



PUBLIC POLICY BLOG

Gender-based violence is a growing concern in Papua New Guinea

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Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is on the rise in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and it is affecting mainly our women population. According to the [PNG National Statistical Office demographic and health survey \(2016–2018\)](#), 56 percent of women age 15 to 49 in Papua New Guinea have experienced physical violence since age of 15, and 28 percent have experienced sexual violence. Eighteen percent of women who have ever been pregnant have experienced violence during pregnancy.

The issue is crippling the role and participation of our women in the society and the economy. Women, through fear, are not participating with their full capacity. Therefore, human resource of PNG is lacking because women make half of the population. This issue also indicates that PNG's implementation mechanisms on gender-related issues are weak and needs to be strengthened.

GBV has been trending media headlines

Throughout the last five years (2017 – 2021), stories associated with GBV have been trending on media platforms such as Post Courier, The National newspaper and Facebook. Most of which have been reports of abusive partners. Majority of these stories observed were of physical violence to mostly women. The victims from these stories were most times severely injured and in some instances, the victims have lost their lives.

Some of the most common stories of violence that have made headlines throughout PNG in 2020 and 2021 include the following:

- [Murder of Late Imelda Tupi](#);
- [Murder of Late Jennelyn Kennedy](#); and,
- Beating of [Debbie Kaore](#).

These stories were fortunate to be covered by the media and brought to the attention of relevant authorities and the State to address. Other stories of violence, however, are not reported and are continuously happening everyday on the streets and in homes of Papua New Guineans.

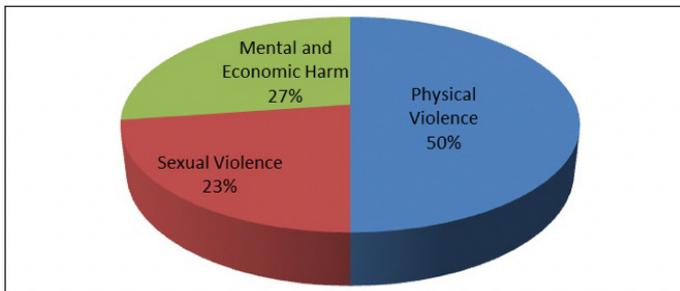
After the murder of Late Jennelyn Kennedy, [women and men have protested](#) against the issue of GBV. The protest provided an avenue for women to speak out about the issue. Some women have expressed their feelings of how PNG has become unsafe for them. These correlates with the [Human Rights Measurement Initiative's 2020 Pacific report](#), highlighting that PNG is the most dangerous place in the region for women and girls. Women cannot walk freely on the street of Port Moresby without being abused and/harassed either verbally or physically by bystanders and/thugs.

People turn a blind eye to abuse and violence, pretending the matter is not of their concern. Every day there is a form of violence that is happening either in homes or on the street. However, it is sad to say that people have become pretentious. Even though the law condemns violence, people do not want to interfere in the act to simply uphold the rule of law.

What people think

From a survey questionnaire sent out to get people's view on the issue of GBV in PNG; particularly on the common forms of violence, influential factors of GBV and how it can be addressed, majority of the respondents highlighted physical violence as the most common form of violence witnessed in their communities (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The observed forms of violence from questionnaire survey



This is reflective of the GBV reports that have been trending on news platforms throughout the years. Fifty percent of physical violence is experienced throughout our communities. A few of these stories were reported and covered by media and were taken action for by law, however, majority was swept under the rugs.

GBV has captured attention of wider community

The stories of murder and violence against women such as late Imelda Tupi, Jennelyn Kennedy and Debbie Kaore has ignited a spark on the issue of GBV. The issue has captured the attention of the wider community, resulting in discussions from stakeholders in PNG and the country's leaders. In the light of these discussions, significant developments have been made. One of which is the formation of the first ever [Coalition of Parliamentarians Against Gender-based Violence](#), led by Grand Chief Sir Peter Ipatas.

A strategy that can be used to address GBV is through wide media coverage and development of effective mechanism for penalizing offenders and rewarding people who

report offenders. Media has played an important role in addressing GBV. Through media, people were made aware of the issue at hand and have come forward prompting relevant stakeholders to take action. Hence, the media should be prompt in covering stories relating to GBV.

Conclusion

Communication is also important in addressing GBV. Victims of GBV should be encouraged to come forward and speak freely of the issue to authorities or on social platforms. Facebook, from the experience of the three victims, is a relevant tool to reach out to authorities for help. However, it is sad that some women tend to be afraid to report their experiences of violence to seek help to relevant authorities. In fact, 39% of women who have experienced any type of physical or sexual violence have not sought help or told anyone about the violence. Therefore, women should be prompt to report any form of violence that they experience. Also, it is the responsibility of the general public to aid in reporting any forms of violence observed to relevant authorities.

About the Author

Samuel Awayang is a Research Intern with the Sustainable Land Development Research Program. He has Bachelor of Science, Environmental Science from University of Papua New Guinea and Diploma in Economic Policy Analysis from PNG National Research Institute. His research interests include environmental policy and economic and social policy and public private partnership in housing development.