



THE NATIONAL
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

SPOTLIGHT

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AS PERCEIVED BY THE YOUTH

Eugene E. Ezebilo
Francis Odhuno
Elizabeth Kopel
Osborne O. Sanida

www.pngnri.org

Volume 15, Issue 3

Key Points

- Several initiatives have been provided to address Gender-Based violence (GBV), however, GBV remains a long-standing issue in Papua New Guinea (PNG).
- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) has been one of the most common types of GBV, which has adverse effects on partners and their children.
- The youth have an important role to play in addressing IPV, however, some of them are not well informed about women's rights and their roles in the family.
- Some youths believe that husbands should beat their wives as a way of disciplining them.
- More awareness about women's rights is needed, and providing more opportunities for girls and women to access education and employment is needed.
- The rate of IPV will go down if legal mechanism for addressing IPV is strengthened, zero tolerance on IPV promoted and offenders penalised without fear nor favour.
- IPV victims (survivors) and their children should be protected by providing them all the support they need to recover from the trauma.

inquire
inform
influence

February 2022



INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA AS PERCEIVED BY THE YOUTH

By Eugene E. Ezebilo, Francis Odhuno, Elizabeth Kopel and Osborne O. Sanida

The contribution of men and women to the economy is needed for a country to achieve sustainable development. However, gender-based violence (GBV) restricts Papua New Guinea (PNG) from achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially those that focus on gender equality and access to quality education. The youth (people aged 15 to 24 years) have the potential to contribute to address GBV and bring lasting peace to their families and the communities they live in. This paper focuses on one of the findings from the recent baseline study by World Vision PNG (WVPNG) and ChildFund PNG (CFPNG) on conflict, violence and peace building among the youth. It is based on a survey of 699 youths who live in Central Province, Morobe Province and National Capital District (NCD). In this paper, emphasis is placed on the youth's perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and strategy that can be used to address it. PNG has a national strategy to prevent and respond to GBV and several initiatives have been implemented by the Government of PNG (GoPNG) to address IPV. However, GoPNG still faces challenges in addressing IPV in the country. IPV can be addressed by providing more effective inclusive mechanisms. It is important to note that there are several types of GBV such as physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence and socio-economic related violence issues. However, these were excluded from the analysis provided in this paper.

What is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)?

IPV is the behaviour and action of partners within the family or between former or current partners that can result in physical, sexual or psychological harm (WHO, 2021). It affects a lot of people and results in infringement of basic human rights, physical and psychological consequences (Patra et al., 2018). IPV contributes to broken relationships, which has adverse effects on children.

Types of IPV

There are several types of IPV which, according to WHO and Pan American Health Organisation (2012), include the following:

- **Sexual violence.** This entails the use of force to make someone to engage in sexual act without survivor's consent; threatening the survivor by using words associated with physical or sexual violence; the use of

gestures or weapons to pass the message of the intention to kill, maim or cause physical harm.

- **Psychological/emotional violence.** This involves causing trauma to the survivor using threats of acts or coercive tactics. It includes acts associated with humiliating the survivor; act of controlling what the survivor can and cannot do; and isolating the survivor from friends and family.
- **Physical violence.** It entails the use of force to cause death, maim or harm the survivor. Examples of physical violence includes scratching, pushing, grabbing, biting, choking, shaking, slapping, punching, burning and use of weapon to hurt the survivor.
- **Stalking.** It involves repeated behaviour or action with the intention of frightening the survivor.

It is important to note that survivors often experience more than one type of violence by an intimate partner (Krebs et al., 2011). Women who had experienced stalking by an intimate partner are more likely to experience other types of IPV.

Factors that contribute to IPV

According to Patra et al. (2018), some factors that contribute to IPV include the following:

- **Cultural.** Some customs and traditions encourage beating of wives under the notion of entitlement and ownership of women. In cases where huge amount of money is paid as bride price, it can generate tension with any slightest provocation. Societies where men often hold power and women are excluded from it (patriarchy) contribute to IPV.
- **Economic.** The quest to control economic resources can result in tension between partners. For instance, if a woman has more resources than her husband, he may consider using violence to put fear on her to control the woman's resources.
- **Legal.** As law enforcement agencies often treats IPV offenders with leniency, it encourages them to continue oppressing their victims. This may discourage the survivor from reporting IPV to law enforcement agencies.
- **Political.** Lack of political will with the believe by some politicians that family is beyond the control of the State. This often makes it difficult to provide an effective mechanism to address issues associated with IPV.

– *Alcohol and drug abuse.* Some people who have a history of drug abuse and those who use alcohol excessively tend to be aggressive to members of their families especially their wives when they are under the influence of drug or alcohol.

Consequences of IPV

IPV can result in several consequences for the survivor, children, the State and wider society (WHO and Pan American Health Organisation, 2012; Patra et al., 2018) such as the following:

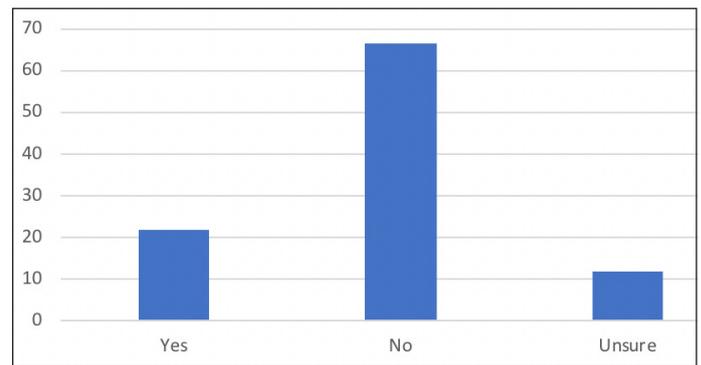
- IPV often denies the survivors their basic rights needed to access resources.
- IPV can restrict a country from achieving human development goals such as SDG 4 and SDG 5 that focus on quality education and gender equality.
- IPV often has adverse impact on the children of survivors. In fact, some children who grew up in an IPV-prone family may think that violence is a way of life.
- IPV is often associated with fatal health outcomes which can result in death, mental health problems, trauma in survivors and their children or maim the survivor.
- IPV is associated with several socio-economic costs which may be direct or indirect costs such as medical, legal and costs associated with time out from work.

How do PNG youth view IPV?

The youth have an important role to play in addressing the incidence of IPV in PNG by contributing to adopt non-violent methods of conflict resolution in their families and communities. This motivated WVPNG and CFPNG to conduct surveys involving 699 youths comprising of 47.9 percent female and 51.2 percent male (WVPNG surveyed 579 youths and CFPNG 120) from Morobe Province, Central Province and the NCD to examine their views about IPV.

Of the 120 youths surveyed by CFPNG, most of the respondents (66.7%) believed that women should not tolerate beatings to keep their families together (Figure 1). Only 21.7 percent of the respondents believed that women should tolerate beatings.

Figure 1. Should women tolerate beatings to keep their family together?

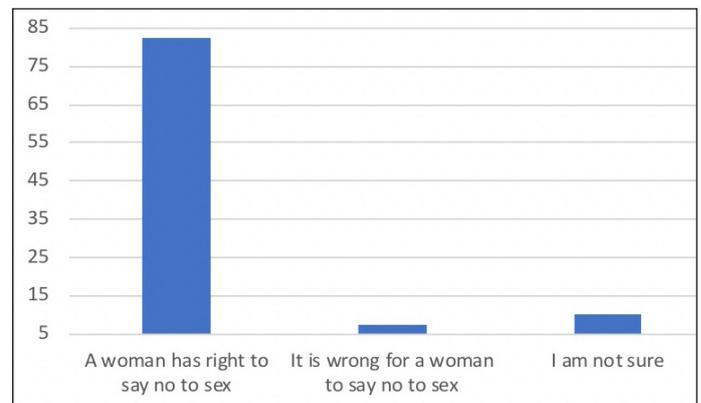


Data source: Childfund 2021

The findings in Figure 1 indicate that the youths are becoming more aware about women’s rights in the family and issues associated with GBV. This could be as a result of the intensity of advocacy on women’s rights and GBV by several Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in PNG. Recently, GoPNG has been supporting the move to rid the country of GBV. However, there is a need for continuous advocacy on women’s rights especially in rural areas where majority of the population live. For the respondents who believed that women should tolerate beatings to keep their families together, it may be that they have considered the refund of huge bride price often paid in PNG. A woman’s attempt to divorce her husband might trigger a conflict situation if her parents are unable to repay the bride price. Thus, women may remain in a violent relationship as reported by Patra et al. (2018) in their Indian study of IPV.

Regarding whether a woman has a right to say no to sex, most of the respondents (82.5%) believed that a woman has a right to say no to sex when she is not in the mood to have sex (Figure 2). Only a small percentage (7.5%) of the respondents believed that it is wrong for a woman to say no to sex even when she does not feel like having it.

Figure 2. Woman’s rights concerning having sex

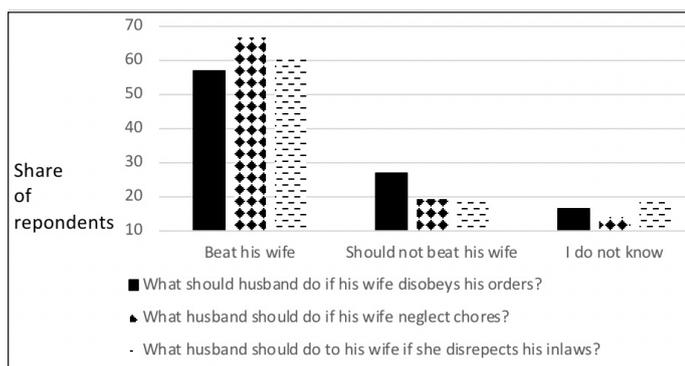


Data source: Childfund 2021

In our experience, in the past, some men tend to believe that when they pay a woman's bride price, they own the woman and she must be ready to have sex whenever their partner wants it. The findings from the CFPNG survey, however, revealed that the youth are becoming increasingly aware that marriage is not all about sex and that a woman's rights to sex should be respected. It is important to note that there is a need for more advocacy on women's rights associated with sex in PNG and on building respectful relationships targeting youth, especially in rural areas. For the group of respondents who believed that it is wrong for a woman to say no to sex, it may be that they considered that if a woman would say no to sex to her husband, it may result in IPV. More research is needed on this subject to provide more information on the perception of the group. Partners should understand that sexual act must be based on mutual respect and consent and that sex without consent may be classified as rape, which is a crime.

When it comes to issues associated with the show of man's dominance and power in the family, of the 579 youths surveyed by WVPNG, more than 50 percent of the respondents believed that men should use their power against women in their relationships (Figure 3). For instance, 56.7 percent of the respondents believed that a husband should beat his wife when she disobeys him compared to about 30 percent who were not in support of wife beating. In terms of chores, 67 percent of the respondents believed that a husband should beat his wife if she neglects chores and only 19.3 percent believed that the wife should not be beaten.

Figure 3. What a husband should do if his wife disobeys his orders, neglect chores or disrespect in-laws



Data source: World Vision PNG

As extended family is part of the PNG culture, it also has a place in the relationship between husband and wife. It was found that 61 percent of the respondents believed that a husband should beat his wife if she disrespects his in-laws. This suggests that some of the youths have the notion that the husband is the head of the family and that one way to discipline his wife is to beat her. This supports the findings of Patra et al. (2018), who found that some traditions support

the beating of wives as a way to show the ownership of women by men.

It appears that youth attach more value to chores followed by relationship with in-laws and attending to orders by the husband was least on the ranking priorities. In the past, women used to be housewives or homemaker and their main responsibility was to take care of their children and do home chores. However, in the modern economy, women compete with men for different types of jobs. In fact, some women are breadwinners and household heads.

The findings in Figure 3 may be reflecting the dominance of men in patrilineal societies found in most parts of PNG, which makes some of the respondents think that male dominance is a normal way of life. It may also be that the respondents who believed that a woman should be beaten for disobeying her husband may have witnessed and experienced IPV in their families, clans, communities or neighbourhoods.

Strategies that can be used to address IPV

IPV in PNG can be addressed using several types of interventions such as:

- More awareness campaign about women's rights. Most of PNG's population live in rural areas where people often find it difficult to access information especially on women's rights. There is a need to create more awareness especially in rural areas using an effective communication strategy such as conducting the awareness in collaboration with community heads and religious leaders. More awareness should be created in primary and high schools with a view to mould the younger generation to change the culture of entrenched violence and develop a different mindset that violence against women is unacceptable. The awareness should also include consequences of breaking the laws, referral pathways and resources needed to strengthen the referral pathways.
- Women who are more empowered educationally, economically and socially are often more protected against IPV (Jewkes, 2002). More opportunities for accessing education and fund for doing business under small and medium enterprises (SMEs) should be provided to women and girls to empower them.
- Consider developing parenting classes where parents are provided information on how to handle their children and how to be a better father and mother. This has the potential of reducing the incidence of IPV in families. Couples can benefit from counsellors who provide counselling services especially in urban areas. There is a need to also provide counselling services in rural areas for perpetrators and survivors individually or as couples

and facilities provided for the treatment of children and youth at risk.

- Consider strengthening PNG's curriculum on personal development and building the capacity of teachers to deliver it. There is a need for more emphasis on the implementation of student behavioural policies in schools.
- The legal mechanism used to address IPV in PNG should be strengthened by promoting zero tolerance for IPV and using stringent penalties against offenders. IPV should not be treated as a private issue that does not need government intervention. More awareness about laws that protect women's rights and consequences of breaking the laws should be conducted in communities.
- Men should be engaged in interventions associated with addressing IPV especially at the community level. This has the potential of encouraging more men to find lasting solution to issues associated with IPV.
- Address the power imbalance between men and women to correct the dominant patriarchal norms especially in PNG where all members of the parliament are men. There is a need to involve more women in decision-making in the country.
- Provide improved access to services for survivors and their children. There is a need to provide more secure facilities for taking care of survivors who may be traumatised and in fear of the consequences of speaking up or leaving a violent relationship. Regular maintenance should be conducted on existing facilities.

Concluding remarks

Several initiatives have been introduced in PNG with the aim of achieving gender equality and equity to promote sustainable development. However, for these initiatives to be effective, it is important to find an effective strategy to address GBV especially IPV, which is one of the most common GBV in the country. IPV can restrict partners and their children, the community and the State from achieving their full potential. Thus, the government should not see IPV as only a family issue which is beyond the control of the State. There is a need for more support from the government at all levels in addressing IPV. An effective mechanism should be developed in collaboration with key stakeholders such as NGOs, community leaders and religious leaders and the private sector. The youth are the country's future and they have an important role to play in addressing IPV in PNG. However, some of them are not well informed about women's rights and the role of women in the family.

If the intention is to address IPV, information on IPV must be made widely available in primary and high schools

to change the perceptions of students. An effective legal mechanism must be developed to address IPV and law enforcement agents must be firm in dealing with IPV offenders. There is a need to create more awareness about women's rights using an effective communication strategy especially in rural areas where most people live. Women and girls should be provided with more access to education and employment opportunities. Facilities and services for taking care of survivors and their children should be provided where they are lacking and regular maintenance work conducted on the existing facilities. Provide parenting classes to educate and empower parents on how to raise children in an IPV-free family. This paper will assist domestic conflict resolution managers and planners in developing an effective mechanism for addressing IPV by considering the role of the youth in conflict resolution and peace building in families and communities.

References

- Jewkes, R. (2002). Intimate partner violence: causes and prevention. *The Lancet* Volume 359: 1423-1429.
- Krebs, C., Breiding, M.J., Browne, A., and Warner, T. (2011). The association between different types of intimate partner violence experienced by women. *Journal of Family Violence* 26(6): 487-500.
- Patra, P., Prakash, J., Patra, B. and Khanna, P. (2018). Intimate partner violence: Wounds are deeper. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 60(4): 494-498.
- WHO (2021). *Violence against women*. WHO Switzerland. <https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/violence-against-women>(Accessed 28 October 2021).
- WHO and Pan American Health Organisation (2012). *Understanding and addressing violence against women: Intimate partner violence*. World Health Organisation, Geneva.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank European Union for financial support; World Vision PNG (WVPNG) and Childfund PNG (CFPNG) for providing data used in this study. We would like to acknowledge the support of the Office of the Lae City Mayor, Lae District LLG, Aihl LLG, the Morobe Provincial Administration Division of Education, Division of Community Development, parents and teachers of 16 primary schools and communities under the Rispektim Yuyet Rispektim Narapela na Sanap Wantaim Project. We thank Ms. Heather MacLeod, the WVPNG Country Director and Mr. Smith Sapaka, Livelihood and Resilience Portfolio Manager, WVPNG for their valuable comments in

the earlier version of the article. We also thank Mr. Anand K. Das, the CFPNG Country Director and Ms. Grace Leiseta, Senior Project Officer at CFPNG for their comments in the earlier version of the article.

About the Authors

Associate Professor Eugene Ezebilo is the Deputy Director for Research at the PNG National Research Institute (PNG NRI). He is an Associate Professor of Economics and holds a PhD in Economics from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden. His research interests include economic development, housing economics and policy, environmental and resource economics, food security and socio-economic impact analysis.

Dr. Francis Odhuno is a Senior Research Fellow and Program Leader with the Economic Policy Research Program at the PNG NRI. He received a PhD in economics from the University of Otago, New Zealand.

Dr. Elizabeth Kopel is a Senior Research Fellow and Program Leader with the Informal Economy Research Program, PNG NRI. She has a PhD in Social Policy from the University of York, UK; Master of Science in Project Management, Northumbria University (with Distinction), UK; Masters in Social Work from the University of Western Australia and a Bachelor of Honours in Social Work (First Class) from the University of PNG. Her research interests are on the PNG Informal Economy, Social Development and Housing Policy.

Dr. Osborne Ogis Sanida is the Director of the PNG NRI. He holds a PhD in Applied Economics (University of Queensland, Australia), Master of Business Administration and Post-Graduate Diploma in Economics (Monash University, Australia), and Bachelor of Economics (UPNG). His research interests/areas include economic policy, economic modelling, international trade and investment, development planning, and development economics.



THE NATIONAL
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
PAPUA NEW GUINEA