



Building Bridges
of Faith Against
Domestic Violence



SOAS
University of London

The project dIdI approach: A culture-sensitive and faith-informed research and intervention programme with men to respond to domestic violence in Ethiopia

Dr Romina Istratii¹ and Dr Zinawork Assefa²

¹UKRI Future Leaders Fellows, SOAS University of London; Principal Investigator of Project dIdI/ድልድል

²Languages and Cultures Academic Staff, Addis Ababa University; Vice Director of EMIRTA

Agenda

- Description of project dIdl, its modus operandi and its aspired decolonial approach
- Description of collaborative research with EMIRTA with men in Amhara region, Ethiopia
- Why an interactive survey? Aims and process
- Visual materials used
- Fieldwork experience and reception of method among participants
- Application of approach in 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 Ethiopia, Eritrea 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.

Project dldl/ደልደል: 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

Dr Romina Istratii - SOAS, University of London

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) and its sister-branch Waniney (Asmara, Eritrea), 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

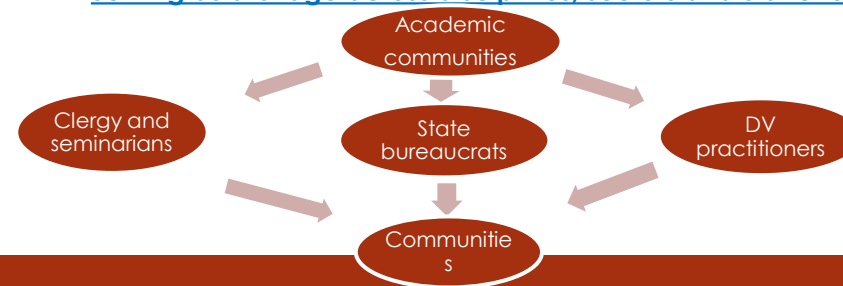


- ❖ Research to understand better how attitudes of domestic violence are informed by religious beliefs and to explore associations with psychological factors (intergenerational violence, trauma, personality disorders, etc.).
- ❖ Research to identify how religious beliefs can serve as a deterrent to becoming 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



Follow Us/Subscribe

- [Home - Project dldl/ደልደል](#)
- [Vimeo Account](#)
- [DV-Gender-Faith mailing list](#)

A practical decolonial approach

- Avoiding pre-defined concepts and reversing the knowledge transfer between the West and the rest of the world;
- Employing participatory, ethnographic and people-centred methodologies in research and intervention approaches;
- Co-producing research and intervention programmes and activities with project partners and stakeholder groups;
- Creating opportunities for growth for all team members in Ethiopia, Eritrea and the UK to the best of our ability;
- Creating opportunities and platforms for learning across sectors, disciplines and stakeholder groups through knowledge exchange activities (conferences in East Africa) and public engagement.

Research with men on domestic violence in Amhara region, Ethiopia

- Research with men had been planned to take place in Aksum, Tigray region, where Dr Istratii's previous long-term anthropological investigations had taken place.
- That study had included male participants who reported to have been deterred from abusive or hurtful behaviour toward wives by a faith-based conscience, emphasising morality and upholding righteousness against sinning.
- The follow-up research aimed to explore how a larger male sample rationalised and understood domestic violence and to identify if faith or other factors could serve as deterrence mechanisms. The research was also designed to serve as an intervention itself, i.e. to raise-awareness and to help men envision deterrence mechanisms.

Collaboration with EMIRTA

- Project dldl/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.



Why an interactive survey?

- Visual method more effective to incite genuine responses (body cues, emotional responses, non-discursive expressions);
- Visual methods more inclusive as they do not require standard literacy skills;
- More effective as an intervention strategy in raising awareness and triggering reflections and problematisations within the participants;
- Could help participants to visualise deterrence mechanisms as they are asked to place themselves in the position of the male protagonist .

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

- 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.
- 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.

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").

Application in humanitarian settings

- Humanitarian responses are often top-down and not based on an understanding of realities in specific contexts;
- This method provides an evidence-based approach that can be easily implemented by local teams and actors;
- Innovative method combining research with awareness-raising;
- Visual methods make it accessible to both implementing non-academic actors and communities regardless of level of literacy.

Thank you

የቅንብሮ

አመሰግናለሁ

For questions contact ri5@soas.ac.uk

Join the mail list **DV-Gender-Faithon JISCMail** for follow-up outputs

