# Papua New Guinea: Women's Shelters Needed





Two decades ago, Papua New Guinea (PNG) led the way in the region in identifying and documenting violence against women. The statistics below reflect the research conducted at the time. While this information may now seem dated, more recent interviews conducted by Amnesty International as part of a research trip revealed that rates of violence are unlikely to have decreased and some women's organisations fear they may have risen.

- 67% of wives had been beaten by their husbands (national average). (PNG Law Reform Commission 1992)
- Close to 100% of wives in the Highlands experienced violence by their husbands, but half that for Oro and New Ireland provinces. (PNG Law Reform Commission 1992)
- In urban areas, one of every six women interviewed needed treatment for injuries caused by their husbands. (PNG Law Reform Commission 1992)
- 55% of women had been forced into sex against their will. (PNG Institute of Medical Research 1994)
- 60% of men interviewed reported having participated in lainap (gang rape) at least once. (PNG Institute of Medical Research 1994)

# The statistics and stories may be shocking. However, this only paints part of the picture.

The patriarchal culture in PNG, as elsewhere, means that violence against women is a key way to maintain women's inequality. Violence against women is connected to such customs which maintains women's lower status – as polygamy and bride price. It strengthen men's belief that they 'own' their wives.

Women also face many different types of violence – violence by their husbands and family, rape and gang rape, sexual violence by police, 'pay back' violence against women as part of tribal fighting and 'sorcery'-related killings.

Yet, instead of offering tangible solutions to violence against women, the PNG Government continues to do little, dwelling on difficulties and a lack of resources. It means little has changed for women since the first research into the issue was conducted 20 years ago.



Nowhere safe to go

Josephine's partner beat her and her stepsons regularly. He beat them when he got drunk. He beat her when she refused to watch him have sex with his girlfriends. Most of the time he beat her to force her to have unprotected sex with him so she could have his child.

In 2007, Josephine (not her real name) fell pregnant. She left her stepsons and her partner, seeking shelter with her parents. She was HIV-positive. After her baby was born, Josephine's family discovered her HIV status. Since then, she has received regular beatings from her brothers.

Josephine desperately needs a place to stay. There are only three safe houses in the capital, Port Moresby, where she lives – each run without government assistance, and each struggling from a lack of resources. The situation is even worse outside the capital.

There is an urgent need for more shelters for women fleeing violence in Papua New Guinea. Until then, Josephine will suffer the daily brutality meted out by her family members because she has nowhere safe to go.

DEMAND DIGNITY



#### **Political inaction**

"My husband broke my nose and hit me with timber over the back of my head. I went to the police to tell them to arrest him—they said they would do it but they didn't" Margaret, East Sepik

PNG's Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, has publicly called for husbands to stop the violence, saying he is ashamed of the high levels in his country.

But his Government has failed to take adequate action. While the formal justice system promises equality, protection and justice it does not deliver it. Law enforcement officials rarely take action when domestic violence is reported to them, and sometimes they are the perpetrators of violence.

The government's first steps should be to listen to the women of PNG.

Women in PNG want the violence to stop to allow them to live in and with dignity.

They want:

- laws protecting their right to live free from violence
- Effective help from police
- Perpetrators to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law
- Somewhere to go when they flee violence in the home
- Violence prevention education in schools

### Positive steps taken

**1995** - PNG ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

**2002** -The PNG Government introduced the Sexual Offences and Crimes Against Children Act. (While the Act coves rape (including marital rape), sexual assault and child sexual exploitation, it does not address violence in the

#### Positive steps taken.....

family. Its implementation has made it largely ineffective to date.

**2009** - Sir Michael Somare was one of the Pacific Island leaders who committed to eradicate sexual and gender based violence at the Pacific Islands Forum leaders meeting, in Cairns in August.

## TAKE ACTION NOW

Sign our petition or write to the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, expressing your concern that women suffering from violence in the home in Papua New Guinea do not have protection because there are too few shelters available, and urging him to:

- set up at least four new shelters across the country before the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November 2010
- Expand funding for existing private shelters.
- Equip these shelters with a 24-hour hotline and counselling services.
- Introduce and enforce specific domestic violence legislation

### Address:

Rt Hon. Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare Prime Minister Morata Haus P.O.Box 639 Waigani National Capital District



Above: National flag of Papua New Guinea



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