



Building Bridges  
of Faith Against  
Domestic Violence



**SOAS**  
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# Engaging men to respond to domestic violence: Findings from project d/dl/ድልድል- EMIRTA joint research in Amhara region, Ethiopia with implications for humanitarian settings

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# Agenda

- Description of project dldl/ድልድል, its modus operandi and its aspired decolonial approach
- Description of collaborative research with EMIRTA with men in Amhara region, Ethiopia
- Interactive survey and visual materials used
- Main findings and participant responses
- Implications for humanitarian settings

## Project dldl/ድልድል

- A research and innovation project dedicated to the development and strengthening of religio-culturally sensitive, domestic violence alleviation systems in East Africa and the UK.
- Especially keen to integrate religious and psychological parameters in the analysis of domestic violence to develop more integrated and effective support systems for victims and perpetrators in religious societies, as well as their international migrant communities.
- The project works through partnerships with organisations that operate at community level or are directly linked to relevant stakeholder groups, including academic institutions, theological colleges, faith-based NGOs, feminist organisations and business training centres in Ethiopia, Eritrea and the UK.

### What is project dldl/ደልደል?

Project dldl/ደልደል is a research and innovation project dedicated to the development and strengthening of religio-culturally sensitive, domestic violence alleviation systems in Ethiopia, Eritrea and the UK. The project seeks to promote a decolonial approach to addressing domestic violence in religious communities by engaging substantively with the religio-cultural belief systems of the victims/survivors and the perpetrators, and by understanding how these belief systems interface with gender, material and psychological parameters to facilitate or deter domestic violence. Working with Ethiopian and Eritrean collaborators, and rural and urban communities, the project seeks to generate new research and intervention approaches, and to apply this knowledge to inform strategies for integrating in domestic violence services and better-supporting affected ethnic minority and migrant populations in the UK.

#### Strategies

1. Working dialogically with partners & employing people-centred methodologies
2. Building on context-specific knowledge & new evidence
3. Connecting with existing DV infrastructure & initiatives
4. Brokering cross-sectoral learning & partnerships through knowledge exchange activities

#### Impact

1. Preparedness among clergy & seminarians to respond to DV victims & perpetrators
2. Religio-cultural sensitivity in NGO/state-led DV sectors
3. Integrated DV systems and better served affected populations
4. Reciprocal research partnerships & mutual professional development

#### Outcomes

1. New practice bridging religious studies, development & public health to address DV
2. Bespoke curricula for seminarians & multilingual training platform for clergy & DV providers
3. New multi-stakeholder knowledge exchange platform
4. Pilot programme leveraging religious & spiritual language for perpetrator & victim support

### Who is involved in the project?

The project works through partnerships with academic and non-governmental organisations in the project countries, including Aksum University (Aksum, Ethiopia), the St Frumentius Abba Selama Kessate Berhan Theological College (Mekelle, Ethiopia), the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), Diversity Resource International (Brighton, UK), EMIRTA Research, Training and Development Centre (Ethiopia), the University of Bristol (Bristol, UK) and the University of Sheffield (Sheffield, UK).

### How Do We Work?

**A decolonial impact-oriented approach: Our main premise is that meaningful and impactful interventions emerge when they are designed from the ground up informed by empirical evidence and real-life experiences**

#### RESEARCH



#### ENGAGEMENT & INTEGRATION

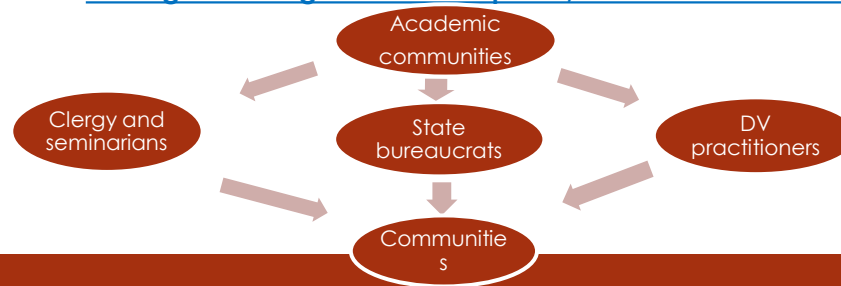


#### KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE



- ❖ Research to understand better how attitudes of domestic violence are informed by religious beliefs and to explore associations with psychological factors (intergenerational violence, trauma, personality disorders, etc.).
- ❖ Research to identify how religious beliefs can serve as a deterrent to becoming abusive or as a coping and healing mechanism for perpetrators and victims/survivors respectively.
- ❖ Research to explore the effectiveness of faith-based interventions internationally and to develop a faith-based perpetrator treatment programme.
- ❖ Research to understand the level of integration of religio-cultural parameters in secular domestic violence sectors and to identify ways to improve integration.
- ❖ Workshops with clergy to provide them with theological, ethnographic and safeguarding training to respond to domestic violence better.
- ❖ Workshops with secular providers (government and non-governmental organisations, social workers, psychologists, etc.) to raise awareness about the complex role of religio-cultural parameters in domestic violence and how to integrate those constructively in their own work.
- ❖ Curriculum development with university and theology instructors to integrate gender issues and domestic violence in education and clergy training and preparation for service.
- ❖ Partnerships with constituent organisations, including religious bodies, government and domestic violence providers to strengthen existing infrastructure.
- ❖ Communication of research results to relevant stakeholders through meetings and personal outreach.
- ❖ Publication of working papers and a blog to achieve knowledge exchange and to promote cross-sectoral collaboration.
- ❖ Delivery of regular webinars and international conferences on specialised topics that are targeted at multiple stakeholders to promote more integrated approaches to domestic violence.
- ❖ Production of films to create awareness and improve multi-stakeholder and public understanding of domestic violence and the complex intersections with religious, socio-cultural, psychological and migration-related parameters.

### Serving as a bridge across disciplines, sectors and stakeholders



### Milestones achieved so far

- 2** literature reviews completed (1 academic paper under review)
- 4** language translations on the website published
- 5** working papers published
- 6** international webinars organized in 2020-2021
- 7** workshops on domestic violence with clergy delivered in Ethiopia in 2021
- 132** members subscribed on the project's multistakeholder platform
- 155** clergy trained on domestic violence in 2021
- 29,874** web page views since April 2021



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# Research with men on domestic violence in Amhara region, Ethiopia

- Research informed by previous research findings in Tigray, which found that some men had been deterred from abusive or hurtful behaviour toward wives by a faith-based conscience, emphasising morality and upholding righteousness against sinning.
- The research aimed to:
  - **Explore how a larger male sample rationalised and understood domestic violence and their attitudes around different types of domestic abuse and violence**
  - **Explore how religious language and beliefs were invoked by men to rationalise (justify or condemn) domestic violence**
  - **Identify if faith, the clergy and other factors could serve as deterrence mechanisms**
- The research was also designed to serve as an intervention, namely to raise-awareness and to help men envision deterrence mechanisms.

## Collaboration with EMIRTA

- Project dIdI/ድልድል interested to support organisations that are less established and need opportunities to build a research portfolio. Collaborating and jointly delivering aspects of the project can ensure local ownership of research and its use locally.
- EMIRTA was a newly established organisation that committed to being a centre for research, training, and social development in Ethiopia and was reflexive of the need to promote indigenous knowledge in research and public health;
- EMIRTA emerged from the research directorate of the Sunday School Department of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and was comprised of highly specialised academics and researchers with sensitivity to religio-cultural dimensions, which would ensure preparedness to undertake such religio-culturally sensitive research.

## Research method

- An interactive survey that combined a questionnaire to collect participant background information (age, level of education, employment status, cultural background, marital status, age of first marriage, number of previous marriages and divorces, types of marriage previously performed, childhood and socialisation in relation to violence).
- A series of visual scenario exercises that presented the participants with different situations within the intimate relationship that had been defined in previous research as harmful and asked them men to describe them, consider if they agreed with the action or not, discuss the reasons behind the action and discuss what they would do if they were in the protagonist's position.

# Scenarios of abusive or harmful situations

- A man shown emotionally and verbally demeaning/humiliating his female partner;
- A man shown raising his hand to hit his female partner;
- A man shown abandoning his female partner (and children);
- A man shown being lazy or drinking, while overworking his female partner;
- A man shown marrying a child bride;
- A man shown using force to coerce his unwilling partner to follow him into bed.



# Developing the visual materials

- Prepared by Ethiopian artist **Mr Yared Tadesse** with close guidance from Dr Romina Istratii;
- The artist was a young male based in Addis Ababa and had little exposure/familiarity with both the topic of domestic violence and countryside life in Ethiopia;
- Dr Istratii shared visual materials from the village life and guided the artist in developing the scenes, suggesting body movement, clothing, environment, etc.
- Multiple drafts were submitted by the artist, reviewed by Dr Istratii and re-submitted. At the final stage, comments were invited from EMIRTA partners, which informed a final round of revisions.







## Fieldwork experience in Amhara region

- Interactive surveys were completed with 72 male participants.
- Men were recruited from the 3 woredas Basona Werana, Angolelana Tera and Ankober.
- Participants have been selected purposefully based on specific criteria (male, different age groups, married or previously married).
- The field team comprised of 4 male researchers, led by Dr Assefa.

## Reception of method among participants

- Men appreciated especially that they were invited to be part of this research on domestic violence, arguing that previous programmes had only worked with women or placed emphasis on women's rights ignoring men.
- Most of the study participants appreciated the use of visuals, the opportunity to place themselves in the position of the male protagonist and to associate their own lives to the situations depicted in the drawings.
- However, in general they needed the help of the researchers to fully decipher the meaning of each drawing.



## Reception of method among participants (cont.)

- Most of the participants admitted the existence of domestic violence, but seemed to be less critical about their own actions.
- The process of describing the situations of domestic violence they were presented with and placing themselves in the position of the protagonist led many men to share their own life's stories, to realise their abusive actions and to regret them.
- However, there were also some men who denied any accountability in past intimate relationships (“ኃይለ ቃል እንኳን ተናግሬያት አላውቅም”).

# Men's rationalisations of domestic abuse/violence

- Lack of awareness by both males and females
- Way of socialisation and example seen within the family
- The influence of tradition and 'old' attitudes
- Men's consumption of alcohol
- Male adultery and children-related disputes
- Lack of communication and discussion between spouses
- Unequal share of finance and responsibilities between spouses
- Unequal distribution of work between spouses and men being unavailable
- Interference of other people in the husband-wife relationship

## Deterrence mechanisms identified by men

- Advice and intermediation of elders and priests (“በሽማግሌም በሃይማኖት አባትም ይመክራሉ”)
- Peer influence and advice of friends (“ጥሩ ጓደኛም እኮ ይመክራል እንኳን የሃይማኖት አባት ቀርቶ ጥሩ ጓደኛም ተው አንተ ይህ አይጠቅምህም”)
- Resolution via associations such as edir “በእድርም አለ፤ በቤተ ክርስቲያን ቄሶች አባቶችም አሉ፤ በነዛ በነዛ እየመከርን እየተመከከርን ነው ይህንን እየፈታን ያለነው።”
- Going to church and hearing the teachings of the faith (“አብዛኛው ጥሩ አመለካከትም አስተሳሰብም የሚኖረን ወደ ቤተ ክርስቲያን ስንሄድ ነው።”)

## **Deterrence mechanisms identified by men (additional themes)**

- Men abstaining from alcohol consumption
- Promoting communication and conflict resolution between wife and husband
- Role of women (e.g. men proposing that women should not accept other women's husbands when men wish to commit adultery)
- Education for both men and women & awareness-raising
- Resorting to legal bodies



## Implications for humanitarian settings

- Humanitarian responses are often top-down and not based on an understanding of realities in specific contexts. The visual method could become a tool of engaging the community in both identifying the problems and in awareness-raising and response mechanisms.
- The research suggests that both men and women need to be engaged both alone and together in responses to domestic abuse. The men in our research felt that through the scenario exercises they developed new awareness of the problem and felt that women should have been given the same exposure.
- In general, the research points to the resourcefulness of religious and cultural mechanisms for conflict resolution and points to the important role that exposure to moral discourse (in the Church) and good advice (from peers) can have on men's behaviour.

Thank you

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For questions contact [ri5@soas.ac.uk](mailto:ri5@soas.ac.uk)

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