

## MOBILISING MEN TO TAKE AN ACTIVE STAND AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

Sadly, one often hears Papua New Guineans speaking negatively about their country. “Everything was better before, or is better in Australia”, they say, and then talk of poor services or security, corrupt politics, officials harassing community members, and a litany of other problems. Whilst it certainly faces many challenges, PNG has much to be proud of, worthy of international admiration not criticism. PNG enjoys remarkable cultural richness and diversity, vitality, hospitably, accumulated knowledge and, despite, or perhaps because of its diversity and exchange systems, the country remains remarkably cohesive. Customary administrative systems often function better than new institutions. PNG is over-governed, often restraining the community’s own efforts, whilst failing to fulfill the State’s core functions.

PNG can have no pride, however, in the inadequate respect and high level of violence against women, particularly in some communities. Whilst domestic and sexual violence occur worldwide, it is universally unacceptable. Such violence is extremely prevalent in PNG by international standards. A society allowing such violence against women or children to prevail has a major problem, seriously undermining its development prospects. It must be tackled by the community itself, including leaders, starting with recognition of the problem.

A positive sign is the growing push from a committed team of reformers, largely women, but also some men. In today’s INA focus, **Ume Wainetti**, coordinator of CIMC’s family and sexual violence action committee (FSVAC), explores the issue: -

In PNG women carry disproportionate family responsibilities, recognized as gender norms – societal expectation of men and women’s roles and behaviour – fueling gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW). At the same time traditional male gender norms encourage men to practice a range of risky behaviour, e.g. physical and emotional violence, drugs, multiple sex partners and the domination of women – contributing to high risks of women being exposed to HIV/AIDS. GBV/VAW entails horrific physical violence that many women continue to suffer at the hands of their husbands and intimate male partners. *There is growing realization amongst those working with battered women and children that addressing this violent attitude will contribute greatly towards solving the problem.* It is men who are in the best position to do this.

**“I know he was seeing another woman but I could not refuse when he demands because I get my face rear-ranged“**

Men with social status, power and privilege can speak out and affect the attitude of fellow men. Besides becoming more respectful towards women, men have to gain self-respect, learning to control instinctive lashing out. Men can play a crucial role in helping to stop domestic violence. Men are already an integral part of the community that supports and interacts with families dealing with violence. They comprise the majority of the judges, police and doctors who work with families in crisis. Some men are neighbors, friends and family members, who support victims by reaching out and lending a hand.

And yet, it is sometimes hard for men to join in the fight against family violence. They may consider it a women's issue, and that they shouldn’t get involved. But family violence is everyone's concern, and there are many opportunities for involving men in making communities safer. Men are critical to violence prevention efforts, because men are more likely to listen to other men when it comes to the perpetration of domestic violence, and because fathers have enormous influence over their children’s development.

**White Ribbon Campaign (WRC):** The WRC is the largest worldwide effort of men working to end men's violence against women. It relies on volunteer support and financial contributions from individuals and organizations. In 1991, a handful of men in Canada decided they had a responsibility to urge men to speak out against violence against women. They decided that wearing a white ribbon would be a symbol of men's

**“Violence Against women is a men’s Issue, and men have to take a leadership role in building a more positive male community.”**

opposition to men's violence against women. After only six weeks preparation, a hundred thousand men across Canada wore white ribbons. Many others were drawn into discussion and debate on the issue of men's violence.

**What does it mean to wear a white ribbon?** Wearing a white ribbon is a personal pledge never to commit, condone nor remain silent about violence against women. Each year, we urge men and boys to wear a ribbon for one or two weeks, starting on November 25, the International Day for the Eradication of Violence against Women. In many countries, including PNG, men and women should wear ribbons until December 10, which is International Human Rights Day.

**Does this mean that men are bad?** We don't think that men are naturally violent or bad. The majority are not violent, but many men have learned to express their anger or insecurity through violence. Many men have come to believe that violence against women, children or other men is acceptable behaviour to exert authority. The problem does not stop with physical violence. There are forms of emotional violence - from sexist joking, to sexual harassment at work, to other domineering forms of behaviour. By remaining silent about these things, you allow other men to poison our working and learning environments.

**Men's Organizations** – Men who are interested in advocating against violence against women should network with government and civil society organizations to distribute awareness information to schools and speak out on issues of public policy. Men and boys are urged to wear a ribbon, including one on their shirt so the ribbon will be visible while they're outdoors and to talk in schools, workplaces, and places of worship about the problem of violence.

**“Churches men’s groups should be completely reconceptualised and reconstructed to better foster gender equity”**

**Does the White Ribbon Campaign occur only for one week?** No. Violence occurs everyday, therefore the campaign against violence against women requires year-round effort, with men's fellowship groups encouraged in the various churches and community-based Men's Organizations to arrange events about positive roles for men, about the importance of men being care-givers and nurturers and spread messages about building healthy relationships.

**What other issues can men's organizations address?** The important aim should be for all men to get involved in campaigns devoted to ending violence against women. Within such a campaign there is a great diversity of opinions on many important issues, including those relating to equality or moral perspectives of women and men. While these issues are of great importance, they should not distract men from working together to end violence against women. Here are just a few ways men can make a difference:

- Be role models to other men. Young men are uniquely positioned to reach out to other young men who are violent at home, to say, "You need help, and I want to help you. Your behaviour is unacceptable."
- Take a vocal stand against domestic violence. Men speaking out can have a powerful effect in helping change social norms that support and perpetuate abuse.
- Reach out to a family where domestic violence is present. Just offering to listen and acknowledging what is going on helps chip away at the walls that surround and isolate families living with abuse.
- Act as a role model to a child who lacks a positive male figure in his life. A male mentor and friend can provide consistent support, and even help the child make a safety plan.
- Take a leadership role in civic organizations, such as sports clubs, churches, and neighborhood associations, and speak out against violence in the home.