

# Ten things we have learnt about sorcery accusations and related violence (SARV) in PNG



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## Acknowledge our large research team and donors



**PACIFIC WOMEN**  
SHAPING PACIFIC DEVELOPMENT

This research initiative is part of the Papua New Guinea-Australia Partnership

Father Philip Gibbs (Divine Word University, PNG), Dr Judy Putt (ANU), Dr Miranda Forsyth (ANU), Ms Lane Munau, Dr Sinclair Dinnen (ANU), Dr Fiona Hukula (National Research Institute, PNG) (Also Dr Ibolya Losoncz (ANU) and Phyllis Philip, Monica Kolkia (NRI), Fidelma Takaili (DWU))

# What do I mean, sorcery??

## Definitions/ terminology

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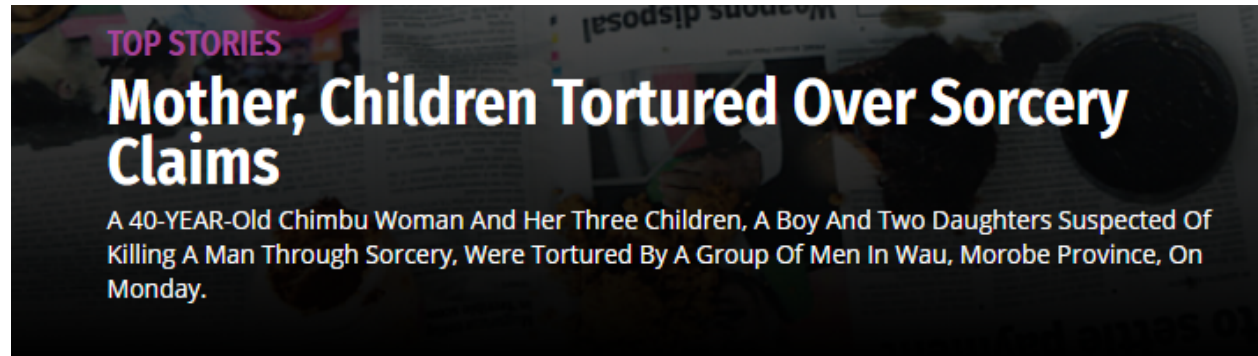
**Sorcery/ witchcraft:** potentially problematic and misleading English words used here to refer to a wide variety of belief systems/ worldviews whereby an individual (the “witch” or “sorcerer”) is considered able to cause harm through supernatural/ occult means. These beliefs vary enormously through PNG.

# 1. Characteristics of victims/survivors

## Are they really all old women?

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- Can be men or women, children or old people, and wealthy or people or poor people
- Gendered depending on area
- Multi-generational , eg recent Morobe case
- Multiple secondary victims



*September 5, 2018*

## 2. Trends and quantities: 3 fieldsites

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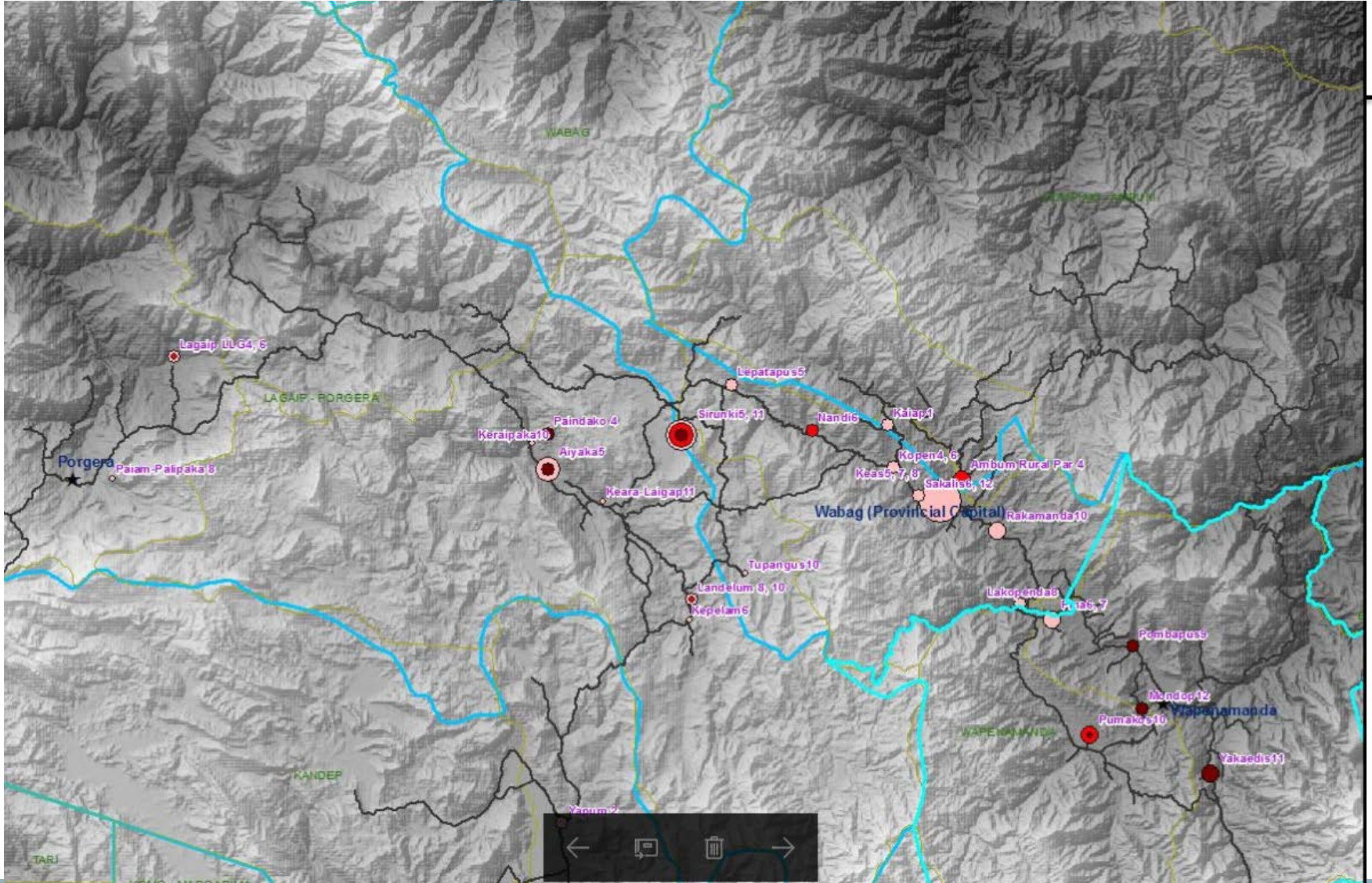
- From 1 Jan 2016 – July 2018 we have recorded:
  - 97 cases in **Enga** and
  - 228 cases in **Bougainville**

**NB: each case often involves multiple victims, this includes accusations as well as violence**
- From 1 Jan 2017 – July 2018 we have recorded 72 cases in **Port Moresby**
- **Total 397 cases**



Ongoing significant problem, not just occasional event

## 2. Trends: Enga 2017



# 3. Multiple types of harm

## Visible and invisible, immediate and long term harm

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*“and many deaths in the community, they relate back to sorcery. And women were the victims of torture of violence and women always live in fear”* (interviewee in Gorokoa)

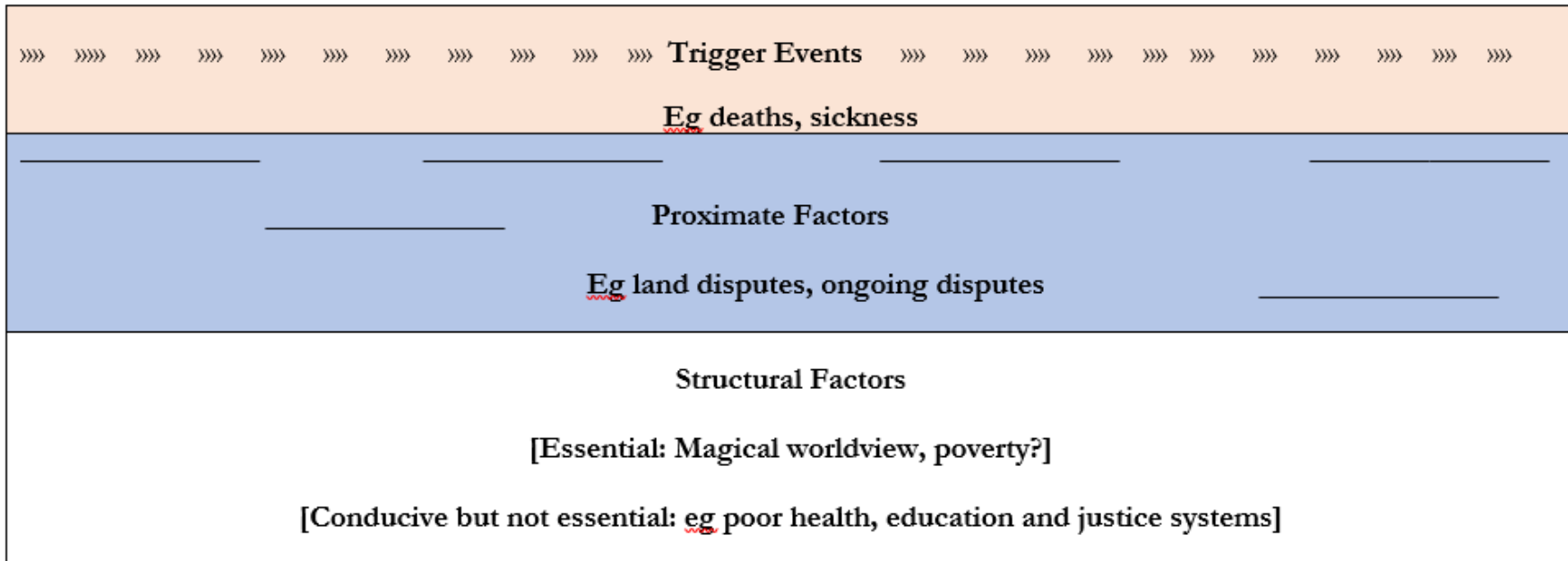
*“Sorcery violence has traumatized people, some lost body parts and are homeless. Most had their permanent houses burnt and chased from the village. Those who are homeless have relocated into the bush to build their lives again as the other communities would not accept them in fear of retaliation. Some have been locked up in jail [for their own protection].”* (Bougainville recorder)

# 4. Catalysts of SARV

It is caused by many things, not just one factor

## Explanatory Framework for Sorcery Accusations & Related Violence in PNG

Landscape on which SARV occurs





# 5. Widespread confusion about the law

## Repeal of the Sorcery Act 1971 in 2013 widely misunderstood

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### **Yama urges government to speed up Sorcery Act**

July 26, 2018 The National

MADANG Governor Peter Yama has called on the Government to fast-track the Sorcery Act to avoid the mass arrests and convictions of people as witnessed this week.

He said the sentencing of 96 people to life imprisonment and death in one court hearing was a great concern for the province because it was a record.

“This situation could have been controlled if the Sorcery Act was in place,” he said.

“What’s done has been done but we must now work on the Sorcery Act from where we left off. As leaders of our people, we must create the avenue quickly to control sorcery-related fights so that it benefits our people in the future.

## 6. Multiple justice responses

State, non-state and hybrid justice systems actively manage SARV

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### State justice response

- *The State v John Kakiwi [2018]*  
PGNC 273, National Court,  
Madang province, 24 July 2018:
  - 8 sentenced to death penalty, 89 to life imprisonment for SARV
- A further 3 wilful murder cases for SARV this year, resulting in convictions for 14 men

### Non-state and hybrid

- Multiple institutions
- *“The good thing about the peace agreement court is that, both parties are present to share their side of the story. Both parties will share their stories and ask questions for the other to answer.”*  
(Bougainville recorder)

## 7. Many accusations are dealt with non-violently

**Who made attempts to deal with accusations in non-violent ways? (583 cases)**

<b>Village elder/leader</b>	<b>68.3%</b>
Family Member	52.3%
Village Court Official	37.0%
Pastor/Religious figure	19.8%
Neighbour	18.3%
Police	16.8%
Government Official	4.6%
Others	5.3%

# 8. The importance of networked containment

## Fears of sorcery contained and non-violent responses modelled

Both for intervention:

Overall the cases in our database show the more people who intervene in a case, the less likely it is to lead to violence

- Eg Simbu rapid response team

And for prevention/ awareness

- Eg Enga workshops with health workers, magistrates, police, Catholic youth leaders and survivors



Image by  
Anton Lutz

## 9. Government agencies are making (some) progress

### Action despite non-funding of SARV National Action Plan

- Maintaining the momentum through SARV NAP Committee regular meetings
- Networks, linking in, incremental, collaborative approach
- Establishment of provincial committees
- Police training
- CLRC church colloquiums
- But non-funding of NAP and mixed messages from leaders about sorcery and who is responsible to address the problem



Police training workshop in Mt Hagen in  
March 2018

## 10. Emerging hypotheses for PNG research about what may counter such violence

Structural, proximate and trigger factors all need addressing. But on top of that:

- Multiple (but consistent and clear!) communication and awareness strategies and messages about no accusations and no violence
- Strong leadership at multiple levels
- Credible threats of state action, Eg/; issuing preventative orders; publicising sentences
- Clarity around the law
- Community driven by-laws and economic development
- Rapid response teams, HRD networks
- Medical evidence and good explanations about cause of death important but not sufficient



Above: New leaders of SNAP provincial committee in Enga;