

Promising Practices in

# Preventing & Eliminating Violence

against Women and Girls in Fiji



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# ABOUT THE RESEARCH PAPER

The Fiji Women's Fund (the Fund) strives to contribute to the ongoing efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls in Fiji. This is one of the Fund's key focus areas, alongside empowering women economically, supporting women in decision-making and leadership, and facilitating coalitions for change. The Fund is an initiative of the Australian Government's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (*Pacific Women*) Program. The Fund provides grants and capacity development to women's groups, organisations and networks in Fiji to contribute to transformative change that improves women's lives. The Fund specifically supports groups that work with women in rural and remote locations and those who are marginalised, including women with disabilities and those facing discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

This paper is based on the work of 4 of the Fund's grantee partners who are working to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls.<sup>1</sup> These organisations are the House of Sarah, Medical Services Pacific, the Reproductive Family Health Association of Fiji and Rise Beyond the Reef. The paper explains the different approaches grantee partners have used and tailored to their own community contexts.<sup>2</sup>

## Credits

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## Peer Review

The Fiji Women's Fund would like to acknowledge and thank the following women and organisations for peer reviewing this paper:

- Anareta Apole – Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
- Emily Elliot – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Abigail Erikson – UN Women
- Nalini Singh – Fiji Women's Rights Movement
- Monica Waqanisau – Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development

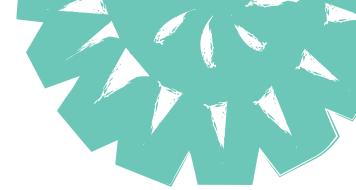
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This publication has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are the authors' alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government. Every effort was taken to ensure the information included in this publication was correct at the time of publication.

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<sup>1</sup> The grantee partners primarily deal with domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual assault and other forms of violence against women and girls, which are also prevalent in Fiji, are not discussed in the paper such as harassment, unpaid care work, trafficking etc.

<sup>2</sup> The authors recognise this diversity in context and that not all approaches work everywhere.

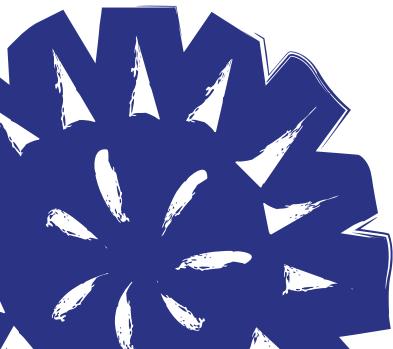


## Abstract

Violence against women and girls is a serious problem in Fiji. Women and girls in Fiji face approximately twice the violent incidents in their lifetime compared to women and girls around the world. This violence affects the women themselves as well as their children and, more broadly, society. Violence has profound negative physical, psychological and economic effects. This paper presents 4 ways to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls in Fiji, drawing from the experience of 4 organisations working in the sector. The paper discusses 4 key learnings. Firstly, to understand the context of women and girls and the violence they face. Secondly, to address violence at the collective level of social norms as well as at the individual level. Thirdly, to engage men and boys. Lastly, to develop contextualised tools to support conversations about preventing and eliminating violence against women. The paper also discusses the ways in which these learnings echo findings from international literature.

## Structure

The paper has 4 key sections. Section 1 introduces the paper by describing the context of violence against women and girls in Fiji and the work of the 4 grantee partners and the Fiji Women's Fund. Section 2 provides the framework that the authors used to structure the analysis. Section 3 presents the 4 key issues that emerged for partners during the implementation of their projects and compares grantee partners' findings with those from international literature. Section 4 concludes the paper by summarising findings and reiterating the key contributions of the paper.





# Section 1: Introduction

## *Violence against women and girls in Fiji*

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Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a critical human rights violation that is widespread in Fiji and the Pacific. For example, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre's (FWCC) national prevalence study on VAWG found that levels of domestic violence in Fiji were twice that of the global average.<sup>4</sup> 64% of women who have ever been in an intimate relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a husband or intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> 24% of women are suffering from physical or sexual partner violence today.<sup>6</sup> These statistics in Fiji are largely echoed in other parts of the Pacific, with available figures showing that between 40% and 70% of women are subjected to violence from intimate partners and family across their lifetimes.<sup>7</sup> Existing rates of violence are only exacerbated by crises. For example, calls to FWCC's domestic violence helplines doubled during March and April in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown.<sup>8</sup>

Violence has extremely negative physical, reproductive and mental health effects on women and girls across their lifecycle, on their children, and there are significant negative economic and social costs to families, communities and the nation.<sup>9</sup> For example, a recent study by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) 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.<sup>10</sup>

Key social and political factors affect the situation of violence for women and girls in Fiji. Violence against women and girls is rooted in gender-based discrimination, social norms and gender stereotypes that perpetuate such violence.<sup>11</sup> Gender-based discrimination is heightened in the patriarchal context of Fiji, characterised by extreme gender inequality.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> FWCC, (2013), Somebody's Life, Everybody's Business! National Research on Women's Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/2011): A survey exploring the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 2

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> UN Women, (2011), Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Evidence, Data and Knowledge in Pacific Island Countries, UN Women Pacific, Suva

<sup>8</sup> Wasuka, E., (2020), Fiji records spike in COVID-19 domestic violence cases, Pacific Beat

<sup>9</sup> FWCC, (2013), Op cit, pg. 4

<sup>10</sup> IFC, (2019), The Business Case for Workplace Responses to Domestic And Sexual Violence In Fiji, pg. 6

<sup>11</sup> Vuniwaqa, M., (2020), Fiji's National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls, Fiji Sun

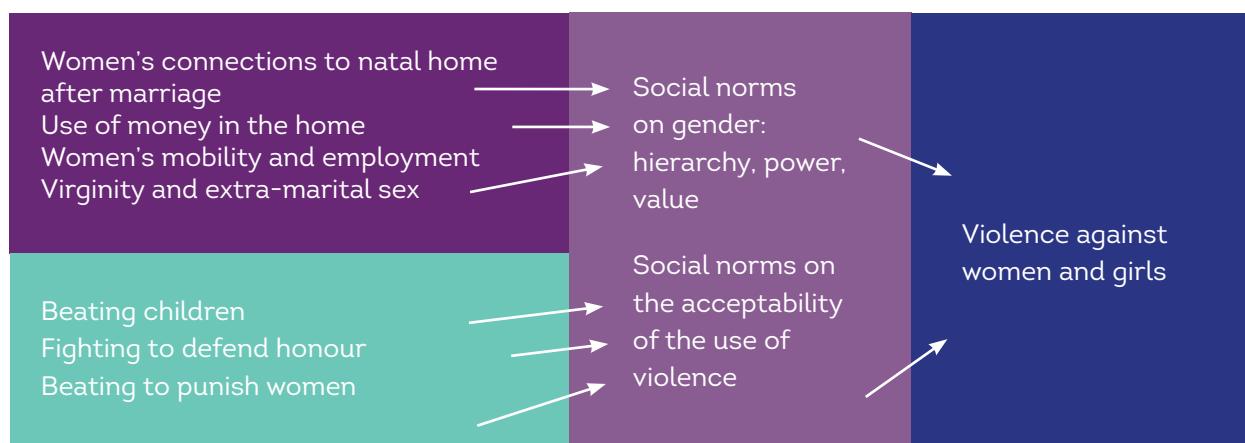
<sup>12</sup> FWCC, (2013), Op cit, pg. 5

Many women lack access to support services and the formal justice system, especially since a significant proportion of people in Fiji (44%) live in rural areas.<sup>13</sup> The absence of a proactive stance against violence against women by the mainline churches<sup>14</sup> is significant in the context of Fiji where almost everyone (98.8%) identifies as religious.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, Fiji's history of political coups increases women's experiences of violence, both during and after the coups.<sup>16</sup>

VAWG in Fiji is reinforced by social norms that condone gender inequality and the use of violence. For example, victims of violence are often blamed by both men and women for not having given the perpetrator enough respect and there are cases where victims of rape within a village are made to marry their assailants.<sup>17</sup> Commonly held beliefs include that men should have the dominant place in the household and that women should stay within their female boundaries.<sup>18</sup> Violence against women and girls is traditionally considered a taboo subject in Fiji, which limits the ability of community members to address the issue. Adding to this, traditional (*iTaukei*) culture includes specific designations within villages dictating that only certain people can report such matters to the village headmen or the police. This cultural restraint on women's ability to speak out against violence is exacerbated for women who marry and move to their husband's village or land.

VAWG exists in a wider field of violence that includes male-to-male violence, female-to-female violence and female-to-male violence. FWCC's research shows that the use of violence as a form of punishment and discipline is accepted within many families and communities.<sup>19</sup> This connection between unequal gendered social norms and the general acceptance of the use of violence to solve conflicts have also been demonstrated as driving violence against women and girls in international literature as shown in Figure 1.<sup>20</sup>

*Figure 1: Social norms and violence against women and girls*



<sup>13</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics, (2018), 2017 Census

<sup>14</sup> Australian Agency for International Development. Office of Development Effectiveness. (2008). Violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor: Building on Global and Regional Promising Approaches. Canberra, Australia: Australian Agency for International Development pg.18

<sup>15</sup> 64.5% of the population is Christian, 28% Hindu, and 6.3% Muslim. The largest Christian denomination is the Methodist Church, which makes up approximately 34.6% of the population. Other Protestant denominations account for 10.4% of the population, Roman Catholics 9.1%, and other Christian groups 10.4%. United States Department of State, (2017), 2016 Report on International Religious Freedom - Fiji

<sup>16</sup> ODE, (2008), Op cit pg. 153'

<sup>17</sup> Newland, L., (2016). Villages, Violence and Atonement in Fiji, in Gender Violence & Human Rights Seeking Justice in Fiji, Papua New Guinea & Vanuatu, Edited by Aletta Biersack, Margaret Jolly & Martha Macintyre, ANU Press, pgs. 56-57

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Op cit pg. 5

<sup>20</sup> Jewkes, R., (2017), What works evidence review: Social norms and violence against women and girls, What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Evidence Review, pg. 1

Some women in Fiji are at a higher risk of violence given their remoteness, disability, status as gender non-conforming, or ethnicity. For example, FWCC's research found that rates of physical, sexual and emotional violence are higher in rural areas than urban areas and higher for iTaukei women and girls than those from all other ethnic groups.<sup>21</sup> Those who are gender non-conforming face discrimination and increased risks of violence.<sup>22</sup> For example, research by DIVA for Equality found that 83% of lesbian, bisexual women and transmen and gender non-conforming people have experienced physical violence by their intimate partner.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, 76% of survey respondents did not feel safe going to the Fiji Police.<sup>24</sup> Internationally, women with a disability are twice as likely to report a recent experience of intimate partner violence.<sup>25</sup>

The ability of women to seek justice in Fiji is limited by the cultural practice of reconciliation known as *bulubulu*. *Bulubulu* is a process of collective apology and seeking atonement carried out especially in the iTaukei community but also used by the non-indigenous community.<sup>26</sup> The process involves an offender bringing an offering to the family or village that has been offended. Often a whale's tooth, which holds significant cultural and economic value, is offered as compensation and to improve relations.<sup>27</sup> The critical issue of *bulubulu* is that the atonement is between offending and offended groups, whether families or villages. The focus on the collective reduces an individual woman's capacity to decide whether she wants to reconcile. Rather than solving the problem, *bulubulu* can prevent women from accessing services or the law.<sup>28</sup>

Additionally, the broader development context in Fiji presents a challenge to address violence against women and girls. An evaluation of Australia's development assistance to support the elimination of violence against women (EVAW) showed that political instability, poor infrastructure and a lack of quality services such as education and health care all posed serious barriers to meeting the needs of women in Fiji.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, VAWG is generally addressed in isolation and not tied to broader development issues.

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<sup>21</sup> Newland, B. (2016), Op cit pg. 55

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pg. 74

<sup>23</sup> DIVA for Equality, (2019), Unjust, Unequal, Unstoppable: Fiji Lesbians, Bisexual Women, Transmen and Gender Non-Conforming People Tipping the Scales Toward Justice, pg. 34

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pg. 78

<sup>25</sup> Chirwa, E., Jewkes, R., Van Der Heijden, I., et al. Intimate partner violence among women with and without disabilities: a pooled analysis of baseline data from 7 violence prevention programmes submitted

<sup>26</sup> International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination, The Role of Culture in Shaping Judicial Opinions on Sexual & Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Cases: Fiji Case Law Survey, pg. 1

<sup>27</sup> Newland, B. (2016), Op cit pg. 55

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pg. 61

<sup>29</sup> Mukata et al, (2014), Review of Australian aid initiatives in the Pacific aimed at ending violence against women, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), pg. 22

## Responses to the problem so far

Governments at the national, regional and global levels have recognised VAWG as a profound problem that needs to be addressed. In Fiji, the National Gender Policy gives the overarching direction for EVAW which is operationalised through the Strategic Plan. 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.<sup>30</sup> At the regional level, the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration was adopted by the Pacific Islands Forum in 2014.<sup>31</sup> This statement includes commitments for countries towards ending violence against women and girls. At the international level, women's rights are reinforced through the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Fiji is recognised as being the most advanced country in the region in relation to addressing violence against women.<sup>32</sup> 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 (FWRM) and the Regional Rights Resources Team.<sup>33</sup> FWCC has largely been responsible for placing the issue of violence against women onto the public agenda. FWCC's most important contribution in this regard is the national survey on the prevalence, incidence and attitudes to intimate partner violence in Fiji.<sup>34</sup> FWCC has played a pivotal role over decades in understanding local needs, advocating for and sustaining change as well as providing services, training and education on VAWG.<sup>35</sup> FWRM has also been at the forefront of the campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls in Fiji. Its research, lobbying and advocacy work has contributed to positive legislative change supporting women's rights.<sup>36</sup>

Religious organisations are also important in the response to violence in Fiji. For example, the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia has worked for over a decade to eliminate violence against women and girls in their faith community in Fiji. In 2013, it passed a policy for zero tolerance of violence against women and children in the church, homes, schools and their communities. More recently, in 2018, faith leaders from the Christian, Muslim, Hindu organisations launched a media campaign to raise awareness on violence against women and girls during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign. House of Sarah's One Voice Campaign featured religious leaders stating the opposition of their faith to rape and violence against women and children. In addition, some Christian Churches observe the first Sunday of the 16 Days of Activism as the 'Break the Silence' Sunday supported by the House of Sarah.

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<sup>30</sup> Parliament of Fiji, (2019), Report of The Auditor General of The Republic of Fiji Performance, Coordination of Actions on Elimination of Violence against Women Performance Audit, pg. xvii

<sup>31</sup> Also relevant is the Boe Declaration on Regional Security with its focus on human security. For further details: <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>

<sup>32</sup> Ellsberg, M., Fulu, E., Warner, X., Potts, A., Dixit, D. and Ullman, C., (2019), Ending Violence against Women and Girls: Evaluating a decade of Australia's development assistance, Fiji Country Supplement, pg. 4

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> FWCC, (2013), Op cit

<sup>35</sup> Ellsberg, M., Fulu, E., Warner, X., Potts, A., Dixit, D., and Ullman, C. (2019), Op cit

<sup>36</sup> See for example, Balancing the Scales: Improving Fijian Women's Access to Justice; Not OK: Stop Sexual Harassment and Law for Pacific Women: a legal rights Handbook accessible here: <http://www.fwrn.org.fj/publications/research-analysis>

Religious organisations also manage almost all the existing crisis accommodation in Fiji as shown in Table 1 below.<sup>37</sup> This accommodation is important as it offers women, and their children, a safe place when facing situations of violence. There are limitations, however, in that facilities cannot cater for special needs, caretakers are often not trained social workers, and there is a lack of finance, space and resources. Additionally, almost all of the housing is located in the Suva to Nausori corridor and many women and girls do not know that crisis accommodation is available.<sup>38</sup>

*Table 1: Emergency housing available for women and children facing violence*

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Description of housing</b>
Salvation Army	Two girls' homes and the Family Care Centres in Suva, Lautoka and Labasa for women and children who have survived violence or poverty or who have been evicted from their homes.
Methodist Church	Orphanage in Suva that sometimes houses children who have faced sexual abuse.
Anglican Church	Orphanage in Suva that sometimes houses children who have faced sexual abuse.
Assemblies of God	Home for orphans in Nadi that sometimes houses children who have faced sexual abuse.
Homes of Hope	Accommodation for sexually exploited women and their young children.
The Good Neighbour International	Rooms for girls who arrive in Suva from rural areas looking for work.
HART Homes	Housing destitute men and women.
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul	A home that takes in the mentally ill, people living with disabilities, blind and destitute men and women who have nowhere else to go.
Ark of Hope	A faith-based home for street kids, the homeless, and anyone else who walks into the compound needing shelter.
Darul Iqamah	A home run by the Muslim Women's League for poverty-stricken women and children.
St Giles	A psychiatric hospital in Suva that takes in abused women and girls who have been abandoned on its doorstep.
Lomani Au Children's Home	Home for children in need – those who have been orphaned, abandoned, neglected, abused – in Savusavu.

<sup>37</sup> Newland, L., (2016), Op cit pg. 53

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pg. 69

Donors have been important partners in the national efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls. The Australian Government through its Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has been the leading donor to EVAW programs in Fiji for over 30 years, providing ongoing funding to FWCC.<sup>39</sup> UN Women has provided long-term technical support in legislation, influencing social norms and the intersections between women's economic empowerment and violence prevention. UN Women has also partnered with the Pacific Council of Churches and is also addressing EVAW through Oceania Sports partnerships that work in Fiji.

### Issues that remain

Many issues remain in addressing VAWG in Fiji despite the advances outlined above. For example, the recent Auditor-General's performance audit of EVAW actions found 3 main issues:

- legislation is gender-neutral<sup>40</sup>, meaning that victims of gender-based violence can be disadvantaged;
- inconsistency with implementing legislation;
- low use of legislation by women themselves.<sup>41</sup>

Other issues include the high rates of violence and increases in violence during COVID-19. A critical issue raised by grantee partners is the lack of services for women and girls in rural areas. There have been initiatives to address this lack of services including FWCC opening branches across the country and the establishment of the Fund which has a specific focus on women in remote, maritime and regional areas. However, there remain major disparities in resource allocation between programs and policy organisations that operate in urban and peri urban centers compared to community based programs. Those primarily based in Suva tend to have greater access to resources. These groups are not necessarily equipped with program delivery strategies or grounded in experience to work with communities outside of town. This creates a bottleneck or barrier to EVAWG resources reaching marginalised groups in Fiji.

Finally, there is a need for a whole of population and whole of government approach to the issue of violence. The Ministry for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation (MoWCPA) is working to address this issue. MoWCPA established an Advisory Group for the Fiji National Action Plan (FNAP) to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls in 2019.<sup>42</sup> The Advisory Group meeting on the FNAP was held in December 2019 and a key outcomes document was adopted to guide the development of the forthcoming FNAP. The outcomes document recognises the root cause of violence as patriarchy and the associated belief

<sup>39</sup> DFAT's support is consistent with its 2016 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy; 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper; DFAT's Child Protection Policy; and the recently launched Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy.

<sup>40</sup> The specific pieces legislation that form the institutional framework for elimination of violence against women in Fiji are the: Crimes Act; Family Law Act; Domestic violence Act; Criminal Procedures Act; Employment Relations Act.

<sup>41</sup> Parliament of Fiji. (2019). Op cit, pg. 26

<sup>42</sup> Two of the partner grantees, HoS and MSP, are members of the Advisory Group.

systems that reinforce gender inequality. The key beliefs that perpetuate VAWG are that violence is acceptable and justified, men's and boy's power and control over women and girls, male peer relations that promote aggression and disrespect to women and girls, and traditional gender roles. The outcome document also discusses the contributing factors that increase women's risk and contributing factors that increase men's likelihood of perpetrating violence. 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. Additionally, the Ministry intends that the prevention plan acts as a coordinating mechanism to ensure that actions to prevent violence are carried out strategically across the country.

### The grantee partners and their projects

Each of the Fund's 4 grantee partners has developed their projects to prevent and eliminate violence against women within this broader context and in response to the needs of their specific community. The aims and rationale of the grantee partners' projects differ in each case as described below.

*House of Sarah* (HoS) was launched in 2009 to address violence against women and girls in the Anglican Diocese of Polynesia and other faith communities. HoS is managed by a dedicated team of volunteers committed to promoting equal and respectful relationships and supporting women throughout the Pacific. The organisation's mission is to provide a listening ear, a warm heart and a welcoming hand to women who are facing violence through counselling, support services, education, networking, partnerships and referrals. The organisation works with women, youth, male clergy and laypeople across their parishes in Fiji and ecumenically with other churches.

The House of Sarah's *Preventing Violence against Women in Fiji's Faith Settings* (PVAWFFS) project aims to mobilise faith communities in the 3 parishes of Matata, Newtown and Wailoku to recapture God's vision of human relations, human rights, equality, gender equality and preventing violence against women.

*Medical Services Pacific* (MSP) is a registered non-government organisation established in Fiji to provide women, youth and children with quality health care and social services. MSP uses a rights-based approach to sexual reproductive and health agency. MSP is widely known for establishing the first integrated and dedicated service for survivors of sexual violence (One Stop Shop/Post Rape Care Clinic), providing medical services, counselling and legal aid. MSP abides by the *Fiji National Service Delivery Protocol for Responding to Cases of Gender-Based Violence* in delivering its services.

The grant from the Fund helps MSP achieve outcomes through the:

- Provision of a range of tailored educational units, health and social services and products to disadvantaged youth in schools, women in markets and girls in rural communities and remote islands such as Rotuma, Kadavu, and the interiors of Ra, Nadroga/Navosa and Rewa.
- Deployment of a clinical outreach team to maritime areas and remote rural locations to provide general medical services (testing and treatments), family planning, awareness on sexual and reproduction health, reproductive tract cancer awareness, testing and treatment, mental and child health care, good nutritional care, counselling and social services.

- Engagement with local village leaders, mentors, Ministry of Health and Police personnel to raise awareness on key issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and ensuring women and girls have rapid access to support services and information.

*Rise Beyond the Reef* (RBTR), founded in 2013, addresses the unique development needs of rural and remote communities in the Yakete District in Ba Province and in the Nabukadra District of Ra Province in Fiji, improving women's and children's lives through ecologically sustainable income-generating projects using traditional skills and materials, addressing gender inequalities, building women leaders, and empowering women and girl survivors of domestic violence. RBTR operates at the local level, in municipalities or groups within a division.

RBTR's flagship project is the *Traditional Contemporary Arts and Crafts Income-Generating Program* in 10 communities specifically targeting women. A grant from the Fund enables RBTR to empower rural women, through training and leadership development, to take greater control of their lives by resisting traditional social structures and kinship norms that result in high rates of domestic violence. Recently RBTR delivered training on paid and unpaid care work, gender, social inclusion and gender-based violence. From the training, a 'Safeguarding Team' was formed consisting of male and female representatives from RBTR partner communities to create "champions" on-the-ground who would carry out this work in their respective communities and within their traditional structure in the long term. RBTR intends to use the safeguarding team it has developed via economic development activities to create a long-term community development approach to address gender-based violence and other harmful social norms with a specific focus on building the capacity of men.

*Reproductive Family Health Association of Fiji* (RFHAF) is a non-governmental organisation that works towards a Fiji where women, men and young people have control over their bodies, therefore their destinies. RFHAF expands the possibilities for women and young people to lead healthy sexual lives where gender and sexuality are no longer a source of discrimination and inequality. RFHAF's project aims to strengthen and empower young girls in making decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The grant from the Fund has helped RFHAF to:

- Provide young girls and their parents or guardians with capacity development, through mentoring on reproductive health and sexuality.
- Promote attitudes and behaviours that will lead to a better quality of life for adolescent girls.
- Impart communication, decision-making, assertiveness, setting goals and resisting peer pressure skills to adolescent girls through mentoring programs to enable them to overcome the challenges of growing up and becoming responsible adults.



## Section 2: Framework for analysis

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The authors compared the grantee partners' learnings with the effective elements of VAWG prevention programs identified by What Works.<sup>43</sup> A summary of the work of grantee partner practices to each of the 10 effective elements in Table 2 shows that grantee partners are using 9 of the 10 elements in their own programming work. Particular areas came up most in the discussion, highlighted in the table below and discussed further in the remainder of the paper.

*Table 2: Comparison of grantee partner projects to effective elements of VAWG prevention projects*

Elements of the design and implementation of more effective VAWG interventions	How the Fund's grantee partners' projects align with these elements of effectiveness
1. Rigorously planned with a robust theory of change, rooted in the knowledge of the local context.	All grantee partners take account of the local context of the women and girls they are working with. This knowledge helps them to develop interventions with a robust theory of change and this theory continues to be tested through practice.
2. Tackle multiple drivers of VAWG, such as gender inequity, poverty, poor communication and marital conflict.	Grantee partners projects tackle multiple drivers of VAWG simultaneously, particularly gender inequality, poverty and poor communication.
3. Especially in highly patriarchal contexts, work with women, men and, where relevant, families.	All grantee partners work with women and men given the highly patriarchal context of Fiji.
4. Based on theories of gender and social empowerment that view behavioural change as a collective rather than solely individual process and foster positive interpersonal relations and gender equity.	All grantee partners' projects are focused on both the collective and individual levels.

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<sup>43</sup> What Works is a DFID-funded global programme working in 13 countries across the world building the evidence base on what works to prevent violence in low to middle income settings. The particular publication that this framework is drawn from is the following: Kerr-Wilson, A.; Gibbs, A.; McAslan Fraser E.; Ramsoomar, L.; Parke, A.; Khuwaja, HMA.; and Jewkes, R., (2020), A rigorous global evidence review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls, What Works to prevent violence among women and girls global Programme, Pretoria, South Africa, pg. iv

<p>5. Use group-based participatory learning methods for adults and children that emphasise empowerment, critical reflection, communication and conflict resolution skills.</p>	<p>Projects include activities that foster empowerment and critical reflection on gender roles and support improved communication and conflict resolution skills.</p>
<p>6. Age-appropriate design for children with a longer time for learning and an engaging pedagogy such as sport and play.</p>	<p>RFHAF's project targets young women and their families and includes age-appropriate activities for this age cohort.</p>
<p>7. Carefully designed user-friendly manuals and materials supporting all intervention components to accomplish their goals.</p>	<p>All grantee partners identify and tailor a set of context-relevant tools to support reflection on VAWG.</p>
<p>8. Integrate support for survivors of violence.</p>	<p>All grantee partners provide referral lists for further support for survivors of violence. MSP is a key provider of care.</p>
<p>9. Optimal intensity: Duration and frequency of sessions and overall programme length enables time for reflection and experiential learning.</p>	<p>Grantee partners are still working out the optimal intensity given most of the projects are in their early stages of implementation.</p>
<p>10. Staff and volunteers are selected for their gender equitable attitudes and non-violence behaviour, and are thoroughly trained, supervised and supported.</p>	<p>Grantee partners choose their staff and volunteers carefully, particularly male advocates who need to live by the principles of the projects.</p>





## Section 3: Key Learning

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The grantee partner shared 4 key learnings. Each learning is described below and compared to international literature.

1. **Understand the context of the women and girls your organisation works with and their experiences of violence.** Each of the 4 grantee partner strives to understand the situations of the women and girls that they work with. Each grantee partner did research to make sure their services and responses are relevant to the women's and girls' needs. For example, MSP initially assumed that only adult women would access their rape response clinics which provides post rape care, STI/HIV testing, safe abortion counselling, information on health and human rights/gender and referrals to supporting partners. But children, in addition to adult women, started to present themselves at these clinics to access services. An example of the situation of violence faced by children is included in the following case study. In response to these findings, MSP established their Child Protection services and the Kids Helpline.

### **Violence against children and MSP's response**

MSP's memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the MoWCPA allows for swift referrals of sexual or gender-based violence cases. Additionally, MSP's MoU with the Fiji Police Force and work with Sexual Offences Unit and joint training ensures all parties are aware and able to use MSP's free services to support survivors of sexual assault. These services ensure women and girls are able to obtain services and greater access to justice. MSP provides holistic post-rape care services that include pre-medical counselling, forensic examination, legal advice, continuum counselling and referrals for safe homes.

An example of the important need for these services is a case that was referred to MSP in the midst of the COVID-19 movement restrictions in Suva. The Fiji Police Force, Sexual Offences Unit, referred the youngest client MSP has ever had for medical forensics and family counselling. In this case, two children, one aged 3 years old and the other aged 3 months old, and their parents were forced to leave their family home as a consequence of reporting the grandfather to the authorities. The situation of crisis was exacerbated for both parents as they were unemployed due to the pandemic and non-essential businesses closing. The family of 4 stayed a night at the police station and was contemplating sleeping at the bus stand. Most safe homes in Fiji can only accommodate the mother and her children and since the family opted to stay together, it was difficult to find safe shelter for the family. MSP was able to find accommodation by requesting a hotel owner to repurpose an empty room as emergency shelter to cater for this family of 4. The family was given 7 days rent-free accommodation. MSP provided additional assistance (cash, food, diapers and other essentials). MSP was able to mobilise resources from friends of MSP, corporate partners and funding under Emergency Support.

MSP advocated to the police to apprehend the perpetrator (who is a known sex offender). MSP's counsellor and legal officer made several follow-ups and demanded that the police officer investigate the case as soon as possible.

It was impressive to see a hotel owner join this important effort as a way of giving back to the community in which they operate. MSP is closely following up on the case deliverables and is providing counselling to the parents. The mother of the children was also referred to MSP a number of years back for sexual assault when she was in high school. The mother is very protective of her two children because of her own experience and wanted justice.

Similarly, RBTR listened carefully to the women in their target communities in Yakete District through a baseline study process. Women shared that poverty, rather than violence, was their greatest concern. As a result, RBTR focused on economic empowerment first while also including elements of women's leadership to address discrimination. This project provided an entry point to begin discussions on safety within the community. Noting the desire to change attitudes and behaviour towards violence against women and children, the HoS conducted baseline surveys to gauge the level of knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour of community members before the commencement of any project activity in those 3 communities. The baseline is crucial to monitor progress over time.

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.

### What the research says

The first learning of grantee partners is supported by regional and international research. For example, one of the principles of Pacific prevention programming is to be informed by context.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, one of the elements of effective VAWG prevention identified by What Works is the need for programs to be rooted in the knowledge of the local context.<sup>45</sup> Effective interventions are those that are contextually appropriate and relevant to the ways in which gender norms are acted out and reinforced in different settings.<sup>46</sup>

International research echoes RBTR's findings that poverty needs to be addressed as part of anti-violence programming. There has been much debate over whether poverty is a driver of violence or not. However, poverty has now been recognised as a key structural driver of intimate partner violence (IPV) in several studies as shown in Figure 2.<sup>47</sup> Structural drivers, in turn, are influenced by individual- and relationship-level risk factors.

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<sup>44</sup> UN Women, (2016), The Road to Change: A Pacific Regional Consultation on Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls Report, pg. 10

<sup>45</sup> Op cit

<sup>46</sup> Jewkes, R., Stern, E., Ramsoomar, L., (2019), Preventing violence against women and girls: Evidence Review, Community activism approaches to shift harmful gender attitudes, roles and social norms, pg. 12

<sup>47</sup> See the following 3 studies: 1) Fulu, E., Jewkes, R., Roselli, T., et al., (2013), Prevalence of and factors associated with male perpetration of intimate partner violence: findings from the UN Multi-Country Cross-sectional Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. Lancet Global Health;1(4):e187 - e207; 2) Gibbs A, Jewkes R, Willan S, et al., (2018), Associations between poverty, mental health and substance use, gender power, and intimate partner violence amongst young (18-30) women and men in urban informal settlements in South Africa: A cross-sectional study and structural equation model. Plos One;13(10); 3) Hatcher, A.M., Stöckl, H., McBride, R.S., et al., (2019), Pathways from food insecurity to intimate partner violence perpetration among peri-urban men in South Africa. American journal of preventive medicine;56(5):765-72

*Figure 2: Structural drivers and individual and relationship risk factors for intimate partner violence*



Poverty, specifically food insecurity, drives intimate partner violence in 3 ways.<sup>48</sup> Firstly, stress about the distribution of food (and resources, more generally) can lead to conflict in acutely food-insecure households. Secondly, poor households face more stress and shocks generally and have less capacity to deal with further daily stressors. Thirdly, lack of food leads to reduced ability to regulate emotions and function cognitively.

Many women in Fiji, are not only poor but are financially dependent on others, particularly men. This reduces their capability to avoid, resist or respond to violence. For example, research by FWRM (Balancing the Scales) shows how inaccessible the court system is for women facing poverty, especially those in rural areas. To initiate or defend a case in Family Court is equal to one weekly wage and double that in the High Court. Additionally, no High Court hearings are heard outside Suva, Lautoka and Labasa. Even transportation costs for poor women in rural areas can mean accessing the High Court is beyond their reach.<sup>49</sup>

Research shows that multi-component programs are most likely to have positive effects in preventing and eliminating violence, given the interconnection between the drivers of violence outlined above. There are, however, risks of violence in women's economic empowerment programming that need to be carefully managed as identified in International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) research.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pg. 5

<sup>49</sup> FWRM, (2017) Balancing the Scales: Improving Fijian Women's Access to Justice pg.13

<sup>50</sup> Eves, R. and Crawford, J., (2014), Do No Harm: The Relationship between Violence Against Women and Women's Economic Empowerment in the Pacific, pg. 2

- 2. Address violence at the collective level through social norms as well as at the individual level.** Grantee partners identified a range of social norms that reproduce or support violence. For example, RFHAF heard from young people that they were not practised in decision-making or familiar with the concept of bodily-autonomy (that their body belongs to them and they have the right to make decisions about it). As a result, RFHAF developed its program to support young people to learn about sexual and reproductive health and rights. But they found that when the young people they had trained went back to their families, their families did not recognise the young people's capacity to make their own choices. As a result, RFHAF ran their 'Somebody Told Me' project. The project encouraged parents to support and nurture their children's new attitudes to bodily autonomy, increased self-esteem, and their capacity to make their own decisions.

Grantee partners found that women and mothers themselves are often unfamiliar with their own human and reproductive health rights and what constitutes violence. This leaves them unable to offer advice or educate their children. For this reason, working with parents can consolidate awareness-raising with children and young people.

HoS works to counter gender discriminatory attitudes, values, norms and practices in the church setting. One specific approach the PVAWFFS team has used is to conduct a biblical study that examines the teachings of Genesis Chapter 1 verse 27 where the female is an equal image-bearer of God with the male. This approach helps to counter patriarchal values, norms and practices that prioritise women's submission to men in relationships, at home and publicly. Understanding human rights as articulated in Exodus 3: 7 also supports this learning. In addition, recognising the power dynamics in a relationship when the man uses his power over a woman is abuse.

The PVAWFFS team trains Community Activists who then share these biblical teachings with community members in activities in the 3 parishes. Participants said they appreciated the new knowledge, while previously they had seen human rights as a foreign concept. Participants also acknowledged that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God as recorded in the Book of Genesis. As such, there should be no discrimination but rather respect for each other irrespective of status, gender or ethnicity. An example of the changes occurring within communities is shown in the box below.

*"After the trainings, as a Community Activist, I now have the boldness to call the police whenever there is a brawl or rowdy behaviour in our village.... Before I used to be scared to intervene but from the SASA! Faith activities, I know my rights and want to be a responsible citizen. I appreciate the Referral List as it has the contact details of the police officer in our area." – Community Activist, Matata*

RBTR's 2019 impact assessment of its work in Fiji's rural and remote communities found positive effects at the community level as well as for individuals and households.<sup>52</sup> At the community level, women now participate to a greater extent in community meetings and have more of a voice in community-level decisions. Women are making themselves heard at district meetings and have more engagement with women outside their own communities. These community-level changes are complemented by changes at the individual and household level. At the individual-level, the evaluation found that women had developed new skills and knowledge, built their confidence and increased their earnings. Additionally, 95% of the women participating gained more control over household resources. At the household level, women reported having more say in how household purchases were made and sharing in major household decisions and expenses. Women also reported that men, children and other relatives— including the elderly –were doing tasks that are traditionally viewed as women's and girls' work because of women's increased workload due to handicraft project participation and income. 98% of respondents also reported more amicable husband-wife relationships since starting the RBTR project.

### What the research says

Attention to social norms is identified as pivotal in international research. For example, another of the 10 elements of effective VAWG prevention identified by What Works is that programs view behaviour change as a collective rather than solely individual process.<sup>52</sup>

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.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, social norms that silence discussion on violence can prevent women and children from speaking out about abuse.<sup>54</sup>

Social norms should be addressed in anti-violence programming given their influence over individual behaviours and attitudes. For example, some effective VAWG interventions engaged and equipped religious, traditional and local leaders. These interventions also worked over multiple years with large numbers of men and women who were carefully selected from within communities to lead behaviour change activities.<sup>55</sup>

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.

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<sup>51</sup> Vunisea, A., (2019), Impact of Rise Beyond the Reef in Rural Fiji. Summary available at: <https://www.flipsnack.com/PebblesWillekesDesign/impact-of-rise-beyond-the-reef-in-rural-fiji-an-assessment.html>

<sup>52</sup> Op cit

<sup>53</sup> Fulu, E., Miedema, S., Roselli, T., McCook, S., Chan, K.L., Haardorfer, R., and Jewkes, R., (2017), 'Pathways between Childhood Trauma, Intimate Partner Violence and Harsh Parenting: Findings from the UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific'. *The Lancet Global Health* 5 (5): e512–22.

<sup>54</sup> Flood, M., and Pease, B., (2006), 'The Factors Influencing Community Attitudes in Relation to Violence against Women: A Critical Review of the Literature'

<sup>55</sup> Rachel Jewkes, Erin Stern, Leane Ramsoomar, (2019), Preventing violence against women and girls: EVIDENCE REVIEW, Community activism approaches to shift harmful gender attitudes, roles and social norms, pg. 2

3. **Engage men and boys in violence prevention.** Grantee partner 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. HoS has engaged with men and boys at a number of levels through their project. They have engaged the Church hierarchy through the Synod and the introduction of the Anglican Church Diocese of Polynesia 'Safe home, Safe church and Safe community' policy. HoS also engages with male priests in charge, church, community leaders and men in each of the 3 communities where the project is based, discussing the benefits of non-violence with them, rather than blaming and shaming. Grantee partners also noted the importance of carefully screening male activists or champions to ensure that they themselves are not perpetrators of violence. Grantee Partners can seek out men and boys specifically or, like RBTR, engage with 'existing tables' – people who are already working on the problem in that community.

### What the research says

Research shows that shifting social norms on gender and masculinity is vital for preventing VAWG.<sup>56</sup> This focus on social norms must occur at the same time as addressing individual- and relationship-level risks. 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.<sup>57</sup> 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).<sup>58</sup> Additionally, traditional masculinity can include notions that a man has the right to have sex with a woman whether or not she consents.<sup>59</sup>

It is important to understand, however, that there are many ways to be a man or to express masculinity. Some masculinities emphasise men's entitlement, dominance and control over women.<sup>60</sup> Equally, there are norms of masculinity that emphasise caring and more equal, non-violent relationships with women. Engaging men and boys in discussions on the range of types of masculinities opens the possibility to shift their expression of masculinity in support of a more caring, less violent society.

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

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<sup>56</sup> Jewkes, R., (2017), Op cit pg. 2

<sup>57</sup> Mukata et al, 2014, Op cit pg. 22

<sup>58</sup> See for example, Rich, E. P., Nkosi, S., and Morojele, N. K., (2015), Masculinities, Alcohol Consumption, and Sexual Risk Behavior Among Male Tavern Attendees: A Qualitative Study in North West Province, South Africa, *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 382–392

<sup>59</sup> Eliminating Violence Against Women in the Pacific Islands, Recommendations from the 12th Annual Conference of Pacific Women and Fifth Pacific Women's Ministerial Meeting, 2013, pg. 5

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

when these stories are not personalised. Rather, talking about someone else allows community members to express their attitudes and behaviours without risk.

RFHAF teaches young girls to think about their 'Me Circle' - the area around themselves encompassed by their own arms. Decisions within their 'Me Circle' should only be made by the young women themselves.

In its training, HoS begins community discussions on violence with bible study, focusing on the principles of justice, peace and dignity. HoS finds this a productive and useful entry point to discussions on violence and aligns with the framework of human rights. Community members can be resistant to the language of rights, seeing it as a foreign concept. In contrast, biblical principles align with human rights but are not resisted in the communities. After this initial bible study, HoS uses a number of tools including power and community posters to discuss issues of power in large groups. HoS also has illustrations available for trained Community Activists to use in discussions with smaller groups of people.

RBTR uses a set of tools drawn from Rapid Care Analysis and GESI toolkits. These tools include the time tracker, which looks at how women and men spend time during the day, the village scape, which shows male and female mapping of the community and resources, and a trigger tree that facilitates a discussion about the root causes and triggers for violence.

One of the issues in using these tools at the village level is the lack of understanding of legal language and laws relating to VAWG. For example, many people do not know about the age of consent or a woman's right to refuse to have sex with her husband. For this reason, RBTR finds that having an experienced facilitator with an in-depth understanding of the local community and its norms is an essential part of using these tools in the iTaukei remote village context.

### What the research says

International research identifies the importance of using materials that are relevant and tailored to the context. For example, another element of effective VAWG prevention is that programs include carefully designed user-friendly manuals and materials supporting all intervention components.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Op cit



## Section 4: Conclusion

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Fiji is currently widening its efforts to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls. This comes against the backdrop of widespread incidents of violence and a series of murders of women in 2019 that highlighted the unacceptability of violence and its terrible consequences. MoWCPA is leading the national violence prevention planning efforts and drawing on the implementation capacity of local partners.

This context means that it is even more important to understand effective programming strategies to prevent and eliminate violence. This paper contributes to this endeavour by sharing 4 practices that local partners use that align with practices that have been demonstrated as effective internationally. Grantee partners emphasise the importance of knowing the context and experiences of the specific women that each project works with, acknowledging that not all women are the same. They work at both individual and collective levels to address risk factors and structural drivers of violence. They work to engage men and boys in violence prevention efforts. And they contextualise tools and materials to the settings where they work.

The Fund has supported the development of this paper in an effort to share the learnings of grantee partners and make it available to others to inform their own programming.<sup>62</sup> The paper centres the experiences and voices of EVAW advocates working in their communities because they know their context best. This paper is part of an ongoing series of the Fund's 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. Please contact any of the grantee partners directly if you would like further information, at the contact details below.

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<sup>62</sup> Grantee partners are already sharing their learnings. For example, this paper has referred previously to RBTR's impact evaluation. HoS is currently undertaking a mid-term review of its project. All partners participate in the *Pacific Women* and the Fund's annual learning and reflection workshops and several partners are members of the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation – Eliminating Violence Against Women and Children (EVAW) Task Force and the Technical Working Group for the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls.



