TRANSFORMING HARMFUL GENDER NORMS IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: A STUDY OF THE OXFAM *SAFE FAMILIES* PROGRAM

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Safe Families

THE EQUALITY INSTITUTE

THE LET'S MAKE OUR FAMILIES SAFE *(SAFE FAMILIES)* PROGRAM

Safe Families is part of a ten-year strategic initiative, supported by the Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence in Solomon Islands

The first phase of the implementation in six communities in Malaita and Temotu provinces ran for just over three years (March 2015 to June 2018).

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Nukiki

Kia

Gizo

Buala

Auki

Tulaghi

MALAITA

Honiara

Kirakira

TEMOTU

Lata

The goal of the *Safe Families* program was to shift local beliefs, attitudes and norms so that family violence will no longer be considered acceptable and tolerated. The program aimed to contribute to this goal through:

- **Mobilising communities to prevent and respond to family and sexual violence**
- **Enabling and resourcing collective action by coalitions**
- **Building the evidence base through research and evaluation**
- **Strengthening national women's institutions, laws and policies**

Based on a review conducted in 2017 by DFAT *Safe Families* has been continued for a second phase, which commenced in January 2019.

SOCIAL NORMS AND HOW THEY DRIVE FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A social norm is a collectively held belief about what others in the group actually do (i.e. what is typical behaviour) and what others in the group *ought* to do (what is appropriate behaviour).

Social norms have three components:

- A **specific shared belief** about what the social norm is;

- The **reference group** that holds that shared belief; and

- **Social rewards** (i.e. status, respect) **or sanctions** (i.e. violence, ostracism) that regulate group adherence to the social norm.

SOCIAL NORMS AND HOW THEY DRIVE FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Gender norms are ideas about how women and men *should* be and act – 'ideal/good' behaviour, roles and traits.

The social norms that drive Violence Against Women (VAW) in Solomon Islands are:

Men seen as 'boss'

· Natural disciplinarian
· Male respondents saw themselves as having "community-oriented" qualities;
· Women saw men more in terms of relationship traits.

The 'good' woman

· Women are seen (by both men and women) as enacting behaviours linked to family/household relationships, as well as passivity, docility and obedience.

IDEAL TRAITS OF A 'GOOD WOMAN'

Women said:

Both said:

Men said:

Participates in community activities

Stays quiet

Passive

Obedient (to husband)

Hard-working

Speaks nicely to people

Takes care of in-laws

Humble

Doesn't gossip or swear

Christian

Self-disciplined

Kind & welcoming

Teach/love children

Shares resources/food

Respectful

Doesn't drink alcohol

IDEAL TRAITS OF A 'GOOD MAN'

Women said:

Patient

Hard-working

Doesn't spend money on alcohol

Gives money to his wife

Active in the community

Helpful to others

Funny

Doesn't get angry

A providing father

Splits firewood

Both said:

Kind

Doesn't drink alcohol

Men said:

Self-disciplines

Has a good attitude

Shares resources (betelnut)

Joyful

Hospitable

Not jealous

Christian

Loves his people

"IT IS ALRIGHT FOR HIM TO BEAT HER BECAUSE THE WIFE DOES SOME WRONG THINGS INSIDE THE HOUSE, SO HUSBAND HAS THE RIGHT TO BEAT HER... IT'S OKAY FOR THE HUSBAND TO BEAT HIS WIFE FOR HER MISTAKES IN ORDER FOR HER TO REALIZE THE WRONGS SHE DID."

– FEMALE COMMUNITY MEMBER, TEMOTU

BRIDE PRICE

"He does have the right to do so *[hit her]* because he already paid for her bride price… To teach her a lesson so she won't do the same mistake again."

– Female community member, Temotu

Interviewer: If a man *[pays]* the bride price, with shell money or whatever, is it ok for him to hit or assault his wife?

Participant: Yes, for me, in my own thoughts, I paid for you *[a woman]*, so you must 'stay straight' *[behave well]* for me. So, if you do something wrong against custom, I must teach you a lesson. It doesn't mean I will beat you until you die, just for you to learn a lesson *[laughs]*.

– Male community member, Malaita

BRIDE PRICE VS. BRIDE WEALTH

Bride price

is often understood transactionally, as a commodification of women and means to reinforce men's dominance; women are 'paid for', and therefore considered to be 'owned' subject to the control of her husband.

"It's like if you pay for something in the store, you own it. You don't have to return it to the store... it's your property [laughs]"

– Young female community member, Malaita

Bride wealth

marriage related exchanges are understood to be embedded in wider systems of reciprocity. More about exchange, value, and social ties.

"It doesn't necessarily mean that you are paying for the girl's life. It is about partnership between the man and the woman's families so that they stay together as one."

– Male community member, Temotu

PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF BRIDE PRICE IS CHANGING

Modern bride price practice even influences parents with more female children to start calculating future accumulative bride prices. Typically, a man with more daughters is rich compared to man with no daughters.

Bride price is becoming competitive.

"These days people charge too much."

— *Male community member, Malaita*

Shifts in the practices are also indicated in the currency used for such exchanges.

"Today we use the 'white man's money'."

— *Female community member, Temotu*

PROGRAMMATIC IMPLICATIONS

One of the recommendations to emerge from the report is to include bride price in program messaging and community dialogues on VAW.

Opportunities for community led discussions to shift away from the commodity related notions of bride price, and reinforce the positive traditions more closely aligned with 'bride wealth'.

Learnings from similar social norms change interventions suggest projects are successful when they:

• are community led, not externally driven;

• focus on changing social norms at the community level, rather than changing attitudes at the individual or family level;

• empower women.

**VIEW THE
FULL REPORT:**

www.oxfam.org.au/safe-families

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