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# **COMMUNITY HEALING & REBUILDING PROGRAM**

Evidence-informed innovation for the prevention of family and community violence in Papua New Guinea

# Evidence-informed innovation for the prevention of family and community violence in Papua New Guinea

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

About this paper .....	4
Introduction .....	5
Context .....	6
The trauma-violence cycle .....	7
What is trauma and why is it relevant?.....	7
What does this mean for violence prevention in PNG?.....	9
Power and the flow of violence .....	10
Gender inequality and violence .....	11
Acceptance of violence against women.....	11
Men’s control of decision-making and the movements of women .....	12
Rigid gender roles.....	12
Dominant masculinities based on aggressiveness.....	13
An integrated approach .....	14

## **ABOUT THIS PAPER**

In recent years, researchers and practitioners have developed strong theoretical frameworks for understanding violence against women and girls (VAWG). While these frameworks guide work in this area, primary prevention initiatives are an emerging area of practice which aim to protect populations and predict and prevent instances and patterns of violence before they occur. All primary prevention should be seen as social innovation. This is particularly the case in the context of Papua New Guinea (PNG), where very little is known about what works to prevent VAWG. Despite the endemic levels of violence in PNG and other countries in the Pacific such as Kiribati and Solomon Islands, there is very little regionally-focused research about what works to prevent violence in these contexts. Therefore, at this point in time, a key purpose of any primary prevention program must be to contribute to the evidence base about what works, by building on the success or promise of existing strategies and innovating to test new approaches.

This paper has been written as a companion document to Oxfam PNG's Violence Prevention Strategy. By bringing together theoretical and practice-based expertise from a range of disciplines, this paper seeks to build a foundation for an evidence-based, multidisciplinary approach to the prevention of violence in PNG. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and practitioners have paved the way for this approach by shining a light on the connection between trauma and violence, and the need to foster healing in communities marred by violence. This paper integrates the global evidence-base with the findings of a scoping study conducted in three communities in PNG<sup>1</sup> to localise external theories.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is an exceptionally heterogeneous country, with over 800 ethnic groups and 800 indigenous languages. There is no one context in PNG, as cultures, communities and experiences vary widely within the country. As such, this paper cannot necessarily be generalised beyond the three communities included in the scoping study in Eastern Highlands, Chimbu and East Sepik provinces.

## INTRODUCTION

Men's physical and sexual violence against women is rampant and severe across PNG, from rural communities to urban centres (although types of violence and prevalence rates vary considerably). Internationally, it has been well established that unequal gendered power relations are the root cause of violence against women.<sup>23</sup> However, it has also been consistently demonstrated that violence against women is triggered and maintained by a plethora of other factors that manifest differently in different sociocultural and political contexts. This paper draws on theoretical frameworks from multiple disciplines and contexts to make sense of the factors that drive and maintain violence in PNG, and in so doing, demonstrates the need for an integrated approach to addressing family and community violence.

The scoping study identified myriad factors that intersect to create an environment that fosters endemic levels of family and community violence, including violence against women and girls. An ecological framework can be utilised to analyse the web of interconnecting issues that foster violence in PNG. This well-supported framework is derived from evidence that no single factor can explain why some people or groups are at a higher risk of experiencing violence, rather, a combination of factors is involved.<sup>4</sup> The framework views violence as an outcome of the interaction of many factors across four key levels: individual, relationship, community and societal, and encourages practitioners to design prevention strategies that work across these levels to address the interconnected issues that cause and maintain violence. This framework is broadly accepted as a tool for understanding violence against women and it informs the strategy of many NGOs that work across multiple levels such as primary prevention, crisis services and policy and legislative change. To date, however, this framework doesn't seem to have been widely applied to community-level primary prevention work, which most commonly focuses on redressing gender inequality, such as by increasing understanding of gender as a social construct and of violence as an abuse of power. Approaches that focus on only one risk factor will achieve limited results in remote communities that do not have access to other services and programs that address the other identified risk factors.

The scoping study indicated that violence against women cannot easily be separated from other forms of violence and that violence is increasing exponentially in these communities as each generation is exposed to the trauma of living in communities marred by violence and abuse. This paper will establish that adults exposed to chronic and prolonged traumatic events as children commonly grow up feeling rage, betrayal, fear, resignation, defeat and shame; have more difficulty regulating their emotions and behaviour; are more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs; and are more likely to perpetrate violence. This paper argues that understanding and addressing the trauma-violence cycle will be critical if we are to succeed at preventing violence in PNG.

A gender-based framework of analysis remains critical to understanding and addressing violence against women and girls in PNG. A gender-based framework explains the flow of violence from men to women and why rates of VAWG are so prolific in communities and societies that have high rates of gender inequality. Further, this framework provides insight into the way violence is maintained through legitimatising and excusing violence against women and silencing victims.

## CONTEXT

Primary prevention programming will only be effective when it is based on an accurate understanding of the context in which violence occurs. Violence in PNG is too often seen by outsiders as traditional, customary or 'kastom'. This is a problematic representation of the issue because it perpetuates colonialising views that see some cultures as less 'evolved' than others. When this framework is used to understand violence in PNG, proposed solutions seek to modernise and 'civilise' cultures through the introduction of neoliberal values and social structures. This approach is not only questionable, it is based on an inaccurate analysis of the issue.

Violence in PNG, including men's violence against women, is located in a context characterised by the intersection and collision of a number of forces, including the displacement of land, resources and culture as a result of years of colonial rule by Australia; rapid and uneven modernisation; persistent, low level conflict (that has recently been exacerbated by the incursion of mining companies whose use of land and uneven employment of different populations and communities has given rise to intra- and inter-community conflict); poverty; an economy wedged between subsistence farming and capitalism; geographic isolation and a lack of basic services in remote communities where the majority of the population lives.

Approximately 78% of people in PNG are living in regional, rural, and remote areas, in a country marked by a rugged terrain – with many communities are living in hard-to-reach areas. Despite the emergence of mining industries and concomitant economic development, around 85% of people in PNG are dependent on subsistence agriculture. Forty per cent of the population is living in poverty.

Papua New Guinea is often cited as one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman, with the prevalence of violence against women and girls estimated to be around 70 percent.<sup>5</sup> The endemic rate of violence in PNG is compounded by a lack of access to police and courts; a lack of basic services and support for women experiencing violence; and high rates of impunity for male perpetrators of VAWG due to the unwillingness of many police, justice and government officials to enforce relevant laws.

Women in PNG fare worse than men in every metric, from health, education and employment to positions of leadership in society. Women and girls are less likely to be at school and have lower rates of literacy,<sup>6</sup> with larger gaps between men and women in rural areas (and Highlands areas). Women are vulnerable to HIV and STIs, as they lack power in sexual relations. Their lower rates of literacy make it more difficult to reach women with health promotion messages. They have much lower participation in paid labour, in government, and in business life. They have less control over household resources. Women have less economic opportunities in the agriculture sector, despite having significant responsibilities in homes which rely on subsistence agriculture.

Gender roles are rigid and social norms and activities are gendered. In many areas of the country, women have responsibility over the domestic space and for the needs of the household: cultivating crops, caring for animals, and bearing and raising children. Men are also involved in home space (through activities such as construction and planting crops), but have much more influence in the religious and political spaces. Overall, the

relationship between PNG culture and gender is characterized by the subordination of women. A range of cultural practices exist which impact on a woman's agency in her life. These include expectation of marriage, child-bearing and what it means to be a 'good' wife/mother/woman, kinship rules that guide who she can marry, polygamy, and bride price.<sup>7</sup> Polygamy is frequently cited as being correlated with family violence. Polygamy is a criminal act in PNG but still widely practiced in some areas of the country, most frequently in the Highlands. Bride price has roots in the kinship structures of PNG and involves the payment of either money or goods to the bride's family in exchange for the bride. While this practice started as an acknowledgement of the loss to the bride's family and of two families coming together, it has become to represent the price a family can sell their daughter for and the price to own a wife.

In this context, women, men and children are exposed to numerous and compounding forms of disempowerment, oppression and trauma. Subsequently, overtime, violence has seeped into social relations, flowing from the most powerful to the least powerful, while weakening protective community systems. Without intervention, the situation in these communities will worsen exponentially.

## **THE TRAUMA-VIOLENCE CYCLE**

Trauma – particularly from experiences of violence – is a significant individual risk factor for perpetrating violence. The trauma-violence relationship is cyclical. What this means is that communities characterised by chronic violence are locked in a cycle whereby individuals are exposed to violence and are then more likely to themselves become perpetrators of violence. This is not to say that every person who experiences violence will become a perpetrator, nor does it excuse violence when it does occur, but it does help to explain why violence is getting exponentially worse in communities with endemic rates of violence.

Acts of violence can be understood as a stone thrown in to a pond; the initial act of violence generates ripples of trauma that are felt by individuals beyond the initial experiencer. These ripples infiltrate communities, families, and relationships.

### **What is trauma and why is it relevant?**

Psychological trauma is an experience during which a person perceives an imminent threat to their safety that overwhelms their ability to cope. Importantly, it is not the incident that causes trauma, but the brain's response. Therefore, two people can experience the same potentially traumatic event and it is possible that one person and not the other will develop psychological trauma.

There are two types of trauma. The first type is often referred to as, "simple trauma," which occurs after a one-off event such as a physical or sexual assault. Just because it is called, "simple," does not mean it is not serious. It has significant negative effects on a person's functioning after the event. The second type of trauma is referred to as, "complex trauma," or, "developmental trauma." This phenomenon refers to the, "experience of multiple and/or chronic and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events, most often of an interpersonal nature and early-life onset."<sup>8</sup> Complex trauma occurs when the relationships that a child relies on to survive are neglectful,

unsafe, or frightening. For example, a child who grows up in a home where there is domestic violence, or where they are regularly physically abused (beaten), or both, can be considered to have experienced complex trauma. Unlike simple trauma, where not every person who experiences a negative event experiences symptoms of trauma, it is very unlikely that a child growing up in such an environment won't experience some negative symptoms from it. Complex trauma affects the very development of the child.

Much of our understanding of the way exposure to chronic violence and instability in early childhood impacts brain development has come from western countries. It has been established that children growing up in environments of chronic violence and stress experience a multitude of profoundly negative outcomes that can define their life if the necessary intervention does not occur early. It is a well-established principle in psychology that the brain is the primary driver for development; all human urges, sensations, physiological systems, internal states are monitored and driven by the brain. More recently, research on the development of the brain has suggested that brain development begins in-utero and ends in late adolescence.<sup>9</sup> Research on neuroplasticity has also revealed that the brain develops and changes in a 'use-dependent' fashion: the areas of the brain that are frequently used will develop stronger connections than those areas that are used less frequently.<sup>1011</sup> The period between ages zero to five is the period during which the brain experiences its most rapid growth and highest level of neuroplasticity. This is not difficult to believe when one considers how dramatically young children change physically, behaviourally, and emotionally from birth to age five.

Healthy development of children requires an environment in which children can thrive, where caregivers are in tune with the child's needs and are able to consistently meet these needs. The needs of infants and children are many: they require basics including food, safety, warmth, and shelter; and they also possess more complex needs including emotional availability of caregivers and their engagement with the child. It is only when all an infant's needs are met, and when these needs are met on a predictable basis, that infants are able to thrive.<sup>12</sup>

Violence, neglect, abuse, and even environments that are chronically stressful, like violent communities, all have serious implications for children's brain development. A home and surrounding environment that are marred by instability and violence shift an infant's brain to a preoccupation with survival, a condition that is not ideal for brain development. As the brain develops in the context of this environment, the systems of the brain related to reacting to and defending from stress become over-activated.<sup>13</sup> The effects of this are worsened if the child's primary caregivers are the source of this stress, i.e. through abuse or neglect. Furthermore, the regular flooding of the brain with various stress hormones leads to poor neural development and therefore a multitude of cognitive, physiological, and emotion regulation difficulties.<sup>14</sup> This is often evidenced in children's behaviour, delayed development, and in their relationships with adults and other children. The experiences of the first five years of life set a template for future development and health. When exposed to chronically unsafe, unstable, or neglectful environments, children are set on a course for lifelong disadvantages involving their physical health, mental and emotional stability, and interpersonal health. This then increases their vulnerability to additional traumatic incidents, which may further compound their original trauma.



Intervention to address the issues arising from these experiences needs to occur as early as possible in the child's life to give the best possible chance of recovery. Otherwise, these children grow into adults whose chronological age does not match their developmental competence, as their brain development has been compromised by their untreated developmental trauma. Developmental trauma of children contributes to violence, including violence against women and girls. Male children grow up to become adult men whose ability to regulate their emotions and behaviour is severely underdeveloped. For that reason, perpetrators of violence are very often victims of childhood trauma, creating a transgenerational cycle of trauma.<sup>15</sup>

## What does this mean for violence prevention in PNG?

The scoping study found that men, women and children from the three communities included in the study, have, and continue to be, exposed to multiple, ongoing and severe trauma. This trauma is a result of the endemic rates of family violence – including the neglect and abuse of children, marital rape and physical violence; tribal conflict, not limited to the community members actively engaging in such conflict but including, for instance, girls who are sent to collect food during heated conflict violent crime; sexual violence, including rape; children orphaned by violence or HIV; young women and girls sold into prostitution; and sorcery-related violence. It is beyond the scope of this study to assess the prevalence of trauma in these communities, however, recent analysis of the UN Multi-country on men and violence in Asia and the Pacific found that childhood trauma was highly prevalent in Bougainville, PNG, finding that 92% of men included in the study had experienced childhood trauma and 84% of women.<sup>16</sup> While Bougainville is a markedly different context to elsewhere in PNG, qualitative evidence collected during the scoping study would suggest that the prevalence of childhood trauma is likely to be very similar.

The experience of multiple and/or chronic and prolonged, developmentally adverse traumatic events beginning in childhood, such as those described above, constitute complex trauma.<sup>17</sup> Research has established a strong connection between complex trauma and depression, suicide attempts, alcoholism, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, domestic violence, cigarette smoking, obesity, physical inactivity, and sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>18</sup> The relationship with alcohol and other drugs is particularly prominent. Alcohol (including homebrew) and other drugs have arguably become a coping mechanism for young people and men in the three trial communities. It is well documented that alcohol and other drug abuse is a common adaptive way of dealing with trauma, stress, abandonment, anxiety, depressions and emotional distress. However, alcohol and other drugs only block or suppress these feelings in the short-term and they further impair an individual from regulating their emotions and behaviour. Subsequently, alcohol and drug use often results in violent outbursts.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, adults that were exposed to chronic and prolonged traumatic events as children commonly grow up feeling rage, betrayal, fear, resignation, defeat and shame, have more difficulty regulating their emotions and behaviour, and are more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs. This picture represents an integral aspect of the cycle of violence in the three pilot communities in PNG.

As well as being an individual risk factor for perpetrating violence, when left untreated trauma can compound within and across generations until it infiltrates every layer of the

community. This is known as community or collective trauma and it is most commonly seen in post-conflict contexts and among Indigenous communities with violent colonial histories.

The community trauma theory hypothesises that trauma “seeps slowly and insidiously into the fabric and soul of relations and beliefs of people as a community.”<sup>20</sup> It fractures the relationships and connection to community that is integral to cultural and spiritual identity. This theory is being used to understand the endemic rates of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia, and there are many similarities between these communities and the three trial communities that justify its application to PNG.<sup>21</sup>

It has been argued<sup>22</sup> that trauma becomes embedded in the cultural memory of a social group and is passed on in the same manner which culture is generally transmitted. This normalises trauma behaviours within the culture. This theory of collective trauma has been used to explain the origins of dysfunctional community syndrome in Indigenous communities in Australia.<sup>23</sup> Dysfunctional community syndrome has been defined as “A situation whereby multiple violence types are occurring and appear to be increasing over generations, both quantitatively (numbers of incidents) and in terms of the intensity of violence experiences...”<sup>24</sup> When applied to Indigenous Australian communities, it has been suggested that a typical cluster of violence in a community with dysfunctional community syndrome will include male-on-male and female-on-female violence, child abuse, alcohol fuelled violence, male suicide, pack rape, infant rape, rape of grandmothers, self-mutilation, intimate partner violence and homicide. When applied to PNG, the increasing violence associated with sorcery accusations are arguably connected to dysfunctional community syndrome. While a belief in sorcery has a long history in PNG and has always been associated with violence to some extent, the number of accusations of sorcery are increasing and the severity of the associated violence is worsening.

The endemic rates of family and community violence in PNG, as well as alcohol and other drug use, is arguably an outcome of the collective trauma that these communities have experienced, and the lack of opportunities to process and heal from this trauma. A trauma-informed analysis of this violence posits that this violence will continue to increase exponentially if it remains untreated and treating it will become more complex over time as it becomes embedded in culture.

The dysfunctional community syndrome theory provides a useful framework for understanding family and community violence in PNG as it demonstrates the interconnectedness of all forms of violence and oppression. Specific forms of violence cannot be addressed in isolation to the overall system of violence that has been bred in these communities. Further, because of the endemic rates of violence, all community members, male and female, need to be treated as both potential victims and potential perpetrators.

## **POWER AND THE FLOW OF VIOLENCE**

It is important to understand the way that power works because violence is inextricably linked with power. Perry<sup>25</sup> identifies a “vortex of violence,” and explains that, “violent

behaviour flows down a power differential," whereby individuals with more power displace their negative feelings and oppression by perpetrating violence on individuals who hold even less power. This vortex of violence was evident in the research, with young women in one of the communities reporting that the violence they experience from older women is the most severe form of violence in their lives. These women perpetrating violence could be displacing their feelings of oppression and experiences of violence by using violence themselves. Perry<sup>26</sup> states, "When you are helpless, frustrated, humiliated, and overwhelmed, it is common to bring this into your interactions with others. If the other is smaller and weaker, it is likely that the direction for frustration and violence will be from more power to least powerful."

When examining how violence flows from those with the most to the least power, it is important not to oversimplify the power relations. The model of power relations that envisions power as being exerted from the 'top-down', by men upon women is oversimplified and it can even be actively damaging when it portrays women as victimised and without agency, and men as oppressors who do not experience oppression themselves. Such views ignore the reality that some men lack power while some women are able to wield a great deal of social power. It tends to homogenise, or, in other words, make it seem as though all the people in one group are the same as one another. It is more useful to see power as relational, shifting, context-specific and dynamic, in other words, power functions like an economy.

This flow of violence influences and is influenced by gender relations. Men tend to be empowered more often when patriarchal systems are in place, as they are in PNG, but usually they can only access such power if they adhere to common understandings of masculinity. Women are less likely to be empowered, but it can happen, particularly when a woman seeks empowerment within the dictates of cultural norms – as when she gains respect for being a model wife and mother. It is also important to consider that violence occurs within genders: violence will flow from a more powerful man to a least powerful man and a more powerful woman to a least powerful woman. Children are most vulnerable to violence as they have the least social power and often experience violence from multiple perpetrators, including men, women and older children.

## **GENDER INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE**

Research proves that there is an inherent connection between women suffering from a lack of social power and violence against women. The evidence-base points towards four key gendered-drivers of violence against women and girls:

### Acceptance of violence against women

Research shows that when communities support or accept violence against women, levels of violence are much higher and women are less likely to get support. Signs that violence is accepted in a community include:

- Violence against women is considered appropriate and reasonable in some circumstances.

- People do not always blame the men for violence, instead they look for other reasons, like alcohol, or they place responsibility on the women themselves for causing violence.
- Domestic violence is seen as a private matter, not to be discussed outside of the family.

It is widely believed throughout PNG that violence against women is acceptable in certain circumstances. It is most commonly seen as acceptable in circumstances where men use violence to 'discipline' women for not delivering on their perceived responsibilities as women (such as not having dinner prepared) or when their behaviour is perceived to be inconsistent with their gender (such as wearing trousers). Anthropologist Robert Eves confirms this in a research paper for Caritas International, saying that the general attitude found in his research was that "men do not hit their wives for no reason" (2016, 24).<sup>27</sup> Violence is more likely to be condoned against transgressive women (women believed to be behaving in a manner inconsistent with gender norms) because they do not act according to prescribed norms and therefore violence against them is perceived as deserved or even necessary and disciplinary.<sup>28</sup>

Since women generally lack access to power and do not have the same rights as men (or if they have the same legal rights those rights are not rigorously protected) violence committed against them often goes unchecked and unpunished, even if it is seen as a social problem. They may not be able to escape such violence, or even speak out about it.<sup>29</sup> Women who speak out may find themselves further disempowered because they open themselves up to backlash.

## Men's control of decision-making and the movements of women

Research shows that violence is more common in families when men control the decision making and women don't have the ability to make their own decisions. When women are not able to move freely in the community and participate in public activities, they are also less likely to have access to economic resources. This can make them even more vulnerable to violence because they may not be able to leave relationship.

Women who do earn money may be subject to economic abuse by their partners, and this can also lead to heightened tension within relationships, and even violence.<sup>30</sup> Yet, research shows that women gaining a level of independence whether that be independence through employment outside of the home, economic independence or independence through education tends to loosen gender roles.<sup>31</sup>

## Rigid gender roles

Research shows that violence is much more common in communities where people believe that men and women have specific roles associated with their gender that they must adhere to. For example, the community might believe that men should make the money and make decisions and women should clean the house and look after children. In the most general sense, research overwhelmingly shows that challenging normative ideas of gender is paramount to reducing violence.<sup>32 33</sup>

In many communities in PNG, there is a sharp distinction between jobs and social roles that are appropriate for women and those that are appropriate for men. Men's roles are often aligned with social power which makes it difficult for women to gain any kind of agency or independence. In a sense, it is difficult for all members of those communities since they all experience restriction on their movements and activities. Furthermore, in PNG there is a strong archetype for the 'good woman': she is generous and giving. This tends to undermine the ability of women to be financially independent and undermines women's success in the financial sphere, which adds to their disempowerment. It prevents them from being able to safely leave violent relationships and support themselves independently. Research shows that violence is most commonly seen as acceptable in circumstances where men use violence to 'discipline' women for not delivering on their perceived responsibilities as women (such as not having dinner prepared) or when their behaviour is perceived to be inconsistent with their gender (such as walking at night). Violence is more likely to be condoned against transgressive women (women believed to be behaving in a manner inconsistent with gender norms) because they are not good women in need of protection and with a defined social function.<sup>34</sup> It was suggested by one participant in the scoping study that educated, empowered women are less likely to experience physical violence, but that the power and control dynamics often presented in other forms of violence including psychological and emotional violence.

## Dominant masculinities based on aggressiveness

Research shows that violence is more common when relationships among men are based on the idea that 'real men' should be tough and aggressive and have many sexual partners. Models of masculinity commonly see an inclination to be violent as natural and essential to men, that is, as something that arises from the biological makeup of men. Gender is cultural, not biological, and violence is not essential to masculinity. This is evidenced by the great number of men who reject violence and by the fact that cultural ideas of masculinity don't always include violence as a necessary part of being male. Nevertheless, where aggression, violence, and physical dominance are emphasised socially as being part of being a man, violence against women is more<sup>35</sup> likely.<sup>36 37</sup>

In PNG, young men's transition into adulthood is dependent on their ability to protect and provide financially for their family. For example, there are high expectations that a man should be able to protect his land and clan from threats, such as rival clans. It is very difficult to disconnect masculinity from aggression and violence in this context. This undoubtedly contributes to the endemic rates of violence in PNG. Further, shifting circumstances and social relationships in PNG have meant that both understandings of what it means to be a man, and men's ability to live up to ideas of what it means to be a man have become imperilled. Research<sup>38</sup> shows<sup>39</sup> that this has contributed to violence against women. Men in PNG have contradictory experiences of power wherein older generations might wield power but younger generations are denied power both materially and socially as they cannot access resources which might normally grant them power. In these circumstances, they may turn to other, more violent means of securing power.<sup>40</sup> Women may often be targets for men who wish to access, consolidate, or reaffirm social power.<sup>41 42 43</sup>

This becomes a particular issue in PNG where men are experiencing disempowerment from a number of sources, including loss of their economic and leadership roles, incongruent view of themselves in line with rigidly held views of masculinity, being the victim of violence from other men or latent and unresolved childhood trauma where the child, now a man, was disempowered by violence in the home.<sup>44</sup> Thus, even though men's power relative to women contributes to VAWG, men's disempowerment is also interrelated with violence against women.

## **AN INTEGRATED APPROACH**

There scoping study indicates that the three pilot communities in PNG are stuck in a cycle of violence that increases exponentially as each generation is exposed to the trauma behaviours of the previous generation. Gender inequality undeniably plays a critical role in maintaining this cycle and dictating the flows of violence, however, this paper argues that redressing gender power imbalances is not enough on its own to stop the cycle of violence.

This conclusion is supported by a recent study that analysed the data from the UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific to explore the connection between childhood trauma and violence against women.<sup>45</sup> The study found evidence of a cycle of abuse, with childhood trauma leading to violence against women and further child maltreatment, which in turn increases the risk of experience or perpetration of violence during adulthood. This study also drew the conclusion that an integrated approach is necessary to address the trauma-violence cycle.

This paper argues for a new approach to violence prevention in the Pacific that unites the community to address their collective trauma and stop the cycle of violence. This approach must support individual and community healing as a precursor to change. When people feel weak and disempowered, they are less likely to be able to have empathy for others and to take responsibility for their own behaviour. It is critical that a safe space is created for all members of the community to work through their experiences of violence and trauma, before they are asked take responsibility for their own behaviour. The approach will also work with communities to create safe communities for children as a means to prevent the traumatising of children and the continuation of the trauma cycle.

This trauma-informed approach will be integrated with a human-rights based approach and a power and gender-transformative approach. These approaches are integral for communities to understand how the cycle of violence is perpetuated and the impact of violence on individuals and groups. This approach will also work to increase the social, political and economic power of women, as gender inequality is inextricably linked with violence against women.

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