ANALYSIS

Violence against women in PNG: How men are getting away with murder

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The women of Papua New Guinea (PNG) endure some of the most extreme levels of violence in the world. They continue to be attacked with impunity despite their government's promises of justice. The situation has been described as a humanitarian disaster yet still does not receive the broader public attention it deserves, inside or outside PNG. It is also a significant obstacle to PNG's development and prosperity.

This is an issue that should, and does, receive the attention of the Australian Government. PNG's largest aid donor, and nearest neighbour, has invested heavily in law and justice in PNG. Australia also explicitly targets gender rights and equity across its aid program. But only so much can be achieved in PNG by outsiders. Change will need to come from within. Australia can support this by pressing the PNG Government to assign a higher priority to addressing violence and by assisting local civil society efforts that aid the victims of violence and address some of its root causes.

On 9 December 2013 — the eve of International Human Rights Day — Sophie Mangai, a wiry 60 year-old grandmother and battle-scarred women's rights advocate, led a protest through downtown Wewak on the north coast of Papua New Guinea.

Years ago her former husband, a soldier, knocked out all her bottom teeth. She endured many beatings. The law would not protect her and her family could not — hers was the bleak, garden-variety narrative shared by an estimated two-thirds of PNG women.[1] But Mangai resolved to rescue herself and others like her.

The president of the East Sepik Council of Women, Mangai had turned out with her banners and her trusty band of activists for the penultimate performance of their marathon '16 Days of Activism' campaign, Wewak's contribution to a global effort to highlight violence against women.[2] It was no abstract distant concern in this corner of the world. What was about to transpire was not on the program.

Mangai led her troops past the busy market. She proceeded through a dusty compound where packed minibuses swooped in and out, ferrying passengers to far-flung villages, or as close as the stunted road network will allow. She advanced towards the police station, a grim, grimy building with a couple of wrecked 4WD patrol trucks decomposing at the front door. PNG police are under-resourced, under-trained, often corrupt, frequently violent, and largely uninterested in the welfare of women and their rights to justice.[3] Complaints of police raping women are commonplace, and they are notoriously rough on their wives. (Only 10 per cent of their ranks are female.)[4]

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Mangai was angry. Her voice was strong even without the megaphone she raised to amplify her message. She had spent the weekend with her friend and fellow activist, Florence Parinjo, trying to find medical and legal help for an 18 year-old village girl, Helen*, who had allegedly been raped by four Wewak police officers some time before dawn a few days earlier.[5] She hollered a challenge to the police chief to come out and talk to the women of Wewak about the violence they endured and what might be done about it.

Survivor Helen, traumatised and injured, was hiding nearby in the crowd with her *bubus* (grandparents) and Parinjo. They were waiting for word from a sympathetic policewoman that it was safe to come into the station and report the rape.

Instead all hell broke loose. A senior officer emerged, reportedly the same officer who led the rapists on a raid of Helen's village. In full view of the large crowd he pulled an M16 rifle from a vehicle, climbed onto a dinghy and fired three shots into the air. People scattered in all

directions, but Sophie Mangai walked towards him. He broke her megaphone, then her spectacles, and then he started on her.

"He just bashed me and beat me and I fell on the step in front of the police station. He was threatening me. He said he will kill me," Mangai recalled later. He started kicking her. "I said 'you can kill me in the name of women, because I'm talking about women's rights, and I don't give a shit'. I wasn't scared, because I knew I had done nothing wrong."

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Parinjo, nearby, was terrified. "He grabs Sophie by the *meri* blouse and punched her again saying 'you are under arrest', and then he points the gun at me and says 'I'm going to shoot you'." She scrambled under a truck and fled with Helen. They hid for many days. Today, nearly nine months later, Helen is still hiding.

Mangai and the grandparents were dragged into the police station and locked up by the enraged senior officer for a week without charge. The story took off on social media, becoming the focus of an international campaign that eventually freed Mangai, forced an investigation, and prompted charges against the officer and his crew. Senior police and politicians, up to the prime minister's office, were shamed into pronouncements of action.

The episode is a powerful illustration of how distant justice is for the women of Papua New Guinea. It also illustrates the resourcefulness and courage — as well as desperation — of individuals striving for their personal security.

As an expert submission to an Australian parliamentary committee recently observed, family and sexual violence in PNG "is widespread, pervasive and highly damaging."[6] Médecins Sans Frontiéres (MSF), a long-time actor in PNG, argues that in some locations, the reality is akin to a war zone.[7]

Much of the violence occurs within families, but it comes in many guises — tribal, opportunist, cultural, institutional, and spiritual. (The latter is sorcery and witchcraft-related, involving the torture and sometimes burning of those accused.)[8] Men also suffer, as do children, but women endure the worst of it.

In a nation of over 800 languages and cultures, the drivers, incidence, extremity and visibility of assaults varies greatly place to place. But perpetrators across the country can rest assured that whatever they do, the chances are that they will get away with it. They are protected by a culture of impunity.

Police are uninterested. Prosecutions are rare. Few survivors have the wherewithal to leave abusive relationships or dangerous communities. Formal courts are often many days' walk from the villages where 80 per cent of the population lives. Traditional law meted out by village courts is often preoccupied with brokering peace rather than delivering justice.

For more than thirty years the PNG Government has talked about strengthening justice but it has achieved little. Finally last year, the parliament passed family protection legislation that was first drafted back in the early 1990s.[9] This criminalised domestic violence, strengthened protection orders, and directed police to pursue family and sexual violence.[10] Despite these formal steps, however, practical efforts to tackle the violence are still not seen as a priority.

Endemic violence in PNG is an issue that should, and indeed does, receive the attention of the Australian Government, PNG's most important development partner. Australia has made large investments in PNG's development, in supporting its legal system and police service, as well as in specific measures to help deal with family and sexual violence.

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Officials understand that this is more than a humanitarian concern. According to a PNG country gender assessment conducted jointly in 2012 by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the UN, and the Australian and PNG governments, "the high prevalence of such violence in PNG is a cross cutting issue, with very serious implications for public health and social policy, economic development, and justice and law enforcement."[11]

There is, however, a limit to what even a major development partner can do. Ultimately efforts to end family and sexual violence must be led by Papua New Guineans. Parts of PNG society, in particular civil society, are taking the lead. Australia could provide greater support for grassroots initiatives to assist victims of the violence. But it should also apply greater political pressure to the PNG Government to make addressing violence a higher priority.

This Analysis shares stories and reflections that illuminate the brutal reality endured by many citizens of one of Australia's closest neighbours. The aim is to push past the sterile and incomplete statistical accounts and explore some of the formidable complexity miring Australia's foreign aid ambitions in PNG.

HELEN'S STORY

The case that brought Sophie Mangai to downtown Wewak began in Helen's village in the East Sepik hinterland. It is a couple of hours' walk for its 400 inhabitants up a mountain from the nearest road. Children make the trek down and back every day to attend school.

Before dawn on Saturday 7 December 2013, a posse of police burst out of the bush. They were searching for Helen's father, a suspect in a bloody land dispute. He surrendered himself when they started attacking Helen and stripping her clothes off, she would later tell investigators.

Four of them grabbed her, spurred on by their commander, who told Helen his men had worked hard to capture her father, and they were "finishing off their work" by raping her. When they were done they gave her to a fifth man — the son of the man her father was accused of murdering — who she says also raped her, locked her in a sago-palm hut and set it alight. She escaped and ran three hours through the bush to her aunty's house for help.

Helen's aunt called Florence Parinjo, who runs a crisis service. "Tell the little girl not to wash, not to do anything, look after her well and bring her to me," Parinjo told them. Helen's *wantoks* (relatives) ferried her by boat to Wewak. "She was in torn clothes. She was traumatised … scared, not speaking well, and injured internally," Parinjo recalls. "I called the matron (at Wewak hospital) and told her she was coming. I called Sophie Mangai."

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At the hospital Helen received only basic treatment before some police, perhaps those involved in the attack, came looking for her. Nurses, fearful for the girl's safety, scrambled together 50 kina ($20) for an ambulance to smuggle her out. "They rescued her in the night," says Parinjo.

Parinjo called a policewoman from the local sexual offences squad, but she could not come as she had no vehicle — a daily complaint for the fledgling national network of family and sexual crime units that Australia has helped to expand. She told Parinjo to bring the girl to the station on Monday, setting the scene for the showdown that would send Mangai to jail, Parinjo and Helen into hiding, and social and mainstream media into a campaigning fury.

The then police commissioner described the allegations as "shocking and shameful" and dispatched a team from Port Moresby to investigate.[12] Prime Minister Peter O'Neill posted a Facebook statement declaring the case a priority. "Violence against women in PNG will not be tolerated and I personally pass on my sympathies to the victim," said the prime minister. "I am also concerned by the allegations of another woman being arrested due to protesting (the crime)."[13]

The investigation chief told Radio New Zealand that he found evidence of police "malpractice and inaction."[14] In February 2014 the Wewak commander was charged with assaulting Sophie Mangai and with rape.[15] Two probationary constables, an auxiliary policeman, and a civilian also face charges of rape, arson, and unlawful wounding. The matters are pending in the National Court. Meanwhile Helen has received no treatment or counseling. She has been instructed to remain in hiding until she is required to give evidence. She is supported by *wantok*s, but she is frightened.

Optimists might find some hope in this episode, in which activists capitalised on the nexus of exploding social media and community

distress inside PNG about issues of safety, police behaviour, official accountability, and violence. In the months since there have been a spate of stories in which individual cases of abuse have been highlighted in traditional and social media, to which the government and law enforcement officials have been forced to respond.[16]

A bleaker view recognises how much hard work and luck it took to illuminate what happened to Helen and Sophie Mangai, and wonders how many similar stories remain lost in the forests.

A HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY AND A BARRIER TO PROSPERITY

The data on violence in PNG is patchy and scarce.[17] It has been observed that it is impossible to even credibly speculate whether gender violence has increased or decreased. What is beyond doubt is that there is far too much of it. Many assaults within families are never reported, and many victims of attacks outside the home consider reporting them to be a waste of time. Police documents, therefore, record only a fragment of the story. Similarly if the victim finds her way to hospital, her injuries and the circumstances in which they were sustained are not routinely documented. Surveys are often years out of date and sterile, scrubbed clean of misery, identity, and humanity.

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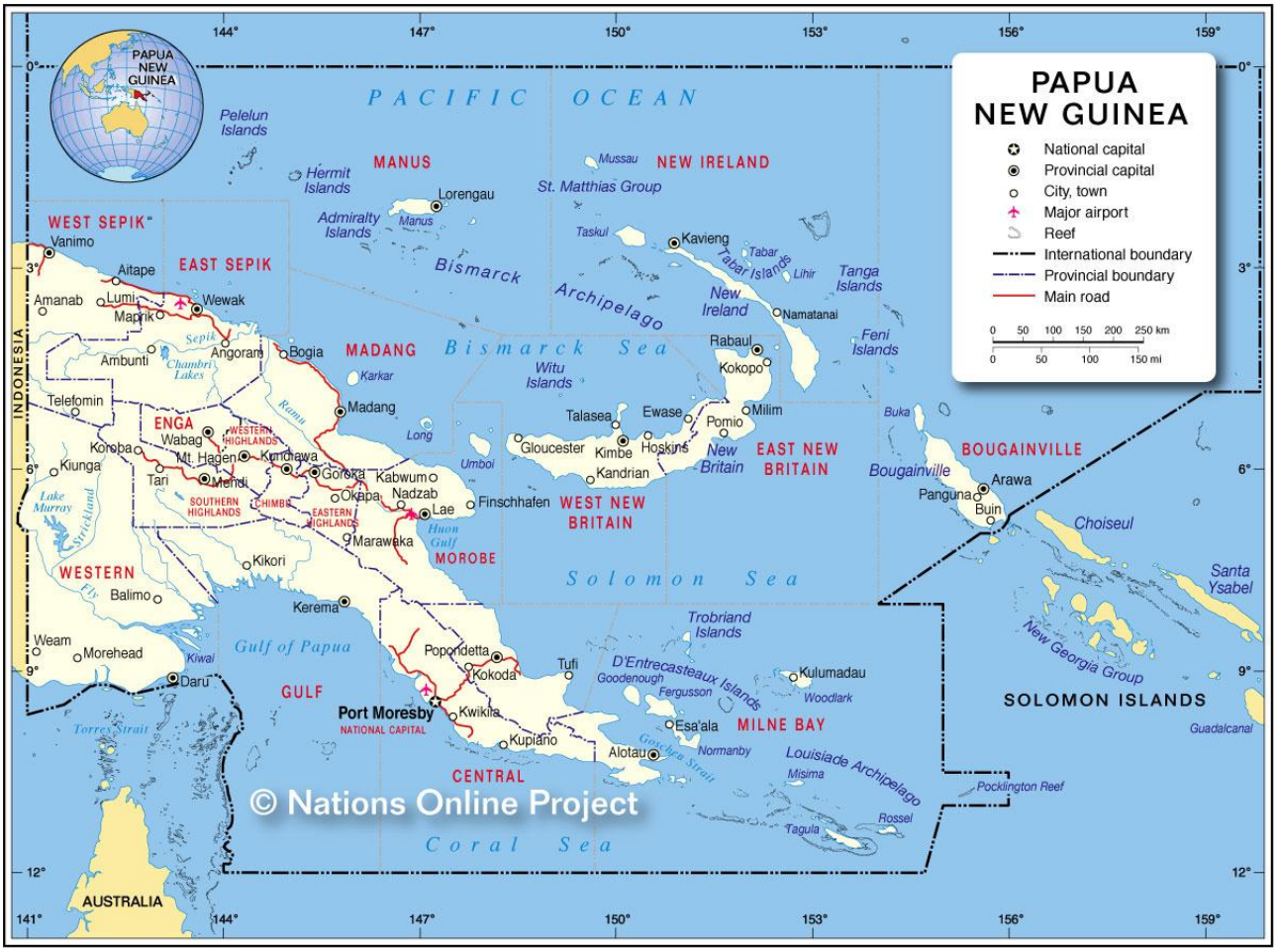
Survivors must find their own way through the labyrinth of services, such as they are. They must walk or catch buses from shelters to clinics to police stations to courts — evading their attackers en route. Only the most determined and fortunate will ever navigate this route successfully.

Further complicating the picture is the complexity and variability of PNG communities. As a recent World Bank analysis of crime trends in PNG noted, crime and violence are not experienced uniformly across the country and tend to be concentrated in 'hot spots', of which Lae and Port Moresby are the worst, ranking among the most dangerous cities in the world.[18] Other flashpoints were identified in Madang, East New Britain, West New Britain, the Western Highlands, the Southern Highlands (including territory now recognised as Hela) and Enga.

One of the most notorious places is Tari, the wild-west wellspring of the $US19 billion ExxonMobil-led liquefied natural gas project (PNGLNG), which has brought wealth and opportunity to some, but is also a powderkeg of social tensions and disenchantment.[19] "Men get money, get drunk, beat their wives, don't feed their children," as one senior man from the nearby Kutubu oil and gas fields summarised. "Development brings both good and bad, but our leaders … they don't see the impact on traditional life, that money really spoils traditional life."[20]

Figure 1: Map of Papua New Guinea



Source: Nations Online Project, "Political Map of Papua New Guinea," http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/papua_map2.htm

MSF set up operations in the broken-down Tari hospital in 2008 when an Oxfam survey exposed widespread instances of family and sexual violence. During a visit in 2009 the author interviewed a Canadian nurse who had come from Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a place synonymous with the worst sexual atrocities. She was shattered by what she found in Tari.[21] "In (Congo) I was in a war zone. One group would rape another group, or would kill another group. You kill or rape the enemy." In Tari, the nurse observed, "families, their own people, hurt each other."

Tari is a particularly dangerous part of PNG. In other parts — in the islands and on parts of the coast, for instance — assaults are less numerous and less extreme. Nonetheless, at hospitals across the country, the evidence of violence is inescapable. From the walking wounded, who line up outside provincial highlands emergency departments each morning to get their wounds stitched and bandaged; to the story recounted to the author by a New Zealand nurse working in Port Moresby, of a young woman disemboweled and killed by her husband and his friends, who had first gang raped her as punishment for some transgression. A detailed survey of 31 maternal deaths in Milne Bay identified domestic beatings in the history of at least one-third of cases.[22]

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The humanitarian consequences of family and sexual violence are in plain sight. What is more difficult to measure are the economic consequences of this violence. Nevertheless the risks to prosperity caused by violence are being recognised within PNG. In 2013, a group of PNG business leaders formed the Business Coalition for Women with Australian and World Bank financial support. Violence is a core focus for the group. According to the resident representative of the International Finance Corporation Carolyn Blacklock, "the idea for a coalition came from listening to the concerns of the private sector related to challenges faced by women, employees, managers, and business owners … they know that equality is not simply an ethical move — it's an economic imperative."[23]

ECONOMIC DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE

Dr Eric Kwa, the head of the PNG Law Reform Commission and one of the nation's most respected jurists, is a passionate advocate for women and has devoted much of his professional life to tackling questions of justice. More than twenty years ago he drafted early versions of the Family Protection Act that has just come into force. His late wife was a leading activist for women.

Asked about his views today on how to improve safety for women, his answer is a surprise. "I've been a teacher of law. I've taught for eighteen years, I've trained all these lawyers, written so many laws, gone to so many court cases. I've written six books on the law. And I've now decided — the law is not the answer to justice."

Kwa grew up on Siassi Island, between New Britain and the mainland. "In my time we had a road around the island," he recalls. "We had two airstrips. We had flights every week. We had shipping every week, coming to get the copra. In the past few years it is all gone. There are no more cars on the island, only on one side where there is logging. My own village, my cousins, nieces, nephews, they have never seen a car. In my time there was no rape, no drugs." Today, Kwa reports, both violence and wild marijuana are spreading across the island. "I've just

been back to my village," he says. "I was there for two days and I witnessed violence right in front of my eyes."

Kwa believes that the erosion of infrastructure, the loss of the capacity to grow crops and deliver them to market, and the loss of opportunity to pursue education and jobs have all combined to create a culture of idleness, hopelessness, and violence.

"The answer is in economic activity," Kwa says. "I've told the Australian Government, I've told everybody — don't pump money into the law and justice sector. Forget it. Why do you want more courts, more police, more lawyers? Why build a nice big courthouse? Because you are admitting there will be a lot more people coming through the system? Put that money into building a road, and you will have less crime, and you won't need more courthouses. Violence is a consequence. We are dealing with symptoms. But we have to deal with the cause, and the cause is the lack of opportunity."

Despite incredible natural resources, poverty is widespread and worsening in many locations, although many proud Papua New Guineans bristle at one-dimensional western wealth assessments and cite their status as landowners. Most of the country remains in traditional ownership. In surveys about violence, people often cite economic pressures as a key contributor.[24] The World Bank reports that poverty is rising, from 37.5 per cent in 1996 to 54 per cent by 2003.[25] Most rural villagers and many urban settlement dwellers cannot access power and water.

Rural decay flows into urban desperation. Women and girls are easy targets for raskol gangs.

PNG ranks in the bottom cluster of countries in UN indices on human development, barely shifting in a decade despite a spectacular resources boom. On gender equity — measuring women's empowerment, labour market participation, and reproductive health — it keeps company with the likes of Zimbabwe and Tanzania. Maternal deaths, a merciless barometer of women's status, are among the worst in the world, doubling in a recent decade. PNG is not on track to meet any of the Millennium Development Goal targets in 2015.

Rural decay flows into urban desperation. Women and girls are easy targets for *raskol* gangs terrorising streets, buses, and settlements. In 2011, 55 per cent of women surveyed by UN Women in Port Moresby reported they had experienced some kind of violence in the markets in the past year.[26] Corruption provides more fuel for the violence — from the enthusiastic pursuit of private graft to the lazy inertia of officials neglecting their duty to provide law and order and justice. Transparency International ranks PNG at 144 out of 177 nations on their corruption index.[27]

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DRIVERS OF VIOLENCE

But economic factors are only part of the story. Gary Juffa is the governor of Oro province, an outspoken rising political star and a proud defender of PNG culture and identity. His part of the country is well known to Australians, as it includes the Kokoda Track. The 42 year-old told the author that violence has "exploded" over his adult life, particularly in urban areas and especially in the last ten years.

Why? "Population growth is ridiculous — about 200 000 people a year, an entire province. Where are the hospitals, schools, roads, bridges, administrators?" "People are all packed and congested. There's friction, obviously … over land and resources. That escalates to violence. Not just against women and children, against men, against families, against ethnic groups that are not as aggressive and assertive as others. They come in and push them off their own land and take it."

These conflicts are exacerbated by PNG's many different languages, mindsets, and values all bumping up against each other, and the erosion of the best of old culture. "We need to appreciate where we came from, to understand we came from a somewhat civilised society — civilised in our terms, and complex," says Juffa. "Certainly we had some bad habits. Eating people was not a good habit — we could do away with that. But we had some good habits and we need to find those again and promote them. Not everything the West brings is good. This constant materialistic effort to get rich is not really good. We need to promote other values — our values."

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"You have angry young men in urban areas who have not had access to a grandfather, who have no cultural principles, morals, and parameters, no loving tribe. All those things have been dismantled by either Christianity or the colonial administration," he says. "They have been told they are savages, and they behave accordingly. Then you've got 10 000 jobs and 80 000 school leavers. The cost of living is through the roof. It is all a very potent mix for violence."

The notion that violence is exacerbated by modernity and urbanisation, as emerges in the accounts from Kwa and Juffa, has wide currency in informing aid programs, but it is a topic debated in the social science literature. There is concern that this narrative can romanticise heritage and gloss over history. A criticism that crops up frequently in the literature and in conversation with deeply travelled specialists is that many of the development programs initiated to combat gender violence fail to draw on the rich archive of anthropological research in PNG.[28]

That 'wife beating' was condoned by a large proportion of the PNG population, men and women, was documented in landmark research by the PNG Law Reform Commission thirty years ago.[29] It also mapped stark differences in attitudes according to geography — patterns that still flow through crime statistics. In Eastern Highlands 95 per cent of men

said it was OK to beat your wife in certain circumstances, and 98 per cent of women agreed. But in New Ireland the number was 17 per cent for men, 7 per cent for women.

As ANU academic Richard Eves observed in his widely cited 2006 study on PNG men's attitudes and behaviour, "there is no doubt that the prevailing gender ideology embraces the view that violence is an entirely appropriate corrective to any failure of wives to fulfil their perceived marital duties."[30]

Talk to older women about their observations over their lifetimes and many recall the threat of domestic violence going back for generations, but they add the caveat that in the past this was contained by *kastom* (traditional culture). Ume Wainetti, national director of the PNG Family Sexual Violence Action Committee, comes from Daru. There, she says, violence was always part of the fabric of family life. But "if a woman got beaten by her husband, her brother would retaliate." Social changes have torn away that safety net.

The other profound change, women say, is in terms of their safety in wider society. This generation has lost freedoms their mothers had. Sarah Garap, a long-time human rights advocate who grew up in volatile Chimbu, says that in many communities tradition provided protection, as rape and violence were taboo. As a teenager in the 1970s she and her friends would walk three hours to Kundiawa from their village without fear or interference. Today that would be considered reckless.

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Alcohol, drugs, pornography, and violent games and movies are all contributing to the problem — the worst of new and old cultures melding. The damage is compounded by the erosion of traditional systems of accountability. The inescapable conclusion is that in modern PNG the position of women has deteriorated rather than improved. This was argued in both government and NGO submissions to the UN CEDAW process (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women).[31]

In an attempt to explain the complex cultural landscape, the expert submission commissioned by the National Council of Women (advised by Eric Kwa) described three major influences marginalising women in PNG. First was old culture, the underlying, predominately male-dominated traditional society. Its perceptions of male supremacy are enduring throughout the wider, particularly rural, population.

Next came the missionaries espousing patriarchal Christianity, in which women were "good enough to place flowers in the vases around the pulpits, but not good enough to preach." Meanwhile they were instructed to submit to their husbands, or be labeled as sinners. "Many successful PNG women had to break this cycle of subtle control by both men and churches to progress."[32] Eric Kwa says the churches, which continue to exercise enormous influence, have still failed to take a strong enough

leadership role against violence. “I go to church every Sunday. I see these others every week, who abuse their families, and the guy up there in the pulpit isn’t even telling them that it is wrong … which means other members of the congregation think it is normal.”

The third factor was the absorption of both traditional and Christian values into imported — and deeply patriarchal — colonial political and economic systems. Women’s voices remain absent from the public sphere and policy. The Pacific has the lowest female political participation in the world.[33] Since the first national election in independent PNG in 1977 only seven women have been elected. Three of these MPs only gained their seats in 2012.

FAILURES OF JUSTICE

While Governor Gary Juffa blames the spiraling violence on many of the same issues identified by Eric Kwa, he has a very different view as to the solution. “The police-to-citizens ratio is horrific. The UN recommends 1 to 400. In PNG it is 1 to 1200. In Oro, a province of 170 000, we had 67 police on strength (in 2012), and only 30 of those were working.”

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Since his election as governor in 2012, Juffa has recruited ranks of reservists, mostly his tribesmen. Public safety has improved, he says, because wrongdoers are dealt with, often brutally. He makes no apology. “These people, they raped a nine year-old, for instance. They cut an old woman’s arm off. They break an old man’s head with a steel pipe and his brains spill out. You want to protect the people who do these things? As far as I am concerned they have given up their rights to be treated like human beings.”

But it is not just a lack of policing resources that is the problem. Social and cultural attitudes to family and sexual violence seep into the justice system. The failure of police and criminal courts to prosecute sexual violence cases suggests that offences against women such as rape are not viewed as a crime, or at least not a serious one.[34] An analysis led by Dr Kamalini Lokuge, of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at ANU, comparing sexual violence cases dealt with by PNG’s Family Support Centre (FSC) in Lae in 2010 and prosecutions through the Lae National Court in 2012, determined that the odds of a criminal conviction in an adult sexual violence case were 1:338.[35] These odds may in fact be overly generous given that many cases never even make it as far as the hospital.

Helen’s story, as told above, illustrates some of the hurdles women face in obtaining justice: remoteness, lack of emergency response capability, and woeful police attitudes and ethics. Two other case studies, from polar ends of the economic and social spectrum, throw more light on the fraught landscape.

The first is that of Beldah, aged 22, from Maprik in East Sepik. Like so many of her rural sisters, Beldah has little education and no money. Her husband raped her with a bush knife and sticks. She wants to leave him but a village magistrate upheld his claim for the bride price he paid to be reimbursed by her family in Oro province, on the other side of the country. They must find 3500 kina ($1300) before she can go home to them.

PNG has a hybrid system of introduced and indigenous justice in which traditional village courts sit within the formal system. It is a pragmatic response to the reality that for many people the state remains remote and ineffectual. Under PNG law, village courts should not determine criminal matters such as rape or murder. Such cases should be police cases and referred to the district and national courts. In reality, however, explains Peni Keris, director of the Village Courts Secretariat, "if the nearest police station is five days' walk or a 1000 kilometre boat trip away, the village court has to deal with it. If they don't, who on earth will?" It is, Keris says, within a magistrate's jurisdiction to deal with the fallout of criminal acts, to do what can be done to stop an escalation of violence by exercising traditional law.

Beldah has spent four months hiding from her husband in the compound of the Nana Kundi Crisis Centre…

As a consequence, Beldah has spent four months hiding from her husband in the compound of the Nana Kundi Crisis Centre, an Oxfam-supported project, one of only a handful of women's refuges across PNG. It counsels about 2000 cases each year. She shares two rooms and a cooking fire with a floating population of similarly damaged women and children. She tried to leave the centre once, and her husband hunted her down.

At the other extreme is university-educated Linda*, 46, who once worked for AusAID assisting victims of violence.[36] There are many such women — lawyers, doctors, executives. Some studies indicate that they are at least as vulnerable to abuse as their less educated sisters. Their experiences have persuaded many of the new educated generation not to marry, or at least not to marry PNG men.[37]

Linda wears crisp white linen and drives a late-model SUV. She runs a business and squeezes in an interview at a Port Moresby cafe between social engagements. She watches the door the whole time as she recounts how her husband, an executive with a resources company, beat her after she refused to accept his 'concubines'; how he gave her gonorrhoea but tells friends and family that she is a *'pamuk meri'* (whore); how she burned the gun he threatened her with and how she has been jailed several times by police whom he bribed; how she is on her fifth divorce lawyer after the previous four were paid more to drop the case. Linda has money, knowledge, and contacts, but seems no closer to justice than Beldah.

AUSTRALIA'S ROLE

Australia has poured hundreds of millions of dollars of aid and development money into PNG every year since independence in 1975. This year the budgeted figure is $577.1 million. On paper it is the highest amount Australia has ever contributed, although Australian aid has actually declined in real terms and as a proportion of the PNG budget — part of an agreed policy to turn the relationship into a 'mature partnership'.[38]

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, who has made several visits to PNG in recent years and spoken with women in highlands communities, has been forthright on Canberra's motivations for prioritising aid directed towards achieving gender equity and tackling violence. "The Australian Government considers women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls, and enhancing women's leadership opportunities in the Pacific a foreign policy priority," she said recently.[39]

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The Abbott Government has retained the flagship 'Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development' program of the former Labor government, which pledges to spend $320 million over ten years to improve political, economic, and social opportunities. In recent years all aid programs have declared the overarching ambition of gender equality, and under the Abbott Government's 'new aid paradigm', gender equality is identified as one of six priority areas for aid.

A substantial stake of Australia's PNG aid program budget is earmarked for law and justice. In the past twelve years some $300 million has gone into this sector through the recently expired PNG-Australia Law and Justice Program (PALJP) and its predecessor program. While a framework for the next phase of that program is still being drawn up, the expectation is that the budget, around $100 million over the next four years, will remain.

The PALJP supported the efforts of Peni Keris to recruit and train more women village court magistrates, which has helped raise their number to almost 1000, and which was cited as a success story in the 2013 Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness.[40] The appointments are designed to change the character of justice and leadership in communities where women preside. The investment in building the capacity, rigour, and consistency of village courts is aimed at improving the quality of justice available to ordinary PNG women.

Australia has also been instrumental in establishing family and sexual violence units at police stations in 11 locations around the country, although providing support, resources, and training for their work is a constant battle. Another $91 million has been spent by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) on programs and personnel in the past six years to advise and support PNG police. There are 73 AFP officers presently

deployed in PNG in support roles — from the training college, to police command, to the public prosecutor's office.

SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS

It is clear from both the incidence and drivers of violence, that a focus on the legal and policing systems will not alone be enough. Australia is also supporting efforts to provide practical support for the victims of violence.

One of the most promising Australian-backed projects is a model developed at the ANU and informed by deeply experienced local actors. Its champion and leader is Professor Stephen Howes, an author of recent reviews into the Australian aid program. The PNG Family and Sexual Violence Case Management Centre (CMC) aims to integrate legal, medical, and social services. The CMC will be based in Lae and it will capitalise on the legacy of local expertise developed by a long-running MSF program. It will support survivors from the time they enter the system — at a safe house or hospital — through the police process, and into the courtroom. Australia will contribute $3 million over the next three years to this program.

The hope, says Ume Wainetti of the PNG Family Sexual Violence Action Committee, is that the Lae CMC will become a training centre, developing skills that can be exported to other centres. Ultimately she wants paid officers in all provinces providing reliable services and systems for routine data collection to better inform future programs.

Another program that appears to be hitting the mark in delivering immediate protection to women at risk is the UN Women Safe Cities initiative, a recipient of Australian support. It helps women earn income safely by improving conditions in Port Moresby's notorious public markets: providing shelter, seating, toilets, water, security, police, and venturing into areas like mobile phone banking and on-site legal advice. The program is now looking at expanding into more markets and cities and new realms such as public buses and bus stations.

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There are also more organic initiatives such as the Human Rights Defender networks that evolved in the highlands. These networks use local activists, often based in remote, volatile communities, to identify and assist women at risk and smuggle them away. Such programs are inherently risky, particularly for activists who often operate with little training and backup. However, the activists are also lifesavers. They can now access Australian money, via Oxfam, to repatriate women at risk back to their parents' villages.

SUPPORTING LOCAL SOLUTIONS

The truth is that no single line of action to address family and sexual violence will work in isolation. Long-term efforts to improve PNG's economy and its system of law and justice, together with more

immediate support to victims, are both necessary pillars of a safer society. It is also true that there is a limit to what Australia can do as an outsider in PNG. The encouraging news is that there are a growing number of local initiatives to tackle family and sexual violence that Australia can support.

One such project comes out of the Port Moresby settlements, where trauma specialist Professor Judy Atkinson has run a series of workshops at the invitation of local communities. “They came up with creative and powerful commitments to what they could do for themselves because the law, as a protective force, does not reach into their community,” says Atkinson. She has now put their ideas into a strategic plan that has been presented to the PNG prime minister for consideration.

One of its priorities is to work with men and boys to address the triggers for violence. This theme comes up constantly in conversations with activists, teachers, magistrates, and health and social workers across the country. There is a yearning for culturally appropriate, schools-based prevention programs teaching non-violent conflict resolution and tackling some of the vexed issues concerning male behaviour and identity in a changing society.

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As long as men’s issues are overlooked, interventions to assist women will backfire.[41] The ANU’s Richard Eves cites research showing that male angst in the face of rapid change has contributed to violence against women.[42] Eves also cautions that the rhetoric of women’s empowerment can have unintended consequences, as Sophie Mangai’s experience in Wewak illustrates.[43] Until there are safety systems in place to protect women, claiming rights can be a dangerous business.

The risks of only partly doing the job are captured in an anecdote recounted by Ume Wainetti. On a recent visit to Alotau, in Milne Bay, she learned that the number of women seeking refuge at the local crisis shelter had fallen, in part because the Alotau network has been effective in having charges laid and perpetrators jailed. But now there has been a backlash. Men in the jail are sending word out to other men warning them to make sure their abused wives never make it as far as the shelter. The ANU analysis underwriting the Lae CMC project argues that “family and sexual violence must be recognised as a long-term human rights problem and constraint on development that requires sustained and serious engagement and investment.”[44]

The time is right to capitalise on the interest in the PNG community in a safer society and harness the anger and distress of citizens whom justice has failed. The social media conversation on these issues is exploding, facilitated by Facebook forums like Sharp Talk and Papua New Guineans Against Domestic Violence, the latter of which has almost 18 000 members. Cases previously hidden are pushed into the light.

Editors Alexander Rheeney of the *Papua New Guinea Post Courier* and Titi Gabi of *PNG Loop* are responding to this groundswell by using their mastheads, as well as online engagement, to campaign against violence. Gabi says that such issues resonate powerfully with her predominantly young audience. Rheeney says that he has come under political pressure for highlighting violence issues. There is sensitivity about the damage such publicity does to the country's image. "Politically that has repercussions. Investors are frightened off … (But) when I became editor I said 'this is my opportunity to bring some change into households around my country. PNG men need to start seeing women as equal partners …. It has to happen now'."

"We are actually talking about changing the cultural fabric of PNG," says Rheeney. "In traditional Melanesian society, women have always been seen as inferior to men. So that is one of the challenges we have. How do we get over that cultural barrier to get to the next phase?"

Getting to the next phase will also require a greater commitment from the PNG Government to addressing the problem. Indeed, the array of programs that Australia supports to address family and sexual violence will count for little until PNG political leaders give the problem a much higher priority.

Australia can play a role in ensuring that the PNG Government takes greater responsibility for the problem…

Australia can play a role in ensuring that the PNG Government takes greater responsibility for the problem and that it accords it much higher priority than has been the case to date. Given the sometimes fraught relationship between Canberra and Port Moresby, this will not be easy. It will require trust and political will. Yet both sides have already acknowledged their desire to make the relationship a more equal partnership. Given the heavy toll that family and sexual violence is taking, effort to address this issue should be at the centre of that partnership. At the very least this means making the issue a regular and prominent feature of the bilateral agenda.

CONCLUSION

The personal stories in this paper recount the high cost, in both human and development terms, of family and sexual violence in PNG. It is an issue that deserves greater attention. It is heartening to see signs of change within PNG, particularly in the way that civil society and social media are mobilising on this issue.

Ultimately the solution must come from within PNG. Nevertheless, Australia has a role to play through its aid investments. Canberra could provide additional help to those in PNG prepared to take responsibility for addressing this problem, by supporting the types of local initiatives outlined in this Analysis. But Australian policy-makers also need to keep the issue high on the bilateral political agenda to ensure that Australia's aid contributions are not wasted.

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Chandler worked for much of her career at *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne and was a regular contributor to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, culminating in roles as a Fairfax senior writer and roving national and international correspondent. In 2009 Chandler earned a Walkley Award (Australia's most coveted journalism prize) for commentary and analysis for articles generated by trips to the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique. In the past year she has been awarded a Melbourne Press Club Quill for Best Feature, the George Munster Prize for Independent Journalism, the 2013 ACFID (Australian Council for International Development) Media Prize and the Royal Australian New Zealand College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology Media Award of Excellence, largely drawing on her contributions reporting on PNG for *The Global Mail,* to which she was a regular contributor (and which ceased operation in February 2014).

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