

Promising Practices in Preventing & Eliminating Violence against Women and Girls in Fiji

This paper shares the learnings of House of Sarah, Medical Services Pacific, Reproductive Family Health Association of Fiji and Rise Beyond the Reef. The paper centres around the experiences and voices of advocates who are working towards preventing and eliminating violence against women (EVAW). This paper is part of an ongoing series of the Fiji Women's Fund Promising Practices Papers that seek to inform and support good practices with the ultimate aim of improving the lives of women and girls in Fiji.



Women and girls in Fiji face approximately twice the violent incidents in their lifetime compared to women and girls around the world.

64%

women in intimate relationship experienced physical/sexual violence



Some women in Fiji are at a higher risk of violence given their remoteness, disability, status as gender non-conforming, or ethnicity.



Calls to Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's (FWCC) and Medical Services Pacific helplines doubled during March and April in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown.



OF LOST WORK PER EMPLOYEE EACH YEAR

International Finance Corporation (IFC) research shows that violence against women results in appreciable costs to businesses in Fiji. The survey conducted with 3 private sector companies in December 2018 found that violence against women translates into the equivalent of almost 10 days of lost work per employee each year.



Gender-based discrimination is heightened in the patriarchal context of Fiji, characterised by extreme gender inequality.



Fiji is recognised as being the most advanced country in the region in relation to addressing violence against women. There has been significant work done to respond to VAW in a survivor-centred manner. Additionally, there is now a range of ways survivors can access help, including hotlines and referrals to relevant agencies.



The advances in Fiji have been attributed to the long and active women's movement and the work of FWCC, the Fiji Women's Rights Movement and the Regional Rights Resource Team.



The Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MoWCPA) established an Advisory Group for the Fiji National Action Plan (FNAP) to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in 2019. The decision to develop the prevention plan recognises the current situation in Fiji and the need to broaden the range of actors working to prevent violence against women and girls.



The National Gender Policy gives the overarching direction for EVAW which is operationalised through the Strategic Plan and the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls. Additionally, key pieces of legislation reinforce women's rights to live free from violence: Crimes Act, Family Law Act, Domestic Violence Act, Criminal Procedures Act and the Employment Relations Act

Four Learnings

1 Understand the context of the women and girls your organisation works with and their experiences of violence

Each of the 4 grantee partners strives to understand the situations of the women and girls that they work with and have conducted research to make sure their services and responses are relevant to women's and girls' needs.

VAWG is often unseen and unrecognised in communities which can make it difficult for grantee partners to understand the real situation of women. The invisibility of violence is exacerbated by the culture of silence limiting women's ability to speak out about the violence they are facing. Grantee partners have to build individual and community awareness of women's rights and violence as well as their own reputation for trustworthiness and confidentiality before women describe their context accurately.

2 Address violence at the collective level through social norms and at the individual level

Partners identified a range of social norms that reproduce or support violence. For example, the HoS works to counter gender discriminatory attitudes, values, norms and practices in the church setting.

Social norms can perpetuate violence in a number of ways. Research shows that those who experience violence in childhood may learn to accept violence as normal and view violence as an effective way to resolve conflicts. Additionally, social norms that silence discussion on violence can prevent women and children from speaking out about abuse.

Multi-component interventions work best to change social norms. These interventions work with groups of individuals and combine several intervention approaches, such as gender norm change and economic empowerment. Individual's views on gender and violence are more effectively changed and the change supported when other dynamics in the environment support this change.

3 Engage men and boys in violence prevention

Grantee partners agree that the problem of violence can only be solved by everyone in the community. As such, men and boys need to be included in violence prevention projects. Grantee partners also noted the importance of carefully screening male activists or champions to ensure that they themselves are not perpetrators of violence. Partners can seek out men and boys specifically or, engage with 'existing tables' - people who are already working on the problem in that community.

Specifically, patriarchal social norms that accept violence as a means to resolve differences and rigidly prescribe unequal gendered roles for women and men perpetuate violence and must be challenged. For example, in many settings 'successful' masculinity is shown by displays of toughness and strength, including heavy drinking and dominance and control over women (including the use of violence). Additionally, traditional masculinity can include notions that a man has the right to have sex with a woman whether or not she consents.

4 Use a set of contextualised tools to support conversations about EVAW

Each of the grantee partners uses tools that they have developed themselves or have adapted to their contexts. These tools help to broker conversations about preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls. For example, MSP has developed case studies drawn from their case experiences. These are anonymised stories of sexual assault or domestic violence that are based on real-life experiences. MSP finds that community members often find it easier to talk about issues of violence when these stories are not personalised. Rather, talking about someone else allows community members to express their attitudes and behaviours without risk.



Level 3, Kaunikuila House,
Sun Insurance Building, Laucala Bay Road,
Flagstaff Suva, Fiji
Email: information@womensfund.org.fj
Phone: +679 331 4410

Scan the QR code for
the full report and data
references

