

Bridging the gap: from protective laws to real change for women

Regional Solomon Islands Ending Violence Against Women

December 11, 2021



At the launch of the Pacific Partnership to EVAWG in Solomon Islands, Vaela Ngai, Director of the Women’s Development Division of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs. Photo credit: UN Women

Solomon Islands became the first Pacific Island country to launch guidelines and support for domestic violence counsellors, released in 2020.

‘These guidelines will contribute to strengthened domestic violence counselling skills at national and regional levels,’ shared Vaela Ngai, Director of the Women’s Development Division of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs.

‘[They support] domestic violence counsellors working with many of the 64 per cent of the nation’s women experiencing physical or sexual intimate partner violence,’ Ms Nagi said.

More than double the global average of women in Solomon Islands experience violence from an intimate partner. It is a national priority to support

the women to recover while preventing such violence from impacting the next generation.

Essential to this process is legislation to criminalise domestic violence and provide support to develop quality national counselling, casework and other support services.

Solomon Islands' domestic violence counselling guidelines are required by the Family Protection Act 2014, but until now, have not been in place. Introducing legislation to criminalise domestic violence is an important first step to addressing violence against women, but those legislative commitments need to be implemented. Converting the words of the law into positive change in a woman's life involves significant and ongoing resourcing and systemic change.

Solomon Islands' Family Protection Act is just one of a dozen acts that have been implemented by Pacific Island governments in the past decade to address family violence.

Solomon Islands' domestic violence counselling guidelines require organisations providing domestic violence counselling services to achieve national accreditation, meet registration standards and comply with the code of ethics and practice standards. The guidelines also provide clarity around training requirements for counsellors.

With support from UN Women's Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (Pacific Partnership), the ministry will use the guidelines to support the implementation of the legislation. The staff are now well on the way to rolling them out in all nine provinces.

'When you go to the community and ask around, you have people from the churches or community leaders that offer counselling help. These people say they are counsellors but they do not have the correct qualifications to prove they have gone through the right training to become a counsellor,' said Koisau Sade, the ministry's Eliminating Violence against Women Coordinator.

'The ministry's concern is this kind of help could be more damaging to a domestic violence victim or survivor. It's a measure that has been made to ensure that counselling services are of a high standard for domestic violence survivors and victims,' Ms Sade said.

Counselling services are one of the essential responses for survivors of violence. In Solomon Islands, service providers have formed the referral network SAFENET. Partners, including Pacific Women partners the Christian Care Centre and Family Support Centre, work together to ensure survivors can access counselling and casework, safe accommodation, health and legal assistance.

Similar SAFENET models are also developing in Fiji, Chuuk State in Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga, with programs in place to support duty bearers to perform their roles.