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Religious Inequalities and Gender

Understanding Intersecting Threats and Vulnerabilities Facing Christian Women and Men in Ungwan Bawa and Saminaka, Kaduna State, Nigeria

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1 Background

The settlements of Ungwan Bawa and Saminaka are located in the Lere Local Government Area of Kaduna state, one of the largest local government areas in the state in terms of land mass and also a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious society. Together, these settlements constitute one of the largest commercial centres in Kaduna state, as they are home to some of its richest farmers and biggest farms. The communities under study provide factories with raw materials needed for the production of essential goods. Products like sugarcane, maize grains, beans, rice, and groundnut are cultivated in large quantities in the area.

The area borders the city of Zaria and, by extension, the northern Muslim-dominated part of Kaduna state. This area connects between the two ethnic groups in the area which are the Hausa and Fulani people. Historically, because of the proximity of the area to the desert north, the communities around Lere Local Government Area were victims of several slave raids by Hausa warlords and Fulani Jihadists in the nineteenth century who occasionally pounced on unsuspecting communities and took with them those captured as slaves, as well as stealing essential farm produce and using the grains stored in barns to feed their horses, donkeys, and camels.

The slave-raiding expeditions were exacerbated by the divide-and-rule policy of the British colonial government in Northern Nigeria when it adopted its indirect rule policy as a system of governance. For instance, the Emir of Zazzau was appointed as the representative of the British Crown for the administration of the area and the collection of taxes from the people. This crude system set in motion maltreatment of slaves, abuse of office, exploitation, and high-handedness to be recorded in the history of the area (Tibenderana 1987). It engendered a feeling of supremacy among the Hausa community, who were perceived by the indigenous groups as 'settlers', and it engendered a correspondingly timid and subservient attitude in the orientation and behaviour of these other ethnic groups. The indigenous communities in the area claim to be the majority in terms of population censuses conducted so far (Sasu 2022). However, they also claim to be politically dominated because of the lopsided structure established through colonial rule. Segregated settlements exist in both Ungwan Bawa and Saminaka. Christians are resident in one section of the town and rarely benefit from development efforts because these do not generally reach their settlements. Christians reside in the less developed part of the town

whilst the Muslim community occupy the more developed areas. Social amenities such as schools and health-care centres are mostly located in the developed part of town so the Christian community have less access to them.

Furthermore, the uneven arrangement, as it affects religiously marginalised women in the area, has greatly exacerbated existing gender inequalities as well as creating new ones. These women encounter cultural and social barriers to development interventions and to educational opportunities. In addition, their poverty often prevents them from accessing good-quality education. In terms of health care, women have not been provided with adequate facilities and personnel to cater for their gender-specific health needs and problems. In addition, the lack of economic empowerment among these women is due to the absence of financial support like loans and grants.

Moreover, there is discrimination in terms of employment, based on ethnicity, religion, and most importantly class and gender stratification. In particular, men are given priority in terms of opportunities for employment as women are seen to be fit only for domestic work and small-scale trading. Traditionally, women are not allowed to inherit the property of their spouses or parents, a practice which reflects long-standing cultural beliefs indicating low female status and oppression from within the community. In the wider society, women who are due for promotion in the civil service as teachers or nurses are sometimes passed over as a result of their gender. Generally, women are more likely than men to be denied any position of authority in society and are side-lined when it comes to political activities and decision-making (Babasanya *et al.* 2021).

Women also experience societal censorship of how they dress, as our research shows. Women are not allowed to dress in the way they deem fit to express themselves. In the past, a woman could be lashed for dressing in a manner considered provocative in certain parts of the area (Bakare-Yusuf 2012). This was considered a socially acceptable corrective measure at some point in the area (*ibid.*).

Our research indicated that Christian women were exploited financially by the Muslim community, who have been privileged economically and politically. Our Christian women respondents felt that there was a deliberate attempt by the politically dominant Muslim male population to objectify and commodify them as sex objects or tools for pleasure.

There is also the problem of rising poverty, especially among Christian women, occasioned by the mass laying-off of both male and female civil servants by the current administration of Nasir El-Rufai, the Governor of Kaduna state. Many women have no career to enable them to fend for themselves and support their families. This has resulted in a rise in infidelity among married women and uncustomary sexually liberal behaviour among single women in search of material sustenance.

From the information gathered during our focus group discussions, the Christian women and girls in Ungwan Bawa and Saminaka shared evidence that highlighted their position as marginalised people. Personally, as researchers, we had to contain our emotions after listening to them.

2 Research aims and methodology

This research aims to comprehend the interconnecting threats and vulnerabilities facing underprivileged women from marginalised religious groups in Nigeria from the angle of gender discrimination from their neighbouring communities as well as their host societies. It also extends to discrimination shown to people on the basis of their religious background as well as socioeconomic biases endured by poor women from marginalised religious groups.

The research also aims to exhume and illuminate the societal experiences of women as an undermined group compared to men of the same faith, including how discrimination from the wider society affects both groups. It looks at cultural and socioeconomic vulnerability of these women and aims to learn from their experiential knowledge by listening to their stories first hand.

The research is an interactive and participatory study based on the collection and analysis of qualitative data. It takes cognisance of positionality as a critical factor in accessing relevant information, since the researcher's identity may impact the process of eliciting data from research participants. Accordingly, data was collected by researchers who were of the same gender, religion and geopolitical origin as the research participants, using focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and ranking.

To understand the threats that Christians faced as a minority group, we used the research instruments to ask questions cutting across all spheres of their lives. We began with their daily lives as workers and businesspeople, then asked about social engagements such as weddings and meetings, and their religious beliefs and practices, as well as the economic challenges they faced daily. Our interactions were not limited to the scope of the research because we went to the field with no assumptions. This fieldwork was meant to expose the researchers to new realities, and we did find that there was so much we did not know about.

3 Demographic information

3.1 Profile of Christian female research participants

On 14 and 15 April 2021 two focus group discussions were conducted in Ungwan Bawa and Saminaka. A team of two female Christian researchers interacted with two groups of Christian girls and women. The first group we interacted with comprised women over 25 years of age, including mothers; only two were single. More women in the group were married and were working mostly as teachers under the Universal Basic Education Board, while some worked with the Primary Healthcare of Kaduna state and two were businesswomen. Some had worked as teachers or health-care givers for years so they spoke from their different experiences in their various schools and clinics but there was always a similarity in their stories and it was almost as if they were completing each other's sentences. The second group comprised women and girls (all unmarried) of less than 25 years of age.

The women were randomly selected, and we were able to get a good combination of ages because, during the first interview, we had a 58-year-old woman, a grandmother, who gave us the perspective of older people as she had a good understanding of some historical events in the community, which helped us understand the present context. During the second sitting, we had girls as young as 11 years, who gave us a more contemporary picture of the threats they face as Christian girls in their community.

Table 1: Female participants in Ungwan Bawa (aged 25 and over)

Initials, job and age	Ethnic origin
EA, Teacher, 42	Igbo
JD, Civil Servant, 58	Amap
RM, Health-Care Worker, 37	Agbiri
AJ, Tailor, 25	Atsam
RJ, Firewood Seller, 41	Adungi
AA, Teacher, 35	Avono
RT, Health-Care Worker, 30	Atyap
MG, Teacher, 33	Amap
CK, Teacher, 29	Igbo
FY, Teacher, 32	Ham
AA, Trader, 36	Adungi

Source: Authors' own.

Table 2: Female participants in Saminaka (aged under 25)

Initials, job	Ethnic origin
KJ, Tailor, 25	Akurmi
MJ, Tailor, 25	Atsam
AL, Tailor, 25	Biom
MS, Sales Assistant, 20	Igbo
MY, Hairdresser, 25	Agbiri
YJ, Tailor, 25	Zhaar
EP, Tailor, 25	Amap
HE, Tailor, 25	Azelle
LJ, Hairdresser, 25	Akurmi
CS, Hairdresser, 25	Akurmi
HM, Tailor, 25	Agbiri
AA, Tailor, 25	Gworok
BE, Tailor, 25	Kono
PJ, Hairdresser, 25	Agbiri
DS, Tailor, 25	Sarkwa
JA, Tailor, 25	Agbiri, (Kurama)

Source: Authors' own.

3.2 Profile of Christian male research participants

The selection of male research participants was carried out using the following criteria:

- Socioeconomically excluded Christian men aged 25–40 from a religiously marginalised community in Ungwan Bawa, comprising civil servants, students, businessmen, and farmers. The total number of informants was 12.
- Socioeconomically excluded Christian men aged over 40 from a religiously marginalised community in Saminaka, comprising civil servants, former civil servants, retired people, businessmen, and farmers. The total number of informants was 12.

Table 3: Male participants in Ungwan Bawa

Initials, job and age	Ethnic origin
MS, Teacher, 39	Agbiri (Gure)
JP, Farmer, 29	Akurmi (Kurama)
AC, Trader, 35	Igbo
BJ, Farmer, 25	Ham
SN, Student, 23	Atsam
JA, Nurse, 23	Akurmi (Kurama)
AS, Farmer, 27	Agbiri (Gure)
SD, Farmer, 33	Akurmi (Kurama)
JD, Trader, 31	Igbo
CD, Health Worker	Agbiri (Gure)
ST, Farmer, 38	Agbiri (Gure)
NI, Trader, 38	Akurmi (Kurama)

Source: Authors' own.

Table 4: Male participants in Saminaka

Initials, job and age	Ethnic origin
TB, Civil Servant, 43	Bajju
NJ, Labourer, 46	Amap (Amo)
DJ, Retired Civil Servant, 63	Amap (Amo)
FD, Teacher, 48	Agbiri (Gure)
BP, Former Civil Servant, 32	Arumaruma
BJ, Unemployed, 37	Agbiri (Gure)
IB, Former Civil Servant	Koonu
YB, Farmer, 40	Tumi
SI, Retired Civil Servant, 60	Adungi (Dungi)
PL, Farmer, 65	Avono (Kiwallo)
SC, Former Civil Servant	Azelle
GD, Civil Servant, 45	Kuzamani

Source: Authors' own.

4 Limitations, strengths, and challenges

The work would have uncovered more findings if the field researchers had had more time and resources to cover more ground and interact with more people from other towns within the local government area. However, the study provided an opportunity for the participants to freely express themselves as regards the issues being discussed without any fear of intimidation or victimisation.

4.1 Positionality

The fact that the male respondents were talking to a man who was a Christian and came from southern Kaduna built confidence in them and created a level of trust that enabled them to speak about the issues that affected them. They also implored us to ensure that this research would be the beginning of a positive change in their locality and the country at large.

5 Research findings

We will now explore the research findings which then leads to the final analysis. The participatory ranking methodology was used with each group and this requires further explanation.

5.1 Participatory ranking

Participatory ranking is known as mixed methods approach to data collection. It involves using open question in the focus group discussions (FGDs) where participants discuss and identify challenges and problems. They then score the order of preference or priority by using a scoring system whereby each participant allocates certain scores to each subject raised. This generates contextualised data that is ranked and analysed. This means each FGD might have some variation of issues when compared with each other but this ensures the analysis is based upon the local participants views rather than being issues applied by the outside researcher. This also allows comparisons between different groupings and genders in the same community or contexts.

Table 5: Results of participatory ranking exercise by Christian females in Ungwan Bawa and Saminaka

Ranking	Threat	Ungwan Bawa	Saminaka	Total ¹
1	Insecurity/ threat to life	23	15	38
2	Joblessness/ unemployment	3	30	33
3	Sexual harassment/ rape	30	35	65
4	Religious segregation/ discrimination	30	9	39
5	Forced marriage	21	33	54
6	Political harassment	3	15	18
7	Injustice	26	6	32
8	Harassment based on dressing	33	38	71
9	Name calling	33	40	73
10	Transportation	12	21	33
11	Financial difficulty	19	38	57
12	Lack of basic amenities	17	32	49
13	Unfavourable working conditions	27	12	39

Source: Focus group discussions.

Table 6: Results of the participatory ranking exercise by Christian men in Ungwan Bawa

Initials	Gender-based violence	Unemployment	Insecurity ²	Religious otherisation ³	Gender discrimination ⁴	Total
MS	xx	xxx	x	xxx	xx	11
JP	xxx	xxx	xx	xxx	x	12
AJ	x	xxx	x	xxx	xx	10
NI	xxx	xxx	xx	xxx	xxx	14
SD	x	xx	xx	xx	xx	8
JD	xx	x	x	xxx	xxx	10
AC	xx	xxx	xx	xx	xx	11
BJ	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	xxx	13
SN	xx	x	x	xxx	xxx	10
JA	xx	xx	xx	xxx	xxx	12
AS	x	xx	x	xxx	xxx	10
	21	26	17	31	27	

Source: Focus group discussions.

¹ Each woman is given a total number of counters and add as many of their total counters as they like. Some might weight a score of 2 whilst they put 5 for something they think is more relevant to them. It is the weighting of the total amount that counts and the ranking of each of those totals. For example, Name calling and Harassment rank as the 2 highest threats.

² Insecurity is the state of being open to danger or threat; lack of protection.

³ Tadros (2020:16) defines 'religious otherisation' as a process where someone is identified as 'other' and 'not one of us' owing to differences of religion and belief.

⁴ Generally, in Nigeria gender discrimination is used in reference to females because they suffer from diverse forms of harmful traditional norms and practices both historically and in contemporary society. Males may experience discrimination, in the form of ridicule and societal disapproval, when they choose an occupation perceived as typically for females. In this research context, women are almost always the exclusive victims of gender discrimination.

Table 7: Results of the participatory ranking exercise by Christian men in Saminaka

Initials	Sex and gender-based violence	Unemployment	Insecurity	Religious otherisation	Gender discrimination	Total
TB	xx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	14
NJ	xx	xxx	xxx	xxx	x	13
DJ	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx	x	13
FD	xx	xxx	xxx	xxx	x	12
BP	x	xx	xx	xxx	x	9
BJ	x	x	xx	xxx	x	8
IB	x	xxx	xxx	xxx	x	11
YB	xx	xxx	xx	xxx	x	11
SI	xx	xxx	xxx	xxx	x	12
PL	xx	xx	xx	xxx	xx	11
SC	xxx	xx	xxx	xxx	xx	13
GD	x	xxx	xxx	xxx	x	11
	22	31	32	36	17	

Source: Focus group discussions.

6 Discussion of findings

6.1 Findings from Christian women

6.1.1 Dressing, violence, and unfavourable working conditions for Christian female teachers and health-care givers

The increasing need to conform to the Muslim mode of dressing for fear of molestation and to earn respect came out strongly in the discussions held. EA, a female teacher aged 48, recounted how Muslim students made fun of her clothes when she was teaching them. She noted that no matter how female teachers dressed, if they did not wear a hijab they were considered 'indecent' and were insulted openly by the students and their own Muslim colleagues. Two teachers, MG, 33, and AA, 35, narrated how they were threatened by students with knives.

According to the female research participants, there was a huge difference in terms of the nature of the work assigned to Christian women and Muslim women within their respective customary and traditional contexts.

The Christian teachers stated that they were often not allowed any emergency leave for more than a day, but that the Muslim teachers could be absent from school without a cogent reason for weeks. The teachers reported that Muslim colleagues would stand

outside chatting while the Christian teachers did the majority of the work. According to CK, a female teacher aged 29, Christian women were exploited 'sexually before [being] given their entitlements, benefits and promotions'. Also, when incentives were donated by the government and other donor organisations for all teachers in primary schools, they were not distributed to the Christian teachers.

The stories told by the health workers were not dissimilar to those of the teachers as they faced similar challenges at the health centres. They claimed to always give their best but never get rewarded, whilst the Muslim health workers were rewarded. All the female health workers said that they had to buy hijabs in order to walk along the road which led to their clinics to prevent them being harassed or molested, because the clinics were in the Muslim settlements.

More generally, Christian women reported compounded discrimination, as it came both from within and from outside their ethno-religious communities. Among non-Muslim ethnic minority groups, as well as in the public sphere such as in workplaces, Christian women tended to be assigned more difficult tasks than their Muslim counterparts. They were also expected to arrive at work early and finish late. Evidence indicated that the woman shared the opinion that most Muslim women who worked in the civil service were permitted to underperform in their work place. This may reflect the cultural expectations placed upon these women.

6.1.2 Sexual harassment: The social vice of the day

Most of the females interviewed revealed that there were multiple cases of Christian women and girls being sexually harassed in the evenings by Muslim teenage boys, who went as far as touching their breasts and buttocks. When they complained, the Muslim teenage boys would come in groups and try to attack them. The research participants also talked about many unresolved cases of rape and complaints about sexual harassment scarcely got any attention. Whenever complaints were made, the Muslim perpetrators would claim that they were in charge of the government of Kaduna state and as such the Christians no voice in this matter. Hence, the victims never achieved justice for the crimes committed against them.

6.1.3 Forced marriage

All the female research participants expressed sadness about how their young girls were often lured away or charmed and forcibly married off to Muslim males. The overall view was that the girls affected were often too young to realise that they were being used as they are usually lured away by gifts. They alleged that some perpetrators even made use of love potions in order to induce the girls to start a relationship with a Muslim man. When Christian parents tried to intervene, they were often threatened and intimidated, and when such cases were taken to the courts, where the authorities, who were mostly Muslims, often acquitted the accused.

6.1.4 Freedom of movement/transportation

The women observed that when travelling on the public transport, a Muslim male would refuse to sit next to a Christian female. The drivers of the vehicles were predominantly Muslims and often charged Christian passengers higher fares, while the Muslims were likely to pay less. For instance, from Ungwan Bawa to Kafanchan, the fare was usually 1,500.00 naira for Christians, but Muslims often paid about 1,200.00 naira for the same trip.

6.1.5 Social and religious segregation

The women said that name calling was a very common practice in Ungwan Bawa. Members of the Muslim community usually accused Christians of not having a religion because they saw anyone who did not believe in the Prophet Mohammed as an *arne* (infidel). Consequently, the Christians were repeatedly called '*arna*' by the Muslims in the community and they found it offensive and untrue. Moreover, Christian women who did not wear a hijab were commonly referred to as 'prostitutes' by the Muslims of Ungwan Bawa, who believed that as long as a woman did not wear a hijab, her body was exposed. The foregoing is aptly captured in the words of one research participant:

When the Sarki of Lere was alive, if you wear tight skirts or clothes that hold your body, whenever you pass through the palace, you will be invited and flogged. Even this area, if you dress anyhow and you do not dress modestly, when you are passing, people will be talking about you: 'Look at the way this person dress'... In this area, you cannot dress anyhow.

(RJ, Female Firewood Seller, 41, 14 April 2021)

Accordingly, the female research participants lamented how they were confronted daily by name calling as they went about doing their duties, dressing in a way they felt comfortable with. Besides, the Christian research participants alleged that they were used as:

Labourers or workforce in Muslim-owned farms without being paid a commensurate amount to the labour expended on the farm. Christian female encounter a lot of upheavals as a result of that.

(RJ, Female Firewood Seller, 41)

The female Christian research participants also complained about how during Easter celebrations, most of the Christians, especially the Catholics, were not allowed to carry out their processions and ceremonies, particularly the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday. The Stations of the Cross is an important part of the Catholic Easter celebrations, but Christians were often prevented from participating. However, they told us that during the *Sallah* (Eid el Maulud) celebrations, the Muslims paraded from Kafanchan to Ungwan Bawa and back accompanied by loud music without any form of restrictions.

The women further emphasised how Muslims repeatedly and deliberately damaged properties owned by Christians by throwing stones at them. It was always problematic to complain to the authorities because no action was ever taken against the perpetrators. To solve the problem, the Christians had to collect money to hire a security guard.

6.1.6 Financial assistance and economic threats

The women and girls discussed how they did not access help from any financial institution in the state even when financial assistance was available. No help came to them from governments, either to alleviate day-to-day economic pressures and to provide assistance during crises. No loans or incentives and no poverty alleviation programmes were available to Christians. The women who engaged in small-scale trading explained how sometimes they were given registration forms to fill in and submit to apply for a loan or small grant for their businesses, yet there would be no response from the government or NGOs, especially when the scheme was administered by Muslims, as the funds ended up being distributed to Muslims.

Furthermore, the female Christian traders complained that when trading in the market, they were often harassed and forced to move from the busiest spots. This resulted with fewer customers because of the poor locations of their stalls. One of them (AA, a trader aged 36) underlined that they had to close their shops or businesses earlier than the usual market closing time for fear of being robbed or molested by Muslim teenage boys.

6.2 Interpretation and analysis

The Christian women and girls, who from all indications and findings above were a minority group, were living lives where their most fundamental human rights were squashed on every single day. Women and girls are always known to be vulnerable to diverse forms of gender-based violence. This is made worse when the men among them (uncles, fathers, and brothers) either perpetuate the violence or cannot defend them from the abuse they face.

The female Christians noted that their men, young and old, shied away from defending them, for fear either of being instantly lynched or of being imprisoned when a case was taken to court and justice was not done. Experiences like this were common among the Christian women and girls in Ungwan Bawa.

According to the research participants, the only group which came to their aid was the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which takes up cases of kidnap and child molestation until the law carries out its full course. They live a 'caged' life, continuously looking upon themselves as second-class citizens in their state. They describe a life of fear and uncertainty. They report that there is no hope for the better, at least not now.

The threats have affected how these women view themselves and how they carry themselves, which has greatly affected their participation in the public sphere, notably participation in policymaking and decision-making, and sometimes their career choices. Because they grow up in a boxed reality, they are afraid of being ambitious enough to break the chain forged by being part of an oppressed minority.

More than 80 per cent of the younger girls we spoke to were textile workers and hairdressers. Others were employed as sales assistants at shops where they are paid meagre wages. Most of the girls either only finished primary or secondary school or dropped out of school altogether before enrolling as tailoring and hairdressing apprentices. When asked why they did not consider other careers, they alleged that other jobs were very

badly paid in their locality. The above shows how limited the choices are for girls in the locality of Ungwan Bawa and Saminaka. However, most of the young girls in the group expressed their desire for further education once they had 'enough money' to do so. Three out of the fourteen girls we interviewed said they were learning skills while waiting for admission to the university. Therefore, it appears that these girls have great dreams of education but that they are hampered by their current sociocultural and economic circumstances.

No major roles were expected of women in the society beyond domestic work, trading and running small enterprises. The women asserted that the only time they were needed and considered useful was when politicians were looking for their support during elections.

Government activities create and highlight ethno-religious differences and reflect discrimination in terms of their engagement with the citizenry. Thus, women are allegedly lured into sexual/amorous liaisons through gift-giving by Muslim men or the promise of promotion in the civil service, and other predatory techniques. Some participants reported kidnapping with conversion to Islam. These women sometimes deny their ancestry and parents when attempts are made to rescue them.

In summary, most of the women expressed great sadness about how their whole lives were oppressed from every angle. Their jobs were at risk every day because they were Christians and a minority. They found themselves unable to complain about injustices at their workplace; their voices were silenced even in their own homes and as they walked along their streets and that Muslim women enjoyed a better standard of living. They worried that their children were always being threatened at school and in play areas. These women said they and their families could not even have a social gathering without suffering intimidation because they were Christians. They further expressed the fear of not being able to sleep in their houses without their roofs being stoned. They were unable to walk on the streets with their dignity and pride unless they dressed in ways that conformed to Muslim customs. In summary, they expressed they had no rights in society.

6.3 Findings from Christian men

6.3.1 Experiences of mobility and being out in public and dress code

In the focus group discussion, the Christian men were asked their views about the threats and vulnerabilities of the women in their community.

There are unwritten dress codes that women are expected to adhere to. Women who dress in outfits that show too much skin or are too revealing of their bodies are molested and disgraced. Various forms of manipulation are demonstrated in commercial or public vehicles around the area. For example, the research participants alleged that Christian women often endured verbal commodification and objectification by the predominantly Muslim male drivers who run transportation in the area. Also, women are not allowed to be outside late at night or evenings. This is to protect them from assault and rape from marauding hoodlums and thugs.

6.3.2 Experience of freedom to worship and carry out religious activities

Women are free to worship and carry out religious activities. However, increasingly, women and girls are abducted and taken away from their husbands and parents, and mysteriously and forcibly converted to Islam (GCPEA 2018). The research participants noted that the abduction and forced marriage of Christian girls was a growing trend as two out of ten girls risked being abducted without redress⁵ (Faase, 2019:20).

6.3.3 Experiences with institutions, authorities, and state support

The information gathered indicated that while Christian women may have access to health facilities, health-care personnel tended to give preference to Muslim women. Besides, the Christian women do not have much engagement with local and national authorities, a situation which contrasts sharply with that of Muslim women, who are supported to access channels of communication with the local and national authorities. The above development is illustrated by the awarding of contracts for school-feeding programmes to public schools for Muslims, the giving of grants and loans by the national government to Muslims which are opportunities Christian women are scarcely aware of.⁶ However, recently, some Christian churches have begun to support women with entrepreneurship training and soft loans, as well as giving relief materials to widows and orphans.

⁵ There are not data to show the precise prevalence of such crimes. But in the empirical study by Open Doors, showed that it is quite common: 'Additionally, abduction and sexual violence, including rape, is a frequently used tactic by Muslim Fulani herdsmen. Fulani herdsmen systematically attack Christian communities, killing Christian men and subjecting Christian women to (sexual) abuse, including rape, and abduction.' (Faase 2019:20)

⁶ This is common knowledge but no written evidence exists.

6.3.4 Experiences of navigating societal changes and pressure to conform

Christian women are under pressure to conform to certain practices and codes to be accepted by the majority religious group. For example, FY, a teacher aged 32, noted that some women in the locality adopted Islamic or Arabic names or even wore a hijab to gain acceptance and political favours from the dominant religious group. It appears that religious affiliation in Ungwan Bawa and Saminaka area can determine the degree of an individual's progress within the ranks in the civil service.

6.3.5 Experiences of conversion and religious targeting

Women have been involved in cases of forced conversion to Islam. Usually, women from low-income households are easy targets. They are lured with gifts or promises of a better life and then taken to different locations. Subsequently, a ritual is undertaken and thereafter their names are changed to Islamic names. According to one of the informants:

Freedom is guaranteed to women in my community. However, for upward mobility in society, I feel that women in my community might have to convert to another religion to attain their dreams, because of how enshrined religious discrimination abound in the community, especially against Christians.
(SC, Former Civil Servant aged 50, 15 April 2021)

6.3.6 Experiences of religious otherisation

The Muslim community refers to Christians as '*arna*', a derogatory term meaning 'infidel'. The term is apparently employed to imply that Christians are inferior and can be subjected to dominance by Muslims and even violence. In other words, language is used as a form of social action to accord a second-class status to Christians whether they are indigenous to the community or not.

Poverty has been weaponised by the Muslim elite in government and other corridors of power and decision-making to create a class dichotomy that is characterised by access to economic power. As reported by one of the informants:

There is abject poverty among our women. Currently, a lot of us have been forcefully disengaged [sacked] from work by the government, both men and women, there is nothing they can do. They have been forced into a situation that they are not comfortable with.

(SI, Male, Retired Civil Servant, 60, 15 April 2021)

This is an example of institutionalised discrimination, aimed at intimidation and victimisation of a religious minority. Also, there is a huge difference between Christian women and Muslim women in this area in terms of economic power. The Christian informants, for instance, PL, a male farmer aged 65, alleges that Christians are discriminated against whenever government grants, such as soft loans and other economic empowerment schemes, are made available in the area by the government. A case in point is the relief materials that were distributed during the Covid-19 pandemic. These were not give to the Christians in the Saminaka and Ungwan area. Besides, there is an apparent privileging of the Muslim women population over the Christian population in terms of access to facilities. As one of the informants observed:

The Muslim women appear to feed well. Their food is different from ours. They eat good food and drink good drinks. But, what of our women, even the common grains we will eat in the house with our children are not there. Sometimes, we have to go to the bush to search for anything that we can eat. The forest now is home to bandits and kidnappers. The difference between Muslim women and Christian women, if you allow me, is like 100 per cent to 5 per cent.

(SC, Former Civil Servant, 50, 15 April 2021)

There is a feeling of great disenchantment among the respondents when it pertains to government support.

7 Conclusion

There is mutual suspicion and acrimony between adherents of Christianity and Islam, the dominant religions in the area. This has infused their co-existence with tension. There is no separation between religion and politics in the state and local government.⁷ The activities of government often reflect bias against the Christian citizenry of the state and local government area.

⁷

Gorka and Sookhdeo (2012:9) affirm this in their assertion that, '...radical Islam does not eschew political organization...'. See also Rondot (1980).

7.1 Challenges and recommendations

7.1.1 Scope of research

This research is designed to increase understanding of the current situation of minority communities in Nigeria, especially from religious and gender-based perspectives. There is much to be unearthed to fully comprehend some of these challenges and achieve desirable changes; more time would be needed to get comprehensive data for proper analysis.

7.1.2 Age bracket

The age range selected for the second focus group discussion was not suitable for eliciting the kind of data needed. We selected a total of 15 girls and at first, we thought the group was too large, but it turned out to be the right decision because only about seven girls participated fully in the discussion. Some of the girls were too shy to talk and never said a word after introducing themselves. Others seem to have had no experiences to share. From the discussion, we observed that a number of the girls appeared less engaged with the issues and challenges and did not speak about them with the same passion as the older women. We feel that focus group discussions with women aged 25–50 and 51–80 would have been ideal for this kind of research because they would have been able to draw on a lot of the history of Christian–Muslim relations in the research sites when discussing their experiences.

7.1.3 Involving the key stakeholders and policymakers

If this research is truly meant not just for data collection and theoretical analysis, but to understand the threats facing Christian minority women in locations like Ungwan Bawa, then the attention of key stakeholders in the state needs to be drawn to these unpleasant realities. CREID should use its influence to see how the lives of these women and girls can be improved. At the very least, their fundamental human rights should always be protected.

7.2 Other key recommendations arising from the findings

- Women should be supported to access good-quality education and girls should be enrolled in school from an early age. This could aid safeguarding them from predatory affiliations with people who seek to hurt or harm them.
- Abuses of women's rights should be reported in the media.
- Women who run small and medium-sized enterprises should be able to access training and retraining in order to become more self-reliant.
- Grants and loans should be given to the men in the area to enable them to set up small and medium-sized enterprises that will render them self-reliant.
- Statutory laws should be enacted that guarantee and always protect the rights of women. Rapists and abductors should be prosecuted and punished.
- An education campaign should be organised for both Christian and Muslim males on current practices in the areas of sex and gender-based violence to help them to become supportive husbands who will eschew unhealthy patriarchal practices.
- Both men and women should be given political education to help them participate in policy formulation and decision-making, enable them to take on leadership positions and equip them to contribute to a paradigm shift in the affairs of the area. Such education should also be offered in schools.

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