

Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study:

A study on violence against women and children

**Report prepared by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community for
Ministry of Women, Youth & Children's Affairs
PO Box G39, Honiara, Solomon Islands**

**National Statistics Office
Ministry of Finance and Treasury, National Reform and Planning
PO Box 26, Honiara, Solomon Islands**



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Honourable Johnson Koli,**Minister of Women, Youth & Children's Affairs**

We, who call ourselves Solomon Islanders, pride ourselves on the notion that we are a peace-loving people. Family is important to us. The health and well-being of our families is vital to us. Our unity as a family is central to our lives.

The evidence which we have seen from this report on the Family Health & Safety Study challenges this conception. Two out of three women aged between 15 and 49 years have been abused and the stories about children being abused are unspeakable, yet violence against women and children has often been the subject of continuous denial and suppression by society. We continue to harbour attitudes that do not conform with what we aspire to be. Society has been slow in condemning violence against women and child abuse as crimes and this is exacerbated by the fact that violence against women is very much inherent in gender-based inequalities practised by our society. Whoever is in control shapes the destiny of others and in this equation, the most vulnerable are our women and our children.

The evidence shown throughout this report demands that we take serious action. We must begin to accept the fact that violence against women and children is a crime and that it is very much a human rights issue as well as a health and an economic issue. It is an issue that should hang on our conscience, wherever each of us stands in society. What do we have within us to bring about positive change for Solomon Islands and its people? What legacy do we want to leave our children and grandchildren?

Violence against women and children is complex and diverse in its manifestations. It cannot be tackled through a single process, neither should it be seen through a single lens. Rather the issues need to be addressed through multiple processes because of their complexity. Let us therefore be strategic in our approach, ensuring that the most pressing issues are given the priority they deserve.

A comprehensive and systematic response by the government, stakeholders and all Solomon Islanders is required. All of us have a role to play. We must be firm in our stance that violence against women and girls will not be tolerated in any form, in any context and in any circumstance. Much, I believe, can be achieved from greater political will and capacity, but there is also a need for considerable investment of resources and consistent support.



...‘Two out of three women aged between 15 and 49 years have been abused and the stories about children being abused are unspeakable, yet violence against women and children has often been the subject of continuous denial and suppression by society...’

‘We must be firm in our stance that violence against women and girls will not be tolerated in any form, in any context and in any circumstance.’

This is the first time that such a comprehensive nationwide study on gender-based violence has been done in Solomon Islands. I wish, therefore, to register my sincere appreciation to the many who have contributed to the success of the research:

- The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), which is the implementing agency for the Family Health & Safety Study, for recognising the importance of doing the study in Solomon Islands and Kiribati. An immense amount of effort has gone into the implementation of the project, with dedicated regional and country teams working very hard, sometimes in challenging and heart-wrenching situations, to ensure the success of the research.
- The funding partners, AusAID and UNFPA, for providing financial assistance and support to the project. Thank you for giving Solomon Islands women the opportunity to be seen and heard and most of all the chance to look forward to a future that we can all be proud of.
- The 3,500 women from throughout the country who gave their time to be interviewed, especially on such a culturally sensitive and often emotionally charged subject. This research gives them a window of opportunity to exercise their freedom, to live a life of decency and fairness.
- The research teams who worked tirelessly to provide research of the quality demanded.
- The men who supported the research during the qualitative phase – their contributions have helped us reach deeper into the issue of gender-based violence.
- The premiers, chiefs and traditional leaders, for allowing the research to be carried out in their provinces and communities. They appreciate that when we talk about violence, we are talking about violence that is felt and experienced by their own mothers, sisters, daughters, granddaughters, aunts and nieces – members of their own families and tribes.
- The Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, for their invaluable support and advice throughout the research process and for being a great partner.
- The Solomon Islands Support Committee (SISC), for their guidance and help.

We have come to the end of the research phase and we now have a more challenging road ahead of us. Let us ensure the effectiveness and relevance of the interventions that Solomon Islands makes throughout the next phase and beyond. The fight will not be an easy one because we are actually fighting the persistent discrimination that women continue to face. But we will not give up. Let us unite to fight violence because together, there is greater hope that we will win.

In conclusion, I appeal to all leaders throughout Solomon Islands to take the issue of gender-based violence seriously. We have been entrusted with the responsibility for taking action. **The time for action is now.** Let us stand tall and be counted as leaders who give nothing but our best to honour our people, regardless of gender, position or status.

Hon. Johnson Koli
Minister of Women, Youth & Children’s Affairs
Solomon Islands Government

Dr. Jimmie Rodgers,**Director-General,
Secretariat of the Pacific Community**

It has been an accepted fact that violence against women and children occurs in Solomon Islands, as it does in many other countries of the region. What was unknown was the magnitude of the problem. For the first time in the nation's history, the *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study* has provided a picture of just how serious and pervasive the problem is – 64% of women aged 15 to 49 who have ever been in a relationship reported experiencing physical or sexual violence, or both, from an intimate partner. This level of prevalence is among the highest reported for countries that have undertaken similar research using the World Health Organization's methodology.

This study, which was funded by the Government of Australia and the United Nations Population Fund, and implemented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and Government of Solomon Islands, replicates WHO's Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women. It is only the third comprehensive study of the issue in the Pacific region and the only one in Melanesia. The two other studies relate to Polynesia (Samoa – 2000/01) and Micronesia (Kiribati – 2008/09).

The aim of the study was to quantify the prevalence of violence against women, identify its impact on their health, explore their coping strategies and identify risk factors. The intention is that the results will provide a basis for interventions that will help reduce and ultimately, hopefully, eliminate violence against women and children.

Many of the perpetrators of such violence use the concept of culture to excuse their behaviour. But from time immemorial, Solomon Island cultures have been protective of women and children. However, there has been a noticeable and worrying trend, especially among the younger generation, to use new interpretations of 'culture' as a basis for instigating violence. If allowed to take root, such distortions have the potential to negate the value of interventions to eliminate violence against women and children.

There is already impetus for taking action in Solomon Islands. What is also required is genuine political will founded on the principle that Solomon Islands is a country that values all its people equally and will protect all of them equally.

At the national level, the Constitution of Solomon Islands, the supreme law of the land, is explicit in stating that every person in Solomon Islands is entitled to the fundamental right



...Leaders believe the Pacific region can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, so that all of its people can lead free and worthwhile lives...'

of freedom of the individual, regardless of race, origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex. It further affirms a person's right to life, personal liberty and freedom from torture or inhuman or degrading punishment or other treatment.

At the regional level, in the Pacific Plan to which Solomon Islands is a party, Forum Leaders state: '...the Pacific region can, should and will be a region of peace, harmony, security and economic prosperity, *so that all of its people can lead free and worthwhile lives.*' Their vision can only become a reality if gender equality is achieved and violence against women and children is eliminated.

At the international level, Solomon Islands is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). These two instruments provide international points of reference for putting in place mechanisms to address the challenges of gender-based violence.

The government and its partners now have a 'tool kit' of knowledge that is a first step in the longer-term effort to 'turn the scars into stars'. The ultimate goal is to uphold the rights of women, children and men in Solomon Islands equally, so that all people in Solomon Islands can live and lead free and worthwhile lives. I am confident that Solomon Islands has the necessary capability and that by taking determined action on the issue, the government can unlock a new level of security and confidence that will drive the development of the nation.

Finally, let me reaffirm that the Secretariat of the Pacific Community is committed to supporting the efforts of the Government of Solomon Islands to effectively address violence against women and children.

Dr Jimmie Rodgers
Director-General,
Secretariat of the Pacific Community

'The government and its partners now have a 'tool kit' of knowledge that is a first step in the longer-term effort to "turn the scars into stars".'

Najib Assifi,**Director, Pacific Sub-Regional Office and
UNFPA Representative**

Today, it is known that around the world as many as one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in some other way – most often by someone she knows including her husband or another male family member. One woman in four has been abused during pregnancy. This means that the family home cannot be considered a safe place for women and girls.

According to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (paragraph 112):

Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms... In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture.

‘Violence against women has been called “the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world”.’

Gender-based violence, or violence against women as it is commonly known, both reflects and reinforces inequality between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims, of which 95% are women and girls. It encompasses a wide range of human rights violations, including sexual abuse of children, rape, domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, trafficking of women and girls and several harmful traditional practices. Any one of these abuses can leave deep psychological scars, damage the health of women and girls in general, including their reproductive and sexual health, and in some instances, result in death.

Violence against women has been called ‘the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world’. Accordingly, the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights and the Fourth World Conference on Women gave priority to this issue, which jeopardises women’s lives, bodies, psychological integrity and freedom. Violence may have profound effects – direct and indirect – on a woman’s reproductive health, including unwanted pregnancy and restricted access to family planning information and contraceptives; unsafe abortion or injuries sustained during a legal abortion after an unwanted pregnancy; complications from frequent, high-risk pregnancies and lack of follow-up care; sexually transmitted infections, including HIV; persistent gynaecological problems; and psychological problems.

Gender-based violence also serves – by intention or effect – to perpetuate male power and control. It is sustained by a culture of silence and denial of the seriousness of the health and many other negative, long-term consequences of abuse.

UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) recognises that violence against women and girls is inextricably linked to gender-based inequalities. UNFPA puts every effort into breaking the silence and ensuring that the voices of women and girls are heard.

As very limited knowledge exists in the Pacific on the prevalence, causes and consequences of domestic violence – the most common form of violence experienced by women world-wide – UNFPA in the Pacific initiated the first-ever national representative study on domestic violence in Samoa in 2000.

The *Samoa Family Health and Safety Study*, funded by UNFPA and implemented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), with the technical support of the World Health Organization (WHO), is to date the only comprehensive study of domestic violence in the region that allows for international comparisons. It used an adapted version of the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women methodology and protocols.

The Samoa study forms part of a UNFPA-supported multi-country study on violence against women in the Pacific and represents Polynesia, one of the three sub-regions of the Pacific. This study was followed in 2008 by similar studies in Solomon Islands and Kiribati, representing Melanesia and Micronesia. Again, SPC acted as the implementing agency and AusAID generously gave funds for these two studies in addition to the support provided by UNFPA.

UNFPA is very proud to have initiated and supported these three national representative studies on domestic violence in the region. We are however very concerned and saddened by the findings, which clearly show the severe pain and persistent suffering of women at the hands of their intimate partners in both Solomon Islands and Kiribati. The very high prevalence rates of domestic violence found in both countries, and the many long-term, negative consequences for women are unacceptable and urgently need to be addressed by national governments, local partners, international donors and development partners in order to develop and implement comprehensive multi-sectoral responses to effectively work towards the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in society.

Action is required in the form of establishing National Plans of Action to eliminate violence against women. These plans should include legislative reform and enforcement of laws for the promotion and protection of women's rights; preventive programmes, including public awareness raising campaigns; and comprehensive multi-sectoral services to deal with the immediate, intermediate and long-term needs of the victims of violence, with measures to ensure coordination and collaboration between these services. Capacity building for a wide range of professionals and service providers will be provided at national and local levels to enable them to effectively integrate related issues into their work and support victims of violence.

As is obvious, this is a major task that requires long-term commitment, coordination, vision and passion to improve the life and future of Solomon Island and Kiribati women and girls. UNFPA Pacific is committed to the task of working towards a life free of violence for women and girls.

Najib Assifi

Director, Pacific Sub-Regional Office and UNFPA Representative

'The studies have provided the evidence: now action needs to be taken to effectively address violence against women in the country'

Judith Robinson

Minister Counsellor, Pacific Development Cooperation, AusAID



Australian Government
AusAID

Violence against women and children and the broader problem of gender inequality is a significant constraint on development. It negates every area of development activity and is an abuse of human rights. Ending violence against women and children is crucial, therefore, to achieving gender equality and delivering positive development outcomes.

The *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study: A study on violence against women and children* clearly shows the pernicious nature of the problem of violence against women and children in the Solomon Islands and outlines recommendations to address this problem.

The report is not a lone voice in the wilderness in its findings or recommendations. It complements a recent study that was undertaken by the Australian Agency for International Development's Office of Development Effectiveness to evaluate methods currently being used to address violence against women and girls in five Pacific Island countries: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and East Timor. The November 2008 *Violence against Women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Approaches* report not only examines the severity and causes of violence against women but also outlines the perspectives and hopes of a broad spectrum of Melanesian and East Timorese societies and a framework for action to address the problem.

The *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study* report provides evidence for concern and demands urgent responses. The Australian Government remains committed to intensifying support for efforts to address violence against women and children in the Solomon Islands, and the Pacific region, including Australia.

Judith Robinson

Minister Counsellor,
Pacific Development Cooperation, AusAID

'Ending violence against women and children is crucial, therefore, to achieving gender equality and delivering positive development outcomes.'

The *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study* and this report would not have been possible without the hard work and commitment of many people. Above all, we would like to thank the thousands of Solomon Island women who participated in the survey, giving their time and bravely sharing their intimate and often painful stories with us.

The support of UNFPA and AusAID was essential in enabling the study to be conducted.

A great deal of credit must go to WHO, which developed the multi-country study that this research replicates and generously shared its methodology, questionnaire and interviewer training materials with us. We would also like to acknowledge that this report is based on the WHO Study report template and that, in writing up the findings, we have drawn extensively from the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women Report (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005).



Permanent Secretary
Ethel Sigimanu and
Women's Development
Division officers

The Project Technical Advisory Panel, established in 2007, comprised international experts on gender-based violence. We are grateful to Dr Henrica A.F.M. (Henriette) Jansen, Dr Janet Fanslow, Dr Mary Ellsberg, Dr Claudia Garcia-Moreno and Riet Groenen for their input to this study and the technical guidance they provided to the project team, which ensured that the research was scientifically rigorous and ethically sound.

The project was managed by the National Project Team under the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs: Pionie Boso-Lalae, Country Coordinator, Jerolyn Vili, Logistics Officer, Alice Rore, National Researcher, and National Team members Naomi Tai and Lionel Sade, and the Regional Team for SPC: Mia Rimon, Regional Project Coordinator, Lilian Sauni, Regional Researcher, Sharyn Titchener (consultant, UNICEF), who developed and managed the child abuse component of the research, and Freda Wickham and

Rose Isukana, Regional Finance and Administration Managers. Interviewer training was conducted by consultant Emma Fulu.

Data entry was carried out at the Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study Office and supervised by Douglas Kimi from National Statistics Office (NSO). Five data processors carried out the work over a 10-week period (August–September 2008). The data processors were trained by Douglas Kimi, with technical assistance from the SPC CSPro technical advisor (Leilua Taulealo), who developed the SIFSS database.

The report, including all data analysis, was prepared and written by consultant Emma Fulu in conjunction with the National and Regional Research Teams: Alice Rore, National Researcher, Lilian Sauni, Regional Researcher and Sharyn Titchener, UNICEF consultant. (Note: the views of the authors of the child abuse chapter do not necessarily represent the views of UNICEF.)

Mrs Ethel Sigimanu served as the National Coordinator for the study. Her support for the project team, NSO staff, and field researchers was unflagging and dedicated. Her encouragement and wisdom guided all of those involved in the study at every step.

Data table development was carried out by Douglas Kimi of NSO in Honiara and consultant Emma Fulu, with technical support and training by Leilua Taulealo of SPC.

Nick Gagahe, the National Statistician, and Chris Ryan of SPC were responsible for sample design and strategic planning of the field research and provided technical assistance throughout the research and data analysis phase.

Drafts of the report were reviewed by Dr Henrica A.F.M (Henriette) Jansen, Dr Janet Fanslow, Dr Jimmie Rodgers, Riet Groenen and Mia Rimon, who gave valuable suggestions and input. The report's recommendations were finalised with the input of the Solomon Islands Support Committee.

NSO was responsible for the logistical success of the survey. Its staff trained the interviewers in household listing and in general survey work in the logistically difficult provincial fieldwork and assisted with canoe and vehicle transportation for field teams, field guides, fuel delivery and questionnaire tracking.

All Solomon Islands photos were supplied by Chris Palethorpe and the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs.

We would like to thank the Social Welfare Division (Ministry of Health) for their support throughout the research. They not only provided follow-up for women/children who required support, but also assisted in conducting the qualitative phase of the research.

This study forms part of a UNFPA-initiated and supported multi-country study on violence against women in the Pacific. The countries involved are Samoa (representing Polynesia), Solomon Islands (Melanesia) and Kiribati (Micronesia). SPC was the implementing agency for all three studies and AusAID provided funds for the latter two in addition to the support provided by UNFPA. UNFPA also provided substantive technical support to the project through the Gender Adviser, Riet Groenen. UNICEF Suva kindly provided financial and technical support for the child abuse component of the study.

The Solomon Islands Support Committee comprised key stakeholders, who informed and monitored the project throughout the field work and who continue to be active in the intervention stages. They contributed their expertise and experience to the development and implementation of this research and we are grateful to all of them.

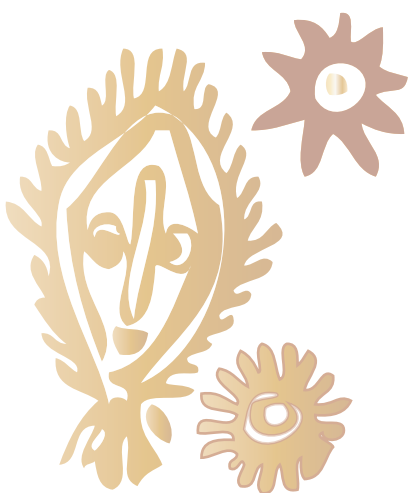
The high response rates and robustness of the data are a testament to the quality of the interviewers, supervisors, editors and data entry staff. They were hard-working, dedicated, and compassionate individuals who truly touched the women they spoke to and in turn were touched by the stories they heard. They are our unsung heroes whose names do not appear in this report for their safety, but whose work was key to the research and production of the report.

The Government of Solomon Islands acknowledges the challenges faced by the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs field researchers, the ministry's project team and NSO staff, who tirelessly researched the extent of violence against women and child abuse throughout the country. Their dedication and commitment to the women and children of Solomon Islands have provided data that will guide our work in eliminating violence against women and children in our beloved nation.



Permanent Secretary, Ethel Sigimanu,
International Women's Day, 2007

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AGO	Attorney General's Office
AOR	adjusted odds ratio
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CCC	Christian Care Centre
CA	child abuse
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
COR	crude odds ratio
CI	confidence interval
CSA	childhood sexual abuse
DEVAW	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women
GBV	gender-based violence
ICPD	International Convention on Population and Development
IPV	intimate partner violence (physical and/or sexual)
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MHMS	Ministry of Health and Medical Services
MWYCA	Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs
NGO	non-government organisation
NSO	National Statistics Office
NZAID	New Zealand Agency for International Development
PACFAW	Pacific Foundation for the Advancement of Women
PPDVP	Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Program
PRPI	Pacific Regional Policing Initiative
RRRT	Pacific Regional Rights Resource Team
SHE	Society for Health Education
SICA FOW	Solomon Islands Christian Association Federation of Women
SPC	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
SPSS	statistical package for social sciences
SRQ	self-reported questionnaire
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAW	violence against women
WHO	World Health Organization



FOREWORDS.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	x
LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	xii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
CHAPTER 1:	
INTRODUCTION.....	21
CHAPTER 2:	
METHODOLOGY.....	35
CHAPTER 3:	
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONNAIRE.....	49
CHAPTER 4:	
RESPONSE RATE AND SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC.....	55
CHAPTER 5:	
PREVALENCE OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE	61
CHAPTER 6:	
PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE BY PERPETRATORS OTHER THAN INTIMATE PARTNERS, SINCE AGE 15	79
CHAPTER 7:	
CHILD ABUSE.....	87
CHAPTER 8:	
ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN VIOLENCE BY INTIMATE PARTNERS AND WOMEN'S PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH.....	105
CHAPTER 9:	
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH	115
CHAPTER 10:	
WOMEN'S COPING STRATEGIES AND RESPONSES TO INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE.....	123
CHAPTER 11:	
RISKS FOR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS.....	139
CHAPTER 12:	
MALE PERSPECTIVES ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE.....	153
CHAPTER 13:	
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	161
REFERENCES.....	171
ANNEXES.....	179

Wife bashing

‘Sister, I’ve come to you with my black eye and bruises’
 ‘I’m afraid of your hubby, don’t want to get involved,
 Go to big brother’
 ‘Brother, can you shelter and feed four more mouths?’
 ‘Any time sis but my wife’s tongue is sharper than a two-edged sword,
 Ask Dad’
 ‘Dad, I’ve come back with my problems, plus three kids’
 ‘What did I say daughter? I was against this marriage from the start, but you
 were too strong for me and wouldn’t listen
 Go back to your husband, he owns you now’
 ‘Policeman, help me
 My husband belted me up last night’
 ‘I’m sorry, but this is a domestic affair
 It’s private, I don’t want to pry’
 ‘Pastor, is there any consolation or prayer for my tormented soul?
 I’d divorce him if I could’
 ‘You can’t ’cos you have promised,
 and the Bible says, ‘No divorce’”
 Impossible to go back to dad,
 Sis doesn’t want to get involved
 Can’t stand sis-in-laws tongue
 The police don’t want to pry
 I don’t want this cruel treatment from hubby
 But where can I go?
 ‘Hubby,
 I’m back
 I’ve brought back this battered body,
 Battered face plus battered case
 I am the ball that players pass around
 I’ve had enough of being tossed around
 Like a hot sausage
 Now I’m back
 Have a ball.’

Jully Sipolo (aka Makini)
 (Billy et al. 1983)

