator

Group members may raise the point that, for some women, submitting to their husband's authority is a choice that they willingly and gladly make as part of their Christian marriage. The goal of this discussion is not to critique the personal choices of women (or men) in how they manage their relationships. Nevertheless, the main issue here is that the biblical text of 1 Peter 3:1–7 (like some of the other Household Codes) does not appear to frame female submission and male headship as **choices** that couples freely make—rather, they are prescribed and presented as the **only** legitimate form of Christian marriage. This may remind us again of coercive control, which, at its heart, is rooted in male privilege and (coerced) female subordination.

The short article by Daphne Marsden (listed in "Further readings and resources") offers further insights into the dynamics of IPV and coercive control in Christian marriages, as well as the way that texts like 1 Peter 3:1–7 are (mis)used to pressure women to stay in abusive relationships. You may find it helpful to read this article prior to leading this session.

How can we support people in our communities who are in coercively controlling relationships?

There are several helpful online resources that offer advice about how to best help someone whom you suspect is in a coercively controlling or abusive relationship.

- The article by Lisa Aronsen Fuentes (listed in "Further readings and resources") offers practical ways to help counter some of the tactics of coercive control when speaking to victims.
- Shine NZ have created a "Safer Homes" booklet that offers practical advice and lists some useful contact details which could be helpful for people impacted by IPV. The booklet can be downloaded free here (link also included under "Further Readings and Resources"), and hard copies can be ordered from Shine. You may wish to make this booklet freely available to members of your community.
- Chapter 2 of this toolkit offers valuable advice on how to support victims and survivors of sexual harm.
- There are a range of community support services throughout Aotearoa New Zealand for victims of coercive control and IPV. It could be helpful to pass these onto someone you think is in an abusive

relationship. You can also find out about services in your own area, which you can share when the need arises.

- **Shine** is a free service that supports victims of IPV and coercive control. Shine provides some free posters and pamphlets that include contact details and advice. You may want to order some of these resources to put in communal areas of your church (e.g., on notice boards and in meeting rooms, kitchen areas, and toilets).
- **Tu Wahine Trust** offers kaupapa Māori counselling, therapy, and support for survivors of sexual harm and violence within whānau.
- **Shakti** is a non-profit organisation serving to support migrant and refugee women of Asian, African, and Middle Eastern origin, including those impacted by IPV and coercive control.
- **Women's Refuge** provides women with safe housing and community support services.
- **Pasefika Proud** addresses violence in Pacific families by using clear, consistent messaging around building strong families and preventing and addressing violence. This resource is designed, delivered, and led by Pacific peoples.
- The Family Violence Information Line (0800 456 450).

- It's important to remember that not everyone who experiences IPV and/or coercive control will feel able or willing to access support services. This is not only because they feel entrapped by their abusive partner; some victims also experience entrapment when the organisations and individuals who are meant to support them (e.g., police, social services, healthcare providers) dismiss or misinterpret their experiences due to colonial, racist, queerphobic, ableist, ageist, and/or classist attitudes and biases (Shine, "Safer Homes," p. 18).

Purity Culture

As well as outlining a particular relationship dynamic between the husband and the wife, 1 Peter 3:1–7 also has quite a lot to say about the appearance of Christian women in terms of their dress and manner.

Notes for facilitator

This section invites the group to think about how 1 Peter 3:1–7 reflects ideas of purity, particularly in relation to women. These ideas are found in Christian purity teachings, which have gained popularity in recent decades. These teachings reinforce harmful stereotypes and assumptions about women's and girls' sexual and social identity; they also serve to perpetuate myths and misperceptions about sexual harm.

The following questions encourage the group to consider what 1 Peter 3:1–7 says about women's appearance, and how this relates to their spiritual "purity." This is followed by some questions and discussion points about purity culture.

Questions for the group

- What are we told about the outward behaviour and appearance of the wife in the text? How are her behaviour and appearance being dictated here?

Notes for facilitator

It might be useful to draw out some of the following ideas from the text so that you can discuss these with the group.

- In verse 1, the wife is encouraged to win over (to Christ) her husband without words. On one level there is an implicit silencing of the woman here (which might link to the idea of submission in the same verse), but it also carries with it the suggestion that wives are responsible for the spiritual well-being of their husbands.
- In verse 2, the word "purity" is used to characterise a Christian woman's lifestyle.
- There is an implied control and critique of the wife's appearance in verse 3, where we learn that she is not supposed to have fancy hairstyles or wear gold jewellery or nice clothes.
- In verse 4, we learn that a wife's beauty is found in her gentleness and quietness of spirit (again reinforcing the idea of submission we have seen already).

- What is this text saying about the type of woman who is pleasing to God?

Notes for facilitator

It is worth stressing that, in this text, the moral and spiritual worth of a woman is strongly connected to her appearance and sexual purity.

What is Christian Purity Culture?

Notes for facilitator

You may want to start the discussion in this section by asking the group what they know and how they feel about purity culture. As ever, encourage participants to draw on their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and language to give meaning to the concept of purity, and to think about how this concept stands in relation to 1 Peter 3:1–7.

Christian purity teachings are centred on the belief that girls' and women's social and spiritual "value" is dependent on their virginity or chastity and their ability to remain sexually "pure." Premarital or extramarital sexual behaviour is strictly frowned upon because it is regarded as a source of women's impurity and shamefulness before God. While contemporary Christian purity teachings target both male and female audiences, the messaging is highly gendered. Young men are told that they have a naturally strong (hetero) sexual drive but are reassured that this is "God-given"—men are "hardwired" to want sex whenever they see a woman, and this is God's gift to them so that they can "be fruitful and multiply." Girls and women, meanwhile, are cautioned that female sexuality is inherently shameful—it is a source of sin and temptation for godly men. Girls and women are therefore warned not to be a "stumbling block" for their Christian brothers; they must hide or guard their sexuality until they are in a committed heterosexual marriage.

Christian purity teachings reinforce the same understandings of sexuality and gender that underpin the various myths and misperceptions about sexual harm (see Chapter 1, pp. 18–20). These teachings put the onus of responsibility onto women for "guarding" their chastity, and therefore perpetuate the myths that a rape victim is "damaged goods" as the result of her chastity or "purity" being compromised. A victim of sexual harm may also be told that she is likely to blame for her own assault because she must have "tempted" her attacker with her immodest dress or behaviour, causing him to act on his "natural" sexual urges. This perpetuates the rape myth that men "just can't help themselves" when it comes to matters of sex. It also justifies the policing and control of women's and girls' behaviour and appearance to protect their Christian brothers from sexual sin. This, once again, effectively shifts the culpability for rape from perpetrator to victim, while undermining women's agency in negotiating their consent.

Questions for the group

- Is purity culture something that is important in your faith community (explicitly or implicitly)?
- How might purity culture impact the lives of women and girls in your faith community?

Closing thoughts

In our various church roles, it's inevitable that we will talk to people about their own romantic relationships. This might be in the context of marriage preparation or during a youth group session (and many other contexts in between).

- How would you speak pastorally about relationships in light of what you have learned during this session?

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the Bible study into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include one or more of the following:

- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

Further readings and resources

Hannah Baylor. 2021. "Kissing Purity Culture Goodbye." https://www.shilohproject.blog/kissing-purity-culture-goodbye/

The Bloody Bible podcast. 2022. Episode 8, "See What You Made Me Do: Intimate Partner Violence and the Bible." https://www.bloodybiblepodcast.com/episodes/blog-post-title-four-ma4yw-a66t4-4bkf3

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Women's Aid. n.d. "What is Coercive Control?" https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/coercive-control/

CHAPTER 4

Group Theology Studies

Notes for Facilitators

This chapter contains three separate studies that focus on different aspects of Christian theology. Each study considers how the church's theological teachings can impact our efforts to accompany and support survivors of sexual harm. Regardless of how many of these studies you plan to lead in group sessions, we recommend that you begin the first session by asking the group to discuss the questions listed on this page. This will allow group members to share their knowledge of Christian theologies and to start thinking about the different ways that theology might play a role in the church's support and accompaniment of sexual harm survivors.

The discussion that follows these questions makes clear why studying theologies is an important step to take in our efforts to tackle sexual harm within our own faith communities. We encourage you to go through it with the group, inviting their comments and questions, and encouraging them to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language to make this topic meaningful.

Questions for the group

- What are some of the dominant doctrines and theologies that are commonly preached or spoken about in your own church?
- Choosing one of the theologies that have been mentioned, can you suggest why it may be relevant to the group's discussions about the church's role in accompanying survivors of sexual harm?
- Is sexual harm something that is preached about in your church? If so, what theologies were drawn on to address it? If not, why do you think sexual harm is not discussed so often in worship settings?

Notes for facilitator

Some examples you might want to share with the group to start the conversation could include theologies of grace, atonement, forgiveness, sacrifice, theodicy, the Trinity, etc. You might like to record the responses on a whiteboard or write them on sticky notes, which can be posted around the room.

The theology studies in this chapter

The three theological issues discussed in this chapter are atonement, forgiveness, and sacrifice. These were chosen because we believe they can have a significant impact on how sexual harm survivors are treated in faith communities.

Theologies of atonement, forgiveness, and sacrifice have and continue to be used by faith communities in ways that cause additional trauma to survivors of sexual harm.

- All three of these theologies have served to silence survivors' voices and to minimise or excuse perpetrators' abusive behaviour.
- Theologies of atonement and sacrifice have been used to encourage victims and survivors to understand their victimisation as a sacred or atoning event (a holy act of self-sacrifice) that they should suffer in silence.
- Theologies of forgiveness have operated to pressure victims of sexual harm into "forgiving" their abusers. This only serves to deny victims full agency over their emotional lives, their ability to process their trauma, and their access to justice.

It is clear that, in a number of ways, theologies of atonement, sacrifice, and forgiveness have the potential to cause additional trauma to survivors of sexual harm. They have been used to promote unhelpful and harmful responses towards sexual harm survivors within our faith communities. The way we speak or preach about these theological issues therefore has real-life consequences for people who experience sexual harm.

The flip side of this, of course, is that theologies of atonement, forgiveness, and sacrifice can also provide opportunities to discuss sexual harm, which remains such a taboo topic within many Christian communities. When considered through a trauma-led and victim-centred lens, these theologies can empower faith communities to start conversations and develop new practices that promote the support and care offered to sexual harm survivors. In this way, theology becomes a means by which social justice is fostered and enacted.

Part of the role of Christian leaders and members of faith communities is to deepen our understanding of the theologies that surround us and to respond to these theologies in ways that minimise their damaging potential and maximise their therapeutic and justice-driven possibilities.

Theologies of Atonement

George Zachariah

Notes for facilitator

- This session offers participants the opportunity to think more deeply about the ways that Christian theological teachings about Christ's suffering may (unwittingly) perpetuate understandings of ***human*** suffering that cause further trauma to victims of sexual harm.
- This study focuses on one particular theology of atonement, which understands the significance of Christ's suffering and death as the means by which God reconciled with a sinful humanity. Participants may consider this theology to be a central aspect of their faith. Care therefore needs to be taken to facilitate the discussion so that a diversity of views can be offered and discussed in an inclusive and sensitive way. Make sure that professional support is available if needed.
- Some of the issues raised in this session overlap with material covered in the "Sacrifice" session included in this chapter (pp. 73–77). Facilitators may wish to cover both topics in two separate sessions, or they may instead prefer to focus on one of these topics, depending on the needs and interests of the group.
- We recommend that facilitators start the session with a content warning about the challenges of discussing sexual harm. E.g., "In this session, we will be discussing sexual harm and intimate partner violence. I acknowledge that these can be distressing topics to talk about." Remind participants that the group is a space where members treat each other's voices with respect and care; furthermore, discussions taking place in the group must be kept confidential ("what we say in the group stays in the group"). The facilitator can also reassure group members that they can leave any time during the session if they are feeling uncomfortable (ideally, it would be useful to organise for another facilitator to check in with the person who has left, either during the session or afterwards).
- The notes for this session include information and questions that the facilitator can present to the group, as well as additional notes and suggestions that the facilitator may want to draw on when leading the discussion and responding to participants. Facilitators can also include additional questions and discussion points that they feel will be particularly meaningful in light of group members' contexts, cultures, traditions, and language. Throughout the session, participants should also be encouraged to raise questions of their own.
- Some parts of the discussion refer to other chapters in this toolkit. We recommend the facilitator familiarise themselves with this material beforehand.
- The length of the session will vary, depending on the level of discussion and the number of participants, but will likely be between one and two hours. Depending on the group size and the time available, the material could be covered in a single session or over two separate hour-long sessions.
- The "Further readings and resources" section lists sources cited in this study as well as some additional readings that may be of interest. Facilitators are ***not*** expected to read all these resources prior to the workshop session.

Group Theology Study

Beginning the session

This session focuses on Christian understandings of Christ's suffering and death. In particular, it explores the belief that Christ's suffering serves to atone for our sins—it has meaning and value, it is redemptive and lifesaving.

Notes for facilitator

The theological teachings that will be discussed in this session may or may not be familiar to the group participants. It might be useful to begin the session by asking the group what they know about theologies of atonement and theological understandings of Christ's suffering. Encourage participants to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language to discuss this issue in a way that is meaningful to them.

If you think it will be helpful, responses can be written on a whiteboard, or on sticky notes that participants can place somewhere in the room.

The session will encourage the group to think about Christ's suffering ***and*** about human suffering. In particular, it explores how the sacred significance of Christ's suffering might be misused, or abused, to downplay or deny the very real suffering of people impacted by sexual harm. Unfortunately, we see this misuse of atonement theology taking place in our churches and communities—it can seriously damage the pastoral care we offer to victims of sexual harm, which in turn will have a negative impact on their journey towards healing.

Notes for facilitator

It will be important at the outset to ground the topic of Jesus' suffering within the context of sexual harm. Before moving onto the next section, you may want to ask the group how they think these two issues might be connected.

Theological understandings of Christ's suffering

Notes for facilitator

This section offers an outline of one particular theology of atonement that is dominant within Christian tradition. How much time is spent on this will depend on participants' familiarity with this theology. The questions raised by participants at the start of the session will help you gauge participants' knowledge so that the section can be tailored to suit everyone's needs. The main thing is to ensure that everyone has a basic understanding of what this theology of atonement entails before moving onto the next section.

Christian theologies of atonement are central to the Christian faith, and Sunday after Sunday we celebrate the memory of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. These theologies of atonement understand Christ's suffering and death as redemptive. His silence and passivity during his trial, torture, and crucifixion are regarded as essential to his role as saviour of the world.

Notes for facilitator

It might be helpful to ask participants if they know of any New Testament texts that speak about Jesus' suffering as a source of atonement. The two biblical texts below can be shared with the group in a handout, on a PowerPoint slide, or read out by the facilitator and/or participants.

This understanding of Christ's suffering as redemptive is not expressed explicitly in the four Gospels but can be seen in some of the New Testament epistles. For example:

> When [Christ] was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2:22–25)
>
> … though [Christ] was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found

> in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6–11)

The early church also connected Jesus to the "suffering servant" mentioned in the Old Testament book of Isaiah: "But he was wounded for our transgression, crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruise we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Whether or not Isaiah's prophecy about the servant was referencing Jesus (and that is a much-debated topic), it is clear that Jesus' suffering was understood as being redemptive from very early on in the history of Christian thought. To learn more about the various theological developments in atonement theology, see the article by George Zachariah listed under "Further readings and resources."

Notes for facilitator

Over the centuries, theologians have understood atonement theology in different ways. If you think the group would be interested in learning more about this, you can share this summary with them—it highlights some ways that theologians have interpreted the "logic" of atonement theology through three main models:

1. The Christus Victor model: this was the first model of atonement to gain popularity in the early church. Jesus' death is understood as the ransom required to pay for humanity's redemption and free them from their bondage to Satan.
2. The satisfaction model: This model was developed by the eleventh-century theologian Anselm of Canterbury. According to Anselm, God required proper payment (or "satisfaction") in order to forgive human sin and reconcile with humanity. But such was the extent of human sinfulness, God had to send his own son to make this payment through his death. This model valorises Christ's sacrifice (and human sacrifice more broadly) as an act of responsibility and selfless love.
3. The moral influence model: This model was developed by eleventh-century philosopher and theologian Peter Abelard, who suggested that Jesus' death was the manifestation of God's love for humanity, and hence his death leads people to conversion to the faith.

(Summary taken from George Zachariah's article listed under "Further readings and resources.")

Christ's own suffering, sacrifice, and selfless love have become foundational to Christian faith and Christian living. They serve as a model or template for Christians to imitate. The image of the crucified Christ is often an invitation to Christians to imitate Christ by walking in the way of the cross. In other words, just as Christ himself suffered selflessly and silently, Christians are often encouraged to be "Christ-like" by bearing their ***own*** suffering in passivity and silence. Suffering is reframed as a sign of a person's selfless love for others and their commitment to their faith. This is expressed by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossians:

> I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. (Colossians 1:24)

For some theologians, Paul's call to participate in the suffering of Christ makes suffering a virtue and a sacred duty. In this particular Christian understanding of Christ's passion and death, suffering that we undergo in our lives is intended by God; we are expected to endure this suffering as Christ did (passively and silently) and to sacrifice ourselves through selfless love for the glory of God. Any attempt to question and abstain from suffering, or to speak out against our suffering, is often considered negatively as an expression of self-love or the "desire of the flesh."

Questions for the group

- Have you encountered this particular understanding of the theology of atonement in your own faith communities?
- Are there occasions when you have heard this theology being used in response to a person's suffering and/or misfortune? Do you think it is a helpful or appropriate way to respond to people who are going through difficult times?

Notes for facilitator

This theology of suffering is often couched in everyday idioms, such as "we all have our crosses to bear," or "her loss is a heavy cross to bear." Mentioning these might encourage participants to think of some examples of their own.

- Atonement theology frames a public act of horrific violence (Jesus' torture and crucifixion) as something that is sacred and healing, something that saves lives and souls, and something that is a significant part of Jesus' intimate relationship with God (Brock and Parker 2001). What do you think about this understanding of violence as sacred and healing? Do you think this understanding of atonement theology could ever be misused to justify (or even celebrate) certain forms of violence within our own communities and contexts?

How does this understanding of atonement theology impact victims of sexual harm?

For some theologians, this particular understanding of atonement theology can be (mis)used to claim that the suffering experienced by survivors of sexual harm is redemptive. Such a use of atonement theology compels victims to accept their abuse passively (just as Christ endured the violence done to him) and to avoid seeking help. According to Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker,

> Christianity has been a primary—in many women's lives the primary—force in shaping our acceptance of abuse. The central image of Christ on the cross as the savior of the world communicates the message that suffering is redemptive … Those whose lives have been deeply shaped by the Christian tradition feel that self-sacrifice and obedience are not only virtues but the definition of a faithful identity. (Brown and Parker 1998, p. 37)

Notes for facilitator

After sharing the above quote with the group, invite participants to discuss their initial thoughts about it. Encourage them to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language to talk about the quote in ways that are meaningful to them.

After this initial discussion, share the two quotes below, which are the words of survivors of sexual harm and intimate partner violencer (IPV). Both women recount the advice given to them by their church leader when they disclosed the regular (sometimes daily) abuse they were experiencing. You can either read these out to the group or invite two participants to read them out if they are willing. You may want to put the quotes in a handout for the group or have them on a PowerPoint slide. Ask the group to listen carefully to these words and think about how Christian teachings about Christ's suffering are being drawn on here by the Christian leaders who have pastoral oversight of these women.

Survivors' testimonies

> I went to my pastor twenty years ago. I've been trying to follow his advice. The priest said, I should rejoice in my suffering because they bring me closer to Jesus. He said, 'Jesus suffered because he loved us.' He said, 'If you love Jesus, accept the beatings and bear them gladly, as Jesus bore the cross.' I've tried, but I'm not sure anymore. My husband is turning on the kids now. Tell me, is what the priest told me true? (Quoted in Brock and Parker 2001, p. 21)

> Go back to him … Learn how to adjust to his moods … don't do anything that would provoke his anger … Christ suffered and died for you on the Cross … Can't you bear some suffering too? (Quoted in Gnanadason 1993, p. 1)

Questions for the group

- What are your initial responses to these two quotes? Have you heard these (or similar) responses to disclosures of sexual harm or IPV before, either in church contexts or the wider community?
- How do the two church leaders quoted here understand the significance of Christ's suffering for Christians? Do you think they are drawing on a particular understanding of atonement theology here?

Notes for facilitator

These testimonies reveal the way that the redemptive nature of Christ's suffering is often extended in Christian theology to encompass all human suffering, as mentioned earlier.

- How do these pastoral responses frame the relationship between husband and wife in a Christian marriage? What are they implying about a wife's status in relationship to her husband?

Notes for facilitator

The pastoral responses are underpinned by the assumption of a hierarchical relationship between husband and wife, with the wife submitting to and obeying her husband's will without complaint, even when he is hurting or sexually harming her. This comes out particularly clearly in the second quote. According to Gnandason (the source of the second quote), the victim "went to the church for refuge and for moral and spiritual support. What she received instead was advice to learn submissiveness and obedience in a distorted relationship and abusive marriage." Further discussion of gender hierarchies in marriage can be found in the Bible study on the Household Codes in this toolkit (pp. 52–58).

- What impact do you think the church leaders' counsel will have on the women they are talking to? How might the responses of these church leaders influence the women's subsequent behaviour (in terms of how they deal with their abuse)?

Notes for facilitator

People may disclose sexual harm or IPV to a Christian leader or church member in an attempt to seek refuge from the abuse, or to get support (emotional, spiritual, and/or practical). First responses to disclosures of sexual harm and IPV can have a significant impact on the victims' future help-seeking behaviour, including their willingness to make further disclosures and to reach out to support services (see Chapter 2 of this toolkit for further details). Inappropriate responses (such as those quoted above) can deter victims from seeking help or disclosing the abuse to anyone else. Victims may also blame themselves for the abuse, or they may see it as something inevitable that they must "put up with"—it becomes their own "cross to bear." This can have a negative impact on victims' mental health, as they become increasingly convinced that they cannot escape their abusive relationship but must instead endure it in silence.

- In some understandings of atonement theology, Jesus' passivity and silence during his passion and crucifixion are viewed as a model for redemptive suffering. In other words, silence and passivity are held up as the "ideal" response to violence and abuse. How do you think this model might impact victims of sexual harm?

Notes for facilitator

Some theologians argue that idealising Jesus' silence in the face of his abuse is deeply problematic, as it sends a powerful message to victims today: if Jesus kept silent, then they should also keep silent. But this may only discourage victims from disclosing their own abuse and from seeking support. It also allows perpetrators to continue their abuse unchallenged. Overall, Jesus' silence may be a harmful model for victims and survivors of sexual harm.

Reframing theologies of atonement in our faith communities

Some theologians have started thinking about how to understand Christ's suffering and death in new, more healing ways.

Notes for facilitator

This section includes some recent theological reflections on atonement, which you can discuss with the group. If you are familiar with other responses that would be appropriate for this session, you are welcome to discuss these too.

For some theologians, Jesus' suffering and death signal the tragic and violent end to the ministry of hope and liberation that he offered to victims of oppression, marginalisation, and violence. Jesus' suffering is significant in that it symbolises his efforts to ***resist*** violence, not to acquiesce to it. And this resistance to violence is the real path towards redemption. According to theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther, Jesus' vocation was not "to suffer and die." Rather, "redemption happens through resistance to the sway of evil, and in the experiences of conversion and healing by which communities of well-being are created" (Ruether 1998, pp. 104–105).

Similarly, Carter Heyward suggests that "we need to say no to a tradition of violent punishment and to a God who would crucify … an innocent brother in our place—rather than hang with us, struggle with us, and grieve with us … Jesus' mission was not to die but to live" (Carter 1999, p. 175). In other words, the Christ event does ***not*** invite victims of sexual harm to suffer willingly for anyone's sake. Rather, the Christ event challenges us to work ***with*** victims to resist all forms of injustice, including the injustice of sexual harm. Our task is not to glorify and worship the cross but to strive together to abolish all unjust crosses and to bring down all crucified people from those crosses.

Bringing an end to sexual harm and IPV within our faith communities requires us to be courageous and creative by engaging with Christian texts and traditions in ways that are centred on survivors and informed by their trauma. How do we do this? The following questions will help start our conversation and creative thinking about this important issue.

Notes for facilitator

The questions below are intended to encourage creative thought about practical and theological responses to victims and survivors of sexual harm within church communities. Depending on the participants, this part of the session could take different approaches. E.g., participants could split into smaller groups, each assigned the task of creating one practice/process/event/resource that their churches could institute to be a more healing and welcoming space for victims and survivors.

Whatever form this discussion takes, encourage participants to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language to think about these questions in ways that are meaningful to them.

Questions for the group

- Survivors of sexual harm may come to their church in search of solace, comfort, courage, and empowerment. How do we ensure that they find what they are looking for? How can we stand in solidarity with victims, walking with them on their journey towards survival and healing?
- How do we theologically and pastorally engage with people who have been abused within the intimate Christian institution of family? Can our theology and pastoral care provide them with healing and wholeness?
- How can we make our faith community a space where survivors of sexual harm are not compelled to remain silent about their trauma and abuse? How do we as a church help to break the silence surrounding sexual harm?
- How can we practice remembrance of the many victims of sexual harm within our own communities and wider society? Can the church play an active role in awareness-raising of the current crisis of sexual harm, both in Aotearoa New Zealand and further afield?

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the session into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include one or more of the following:

- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging about this session.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

Further readings and resources

Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker. 1998. "For God So Loved the World?" in *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Source Book*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie M. Fortune, pp. 36–59. Continuum.

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker. 2001. *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us*. Beacon Press.

Aruna Gnanadason. 1993. *No Longer a Secret: The Church and Violence against Women*, WCC Publications.

Carter Heyward. 1999. *Saving Jesus from Those Who Are Right: Rethinking What It Means to Be Christian*. Fortress Press.

Helen Paynter. 2020. *The Bible Doesn't Tell Me So: Why You Don't Have to Submit to Domestic Abuse and Coercive Control*. BRF.

Rosemary Radford Reuther. 1998. *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*. Sheffield Academic Press.

George Zachariah. 2022. "Legitimising Sexual Violence: Contesting Toxic Theologies that Valorise Suffering as Redemptive." The Shiloh Project, 9 April 2022. https://www.shilohproject.blog/legitimising-sexual-violence-contesting-toxic-theologies-that-valorise-suffering-as-redemptive/

Forgiveness

Rocio Figueroa

Notes for facilitator

- Christian teaching and preaching on forgiveness needs particular sensitivity and care in the context of sexual harm. This group session offers some suggestions for thinking more deeply about what forgiveness involves and the place it might have in a Christian response to abuse.
- The topic of forgiveness is a very delicate one. In many Christian contexts, forgiveness has been used as a means of silencing victims of sexual harm and depriving them of full access to justice. The topic can trigger feelings of shame, guilt, and anger. It is necessary to communicate to the participants that the session will be about "deconstructing" misconceptions and harmful ideas about forgiveness and moving towards a vision of forgiveness that embraces the dimension of justice and vindication.
- As with other resources in the toolkit, the issues are sensitive and can be confronting, so take time to gauge whether the group feels ready to have this discussion, and make sure that professional support will be available if needed. Aim to facilitate the discussion so that a diversity of views can be offered and discussed in an inclusive and sensitive way.
- The chapter includes information and questions that the facilitator can present to the group, as well as additional notes and suggestions that the facilitator may want to draw on when leading the discussion and responding to participants. Facilitators can also include additional questions and discussion points that they feel will be particularly meaningful in light of group members' contexts, cultures, traditions, and language. Throughout the session, participants should also be encouraged to raise questions of their own.
- Some parts of the discussion in this chapter refer to other chapters in the toolkit. We encourage the facilitator to familiarise themselves with the full toolkit before running this session.
- It can be valuable to start the session with a content warning about the challenges of discussing sexual harm. E.g. "In this session, we will be discussing sexual harm and abuse. I acknowledge that this can be a distressing topic to talk about." Reassure participants that the group is a space where members treat each other's voices with respect and care, and remind them that discussions taking place in the group must be kept confidential ("what we say in the group stays in the group"). The facilitator can also remind group members that they can leave any time during the meeting if they are feeling uncomfortable (ideally, it would be useful to organise for another facilitator to check in with the person who has left, either during the meeting or afterwards).
- The length of the session will vary, depending on the level of discussion and the number of participants, but will likely be between one and two hours. Depending on the group size and the time available, the material could be covered in a single session or over two separate hour-long sessions.
- The "Further readings and resources" section lists sources cited in this study as well as some additional readings that may be of interest. Facilitators are ***not*** expected to read all these resources prior to the workshop session.

Beginning the session

This session explores understandings of forgiveness and encourages participants to think about what forgiveness involves and how it might play a role in Christian responses to sexual harm. Growing up, many of us were taught that forgiveness is always a good thing and that Christians are called to offer unconditional forgiveness to anyone who does them wrong.

Notes for facilitator

The theological teachings that will be discussed in this session may or may not be familiar to the group participants. The question below encourages the group to discuss what they know about Christian understandings of forgiveness—what teachings are they familiar with? Encourage participants to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language to discuss forgiveness in a way that is meaningful to them.

Question for the group

- What are the lessons you've learned about forgiveness, within your family, your faith community, and among your peers?

Notes for facilitator

It might be helpful to write down people's understandings of forgiveness, either on a whiteboard or on sticky notes that can be placed on a table or wall in the room.

This session explores how messages of unconditional forgiveness can be harmful in situations where we encounter survivors of sexual harm. The goals of the session are to consider the serious impact of sexual harm and (with this in mind) to reach a deeper understanding of what is involved in Christian forgiveness.

Questions for the group

- First of all, what do you think are some of the common emotional responses to sexual harm that victims and survivors will often experience?

Notes for facilitator

Sexual harm can have a very serious impact on victims and survivors, causing them to experience shock, sadness, a sense of betrayal, anxiety, shame, disgust, hurt, resentment, despair, and most commonly anger.

Responding to these different emotions can be a challenge for churches, and Christians often find victims' anger especially difficult. Anger is seen as incompatible with the commandment to love one's neighbour and even to love one's enemies. Instead of taking victims' anger as a call for deeper engagement with them, many Christians try to make the anger disappear by telling victims to "turn the other cheek," forgive their abuser, and "move on" with their lives.[15]

- Can you think of reasons why this type of response may be damaging for victims of sexual harm?

Notes for facilitator

A call for forgiveness might seem like an appropriate Christian alternative to anger but encouraging victims to "turn the other cheek" can be a new form of injustice. Simplistic calls for forgiveness do nothing to address the underlying issues of sexual harm, and can leave victims vulnerable to further exploitation. To ignore or condemn the anger of the victims is an insult to victims; it betrays a lack of understanding of the psychological dimension of their wounds, and it is also morally wrong.[16]

- How do we respond to victims' anger in light of our Christian understanding of forgiveness?

[15] Another common response is to tell victims to "suffer in silence"; the sessions on "Theologies of Atonement" and "Sacrifice" (both included in this chapter) cover this issue in depth.

[16] St. Thomas Aquinas is very clear about how anger contributes to our growth (Summa Theologica vol. 1-2, question 24, articles 1-2; https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2024.htm). According to Aquinas, if someone harms us and we love ourselves it is rare if we do not have anger (Summa Theologica vol. 1-2, question 48, article 1; https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2024.htm).

Notes for facilitator

Any response to victims of sexual harm should be centred on recognising their need for self-respect and self-dignity—we must attempt to nurture that need and to acknowledge each victim's right to resent injustice, resist their abuse, and feel anger about their mistreatment. The term "vindication" may be helpful to use in this discussion: when people are upset or feel wronged, they often seek vindication. Vindication involves claiming for yourself something to which you feel entitled; it can relate to a victim's legitimate desire to set things right and ensure the offender faces justice for what they have done.[17]

Another theological term that some participants may find helpful to think about here is "charity": this refers to a universal love that we are called to have towards any human being because of our shared humanity. Charity does not seek to destroy offenders but to correct and rehabilitate them.[18]

Take time to discuss these issues with the group, inviting participants to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and language to find meaning in this topic. You might also want to ask participants to share alternative terms to "vindication" and "charity" which they find particularly meaningful to use in this context.

To conclude this part of the discussion, it is useful to remind ourselves that anger is sometimes necessary and healthy. It helps to protect victims of sexual harm by reinforcing their own belief that they are worthy of justice, vindication, and respect. Simplistic calls to "forgive and forget" or to "move on" fail to do this. Passages in the Bible are often cherry-picked and quoted as endorsements for this sentiment (e.g. Matthew 5:39, when Jesus teaches his followers to "turn the other cheek"). It is therefore necessary to look in more detail at what forgiveness should look like in the context of abuse.

[17] Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, vol. 1-2, question.46, article 2; https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2046.htm

[18] St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between anger moved by charity and anger driven by malice and hatred which seeks the eradication of its object (Summa Theologica, vol. 1-2, question 46, article 6; https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2046.htm).

What is forgiveness?

Notes for facilitator

To start this part of the session, ask participants how they would define forgiveness, given the discussion so far. Again, participants' responses can be written on a whiteboard or sticky notes.

Forgiveness means different things to different people. Different understandings of forgiveness might be more helpful or less helpful in particular situations. Some understandings of forgiveness might combine with each other, whereas some might sit in tension with other understandings. In any discussion of forgiveness, it is important to ask which understanding of forgiveness is being assumed, especially when discussing responses to sexual harm. Let's look at three common understandings of forgiveness.

Notes for facilitator

As you go through the following three definitions of forgiveness, it will be helpful to connect these—where possible—to the definitions offered by the group.

1. Releasing the offender from consequences

Forgiveness is often understood to involve releasing an offender from retribution for what they have done. In cases of very minor matters and/or unintentional offences which do not have serious or long-term consequences, this approach to forgiveness may be appropriate. However, in cases of sexual harm, it is very unlikely that this will be an adequate response. It does not address the victim's right to vindication or reparation. Any understanding of forgiveness that only addresses the wrongdoer's release from retribution is therefore insufficient when thinking about sexual harm. The inadequacy of this understanding of forgiveness is even more glaring if the victim is ***pressured*** into offering this form of forgiveness against their own wishes, as is often the case. This pressure only diminishes victims' sense of agency and self-worth, both of which have already been seriously undermined by the perpetrator. Victims should never feel compelled to offer forgiveness to their abuser if they do not feel ready to do so. Moreover, the issue of whether or not a victim should forgive their abuser cannot be allowed to derail efforts to bring perpetrators of sexual harm to justice.

2. Letting go of negative feelings

Forgiveness may also be understood as primarily about changes to the victim's negative feelings toward their

offender. This approach to forgiveness focuses on the victim giving up—or letting go of—bitterness, hostility, or negative feelings. If a victim feels able and willing to let go of these feelings, it can be an important step in healing. However, churches need to recognise that victims should not be pressured or coerced to follow this path. Extreme care needs to be taken to avoid adding an extra demand to the burdens already carried by victims. Survivors of severe trauma may not have control over their feelings toward their offenders, or even full control over the feelings they have towards themselves. In most cases, churches should not be telling victims what to do; they should be listening to how victims feel. Embracing forgiveness as the transformation of the victim's feelings can be positive, but it should not detract from the severity of the offence or the harm it has caused.

3. Renouncing personal vengeance or resentment

Forgiveness can be understood as involving the victim's decision to renounce any desire for personal revenge or to end their sense of resentment. This is similar in some ways to the first approach, but calls for a distinction between personal vengeance and retributive justice. It sets aside any wish for personal revenge but preserves a component of righteous anger and a proportionate response based on accountability and due process of law. For serious offences, this approach has significant benefits over the first approach. It allows a victim to separate any forgiveness they might offer at a personal level from the expectation that an offender should still face prosecution as a judicial process. In this way, a survivor can give up their sense of personal resentment whilst expecting the appropriate authorities to take action to uphold their dignity.

Guilt and Forgiveness

Notes for facilitator

This short section addresses the common issue of survivors feeling guilt about their abuse and their own need for "forgiveness." It might be helpful to ask the group why they think these feelings of guilt might arise. Going through some of the common myths and misperceptions about sexual harm (listed in Chapter 1, pp. 18–20) might help participants understand survivors' sense of guilt and shame.

It is common for survivors to feel guilty about the harm committed against them. It is therefore very important to emphasise their innocence; sexual harm is a crime for which victims bear no responsibility. They have not committed any "sin," it is never their fault.

If a survivor feels unable to forgive the perpetrator, they also need to understand that this is not a "sin" either, but rather a normal process of grief and healing.

Reframing the gift of forgiveness: Some helpful ways to think about forgiveness in Christian contexts

Notes for facilitator

This section outlines some useful points about forgiveness to talk through with the group. It will be helpful to pause for questions and discussion between each point. This will then lead to the next section, which suggests a model for understanding forgiveness as an emotional, relational, and spiritual process.

A Christian approach to forgiveness should be ready to offer support to sexual harm survivors who wish to let go of negative internal feelings (such as resentment, hostility, bitterness, desire for revenge, fear of possible future harm, and depression) but it does not demand this from them. Nor does it blame or judge a survivor who is unable to take these difficult steps. It will be valuable to think about forgiveness in ways that can help us support victims and survivors of sexual harm and accompany them on their journey towards healing.

- **Forgiveness is a supererogatory act.** This concept is defined as an act that is morally good but not morally obligatory. By virtue of its supererogatory nature, forgiveness is not something that we can morally foresee, expect, or require. We can help a survivor to forgive if they tell us that they ***want*** to forgive.
- **To forgive is an act of grace.** Forgiveness offers the offender a gift they do not deserve. However, forgiveness is not about excusing or denying serious wrong-doing. A more appropriate approach to forgiveness is to acknowledge the harm and the injustice of the offence and avoid the tendency to minimise the consequences. This approach centres the survivor's feelings—including feelings of anger they might have—and does not pressure the survivor to offer forgiveness. Survivors report that when they are told that they must forgive they feel upset and re-victimised. If a survivor is not ready to forgive, insisting on forgiveness is theologically and morally wrong and increases their suffering. Genuine forgiveness is voluntary. Just as forgiveness should not be motivated by pressure from a third party, it should likewise never be demanded by the offender. Neither individual offenders nor institutions have the right to demand forgiveness. It is the prerogative of the survivor to decide at what point of their journey they want to consider forgiveness and what forgiveness might mean for them.

- **Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation.** A survivor may decide to forgive but this does not necessarily mean they need to remain in relationship with the offender. Forgiveness happens within the person while reconciliation happens in a relationship. Forgiveness is a gift one gives to someone who has harmed you but reconciliation is the restoration of wounded trust and is mutually earned through trust-giving behaviour. Forgiveness and reconciliation are separate processes. In many cases of sexual harm, it may be appropriate to forgive but not to reconcile.
- **Forgiveness is a process rather than an event.** While a Christian approach to forgiveness should not insist that the survivor forgive or insinuate it as a duty, when the survivor themselves wants to forgive, or asks for help to forgive, those who are spiritual counsellors, confessors, or friends should understand that forgiveness is not a one-off occurrence but an ongoing process throughout which survivors may need support. Since forgiveness includes many elements, psychological therapy is often very valuable, as is spiritual accompaniment if the person wants it.

Group activity: Forgiveness from a Christian perspective

Notes for facilitator

This section lists some of the potential components involved in the forgiveness process, as outlined by psychologist Jean Monbourquette. Share these with the group (on a PowerPoint slide or in a handout) and ask them to take a few moments to read them through. Then, invite each participant to choose one of these components and explain why they have chosen it. They can choose one that feels the most meaningful, or that resonates with something in their own cultural and/or faith contexts, or that they think would be particularly challenging. Encourage them to discuss their choice in language that is meaningful to them.

Psychologist Jean Monbourquette identifies a number of components involved in the process of forgiveness and some of these are listed below. These components are not meant to be consecutive—a person can follow them according to their own preferences.

1. **Renounce revenge.** Decide you want to forgive. This is an important step: we may feel inclined to imitate our offender's abusive behaviour as a defensive mechanism (i.e., to "get back" at them). By not entering such a dynamic of aggression, we can distance ourselves from the offender.
2. **Recognise your wound and in some cases accept your inability to forgive.** Sometimes, our wounds are so great that we are unable to offer forgiveness. That's okay—forgiveness cannot be reduced to a simple or easily achieved action.
3. **Share your wound with someone you trust, a wise person.** An important step towards forgiveness is to be able to verbalise what happened, both for its cathartic function and for the benefit of better understanding ourselves and sharing the burden with someone we trust.
4. **Identify your loss and mourn it.** An important step towards forgiveness is to recognise all we have lost because of the offense, such as friendships, trust, self-esteem, or self-dignity. When we recognise the nature of our hurt and what we have lost, we may be able to start healing.
5. **Forgive yourself or recognise your innocence.** In instances where someone has offended you and you also bore some responsibility, it is important to forgive yourself. In cases of sexual harm, however, victims often blame themselves, but sexual harm is never the victim's fault. Victims and survivors need to recognise their innocence; they bear no responsibility and therefore do not need to be forgiven.
6. **Understand the offender** (empathise with compassion), which is different from simply justifying the offender's actions. Empathising with compassion means understanding the traumas that cause some people to traumatise others and the capacity for some people to do terrible things to others.
7. **Make sense of the offense.** Any offense hurts, but sometimes it is possible to use our hurt as a way to grow. For example, we might learn to be more empathetic towards other people who are suffering, or begin working with victims who have suffered the same offence as us. This process can take a long time, and some survivors of sexual harm may (understandably) never reach a place where they identify their trauma as a source of personal growth.
8. **Understand that sometimes it is necessary to have patience** if your heart and mind are not yet capable of forgiving.
9. **Decide whether to end the relationship with the offender or to renew it** (when a prior relationship exists).
10. **Celebrate forgiveness.** Thank God when we feel we have made a little progres

Notes for facilitator

Sometimes a perpetrator of sexual harm may ask to be forgiven. In such cases, repentance is required of the perpetrator. Repentance includes:

- Confession—involving the perpetrator acknowledging the harm caused, which may include an unconditional apology to the victim.
- Contrition and a commitment to amend their life—involving the perpetrator taking full responsibility for the harm and being willing to bear any consequences, which may include reporting the abuse to the civil authorities or disciplinary action within the church.
- Reparation—involving the perpetrator offering to make amends for the harm, where this is appropriate.

Where these requirements are satisfied, a clergy person may pronounce God's forgiveness.

Where a perpetrator is forgiven by God or their victim, **this does not mean that:**

- The victim should be expected to minimise the abuse or excuse the perpetrator or forget about their abuse.
- The church should appoint or re-appoint the perpetrator to a ministry role or a position of power and trust.
- The perpetrator should avoid punishment for their actions.
- The victim and perpetrator should be reconciled.

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the session into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include one or more of the following:

- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

Further readings and resources

Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologica, volumes I–2. https://www.newadvent.org/summa/2.htm

Simone Grigoletto. 2019. "The Fragility of Forgiveness. Supererogatory Goals for a Restorative Approach to Conflict Management." *Verifiche* Anno XLVIII, N. 2, July–August.

Jean Monbourquette. 1995. *Perdonar*. Sal Terrae. (Also published as *How to Forgive: A Step-by-Step Guid*e, Franciscan Media, 2000).

Stephen Pope and Janine Geske. 2019. "Anger, Forgiveness and Restorative Justice in Light of Clerical Sexual Abuse and Its Cover-up." *Theological Studies* 80 (3): 611-31.

Everett, L. Worthington. 2005. *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy*. IVP Academic.

Sacrifice

Rocio Figueroa

Notes for facilitator

- This chapter offers some suggestions for thinking more deeply about the meaning of sacrifice in a Christian context and its significance in shaping Christian responses to sexual harm.
- As with other chapters in the toolkit, the issues to be discussed are sensitive and can be confronting, so take time to gauge whether or not the group feels ready to have this discussion, and make sure that professional support will be available if needed. Aim to facilitate the discussion so that a diversity of views can be offered and discussed in an inclusive and sensitive way.
- Some of the issues raised in this session overlap with material covered in the "Theologies of Atonement" session included in this chapter (pp. 61–66). Facilitators may wish to cover both topics in two separate sessions, or they may instead prefer to focus on one of these topics, depending on the needs and interests of the group.
- We recommend that facilitators start the session with a content warning about the challenges of discussing sexual harm. E.g., "In this session, we will be discussing sexual harm. I acknowledge that this can be a distressing topic to talk about." Remind participants that the group is a space where members treat each other's voices with respect and care; furthermore, discussions taking place in the group must be kept confidential ("what we say in the group stays in the group"). The facilitator can also reassure group members that they can leave any time during the session if they are feeling uncomfortable (ideally, it would be useful to organise for another facilitator to check in with the person who has left, either during the session or afterwards).
- The chapter includes information and questions that the facilitator can present to the group, as well as additional notes and suggestions that the facilitator may want to draw on when leading the discussion and responding to participants. Facilitators can also include additional questions and discussion points that they feel will be particularly meaningful in light of group members' contexts, cultures, traditions, and language. Throughout the session, participants should also be encouraged to raise questions of their own.
- Some parts of the discussion in this chapter make reference to other chapters in the toolkit. Facilitators should familiarise themselves with the full toolkit before running this session.
- The length of the session will vary, depending on the level of discussion and the number of participants, but will likely be between one and two hours. Depending on the group size and the time available, the material could be covered in a single session or over two separate hour-long sessions.
- The "Further readings and resources" section lists sources cited in this study as well as some additional readings that may be of interest. Facilitators are ***not*** expected to read all these resources prior to the workshop session.

Group activity: Silent negotiation exercise

Notes for facilitator

This exercise encourages participants to think about the different meanings of sacrifice in everyday contexts, and to evaluate examples of sacrifice in terms of them being "good" (i.e., understandable, commendable) or "bad" (i.e., ill-advised, harmful).

The different examples of sacrifice (listed below) are placed on a table, each one on a separate piece of paper.

The top of the table has a sign on it saying "GOOD"

The bottom of the table has a sign on it saying "BAD"

The group stands in silence around the table.

The task is to sort out the scenarios, with "good" *(i.e., understandable, commendable)* examples of sacrifice at the top of the table and "bad" *(i.e., ill-advised, harmful)* examples at the bottom.

Each participant in turn can move ONE scenario to a new position.

There is no discussion (at this stage).

Go around the group in order, inviting each participant to move one scenario.

Participants may choose to move a scenario that was put in a place by someone else.

Do two silent rounds, then one round where each participant explains why they are shifting the scenario they have chosen. If they do not want to shift any of the scenarios, ask them to choose one scenario and explain why they think it is in the correct place.

Then look at the ordered list and discuss what makes a sacrifice "good" *(i.e., understandable, commendable)* or "bad" *(i.e., ill-advised, harmful)*

How do you distinguish between these different types of sacrifice?

Phrases to use in this exercise

- A person with a curable disease does not go to a doctor because he does not want to burden his family with the expense.
- A member of a religious community does not accuse the spiritual counsellor who touched her inappropriately because she does not want to disturb the life of the community.
- A mother always looks after her children and does not ask her husband for help, so she has no time to care for herself.
- A woman in an abusive relationship stays with her partner out of love for him and the children.
- A husband remains loyal to his unfaithful wife.
- A parent leaves a job to care for their child with cancer.

The problem with understanding suffering as sacrifice

Notes for facilitator

This section draws together understandings of suffering and sacrifice. The quotes listed below illustrate how the suffering of sexual harm survivors may be reframed as "sacrifices" survivors have to make in order to be "Christ-like." It might be helpful to share these quotes with the group in a handout or on PowerPoint slides so that they have time to read them through once or twice. You may also wish to read them out to the group (or invite group members to read them aloud) if that feels appropriate. Then, invite the group to discuss these examples. There is also a discussion question at the end of the section.

Jesus' suffering during his passion and crucifixion are often understood by Christians as being a sacrifice that he made in order to bring salvation to humanity. Christians who are suffering have sometimes been told by people in their faith community to persevere and endure "like Jesus did." Suffering therefore becomes reimagined as a "sacrifice" people have to make in order to be Christ-like.

For example, Rebecca Parker includes a testimony from a woman who was being abused by her husband:

> I went to my priest twenty years ago. I've been trying to follow his advice. The priest said I should rejoice in my sufferings because they bring me closer to Jesus. He said, "Jesus suffered because he loved us." He said, "If you love Jesus, accept the beatings and bear them gladly, as Jesus bore the cross." I've tried, but I'm not sure anymore. My husband is turning on the kids now. Tell me, is what the priest told me true? (Quoted in Brock and Parker 2001, p. 21)

Lucia, who was sexually abused when she used to be a nun, commented:

> Each time during my time as a nun when I suffered something painful, or the abuse itself, I thought that Jesus suffered worse than me, and I had to offer my own suffering without complaining so much … You

> couldn't complain because we asked God to suffer in this life and live in purgatory so it was good that these things were happening. (Quoted in Figueroa and Tombs 2020, p. 24)

Another abused ex-nun responded as follows when asked if she saw any connection between her abuse and Jesus' suffering:

> Jesus' suffering was heroic, and he accepted it and suffered silently so I just thought that I had to suffer silently and so identify with Jesus' suffering. The only feeling that I could do is bury it and not complain. And secondly, the other difficulty I was thinking a lot about the text of the Gospel of Matthew when Jesus says that if someone strikes you on the right cheek you must turn the other also (Mt. 5:39). The striking on the cheek makes sense. But what happens if Jesus was to say that if someone rapes you, allow him to rape you again? He would never say that. So, it made me think, what is the difference of striking on the cheek and sexual abuse? Somehow, I think it is not right to be silent, but I didn't find any encouragement from Jesus to help me to speak out and defend myself. At least I understood Jesus suffered and I also suffered so in one sense he was close to me yet his suffering was so different to mine. At the same time this identification helped the abusers to keep me silent. (Quoted in Figueroa and Tombs 2020, pp. 23–24)

Question for the group

- How might Jesus' suffering be used to silence victims and suppress their cries for help?

Notes for facilitator

Jesus has been evoked as a model for redemptive suffering in the face of abuse. But Jesus' silence may be a troubling model for victims of sexual harm. The suffering and sacrifice of Jesus should never be used to minimise or sustain such harm.

What is sacrifice?

Notes for facilitator

At the start of this section, ask the group how they would define the term "sacrifice." Do they think that sacrifice always carries a religious meaning, or does it have wider connotations? Responses can be written on a whiteboard, or on sticky notes that can then be placed somewhere in the room.

Jesus appears to ask his followers to make sacrifices:

- "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).
- "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13).

Paul also speaks of Christian sacrifice:

- "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1).
- "We are always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh." (2 Corinthians 4:10–11).

Question for the group

- How do you think these passages should be understood? What are Paul and Jesus saying about the nature of Christian sacrifice?
- How might you read these biblical texts in light of the earlier quotes by the women who had experienced sexual harm?

Notes for facilitator

These questions are designed to encourage the group to start thinking more deeply about the nature of Christian sacrifice, particularly in light of the experiences of sexual harm survivors. There are no easy answers to either question, but the important thing is that participants begin to recognise how notions of sacrifice may be misapplied to survivors' experiences of sexual harm.

Understanding religious sacrifice

Sacrifice is a difficult concept. Its meaning varies between different cultures and religions. In many religious contexts, sacrifice can be understood as a form of communication between the human and the divine. It usually means gifting something to God, often in a ceremony that symbolises the internal surrender to God, during which an external gift is consumed or destroyed. The purpose is typically to acknowledge God's dominion and ask God for blessings, expiation, or protection.

1. Sacrifice in the Old Testament

- In the Old Testament, faith is based on a personal relationship between God and God's people. It is a loving relationship based on the *shemah* prayer.
- The *shemah* is the most essential prayer in all of Judaism: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one … You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5).
- This relationship respects the transcendence of God, and reflects trust in God and dependence on God.
- The ancient Israelites also expressed their relationship with God through ritual sacrifices (e.g. Genesis 8:20–21; Leviticus 9:7; Job 1:4–5). They understood sacrifice as a **gift to God.**

2. Sacrifice in Christian Tradition

- In some interpretations of the cross, Christ's death and blood are understood as a sacrifice enacted to address God who is understood as a Father who demands justice.
- This usually accompanies a judicial vision of a righteous God who requires the sacrifice of the Son to forgive the sins of humanity.
- Even though the ritual sacrifice of animals was not about valuing the animal's suffering, this interpretation of atonement often turns the cross into a punishment, penalty, or payment.

Notes for facilitator

See the "Theologies of Atonement" section in this chapter (pp. 61–66) for further discussion of this Christian understanding of Christ's suffering and death.

Problematic understandings of sacrifice

The idealisation of sacrifice can be especially detrimental to oppressed and marginalised groups, and, in particular, to victims of sexual harm. In a Christian context, a victim may feel that they have to endure their suffering as Jesus did. This vision of sacrifice is linked to a Christ-like "suffering in silence" and it can be one of the reasons why many victims do not speak out about their abuse.

In patriarchal traditions, it is usually women who are asked to make sacrifices for the sake of their partners or families, or more generally, they are expected to sacrifice themselves to serve men. For example, women may be expected to give up their jobs when they get married and have a family, or to take primary responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Daughters, rather than sons, are often expected to look after their elderly parents, even if this means sacrificing their career prospects and other life goals.

Sacrifice is often understood as a synonym for suffering, and sometimes suffering is divinised—that is, it is seen as something holy or sacred, pleasing to God.

Questions for the group

- When cultural norms expect women to sacrifice themselves, how might that have a negative impact on survivors of sexual harm?

Notes for facilitator

The expectation that women must sacrifice themselves may also operate to keep women from speaking out when they experience sexual harm and/or intimate partner violence. They may believe they are "expected" to suffer in silence—that the violence is part and parcel with being a woman in a patriarchal world. This is echoed in the quotes shared earlier in the session, so you may want to refer to these again during the discussion of this question.

- If sacrifice is divinised (i.e., given a sacred or holy significance), how might that shape our responses to survivors in unhelpful ways? (Think back to the quotes mentioned earlier in the session).

Notes for facilitator

This divinisation of suffering could be very harmful for survivors of sexual harm and intimate partner violence, because they may believe that they cannot fight against the violence but must passively endure it in order to be "Christ-like" or pleasing to God.

The session on "Theologies of Atonement" in this chapter (pp. 61–66) also discusses the divinisation of suffering and sacrifice, and the impact that it may have on victims of sexual harm.

Group activity: Thinking about sacrifice more deeply

Which of the following views do you find helpful in relation to sacrifice? And which do you find unhelpful? Think about each statement in light of how it might be meaningful (or harmful) for survivors of sexual harm.

Notes for facilitator

As well as discussing the following views, invite group members to offer their **own** views about sacrifice that they personally find helpful and which they think might be meaningful for survivors. Encourage them to draw on their own contexts, cultures, traditions, and language to construct a definition of sacrifice that is significant to them.

- Salvation does not finish with the cross but with the resurrection: God wants us to live a flourishing life.
- Suffering is not good, but it is present in our world: sometimes when it is inevitable, we need to bear it, sometimes we need to resist it and protest against unjust suffering, and sometimes we can choose to suffer in a relationship of reciprocity.
- Sacrifice should be understood as an act of love, not suffering. Sacrifice is a personal gift that is made from a position of freedom and considers the three loves: love for oneself, love for the other, and love for God. Self-love should be valued alongside other forms of love.
- In all of our relationships (with partners and friends), reciprocity is needed: there must be mutual respect and reciprocal love.

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the session into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include one or more of the following:

- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

Further readings and resources

Rocio Figueroa and David Tombs. 2020. "Seeing His Innocence, I See My Innocence: Responses from Abused Nuns to Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse. Discussion Paper." Centre for Theology and Public Issues. University of Otago.

Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker. 2001. *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering and the Search for What Saves Us*. Beacon Press.

Rosemary Ruether. 1998. *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*. Bloomsbury.

CHAPTER 5

Getting our Language Right

Miryam Clough and Caroline Blyth

Notes for Facilitators

- This study session encourages participants to think about the language used in our church communities and spaces. Does it facilitate environments that are respectful and safe for all those who inhabit them? Or is it dismissive and potentially abusive towards some, while giving greater privilege and power to others? The session will cover issues of inclusive and non-inclusive language, and the ways that language can impact survivors of sexual harm.
- While this session focuses particularly on ***gender-inclusive*** language as it relates to survivors of sexual harm, many of the points raised can also be applied to other forms of language that similarly marginalise people, e.g., by virtue of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, disability, or age.
- As with other resources in the toolkit, the issues here are sensitive and can be confronting, so take time to gauge whether the group feels ready to have this discussion, and make sure that professional support will be available if needed. Aim to facilitate the discussion so that a diversity of views can be offered and discussed in an inclusive and sensitive way.
- The chapter includes information and questions that the facilitator can present to the group, as well as additional notes and suggestions that the facilitator may want to draw on when leading the discussion and responding to participants. Facilitators can also include additional questions and discussion points that they feel will be particularly meaningful in light of group members' contexts, cultures, traditions, and language. Throughout the session, participants should also be encouraged to raise questions of their own.
- Some parts of the discussion in this chapter refer to other chapters in the toolkit. We encourage the facilitator to familiarise themselves with the full toolkit before running this session.
- It can be valuable to start the session with a content warning about the challenges of discussing sexual harm. E.g., "In this session, we will be discussing sexual harm and abuse. I acknowledge that this can be a distressing topic to talk about." Reassure participants that the group is a space where members treat each other's voices with respect and care, and remind them that discussions taking place in the group must be kept confidential ("what we say in the group stays in the group"). Facilitators can also remind group members that they can leave any time during the meeting if they are feeling uncomfortable (ideally, it would be useful to organise for another facilitator to check in with the person who has left, either during the meeting or afterwards).
- The length of the session will vary, depending on the level of discussion and the number of participants, but will likely be between one and two hours. Depending on the group and time available, the material can be covered in a single session or in two separate hour-long sessions.
- The "Further readings and resources" section lists sources cited in this chapter as well as some additional readings that may be of interest. Facilitators are ***not*** expected to read all these resources prior to the workshop session.

Defining inclusive language

Notes for facilitator

At the start of this part of the session, ask the group if they have any personal experience of language being used to privilege certain groups of people while excluding others. Can they think of examples of language that may cause some people to feel excluded? These may be words that we commonly use as generic terms to refer to people of all genders, but which are nonetheless masculine terms (e.g., "mankind," "layman," "chairman"). Or they may be words that are often understood in too narrow a sense (e.g. if a woman tells us she's married, we might ask her about her "husband," making the assumption that she is in an opposite-gender relationship). Language can also privilege whiteness over other racial identities—we rarely if ever hear of someone being described as "white" (e.g., "white actor Tom Cruise") but it's common to see non-white racial identities being mentioned (e.g., "African American actor Morgan Freeman," "Korean-born golfer Lydia Ko"), as though non-whiteness is a marker of difference or otherness that needs to be flagged. Participants may also want to consider the **visual** "language" of images—for example, business advertisements where everyone pictured is white, able-bodied, and male. Some people may not think that these language issues really matter, but for others, language (whether spoken or in images) can make them feel hurt or excluded.

It might be helpful to write the examples offered by the group on a whiteboard, flip chart, or sticky notes so that everyone can see them. While this session focuses on language in relation to gender, the group may want to offer examples of non-inclusive language relating to other aspects of identity, such as sexuality, race, disability, and class.

For some participants, discussions about "inclusive language" can be quite confronting—it is not uncommon for people to feel threatened or frustrated by calls to regulate or pay attention to the language they use in everyday contexts. We've all encountered folk who think that calls for inclusive language are "nonsense," "woke," or a sign of "political correctness gone mad," not to mention a serious form of censorship. Should this discussion be raised by members of the group, encourage them to hold these thoughts to one side as they go through the session, and to revisit them again at the end, where, hopefully, they might be better equipped to understand why inclusive language **is** worth taking seriously.

What is gender-inclusive language?

The prevalence of sexist and patriarchal language (language that privileges men and disadvantages or demeans women) has long been highlighted and challenged by feminists. Since the 1970s, inclusive language policies have been gradually adopted by secular institutions. Some familiar examples of inclusive terms that were introduced as the result of such policies are "police officer" rather than "policeman," "chairperson" (or "chair") rather than "chairman," and "firefighter" rather than "fireman." While these changes may seem relatively benign, they speak to the wider feminist concern that patriarchal language which privileges the male and masculine has long been regarded as the all-encompassing "norm" in western cultures. Male terms and pronouns have traditionally been used to represent ***all*** people of ***all*** genders, with the result that gender identities which are not exclusively male have effectively been erased or subsumed. If the masculine is the "norm," then anything that is not masculine becomes undervalued, subordinated, or even erased.

Questions around inclusive language use in church contexts also began to arise in the 1970s, and over the past decades, many Christians in Aotearoa have been calling on their church to adopt liturgical and theological language that makes people of all genders feel visible, welcome, and included.

So, what is gender-inclusive language, and why is it important in our faith communities?

Notes for facilitator

We recommend you begin this part of the session by asking group members how they would define gender-inclusive language, or invite them to offer some examples of language they think is gender-inclusive. These definitions and examples could be written down on a whiteboard, flip chart, or sticky notes. Encourage group members to share examples from their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and languages, so that they can see the breadth and depth of what "gender-inclusive language" means to different groups and communities.

After the group shares their thoughts, you can show them the definitions offered below—invite participants to comment on these definitions and to ask any questions that they may have about them.

Gender-inclusive language can be defined as follows:

- It is language that allows people of all genders to feel included and welcome.
- It is language that enhances the lived experiences of people of all genders.
- It is language that does not privilege men over women and other genders.
- It recognises that so-called generic terms like "men" and "mankind" are no longer heard or experienced by most people as inclusive of women and other genders.
- It is sometimes referred to as "gender-neutral" language.
- In church contexts, it is language that draws on a wide range of Christian images and metaphors for God that move beyond the predominant, male-identified language of "Father" and "Lord." It is language that explores images of God based on the experiences of people who are/have been oppressed (Allen 1986).

Question for the group

- Does your church have an inclusive language policy? If so, how widely is it known? Is inclusive language an issue that is prioritised or regularly discussed?
- Has your church adopted any prayers, liturgies, worship songs, or other resources that you recognise as using gender-inclusive language?

Notes for facilitator

It will be helpful to find out about the inclusive language policies and resources used in your own church (and/or the churches of the group participants) in advance of this session.

One example of a policy on gender-inclusive language comes from the Catholic Church of New Zealand—you can read the policy here (and it is included in the "Further readings and resources" list).

An example of a resource that attempts to use gender inclusive language is the Anglican Church's New Zealand Prayer Book/He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa (1989), which was created in recognition of the "increasing need to choose language which is inclusive in nature and which affirms the place of each gender under God" (ANZPB/HKMoA, p. xii). The prayer book sought ways "to address God in language which is other than masculine and triumphal'" (ANZPB/HKMoA, p. xiv). You may want to invite the group to share what they know about any resources their own churches use which may have similar aims to this prayer book.

Unfortunately, many forms of non-inclusive language continue to be used in our churches, despite the policies and resources that are currently available. We find language that excludes some members of our faith communities being used in worship songs, service sheets, prayers, Bible readings, and sermons. When inclusive language policies ***do*** exist, they may be underused or unknown by our church leaders. Also, conversations about inclusive language are not always seen as a priority in many contemporary church communities.

Question for the group

- Why do you think our faith communities continue to use language that might exclude some of our members? Is this something that you've experienced in your own church? And why do you think it might be important to address this?

Notes for facilitator

Some people may not think that the language we use in church and secular settings is all that important—so why make a fuss about it? But it's worth keeping in mind that the language we use not only **reflects** our belief systems and views, it also shapes them, and it **shapes** our responses to the world around us, including our relationships with others. Language is very powerful: when our language effectively undermines, marginalises, or ignores certain people and the communities they belong to (e.g., by virtue of their gender, sexuality, race, class, or ability), we diminish them and deny their full humanity—that is, we fail to recognise that they are created in the image of God. Once we dehumanise and disrespect a person or group in this way, it becomes much easier to do them harm.

Here is an example of an experience one of the contributors to this toolkit (Miryam Clough) had when she (inadvertently) used language in a way that caused distress for someone else. She writes:

Recently I gave a presentation where I was trying to explain the evolution from human sacrifice in ancient times to scapegoating in cultures where this practice would have been regarded as abhorrent. As part of my talk, I carelessly used the phrase "primitive" to describe communities that may have practised human sacrifice. In my mind, I was imagining ancient communities, perhaps four or five thousand years ago, without giving any thought to who those people actually were. But for someone else in the room who had experienced the term "primitive" being used pejoratively against indigenous communities, the word was understandably upsetting and triggering. It diverted her focus and attention away from the presentation. I'm very grateful that she took the trouble to explain the effect my insensitive use of language had on her.

Another toolkit contributor (Caroline Blyth) recalls a colleague telling her about an incident where she heard language being used in a distressing and triggering way. She writes:

A few years back, a colleague of mine attended a theology conference. When one of the speakers went up to the lectern to deliver his presentation, a member of the audience asked him how he'd injured his hand, which was scraped and bruised across the knuckles. The speaker smiled and "jokingly" responded, "Let's just say it's no coincidence that no one's seen my wife recently." The (predominantly male) audience erupted into laughter. My colleague was very upset by the speaker's response (and the audience's laughter), as she felt it undermined the seriousness of intimate partner violence. She was also aware that there could have been audience members who had experienced (or were currently experiencing) intimate partner violence themselves—how would they have felt hearing their victimisation being used as a source of humour? To be sure, it was just a few words, spoken in jest, but these words demonstrate the power of language to diminish and demean victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

You may wish to share these examples with the group during your discussion. Alternatively, you can use a different story that makes a similar point about non-inclusive language, but which is more relevant to the group members. The important thing is that you encourage group members to draw on their own cultures, contexts, traditions, and languages so that the conversation is meaningful for them.

Few of us would want to cause someone distress, however unintentionally. So, it's important to think about the language we use in our church communities and to listen to and respect the experiences of those who have been harmed by language. While we personally may not mean to cause hurt, the power of language to shape human behaviour and to discriminate against and oppress others cannot be underestimated.

Notes for facilitator

Group members may want to discuss the questions on the next page with each other (either in smaller groups of two or three, or as part of a wider group discussion). But if you think the questions may raise issues that are too sensitive or uncomfortable for participants to share with each other, you could instead have a short period of silent reflection, after which members are invited to share their thoughts with the group, but only if they feel comfortable doing so.

Questions for the group

- For some of us, the language used in our church communities may make us feel excluded, ignored, or disrespected. Is this something that you've experienced yourself? Read through the following questions and think about them in light of your own experiences.
- Does the language used in my church predominantly include me or exclude me?
- What does it say about my place and value in my church community if I am persistently addressed or described by language that is meaningless to me, that excludes me, or that denies the essence of who I am?
- Does the language used in Bible readings, hymns, songs, and prayers in my church enhance my experience of prayer and worship, or does it make me feel like an outsider in my faith community?
- Might the language used in my church feel unwelcoming and excluding to some members of the congregation, even if it is not for me personally? What is it about the language used in my church that does make me feel welcome and included, and why might others experience it differently?
- Does the language used in my church make clear to everyone that sexual harm and intimate partner violence are serious sources of trauma? Is language used in a way that affirms my church is a safe and welcoming space for victims and survivors?

Why is it important to think about inclusive language when we accompany survivors of sexual harm?

Notes for facilitator

We suggest that you begin this part of the session by asking the group why they think that using inclusive language could play an important role in supporting and accompanying survivors of sexual harm. How might non-inclusive language impact survivors in negative ways? And why might inclusive language help survivors journey along their path towards healing? After the group have shared their thoughts, you can go through the following material with them.

The use of gender-inclusive language in our faith communities may or may not be meaningful and empowering for us personally, but it does play a vital role when we journey with survivors of sexual harm. Non-inclusive language that demeans or excludes those who do not identify as male/masculine can foster an environment where patriarchal power and privilege are reinforced and affirmed. Using male-centric words (such as "mankind" and "brethren") to refer to people of all genders, or consistently using male pronouns when referring to God, ultimately serves to prioritise masculinity and manhood, equating them with a sense of authority and power. At the same time, such non-inclusive language disempowers women and femininity by relegating them to a lower and less-deserving status. This only serves to replicate and reinforce the same hierarchies of power and privilege that allow sexual harm and intimate partner violence to flourish in our communities. Because when we grant power and authority to just certain parts of our community, we inevitably diminish the power and agency of others, thereby rendering them vulnerable to harm.

Similarly, certain language used in our faith communities may be "triggering" for some survivors of sexual harm (for a reminder about "triggering," see Chapter 2, p. 30). Perpetrators of sexual harm seriously undermine survivors' sense of their own autonomy and agency by denying their right to bodily autonomy and their ability to withhold their consent. Non-inclusive language that prioritises and idealises male authority and power may therefore cause further trauma to survivors who have been victimised by men, making them feel even more disempowered. Inclusive language, on the other hand, can play an important role in helping survivors to recognise their faith community as a place where they feel safe, welcome, listened to, respected, empowered, and accompanied. It is imperative that we stop sexual harm happening in our churches and communities. To do this, we must challenge the patriarchal inequities that are scaffolded by the church's non-inclusive theology and language. Most, if not all, denominational churches have inclusive language policies, but these may or may not be supported at local level. Without meaningful change in these areas, we will not achieve the equality, justice, and peace that are foundational to our faith as Christians. Making shifts in thinking and language can be difficult, but it is essential for the safety and health of the church and all its members that we make the effort to address this.

Talking about God in inclusive ways

Notes for facilitator

This part of the session addresses images of God's "maleness" and how representations of God as "male" can foster harmful patriarchal hierarchies in our churches. It might be helpful to start by asking the group to share examples they're familiar with of language and imagery that equates God with maleness or masculinity. These can be written on a whiteboard, flip chart, or sticky notes. Then ask the group how the language and imagery of a male/masculine God might be received by different members of their community. Would everyone see these as inclusive? Or would some folk experience them as non-inclusive? As always, encourage group members to draw on their own contexts, cultures, languages, and traditions to respond to these questions.

Our images of God and the ways that we talk about God are important. They can play a powerful and influential role in our faith, our relationships with others, and how we make sense of the world around us. One image of God that has been dominant for centuries within Christianity is God as male. God is typically spoken about using masculine pronouns (he/him/his) and masculine titles (e.g., father, king, Lord). This common equation of God with maleness and masculinity has been used over the centuries by church leaders and theologians to construct a patriarchal church that reinforces and privileges men's power and authority and seriously limits women's social and religious agency (see Dolan 2018). When we idealise images of God as male, we imbue maleness and masculinity with an indisputable sense of divinity, power, and authority. As feminist theologian Mary Daly famously said in her book *Beyond God the Father* (1973), "If God is male, then the male is God." This equation of God with maleness and masculinity has long been used to justify men's power and control in both religious and wider social contexts. It has also allowed some men to abuse their power with impunity.

Why is this issue important to think about when we accompany survivors of sexual harm?

Alice's story highlights the significance of theological language for some survivors of sexual harm.

> I grew up in a devout Christian family and went to church regularly as a child. I loved the music and the candles and the smell of coffee brewing at the back of the church for morning tea after the service. My father was a well-regarded member of our church—people respected him and sought spiritual advice from him. But as a child, I experienced physical and sexual abuse at his hands. I don't think anyone at church knew about it. When I finally left my family home, I also left my church community. I was 15 years old. Many years (and a lot of therapy) later, I decided to take my own young children to a local church near where I was now living. The people there were so warm and welcoming but the moment the service started, it was "Father God" this and "God our Father" that. I couldn't think about God or the music or the prayers. All I could think of was my own abusive father and I felt sick. Over the years I have got better at responding to my triggers, so on this occasion, I went and sat outside for a bit. After the service, I explained to the priest why I struggle to hear God spoken about as a father. The priest told me that this is how all Christians speak of God because this is the way Jesus spoke of God. I have not been back to church since that day.

Alice's experience of being triggered by masculine imagery to describe God is by no means an isolated experience. Musician and hymn-writer Linda Allen puts words to a similar experience in her hymn *God, I Cannot Call You Father*. Prioritising masculine images of God can have a damaging impact on survivors of sexual harm. Talking about God as "Lord" and "father" may reinforce images of an authoritative and masculine God—this can be very difficult for survivors (like Alice) who have been abused by a male family member or a man in a position of authority. Other language that describes God in solely masculine terms also strengthens the connection between masculinity/maleness and power—this could reinforce survivors' fears about their abuser's power to continue victimising them, not to mention their ***own*** powerlessness and vulnerability.

It is also important to note here that people who are sexually harmed in Christian contexts not only experience damaged interpersonal relationships; they can also experience deep disconnection and disillusionment in their relationship with God. This disconnection can compound the trauma of sexual harm, as the abuse also impacts the victim's spiritual well-being. Rebuilding connection and trust with God can take years—and indeed, some survivors may never rebuild this relationship. But for survivors who do wish to reconnect with God, language that is inclusive and non-triggering can be vital to this journey.

Questions for the group

- Can you think of other reasons that prioritising male images of God might be traumatising for sexual harm survivors?
- Does your church regularly use language to describe and address God in ways that may feel irrelevant or distressing to survivors of sexual harm (e.g. because

their experiences and relationships with male authority figures have not been based on love and protection, but on cruelty and harm)?

How, then, do we start talking about God in more inclusive ways? If we look at the Bible, we can see that it includes many ***different*** metaphors and imagery to talk about God. To be sure, some of these metaphors draw on masculine terms: God is father, Lord, king, and warrior. The biblical authors also use masculine pronouns (he/him/his) to refer to God. This use of language is not, however, suggesting that God ***is*** a "man" or has a male gender—the Bible was written in a patriarchal world, where masculinity was associated with power, strength, and authority. Little wonder, then, that the (male) authors of these sacred texts chose to speak about their God in masculine terms as they attempted to convey ***God's*** ultimate power, strength, and authority.

Notes for facilitator

Before moving on, invite the group to share any images of God they're familiar with that do **not** focus on God's maleness or masculinity. Add these to the whiteboard/flip chart/sticky notes, alongside the examples of male images of God.

There are various examples listed below, so you may want to share a few of these first to start the conversation. As always, encourage group members to share examples from their own contexts, cultures, languages, and traditions.

Male/masculine metaphors are ***not*** the only way God is described in the Bible. Sometimes God is likened to inanimate (and genderless) objects. For example,

- Fire (Deuteronomy 4:24).
- Water (Jeremiah 17:13).
- Light (John 8:12).
- Bread (John 16:12-13).
- A rock, a shield, and a fortress (Psalm 18:2).

All these metaphors affirm God's life-giving power and strength, without saying anything explicitly about masculinity or gender.

God is also likened to people whose livelihoods we might associate with people of different genders, such as

- A gardener and a potter (Genesis 2; Isaiah 64:8).
- A shepherd (Psalm 23; John 10:11).
- A healer (Psalm 103:2–3).
- A vintner (John 15).
- A beekeeper (Isaiah 7:18).

And at times, feminine metaphors are used to describe the deity. God is compared to

- A woman (Psalm 123:2-3; Luke 15:8-10).
- A mother (Numbers 11:12; Deuteronomy 32:18; Psalm 131:2; Hosea 11:3–4; Isaiah 49:15; 66:13; 1 Peter 2:2–3).
- A mother bear protecting her cubs (Hosea 13:8).
- A mother eagle (Deuteronomy 32:11-12) who guards and supports her fledglings while they learn to fly.
- A mother hen (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34) who nurtures and protects her chicks.

God's wisdom is also personified in female form as "Woman Wisdom" (Proverbs 8). And, perhaps most crucially, God creates ***all*** of humankind in the divine image (Genesis 1:27). The image of God is therefore not only male; it embraces and reflects the full spectrum of genders, from female to male and everything in between.

It is not only in the Bible that we find non-masculine language being used to talk about God. The fourteenth-century mystic and anchoress Julian of Norwich called God both Father and Mother. Julian said:

> I understand three ways of contemplating motherhood in God. The first is the foundation of our nature's creation; the second is his taking of our nature, where the motherhood of grace begins; the third is the motherhood at work … and it is all one love. (Quoted in Dahill 2008, p. 74)

Similarly, Anselm, the eleventh-century Archbishop of Canterbury, prayed to "Christ, my mother" and called God "the great mother." And the fourth-century theologian John Chrysostom referred to Christ as our "friend, and member, and head, and brother, and sister, and mother" (quoted in Tomkins 2015).

In sum, God is understood by the biblical authors and some Christian thinkers in ways that are far richer than masculinity/maleness alone; God is affirmed as being strong, creative, caring, life-giving, protecting, nurturing, and healing. To be sure, some masculine metaphors for God may well be meaningful for Christians (e.g., God as father can give expression to a caring and intimate relationship with the divine); nevertheless, if we prioritise ***only*** the masculine imagery of God, we deprive ourselves of many other aspects of the divine and are left with an incomplete and diminished understanding of God. As Abigail Dolan (2018) notes,

> The language we use to describe God does not change God, but it does affect the way we understand and interact with God. When we limit our symbols, we lessen the aspects of God that can be revealed to us. Our ability to understand the fullness of God shrinks or swells with our language.

When we allow other names and pronouns for God, we open up a richness of both imagery and relationship. We can make God accessible to more people if we offer

more inclusive ways of talking about God—we make our worship more hospitable and more companionable for everyone, including survivors of sexual harm.

Of course, this is not to say we have to "throw out" all the male language for God—but it is important to include a ***broader*** range of God language that reflects the inclusivity of God's love. We can still call God "Father," but we can also talk of God as "Mother." Or we can replace male pronouns that refer to God with the word "God." If this sounds clumsy and a gendered pronoun seems more natural, we could try using a range of pronouns. "He," "him," and "his" don't need to be the default position—it's fine to refer to God as "she" and "her." Equally, second person pronouns (you/your/yours) can be used very effectively. For example, the first few verses of Psalm 23 could be read out as follows:

> O God, you are my shepherd; I shall not want.
>
> You make me lie down in green pastures;
>
> You lead me beside still waters;
>
> You restore my soul;
>
> You lead me along the right paths for your name's sake.

Notes for facilitator

This part of the session focuses on some practical ways that group members can incorporate inclusive language into their church life and worship. The suggestions are far from exhaustive, and we encourage you to include examples of your own that will be relevant for the group. There are also questions at the end that invite group members to share their own examples and ideas. As always, encourage group members to draw on their own traditions, cultures, contexts, and languages to make this subject relevant and meaningful for them.

Here are some ways that inclusive language practices and policies can be introduced into our faith communities.

1. We can find and use terms in our preaching and ministry that do not prioritise masculinity over other genders and that do not restrict gender to a strict binary of male and female. Some examples might include:

Non-inclusive language	Inclusive language
Man / mankind	Humankind / humanity
Men / all men	People / all people
Sons	Children
Brothers / brethren	Siblings / kin / friends / e hoa mā / e te whānau
He / him / his (when referring to humankind in general)	They / them / their(s) We / us / our(s)
He / him / his (when referring to God)	She / her / her(s) You / your(s) They / them / their(s)

2. We can use hymn books, prayer books, and Bibles that adopt inclusive language. For example, the New Revised Standard Version updated edition (NRSVue, 2021) has attempted to incorporate inclusive language that is already present in the original texts. *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Version* (2009) goes further, seeking fresh and inclusive ways to overcome barriers and to express ancient thoughts, while aiming to be faithful to the original languages.[19]
3. We can check and update other liturgical resources, including our service sheets, song sheets, PowerPoints, and pew sheets, to ensure that the language used in these is inclusive. There are some helpful resources for inclusive liturgies, songs, and prayers available on the Worship Words website (the link is included in the "Further readings and resources" list).
4. When we pray with or for others, we can use language that is neutral or inclusive, including the words we use to address God. For example, rather than including terms such as "Father God" or "Lord," you could use more encompassing terms, such as "Loving God," "Gracious God," "Caring God," "God our Creator," and "Creator, Redeemer, Spirit of Grace."

Questions for the group

- What do you think of these suggestions? Are any of them currently being used in your church? If so, do you think they are being impactful in terms of developing inclusivity and a sense of community?

[19] For reviews and discussions of inclusive Bibles, see Schmidt (2022) and Peters (2014).

- Can you think of any other things that you currently do or would like to introduce in your faith community which foster the use of inclusive language?
- What other inclusive terms of address for God can you think of? Are there any terms you are currently using that you'd like to share with the group?
- How might these practices of inclusivity make your church a safer space for survivors of sexual harm?

Group activity

Notes for facilitator

This activity is designed to encourage the group to apply what they've learned during the session by creating a prayer resource that will be meaningful, relevant, and appropriate for survivors of sexual harm. Group members can work in small groups of two or three, or they may prefer to do this activity by themselves, or to work collaboratively with the whole group. There are some questions that will help guide participants through this exercise—please share these prior to the participants starting this activity. Once everyone has finished their prayer resource, they can be invited to share it with the group and to offer each other feedback.

As always, encourage group members to draw on their own cultures, contexts, languages, and traditions to complete this activity. The important thing is to ensure that the prayer resource they create is meaningful for survivors in their church community.

Participants can write their prayer "from scratch" or may want to rework an existing prayer or biblical text (such as a psalm) using inclusive language that is sensitive to the needs of sexual harm survivors. For inspiration, you may want to share some examples from sources such as Common Grace, Worship Words, and the Australian Anglican Church (all of which are listed under "Further readings and resources"). Elizabeth Gray-King's "Healing prayer after trauma" is an excellent example (found here at Worship Words) and Miryam Clough's "Psalm of Deliverance" (also in the "Further readings and resources" list) illustrates how biblical texts can be revised in ways that make them inclusive and suitable for survivors of abuse. You can use your own examples if these will be more meaningful and relevant for group members.

Allow enough time for participants to complete this activity—ideally, 30-40 minutes. If you do not have enough time to include the activity in the session, you may want to share the above-mentioned sources with them and encourage them to do this creative exercise in their own time.

Things for participants to keep in mind when creating their prayer:

- Will the language I am using in my prayer make people of all genders, sexualities, ethnicities, ages, and abilities feel included and welcome? Will it enhance the lived experiences of everyone who hears it?
- Does the language in my prayer ***avoid*** privileging men over women and other genders?
- Do the images of God I'm using move beyond male-identified language to ensure that God is relevant and meaningful for all people? Will this image allow survivors of sexual harm to see God as a source of support, strength, safety, and love?
- Does my prayer offer hope and support to survivors of sexual harm? Does it invite survivors into a sacred space where their voices are heard, and where their trauma is acknowledged with deep empathy and compassion?
- Does my prayer allow survivors to recognise that my church is a safe space for them—a space where they will be supported and accompanied on their journey towards healing?

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the session into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include one or more of the following:

- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging about this session.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.

Further readings and resources

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Stephen Tomkins. 2015. "Why is God Not Female?" BBC News Magazine, 2 June 2015. https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-32960507

Worship Words: Creative and Refreshing Liturgy for Today's Church. https://worshipwords.co.uk/

CHAPTER 6

Drawing Together the Strands

Emily Colgan

Notes for Facilitators

This final section of the toolkit invites group members to take part in a debrief and reflection on the different sessions they have attended and asks them to think more deeply about where they go from here—how they can use their role as Christian leaders to better accompany victims and survivors of sexual harm in their communities. This section raises questions about how they will do things differently. It asks about the tangible, concrete ways in which they might change their practice. It encourages them to identify the practical things they can do in their own community to make it safer for victims and survivors to come forward, share their experiences, and be supported in their journey. It invites church leaders to start planning how they can make their churches safer spaces for victims and survivors.

There are no "one size fits all" answers to these questions. Each church community will have its own specific strengths and needs, so will want to develop different responses and practices depending on the unique make-up of its members, its traditions, and its cultural context.

Here are some questions to share with the group. You can either put them on a PowerPoint slide or include them in a handout. Ideally, participants should have some time and space to reflect on these questions, either by themselves, or in groups of two or three. Participants should then be invited to report back to the main group. You might like to record these reflections on a whiteboard, flip chart, or sticky notes so that everyone can see them.

Questions for the group

- Were there any moments during the sessions when you recognised that you or your faith community might be (inadvertently) enabling ideas, theologies, or practices that allow sexual harm to continue unchecked? If so, what are these ideas, theologies, or practices and why do you think they are helping to perpetuate sexual harm?
- Were there any moments during the sessions when you recognised that you or your faith community are already engaging with ideas, theologies, or practices that challenge or resist sexual harm?
- In Chapter 1 of this toolkit, we noted that church leaders have the significant potential to speak out against sexual harm and to emphasise the church's responsibility to foster a safer community for victims and survivors (pp. 21–22).
    - How might you, as a Christian leader, better accompany victims and survivors of sexual harm in your community?
    - What are some of the specific ways in which your church community could be a safer place—a place of welcome, healing, and restoration—for victims and survivors of sexual harm?

Notes for facilitator

We have listed below (in no particular order) some possible answers to these last two questions. You may want to mention a few of these to the group before they give their own responses (as examples of the type of things they could consider); alternatively, you can share them after group members have offered their own feedback and ideas.

The list below is far from exhaustive, and you are welcome to share your own examples with the group, particularly those that are relevant to the group members' own contexts, cultures, and traditions. You may want to give a copy of these ideas to group members at the end of the session, so they can keep them and reflect on them further.

Ideas for making our faith communities safer places to accompany victims and survivors of sexual harm

- **Special services.** E.g., offering prayers and/or liturgies for survivors of sexual harm. It is important to create opportunities for survivors to begin healing and processing their physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds. You can find examples of suitable prayers and liturgies at Common Grace and from the Australian Anglican Church.
- **Preaching.** Church leaders can serve as role models and promote new ways of thinking theologically through their preaching and teaching. There are some useful online sites that share sermons which confront issues of sexual harm from the pulpit (e.g., see the Sojourners website).
- **Vigils.** Vigils are a form of peaceful protest or resistance that church members can participate in to protest sexual harm and show their support to survivors.
- **Workshops.** Since sexual harm is a taboo subject, churches can help by educating the community about this topic. Encouraging discussion around the issue of sexual harm is particularly powerful when it is initiated by the church.
- **Bible studies.** Church leaders have the power to interpret scripture and theological traditions in ways that strive to ensure they are no longer used to justify, perpetuate, or excuse sexual harm.
- **Encouraging community participation.** Church leaders can get involved (and encourage members to get involved) in movements such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence (held annually between 25 November and 10 December), the World Council of Churches' Thursdays in Black campaign, Pasefika Proud, and the White Ribbon campaign.
- **Using inclusive language and images in worship when we talk about humanity and God.** This includes recognising and reconsidering the language we use to refer to others and to God, asking ourselves if it excludes some and includes others (not just men and women). E.g., how would you express in your worship that all genders are made in the image of God?
- **Challenging hegemonic masculinity.** Church leaders (especially male leaders) are in a strong position to serve as role models of healthy masculinity for the men and boys in their faith community. By doing so, they help to challenge hegemonic masculine ideals that are often central to the perpetuation of sexual harm. Healthy masculinity identifies care, compassion, empathy, and the rejection of violence as central to being a good man. Healthy masculinity involves men and boys learning to be open and honest about their emotions (rather than trying to hide them) so that they can flourish and thrive in their lives and their relationships. Further details about promoting healthy masculinity can be found on New Zealand's White Ribbon website.
- **Promoting the participation of women and LGBTQ+ community members in all levels of decision-making throughout the church.** To be equitable, everyone who is affected by sexual harm must be represented and involved in developing solutions. One part of the faith community cannot autonomously decide what is equitable and helpful for ***everyone*** in the community.
- **Confronting acts of sexual harm, as well as misogynistic or homophobic attitudes whenever we encounter them, even when they are passed off as "harmless" or a "joke."** This includes encouraging people to stand up for those on the margins and asking people to think beyond gender stereotypes. E.g., if we hear someone joke about giving their wife a "smack" to "keep her in line," or expressing their view that rape victims are "asking for it," or if we notice them rolling their eyes when they see a same-sex couple in church, we call it out.
- **Emphasising our fundamental equality and dignity.** From Genesis through to Jesus and Paul, there is a biblical foundation for the equality and dignity of all people. The Gospels in particular show Jesus as challenging social injustice, including sexual harm. Jesus' ministry was inclusive of all. He related to ***all*** people, regardless of their social status, and his vision of the kingdom of God was one where ***everyone*** was equally welcome. It is important that these

messages of equality and inclusion are reflected in the worshipping life of the community (through sermons or liturgy).

- **Talking about sexual harm in the context of marriage preparation.** Many churches are actively engaged in preparing couples for marriage. There is huge potential to talk about sexual harm in the context of marriage.
- **Ensuring that church members know about community support services for victims of sexual harm and intimate partner violence.** Use church notice boards and communal spaces (including toilets, meeting rooms, and kitchen areas) to share information about helplines, shelters, and other community support services.
- **Offering spaces in your church for deep listening to stories of trauma experienced by survivors of sexual harm.** Make sure that all church members are aware of these spaces and how to access them.
- **Publicise church policies on sexual harm and detail the processes for victims and survivors to file formal complaints.** Your church will have detailed policies and procedures relating to laying a formal complaint and pursuing disciplinary action against a perpetrator of sexual harm. It is important to make sure that this information is freely available and accessible to all in your church community. It is also helpful to have someone who can be an advocate for a survivor throughout a formal complaint process.

Ending the session – notes for the facilitator

Give some thought to how you wish to end the session in a helpful way. Try to time the session so that you can end with space and opportunity for the group to transition out of the session into whatever they will do next. Depending on the group and context, this might include one or more of the following:

- A short debrief and/or sharing of what has been most helpful and/or most challenging.
- A reminder of support available and how to access it.
- A closing prayer, the Grace, or a waiata.