

**Developing contextually appropriate responses to  
family and domestic violence in Melanesia: Project Report from  
Stakeholder Engagement Workshops**

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*May 2023*

**ABSTRACT:** This report provides an overview of the workshops that were held in March 2023 with approximately 20 stakeholders representing police, government and NGOs from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. It provides a synopsis of key themes and high level observations arising from the discussions and activities that took place, highlighting the value of cross-national and cross-disciplinary information sharing and discussion on family and domestic violence (FDV) amongst key frontline and regional stakeholders.

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This report provides an overview of the workshops that were held in March 2023 with approximately 20 stakeholders representing police, government and NGOs from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. It provides a synopsis of key themes and high level observations arising from the discussions and activities that took place, and complements the other workshop materials that were disseminated to participants (e.g. country profiles, talanoa reflections, etc.).

The overarching aim of the workshops was to provide an opportunity for cross-national and cross-disciplinary information sharing and discussion on family and domestic violence (FDV) in these nations. A recurring theme across the two days was how much work was already being done through local and regional expertise and organizations and their shared commitment to address FDV.

There was unanimous agreement among all country representatives about the need for local partners to work together to provide effective, efficient and well-coordinated services for survivors. All countries have existing referral pathways, which aim to coordinate the response provided by partners (e.g. NGOs, health, courts, churches, police, safe houses, government departments, counselling, etc.). All of the countries have ministries responsible for the establishment of the legislation that guides the different referral pathways. However, there are arrangements in place at local levels that differ depending on the context (e.g. provincial level, local, outer islands or rural areas, where there aren't available resources to support the referral pathways, etc.). For example, in Solomon Islands, in the provinces, churches are a key partner. In Fiji, the nurses' office is the primary point of contact where police officers are not available. Vanuatu has a system in place whereby authorized persons are identified in the legislation and are given powers to act (e.g. sign short term restraining orders) in areas where the pathways cannot be properly actioned because of limited resources. All countries share a similar challenge of responses being delayed outside of urban areas, but are taking different approaches to try to overcome this.

The effective implementation of referral pathways is facilitated by clear and up-to-date operating guidelines, such as a referral pathway guidebook for all service providers (available in Fiji and Solomon Islands). A memorandum of understanding between the Vanuatu Police Force and the Vanuatu Women's Centre clarifies each organisation's roles and responsibilities in relation to FDV. In Papua New Guinea, there are specific standing orders for investigations into domestic violence, sexual offences, and sorcery accusations related violence (SARV), and Standard Operating Procedures for Family and Sexual Violence Units. Long term funding (5-years) was also cited as a positive factor, but this is sometimes allocated in relation to organizational structure and ability to meet donor requirements, which creates difficulties for new/smaller organizations to access funds. Political engagement in terms of preventing and responding to FDV is essential, and often created by a strong in-country feminist advocacy network. However, other methods such as the summit in Papua New Guinea to hold Parliamentarians accountable can also be helpful for instigating positive change and clarifying the government's commitment.

A major inhibitor to successful multi-agency working in all countries is a lack of awareness, both of FDV and the referral pathway. All key stakeholders must be well versed in their role and responsibilities, but this is particularly challenging in remote and maritime areas. Indeed, the top priority going forward identified by all countries is training (e.g. gender sensitization, gender and human rights, policies and procedures related to the referral pathway, upskilling officers on how to deal with survivors, etc.). Continual learning on key topics such as investigations involving vulnerable witnesses and/or child victims, as take place in Papua New Guinea with police and prosecutors, also integrate sessions that challenges mindsets (e.g. gender inequality, victim blaming, power and control, etc.) were cited positively. Closely aligned to this is the need for general awareness raising campaigns so that people know how to access services. In-country expertise should be utilized where possible, rather than relying solely upon outside experts.

Participants also drew attention to the fact that available services for FDV survivors are concentrated in urban centers with little to no support from the state, civil society or development partners in rural areas. Despite the ease of identifying non-state mechanisms available in some rural, maritime or remote areas away from urban centres, engagement with such support networks was either described as unclear or problematic due to non-regulation or non-referencing in existing country guidelines on service delivery partners and pathways. These types of collaboration, while deemed necessary and often in the best interest of survivors, reflect the highly discretionary nature of service provision in some local areas.

For any nation, establishing effective multisector service delivery is a complex and multi-layered process, and the four island nations represented at the workshops are no exception. It was clear how their responses and partnerships have been locally developed despite variations in government commitments, scarcity of resources, arbitrary funding sources and budgets, and local socio-economic, geographical and cultural contexts. Some of the innovations highlighted in the workshops included the creation of:

- civilian police groups to provide services to hard-to-reach communities in Vanuatu;
- elimination of violence against women (EVAW) committees in communities across Fiji that work to hold police and courts accountable for victims;
- agreed minimum service standards, regular implementation group meetings of frontline workers and a standardized multi-agency data template in the Solomon Islands;
- a large network of Family Sexual Violence Units with mostly female officers operating throughout Papua New Guinea;
- gender-sensitization training provided by Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and other members of the Pacific Women's Network Against VAW for police and other frontline responders across the region;
- training for church and cultural elders in all four countries, to enable their powerful roles to make a positive contribution to the overall response.

A final workshop activity involved the identification of research priorities by the participants. These fell into three broad categories. The first focused on perpetrator programs, how to mitigate the root causes of violence to instigate behavior change and how to adapt these to programs to local contexts (e.g. traditional cultural norms and churches). A second strand focused on understanding the prosecution and sentencing trends for FDV cases in Pacific Island countries and the factors linked to successful outcomes. Finally, research focused on identifying survivor experiences at court and interventions designed to aid their recovery were also mentioned. It was acknowledged that new research should move beyond policing to focus on other areas of the criminal justice system in order to avoid duplication and to make best use of existing capabilities, resources, materials, and/or technical knowledge and expertise. The GCRF networking grant, which funded the workshops, aimed to “establish a network of stakeholders to be involved in a larger project that will explore actionable directions for improving responses to FDV in the Pacific.” These research priorities provide an important starting point for developing these plans in the future.