TRANSFORMING HARMFUL GENDER NORMS IN SOLOMON ISLANDS:

A STUDY OF THE OXFAM SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM

THE EQUALITY INSTITUTE
SVRI sexual violence research initiative
MONASH University
OXFAM

Published October 2019.

www.equalityinstitute.org/

www.monash.edu/medicine/sphpm/units/global-and-womens-health

www.oxfam.org.au

Suggested citation Homan, S., Honda, T., Leung, L., Fulu, E. & Fisher, J. *Transforming Harmful Gender Norms in Solomon Islands: A study of the Oxfam Safe Families Program*. The Equality Institute, Monash University, and Oxfam Australia, Melbourne, October. 2019.

Cover image: Kim Litera/Oxfam

OXFAM
Australia

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY 8

Abbreviations 8

Glossary 8

1. BACKGROUND ON SOLOMON ISLANDS AND SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM 10

1.1 Solomon Islands 10

1.2 Violence against women and family violence in Solomon Islands 10

1.3 The Safe Families program 11

1.4 A study of the Safe Families program 12

2. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY 13

2.1 Research aims 13

2.2 Research sites and participants 13

2.3 Research tools 14

2.4 Data collection 14

2.5 Ethics 14

2.6 Strengths and limitations of the study 14

3. FINDINGS: GENDER NORMS IN SOLOMON ISLANDS 15

3.1 Social norms and how they drive family and sexual violence 15

3.2 The disconnect between violence against women and discipline 17

3.3 Bride price 18

3.3.1 People's understanding of bride price is changing 18

3.3.2 Tying bride price to gender roles and discipline 19

3.4 Community understandings of different forms of violence 20

3.5 Community understanding of the causes of violence 20

3.5.1 Infidelity and jealousy 21

3.5.2 Alcohol 21

3.5.3 Violence as a result of women's transgressions 22

3.6 Legislation against family violence 22

4. FINDINGS: PROMISING RESULTS FROM THE SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM **24**

4.1 Changes in awareness, attitude, and behaviour of community members 24

4.2 Self-reflection and transformation of community engagement facilitators 25

4.3 Improved capacity and self-esteem 26

4.4 Strengthening local response to family violence 26

4.5 A decrease in violence? 27

5. FINDINGS: EFFECTIVE (AND LESS EFFECTIVE) ELEMENTS OF THE SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM **28**

5.1 Effective elements of the Safe Families program 28

5.1.1 Driving personal transformation 28

5.1.2 Adapting practice to local context 29

5.1.3 Holistic approach in project design 30

5.1.4 Multiple component approach 30

5.2 Less effective elements of the Safe Families program 32

5.2.1 'Only talk' approach 32

5.2.2 Involvement of youth 32

5.2.3 Donor-led design 32

5.2.4 Temporary delays in program implementation 32

5.2.5 Distortion of program message 33

6. RECOMMENDATIONS **34**

7. REFERENCES **36**

8. APPENDIX **37**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Research reported in this study was supported by the Sexual Violence Research Initiative hosted by the South African Medical Research Council. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the SAMRC. The Safe Families program in Solomon Islands is implemented by Oxfam with funding from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

The principal investigator and authors of this report would like to thank the following people for their participation in, or support of, the research in Solomon Islands:

The women and men of Auki, Kunu, Oibola and Siwai in Malaita province, and Minerv, Minevi, and Nemba in Temotu province, who took part in interviews and focus group discussions. Their invaluable contributions underpin the findings in this research.

The Oxfam Safe Families program teams in Malaita province, Temotu province and Honiara who were interviewed as part of this research and who arranged interviews and focus group discussions with community members.

Solomon Islands research team: Kiri Dicker, Oxfam Solomon Islands; Julianne Wickham, Oxfam Solomon Islands; Solomon Alufo`oa, Samantha Kereka Poloso, Angella Evon Salo, William Ekotau, Ryno Kaitu`u, William Menaplo, Grace Dagi, Patrick Lano, James Ber and Barnabas Tawake.

Doris Puiahi, Oxfam Solomon Islands; Kiri Dicker, Oxfam Solomon Islands; and Debbie Lukisi for translation and transcription of audio interview data.

Current and former staff from Oxfam Australia and Oxfam Solomon Islands who participated in validating preliminary findings and reviewing the draft report: Doreen Fernando, Doris Puiahi, Kiri Dicker, Lavinia Dakei, Dolores Devesi, Jo Podlesak, Tanushree Soni, Eleanor Jackson, and Maud Mukova-Moses.

AUTHORSHIP

This report was authored by Dr Sarah Homan, The Equality Institute; Dr Tomoko Honda, Monash University, School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine; Loksee Leung, The Equality Institute; Dr Emma Fulu, The Equality Institute; and Professor Jane Fisher, Monash University, School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the findings from a qualitative study and process evaluation to assess the implementation of Oxfam's Safe Families program in Solomon Islands. The study sought to understand the processes of shifting harmful social norms that drive family and sexual violence in Solomon Islands.

Despite having some of the highest rates of violence against women globally, there is very little evidence in the Pacific on the effectiveness of interventions aimed at stopping violence against women (VAW) before it starts. With funding from the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) through the SVRI World Bank Group Development Marketplace Award 2017, research partners Oxfam, the Equality Institute (EQI), and Monash University jointly designed and implemented the research in Solomon Islands. In addition to examining how to shift harmful gender norms, this research examines factors that helped or hindered the implementation of the program. This will be used to inform continued implementation of the Safe Families program in phase two.

Alongside forthcoming research and evaluations of prevention interventions underway in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Tonga, this study will contribute to the emerging evidence around what works to end VAW and build the practise knowledge regarding violence prevention activities in the Pacific region.

BACKGROUND

Solomon Islands is a Pacific nation encompassing over 900 islands spread across 1,500 kilometres of ocean. It is ranked 152 out of 189 on the United Nation's Human Development Index and the population of approximately 560,000 people mostly live a rural lifestyle supported by subsistence agriculture and fishing [1].

Independence from the British was gained in 1978, however modern times have tested the limits of the country's resilience, with Solomon Islanders feeling the burden of climate change, food insecurity and natural disasters such as cyclones and floods. A prolonged period of social unrest (1998-2003) debilitated government and significantly delayed development progress.

While diverse, Solomon Island cultures are predominantly patriarchal. Implicit within these cultures are a complex array of gender norms that maintain strict social hierarchies dominated by men. As a result, Solomon Island women experience vast and persistent gender inequality, which is also reflected in extremely high rates of physical and sexual VAW and girls. ***The Family Health And Safety Study*** in 2009 found that 64% of ever-partnered women in Solomon Islands had experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15. The same study found that bride price was a factor that increased the risk of intimate partner violence. Progress in addressing this violence has been made with the recent gazettal of the *Family Protection Act 2014*, however access to justice for survivors of violence remains poor. There are very few specialist support services outside the country's capital, making it difficult for women to access formal support.

Implemented by Oxfam, the Safe Families program (also known as the Let's Make Our Families Safe program) was part of a 10-year strategic initiative, supported by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence in Solomon Islands. The first phase was implemented in six communities in Malaita and Temotu provinces for just over three years (2015-2018). The goal of the Safe Families program was to shift local attitudes and norms so that family violence would no longer be considered acceptable. This was done through the following strategies:

1. Mobilising communities to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence.
2. Enabling and resourcing collective action by coalitions (service providers such as health services, police, women's organisations, church groups – formed into provincial alliances).
3. Building evidence and knowledge about family violence through research and evaluation.
4. Strengthening national women's institutions, laws and policies.

An evaluation of the previous iteration of the Safe Families program (Standing Together Against Violence – STAV) showed evidence that the program approach was promising. Designed to build on these findings, this study aims to generate fine-grained evidence on the effective components of programs to reduce violence in resource-constrained, remote communities and post-conflict settings, such as Solomon Islands, where prevalence of violence is high.

RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Research aims and tools were jointly developed by the EQI and Monash University in close collaboration with Oxfam Solomon Islands staff. All data collection in the provinces was conducted in pijin, the official language of Solomon Islands.

Data collection took place in May 2018 in nine sites in the provinces of Malaita, Temotu and the capital Honiara. Data was acquired through 33 in-depth interviews and 15 focus group discussions (FGDs), with women and men segregated when appropriate. A team of ten local male and female research

1 The World Bank Open Data: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ny.gdp.pcap.cd, Accessed February 2018.

assistants were recruited and brought to Honiara for research training. At each research site, Oxfam's Community Engagement Facilitators (CEFs) recruited community respondents for interviews and FGDs, ensuring that community members had different levels of exposure to the Safe Families program. FGDs were also held with provincial alliances (PAs) and Oxfam staff in the Honiara and provincial offices.

Ethics approval for the research was obtained from Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. Prior to data collection, all potential participants were informed about the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary and that all personal identifiers would be removed from the pooled data. Consent to record conversations was obtained, and all researchers were trained in research ethics. Participants were not explicitly asked to disclose their own experiences of violence. However, as a safety measure, all FGDs were instructed to be segregated by sex.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the aims of the research included a focus on understanding norms and attitudes to sexual violence, research tools did not explicitly ask participants about sexual violence. This was due to the sensitivities in raising the topic without first establishing significant trust with community members.

The research design stipulated gender-segregated FGDs. However, when the research data was analysed, it was discovered that a male researcher was present in a small number of FGDs involving young women. It is possible that this was due to male team leaders misunderstanding their role of overseeing the data collection processes.

Questions exploring different forms of violence were not always adequately explored by the researchers, which resulted in some data lacking rich description of meaning. This issue, as well as the issue relating to gender-segregated FGDs, could have been addressed if the research budget allowed for more researcher training.

FINDINGS

FINDINGS: GENDER NORMS

'Good' and 'bad' women and men. Communities in Malaita and Temotu adhere to rigid gender norms and strict gender roles. Clear ideas exist for what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' behaviour for women and men. However, the research found interesting differences between what women considered ideal behaviour for men and how men viewed ideal behaviour for themselves. Understanding social norms around what makes a good woman and good man is important because these norms set the community's ideas and attitudes about what kinds of violence are justifiable.

Violence and discipline. The community generally perceives VAW to be unacceptable, but show a willingness to justify it for disciplinary purposes.

Expected behaviour for women and men differs, particularly when looking at the different consequences women and men experience when they defy gender norms. Women's behaviour is strongly policed and their transgressions often resulted in severe punishment. However, men are far less likely to be held accountable for their actions.

Changing understanding of bride price links to gender roles and discipline: Community understanding of the commonly practised payment of bride price is changing. Historically, this payment by the groom's family to the bride's family, also known as bride wealth, was used as a form of compensation to the bride's family for the loss of a daughter[2], and symbolised social ties between two families[3]. Previously, Solomon Islanders did not frame the practice with understandings of payment, but rather local languages described an exchange or gift. As such, bride price was never originally about ownership or property. However, as the exchange below highlights, there has been a shift in attitudes and understanding of bride price in the community.

The research suggests that bride price is now becoming competitive and defined in terms of commodification.[4] Participants reminisced about the old days when bride price was not so expensive and their feelings that "these days people charge too much." The research found that these recent ideas surrounding ownership of a woman are being used as a justification for violence.

Community understanding of different forms of violence/causes of violence: The most common forms of violence cited by research participants were physical violence and arguments. Financial violence was also often raised, however sexual violence was rarely mentioned. The fact that Solomon Islanders appear reticent to discuss sexual violence, and sexuality more broadly, indicates space for further program development and research.

Evidence from the Pacific and around the world, strongly suggests that gender inequality is a root case of VAW[5].

2 Papps et al, (1983) 'The Role and Determinants of Bride-Price: The Case of a Palestinian Village [and Comments and Reply]'. Current Anthropology, 24(2), pp.203–215.

3 Conway, J. and Ennio, M. (1990) *Marriage in Melanesia: A Sociological Perspective*, Papua New Guinea: The Melanesian Institute Point 15.

4 See Wardlow, (2006) for similar discussion in Papua New Guinea and also Melanesia more generally.

5 Fulu, E. et al (2016).

However, when asked what the root causes of VAW were, research participants pointed to issues such as gossip, alcohol consumption, infidelity, jealousy and gambling.

Men and women generally agreed that men's consumption and abuse of alcohol is a major cause of violence, particularly between husbands and wives, but also between other family members. Some men indicated women are also starting to drink.

The research found evidence that VAW is seen as a result of women's transgressions. As identified earlier, there are certain expected behaviours in Malaita and Temotu that make up the gendered social norms for women. These include not gossiping, not going out too much and doing the household chores. Community members said it is common for women to experience violence if they did not behave within these norms, and that it was justifiable.

Legislation against family violence: The adoption of the Family Protection Act 2014 had some impact on community attitudes and behaviours. Anecdotally, men now think twice before beating a woman, however this appears to be due to a fear of punishment rather than a shift in understanding that violence is wrong.

FINDINGS: PROMISING RESULTS OF THE SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM

Overall, there are early signs of change in the program communities in Malaita and Temotu. While the changes may seem small, they are not insignificant. Findings from this study reflect the global evidence on shifting social norms: sustained and meaningful social change on a large scale often takes years or even generations[6].

Changes in awareness, attitude and behaviour: The study found that awareness about VAW has increased, and some attitudes and behaviours have changed.

Self-reflection and transformation of community engagement facilitators/Improved capacity and self-confidence: Many research participants, particularly male CEFs, expressed that they previously felt they had control over family members. After exposure to the Safe Families program, they realised they were influenced by gendered stereotypes, and that their gender-biased attitude to housework was a controlling behaviour.

Another distinctive aspect of change is that Safe Families enabled staff to increase their self-efficacy. In particular, female staff and community members who used to be reticent to speak in public said that engaging in this program helped them to be more confident.

Strengthened local response to family violence: One of the crucial components of the Safe Families model is the establishment of the PA, a network aimed at promoting collective actions to prevent family violence.[7] While the original aim of the PA was to coordinate prevention activities and raise awareness at the provincial level, a positive unintended outcome has been strengthening local response services to family violence. The PA includes staff from the provincial government, police, hospitals, welfare offices, women's organisations, and the church.

A decrease in violence? Some community members reported that the Safe Families program has reduced the incidence of violence in their communities. While this is a promising finding, it should be treated with a degree of caution for a number of reasons. Firstly, community members in program sites may feel inclined to report positively about an intervention, out of fear that current and/or future interventions, benefits or services might be removed from their communities if an intervention is deemed unsuccessful. Secondly, as previously mentioned, community members often condone VAW when it can be justified as disciplining women. While there are some signs of improved knowledge and attitudes towards VAW, this study is unable to verify whether there has been a decrease in VAW in the Safe Families communities. We know from global evidence that behaviour change and decreasing community prevalence of VAW can take years to occur.

FINDINGS: EFFECTIVE AND LESS EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM

Effective:

Role of the community engagement facilitators: The training provided to CEFs supported them to take on responsibilities as community role models. They built trust and rapport with the community over the three years of programming, which enabled them to discuss sensitive subjects. CEFs were also supported to adapt their approaches to the local context, ensuring outreach efforts included community members with less mobility, or those reluctant to discuss sensitive subjects in public.

Integrated approach for prevention and response: Safe Families aimed to promote a community-led integrated approach, which addressed both prevention and response to violence. The program raised awareness by encouraging the community to identify and discuss practices and norms that condone and reinforce VAW. Community activities involved many stakeholders, such as women and men, youth, chiefs, religious leaders, police, political leaders, the provincial government, and women's organisations. Most of the community members, CEFs and PAs commented that the referral system and services are now responding to the needs of survivors of violence.

6 Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

7 Two provincial alliances were formed, one in Malaita and one in Temotu.

Building towards a multiple component approach: After facilitating awareness-raising activities, CEFs supported communities to establish Family Violence Prevention and Response Action Committees (FVPRACs) to promote and sustain violence prevention at the community level, and to develop Community Action Plan (CAPs) to address their own priority projects to stop family violence. These CAPs were effective in encouraging communities to look at multiple strategies to stop family violence, but were limited in their reach.

ESTABLISHING PATHWAYS TO EFFECTIVE CHANGE:

Less Effective:

'Only talk' approach: Many CEFs and Oxfam staff pointed out that a one-way approach with 'only talk' was not engaging and did not inspire or capture the interest of community members. This had a significant impact on attendance levels.

Limited involvement of youth: Youth are an important group to work with in order to prevent future violence. Youth participation was initially low, but when the program introduced more diverse and flexible methods of engagement, young women and men started to actively participate.

Distortion of program message: It was evident that a small number of participants misunderstood the core message of the program. This led to a small number of people believing women needed to adjust their behaviour in order to avoid violence, when the message was targeting men and asking them to recognise and change their harmful behaviour.

Further research is needed to understand where this distorted understanding came from. It could have been a combination of factors, such as receiving second-hand knowledge from other community members, or community members' own biases altering their understandings. While this was not a large-scale issue, it could prove to be problematic if not identified and corrected.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study provides valuable, fine-grained evidence on effective approaches to reducing violence in two provinces in Solomon Islands. Acknowledging that change to social norms takes time, the study builds on findings from evaluation of the STAV (Standing Together Against Violence) program, which was the first initiative showing promising results and which led to the Safe Families program. The ecological model approach to gender was used in this study, which conceptualises violence as the outcome of interaction at four levels: individual, relationship, community, and societal. The study provides insights into the strict gendered norms and gendered roles at individual, relationship and community levels in Solomon Islands, and the practice of bride price and how these practices, norms, and attitudes relate to VAW. It provides analysis of effective community-level violence prevention activities, using the first-hand experience and lessons learned by project staff and community members. Such insights will be valuable in shaping the approach, implementation, and messaging for Safe Families phase two. It also provides valuable lessons for other programs seeking to reduce violence in similar contexts.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations for the future implementation of the Safe Families Program are suggested:

1. Work with communities to ensure interventions are transformative of attitudes, norms and behaviour, and not limited to awareness-raising.
2. Ensure the program emphasises the benefits of gender equality to the community.
3. Actively shift social norms around corporal punishment.
4. Continue to build on the role modelling approach.
5. Include the subject of bride price in program messaging and community dialogues on VAW.
6. Monitor and evaluate the implementation and the impact of the program.
7. Adopt more engaging and creative approaches, such as arts, dance, drama, sports, radio and television.
8. Focus on children and young people.
9. Explore potential links between the Safe Families program and other community development and economic programs.
10. Optimise and refine pilots, utilising the lessons learnt to scale-up activities.
11. Ensure a collaborative co-design process for the development of prevention initiatives.

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

ABBREVIATIONS

CAP	Community Action Plan
CEF	Community Engagement Facilitator
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EQI	The Equality Institute
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FVPRAC	Family Violence Prevention and Response Action Committee
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IPV	Intimitae Partner Violence
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
MWYCFA	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs
PA	Provincial Alliance
PAP	Provincial Action Plan
STAV	Standing Together Against Violence program
VAW	Violence Against Women

GLOSSARY

Bride price: A payment made in traditional and/or modern forms of currency by the groom and/or the groom's family to the bride's family at the time of marriage. The tradition of giving a bride price is practiced in varying forms in many countries throughout Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific. Also referred to as bride wealth or bride token.

Domestic violence: Acts of violence that occur in domestic settings between two people who are, or were, in an intimate relationship. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse. See also family violence.

Drivers of violence against women: The underlying causes that create the conditions in which violence against women occurs. They relate to the particular structures, norms and practices arising from gender inequality in public and private life, but which must always be considered in the context of other forms of social discrimination and disadvantage. Sometimes referred to as the root causes of violence against women.

Economic violence: Denying or reducing economic remuneration for sexual services and/or access to and control over financial resources.

Emotional violence: Any act, threat, or coercive tactics that cause trauma or damage the self-esteem, identity or development of an individual.

Family violence: Violence between intimate partners as well as violence between family members. Family violence includes violent or threatening behaviour, or any other form of behaviour that coerces or controls a family member or causes that family member to be fearful.

Gender: Defines masculinity and femininity and refers to the socially learnt behaviours, roles, activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender expectations vary between cultures and change over time.

Gender equality: Includes the redistribution of resources and responsibilities between men and women and the transformation of the underlying causes and structures of gender inequality to achieve substantive equality. Diversity and disadvantage are recognised to ensure equal outcomes for all. Therefore women-specific programs and policies are often required to end existing inequalities.

Gender equity: Fair treatment for women and men according to their respective needs.

Gender justice: Full equality and equity between women, men and people of other genders in all spheres of life. While equality means that all genders have equal access, status and rights, this goes beyond equality: it requires us to right the wrongs, and to address the structures and processes that have maintained and perpetuated a status quo where women have less power than men.

Gender roles: The responsibilities and functions expected to be fulfilled by women and men, girls and boys in a given society.

Intimate partner violence: Behaviour by a man or a woman within an intimate relationship (including current or past marriages, domestic partnerships, familial relations or people who share accommodation) that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm to those in the relationship. This is the most common form of violence against women.

Kastom: A pijin term meaning 'custom'. Kastom refers to cultural or traditional ways of doing things and is central to village life and the way the society is organised.

Intersectionality: A theory and approach which recognises that our identities are made up of multiple, interrelated attributes (such as gender, race, ability, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sexual identity, and socioeconomic status) and understands the intersections at which women, experience individual, cultural and structural oppression, discrimination, violence and disadvantage.

Normalisation of violence: Violence, particularly violence perpetrated by men, is seen and treated as a normal part of everyday life.

02: [pronounced 'Oh-too'] Is a local term in Solomon Islands used to describe an extra-marital affair and also the person outside of the marriage who is involved in the affair. It is derived from the fact the person is considered to be the second partner. A "01" refers to a person's first partner or formal spouse.

Physical violence: The intentional use of physical force or physical deprivation, with the potential for causing harm, injury or death.

Prevention of violence against women and girls: Interventions that seek to reduce the prevalence and incidence of violence against women and girls.

Reinforcing factors: Factors that become significant within the context of the drivers of violence. These factors do not predict or drive violence against women, however when they interact with the drivers they can increase the frequency or severity of violence.

Sex: Refers to the biological and physical characteristics used to define humans as male or female.

Sexual violence: Sexual activity that happens where consent is not obtained or freely given. It occurs any time a person is forced, coerced or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activity, such as touching, sexual harassment and intimidation, forced marriage, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, sexual assault and rape.

Social norms: Rules of conduct and models of behaviour expected by a society or social group. They are grounded in the customs, traditions and value systems that develop over time in a society or social group.

Violence against women (VAW): Any act of gender-based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of harm or coercion, in public or private life. This definition encompasses all forms of violence that women experience, including physical, sexual, emotional, cultural/spiritual, financial and others, that are based on their gender.

Photo: Kim Litera/Oxfam

1. BACKGROUND ON SOLOMON ISLANDS AND SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM

1.1 SOLOMON ISLANDS

Solomon Islands is a Pacific Island nation encompassing over 900 islands spread across 1,500 kilometres of ocean. It is ranked 152 out of 189 on the United Nation's Human Development Index and the population of approximately 560,000 people mostly live a rural lifestyle supported by subsistence agriculture and fishing.[8] Solomon Islands gained independence from the British in 1978 and is a predominantly Christian country. The church, along with kastom (traditional beliefs and practices), sets an important context for the norms, attitudes, and behaviours of Solomon Islanders.

The majority of Solomon Islanders are of Melanesian decent. There are also small but significant populations of Polynesian, Micronesian and Chinese descendants, each with their own distinct languages, customs and traditions. Like most parts of the Pacific, the Solomon Island cultures are traditionally collectivist, characterised by deep obligations to family and tribe[9].

In more recent times, modernisation has tested the limits of the country's resilience, with Solomon Islanders feeling the burden of climate change, food insecurity and natural disasters such as cyclones and floods. A lack of employment and education opportunities in rural areas has resulted in significant urban drift as young men and women migrate to urban centres. This has created an even greater pressure on infrastructure and essential services in Honiara and provincial capitals.

Significant progress has been made towards national healing, peace and stability, however memories of the 'tensions' — a prolonged period of social unrest (1998-2003) that debilitated government and reversed development progress — are unlikely to be forgotten for decades to come. Despite their vital role in brokering peace, women were largely absent from formal decision-making and public forums regarding reconciliation[10].

1.2 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND FAMILY VIOLENCE IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

While diverse, the Solomon Island's cultures are predominantly patriarchal. Implicit within these cultures are a complex array of gender norms that maintain strict social hierarchies dominated by men. These norms have been reinforced and strengthened over time through the process of colonisation and exposure to the western institutions of church and government. As a result, Solomon Island women experience vast and persistent gender inequality, which is also reflected in extremely high rates of physical and sexual violence against women (VAW) and girls.

A comprehensive national prevalence study of VAW and girls, using the World Health Organization's multi-country *Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence* methodology, was conducted in Solomon Islands in 2009. The ***Family Health and Safety Study*** found that 64% of ever-partnered women had experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15. The same survey found that 37% of young women aged 14-29 reported that they had been sexually abused before the age of 15, and 38% reported that their first sexual encounter was forced. The same study showed that nearly three-quarters of Solomon Islands women think that a man is justified in beating his wife under some circumstances.[11] The *Family Health and Safety Study* further found that bride price increased risk of intimate partner violence, particularly when it was not paid in full. Women whose bride price had not been fully paid were more than two and a half times more likely to experience partner violence than women whose marriage did not involve bride price.[12]

While significant progress in recognising and addressing VAW has been made with the recent gazettal of the *Family Protection Act* 2014, access to justice for survivors of violence in Solomon Islands remains poor. In a majority of cases where violence is perpetrated against women, resolutions are reached using traditional methods, such as payments of compensation. Women are commonly the subject of these exchanges, but they are rarely the beneficiaries[13]. There are very few specialist support services outside the country's capital, making it difficult for women in other areas to access formal support. Instead, they turn to informal support from community members, such as family, chiefs and pastors[14].

8 The World Bank Open Data: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ny.gdp.pcap.cd, Accessed February 2018.

9 Barclay, A. (2015: 6) *STAV End of Program Evaluation Report*

10 Brigg, M., Chadwick, W., Griggers, C. Murdock, J., Vienings, T. (2015) *Women and Peace: The role of Solomon Islands women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding,* UNDP

11 Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2009). Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study. SPC: Noumea. https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/SolomonIslandsFamilyHealthandSafetyStudy.pdf (Accessed April 2019).

12 Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2009). Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study. SPC: Noumea.

13 Barclay, A (2015: 3) *STAV End of Program Evaluation Report*

14 Barclay, A (2015: 3) *STAV End of Program Evaluation Report*

1.3 THE SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM

Implemented by Oxfam, the Safe Families program is part of a 10-year strategic initiative, supported by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence in Solomon Islands.[15] The first phase of the implementation in six communities in Malaita and Temotu provinces ran for just over three years (March 2015 to June 2018). The Safe Families program took a multi-layered approach to violence prevention that aimed to influence the social and cultural norms, values, attitudes and beliefs that support family and sexual violence, as well as enable and resource collective action to enhance collaboration.

The goal of the Safe Families program was to shift local attitudes and norms so that family violence will no longer be considered acceptable. The program aimed to contribute to this goal through:

1. **Mobilising communities to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence**

   The Safe Families community mobilisation process was led by Oxfam Community Engagement Facilitators (CEFs)[16], who provided intensive training and worked in mixed-gender pairs to build long-term relationships with target communities. Over a 12-month period, the CEFs undertook:

   - *Community mobilisation,* which was facilitated with support from community leaders, such as traditional and faith leaders, and other support networks. During this stage, Family Violence Prevention and Response Action Committees (FVPRAC) were established to guide the implementation of the program.
   - *Awareness raising,* which involved a structured process of regular community conversations. Community members learned about family and sexual violence using a gender and power sensitive approach. These conversations were facilitated by CEFs using a toolkit developed by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA).
   - *Community Action,* in which the communities developed their own Community Action Plans (CAP) outlining their priorities to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence at a community level.

2. **Enabling and resourcing collective action by coalitions**

   A unique and innovative aspect of the Safe Families model was the development of Safe Families provincial alliances (PAs) — multi-stakeholder coalitions that include health services, police, women's organisations, family support centres, church groups and local religious organisations. The PA met regularly to share information and plan collective actions aimed at preventing violence and strengthening services responding to violence at the provincial level, such as medical, counselling, and refuge services. A representative from FVPRAC was also included on the PA, to enhance the flow of communication between community members and service providers. PAs developed their own priorities, which were outlined in a Provincial Action Plan (PAP), with implementation supported by Oxfam. PA members also received training in partnership development at the beginning of the project (provided by the Pacific Leadership Program)[17], and gender-based violence (provided by IWDA).

3. **Building the evidence base through research and evaluation**

   Safe Families aimed to enhance knowledge about the cause and dynamics of family violence in Solomon Islands to inform and strengthen effective interventions. This included a program of monitoring and evaluation. A consulting firm, IOD-PARC Australasia, led the Safe Families consortium to collect and analyse data, which was used to inform the strategic direction and continuous improvement of the program during the first phase of implementation. This research report will also contribute to ongoing program design and adaptation during phase two of the Safe Families program.

---

15 For more details, see: **https://www.oxfam.org.au/country/solomon-islands/** (Oxfam Solomon Islands), and **https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/solomon-islands-safe-families-design.pdf** (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Accessed in June 2019).

16 CEFs are paid community volunteers with specific job descriptions recruited by Oxfam through a publicly advertised recruitment process. The recruitment process specifically sought to identify individuals with previous community development experience. They work in mixed-gender pairs to engage and mobilise target communities to take action to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence. Prior to undertaking community mobilisation, they participate in a three week training provided by IWDA using the toolkit developed specifically for the Safe Families program. For details of the toolkit, see **https://www.iwda.org.au/assets/files/IWDA-Solomon-Islands-Manual_web.pdf** (Accessed February 2019). In addition to this, they receive ongoing training and mentoring support, especially in feminist principles and approaches.

17 Partnership was developed by organising the coalition of members from the provincial government, the Department of Health (Provincial Hospital), the Police Department, Welfare Office, Women's Organisations, Churches, and the Community Representatives. Those members from the different agencies strengthened the network system of support and referral services for those who are experiencing family violence.

Photo: Kim Litera/Oxfam

4. **Strengthening national women's institutions, laws and policies**

   The Safe Families program provided core funding to national and provincial women's institutions to ensure voices of rural women were included in the development of national legislation and policies to address family violence.[18] These organisations were closely involved in providing information about the new *Family Protection Act* 2014 to rural populations.

Phase two of the Safe Families program commenced in January 2019. Phase two continues to focus on prevention of VAW at the community level, however, the program has expanded in terms of reach and sustainability by engaging all provinces over the life of the Program.[19]

1.4 A STUDY OF THE SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM

This report outlines the findings from qualitative research and process evaluation to assess the implementation of the Safe Families program and understand the processes of shifting harmful social norms that drive family and sexual violence in Solomon Islands. An evaluation of the previous iteration of the Safe Families program, Standing Together Against Violence (STAV), showed evidence this program approach was promising.[20] Designed to build on these findings, this study generates fine-grained evidence on the effective components of programs to reduce violence in resource-constrained, post-conflict settings, such as Solomon Islands, where prevalence of violence is high.

With funding from the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) through the SVRI World Bank Group Development Marketplace Award 2017, Oxfam, The Equality Institute (EQI), and Monash University jointly designed and implemented this research to investigate how the Safe Families program is shifting harmful gender norms and preventing family violence and intimate partner violence. The research examined factors that helped or hindered the implementation of the program, and generated evidence to inform implementation and a future trial of the effectiveness of the Safe Families program in reducing family and sexual violence in Solomon Islands.

Despite having some of the highest rates of VAW globally, there is very little evidence in the Pacific on the effectiveness of interventions aimed at stopping VAW before it starts. Alongside forthcoming research and evaluations underway in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Tonga[21], this study will contribute to the existing evidence around what works to end VAW and build the practice knowledge regarding violence-prevention activities in the Pacific region.

---

18 These institutions include National Council of Women, the national representative body for women in Solomon Islands, Vois Blong Mere Solomon, a women-led communications organisation working toward peace and security for rural women.

19 In phase two, there is a strategy that creates four distinct pathways of changes that reflect the different drivers contributing to GBV and VAW: **Influence** policy and practice, **empower** national, provincial and community structures, strengthen **response** mechanisms, and promote **prevention**.

20 Barclay, A. (2015) *STAV End of Program Evaluation Report*

21 Mobilising Communities to End Violence Against Women, **https://pacificwomen.org/stories-of-change/mobilising-communities-end-violence-women/**

2. RESEARCH SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 RESEARCH AIMS

This evaluation of the Safe Families program sought to examine its implementation and understand the processes that shift and transform harmful social norms, which drive family and sexual violence in Malaita and Temotu provinces in Solomon Islands. The research also aimed to better understand and describe the context-specific responses of individuals, communities and agencies to the Safe Families model for violence prevention in Solomon Islands, in order to inform optimisation and increase program activities.

Specifically, the objectives of the research were:

- To improve understanding of the context-specific norms that drive family and sexual violence in two provinces in Solomon Islands, and the potential pathways and mechanisms to change these norms;
- To explore changes that have been achieved through the Safe Families program among individuals, communities and agencies, and how these can be addressed in optimising and taking to scale the Safe Families intervention; and
- To identify effective and less effective elements of the Safe Families program and recommend measures for strengthening these elements.

In addition to this report, the research team will also produce articles and publications on how to conduct research on VAW that is ethical, safe and rigorous in the context of small, geographically-disparate island communities where violence is relatively normalised.

2.2 RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

Data collection took place across nine sites in the provinces of Malaita, Temotu and the capital of Solomon Islands, Honiara. Data was collected through in-depth interviews between Oxfam Solomon Island staff from provincial sites and community members from Safe Families intervention sites. Focus group discussions (FGD) were also held with Oxfam staff from Honiara, and PA members from Malaita and Temotu provinces. As the research aimed to examine the community attitudes and gender norms of different age groups, FGDs were also held with young men and young women from the intervention sites.

At each research site, Oxfam's Community Engagement Facilitators (CEFs) recruited respondents for interviews and focus groups discussions. The selection criteria for recruiting interview respondents ensured that men and women were interviewed in each site and that, where possible, the community members had different levels of exposure to the Safe Families program — from self-reported high levels of engagement with Safe Families to no knowledge at all. Participants for young people FGDs had to be between the ages of 16 and 30. Two FGDs — one all-female and one all-male — were held in each site. Table 1 below outlines the sites where data was gathered, the data collection methods, the types and number of respondents.

TABLE 1: DATA COLLECTION SITES AND METHODS

RESEARCH SITES	IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS	FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS
Auki, Malaita	• Oxfam staff (6)	• Provincial alliance (1 FGD, 6 participants)
Kunu, Malaita	• Community men (1) • Community women (2)	• Young women (1 FGD, 7 participants) • Young men (1 FGD, 9 participants)
Oibola, Malaita	• Community men (2) • Community women (2)	• Young women (1 FGD, 6 participants) • Young men (1 FGD, 6 participants)
Siwai, Malaita	• Community men (1) • Community women (2)	• Young women (1 FGD, 14 participants) • Young men (1 FGD, 7 participants)
Lata, Temotu	• Oxfam staff (5)	• Provincial alliance (1 FGD, 6 participants)
Minerv, Temotu	• Community men (2) • Community women (2)	• Young women (1 FGD, 7 participants) • Young men (1 FGD, 6 participants)
Minervi, Temotu	• Community men (2) • Community women (2)	• Young women (1 FGD, 7 participants) • Young men (1 FGD, 7 participants)
Nemba, Temotu	• Community men (2) • Community women (2)	• Young women (1 FGD, 6 participants) • Young men (1 FGD, 6 participants)
Honiara (National capital)	• No in-depth interviews	• Oxfam staff (1 FGD, 4 participants)
TOTAL	• **Community women (12)** • **Community men (10)** • **Oxfam staff (6 women; 5 men)**	• **Young women (47)** • **Young men (41)** • **Oxfam staff (4 women)** • **Provincial alliance members (4 men; 8 women)**

2.3 RESEARCH TOOLS

Interview and FGD guides were developed by EQI and Monash University in close collaboration with Oxfam Solomon Islands staff. Separate guides were developed and tailored to each cohort. The FGD with Honiara-based Oxfam staff was conducted in English, but all other interviews and FGDs were conducted in pijin, the official language of Solomon Islands. Translation of the tools from English into pijin was led by the local research team in Solomon Islands to ensure they were appropriate for the local context. Including local researchers in the tool refinement and adaptation process was critical, particularly given the interview and FGD questions were focused on concepts not commonly discussed among community members, such as gender norms, roles, and expectations.

2.4 DATA COLLECTION

Field work and data collection took place in May 2018. A team of 10 Solomon Island researchers — men and women — were recruited from Malaita and Temotu provinces and brought to Honiara for five days of training on gender equality and the root causes of family violence, as well as research ethics and techniques. The training was jointly facilitated by EQI, Monash University and Oxfam Solomon Islands. Working alongside the research leads from EQI, Monash University and Oxfam, the research teams travelled to the offshore island provinces of Malaita and Temotu, and conducted interviews and FGDs with Safe Families community members and program staff. In total, 49 interviews and FGDs were conducted and over 70 hours of interview audio recording were collected for analysis.

2.5 ETHICS

Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee. Prior to interviews and FGDs, all potential participants were informed about the purposes of the study and that participation was voluntary. Participants were assured that no names or other personal identifiers would be used and that only pooled data from which no individual could be identified would be reported. Consent to record conversations was obtained prior to initiating group discussions or individual interviews.

This study focused on community attitudes and norms around VAW and did not explicitly ask participants to disclose their own experiences or perpetration of violence. However, as with any study that delves into sensitive topics, there was always potential for participants to make disclosures during discussions about VAW and intimate partner violence. As an ethical and safety measure, all FGDs with young community members were segregated by sex. Facilitators and interviewers were sex-matched with respondents; female researchers interviewed female respondents and male researchers interviewed male respondents.

Prior to data collection, researchers were trained in research ethics, including confidentiality and the importance of ensuring privacy and anonymity for the respondents. All participants in this research provided their informed consent to participate and understood the voluntary nature of the research. Researchers were instructed to conduct interviews in private settings to ensure confidentiality. This was often challenging in the provinces, where there were few enclosed and private venues that could be used for this purpose. In such case, researchers selected interview settings outside of earshot from other community members.

2.6 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

STRENGTHS OF THIS STUDY

- This study took a participatory approach and local researchers from Malaita and Temotu provinces played a key role in adapting and refining the research tools. This ensured that the tools were well adapted to the site-specific contexts, fostered a sense of ownership among the local researchers, and built and valued local capacity.
- Little rigorous research has been conducted in Solomon Islands or the Pacific on VAW and how to prevent it. This research is timely, as there have been a growing number of interventions aimed at preventing VAW in the Pacific. The findings will help build much-needed practice knowledge.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

- While the original aims of the research included a focus on understanding norms and attitudes on sexual violence, in the end, the research tools did not explicitly ask participants about sexual violence. This was due to the sensitive nature of the topic and a perception that it would be challenging for researchers to bring up the topic of sexual violence without first building sufficient rapport with community members.
- While the research design stipulated sex-segregated FGDs, a male researcher was present in a small number of young women FGDs. This may have impacted the conversation among the young women and made the job of the facilitator, who already faced challenges drawing out responses, more difficult. The importance of sex-segregation was highlighted to researchers throughout the training and reiterated during field work. It is possible that male team leaders misunderstood their role of overseeing the data collection processes as actually having to be present throughout all FGDs. In future, more time (approximately two weeks) allocated to training researchers, and added emphasis on research methodology and ethics, may prevent this mistake from occurring again.
- The questions posed by interviewers about different forms of violence were not always adequately explored. Therefore, the data is lacking a rich description of the community members' understandings of violence. This could be due to lack of researcher experience, suitable training, or both.

Photo: Kim Litera/Oxfam

3. FINDINGS: GENDER NORMS IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

3.1 SOCIAL NORMS AND HOW THEY DRIVE FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A key component of the research examined the context-specific social norms that drive family and sexual violence in Malaita and Temotu provinces. Social norms are the common rules shared by a group regarding socially acceptable or appropriate behaviour in particular social situations. Although often related to individually held beliefs or attitudes, social norms are distinct from the attitudes and beliefs of individuals. A social norm is made up of one's beliefs about what others do, and by one's beliefs about what others think one should do.[22] People are inclined to comply with a norm if both these social expectations are in place — that is, if they expect others will conform and expect them also to conform to it (and would disapprove if they did not). Social norms are maintained by the anticipation of approval or disapproval of one's actions, otherwise known respectively as positive and negative sanctions. People who break social norms may face community backlash, often in the form of losing or conferring status and power within the group[23].

In many cases the threat of sanctions, both real and perceived, is sufficient to maintain social norms.

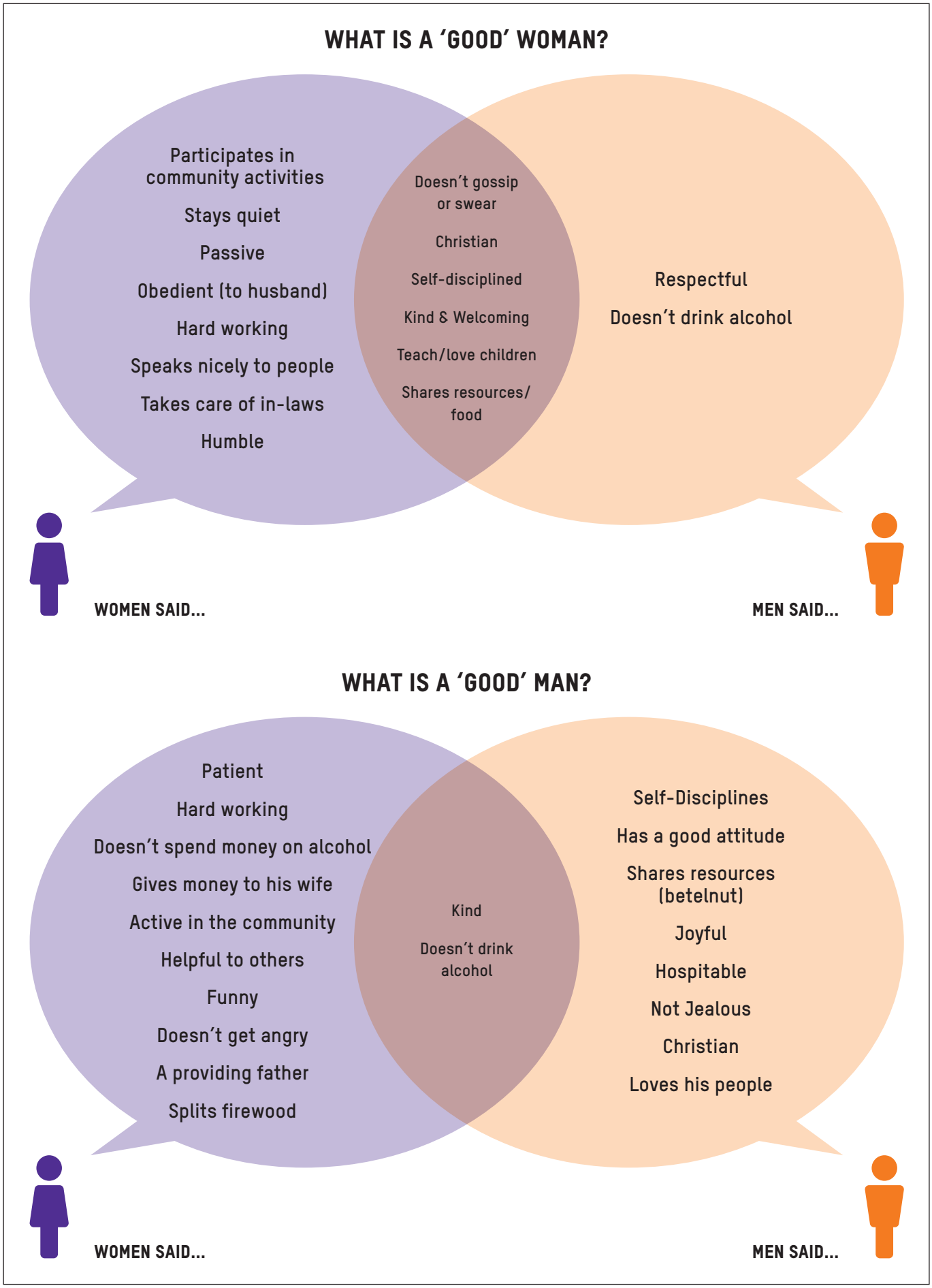
Social norms about appropriate roles and behaviour for women and men are called gender norms. This is often expressed through local conceptions about how women and men should ideally behave. Put more simply, people have common understandings of what characteristics make a good man and a good woman.

In the context of Solomon Islands, this study found that communities in Malaita and Temotu provinces adhered to rigid gender norms and strict gender roles. Interview respondents and FGD participants expressed clear ideas about what traits were considered good behaviour for women and men. There were similarities between what women thought of as good behaviour for themselves, and what men considered ideal behaviour for women. However, there were some interesting differences between what women considered ideal behaviour for men, and how men viewed ideal behaviour for themselves.

22 Bicchieri, C. (2006). *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

23 CARE (2017). *Applying Theory to Practice: CARE's Journey Piloting Social Norms Measures for Gender Programming - Report*. Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc. (CARE).

FIGURE 1: IDEAL TRAITS OF 'GOOD' WOMEN AND 'GOOD' MEN



The research revealed that both men and women had similar ideas about what it meant to be a good woman, which included: being kind and welcoming; responsible for child-rearing; self-disciplined; not gossiping or swearing; sharing resources; and being a good Christian (*Figure 1*). There was greater divergence between men's and women's ideas about what it meant to be a good man. When asked to describe the characteristics of a good man, most female participants highlighted relationship traits. For example, women commonly said that a good man is someone who gives their wife money, is kind to her and provides for their family. However, male participants more readily identified positive traits related to community-level connections, such as being kind to other community members, sharing what they have, and having a good attitude to others. In fact, the only thing men and women agreed on when it came to being a good man was that they should be kind and refrain from drinking alcohol. These different perspectives likely stem from the fact that in Solomon Islands, men are seen as natural leaders and are expected to fulfil leadership roles at home and in the community. More research on this topic may be useful in guiding the content of community-level violence prevention and gender norm change interventions.

The tendency for women to nominate relationship traits of good men could also be due to the high rates of intimate partners' violence experienced by women in Solomon Islands. As mentioned earlier, 64% of Solomon Island women had experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime. It is therefore not surprising that women would identify kindness and lovingness as desirable traits in a partner. Furthermore, women are seen as caregivers whose roles are generally restricted to the home and family and therefore have a vested interest in a partner who shares the burden of household and care work.

Both men and women had a clear idea of what women should not do (and the associated sanctions with such behaviours) whereas men's and women's ideas of a good man were defined by more valorised characteristics involving greater levels of agency. The gender norm, or gendered ideal, that men should be kind stems from Christian teachings. Specifically, the Bible instructs men to be caring and compassionate, however it is usually framed in terms of kindness to neighbours and less commonly framed in terms of kindness and respect between husbands and wives.

It is also noteworthy that some of the features of a good woman could potentially increase her risk to violence. For example, if a woman is overly generous and provides food and hospitality to her relatives, she risks being seen as giving away too many of the family's resources and this could lead to arguments with her husband. This is confirmed in the following FGD exchange about what it means to be a good woman.

> **Participant:** *"Some women are good, it's their husbands who are not good..."*
>
> **Facilitator:** *"What do you mean by that?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"Their husbands are jealous."*
>
> **Facilitator:** *"So, then it affects her character? She can't do the things that good women do, because of her husband's jealousy..."*
>
> *[Everyone agrees]*
>
> – Young male community member, Temotu.

While men are generally seen as the boss of the household and are responsible for important decision-making, women are seen as the more responsible money managers, and are generally given some or most of the control over household finances. This is largely accepted because both men and women interviewed believed men would misuse household income and spend money on alcohol, tobacco and gambling.[24]

> *"In some families, men cannot manage the money, because they might go and drink, in that instance, some women look after the money."*
>
> – Male community member, Malaita.

Understanding social norms around what makes a good woman and good man is important because it provides insight into how men take on the role of the boss, with the right to enforce women's ideal behaviour, usually with violence.

3.2 THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DISCIPLINE

When directly asked, community members would say VAW is unacceptable. However, when presented with a scenario in which a woman does not behave according to accepted gender norms and gender roles, community members commented that violence could be justified as "discipline" and to "teach her a lesson".

> **Interviewer:** *"If husband pays for the bride price, do you think people in the community would think the husband has the right to beat her?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"No, he should only advise her."*
>
> **Interviewer:** *"What if she commits adultery/extra marital affairs? You think he should just advise her?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"He should beat her."*
>
> – Female community member, Temotu.

This is related to the normalisation of violence, where violence, particularly men's, is seen and treated as a normal part of life. Because of their dominant roles within the family and society, men are considered to have the right to teach their wife so-called acceptable forms of behaviour. For example, community members said that if a woman swears, gossips, or has an affair with another man, there is justification for her to be beaten. The payment of bride price also provides additional justification for discipline in the form of violence (see section on bride price).

> **Interviewer:** *"What are some things that a woman can do [so] that people in this community think it is ok for her husband to hit her?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"If she swears a lot, because that is considered offensive in our culture, and also if she is unfaithful to her husband, then it's ok for him to hit her."*

24 See also Kruijssen et al. (2013) and Eves (2018) for supporting research on gender, income and household decision making in Solomon Islands and the Pacific.

Interviewer: *"Anything else? What do other people in the community think?"*

Participant: *"If she breaks culture, people in the community will say 'leave him to hit her'. They'll say it's okay because of culture."*

– Female community member, Malaita

Community members clearly indicated that discipline must take the form of physical punishment, such as beating, in order for a woman to learn the severity of her actions and to prevent repeated transgressions. However, they also emphasised that it should not be too severe and should only serve to teach a woman the right way to behave.

"How I see it, is that woman is under the man. She is under the control of the man, so for him to [beat her], it's okay, because he needs to teach her a lesson. For him to beat her to death, that's not okay, because when she was with her family, they kept her well, but in terms of teaching her a lesson, that is his right because he has paid for her."

– Male community member, Temotu.

This research shows that the expected behaviour for women and men differs. Nowhere is this clearer than when looking at the different consequences women and men experience when they defy gender norms. Respondents said that if women transgressed gendered ideals they would be disciplined, usually with violence, by their husbands. If men transgressed, the community or family would simply talk to them, telling them the appropriate way to behave (although some key informants felt this rarely happened in practice). While women's behaviour was strongly policed and women's transgressions often resulted in severe punishment, men were far less likely to be held accountable for their actions. These ramifications, as illustrated in the data set, are a further indication of gender inequality, which global research suggests is the root cause of VAW.

3.3 BRIDE PRICE

Interviewer: *"If a man [pays] the bride price, with shell money or whatever, is it ok for him to hit or assault his wife?"*

Participant: *"Yes, for me, in my own thoughts, I paid for you [a woman], so you must stay straight [behave well] for me. So, if you do something wrong against custom, I must teach you a lesson. It doesn't mean I will beat you until you die, just for you to learn a lesson."*

– Male community member, Malaita

Bride price is a payment made from the groom and the groom's family to the bride's family at the time of marriage. Most respondents indicated bride price is an important practice in both Malaita and Temotu provinces. Across the Pacific, the practice is often understood as a commodification of women and a way to reinforce men's dominance; women are paid for, and therefore considered to be owned, subject to the control of her husband[25]. This is inconsistent with traditional understandings of bride price. This research suggests that the shift in understanding of bride price in Solomon Islands enables VAW in a number of ways. Bride price is also related to an implied understandings of good womanhood, the justification of VAW and whether or not a woman feels pressure to remain in a violent relationship. Therefore, understanding the circumstances in which violence occurs becomes clearer when bride price is more fully understood as a cultural practice.

3.3.1 PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF BRIDE PRICE IS CHANGING

Participants' understanding of bride price differed between age groups, indicating that the practice has changed over time. Bride price has deep cultural significance related to community ties and the way women are valued. Also known as bride wealth, historically, it was used as a form of compensation to the bride's family for the loss of a daughter, as she moved from her family home to live with her husband's family[26]. It also symbolised the formalisation of social ties between two families[27]. While these sentiments are still present, the study found that many respondents, particularly younger age groups, believed bride price also meant a woman is owned by her husband.

This change in understanding is not surprising given the context. Many academics have written on the commoditisation of bride price in the Pacific more widely.[28] [29] Solomon Islands has not been immune to modern and capitalist influences, and, like other Pacific nations[30], the arrival of colonial influences and missionaries meant that outsiders have likely overlaid their own western assumptions about what the local cultural transactions meant. Previously, Solomon Islanders did not frame the practice with understandings of payment, but rather local languages described an exchange or gift. As such, bride price was never originally about ownership or property.

As the exchange below between one interviewer and an older man in Malaita highlights, there has been a shift in attitudes and understanding of bride price.

Interviewer: *"What does that practice of 'buying a woman' mean in this community, what is the significance?"*

Participant: *"Before, marriage was when you joined two tribes together…I remember the elders before, they saw [bride price] as a good thing, like the tribe or the girl, they saw some value in her. For example, she was a hard worker, but not only because of [just the] girl, because there was some value in uniting her tribe or her family with theirs. That's why they paid, in custom. But*

25 Wardlow, H., (2006). *Wayward women sexuality and agency in a New Guinea society,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

26 Papps et al, 1983(1983) *'The Role and Determinants of Bride-Price: The Case of a Palestinian Village [and Comments and Reply]'. Current Anthropology, 24(2), pp.203-215.*

27 Conway, J. and Ennio, M. (1990) M*arriage in Melanesia: A Sociological Perspective,* Papua New Guinea: The Melanesian Institute Point 15.

28 Filer, C. 1985 "What is this thing called ""Brideprice""?'" *Mankind* 15 (2): 163-83

29 Valeri, V. (1994) 'Buying Women but Not Selling Them: Gift and Commodity Exchange in Huaulu Alliance,' *Man* 29: 1-26

30 Jolly, M. 1994 *Women of the Place: Kastom, Colonialism and Gender in Vanuatu.* Camberwell, Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers.

[in modern time], you see men just looking at a woman and saying 'oh, she's mine' without any thought to her background or family…The woman doesn't have any say about it, because that's culture, the way people see it, it's like going to the store, you go and pay for it.

Before, in terms of custom, it had nothing to do with the boy and girl you see, the elders and parents looked for a woman for the man, because they understood the value in the girl and her tribe and how she could benefit them, for example, she might be good at making shell money, that's how tribes [survived] by seeking out the resources they didn't have through bringing them into their family."

– Male community member, Malaita

Shifts in the practices are also indicated in the currency used for such exchanges. In the past, traditional currency was exclusively used; in Malaita a type of 'shell money' and in Temotu 'feather money' were given for brides. Nowadays it is common to use both traditional or modern currency, or as one woman from Temotu put it: "Today we use the 'white man's money'". This research suggests that bride price is now becoming competitive and defined in terms of commodification[31], as indicated by participants who reminisced about when bride price was not so expensive and their feelings that "these days people charge too much."

3.3.2 TYING BRIDE PRICE TO GENDER ROLES AND DISCIPLINE

While the exact rates of VAW and how it relates to bride price are unknown, the interview and FGD data suggests that more recent ideas surrounding ownership of a woman are being used as justifications for violence. However, it is not simply the idea that a woman is considered to be owned that justifies violence, but also the fact that bride price places social expectations on women's shoulders.

As a publicly acknowledged exchange, bride price performs an important social function for women's status and role in the wider community. When bride price is paid, a woman, recognised now as a married woman, is granted respect and honour; she is legitimised and seen as a woman having value.

Participant: *"I will say that the marriage is only respected once the bride price has been settled. Until that time the woman still belongs to the public…"*

Interviewer: *"So, you are saying that it has an impact on the woman, because it gives her more respect when her bride price has been paid."*

Participant: *"Yes, until then, she is nobody's wife."*

Interviewer: *"So, it gives value and respect to the woman?"*

Participant: *"Yes. And that woman will look upon herself as a married woman. [She'll say] 'I have been paid. People respect me. My husband's people respect me because they paid for me'."*

– Male community member, Temotu.

For participants in the study, the issue of women leaving or staying with an abusive husband was explicitly tied to bride price. While some opinions differed, especially if children or severe violence were factors, many stated that while women could leave for a short time, she would be expected to return to her husband eventually, otherwise compensation would need to be paid.

Interviewer: *"So, in your opinion, for example, if your husband treated you badly all the time or you didn't have children, is it okay for the woman to leave the man?"*

Participant: *"She can leave, but if they paid for her then she will always and forever be under the control of the man."*

– Female community member, Temotu.

Participant: *"What I think is that he has the right to say that [she is paid for so she must stay], because he paid for her, so her family doesn't have the right to say [any] thing. It's like if you pay for something in the store, you own it. You don't have to return it to the store."*

Facilitator: *"It's your property?"*

Participant: *"Yes, it's your property. So if the man pays bride price and you go and stay with him, even if he treats you badly, it's hard for you to leave, because he's paid for you! He paid money to your parents for you to leave your house and come and live with him, so you can't leave [husband's house] and go back, because he's already asked for permission from your parents."*

– Young female community member, Malaita

"If the bride price is big [expensive] it only makes it worse for the woman, because she can't leave [a violent relationship], so she just stays quiet. It's usually her side of the family who advises her to stay, because the size of the bride price. The size of the bride price will determine her freedom to leave, so say it's an average bride price, it will be easier. But you know the pride of us Malaitans, these days some men want a big bride price."

– Male community member, Malaita

There was evidence this belief was also changing however, as some respondents challenged this notion that a bride price makes it difficult for a woman to leave an abusive marriage.

Interviewer: *"Some people believe that when a man's family buys a woman, that it is hard for the woman to leave her husband, what [are] your thoughts?"*

Participant: *"In the past, people really held on strongly to that idea, but these days the practice is unfavoured, these days if a man doesn't treat his wife properly, even if he paid for her, she can leave. Last time, not so much, but this time, she can leave…it's changed."*

– Female community member, Malaita

Interviewer: *"Some people say that if a man has paid for his wife, it's hard for her to leave him, what do you think about that?"*

Participant: *"That's not right, because she is a human being; if you treat her badly, she will leave, no matter how hard you try and get her back, it's her choice to go if*

31 See Wardlow, 2006 for similar discussion in Papua New Guinea and also Melanesia more generally.

she wants. No matter if you paid for her, it's hard for you to control her, it depends on her. So that's your failure [if you treat her badly and she leaves]."

– Male community member, Malaita

More generally, the divergence of views on gender roles and expectations expressed by young people, especially by young men in FGDs, indicate that attitudes may be gradually shifting. Youth FGDs, particularly in Malaita province, revealed that young people from the same communities often did not hold the same opinions, and in some cases, held views that were in complete opposition. This suggests that these gender norms may be less entrenched or that individual attitudes may be gradually changing. Further research on this issue would help confirm the depth and breadth of this change.

3.4 COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF VIOLENCE

The most common forms of violence cited by focus group and interview participants were physical violence and arguments. Financial violence was also often raised, though most community members talked about the misuse of household income, especially for the purchase of alcohol, rather than men exerting financial control over women.

This research originally intended to focus on the social norms that drive family and sexual violence. However, in the process of refining the research tools, local researchers advised that it would be difficult to explicitly raise the topic of sexual violence with community members, particularly when interviewers would not have sufficient time to build the rapport required to discuss such private and taboo topics. The final research tools included questions about family violence more broadly, which would capture different types of violence — including sexual violence — if raised by respondents themselves.

Sexual violence was rarely raised in interviews and FGDs. When it was raised by one CEF, it was in the context of risks faced by women in public spaces rather than in the private sphere. Community members only raised sexual violence five times in passing, with one female community member from Temotu stating that sometimes men would "demand sex from their wives when they are drunk", however, it was "not that common". One male participant from Malaita said that community members are often afraid to report sexual violence because it is seen as a private matter. When community members did raise sexual violence, the interviewers rarely probed for further information. The lack of discussions around sexual violence between researchers and participants is nonetheless noteworthy. The fact that Solomon Islanders appear reticent to discuss sexual violence, and sexuality more broadly, due to the taboo nature of the themes indicates a space for further program development and research.

Domestic violence was also considered a private matter and was not discussed publicly. However, some community members commented this ought to change and that talking about violence was good for raising awareness and resolving problems.

"Yes of course, [talking about VAW] is a good thing, we need to know about it because before we were just blind and didn't know about anything. So, it's good, and if some of the families don't hear about it, we will tell them 'well this is what we learned in the session [referring to community conversations].' Yes, it's a good thing."

– Female community member, Malaita.

3.5 COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

Evidence on VAW in the Pacific, and around the world, strongly suggests that gender inequality is a root cause of VAW.[32] Compared to community members, the CEFs demonstrated a better understanding of gender inequality, how this manifested in their own lives and the links between gender inequality and VAW. This is likely due to the extensive training CEFs had undertaken on VAW and gender equality, and the more consistent programmatic exposure CEFs received as part of program implementation. While Oxfam CEFs were not directly asked what causes VAW, their understanding of gender inequality and male dominance was commonly acknowledged in their responses during interviews. For example, one female CEF acknowledged not only the role of power in gender inequality but men's reluctance to change.

"In reality, such men overpower their wives, they think they have the power. When we talk about gender equality, he says he will not overpower his wife. He blames his wife, but he should blame himself. They still want to overpower their wife and children, to command them to do [something] according to his wish, so he does not want to participate in gender equality as he wants to hold onto his power, and his abuse against his family. Although he is aware of the program, it will take time. As the communities practise and participate in the program, then he will realise that he is the only one who does not change in his community. So maybe someday he will slowly change but may need time."

– Female CEF, Temotu

However, in spite of CEFs' knowledge, this understanding was not yet evident among community members. Only one community woman from Malaita recognised power as a root factor in VAW, saying:

"My own opinion is that it is all about power. My thinking is that the man likes to have the power over the woman, he wants to be the boss, so then violence happens."

– Female community member, Malaita

This lack of understanding was also a finding from the STAV program. The STAV end of program evaluation report found that, while the family-centred approach was successful in engaging communities to start addressing the endemic levels of violence,

32 Fulu, E. *et al* (2016).

this approach "failed to effectively identify gender power imbalances as the root cause of VAW. This is evidenced by the fact that community members identified external factors as the cause of violence (i.e. alcohol consumption, women's gossiping, and jealousy were commonly cited as the causes of violence)."[33]

The findings in the Safe Families program are similar. When asked what the root causes of VAW were, community members in particular pointed to issues such as gossip, alcohol consumption, infidelity, jealousy and gambling. These are not the causes of violence, but are reinforcing factors. While they can increase the severity and frequency of violence, they are not the root cause of VAW.

3.5.1 INFIDELITY AND JEALOUSY

Jealousy over actual or perceived infidelity was mentioned frequently as a reason men or women might act violently towards a partner. While some respondents mentioned arguments between women over male partners, as well as women getting angry with unfaithful husbands, overwhelmingly the data suggests this predominantly took the form of men's violence towards women. The common phrase used for infidelity in Malaita and Temotu is "02", in reference to a person's second partner. (A primary partner is referred to as "01"). While infidelity was widely viewed as unacceptable, it appeared to be relatively common. And while it was generally agreed that both women and men could be unfaithful, it was also commonly understood that women were responsible for behaviour which might make their husband jealous. Behaviour such as talking to and spending time with men who are not relatives, or travelling far from home alone for extended periods, may result in a husband being violent toward his wife. There was an acceptance of violence towards women who were unfaithful (real or perceived), as illustrated in the quotes below.

> *"...If she swears at her husband or is unfaithful to him, people will say it's okay for the man to hit her, she deserved it. It's just how we think here."*
>
> – Male community member, Malaita

> *"Women have jealous minds and men have jealous minds too. But some jealous man, for example, if they saw their wife talking with other men, they just don't waste time, they see their wife and they just beat her. They'll think 'this is not right by me; I am going to beat you'. They paid [bride price] for her. And later he might regret it and see what a stupid thing he has done, but the woman should respect people and not behave like that."*
>
> – Male community member, Temotu.

3.5.2 ALCOHOL

The men and women interviewed generally agreed that men's abuse of alcohol was seen as a major cause of violence, particularly between husbands and wives, but also between other family members. However, some men indicated they thought some women were also starting to drink.

> **Facilitator:** *"Who usually drinks, the mother or the father?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"Nowadays they both drink! Mothers and fathers!"*
>
> *[Everyone laughs]*
>
> **Participant:** *"Yeah when the father drinks, the mother is angry, so then she drinks."*
>
> *[Everyone laughs and confers]*
>
> - Young male community members, Temotu

The role of alcohol in intimate partner violence is complex. The association between alcohol use and partner violence is likely to be due to a combination of factors: alcohol contributes to violence through enhancing the likelihood of conflict and reducing inhibitions.[34] Ultimately, the use of alcohol does not explain the underlying imbalance of power in relationships where one partner exercises coercive control. In the context of Solomon Islands, effectively addressing alcohol abuse is an important component of initiatives aimed at decreasing the prevalence and severity of violent incidents, and other positive outcomes such as more income for households, greater health benefits, and increased well-being. However, international program evidence shows that tackling alcohol consumption to reduce violence is more effective when combined with approaches which also actively address gender inequality.[35]

Community members also raised alcohol as an issue in relation to the misuse of money, specifically by men. Many respondents said that while the man is the head of the household, women are better at managing the money because men will spend it on alcohol.

> *"In my view, in some families it is the women who are responsible for looking after money and in some it is both the father and the mother who control the money. But I think it is best for women to control the money... Because if daddy controls the money, he will go and drink and misuse the money, but mummy knows how to* control the money and manage it in the house."
>
> – Female community member, Temotu

Local informants also pointed out that the common practice of giving women control over household finances is not always empowering for the woman if the ability to make decisions is not genuinely in her control. In some cases, this allocation of responsibility can be viewed as merely shifting the burden of another household management task from the man to the woman. Local respondents also observed that this practice could increase women's vulnerability to violence when men give women control over household finances but do not accept the financial decisions she makes.

---

33 Barclay, A (2015:6) *STAV End of Program Evaluation Report*

34 Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2009). *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study.* SPC: Noumea.

35 Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia,* Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

3.5.3 VIOLENCE AS A RESULT OF WOMEN'S TRANSGRESSIONS

As already discussed, there are certain expected behaviours in Malaita and Temotu that make up the gendered social norms for women. These include not gossiping, not going out too much and doing the household chores. Community members said it was common for women to experience violence if they did not abide by these norms, and that it was justifiable.

> *"I have seen other communities where the way of the man is the only way. If he comes home and the woman hasn't cooked dinner, he will beat her and she will cry, that is the normal way he treats her."*
>
> – Young male community member, Malaita

> *"When women gossip their husbands beat them. When women are involved in infidelity and do things that are perceived as not right within the household, husbands beat them for these. When husbands hear that their wives are involved in 02 or gossiping, they will beat them."*
>
> – Female community member, Temotu

> *"It starts in the house...because the family paid for her. So if she is lazy... if she doesn't work hard in their house, and the husband hits her, [the family] will say it's okay because she was too lazy. Then, if the woman goes out a lot, people will say 'let him hit her.'"*
>
> – Male community member, Malaita

The fact that community members identified reinforcing factors as causes of violence is concerning. When community members believe factors like alcohol consumption or infidelity are causes of VAW, it can create an environment where the violence is considered justified, or having only occurred due to the man having an alcohol problem. On the other hand, reinforcing factors such as alcohol consumption and poverty are significant realities in Solomon Islands that need to be addressed within the contexts they arise.

3.6 LEGISLATION AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE

The adoption of the Family Protection Act 2014, the national legislation which deems domestic violence unlawful, has had some impact on community attitudes and behaviours. Anecdotally, there was some indication that men, since being made aware of the act, now think twice before beating a woman. However this behaviour change is not due to a shift in understanding that violence is wrong, but a fear of punishment. Consolidated and verifiable data on convictions as a result of the implementation of the act is not yet available. However, a family protection report prepared by SAFENET documenting rates of reports, trials, and convictions is being prepared for Solomon Islands Parliament. SAFENET is part of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA).

> **Participant:** *"I have the right to beat [my wife], violence would most certainly happen. I think that I would be violent but then I also think in terms of the law... Because she might go and report me, and I would go to prison."*
>
> **Interviewer:** *"Okay, so what did you come up with? You said you would think in terms of violence and then in terms of the law, so what would you do? Would you beat her or not?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"I wouldn't beat her."*
>
> **Interviewer:** *"Why do you say that?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"Because the law prevents it."*
>
> – Male community member, Malaita.

One man in Temotu pointed out that sometimes there were incompatibilities between the law and local custom or the church.

> *"I think that in terms of custom, there are some areas that do not coincide with the law... or is not right according to the church. For example, if my wife slept with another man, according to custom it is right for me to...kill/beat her, but this is a breach to the law and the church. So sometimes areas like that are forbidden by the law but the custom supports it... this means there are ways of going about issues related to violence."*
>
> – Male community member, Temotu.

Photo: Kim Litera/Oxfam

4. FINDINGS: PROMISING RESULTS FROM THE SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM

> *"I always look back, before, when I was single, my sisters and my mother were always the ones who washed my clothes, who cooked for me, and they always washed the dishes. The Safe Families program changed my attitudes and behaviours towards gender roles, so me and my wife have agreed that when I am out of the house [in the morning for work], she takes over the household work. From 4.30pm, when I am back [at home in the evenings], all the work in the house I have to do it, because [my wife] has spent the whole day doing that. So, I bath our child, feed her, cook, wash, those things. The social norms of our community say that those [tasks] are things for women to do, but no, the [Safe Families] program told me that I can do it."*
>
> – Male CEF, Malaita

Overall, there are early signs of changes in the program communities in Malaita and Temotu. While the changes may seem small, they are not insignificant. Findings from this study reflect the global evidence on shifting social norms: sustained and meaningful social change on a large scale often takes years or even generations[36]. While it is difficult to isolate the changes observed and attribute them to the Safe Families program, the study uncovered many encouraging indications that the program was contributing to real, positive changes in attitudes and behaviours around VAW. While variable in scope and scale, critical changes were also observed around strengthened support for community response to VAW.

4.1 CHANGES IN AWARENESS, ATTITUDE, AND BEHAVIOUR OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community members increased their awareness of the issues related to VAW. One male community member noted that the program had helped him understand violence better:

> **Interviewer:** *"What were the most helpful and least helpful activities [of the] Safe Families program?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"Well, one is this awareness, this education, you need to educate people about what violence is. Because I understand that violence is not just physical, there are lots of ways, like intimidation, you don't need to hit her, you can shout at her and [those] kind of things."*
>
> – Male community member, Malaita

Some community members also reported attitudinal shifts as a direct result of exposure to the program:

> **Interviewer:** *"Has this program impacted your personal life or your relationship with others?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"Yes. Ever since I attended the [program] activities, I'm trying to change my attitudes, behaviours and character towards my family. People look at me as a role model in the community, because I am the Chairman of the Committee, so that's some of the differences I have seen happen in my own life."*
>
> – Male community member, Temotu.

Some respondents reported that they had changed their behaviour due to the Safe Families program. Perpetrators said they were now less inclined to use violence, and women reported increased confidence to participate in activities outside the home.

> **Interviewer:** *"From your experience, what kind of method did you use to teach your wife? Or what sort of methods do others use?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"[Laughing] Bro, in the past, I used to love hitting women when they did the wrong thing, but this time I have changed a little bit, because of the trainings by Oxfam. Now…I just hit something else when I get angry at my wife. So, these days I don't experience that what we are talking about very much, because now we talk about it in the house and it's finished, once I know I am getting angry, I just walk out."*
>
> – Male community member, Malaita

> **Interviewer:** *"Do you think the program made an impact in your personal life and relationships with other people?"*
>
> **Participant:** *"Yes, it really made big changes in my life. For example, in the past I'm someone involved in unwanted activities such as drinking [beer] and shouting in the community. But at the moment I don't drink anymore because I know that if I drink, I will shout in a disorderly manner, which will cause violence in the community or I swear a lot too. But now I don't talk badly about another person anymore…I now respect other people. The introduction of the program helped me to stay* out from these unwanted activities."
>
> – Male community member, Temotu

> *"Before this program, I was a woman who was very ashamed. It would be hard for you to see me walking around, I stayed in my house. I stayed there for 10 years of the past 11 years. Now we say, 'Okay! Let's do our meeting at [name omitted]'s house'. So, there I got*

36 Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia,* Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

used to walking on the road, but before that I never used to walk around."

– Female community member, Malaita

There were also recorded impacts on some bystanders. One man from Temotu reported that he was now more likely to discuss violence prevention openly in the community as a result of his exposure to the program.

Interviewer: *"Okay, can you give one major change that the program brought on you personally?"*

Participant: *"I used to be a very quiet person and stay a lot in the house, I don't go from house to house. But now I feel that I want to go out to other houses and talk about violence. I myself am very interested to discuss about violence, when I see that [other people] are... violating the rights of others, I will intervene and have a conversation with them telling them that it's not right...I also approach husbands and wives who argue a lot and tell them the right ways of dealing with issues. Things like: when you discipline your child, do it appropriately. I feel that I have a responsibility to do something about violence in the community. I am a quiet person before but now I sometimes took the lead to stop unwanted activities in my community. In the past, when I see two people arguing, I get scared but today I will approach them and try and sort out the issue."*

– Male community member, Temotu

One older man from Malaita made a point of saying just how long social change takes in his community:

"All the programs do is talk, they come and talk to me but I am a man who has been brought up in a culture, that's how we live. You come and talk to me about a new idea that I need to adopt...well... Safe Families only came into the community this year, so we wouldn't expect for it to have a result yet. It takes time, you are dealing with human beings, they don't change overnight."

– Male community member, Malaita

4.2 SELF-REFLECTION AND TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FACILITATORS

The Safe Families program played an important role in raising awareness of unequal gender relations and social norms that condone violence. Unsurprisingly, improved knowledge, awareness, attitudes and self-reported behaviour appear more significant amongst the CEFs and the members of FVPRAC. Many participants, particularly male CEFs, expressed that prior to their involvement in the Safe Families program, they considered themselves to be the boss in their home, with control over other family members. The program provided some motivation for a process of self-reflection. After exposure to Safe Families, the CEFs realised they were influenced by gendered stereotypes and acknowledged that their gender-biased attitude to housework was a controlling behaviour. They gradually dispelled such attitudes and engaged themselves more in domestic tasks to support their partners, while learning and undergoing training for awareness activities. Although men were generally not involved enough in housework, gradual changes in attitudes were instrumental in developing good relationships with their wives, as they reported having more receptive attitudes.

"I tended to see myself as a boss and relax a lot while my wife does all the house chores. But now, I have now come out of that mentality. This is a very hard thing. I start to work collaboratively with my wife, we share ideas and decide together. It is one thing that impacted me positively as a CEF."

– Male CEF, Temotu

"Before, I used to get very angry. If I see something is not right, I instantly engage chiefs to help solve the problem. But now when I joined the program, if my wife is angry with me, I just humble myself and communicate with her in a very acceptable manner. People have witnessed this change in me and confirmed the changes."

- Male community member, Minerv

Staff members in particular, whose job was to promote violence prevention and shifts away from the social norms that permit violence, found themselves in a complicated situation as they came to realise that their previous behaviour was contradictory to the goals of the program. This self-reflection led them to become less tolerant of violence in themselves. Many came to understand that in delivering complex and challenging messages around attitudes and behaviours that drive violence, they also had to change their behaviour.

"Before I had any involvement in the program, my behaviour and attitude were altogether different...I look back now I can see that there was a lot of areas where I committed violence. So, when I started, I realised that everything I had been doing was against the goal of this project."

– Male CEF, Malaita

Although a rigorous assessment has not been conducted to verify whether the Safe Families program's community awareness activities had reduced violence at the end of phase one, our research has shown important changes in some participants' knowledge of VAW and gender inequality. The study also captured a change in attitudes toward social norms, gender stereotypes, and acceptance of VAW. Comments on these changes were

BOX 1: SUMMARY OF PROVINCIAL ALLIANCE GROUPS

MALAITA PROVINCE

- Frequency of meeting: Bi-monthly
- Members of alliance group: ACCOM, authorised justice (SPC RRRT), church groups, correctional services, magistrate, Malaita Christian Care Centre, Market for Change, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of Women Youth Children and Family Affairs, MPCW, police, Solomon Island Women in Business Association.
- Meeting Proceedings: Usually steered by the Oxfam Safe Families team. Discussions would be on sharing resources, strengthening informal referral systems, and requesting capacity training on gender prevention work.
- Resources: Utilised their own resources for community mobilisation during community visits.

TEMOTU PROVINCE

- Frequency of meeting: Bi-monthly
- Members of alliance group: church groups, community representatives, correctional services, Family Support Centre, magistrate, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, police, provincial government.
- Meeting proceedings: Steered by Oxfam Safe Families team with support from provincial alliance coordinator
- Resources: Utilised their own resources for community mobilisation during community visits.

predominantly made by CEFs and FVPRAC members during the evaluation of phase one. However, changes made during the implementation of the program were not systematically monitored. The program needs to introduce monitoring processes to measure and demonstrate how participants' knowledge and attitudes change, and the magnitude of these changes in response to the interventions to prevent family violence.

4.3 IMPROVED CAPACITY AND SELF-ESTEEM

The participants of Safe Families regarded overall capacity building and knowledge transfer as positive outcomes. For many, the program introduced concepts they had never been exposed to, and this gave them new knowledge and skills.

> *"It is also rewarding in the trainings...on things I do not know: how to approach people, how to work as a facilitator in communities, and it really upgraded my knowledge on how to work with communities."*
>
> – Female CEF, Temotu

Another distinctive aspect of change is that Safe Families enabled staff to increase their self-efficacy. In particular, female staff and community members who used to be shy and introverted stated that engaging in this program enabled them to be more positive and outgoing.

> *"I was a bit reserved at first to be honest. But as time goes, I started training my mind to be confident and soon found myself in love with my duty and that's what happening right now."*
>
> – Female CEF, Temotu

This process reflected an improvement in self-esteem and feelings of self-confidence. There was a strengthened sense of belonging and social connectedness to the people they are working and living with in their communities.

4.4 STRENGTHENING LOCAL RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

One of the crucial components of the Safe Families model is the establishment of the Provincial Alliance (PA), a network aimed at promoting collective actions to prevent family violence.[37] While the original aim of PAs was to coordinate prevention activities at the provincial level and raise awareness, a positive unintended outcome was strengthening family violence response services. Initially, the PAs comprised exclusively of members from various VAW response agencies. However, facing the low level of awareness of their activities, the alliance and the communities decided to also include community representatives.

With community representatives actively involved in PAs, they could successfully develop and strengthen service delivery at the provincial level. Through engagement with Safe Families, the community received support to provide better services to survivors of violence and developed a referral system. Many PA members, CEFs and community members stated that the referral system is functioning, with some survivors already benefitting from it. For example, in the past, most of the survivors did not report violence to the police. However, the reports of survivors who receive hospital care are now shared with the police. Hospitals and the police cooperate closely to monitor these incidents.

> *"At the beginning, most of the cases used to come into medical, but then they never came to the police. [Instead] they used to run away. [The report] didn't make it to the police, but now [the police] receive referrals from medical."*
>
> – Provincial alliance member, Temotu

37 Two provincial alliances were formed, one in Malaita and one in Temotu.

"If it was [an incident] involving violence then they can just ring the police. The police appear. Take them to the hospital. These [police officers] are the alliance members who take them to hospital... After treatment, then they can refer them to the Provincial Council of Women who have the accommodation [shelter]."

– Oxfam staff member, Honiara

In the PA network, police now engage in activities to inform community members about the *Family Protection Act* 2014. They also support FVPRAC to review and suggest amendments to the community by-laws, so they are consistent with the values and policies of Safe Families.[38] This process enhances community knowledge that violence is not acceptable and can result in criminal charges.

"In the past people did not concern [themselves] about domestic violence, however people are [now] informed and understand how to deal with violence. Therefore, they formulate community by-laws and impose penalties according to the nature of cases."

– Male CEF, Malaita

Despite this effort, staff members found that some community by-laws still did not correspond to gender sensitive principles, such as fines and prohibition being enforced for women wearing trousers. Community by-laws should be regularly reviewed and revised as needed, and further awareness activities need to be conducted. Responsibility for reviewing the by-laws currently sits with village committees and community chiefs.

Knowledge sharing with community members, particularly chiefs and FVPRAC, provided the community members with practical skills and guidance to cope with issues relating to family violence. Some CEFs commented that prior to the introduction of Safe Families, family-related troubles were mediated by the chief, and conflict settlements often required parties to keep quiet. Now, the chief and FVPRAC members closely monitor reported cases of violence brought to them and seek to intervene with appropriate precautions and measures. Where possible, they also offer support through the network with relevant expertise and agencies developed by the PA.

"The [Family violence Action Committee] is tracking incidences of violence happening in the community, and...have intervened in violence cases that happen in the community."

— Male CEF, Temotu

"One area I saw help a lot was related to problem solving especially among chief because in the past chief found it hard to solve problems... but the program has provided more skills and tools to deal with problem in a systematic and appropriate manner."

– Male community member, Temotu

4.5 A DECREASE IN VIOLENCE?

A majority of respondents felt violence remained a big problem in their communities.

Facilitator: *Is family violence a problem in this community? Husband beating his wife, wife beating her husband, is that a big problem in this community, as you see it?"*

Participant: *"Yeah, it is a big problem in this community. Husband and wife argue, fight. The woman runs away."*

– Young male community member, Malaita

Facilitator: *"Is [violence] a big problem in the community?"*

Participant: *"In this community violence is normal, even though awareness has been done, it still continues. A man wakes up with violence in the village. So, I don't know why it is this way, the awareness happens, they hear it, the very next day [violence] continues."*

– Young male community member, Temotu

Interviewer: *"Do people in this community see family violence as a problem in the community?"*

Participant: *"Yes...Prior to Oxfam coming here, we thought those things [violence] are just normal practices that we do, but when Oxfam came, we realise that these things constitute violence or abuse, so at the moment, we now recognise what violence is all about and the problems it caused in the community."*

– Male community member, Temotu

Some respondents reported that the Safe Families program had reduced the incidence of violence in their communities. While this is a promising finding, it should be treated with a degree of caution for a number of reasons. Firstly, community members may feel inclined to report positively about an intervention out of fear that current and/or future interventions and other benefits or services might be removed if an intervention is deemed unsuccessful. Secondly, as previously mentioned, community members often justified VAW as a form of discipline. In cases where a community member reported that they thought violence in their village had reduced, it is not clear whether they meant all forms of VAW had decreased or so-called unjustified violence had decreased. Lastly, global research shows that VAW frequently occurs in the home.[39] In communities where there is some growing awareness that VAW is not acceptable, violence can often occur privately and quietly behind closed doors, without community awareness.

38 Apart from the state laws, each village community develops their own by-laws to regulate community activities and ensure a safe and peaceful environment in the areas of crime, custom/tradition, family protection, health and environment, marine and fisheries and other natural resources, and community governing body. By-laws are updated or revised as appropriate by the governing body of the community with advice from police. Safe Families encouraged communities to clearly stipulate non-acceptance of any forms of domestic violence.

39 Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia,* Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

5. FINDINGS: EFFECTIVE (AND LESS EFFECTIVE) ELEMENTS OF THE SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM

The findings presented below focus on the most effective elements of the Safe Families program, specifically in the activities of training for gender equality and reducing VAW, establishment of partnerships and networks, and development of the community action plans. These findings are drawn from program documentation and opinions expressed by program staff, PA members and some community members. A rigorous evaluation of the program with predetermined indicators to help verify some of these findings would be valuable.

5.1 EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM

5.1.1 DRIVING PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

Carefully selecting and supporting CEFs and providing them with an intensive training program, a lengthy implementation period and a well-designed toolkit were keys to making the Safe Families program more effective. These strategies particularly assisted with the capacity development of staff members and facilitators, and their personal transformation through learning, reflection and commitment to change.

Establishing role models in the community

The training program for CEFs, provided by IWDA, was designed to develop the skills to influence program participants and increase awareness of gender issues, human rights, power relations and social norms related to gender-based violence. Apart from the skills, knowledge and know-how for facilitation, the intensive training also emphasised how program implementers (staff members, CEFs, FVPRAC and PA members) should change their own attitudes and behaviours. CEFs were told that they would be expected to be role models for gender equality and respectful relationships in their communities. This message had a powerful effect on them in developing responsible attitudes and behaving accordingly. As they proceeded with awareness activities, they gradually understood the meaning of serving as role models for community residents to emulate.

> *"Our public appearance and our contact with people day-to-day is very important. I see that I am like a role model of what we teach through Safe Families program. People see that I put in action what I talk about so it helped them do the same thing. When they see me as a role model it helps them to change. I see it as 'actions speak louder than words.'"*
>
> – Male CEF, Temotu

The program encouraged CEFs to undergo a personal transformation through learning, reflection and commitment to change. It may take some time to achieve, but Safe Families provided them with a solid foundation for self-reflection and discovering positive changes in individuals. After receiving the training on women's rights, feminist approaches, family violence and fraud awareness, staff recognised that some of their behaviours were inappropriate, and they were confident to raise these issues with management. In very few cases, this resulted in the termination of individual staff contracts.

Long-term relationship to establish trust and rapport with community members

The CEFs were able to develop trusting relationships and rapport with community leaders and members over the three year duration of the program. Many staff members and CEFs reported that this was key to the successful program implementation. Trust is an underlying basis of all relationships, but it is not possible to earn trust without prolonged contact based on meaningful interactions. Although trust is a general term and the participants did not specify what it meant to them, the interpretative analysis implies that trustworthy individuals are: capable, act on their word, and sincere and honest. Some staff members and CEFs described that the community would likely trust them if they sent messages that are new and useful to their lives, or helped to effectively manage and coordinate the activities and groups that promoted the program.

> *"[Temotu PA coordinator] had a better understanding of project…Because of this higher level of education, he was more analytical. He could think outside of the box… they relied so much on him… "*
>
> - Oxfam staff FGD, Honiara

Staff also gained trust by fulfilling their commitments to communities as promised. Some CEFs talked about their efforts to carefully plan every community visit rather than making impromptu visits. Participants said that CEFs were trustworthy if they were reliable and did what they said they would do. This included keeping to schedules and showing up for activities at pre-arranged times without cancelling. This dependability helped the program to operate smoothly and earned strong support from the community.

> *"In the communities I worked in, I really find it easy because of their support…when I want to visit a community, I write a letter informing the community about the upcoming visit and everything will be set in order to prepare for my visit without any difficulty. So that is one area I see that they are very supportive, especially to us CEFs".*
>
> – Male CEF, Temotu

Being a role model was one of the key messages to CEFs to demonstrate moral behaviour and honesty. Of the three elements of trustworthiness explained above, being capable and reliable are observable in a short period of time. However, being a role model takes longer to establish. Investing in a prolonged relationship with the community gradually helped the CEF act with integrity and generated mutual respect and credibility. Some CEFs commented that if they elicited trust, it enabled them to cope well with any challenges they encountered. They were also able to gain the community's understanding even when community expectations were not aligned with program objectives.

> *"...my relationship with the community I work with is very good. People respect me because of my conduct like moral behaviour. The community knows me, so they respect me, and I respect them too. So, my working together and my relationship with them is very good."*
>
> – Male CEF Temotu

5.1.2 ADAPTING PRACTICE TO LOCAL CONTEXT

Message delivery

It is important to maintain a good balance between program fidelity and the need to adapt to local contexts. All CEFs reported that the training they received from IWDA was informative, provided new knowledge and built their capacity to facilitate awareness activities. However, when they started to deliver those messages in the field, they encountered some difficulties. For example, CEFs were asked many challenging questions by community members which were not covered in the toolkit. CEFs therefore adapted by holding impromptu discussions, gave their best possible responses, and promised to seek further answers. Responding to this problem, the project manager of Safe Families monitored the quality of key messages and interactions with community members and attempted to consolidate all questions and answers to standardise responses and explanations. The project manager suggested collecting this information and compiling it into a guidebook. In addition, the large toolkit did not fit within the planned schedules for communities. This meant that some CEFs had to shorten the sessions without changing the original principles and contents.

> *"The challenge now for us CEFs is really adopting this support with our own creativity, like how creative can we be to get the message out to communities and continue fighting for what we are fighting for."*
>
> – Male CEF, Malaita

CEFs also witnessed a decrease in participant numbers as time went on. Some mentioned that the conventional style of awareness raising was not very engaging for some community members and did not hold their attention for long. They realised the need to add education-entertainment or a so-called edutainment approach that includes drama/street theatre, singing, games or sports events to deliver messages in a more effective and engaging way.

> *"I have noticed, if you just come into this community to do a talk, then I see how people get bored. People have gotten used to the dramas, so now they expect more exciting things, and it will make the messages more accessible to more people, so let's continue to program but put the messages into small dramas."*
>
> – Female CEF, Malaita

Using performances to share key messages was a tactic that attracted more participants. A special arrangement was made to conduct these activities in the evenings after office hours or on weekends so that more community members, particularly younger individuals, were able to attend. While this successfully increased participant numbers in some cases, there were additional challenges related to maintaining program fidelity and preventing the distortion of messages (see section 5.1.2).

Outreach effort

The manual-based approach did not lead to community mobilisation or increased participation in activities, particularly for those with special needs. The initial plan assumed that participants would turn up if invited to meetings, and CEFs could mobilise them and promote participation as instructed. However, certain sectors of the population were excluded from this process because of immobility and reluctance to discuss sensitive issues. These groups included the elderly, community members with mobility problems and those potentially experiencing violence. There was a concern that participation would expose violence happening within a family or lead to a general loss of privacy. There also was potential for secondary victimisation as a result of publicly disclosing domestic matters. In response, the CEFs in Temotu modified the initial plan and introduced house-to-house visits to deliver key messages to raise awareness within such groups. This achieved a positive outcome, ensuring an inclusive intervention that attempted to maximise accessibility and participation of marginalised groups.

> *"Sometimes some married people...may feel bad in case they are being seen as violent person, so we usually visit them at their homes. We ensure we visit people with disability. Sometimes it is challenging therefore needs time, effort and commitment to reach all the people."*
>
> – Male CEF, Temotu

Along with targeting individuals and families, outreach to organisations in the communities is an alternative way to demonstrate effective message delivery to a sizeable group. For example, most community members are Christians. The church congregation is an ideal place to effectively raise and talk about the issues of family violence, gender equality and human rights. Some church leaders were selected as members of the PA as well as FVPRAC. On some occasions, these leaders delivered key messages in their churches about what they have learned and understood in Safe Families. Other church members involved in Safe Families helped disseminate ideas and messages of family violence issues in the church, resulting in a spill-over effect.

> *"I think it has made a positive impact inside the Church and allowed us to incorporate issues of domestic violence. The Church is very strong against the ordination of women but now Priests are starting to learn that culture or religion does not give people the right to abuse women and children. So, I have seen changes in that respect, they [priests/pastors] have started to become advocates against violence in the community, whereas before they stayed silent."*
>
> – Provincial alliance FGD Temotu

When organising activities, CEFs tended to passively wait for the participants to come and join. Instead, the CEFs could identify opportunities to deliver key messages at existing events, such as at community members' homes, workplaces, schools and churches. In the communities, churches are able to attract more women and men, and potentially play a role in delivering messages on violence prevention and identifying family members who hint at their exposure to violence and are seeking help.

5.1.3 HOLISTIC APPROACH IN PROJECT DESIGN

Integrated approach for prevention and response

Safe Families aimed to promote a community-led integrated approach, which addressed both prevention and response to family violence. Awareness raising activities aimed to reduce violence through public discussion about practices and norms that condone and reinforce VAW. Community mobilisation approaches were complex interventions that involved many stakeholders, such as women and men, youth, chiefs, religious leaders, police, political leaders, the provincial government, and women's organisations. Safe Families also established a system of service delivery and referral with special support from the different expertise found within the PA. Most of the participants from the community members, CEFs and PA, commented that the referral system and service delivery are now functioning properly in response to the needs of survivors of violence.

> *"I think that when you do primary prevention, you also need to step up...response services... because we are raising awareness and people will be disclosing and asking for services. You can see that link."*
>
> – Male CEF, Malaita

Many participants from the PA and CEFs described that the survivors in need of support for health services are now referred to hospitals, shelters, and legal services as necessary. Police are also able to obtain violence incident reports within this network (reported by the hospital, for example). This makes it possible for key stakeholders to share information, thus enabling a more comprehensive understanding of family violence within communicates.

The PA was also engaged in awareness activities, in which police shared knowledge about the Family Protection Law and supported the redevelopment of community by-laws. Some CEFs and FVPRAC members commented that this process promoted police presence and enhanced the understanding of the legal system in relation to the allegations of violence.

5.1.4 MULTIPLE COMPONENT APPROACH

After facilitating awareness activities, CEFs supported communities to establish FVPRACs to promote and sustain violence prevention, and to develop a community action plan (CAP) to address their own priority projects to stop family violence. It was largely a community-led plan prepared in a participatory manner.

Some staff members noted that despite the existence of community-based voluntary activity committees (such as water, heath and income generating committees), FVPRAC was the only group that received practical, instructive, and systematic training and was encouraged to design their own comprehensive activities to prevent family violence.

> *"They really appreciated the training [to develop CAP] because in most of the communities, we have lots of established committees, like church committee, development committee or whatever, but they are not really functioning, because they don't know really their roles and responsibilities."*
>
> – Male Oxfam staff, Temotu

The components of CAPs and how they were developed differed from community to community, but they generally contained training, awareness building, amendments to community by-laws, development of small-scale grant applications and plans to secure a budget for safe environment and other community facilities (i.e. walls and gates). For example, one community in Malaita listed water and sanitation facilities in their CAP, because community members were concerned about the risk of sexual assault when young women and girls travelled long distances to collect water and emphasised the importance of situating this facility at a proper location.

> *"Because the project was just about awareness, we couldn't go into livelihood activities and fulfilling the basic needs of communities. For example, some of the communities have a problem with water too and the women have to paddle far away to get water and sometimes they can get raped or harassed along the way, so I think we need to look at what are some of the practical things we can do for communities that will help women."*
>
> – Female CEF, Malaita

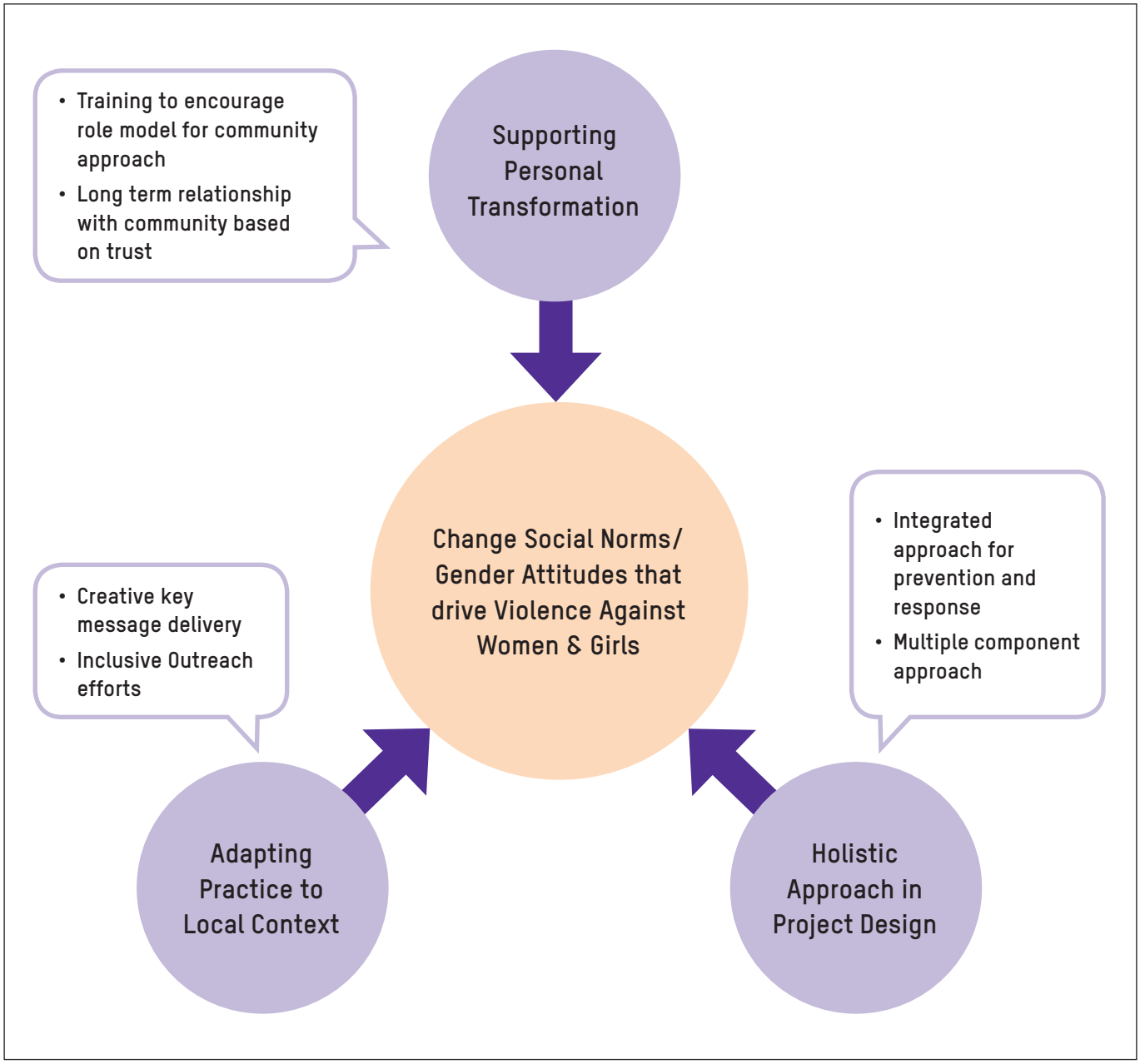
This type of project is not directly related to the original aims of the program, which were to focus on community-based education.

However, it might be more realistic to combine prevention activities with material-based investment in order to respond to the realities of community members' lives, and enhance their initiatives and motivations to implement projects together. Many participants raised the need to include tangible elements in the program to improve their livelihoods, while some expressed scepticism about the efficacy of stand-alone projects that exclusively focus on awareness to change attitudes and behaviours to stop violence. Some communities had already started a savings group for women in this program during phase one, followed by income generation activities (e.g. market development) in which awareness activities for violence prevention are already incorporated.

> *"However the Safe Families program is mainly focused on changing the attitude and behaviour of human beings. They will never really appreciate it, even though they know you have helped them connect to different services: community and police, community and medical, community and provincial government. But they still don't realise that it is the Safe Families program that provided that support, so they'll still say that 'Safe Families didn't do anything for us' because their mindset is focused on looking for tangible things to be set up in the communities."*
>
> – Male CEF, Malaita

As noted above, this program employed a community mobilisation approach to stop VAW. Yet, in resource-constrained and remote communities, such as those in Solomon Islands, a violence prevention program based on a multiple component approach will likely be more effective. Such an approach could generate a synergistic effect through providing support in living environment and livelihoods.

FIGURE 2: EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS OF SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM



5.2 LESS EFFECTIVE ELEMENTS OF SAFE FAMILIES

Data analysis revealed four key themes for less effective elements:

1 'Only talk' approach

2 Mobility and migration

3 Involvement of youth

4 Donor-led design and delayed implementation.

5.2.1 'ONLY TALK' APPROACH

The primary objective of Safe Families was to reduce violence at the community level through changes in public discourse, practices, gendered attitudes, beliefs and social norms that drive family violence. Awareness-building activities about gender inequality and family and sexual violence were conducted by CEFs for 3-4 months with small groups of women, men, youth, community leaders, and religious leaders. This was guided by CEFs using a toolkit, and key messages were constantly revisited and reinforced. Yet, the conventional mode of repeating the same topic on violence did not necessarily guarantee that conversation would be sparked and sustained among participants. Many participants, including CEFs and Oxfam staff, pointed out that a one-way approach with 'only talk' was not engaging and did not inspire or capture the interest of community members. This had a significant impact on attendance levels.

> *"So, it's hard to just be asking people to come and say: 'Ok we want to talk about violence.' There is less interest. So, we need to figure out what keeps communities together."*
>
> - Oxfam staff FGD, Honiara

> *"Because people will be irritated to hear the same thing over and over and at the end of the day, it's like giving a test and asking them if they memorise the lesson."*
>
> - Male Oxfam staff, Malaita

Thus, many suggested that there should be more appealing options for delivering key messages, such as the aforementioned 'edutainment' format. This change in approach was made partway through the program.

5.2.2 INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH

Youth represents an important group to work with in order to prevent future violence, yet their attendance was low. One reason for low attendance was due to their work and school commitments.

> *"The young girls attend more as they follow their mothers to the meetings. That is daytime meetings. But during programs held at night that incudes dramas and skits being done, the whole community attends. Both males and females. But during [daytime] meetings, young boys participates less."*
>
> – Female community member, Temotu

However, when the program introduced more diverse and flexible methods of engagement, young women and men started to participate actively.

> *"Another isolated group, and this is more before, is the youths, because they think the program is just for married couples. But since this theatre group came in, it's really engaged young people from the start, so they are now among the most active."*
>
> - Male CEF, Malaita

It is clearly important to involve youth in programs that shift the social norms and gender attitudes that drive violence in the long term. In terms of development of attitudes and beliefs that support gender stereotypes and gender-based violence, there is some evidence to suggest that these attitudes are developed early among adolescents and are reinforced by prevailing social norms.[40] Beyond merely targeting youth as participants, programs could more effectively engage youth as a cohort if they were included in the design and implementation of the intervention. More research would be needed to fully understand the enablers and barriers to youth involvement in the Solomon Island context.

5.2.3 DONOR-LED DESIGN

Safe Families program staff indicated that the project design process was complex and, at times, challenging. Staff felt that local expertise was not always considered by the donor, who led the design of the project, and this did not give enough space for partners to contribute. It is important, however, to highlight that the donor took on-board the concerns expressed by Oxfam, which resulted in Oxfam leading the design for the second phase of the project.

> *"The process for developing the design document wasn't what we expected. We expected more engagement, to do back and forth and designing the workshop together. We understood why we would do it in a certain way and also because during the reflection session last year in November, we had gone in detail, brought in the staff from the provinces and they had shared their thoughts about what worked what didn't work. We had a lot we wanted to input and share. But it was very top-down."*
>
> – Oxfam staff member, Honiara.

5.2.4 TEMPORARY DELAYS IN PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Some CEFs reported that a delayed transfer of funds to the field while negotiating a contract extension with the project donor resulted in a temporary suspension of activities and threatened the success of the project. This was particularly noteworthy when community members were enthusiastic about making changes. The interruption affected community members' morale and caused some challenges when restarting the activities.

40 Harris, A et al., (2016) The Body Shop Australia. (2006), Blanc, A. (2001), Barker, G. (2000)

Photo: Kim Litera/Oxfam

"What I have experienced is that I might go to the community this week, but then we might have to stop for another three weeks [while waiting for program funds to come through] and the community might think, have we finished? So you see, we need support in terms of improving the process and availability of funds for activities, because it affects the interest of communities in the program. When people are in the mood for implementing activities to prevent and respond to violence then we need to keep that fire burning. If the fire dies out then you have to go looking for matches, and they are in Honiara."

– Male CEF, Malaita

5.2.5 DISTORTION OF PROGRAM MESSAGE

It is evident that a small number of participants misunderstood the core messaging of the program. This led to a small number of women adjusting their behaviour in order to avoid violence, when the message was targeting men and asking them to recognise and change their harmful behaviour. This confusion seemed to go deeper than simply employing a safety strategy, for example, intervening with someone who is sober is much safer than with someone who is drunk. Participants spoke clearly to themes of the good woman, where women are expected to be passive, self-disciplined and obedient to their husbands.

"I'm one woman who argues consistently with my husband...So, when Oxfam came in, I said, this is true life, what Oxfam said is good... If he goes drinking, I will say, it's okay... No matter our daddy goes drinking, I do not get angry with him. Because if I get angry with him when he is drunk, he will hit me... and I've been in the program learning all these, so I better act appropriately. When he is normal then we can talk."

– Female community member, Temotu

"Before the program came, if I disagreed, I would get angry at my wife, we would fight, but since the program, she knows when to stay silent, now she knows when to stay [silent] so that is one thing the program has achieved. Now when I say something is not right, my wife realises it is not right... that's how I know the Oxfam program has had some impact. Because in every home, if the man disagrees with something, there will not be violence if the woman is quiet. If the woman retaliates, there will not be peace."

– Male community member, Temotu

Further evidence of this is found in changes to some of the by-laws. While many have identified mostly positive changes, in some cases the by-laws have been amended in ways that are not consistent with the principles of gender equality. The community by-laws should regularly be revisited and revised if necessary, and further awareness activities need to be conducted.

"Before I left [Oxfam] and saw a draft of one of these by-laws and it has things in it like: "Women are not allowed to wear trousers". I was asked to pay a 50 dollar fine for wearing trousers. I said I'm comfortable with my dress code I'm not paying anything.'"

- Female Oxfam staff, Honiara

Further research is needed to understand where this distorted understanding is coming from. It could be a combination of factors, such as receiving second hand knowledge from other community members or community members' own biases altering their understandings. While on the whole this was not a large-scale issue, it could prove to be problematic if not identified and corrected. It is therefore important that the program establishes measures to strengthen message delivery, as well as adequately monitor and evaluate community members' understandings of gender inequality and VAW before moving onto further stages.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations for the future implementation of the Safe Families program are suggested below:

1) **Work with communities to ensure interventions are transformative of attitudes, norms and behaviour, and not limited to awareness-raising.** Many prevention initiatives focus on increasing community awareness about gender inequality and the root causes of VAW. But while awareness raising may be a critical first step in the process of transformation, it is important that the intervention extends beyond merely improving knowledge and awareness about VAW. It is also important to ensure that the local context and local norms — for example, norms around alcohol consumption and the socioeconomic context (see Recommendation 9) — are also taken into account. As evident in this study, the shifts in knowledge, attitudes and self-reported behaviour of program staff compared to the relatively smaller shifts experienced by community members illustrates that social change and behaviour change is a gradual process which takes time and long-term programmatic exposure. Transformation of harmful social norms around VAW are more likely to occur when individuals understand concepts of inequality and power in interpersonal and community dynamics — a process that often involves critical self-reflection. Global evidence shows that interventions that focus on building interpersonal skills, such as communication skills, and approaches that emphasise positive modes of masculinity are also more effective in shifting attitudes, norms and behaviours.[41] Greater transformation could also come from approaches which promote gender justice and involve identifying and addressing the barriers to gender equality.

2) **Ensure the program emphasises the benefits of gender equality to the community.** While community awareness of the Family Protection Act appeared to result in some self-reported changes in behaviours (namely, curtailing perpetration of VAW) it would be better to see this based on the understanding that women deserve to live free from violence. While male program staff often described how their improved understanding of gender equality resulted in them taking up a greater proportion of household chores and child rearing duties, in this study, articulation by men of why gender equality was beneficial to men was notably missing. Safe Families could strengthen their programmatic messaging by focusing on the positive rather than punitive – emphasising and demonstrating how gender equality is a positive outcome for both men and women.

3) **Actively shift social norms around corporal punishment.** This study found pervasive acceptance in the community for corporal punishment. While VAW was mostly viewed as unacceptable, physical violence was readily justified in cases where a woman had transgressed and needed to be taught a lesson by her husband. The acceptability of physical violence as a form of discipline is problematic and appears to present a significant barrier to shifting norms around VAW. Complementing VAW messaging with information about the harm and potential alternatives to corporal punishment could help shift the norms around physical violence. Such an approach will also contribute to promoting non-violent social norms which reject VAW and other forms of violence more broadly.

4) **Continue to build on the role-modelling approach.** This study showed that the role-modelling approach was effective in not only catalysing internal transformation at the individual level but also then reinforcing program messaging to the community through the actions and behaviour of project staff.

5) **Include the subject of bride price in program messaging and community dialogues on VAW.** There are programmatic opportunities to move away from the commodity-related notions of bride price, and reinforce the positive traditions more closely aligned with 'bride wealth'. For example, emphasising that marriage-related exchanges are embedded in larger systems of reciprocity and kinship formation that emphasise the empowering, positive aspects of it for women, rather than notions of so-called 'ownership'. These messages and dialogues would be more effective if supported by engaged local community leaders.

6) **Monitor and evaluate the implementation and the impact of the program.** It is vital to monitor and evaluate the process of personal transformation of staff members, CEFs and FVPRAC. Monitoring to measure knowledge, attitudes and behaviour may be introduced using a sophisticated theory-based approach for behavioural change. This can be of great use for presenting scientific evidence.[42]

7) **Adopt more engaging and creative approaches.** To increase participation in awareness activities, consider the utilisation of arts, dance, drama, sports, radio, television, and other mediums that are more likely to engage community members. However, the quality of 'edutainment' activities should be regularly monitored by program staff to ensure that messages are not distorted.

8) **Focus on children and young people.** As beliefs that support gender stereotypes and gender-based violence are developed in childhood and early adolescence, concrete strategies to involve more young community members in the program need be developed. Beyond merely targeting youth as participants, the Safe Families program could more effectively engage

41 Fulu, Kerr-Wilson, and Lang (2014) 'What works to prevent violence against women and girls? Evidence review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls, UK Department of International Development.

42 For example, SASA! applied 'Transtheoretical model theory' (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1997) to see the process of behavioural changes.

youth as a cohort if young people were also included in design and implementation of the intervention.

9) **Explore potential linkages between the Safe Families program and other community development and economic development programs.** Poverty, lack of employment opportunities, limited access to water and sanitation are just some of the difficulties faced by communities in Solomon Islands. Arguably, prevention interventions which acknowledge and address multiple forms of disadvantage and inequalities experienced by community members would be far more effective in securing buy-in and community engagement. While a single program could not address all the social, health, environmental, and economic challenges in a low-income country, it would be worthwhile for Safe Families to explore and potentially establish links between other organisations and/or programs focused on WASH, economic empowerment, education, health, climate change adaptation, and other development issues. This would result in a more holistic approach to poverty reduction and rights promotion, while at the same time fostering greater collaboration and cooperation within the community and international development sector.

10) **Optimise and refine pilots, utilising lessons learnt to inform scale-up.** In order to ensure that the future scale-up of the Safe Families program is impactful, sustainable, and avoids unintended negative consequences, it is advised that learnings from rigorous testing of program implementation on one site are documented.

11) **Ensure a collaborative co-design process for the development of prevention initiatives.** Given the evidence around effective prevention intervention efforts in the Pacific is still emerging, design processes that value and actively include local expertise, local stakeholders, and community members with help ensure that interventions are tailored to the local context. A genuine co-design process will also ensure a greater sense of local ownership for the program.

Photo: Kim Litera/Oxfam

7. REFERENCES

Barclay, A. (2015) *Standing Together Against Violence (STAV): End of Program Evaluation Report,* Alison Barclay Consulting.

Barker, G. (2000) 'Gender equitable boys in a gender inequitable world: Reflections from qualitative research and programme development in Rio de Janeiro', Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 15(3), pp263-282, DOI: 10.1080/14681990050109854.

Blanc, A. (2001) 'The Effect of Power in Sexual Relationships on Sexual and Reproductive Health: An Examination of the Evidence', Studies in Family Planning, 32 (3), pp. 189-213.

Bicchieri, C. (2006). *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), pp77-101.

Brigg, M., Chadwick, W., Griggers, C. Murdock, J., Vienings, T. (2015) *Women and Peace: The role of Solomon Islands women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding,* UNDP and University of Queensland

CARE (2017) Applying Theory to Practice: CARE's Journey Piloting Social Norms Measures for Gender Programming - Report. Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc. (CARE).

Conway, J. and Ennio, M. (1990) *Marriage in Melanesia: A Sociological Perspective,* Papua New Guinea: The Melanesian Institute Point 15.

Eves, R. (2018) 'Understanding the Relationship between Women's Economic Empowerment and Violence against Women in Melanesia' *Research Summary Report,* Department of Pacific Affairs Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian Capital Territory.

Filer, C. (1985) 'What is this thing called "Brideprice"? *Mankind* 15 (2): 163-83

Fulu, E., Nyberg, A., Yuladhar, S., Rugkhla, O., Sharma, A., Tiaree, E., and Urbano, M. (2016) 'Preventing Violence against Women and Girls through Social Norm Change: Learning Paper from the Asia-Pacific Forum on Preventing Violence against Women and Girls: Evidence and Tools for Social Norm Change. 1-2 December 2015, Bangkok.' Bangkok: UN Women, UNFPA, and DFAT.

Harris, A., Honey, N., Webster, K., Diemer, K., & Politoff, V. (2015) *Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women: Findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey for respondents 16–24 years,* Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, Australia.

International Women's Development Agency. (2015) *Safe Families: A toolkit to engage communities to respond to and prevent family violence in Solomon Islands.*

Jolly, M. (1994) *Women of the Place: Kastom, Colonialism and Gender in Vanuatu.* Camberwell, Australia: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Kruijssen F., Albert J.A., Morgan M., Boso D., Siota F., Sibiti S. and Schwarz A.J. (2013) Livelihoods, markets, and gender roles in Solomon Islands: Case studies from Western and Isabel Provinces. CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems. Penang, Malaysia. Project Report: AAS-2013-22. 16 p

Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety and VicHealth (2015) C*hange the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia,* Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

Oxfam Australia & Solomon Islands. (2018) *Lets Make Our Families Safe (Safe Families), Striving to prevent family violence in Solomon Islands.* Phase II Design (Unpublished document).

Papps, I.,Davis, J., Grossbard-Shechtman, A., Mair, L., Pryor, F. L, Reyna, S. P., Gratton, N. E., Schneider, H. K., Tapper, N. and Wilder, W. D. (1983) 'The Role and Determinants of Bride-Price: The Case of a Palestinian Village [and Comments and Reply]'. *Current Anthropology,* 24(2), pp.203–215.

Prochaska, J. & Velicer, W. (1998) 'The Transtheorecical Model of Health Behavior Change', The American Journal of Health Promotion, 12(1), pp38-48.

Roubin, D. Billy, A. Hilly, G., Nardi, G., Nuia, N., Fernando, D., Gesiau, J., Maneka M., and Gerea, L. (2018) *Community Perceptions of Gender Norms and Economic Opportunity in Rural Solomon Island,* Strongim Bisnis and Oxfam in Solomon Islands, Solomon Islands.

The Body Shop Australia. (2006) *The Body Shop Australia's Survey of Community Attitudes, Understandings and Responses to Abuse in Relationships: A Summary of Findings,* Mulgrave: The Body Shop Australia.

Valeri, V. (1994) 'Buying Women but Not Selling Them: Gift and Commodity Exchange in Huaulu Alliance, *Man* 29: 1-26

Wardlow, H. (2006) *Wayward women sexuality and agency in a New Guinea society,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. (2015) *Young Australians' attitudes to violence against women: Summary of findings from the 2013 National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey for respondents aged 16–24 years.* Available at: **https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/SurveySummary_YoungPeople-attitudes-violence-against-women.pdf?la=en** (Accessed: 17 March, 2019).

8. APPENDIX

SAFE FAMILIES PROGRAM SUMMARY

OFFICIAL PROJECT TITLE	Let's Make Our Families Safe program Solomon Islands
BRIEF TITLE	Safe Families program
DONORS/ IMPLEMENTING AGENCY	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia Oxfam Australia and Oxfam Solomon Islands
WHY	Solomon Islands women experience significant and persistent gender inequality, which is also reflected in extremely high rates of physical and sexual VAW and girls. In response to these concerns, a ten-year strategic initiative, supported by the Australian Government, was launched to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence in Solomon Islands. Safe Families is a multi-layered approach to violence prevention that aims to influence the social and cultural norms, values, attitudes and beliefs that contribute to family and sexual violence, as well as enabling and resourcing collective action to prevent and respond to violence.
WHAT (MATERIALS/ PROCEDURES OR ACTIVITIES)	**Materials:** Posters, leaflets and toolkits were developed and provided to communities **Procedures:** Mobilising communities to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence. Enabling and resourcing collective action by coalitions through the PAs. Building the evidence base on successful violence prevention strategies through research and evaluation.
WHO PROVIDED SUPPORT AND IMPLEMENTED THE INTERVENTION	Oxfam staff provided overall management of the program and supervision of field staff. IWDA gender specialists provided training to CEFs (four females and four males in two provinces). Eight CEFs mobilised communities and provided awareness activities, and supported the establishment of FVPRACs. PA members (7-8 people each in two provinces) provided coordination of services and awareness-raising activities.
HOW	Face-to-face trainings, workshops, community dialogues, meetings, edutainment such as street theatre, singing, sporting events, and house-to-house visit outreach activities.
WHERE	Malaita Province (Gwailiki and Lilisiana, followed by 10 new communities: Auki Island, Dukwasi, Fiu, Folodako, Kunu, Lalofo, Malawai, Oibola, Siwai and Tatabebe). Temotu Province (12 communities: Area 4, BANEPA, Banie, Banua, Malo, Manoputi, Miner, Minevi, Nella, Nemba, Noepe and Venga.
WHEN AND HOW MUCH	Between 2015-2018 (phase one). Three weeks training for CEFs. Three years of mobilisation. 3-4 months of awareness activities. Two years for both the provinces to develop all their CAPs.
MODIFICATION OF INTERVENTION	Introduced edutainment activities (Drama, singing, sports, etc). Conducted outreach activities for those who were not able to join the activities.
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS WHO RECEIVED INTERVENTIONS	Approximately 4,000 people in two communities of Malaita, and 3,000 people in 12 communities of Temotu.

THE EQUALITY INSTITUTE

SVRI sexual violence research initiative

MONASH University

OXFAM