

Women human rights defenders and male advocates making a difference in Bougainville

Autonomous Region Of Bougainville Papua New Guinea

SHARE

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The Sisters of Nazareth have been implementing the “From Gender Based Violence to Gender Justice and Healing” project in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea for two and a half years. The project works to reduce family and sexual violence.

Strong women and men are making a difference as women human rights defenders and male advocates promote shared power and decision-making and speak up to prevent family and sexual violence.



Sister Josephine Lahio of the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation at the Pacific Women Papua New Guinea 2018 Annual Learning Workshop. Photo Credit: Pacific Women Support Unit

In a region where formal mechanisms to address violence against women and services for survivors are limited, the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation works with and through women human rights defenders and male advocates. These women and men learned to raise awareness and respond to family and sexual violence and gender inequality, and how to use these skills in their own communities.

Assessments of the project have revealed that women human rights defenders play many roles. They are educators (raising awareness on family and sexual violence, gender equality and human rights), defenders (providing basic counselling, referrals and response to protect women and extract them from situations of violence), advocates (influencing decision makers at community level), and activists (taking action in public places to address family and sexual violence issues).

The men's hub and male advocacy program provide spaces for men to work with men, including young men, and boys. This promotes safety for women and children, recognising the importance of men who perpetrate violence taking responsibility for that violence and being supported to end their behaviour.



Rebecca Kossin, Project Officer of the Nazareth Centre for Rehabilitation, at the Pacific Women Papua New Guinea 2018 Annual Learning Workshop.
Photo Credit: Pacific Women Support Unit

One lesson from the project is that when male advocates work alongside women's human rights defenders it also gives women an opportunity to work closely with male traditional leaders, which can change traditional norms around the role of women in leadership positions. As a result of participating in the project, 46 women's human rights defenders took up new leadership roles as community facilitators and elected ward members in local level government. The project increased opportunities for women in local communities to be heard, to be respected and to be safe.

During the first phase of the project, the Nazareth Centre conducted training for 869 women human rights defenders and 432 male advocates. They built skills and capacity on gender-based violence, human rights, women's rights, roles of women human rights defenders and peace and conflict resolution. At the end of the training, all participants developed individual and district plans for working back in their communities.

Many women's human rights defenders report that this project has brought positive change to their communities. These include changes in attitudes about gender-based violence and more respect for women, along with non-acceptance of violence. They also include reduced alcohol and drug sales and consumption, which often link to violent behaviours in families and communities.

Women report feeling safer in their communities and women's human rights defenders and police have collaborated successfully when responding to cases of gender-based violence.