Women's Safety in the Pacific Region

A Pilot Study

Judy Putt, Jasbant Kaur, Domenica Gisella Calabrò, Sara N. Amin, Gemma Malungahu, Theresa Meki, Cathy Alex, Rochelle Bailey and Amanda H. A. Watson

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Cover image: ‘Traversing Unsafety’.
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June 2025

DOI: 10.25911/YW1Q-4374

Australian National University

Department of Pacific Affairs

Australian Aid

Pacific Research Program *An Initiative of the Australian Aid Program*

Australian National University | Department of Pacific Affairs | Development Policy Centre | LOWY INSTITUTE

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Photograph by Judy Putt

Abbreviations

AE	Approved Employer
ANU	The Australian National University
APNG:WLN	Advancing Papua New Guinea: Women Leaders Network Incorporated
CEO	chief executive officer
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DPA	Department of Pacific Affairs
DFV	domestic and family violence
DV	domestic violence
GBV	gender-based violence
GWIM	Global Women in Management
LGBTIQ/LGBTI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (or questioning)
MICS	Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey
NBV	National Bank of Vanuatu
NCD	National Capital District
NGO	non-government organisation
NSW	New South Wales
PALM	Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme
PLS	Pacific Labour Scheme
PMVs	public motor vehicles
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PRC	Pacific Research Colloquium
RSE	Recognised Seasonal Employer
SWP	seasonal worker program
USP	University of the South Pacific

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the many people who participated in this study and generously shared their experiences, insights and time.

This research was made possible with the support of fellow research assistants: Mrs Gwenda Kalmet Calot and Miss Cleona Carlot who supported the Vanuatu pilot study, and Mrs Telusa Tu'ionetoa (PhD candidate, Department of Pacific Affairs at The Australian National University) who supported the Tongan pilot study. Ms Minetta Kakarere from the University of Papua New Guinea provided excellent support with lining up interviews in Port Moresby.

This research was funded by the Pacific Research Program Phase II, which is led by the Department of Pacific Affairs at The Australian National University, in partnership with the Development Policy Centre and the Lowy Institute, and is co-funded by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the consortium partners' parent bodies.

The study also benefited from the support of colleagues in our respective institutions, including The Australian National University, the University of the South Pacific and the Advancing PNG: Women's Leadership Network.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge Elise Howard for her contribution to this research and the wonderful and supportive teamwork of those involved.

Contributors

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Sara N. Amin is Senior Lecturer and Discipline Coordinator of Sociology, University of the South Pacific (USP). She completed her PhD in Sociology at McGill University (Montreal, Canada) and has a background in mathematics (BSc, McGill University) and international development (BA, McGill University). Her research in the Pacific Islands and South Asia has focused on the interactions between different authorities (international, state, civil society, religious and indigenous) in regulating gender relations and gendered security. Prior to joining USP, she worked at the Asian University for Women (Bangladesh) and was an International Visiting Scholar at Georgetown University (USA). Her research and teaching interests centre on the sociology of identity, gender, migration and education. Her research has been funded by various organisations including the British Academy, the Australian Research Council, the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council, the Fulbright Foundation and the Ford Foundation. Sara is Bangladeshi-Canadian and grew up in Thailand.

Ms Cathy Alex, Advancing Papua New Guinea: Women Leaders Network Incorporated (APNG:WLN)

As the Executive Director of APNG:WLN Cathy heads an emerging and active network of self-motivated women promoting women's leadership, economic opportunities, access to legal support and improved security in local communities across the country. APNG:WLN's vision is to grow a diverse and inclusive network of women leaders where women and girls are inspired, empowered and encouraged to reach their full potential. APNG:WLN is the secretariat of PNG Global Women in Management (GWIM), 87 women leaders who run more than 70 community-based organisations in 15 provinces of PNG and 4,210 council wards. Cathy is a community development professional working with rural and semi-rural communities of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and has frequently acted as a liaison officer and cultural adviser for academic researchers, especially in the Kikori to Bosavi area in Gulf and Southern Highlands provinces. With a degree in tropical agriculture, she also volunteers with a conservation non-government organisation (NGO) and runs a social enterprise.

Dr Rochelle Bailey, Department of Pacific Affairs, The Australian National University

With degrees in anthropology and political science, Rochelle Bailey has conducted 18 years of ethnographic research on Pacific labour mobility, while researching New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme, and another 12 years with research cohorts in Australia's Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP), now under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. She has examined how Australian and New Zealand migration policies affect individual, family, and community interactions and involvement. Furthermore, she has contributed to changes in RSE and SWP policies and has been involved in consultations for Vanuatu's various national policies on labour mobility. Rochelle's longitudinal research (2007–24) focuses on the cultural, economic, social and political impacts of cross-border labour schemes. Her multi-sited research has a strong emphasis on collaboration and culturally appropriate knowledge sharing with migrants, families, employers, governments and communities in both sending and receiving countries.

Outside of the migration programs with Australia and New Zealand, Rochelle has conducted commissioned work in Kiribati examining human trafficking, and gender and social inclusion in domestic and international employment arrangements for I-Kiribati citizens.

Since 2004, Rochelle has worked on politics, intergovernmental relationships, regionalism, gender and social inclusion, health, education, economics, social change and migration issues in the Pacific.

Dr Domenica Gisella Calabrò, School of Law and Social Sciences, University of the South Pacific, Fiji

Dr Domenica Gisella Calabrò joined USP in 2018 to coordinate the postgraduate gender studies program. She holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology (University of Messina, Italy) and has a background in foreign languages and literature. Prior to joining USP, she was a postdoctoral researcher within a European Research Council (ERC) funded project[1] in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Her research has focused on sociocultural change and processes of inclusion and exclusion in minority contexts, mostly through the prism of gender. Between 2008 and 2019, she conducted extensive ethnography in Aoteaora New Zealand Māori settings, including diasporic ones in Europe, investigating the indigenisation of rugby, with a focus on the masculinities produced within and around the game. During her doctoral and postdoctoral fieldwork, she was a visiting researcher at Te Kawa a Māui/The School of Māori Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. While at USP, she has been examining queer Indo-Fijian experiences with a research team of USP gender studies graduates, including Jasbant Kaur. She has also engaged in a reflection on gender-related pedagogy in the Pacific Islands region as a result of her work towards developing the Gender Studies program. Domenica Gisella hails from the Mediterranean, born and raised in southern Italy (Calabria).

Ms Jasbant Kaur School of Law and Social Sciences, University of the South Pacific, Fiji

Jasbant Kaur is an early career researcher with a focus on mental health, queer cultures, Indo-Fijian experiences, gender, disability and social inclusion. Committed to social justice and decolonisation and the politics of

othering versus belonging, Jasbant's work aims to highlight and address intersectional invisibilities and the complexities of marginalised identities.

Jasbant is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Social Policy and Administration through research and holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Social Policy and Administration, a Postgraduate Certificate in Gender Studies, and a Diploma in Leadership, Good Governance, and Human Rights. These educational qualifications have equipped Jasbant with a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted issues impacting policy and lived experiences.

A notable achievement in Jasbant's career is the publication of the co-authored paper titled 'Behind the Mask: Intersectional (In)Visibility of Indo-Fijian Queer Experiences' (Calabrò et al. 2022). This research explores the nuanced layers of gender visibility and erasure within the Indo-Fijian queer community, contributing valuable insights into lived realities of Indo-Fijian LGBTIQ people who aren't regular subjects of inquiry in research.

Beyond academic pursuits, Jasbant finds inspiration and reflection through writing poetry and delving into autobiographies and memoirs.

Dr Gemma Malungahu, Department of Pacific Affairs, The Australian National University

A research fellow with the Department of Pacific Affairs (DPA), ANU, Dr Gemma Malungahu is a proud Tongan. Her father Kelepi Malungahu is from Kolonga, Ha'atafu and 'Atatā and her mother Silina Malungahu is from Tungua, Ha'afeva, Nomuka Ha'apai and Haveluloto. Her maternal great-great-grandmother is a Samoan named Sina Lauli'i, who migrated to Tonga and married Gemmas great-great-grandfather Tevita Mahe in Vava'u in the mid-1930s.

With degrees in health sciences and public health, Dr Malungahu is passionate about health equity and social justice amongst disadvantaged groups, including how structural factors at the international and national level can hinder or improve the wellbeing of vulnerable and marginalised groups in society. With two master's degrees, a Master in Health Sciences and a Master in Public Health with First-Class Honours, she has a wealth of knowledge and expertise on the social determinants of health, health systems, social welfare, climate change, globalisation and socio-cultural environmental factors and their impacts on health and wellbeing. Her 2020 doctorate in health sciences from the University of Auckland is titled 'Too little space! Experiences and perspectives of Housing and Housing Policy: Tongan Families with rheumatic fever in South Auckland and Key Housing Informants' (Malungahu 2020). Her research findings underline the issues of systemic racism and essentialism within the socio-political sphere of policy decision making and implementation processes. She developed a policy framework called the Lolo Na'ati (nard oil) model to help improve decision-making processes addressing the rights of Pacific peoples (and other marginalised groups) to adequate housing, thus aiming to improve the overall health and wellbeing of Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand and the diaspora in general.

In 2019, Dr Malungahu carried out a Tracer study for the DPA to explore the career and research trajectory of alumni of the Pacific Research Colloquium (PRC) program between 2014 and 2018. The overall findings from the study indicated the benefits of the PRC program in improving research capacity and fostering research collaboration with Pacific regional partners, national institutions and local partners

Dr Theresa Meki, Department of Pacific Affairs, The Australian National University

Dr Theresa Meki is a Pacific Research Fellow with the DPA, ANU. She is an early career Papua New Guinean researcher with a degree in political science. She is primarily interested in women's representation both in national politics and historical documentation. Dr Meki's doctoral thesis, awarded in 2022, examined Oro women's campaign strategies in the 2017 PNG national elections (Meki 2021). In the last seven years, Theresa has worked on various Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)-funded DPA projects such as the Women in Leadership Support program (WLSP) and the Joint District Assessment and Political Context Analysis in PNG, and she worked as a team leader (Oro Province) for two PNG National Election Domestic Observations (2017 and 2022). Prior to joining DPA (then SSGM) in 2015 as a postgraduate student, Meki worked on the Pawa Meri documentary film series as a field producer and research assistant while completing her honours degree at the University of Goroka. Meki is currently a co-convener of the Revitalising the PNG Dictionary of Biography project.[2]

Dr Judy Putt, Department of Pacific Affairs, The Australian National University

With postgraduate degrees in social anthropology and in criminology from the Australian National University and Cambridge University, Dr Judy Putt has undertaken extensive research in crime and justice with a focus on action-oriented, mixed-methods, and on practice and policy relevance. Her publication record includes major research and evaluation reports, including those that have focused on domestic and family violence, community safety in remote Australia, and criminal justice reform. She has also co-authored numerous papers and journal articles on a wide range of topics related to crime and justice.

Since joining the DPA in 2017, she has been involved in major research projects on regional policing, sorcery accusation related violence, temporary labour migrants in Australia, and family protection orders. She is currently the lead researcher on projects that focus on sexual violence against children in PNG, and on service delivery in PNG.

Dr Amanda H. A. Watson, Department of Pacific Affairs, The Australian National University

Dr Amanda H. A. Watson is a researcher at the DPA, ANU. Her research interests include information and communication technologies in the Pacific Islands region and the role of the media sector in Pacific Island countries. Dr Watson has published in various academic journals, including *Mobile Media and Communication*, *Pacific Journalism Review*, *Media Asia* and *Australian Journalism Review*. She completed her PhD in communication studies at Queensland University of Technology (Brisbane, Australia), which involved a study of the trends occurring as mobile network coverage spread to rural areas of Papua New Guinea. Dr Watson also has a background in international development (Master of International Social Development, University of New South Wales) and media studies (Bachelor of Arts [Mass Communications] with Honours in Media and Cultural Studies, Macquarie University).

Research team (Dr Amin absent)
Photograph by a stakeholder

Abattoir, regional New South Wales, Australia
Photograph by Judy Putt

Introduction: Context and rationale for the research

Judy Putt

This brief introduction seeks to explain why we embarked on the journey of collaborative research on women's safety. We agreed that although there is an ever-growing literature on gender-based violence in the Pacific region, there are many spheres of women's lives that are not being included in such research, nor were women (and men) being asked about their feelings of safety and what it might mean to live in a world free from violence and harm. As a result, we embarked on this joint project — a pilot study — to give substance to and address our disquiet. This introduction gives context by outlining current methodological gaps and the focus on domestic and family violence, before providing an overview of the study and the common threads that emerged across the different chapters in the report.

Regional focus on domestic and family violence

The issue of violence against women has now become a regular part of the agenda of international forums, and international legal and policy frameworks for addressing it have been developed. A landmark achievement to this end was the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1993, which called for states and civil society to develop 'in a comprehensive way, preventive approaches and all those measures of a legal, political, administrative and cultural nature that promote the protection of women against any form of violence'.[3]

Until recently, most of the interventions internationally to stem violence against women have been dominated by a criminal justice approach, with more emphasis in the past two decades, especially in low- and middle-income countries, on multi-sectoral approaches to prevention (Ellsberg et al. 2015). However, the criminal justice approach is the best-known, most established violence reduction policy, top-down in approach and focusing on control through higher rates of arrest, conviction and punishment, facilitated by judicial, police and penal reform. While gender-neutral by design, both justice and police agencies tend to be male-dominated, frequently limiting women's access to such institutions, and they also inherently suffer from being a legacy of past colonial regimes and inadequately resourced in many low- and middle-income countries. In the Pacific region, the formal justice system is often predominantly staffed by men, especially at the leadership level. Policing numbers, for example, indicate that most countries in the region have a relatively low proportion of women police officers, with the proportion ranging from 13 per cent to 24 per cent in the larger countries in 2016 (Putt et al. 2018).

Regionally, the focus of reform to tackle violence against women has been on gender-based violence (GBV) and in particular, domestic and family violence (DFV), with family protection legislation introduced across the region (Putt and Kanan 2022) and evident in the recent regional recommitment to the Pacific Partnership to End Violence against Women and Girls (Pacific Community 14/6/2024). This focus is understandable, given the high levels of GBV revealed by country-based surveys, and well-documented resource constraints to implement reforms to address GBV (Office of Development Effectiveness 2019). Both the prevalence of GBV and shortcomings in formal justice sector responses have been attributed to the justice system's colonial roots, patriarchal biases in practices, and social norms that contribute to subordination and marginalisation of women victims (Biersack et al. 2016; Erikson et al. 2023; Jolly 2012).

This focus on DFV and sexual violence should not be lost, but we would argue that addressing GBV in all its forms requires a more comprehensive understanding of all forms of crime victimisation and placing such violence within the wider context of gendered dimensions to personal and community safety. To do this, we believed it was important to explore and understand Pacific women's perspectives on safety and to employ a methodology that drew on and was sensitive to Pacific research modalities (Naepi 2020; Nakata 2007; L.T. Smith 2022).

Gendered safety

Being safe and having a reduced fear of crime and violence is a fundamental human right and integral to efforts to build socio-economic wellbeing and political stability. There are clear gendered and socio-cultural differences to understanding and experiencing safety, risk and patterns of victimisation, and fear of crime (Bhardwaj and Apel 2022; Stanko 1997; Walklate 2017). Rapid social change is creating new challenges for women, in the terrestrial and online environments, that impact on their physical and online safety, and financial security. Increasingly, women in the region have access to smartphones and are involved in the cash economy either in their home countries or through labour mobility schemes. It is therefore important to take a holistic view of what is contributing to experiences of unsafety and to proximal causes of victimisation, and not just focus on domestic and sexual violence.

A prevention perspective of developing culturally appropriate responses to improve safety requires an understanding of how safety is defined and understood

within any given setting and the kinds of meanings attached to it, the kinds of justifications that are used for it and the kinds of responses, if any, that it elicits.

Although research has been undertaken on GBV, including Family Health and Safety Surveys in multiple countries (UN Women 2011) and more recently on children's online safety in the Pacific region (Third et al. 2020), this is the first time to our knowledge that there has been an effort to embrace a holistic approach to exploring notions of safety that includes physical, online and financial dimensions. This exploration has been undertaken in culturally appropriate ways that suit the local context and align with the growing body of literature on the primacy of Pacific voices and methodologies (for example, Guttenbeil-Likiliki 2020; McDonnell and Regenvanu 2022; Tuck and McKenzie 2015). At a more conceptual level, Alexeyeff (2020) argues for an intersectional, locally informed appreciation of local power dynamics to counter the homogenising and disempowering effects of development feminism.

Methodological gaps

Surveys indicate high levels of domestic violence and sexual violence in the Pacific, perpetrated mostly against women and girls (Office of Development Effectiveness 2019), and underlying socio-cultural norms and gendered biases no doubt contribute to both the prevalence of violence against women and girls, and the inadequate response from the formal justice services. Large-scale surveys rely on agreed definitions and standardised questions to allow comparisons across countries and different groups of women, which enables researchers to make comparisons across different countries and groups of women (Ellsberg and Heise 2005). The most common method is to ask women whether they have experienced a series of behaviourally specific acts, and those women who disclose violence are then asked to specify their relationship to the perpetrator and the frequency or period in which it took place.

The drawback of this approach is that it is not possible to know whether these acts have the same meaning in different cultures or to different women. A further issue is that although such surveys do typically ask about reporting to the police and help-seeking behaviours, there is not the opportunity to fully explore the range of factors that can contribute to a woman's perception of her safety and the strategies she adopts to mitigate and avoid the risk of crime victimisation.

Country specific and localised surveys on crime and safety suggest that women's perceptions of safety in certain events and places are different to those of men (see, for example, Putt and Dinnen 2023; Jewkes 2015; Sustineo 2018) and the national surveys of family health and safety in the region). Moreover, having identified these gender differences, insufficient detail is available to expand on the rich and varied nature of these differences in behaviour and meaning, and the implications of such differences.

There is a major gap in the research, in that no in-depth studies have investigated the subjective experiences and everyday practices of women, their notions of safety and how they seek to protect themselves. Arguably, questionnaires have inherent biases, with instruments largely constructed based on a knowledge base built on research conducted in high income Western settings. In addition, the surveys have not kept abreast of significant new and emerging arenas in the online world, most notably social media, that pose risks and opportunities for users, and the increasing numbers of women across the Pacific involved in the cash economy and utilising financial products such as bank accounts, micro-insurance products and micro-loans. Even though technology-facilitated GBV is a major theme of the Pacific Women Lead program, it is noted that very little research evidence exists regarding its nature and incidence, or on effective prevention (Pacific Community n.d.).

The pilot study

Objectives and approach

The pilot study that this report documents was driven by the need to investigate the meanings of personal and community safety to women from a range of Pacific Island countries, which included their perceptions of risk and how they seek to reduce or prevent harm. Any efforts to promote political and economic empowerment must acknowledge the lived experiences and practices of women as they try to navigate a turbulent, precarious and often dangerous environment. In particular, the study sought to explore how women experience and understand safety, within different contexts and over the life course. In the low- to middle-income countries in the Pacific region, rapid social change is creating new challenges for women, in the terrestrial and online environments, that impact on their physical and online safety, and financial security. The objectives of the study were:

- To explore and document the meanings of physical, financial and online safety for Pacific Island women;
- To improve our understanding of women's experiences that make them feel safe and unsafe, in different contexts, and
- To document and learn from the strategies and measures adopted by women to protect themselves and others in the community.

Conducted in 2024, the pilot study on women's safety involved a collaboration between ANU, APNG:WLN and the University of the South Pacific (USP). The interdisciplinary research team of nine women has complementary and overlapping areas of expertise and experience. The study capitalised on the knowledge and networks of the team. Each team member contributed to the study by conducting the research with Pacific Island women in five countries: Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and Australia. The ANU Human Research Ethics Committee reviewed and approved the research proposal (Protocol: 2023/373) prior to the study's commencement. Ethics clearance was also

received from the USP Research Committee for the research conducted in Fiji.

A collaborative, ethical and safety-first approach underpinned the study. There were seven sub-projects conducted as part of the study, with varying degrees of complementary emphasis. For example, the Vanuatu project focused on the impact of labour mobility schemes and financial security, while a project with university students in Australia focused on online safety. Each of the seven projects was designed and undertaken by team members. Each project also adopted its own methods, although for the most part projects involved interviews and/or group discussions. The Tongan project had a specific Pacific research methodology. A short report was written up on each of the projects, and these include more detail on the various methods that were employed and can be accessed by contacting the authors. Table 1 shows the list of projects, and the researchers who conducted them. Each of the following chapters in this report relates to one of the projects.

Participants across all the sub-projects were invited to complete a short survey on safety (a copy of the questionnaire is provided in the Appendix). The majority of participants did participate, with 124 respondents in total, of whom 27% were men and 72% were women (with one respondent preferring not to answer the question). To better understand the gendered dimensions to the subjects under discussion, men were included as participants in most sub-projects. A short chapter also presents the survey findings, the aim of which was to help identify common threads and distinct characteristics of the very diverse sub-project samples that were involved in the study.

Common threads

This report showcases the main findings from each of the study's components. These were presented to stakeholders at a workshop in Suva, Fiji, in August 2024. Both the team discussion and stakeholder comments have aided the analysis of what is common across the sub-projects but also the distinctive features that relate to each topic and place.

Irrespective of place or the identity of participants, there were issues that were raised that affect perceptions of safety in Pacific Island country settings. These were underlying structural factors that were summed up in the Tongan chapter (chapter 2) as the theme of 'Change and Decline'. There was a pervasive sense across all sub-projects that there have been significant socio-economic changes tied to population pressures and mobility, and globalisation and connectivity, that have led to greater inequality, an erosion in socio-cultural capital and a destabilisation of worldviews.

Precarity emerged in accounts of life in a Fijian urban settlement (chapter 1) and among women's lives in conflict-affected areas of Papua New Guinea (PNG) (chapter 4), as well as the unsettling effects of labour mobility on people's family relations and confidence to

Table 1: The study's sub-projects: title, location, researcher/s, number of participants

Chapter	Project (and chapter) title	Location of research	Research team member/s	Number of participants
1	Safety and unsafety in Veidogo informal settlement	Fiji	Dr Sara N. Amin; Dr Domenica Gisella Calabrò; Ms Jasbant Kaur, USP, Fiji	21
2	Safety of Tongan women living in Tongatapu	Tonga	Dr Gemma Malungahu, DPA, ANU	21
3	Personal safety in public spaces: A pilot study of Port Moresby	PNG	Dr Theresa Meki, DPA, ANU	20
4	A glimpse of women's safety country wide — PNG	PNG	Ms Cathy Alex, APNG:WLN	
5	Women's financial safety project — Port Vila, Vanuatu	Vanuatu	Dr Rochelle Bailey, DPA, ANU	20
6	Perceptions of safety of PALM workers in Australia	Australia	Dr Judy Putt, DPA, ANU	29
7	Perceptions of online safety: A pilot study with Pacific Islander students in Australia	Australia	Dr Amanda H. A. Watson, DPA, ANU	13
8	Survey of Pacific women's safety	All locations	Dr Judy Putt, DPA, ANU	124

Source: The authors.

manage the cash economy (chapter 5). Across spatial dimensions, whether in the home, in public or online, it was apparent study participants felt a higher degree of uncertainty and insecurity than formerly, given the nature and extent of threats, which were deemed to be less predictable than in the past. Even where participants were feeling safe in their physical environments, such as the university students and workers in Australia (such as chapter 6), there was a tangible degree of anxiety about vulnerability in the online world, particularly from scams. However, caution is required in assessing the level of anxiety, which can be relatively diffuse and low level, compared with the immediacy of a physical threat from thieves or potential assailants.

Gender does matter in all sorts of important and subtle ways. As the survey results show in chapter 8, women are more likely to feel unsafe, to see social problems as greater and to see certain social groups in the local context as more vulnerable. Such heightened levels of perceived unsafety, personally and at a community level, are linked to the socio-cultural norms that place an onus on women's responsibility to be mindful of their own wellbeing and the family's wellbeing, which relates to gendered notions of how to be embodied, valued and accepted. An intersectional lens is required to navigate the subtleties of gendered differences because class and ethnicity are shaping women's experiences and narratives. In this project, we found these differences between professional, well-educated women (in chapters 2 and 3) and the more politically and economically marginalised (in chapters 1 and 4).

Nevertheless, there are ongoing challenges with types of specific criminal activity — domestic and family violence and sexual assault — that disproportionately affect women and which can be canvassed often only in oblique ways, and can cause shame and embarrassment to the speaker. For instance, there are difficulties in talking about incest and child sexual abuse, which were raised in interviews and meetings in PNG and Tonga (chapters 4 and 2). Having said this, there are certain locations and activities in the physical and online environments where women may be more vulnerable and targeted; for example, for pickpocketing and theft in public spaces and on public transport (see chapter 3). Participants across groups were more comfortable talking about a common source of trouble — troublesome youth, usually young men — and their access to and use of alcohol and other drugs.

Avenues for assistance and pro-active strategies that were recounted by participants in multiple settings rested on familiarity and relationality, on knowing people and places, and not being alone. Gendered approaches to protection and risk reduction did emerge from the sub-projects. Much of the time, both men and women seek to know places, times of day, and local people to minimise risk and foster **guardianship**. But there can be differences in who is acting as a guardian. Parents take steps to protect children in the online environment (see chapter 7), and there are concerns expressed about children and transnational parenting, with pros and cons associated with the additional family access to capital (chapter 5). Male workers in the PALM scheme referred to 'looking after' their fellow women workers from their home countries while in Australia (chapter 6), which reflects a common theme that the 'ownership' of women's safety relates to her own positioning and compliance with gendered roles. Women also described moving around in public spaces with other women and male relatives to protect each other and dressing 'down' (chapter 3), and only participating in familiar social media groups (chapter 7).

A core theme across the sub-projects was the reliance on **self-instigated and organised strategies** to prevent harm and reduce vulnerability. This accords with an increased individualisation being witnessed across the region and a reduction or weakening in communal approaches to prevention and order making (an example was hiding money, as described in chapter 3). Attitudes to authority figures were frequently ambivalent, as participants referred to the government being behind evictions (chapter 1), and police targeting young men (chapter 1). The survey results showed that, overall, respondents viewed local leaders and village courts as most important for maintaining safety but that when it came to resolving disputes it was the family and police who were viewed as most important (see chapter 8). This underlines the distinction between preventing the escalation of a problem and who or what should intervene if actual conflict or disagreements arise. Some participants, noticeably in urban settings, asserted that those people who help and provide support are those who are then placed at greatest risk. This would also stem from the increased focus on self-protection rather than helping others and being part of a community.

Distinctive issues

The **spiritual domain** was seen as contributing to danger, harm and conflict in several isolated instances. Sorcery (which, depending on the context, may also be referred to as black magic or witchcraft) was mentioned in the discussions in Vanuatu (chapter 5), and in Fiji (chapter 1). Among certain groups there was a pronounced stress on how faith and family values can provide protection and stability. In Tonga, for example, faith in God and nurturing one's family through faith and Tongan cultural values formed an important protective factor to ensuring women safety, and the safety of the family as a whole (chapter 2), and several respondents in Vanuatu in their survey comments explicitly mentioned their personal faith as assisting them to deal with the situations in which they find themselves (chapter 5). It is unclear whether such views represent a fatalistic acceptance of negative events and/or act to comfort and console when such events occur. Certainly, the respect of church leaders and the sociality generated through belonging to a church jointly represented a recurring motif in many discussions and interviews.

In the material realm, not having much and the fear of having it stolen was more pronounced among those

who are poor, i.e. lacking security of land and of income. It was also likely that the places where such participants lived were also where more predatory crime was seen to happen, mainly perpetrated by young men. Only in certain places were natural disasters and the impact of climate change raised as contributing to a diminution of safety, in Vanuatu and in the settlement in Fiji (chapters 5 and 1, respectively). However, more generally, **particular events and their timing** can heighten feelings of precarity and unsafety, with, for example, cyclones in Vanuatu and an eviction notice in Fiji.

Future research

The research described in this report was a pilot study to see how we can unearth more nuanced accounts of safety and risk which pay attention to the places and spaces that people inhabit in their daily lives, and how people perceive their own safety. The findings do strongly support the need for a larger study because of the escalating stresses than many women (and men) are dealing with in the Pacific region. The pilot study has underlined that there are gendered dimensions to how safety is perceived and experienced, and the protection strategies that are adopted. Identifying commonalities across gender and locations was crucial to our growing appreciation of specific and more generalised dimensions to safety. In the future, we would argue that men should be invited to participate in research but the majority of prospective participants need to be women.

Only a small number of participants was involved in each sub-project, which sharpened our focus on intersectionality as participants came from a range of class and ethnic backgrounds and aligned themselves to quite discrete places and kinship groups. As a result, a larger study would allow for a broadening of the scope and more inclusive coverage of the sub-projects so that it would expand to the outer islands in Tonga, a greater number of urban settlements in Fiji, and a wider network of women leaders in PNG. The larger study would enable more targeted approaches to examine online safety and financial security, including links to cross-border labour schemes, in multiple locations. The survey instrument should also be amended to include more questions on financial safety and cultural safety. Further engagement with local, national and regional stakeholders in the private and public sectors will assist in constructing research that is relevant to building preventative approaches that are appropriate, feasible and supportive of women's own efforts to reduce harm to themselves and others.

There is so much more to be done.

This research report

The rest of this report consists of a collection of papers from each of the contributors to the project. As we were undertaking a pilot project, with an emphasis on exploration of the project's research questions, each chapter has different author/s and has its own unique approach, focus and setting.

Court hearing about the eviction, Suva, Fiji
Photograph by Jasbant Kaur

Chapter 1: Safety and unsafety in Veidogo informal settlement

Jasbant Kaur, Domenica Gisella Calabrò and Sara N. Amin

Introduction

In the context of Fiji, larger dynamics of economic, legal, political, environmental and gendered insecurities influence individual and community safety (Bryant-Tokalau 2014). Pangerl (2007:252) argues that 'Perceptions of insecurity are therefore understood as "rooted" in and "routed" through the historical specificities of Fiji's colonial state, postcolonial politics and coups, and inter-communal dialectics of insecurity consequent on them'. A range of studies have highlighted diverse mechanisms through which unsafety is produced and the different ways that women respond to threats of violence and insecurity in Fiji. For example, McKinnon et al. (2016) showed that men's practices of dismissing and/or denying women's knowledge and women's practices of gossiping at work produce unsafety for women in communities trying to take on leadership positions. Trnka (2010) documented how Indo-Fijian women experienced and responded to the violence of the 2000 coup that made both the familiar unsafe and the safe unfamiliar, paying attention to both the larger institutional dynamics, but also the everyday discursive processes linked to story-making and humour as ways of finding safety. These studies are important in pointing to the complexity and multidimensionality of understanding safety and responding to unsafety.

Our study intends to add to that body of literature by examining women's experiences of safety in the context of an informal settlement in Suva. Informal settlements are often represented as unsafe, but with little critical interrogation of how people in these spaces experience safety. Presterudstuen, drawing on Brij Lal's characterisation of informal settlements as centres of 'disruption and rupture', has also highlighted how people in informal settlements have developed relationalities, practices and collectives that are new and beyond 'kinship, family, religious, or ethnic systems of meaning that dominate formalized socialities in the wider community' (2024:7).

Since 2007, the majority (58% in 2021) of Fiji's population has lived in urban areas, and Suva is by far the largest city in the country (Kiddle et al. 2017; World Bank 2022). Almost a third of the Suva population lives in informal settlements (Jones and Sanderson 2017). Informal settlements in Suva are characterised by multiple forms of mobilities, including the displacements of Indo-Fijian farmers and communities with the expiration of land leases and the coup-related violence, increasing penetration of the cash economy into rural life for indigenous and other communities, and environmentally related displacements for all communities (Naidu et al. 2015; Bryant-Tokalau 2014). Socio-economic, cultural diversity and multiple forms of 'rootedness' and formality characterise informal settlements in urban Fiji (Bryant-Tokalau 2014; Naidu et al. 2015).

The social nature of informal settlements, along with the lack of scholarly attention to its inhabitants' experiences linked to safety, motivated us to focus on exploring the meaning of safety among women in the Veidogo settlement, Viria East Road, Vatuwaqa, Suva, Fiji. While this study examines mainly women's perspectives and experiences of safety, it also sheds some light on men's and boys' perspectives on safety and aspects of men's experiences of unsafety in these settlements. We then provide an overview of the way the community in general, and women in particular, live through the multiple dynamics of (un)safety, paying attention to changing socio-economic, political and environmental contexts.

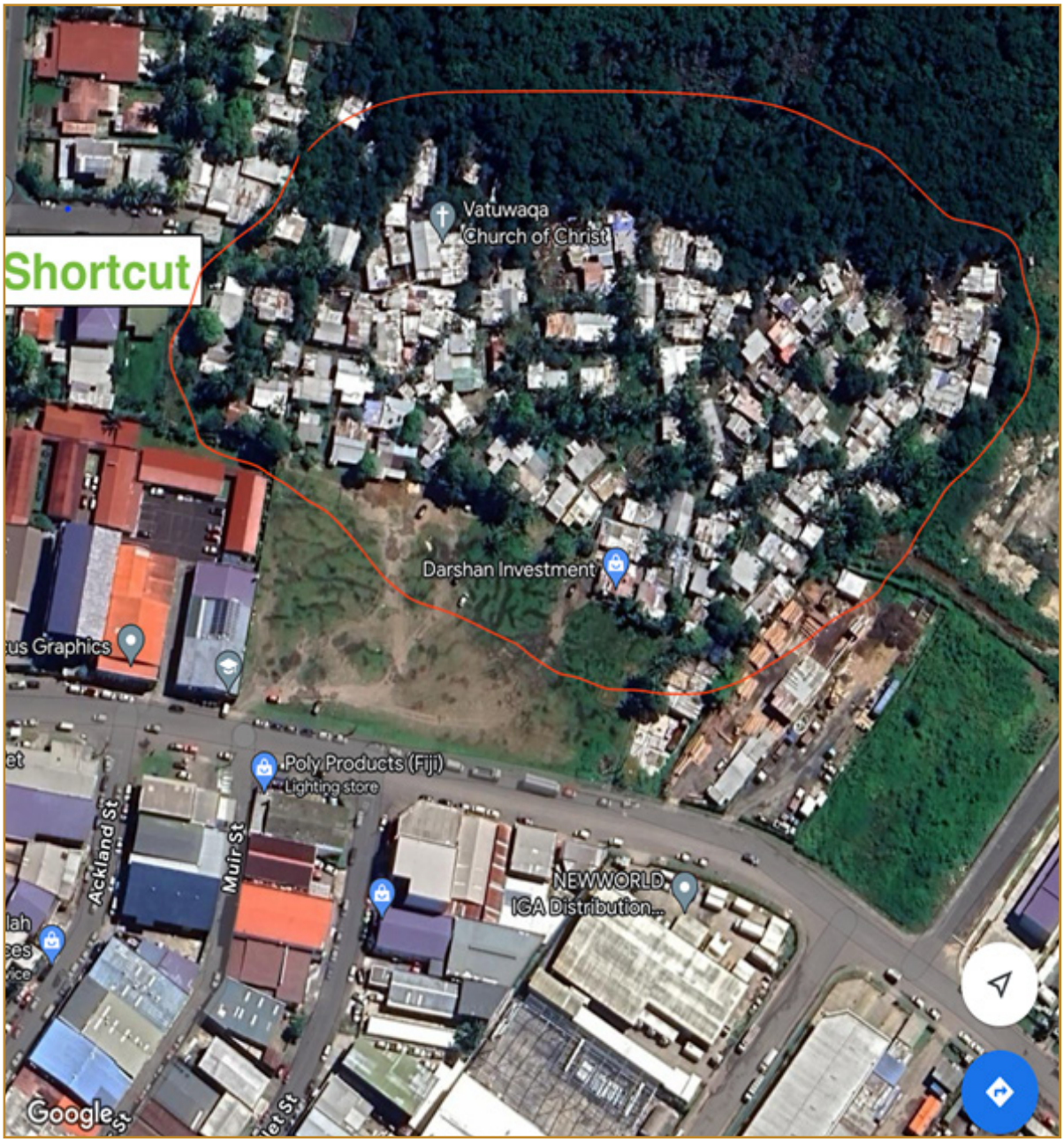
Study setting

Located six kilometres from bustling Suva, Veidogo (see figure 1) is among the oldest squatter settlements in the area, with roots stretching back over 80 years. Jasbant's grandfather, Ram Sarup, was its first resident, drawn by the site's proximity to essential services. His early companionship with an iTaukei[4] family sparked a bond that has endured through generations. Over time, new settlers arrived, including families relocated from other informal settlements that became industrialised like Rups Raiwaqa. This influx has shaped Veidogo into a diverse community where some families expanded by building new homes nearby, while others sold their houses or welcomed relatives to live within its boundaries.

In its earlier days, Veidogo thrived with a vibrant ecosystem, abundant with mangroves and seafood. Residents cultivated gardens, enjoyed fruit trees, and during king tides, seawater filled the community, bringing seafood almost to their doorsteps. Built on stilts to adapt to the tides, homes were near the shore, which was central to daily life and food sharing. A sport ground hosted weekend-long tournaments, where Indo-Fijians and iTaukei came together, fostering a strong sense of unity and prosperity.

Today, industrialisation has transformed the settlement, encroaching on wetlands and pushing the shoreline over 100 metres away, leaving rocks and sparse mangroves. Frequent flooding has eroded the lush greenery and playgrounds, while increasing overcrowding has strained relationships (see figure 2).

Figure 1: Veidogo



Source: Google Maps.

Many residents now experience social distance and divisions between iTaukei, Indo-Fijians, newcomers, and older settlers, deepened by socio-economic inequalities. Despite environmental and social challenges, Veidogo remains a secure and familiar home for its residents, more stable than other parts of Suva. For many, especially women, the community's safety is a valuable aspect, although eviction threats loom over this fragile stability.

Methodology

Our study adopted an intersectional lens, directing our analytical attention to the dynamics that emerge from intersecting power differentials (Cho et al. 2013). We explore how this physical, economic and social locality, which dominant discourse tends to represent as dangerous, informs women's concerns over safety. We acknowledge that power dynamics within the settlement itself may nuance the understandings and experiences of safety of the women living in this space. Particularly, we

Figure 2: Overcrowding

Source: Photograph by Jasbant Kaur.

paid attention to social categories like age, ethnicity, status within the settlement, and disability.

The research team member Jasbant Kaur's knowledge of the informal settlements' reality, and particularly the Veidogo settlement, where she grew up, has guided other team members (Sara N. Amin, Domenica Gisella Calabrò). As such, Jasbant has also overseen the communication with the settlement, where some of her family members and the iTaukei people she grew up with still reside. As a Fijian Hindi and Fijian speaker, she has equally helped the team make the topic more comprehensible and helped recognise local nuances.

In October 2023, the whole research team offered a *sevusevu* of *yaqona*[5] to a party representative of the Indigenous Fijian community in the settlement, as per cultural protocol in this space. The ritual unfolded at the place of the iTaukei family that had been the longest in the settlement, which equally hosts community gatherings, including the meeting of the youth group. Concurrently, we introduced our study to one of the Indo-Fijian women residing in the settlement.

Our actual data collection started in March 2023, ending in July 2024. During that time, we tried to elicit understandings of safety and risk (including physical, spiritual, financial, environmental and online safety), and to draw out where participants feel safe or at risk, what makes those places safe or unsafe (including infrastructure, services, social media, social actors and more), what places them in unsafe places, and how they respond to/navigate unsafe places (including who they reach out to). From the first encounters to our visits for data collection, we observed group interactions and people's stances, paying particular attention to dynamics signalling safety or discomfort.

Fully relying on the use of *talanoa*[6] to probe experiences, perceptions and strategies of respondents linked to safety, we had initially envisaged to structure that as focus groups. However, our first step was to hold interviews with the wife and husband within the family that hosted the *sevusevu*, who seemed to act as gatekeepers within the community. Both could get a better sense of what the project was interested in and how it could benefit the settlement's community. In turn, our team could get a more detailed introduction into the current settlement dynamics that may inform safety issues, as well as their respective roles in contributing to maintaining safety within this space. Eventually, we opted for one-on-one interviews, most of which, however, then organically evolved into informal collective discussions. An online survey was shared at a later stage.

The following reality of the Veidogo settlement and the power dynamics between participants and researchers justified the adjustments in terms of data collection.

1. The settlement has significantly expanded and increased in population to 295 children and 545 adults which make up 840 total population spread across 139 households, with a now constant

appearance of 'new faces'. Many of the settlement's inhabitants do not know each other, and, more importantly, they may mistrust each other, with repercussions on their sense of safety.

2. The number of Indo-Fijian inhabitants has decreased significantly and the remaining Indo-Fijian households seem to keep to themselves. One of these has experienced conflict with two related households.
3. The wife within the family who hosted the *sevusevu* became our focal point for the iTaukei community. However, rather than gathering women for discussion, she gradually directed us towards a few women she trusted, staying over for their interviews, thus participating in all the conversations, and occasionally helping to explain some questions in iTaukei. While the three researchers were discussing the compensation for her assistance and time, she indirectly shared that she expected to be remunerated for her assistance to continue supporting the project. Her approach may have been encouraged by her old connection with the researcher Jasbant and the honorarium interviewees had been receiving.
4. While Jasbant was acquainted with some other iTaukei women residing in the settlement, she did not personally try to involve them in data collection to avoid overriding our focal point's role in the iTaukei community.
5. Due to limited availability of privacy, people would just stay or come in the spaces participants had made themselves available for interviews, and from there would just join the conversation.

The participants included 14 women: nine iTaukei women, including one elderly woman with a disability, and five Indo-Fijian women, aged 42 to 69 years. While we had anticipated including some men, particularly through community leaders, we ended up with seven men in total who shared their views. These included three iTaukei men (the husband of the oldest family; the latter's young nephew; and a man in his thirties), two older Indo-Fijian men, who were husbands of two Indo-Fijian female participants, and two youths. All participants were provided with an honorarium of FJ$30 for interviews and FJ$10 for the online survey respondents.

Findings

Responding to unsafety

In our small sample of interviews, we still saw a range of experiences and perceptions of safety. For example, for Kamini (67), there was no safety in the settlement. When asked what safety meant to her, she said:

> That's what I'm thinking, what should I say to you. There is no sense of security here, no privilege for cars, not for lights, water everywhere (leaks inside the house). When we are sick, we have to go to the main road to bring a taxi, then go to hospital despite it being morning or evening. Don't know what safety is. No sense of security.

However, Priya (69), who has been living in the Veidogo settlement for 40 years, and perhaps 10 or more years of that alone in her section, pointed out never having been mugged, despite non-restrictive movements in the night. For others, there was relative safety in Veidogo, compared to other places. For example, a young woman said it was still the safest community in Vatuwaqa, as she made comparisons with the nearby community.

The notion of safety in the presence of unsafety as perceived by people in the Veidogo community comes in many forms. For some, it is in companionship, often relying on family members (older grandchildren, men in the family, or other women) and neighbours, while for others it is in being alert and having contingency plans. These contingency plans often mean that women limit their activities. For example, Maya (42) shared: 'Like, we don't go to sea now, before we used to go to the seaside, and now we don't go to the neighbours too, because it's not safe nowadays.' This is not just about leisure but also access to food. Women not being able to go fishing alone even during the day means there is an increased burden for them to look for company and share their catch. For Salote (66) who has been in Veidogo since she was 16, it meant no conflict or fighting, while for her daughter Mareta (33) it meant knowing neighbours. Teaching family values and ensuring their loved ones do the right thing was also identified as a definition of safety. For many their faith was also a safety net. For instance, Rani affirmed 'When you go [out to pray] to God, please keep my house in your hands'.

In a group discussion, the iTaukei friends Vasemaca (51) and Sala (63) shared their recommendations to kids:

> Vasemaca: When they're going to school, they always walk you to the school. If one student, their car comes and stops up to you, don't talk to them.
>
> Sala: Don't talk to them.
>
> Vasemaca: If they give something, don't eat it. It's very dangerous nowadays.

Some women report activities to Mosese, Vasemaca's husband and a member of one of the oldest families in the settlement, who acts as the head chief. He is therefore looked upon as the person who can call out problematic issues. Mosese shared:

> For safety in this place ... like we are staying here as a brother and a sister, we Fijians are very near to each other, so the safety is for other people from outside, outside from this area, they can come in and create a problem here, but at the moment it's good, we look at each other back and move on, like children we sending them here, there, come back because we know each other, like me I go around to everybody's house, I know the face of everybody.

When women have no choice but to venture into unsafe places at unsafe times, women cope however they can, by how they hold their purses, sometimes carrying kitchen knives. Young women are told to scream and shout out the names of their fathers or men in the community. Parents particularly worry about the safety of their daughters and take precautionary measures to accompany them — which has implications for young women's mobility. An elderly father, Suren (69), used to pick up his daughters every night, worried about 'What if it happens?'. Similarly, Priya, a single mother used to be her daughter's escort as a precautionary measure. Her main concern was catcalling from men on foot and drivers and a fear that someone might pull her into a vehicle. Another iTaukei mother shared, 'So wherever you go, you take your daughter with you. That's for safety, you can't leave her alone in the house you know. The boys nowadays it's very dangerous.' Ana advised, 'Plenty of things have been happening here and there [including rape] if us sometime during the day time we feel unsafe. Plenty street kids around.' These things have also occurred in nearby settlements of Nanuku and Wailea S, which make the women of Veidogo anxious.

People may also rely on others in the community. For instance, the Indo-Fijian Suren noted being able to leave the house under the supervision of iTaukei neighbours:

> The neighbour keeps an eye on the house. When I went to drop my daughter off at the airport, I told the Fijian ladies they got their grog and sat at either the back porch or front they sat and wait for us [while they drank their grog]. They don't take any money. So, when I come back from the trip, I just give some kava and cigarettes, or some takeaway food. Many times, we have gone to the airport to drop the relatives.

This is a particularly interesting observation given how Indo-Fijian inhabitants may fear the iTaukei people in the community. Suren and his wife do not socialise with anyone in the community, but easily coexist with their iTaukei neighbours to the extent of entrusting them with the safety of their place when they are away.

The recent formation of a committee in the settlement has also been an important source of safety, at least for some. Sala was one of them:

> Before there was no committee, we didn't know what was happening. But now when the committee is, we know our footsteps every day. What is going here, what is that.

Lately, there have also been attempts to start activities towards community building. They all come together to clean around the settlement and enjoy some sports and lunch afterwards.

The concept of neighbourhood watch used to be quite strong in the community, where people looked out for each other. Despite the increasing mistrust with new faces coming and drugs entering this space, some iTaukei try to hold on to this practice to resist the insecurities produced by those very changes. More specifically, iTaukei people may find a sense of community and a safe space at the acting chief's house, where some meet regularly, including a youth group. There is no such space for the now small Indo-Fijian community, where there seems to be significant mistrust, reinforcing the sense of being unsafe.

Across ethnic groups, some presented jealousy as another source of insecurity for people, sometimes framed through a narrative of witchcraft. The nervousness of witchcraft was observed more in the older population in comparison to the middle-aged and younger individuals. Maya, for example, declared, 'Yes, it is [jealousy] a big problem. Because nowadays people don't want to see anyone going ahead of them.' Salote shared that witchcraft happens but also drew on her faith to counter it. 'We believe that God is more powerful than witchcraft, although we experience it. The power of God.'

Land insecurity

Over the years, the community has been repeatedly told that they would get evicted and more recently had received a formal legal notice. At every general election, there have been talks about relocation of the people of the Veidogo settlement. Being accustomed to this, people expected the talks to die down, even more so since the government shift during the recent elections in 2022. When they were issued a formal eviction notice, it suddenly seemed that this time they had to move.

The promises of being relocated to better conditions (Begum 25/10/2018; Chand 1/6/2020; *Canberra Times* 12/12/2022) raised hope for some as Gopal (33) shared: 'I feel good about it because the kids will have a future, I could have turned out better but I followed the bad crowd and didn't achieve much in life'. However, for others, there are important reasons to stay, hence the eviction notice was a major source of emotional and economic stress. Some community members had extended or renovated their homes recently only to be told to move in the coming months. People would have saved for months to do urgent repairs and now found themselves in despair of losing money as well as their houses. Kamini recalled that the day they got the formal eviction notice, her husband didn't sleep all night because he was worried about where they would go. Most of the people who live in the community live pay cheque to pay cheque and many don't have any savings: 'Where us people going to go, because us people got no money to buy the land' Kamini wondered. Salote lamented, 'We're getting out. No, I have to look for another school, a new place we have to go. We don't know what will happen there.' The location of the community is equally important, for the members of the community continue to want to live here also because of the settlement's proximity to town. As Salote further elaborated:

It's a bit difficult because we're so used to the environment. And we're close to where the children go to school and close to the workers. But, even though I have two sons, they're working close by. One is working in the industrial area and the other one is working at the Laucala Bay service station. My husband is working for the council. So it's close to them. If we have to move out of here, it will be hard. Because sometimes, even my son, starts at half past five in the morning. And he walks to work. He said when there's no taxi or anything, he'll walk. It's easy for him to walk. And my husband too. We're both the same. We can both walk to work.

This constant reality of being in a place but being under threat of being displaced is thus another key source of how insecurity is lived in the community. Vasemaca put it clearly: 'The land. We want our own. We want our own land.' While the land doesn't belong to anyone in the community, land can also be a source of dispute within the community. Kamini mentioned that she wanted to build a porch (hers was the only house without one), but her neighbour wouldn't let her and said that the land was hers. Not being able to build a porch spills over into other aspects of safety. Kamini explained that without the porch, 'When it's hot I just close the door and wear undergarments day time, night time', and she can't keep her door and windows open, to avoid theft.

New faces

With increased urbanisation, the proximity to town that motivates many of its inhabitants to stay has also attracted more and more new families. According to people in the community, relatives of the early settlers come from the islands and other parts of the country to stay with their families in the settlement while looking for work, and after a year or so they build a house next to their relatives. Since there are new people in the community, many feel that the sense of communal responsibility has slowly faded, especially since the people who stayed there for a long time have either died or moved away. Instead, the presence of 'new faces' was repeatedly mentioned as a source of anxiety.

Night time I'm afraid to walk because there are so many new faces in that settlement now, so we don't trust anybody. (Maya)

New faces coming here is very risky for ladies and small girls...to see new faces here we don't know the daytime and we are staying alone in the house. Maybe something happens if the husband goes out or the family we don't know. (Vasemaca)

'I don't feel safe because those that are outside our community (those that were staying there before they were relocated) something happens every day there is a police presence, they must be stealing why else would the police come all the time. (Rani)

While several people expressed concerns about the new faces in the settlement, a few of them were not worried about seeing new people in the community per se but focused on the increasing number of iTaukei teenagers hanging out in the community. Since there have been reports of theft in the community, the women are anxious when there are no men present in the house. Other than theft, there was concern about these new faces, especially of male youth being seen as a source of fear. Sala noted:

But nowadays there are plenty of houses here, we don't know each other. Before we used to go from my house to their house, to another Indian house. We know each other. But now when we go around we are frightened. No light, no electricity... just worry about them [our children] because we don't know each other here. Because plenty of boys here, we don't know them, where they come from. So because our kids, are big and even they are girls too. We can't just leave them like that.

Since there is a canteen within the settlement (with electricity) people prefer paying a few extra dollars to buy from them rather than go to the main shop. Vasemaca noted, 'We can go buy the stuff there rather than going up to the main road, it's very risky, you know, some of the bad boys there at the shop, we don't know them.' She added that, 'Sometimes when the little girls/boys go to the shop during nighttime they will rob their money or phone. It's very risky going out. Never mind, it's a bit expensive we can go and buy the stuff.'

Electricity

Women in the community repeatedly expressed how the lack of electricity impacts their safety and security. Since they rely on solar power, which is unreliable during cyclones and strong winds, they are often left without light. This situation is worsened by the fire hazards posed by using hurricane lanterns. This lack of electricity limits access to safety resources. Vasemaca described how this affects calling the police: 'We don't have electricity. We have to charge our phones elsewhere, so sometimes we can't call the police if the battery is low. What can we do?'

People may use candles and lanterns for tasks like washing dishes or reading, keeping them close for visibility, especially in latrines outside the homes. However, this adds to the risk of fire. Food preservation is equally challenging without refrigeration, meaning families cannot bulk buy meat or vegetables, affecting both financial and health security. Electricity shortages also affect education and mobility. 'No light, no electricity here ... When kids have school, they need electricity for their schoolwork', said Sala. 'We can't go

out at night … it's very dark here, so we need electricity to make us light it.'

Additionally, children's uniforms are often wrinkled or even damp since solar power cannot support ironing, a challenge that has persisted for generations. A kindergarten started by international volunteers had to relocate to a neighbouring area with electricity, depriving young children of access to pre-school in their own community. At night, residents ask taxi drivers to shine headlights to illuminate their path home, a long-practised solution that offers only limited safety, particularly for women who live closer to main access points.

Despite the community's efforts, petitions for reliable electricity have gone unanswered each time the government changes. Priya voiced a sentiment of resignation: 'Even if I have to stay in a tiny house, it will be fine as long as we have electricity. There are no chances of getting power here.'

Youth

Youth disobedience seemed to be a major issue in the community, especially among men. From substance abuse to theft and violence, youth is allegedly involved in crimes:

> Because that small son everywhere grab the phone, the money like that 11-year-old and everybody said this small one grab [my] phone. (Kamini)

> The boys have changed, like the drug addicts. Before, they were drunken […] They go into prison today, come out tomorrow, they never cause any trouble. But this, the young generation that we have now, they are different [drug related]. (Salote)

More generally, youth may be depicted as a source of distress and disturbance. Some older women pointed out how drugs and alcohol now affect girls and young women too, which caused even greater concern about the 'state' of youth. At the same time, while there were some reports of young women being drunk and disorderly in the community, young men and their use of alcohol and drugs were repeatedly highlighted as a problem. Gopal pointed to how things had changed for young people similar to the way the land has changed with the multiple reclamations. Young people used to be able to catch seafood and sell it to get money and help with household expenses; however, since the shores have been reclaimed the sea is no longer a reliable source of income. Some older residents felt that deaths of fathers had affected youth behaviour as well. Again, Salote observed that, 'Because some of them have no father, their father passed away. Some of them have no other option. So, mixing around, eh? When you mix around with the wrong crowd, you get into the mess, right?' Perhaps more importantly, death of community members is ever present. During our fieldwork, there were multiple funerals in the community. This presence points to another site of insecurity and unsafety for the community, as families lose income earners and carers.

Substance abuse

Increased substance abuse emerged as a strong source of concern in contemporary Veidogo. While previously men, especially younger ones, indulged in marijuana, more recently there have been reports of chemical drugs like methamphetamine and 'ice', as well as cocaine, being used and peddled within Veidogo boundaries. Moreover, the community reported that drug use was now common even among younger kids.

> The only thing changed is small kids smoke now unlike before. Now kids smoke in front of parents and parents don't say anything so can't say much. (Suren)

> Here kids age 13 and 14 smoke stand in a circle, puff and pass on. (Suren)

> It's not safe to come late at night nowadays, because there are some [inaudible] boys who drink marijuana in front of the house, and it's not safe for us ladies. (Maya)

People in the community are also known to sniff glue to get high. While this practice has been common among adolescents in other places, in the Veidogo settlement youths also indulge in it. The acting head chief identified the circulation of drugs as a major presence within the community:

> There's a network going on here. If you go inside, you will be settled. If you want to leave, you have to go to the school. There's a network. If you want to leave, you have to go to the school. If you want drugs, everything. That's what they say. There's always this kind of crime. Especially with the girls in the school. And now I'm not going to the school.

Within that same discussion, Vasemaca added 'Last week, at the school sit-in, one school here in Suva, she told me, there was one girl, who was selling drugs inside the school'. While drug users are scattered across the community, the sale and usage of drugs seems to be mainly concentrated around the area where the founders are located. That allegedly acts as a hub for purchasing and use, due to nearby water meters providing some privacy. Reports of fights related to substance abuse have also emerged, but so far it has not escalated to the point of involving security forces.

Petty crimes

Residents reported frequent thefts in the community, from everyday items to construction materials and solar panels. One participant recounted, 'One time somebody took off my louvre blade and came inside, they took my son's stuff … Nike shoes and the job site safety boots and my son's watch.' Many avoid leaving clothes or shoes

unattended outdoors, as even these items are frequently stolen. With reliance on solar power, solar panels are a newer target for thieves, though thefts of benzine lights were also common in the past. Priya, recalling the theft of her benzine light, emphasised its loss as it was 'the most important thing in the household'.

The community members often suspect these petty criminals are from neighbouring informal settlements. Kamini shared her experience of losing a new smartphone: 'One o'clock lunch hour, I made the noodles … and my phone was there … I just go and wash my hands. Same time my phone finished, gone.' Long-term resident Gopal observed, 'Things have changed a lot, these days everyone looking for money', though he feels his established presence in the area makes him less vulnerable. Suren noted, 'The thief, they know who has money and who doesn't. We are old people; we wouldn't have money on us.'

Mugging is a frequent concern, especially around the local automated teller machine (ATM), which serves as a hub for Veidogo and neighbouring communities. Robberies also occur openly, sometimes even in broad daylight. An elderly couple lost their groceries while away for a hospital visit. In another instance, thieves arrived with a carrier, pretending to move out the household's possessions while neighbours, unaware, assumed the family was moving. In this context, residents' precarious housing status contributes to their vulnerability to 'easy' robberies.

Opportunistic thefts, like stealing a running generator, as Vasemaca described, are common: 'Brothers that side when the generator is still on … they will steal the generator and run away.' Others are more calculated, with thieves using tools like bolt cutters to gain access to homes. Rani shared that, 'Our neighbour Salen's phone got stolen; Jioji [another neighbour] asked him to use his phone … and he just ran away with it.' The growing prevalence of petty crimes has led to an erosion of trust among residents, amplifying a sense of vulnerability and community disconnection.

Violence

Violence is an all-too-common reality for this community. Kamini has personally faced violence twice while walking home from work at night, a time when no buses are available: 'Two times myself on the road when I knock off from [work] at 10 pm … four Fijian people grabbed my bag and want to punch me … I took out the kitchen knife and they ran away.' Now, she always carries a knife for protection. The nearby suburb of Nabua, frequented by settlement residents for shopping, is also known for crime. Recently, gang-related violence in the area escalated, with 45 men and 14 juveniles appearing in court for violent brawls (Daucakacaka 16/7/2021). While Veidogo feels safer than other nearby squatter settlements, there is still concern. Gopal mentioned, 'Other places like Nanuku and Wailea are very bad … our side is much better because we grew up together'.

Safety concerns extend to public transport. Many residents, especially women, feel unsafe taking buses at night and avoid shortcuts that could expose them to crime. Petty thieves often target this area, sometimes returning to the settlement to sell stolen goods.

Police interactions add another layer of insecurity. Nineteen-year-old Manasa described a troubling incident: 'Some gang of policemen came … They thought we were playing some kind of a game … They beat us a bit. Even the small kids.' Fear of police retaliation kept residents silent, even in unjust situations. Yet, despite this, many still hope for stronger police action to deter crime, as the community sees little regular police patrol.

Discussions around domestic violence (DV) remain hushed. In a quiet conversation, Vasemaca hinted that some women had experienced violence, but attempts to discuss DV further were subtly discouraged. Occasionally, there was a joking reference to couple disputes, and Kamini noted that 'Every weekend, the ladies are drunk and fight and shout.' Suren, living among elderly neighbours, reported DV as rare, possibly due to the age and maturity of residents. The reluctance to address DV reflects a broader issue of bystander inaction. While civil society organisations encourage reporting abuse, people often avoid calling the police. One resident commented, 'No [don't report] because the police don't come', capturing the community's scepticism about police assistance.

Overall, violence — whether from external threats, internal conflicts or interactions with police — casts a shadow over community life. There is an underlying issue of violence against women and girls, though largely unspoken and often dismissed as mere rumours. As a result, women's safety remains a concern, and the community faces ongoing challenges in fostering an environment of genuine security and trust.

Security forces

Community members seemed to have a mistrust towards police in the area. Many people interviewed felt the police weren't doing enough towards keeping them and the neighbourhood safe. 'Nothing, I just go ask [police] every day, [they say] We going to call, we going to now call, [it's been] six months now'. Kamini continued, 'The police too nowadays, police only sit down and watch the movie on the phone like that, they can do his work. When I go the police, police post there, every time they watching the movie there like that.'

Some believed that police response was much better with the previous Fiji First government: 'When Fiji First government, we want to go, do complaints on small issues, the police come at the same time.' In the past, there used to be some police patrolling in the area next to the reclamation, but this was largely due to two police officers who were then living at their relative's place in the Veidogo settlement. Some also felt that police behaviour was prejudicial against young boys. Vasemaca described how 'sometimes when the police

come, they assault the small boys for sitting down there. That's not good, they should come [and] ask them nicely what are you doing there.' The police have in the past searched teenager's pockets and taken their money.

It was noted that police had run surveys within the community and asked people how they could better assist the people of Veidogo. However, there were no follow-ups or actions taken on their recommendations. It was believed a *talanoa* session between community members and the police force could turn things around, for those could play a vital role at reducing people's concerns over their safety. Our interviewees hoped for regular police patrols around the community, especially at night and in the outskirts.

Politics

Based on our conversations, there seemed to be a pattern of politicians visiting the community during the campaigning period and then forgetting about them as the general elections ended. The acting chief emphasised, '[only] before the election, they want us to tick. It happens all the time'. Kamini lamented that those politicians 'promised us that they will take us out of here, if [they] win Fiji First, they will take us out of here and subgrade our land … The old people — will give us land for free'. The Fiji First government had guaranteed the community that they would be relocated and would get money to rebuild, although there was no clarity on the type of land where they were told they would have a place to rebuild. Participants also argued that with the Bainimarama government, social welfare benefits were better, and the allowances for food and transportation were higher. It is important to note that this was not a subject of inquiry and further investigation would be needed to verify if there was a reduction for everyone.

Following the most recent eviction notice, there has been more attention from the government:

> Now last night we had a meeting here, it was 180 houses here in Veidogo. But actually, we are happy that the government came and talked to us last night. We are very happy about that. So we are looking forward. God is everything. He knows what we are crying for about our place. We think God will give us [some]where to go. We had a committee here in Veidogo. We always go around and have meetings, so we have to talk to each other about what we have to do. And also this Easter we are going to do the clean-up in our village here. So we had a committee, we had to confirm everybody to come to do the cleaning in our village. So we are very happy, everything is coming to our village. The government is coming.

While participants referred to tensions between the different ethnic communities in indirect ways, Kamini did share that '… when Rabuka did the coup [1987] then people troubled us a lot, saying go back to India'.

Health and safety

Environmental degradation and inadequate waste and drainage services have also led to significant health and safety concerns in this community. Sewage issues persist, with open pipes draining wastewater onto common walkways. Maya observed, 'The sewage problem, there is no proper sewer line now', while Kamini described how, 'black, dark black water' with a bad smell flows openly. Mosquito-borne illnesses are another ongoing threat, especially with stagnant water following rains. Despite complaints, the health department has not addressed the mosquito issue. Ana highlighted, 'last year, there were plenty of mosquitoes and we sent an email… up until now no one has come'. Stray dogs add to the health risks. Fire hazards compound these risks. Homes, made of wood and corrugated iron, are highly flammable and close together. Vasemaca recalled, 'There was a fire … so the fire authority took a lot of time to bring the hose right to the house', resulting in the home burning down. Many rely on kerosene stoves or wood fires due to propane's high cost, further increasing fire risks in the community.

In all this, healthcare access is limited. A previously available nursing station is now closed. Salote, who relies on a wheelchair, noted that 'I'm not able to go when it's raining like this'. Emergency response is also challenging. To this regard, Gopal shared that during an ambulance call for his father, 'all of us just come together and lift the stretcher and manage to take them to the transport' due to uneven paths.

Flooding

Flooding has become a major issue in the Veidogo community in the past decade. There is equally an issue of saltwater inundation during high tides. Combined with the drainage issue, the floodwaters pose a health risk to everyone in the community. 'When it floods, we can't go outside and if we go, we get sores on the legs', Kamini noted.

Middle-aged Maya pointed out that flooding was exacerbated due to unhygienic practices, 'because nowadays people, they don't clean drains, they don't clean the yards, their compounds'. Flooding, as well as saltwater inundation, could affect the sewerage system used by the community. In Veidogo there are no sewage pipes provided by relevant government ministries. In response, people create a system by digging holes to the depth of two drums and reinforcing the mud walls of the ditch with metal drums, which form the septic system as well as the foundation of the latrine. In the past, this system worked well for the community; however, since flooding has become a major issue, the reinforced

metal drums rust and deteriorate quickly due to salt and human waste seeping into these flooded waters.

Heavy rain and flooding also make the area swampy and this poses a risk of falling and causing serious injuries, which could be exacerbated for elderly people. As we saw Salote mention above, disability access for those using wheelchairs or crutches would be even harder in these weather conditions. Residents do what they can to cope with the challenges. For example, Kamini said:

> When I go outside, to save my shoes I wear plastic, I put the plastic from here, put the rubber band. When I go on the road, I take out the plastic, put it in the rubbish bin.

Conclusion

All of the various themes that we have so far identified point out how women's understandings and experiences of safety in Veidogo fall within collective experiences of insecurity in the context of informal settlements in Fiji. Based on the male understandings and experiences of safety and unsafety within the settlement we came across, and how these interact with women's, many concerns are shared between men and women. While we focus on women's experiences of safety in Veidogo settlement, we then need to recognise how dominant the non-gender structural dynamics are.

During our data collection, we witnessed a sudden shift in the mood as the settlement's inhabitants received an eviction notice, amplifying the above-mentioned structural dynamics. While eviction had always been in the air, this was the first time the settlement's inhabitants received a notice. This event stirred what we may describe as a safety crisis. At the same time, this sense of crisis subsided as people found reassurance in the visit of government representatives and somehow reverted to a state of precarity. Indeed, precarity underpins the various themes we identified. All of the settlers are in a precarious situation due to land insecurity, economic instability, political vulnerabilities and environmental degradation. The gendered dimension of our study lies in the way women in particular, but also men, navigate this collective precarity and keep safe through uncertainty.

More broadly, we have observed a changing community, marked by deteriorating trust, 'strangers' coming and going, and increased presence of drugs. The uncertainty and distress generated by these shifts reinforce the precarity of Veidogo's inhabitants, thus heightening their sense of unsafety and requiring constant adjustments to their strategies towards safety. Contrary to our expectations, the ethnic dimension barely emerged as a feature of that precarity. When it came to politics, a general neglect from all governments dominated the discussion across ethnic groups. As anticipated in the methodology section, the Indo-Fijian population has significantly decreased following the coups, and the families who remain seem to have been mostly keeping to themselves. That on its own is a safety response. If anything, intra-ethnic tensions emerged as a source of insecurity to the point of preventing us from interviewing women in a family antagonistic towards Jasbant's family.

Within this scenario, domestic violence seems to be exclusively a concern of women. However, the very nature of the Veidogo settlement, which allows limited space for privacy and where people are now mostly trying to mind their own business, has made this topic quite elusive. Ideally, the conversations we started may create more opportunities to examine that aspect. At the same time, it is important to underscore how these women's narratives kept coming back to the wider economic, social and political structures shaping these women's everyday experiences of unsafety.

Chapter 2: Safety of Tongan women living in Tongatapu

Gemma Melvena Malungahu

Overview

This section presents the findings from a pilot study that explored the meaning of safety among Tongan women in Tongatapu. The study was informed by three Tongan research approaches, namely the *Kakala* framework (Thaman 2006), *Talanoa* (Vaioleti 2016) and *Tālanga* (Ofanoa et al. 2015; see Glossary at the end of this chapter for translations of all Tongan terms), carried out with eligible participants, who were required to identify as Tongan, live in Tongatapu (at the time of the study) and be between 18 and 65 years of age.

Altogether, there were 21 people who took part in the Tongan pilot study. There were three group *talanoa* and 12 individual *talanoa*. A heterogenous sample was gained with an age range between 22 and 63 years. The occupations of individuals ranged from chief executive officer (CEO), to government officials, to workers in the non-government organisation (NGO) sector, to private companies and church groups.

Tonga is a highly conservative and Christianised country. The findings from the report reflected this in terms of how safety was perceived by those who took part in the study. Safety was defined as the importance of *tau'ataina* (freedom) and *malu* (shelter and protection from harsh conditions in the physical, social and spiritual environment). The foundation of Tongan society is the family unit or the home, where aspects such as order, harmony and balance in the home, encompassing holistic aspects of safety, a strong connection to Tongan culture and identity (*anga fakatonga moe nofo 'a kāinga*) were identified as key aspects of safety not only for Tongan women but for Tongan society in general.

The crumbling of the home describes the worsening of safety for Tongan women due to multiple factors such as drugs, the loss of *anga fakatonga* (Tongan culture), taboos[7] being broken between father and daughter, brother and sister, distance from God, the works of the enemy, intergenerational strongholds and curses, influence of drugs and poverty (prostitution), and its influence on issues of incest and teenage pregnancy.

This section prioritises the recommendations that were put forward by the participants, which made up the final theme of the findings termed 'opportunities to improve safety for Tongan women'. These include improving one's relationship with God, rebuilding the family unit, reconnecting with *anga fakatonga* and *anga fakafonua* (patriotic values, traditions and customs); creating a safe space, the importance of showing love, compassion and care to our daughters, choosing one's husband wisely, and the creation of policies and legislation to improve safety within institutions.[8]

Background

The safety of women can be described in various ways. International literature frames the safety of women in terms of being free from all forms of violence and abuse, ensuring the environment in which women live is safe and free from violence, harm and danger, and ensuring healthcare and other important services important for human and women rights are accessible and safe (UN Women 2022). Despite this, little research concerning what safety means for women in the Pacific, including Tonga, has been undertaken. Violence against women globally, regionally in the Pacific and nationally in Tonga is of great concern. The first Tongan study, the National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Tonga, was undertaken in 2009 and found that 79 per cent of women reported having experienced physical or sexual violence once in their lifetime (Jansen et al. 2012). Of those who took part in the study who were married or ever partnered, 33 per cent had been victims of physical violence, 17 per cent victims of sexual violence and 24 per cent subject to emotional violence (Jansen et al. 2012). Although the study was undertaken over a decade ago, the issue of violence against women is still of concern.

These findings are supported by the 2019 Tonga Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey (MICS), undertaken by the Tonga Statistics Department (Tonga Statistics Department 2020) in collaboration with other national ministries,[9] which indicated that 20.7 per cent of ever-partnered women have experienced physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime, 3.6 per cent of ever-partnered women have experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime and 18.6 per cent of ever-partnered women have experienced emotional violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. The same survey assessed the attitudes of women aged 15 to 49 years relating to whether they think that husbands/partners are justified to hit or beat their wives/partners in a variety of situations. The majority of women[10] were from rural areas (72%) compared with urban areas (24%). Of these, 21.8 per cent of women believed a husband is justified in beating his wife if she goes out without telling him, 31.4 per cent if she neglects the children, 6.2 per cent if she argues with him, 8.3 per cent if she refuses sex with him, 4.5 per cent if she burns the food and 38.1 per cent for any of the mentioned five reasons.

According to Tevita Vailea,[11] between January and June in 2020, 537 domestic violence cases were reported and 117 police safety orders were issued, of which 99 were prosecuted. These figures may well be an underestimation

of the actual cases of domestic violence occurring against women within the community due to underreporting influenced by multiple and complex factors. These include but are not limited to cultural, religious and socio-political factors, particularly if the perpetrator is a husband, brother or son of the complainant. To address these issues, exploration of the safety of Tongan women is warranted to inform a greater understanding of where the gaps are, to help inform improved safety for women. Safety, for the purpose of this research, may refer to a holistic and encompassing concept of peace and security that is free from real or potential threats related to (but not limited to) physical harm and danger, financial and social burden, and socio-political factors that can threaten one's sense of peace and security.

Aim and objectives

The overarching aim of this research was to explore the perceptions of Tongan women aged 18 to 65 years living in Tongatapu towards safety and what that means for themselves, their families and their community.

The objectives were to:

- Undertake *talanoa* and *tālanga* discussions with eligible participants to gain their perspectives of what safety means
- Explore the barriers and enablers of safety (financially, physically and socially)
- Identify policy and practical recommendations that can support women's safety in Tonga.

Research methodology and design

The *Kakala* framework (Thaman 2006) informed the process of this research project. The framework is an Indigenous one of knowledge and wisdom unique to the Tongan process of creating a *kakala* or garland (Thaman 2006). There are three main processes: *toli*, *tui* and *luva*. *Toli* (picking of the flowers), emphasises the importance of selecting and choosing the most beautiful flowers; in this case, selecting eligible participants to partake in the *talanoa* and *tālanga* sessions based on certain criteria. Women who take part in the sessions must:

- Identify as Tongan
- Currently reside in Tongatapu
- Be between 18 and 65 years of age.

In order to gain a heterogeneous sample, a diverse group of women representing various social classes, occupations, education/qualifications, age groups and residential areas within Tongatapu were identified and recruited. Eligible participants were recruited with the support of a female research assistant based in Tongatapu who is familiar with the subject area. Upon recruitment, further information about the research was provided and a consent form was given. Verbal or written consent was signed or stated prior to the commencement of each *talanoa* and *tālanga*. Personal identifiable information is kept strictly confidential unless otherwise requested by the participant.

Talanoa and *tālanga* sessions were held in either a group or one-on-one setting, depending on the preference of the participant(s), to help provide space and opportunity for each individual to share their views in response to each prompt and thereby provide more in-depth and rich data. *Talanoa* and *tālanga* sessions occurred at a time and place that was familiar and convenient to the women. It was anticipated that four *talanoa* and *tālanga* sessions would occur during the *toli* phase — contingent on the availability of the women who agreed to take part in the research. *Talanoa* and *tālanga* occurred in both Tongan and English.

Demographic data via a short survey was captured either before or after the *talanoa* and *tālanga* sessions.

Some prompts posed during the *talanoa* and *tālanga* sessions included:

- What does being safe mean to you and your family?
  - o What does financial safety mean to you?
  - o What does it mean to be physically safe?
  - o What does it mean to be safe in a social context?
- What are some circumstances that you may have experienced that have made you feel unsafe (physically/financially/socially etc.)?
- What are some circumstances that have made you feel safe (physically/financially/socially)?
- What would you recommend happen in society in order for women in Tonga to feel and be safe?

Alternatively, women who agreed to take part in the research had the power (agency) to choose whether they would prefer to take part in group or individual *talanoa* and *tālanga* with the researcher. This was to provide agency for the women to ensure they feel safe and comfortable with 'who' they share their stories and perspectives with. Food was shared at the beginning and during the *talanoa* and *tālanga* as a sign of generosity for availing their time. *Koha* (gift) was gifted as a token of appreciation for sharing their *koloa* (knowledge and treasure) with the researcher and project.

Tui (weaving together the flowers) referred to the collation and analysis of the data collected. *Tui* underlines the importance of ensuring that each flower is positioned in a beautiful yet organised way. This is represented via the themes that were yielded during the *talanoa* and *tālanga* whereby inductive and deductive analysis occurred. During the *talanoa* and *tālanga* women took part in the initial phase of analysis by way of verbal summative feedback between the facilitator and group. Data analysis was informed by a Christian biblical perspective and Tongan cultural values. This is quite fitting as the Kingdom of Tonga is a conservative country where the majority of society is affiliated with a Christian religion of some sort. According to the 2011 Census, 99 per cent of the country identify as belonging to a Christian denomination (Methodism, Mormonism, Catholicism etc.).

Finally, *luva* (the gifting and giving away of the garland presented) emphasises the importance of the findings being interpreted and presented in a meaningful manner conscious of the multiple audience sessions it will be presented to.

Findings

Altogether, 21 people took part in this research. There were three group and 12 individual *talanoa* and *tālanga* sessions. The participants ranged from 22 to 63 years of age. The types of employment of those who took part in the research included a CEO, government officials to the labour workforce, a warehouse worker and church roles. The majority of those who took part in the research had a tertiary level education of some sort, i.e. a certificate, bachelor's and/or master's degree. *Talanoa* and *tālanga* sessions took between 45 minutes and three and a half hours.

Table 2 indicates the type of organisation and gender breakdown of the participants who took part in the research.

All participants had either directly experienced some form of violence or abuse in their lifetime or knew of someone who had experienced some form of violence or abuse. The following paragraphs discuss the various themes from the findings.

Key themes

Four key themes were proposed by the participants: perceptions of safety — *tau'ataina* (freedom) *moe malu 'oe famili* (safety and security of the family), crumbling of the foundation, true security comes from God and opportunities to improve safety. Under each key theme there were sub-themes that provide context to each theme.

Perceptions of safety

The perceptions of safety as discussed by the participants referred to aspects of *tau'ataina* (freedom and sense of agency), *malu 'oe famili* (protection or security of the family from any physical, environmental, social or spiritual harm). The foundation of Tongan society was closely tied to one's strong connection to Tongan culture and identity (*anga fakatonga moe nofo 'a kainga*), to help promote order, harmony and balance in the home encompassing holistic aspects of safety within Tongan society.

Tau'ataina mo e malu 'oe famili

Tau'ataina loosely refers to freedom in Tongan and differs from the Western meaning of freedom, usually referring to personal freedom and autonomy (Kavapalu 1995), having the agency and authority to be oneself amongst women. *Malu* loosely refers to security, not in the geopolitical and defence space rather a more holistic and encompassing concept where a family and/or individual is safe from harm and danger, and can express themselves freely (within the realms of respect and love) without fear of violence or abuse, ridicule or judgement in the family space. Having a place where you are free to be yourself was deemed as important. When Hūfanga was asked what she meant by *tau'ataina* she responded stating:

Kou lava pe au 'o talaatu ka koe 'a e me'a koia kou fie talaatu 'uhinga he 'ikai ke ke hanga koe 'o ta au mo tuli au ki hala ... and when that is gone 'ikai ke ke toe ongo'i safe ko e, so then you come out [leave] ... And to me ko e mole pe 'a e tau'ataina ke te fai katoa ngaahi me'a koia. Ke te lea tau'ataina and know that one would not be blamed ha hoko ngaahi me'a koia, pea nau ha'u leva kumi hūfanga.

I can tell you what I want to say because you will not abuse me and chase me to the road ... and when that [trust] is gone, you won't feel safe, so then you come out [leave] ... And to me when you lose the freedom to do all of that [be one's self], to have freedom of speech and know that one would not be blamed if those things happen, they come and find solitude.
(Hūfanga, female, NGO)

According to the 2019 MICS survey, 59.5 per cent of ever-married women reported experiencing at least one form of controlling behaviour from a partner in their lifetime, most commonly insisting on knowing where she is at all times (52.5%), being jealous or angry if she talks to other men (40.3%), not allowing her to join any social functions (24.5%), frequently accusing her of being unfaithful (23.8%), and not permitting her to meet her female friends (19.2%) (Tonga Statistics Department 2020 as cited in UN Women 2022:10).

Safety 'a 'api, mo e malu 'oe famili

The safety of women and people in general starts with the home. Although we can attest there is no such thing as a perfect family, a family ought nonetheless to strive for peace, order, harmony and balance in the home. Here, the foundation of Tongan society is the

Table 2: Participants by type of organisation and gender

Type of organisation	Gender breakdown	Total no. of people
Government agency	4 females, 1 male	5
NGO	7 females, 2 males	9
Church group	6 females	6
Private agency	2 females	1

Sources: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

home where the connection to *anga fakatonga* and Her Late Majesty Queen Salote's *faa kavei koula* (four golden strands of Tongan society) — *faka'apa 'apa* (respect), *tauhi vā* (nurturing one's relationship with others), *loto tō* (humility), *mamahi'i me'a* (loyalty), and *moe nofo 'a kainga* (kinship ties) — is practised (Crozier 1966; Helu 1995).

> The safest place for our young [children] is the home. I acknowledge the issue of abuse occurring in the family nowadays, but that is because the 'home is not a home'. The family is not a family. Which is due to a number of reasons. (Tevita, male, NGO)

True security and safety comes from God

The important foundation is of God being our security and safety net. If the family or the nation loses faith and trust in God, then the very foundation of Tongan culture is lost whereby *'oku mole leva 'a e 'ofa* (love is lost). Acknowledging God's protection over life as the overseer, the protector, guider and intercessor were acknowledged in the stories that were shared by the participants. The place of Christianity is weaved in with counselling. Churches have an active role in service provision by NGOs and government agencies.

God and family = security and safety

The quote below explains the important foundation of God being our security and safety net.

> *Ka ko 'eku sio ko e 'a'aku, that was where we were safe, family. 'A ia 'e end up pe family. Tupou 1 na'a ne hanga 'e ia 'ave 'a Tonga ki he 'Otua. Ko e misi 'a Tupou 1, tapu ange mo ia, understood that God was his family. Ne 'ave pe ki he 'Otua 'a e family. Kou tui au i ko e, hange ko e ngaue ko e na'u fai .... I wished that I would have stayed with the kids hange na'e a'u ia ki he tu'unga pehe.*
>
> I personally view that we were safe as a family because of how King George Tupou the first gave Tonga to God. With all due respect to His Late Majesty, he understood that God was his family. He gave God the family. I believe that similar to the work I did ... I wish that I would've stayed with the kids [students], like it would reach that point [referring that only God can care for the family, for His people, as humans we can only care for our family to a limited point]. (Tevita, male, NGO)

Holo 'a e 'api (crumbling of the home)

'Crumbling of the home', the home being the foundation of any society, refers to when families themselves are no longer a 'family'. This overarching theme refers to factors in society that have influenced the poor safety of Tongan women. These factors include (but are not limited to) the influence of drugs, the loss of *anga fakatonga* or Tongan culture such as taboos being broken, distance from God, and the works of the enemy, incest, intergenerational strongholds and curses, physical structure of the house and its influence on issues of incest and teenage pregnancy.

Holo 'ae 'api was indirectly discussed as attacks from the enemy which refers to the negative and unjust interactions Tongan women and girls have across their lifetime that do not align with the Christian faith and *anga fakatonga* (Tongan culture). This macro theme will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

'Alu pe 'ae taimi moe toe kovi ange 'ae ngaahi 'aho (as time goes by it seems the days are worsening)

In some cases, it seems as if the treatment of women is worsening over time. One of the main reasons is the degradation of Tongan values and morals. This was a key issue that was frequently discussed in the research. Tongan societal values towards the safety, dignity and value of Tongan women (i.e. *fahu* system, brother and sister taboo)[12] seemed to have changed in some contexts, particularly by those who took part in the study who work in the justice system. In some circumstances, Tongan women are no longer viewed as valued human beings in Tongan society. For example, Paula stated that:

> *Ko e value ko e fefine 'aneafi it's not the same. Ko e malu ko e 'a e fefine 'aneafi, culturally, language mo e anga e nofo 'a Kainga 'ikai koia he 'aho ni. Ko e sio ko e kakai tangata 'aneafi ki he kakai fefine 'aneafi, quality 'enau malu, 'enau value, 'enau dignity 'oku 'ikai ko ia ia 'aho ni. Ko e sio ko e husepaniti ki hono uaifi as a konga hono sino, ko 'ene koloa, ko e privacy pe 'a'ana.*
>
> The value of a Tongan woman yesterday (before) is not the same today. The safety of a Tongan woman culturally, linguistically, and Tongan society is not the same today. The way a Tongan man views (perceives, sees) Tongan women yesterday, their safety, value, dignity is not the same today. The way a husband treats his wife as a part of his body, as his own treasure as his own is no longer the case. (Paula, male)

Breakdown of the Tongan taboo system — Incest

In the Tongan social structure, the relationship between brother and sister is taboo, whereby there are certain protocols and respect practices that must be observed (Helu 1995). Such practices have been embedded in Tongan culture from even before missionary influence. Unfortunately, the issue of incest in Tonga is not new (Niumeitolu 2015) and seems to have increased over the years, perhaps most likely due to the breakdown of *anga fakatonga* and the influx of drugs. Paula shares how incest occurred in a family influenced by drugs; the brother no longer valued *faka'apa 'apa* (respect) for his sister:

> The woman was raped by her own brother. And so what I'm saying is, where is the safety, the family taboo system is broken, because when a sister enters a room, the boys will move to the opposite side. When she goes to a place, the boys will move elsewhere. (Paula, male)

Inability to fulfil role as a husband and father

Paula had gone on to say that, when a husband (influenced by drugs) cannot fulfil his duty as a husband and father to their children, he uses immoral and unjust means to prostitute his wife to gain financial funds. When such injustices occur, he questioned how the value and dignity of women are being eroded in Tongan society.

> When he cannot fulfil his role as a husband, to afford things to look after his family, he uses his authority as a husband to prostitute his wife. Where are the rights of women? Where is the value of women? Where is the safety (*malu*) of a wife to her husband? Domestic violence has increased by 28 per cent, where he hits her at a, b, c. He doesn't want people to know that he prostitutes her for drugs! (Paula, male)

Daughters' safety questionable

Daughters are the treasure of their parents, but in today's society due to the influence of drugs in Tonga a daughter's safety is questionable. As reiterated by Paula:

> The treasure of the father and mother is their daughters, the way they would view (and treat) their daughters would be different to the rest of their children. But there are root factors that lead us to question their safety. Where is the safety of a daughter to their father when the father is prostituting his daughter for drugs? (Paula, male)

Rights of women to be treated well seen as clashing with Tongan morals and cultural norms

Early in her career, a service provider faced ostracism for assisting women victims of gender-based violence (GBV) and domestic violence (DV) in standing up for themselves, whether by seeking help or filing complaints with the police. She was told by others that her actions would be responsible for breaking up many families. As Peta shared:

> When I first started, I was told to my face, there would be a lot of families broken down, lots of families that will beat women, lots of swollen and black eyes because of what I am doing to help, 'you're not a lawyer' (they would say to me). (Peta, female)

In this case staying in the marriage because of the commitment one has made in their vows to their husband is one thing; however, this does not permit the use of violence in any shape or form. One of the clients had a child each year to the same man as his way to control her and prevent her from leaving him.

Chaos caused by spiritual forces

As human beings, we are not just social beings but we are spiritual beings as well. As written in Ephesians 6:12, 'for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Paul, Ephesians 6:12, King James Version, Holy Bible). There were some discussions related to the dark spiritual realm that had manifested within a school which was associated with the suicide of one of the teachers. The safety of Tongan people, not just women, ought not to be sought after only in the physical realm but in the spiritual realm too. As discussed by Tevita:

> The man's classroom who had committed suicide — when you open the door, you feel goosebumps. When we started praying, the desks in the room started to slam from the ceiling. And this happened Saturday midday. The pastor opened her eyes and said are there any students in here? The pastor laughed and said, see how powerful the evil spirits are in here. It's okay, let's pray. The pastor closed their eyes and prayed. When the pastor prayed, I (Tevita) saw there were like 100 plus desks in the air (slamming). It went on for maybe 5 minutes. After that the desks ceased slamming, and things resumed back to normal. We then heard babies crying from the mango tree. We looked at each other, and I said, it's probably some bats. We closed our eyes and it still sounded like babies crying, and the pastor said to me, they are evil spirits that are manifesting, it's not just mental health issues, this was a spiritual issue. (Tevita, male)

The worry of a mother, 'alu pe 'ae taimi moe kovi 'ae ngaahi 'aho

The worry of a mother for the safety of her daughter(s) seems to have worsened over time. Safety concerns for school-aged children — to not accept candy from strangers, or a car ride offered by one's own neighbour — were discussed. Lose describes how even though they live right opposite the school, teachings at school concerning safety helped her daughter, and that this aligned with her own teachings. It appears the safety of children has become more of a concern, particularly with the frequent issues of abduction, strangers luring children with candy. As discussed by Lose:

> My daughter was playing outside the classroom ... and suddenly there was a

vehicle that had come around the side and a man said, 'Kids what are you doing?' My daughter being the loudmouth one shouted, 'I'm going to tell the teacher on you', and then they ran... She heard before, something like that happened on the Eastern side, there was an individual who tried to attract/lure kids with candy. The [teachers] said to the class to never accept any candy or go to them [strangers]. I teach them [her kids] that if the neighbour offers a ride home do not accept. The school is literally opposite the house, but if we're not there, just stay at school, sit at the door and look out for us. Now that my daughter is getting older, I worry more about her, you know with teenage pregnancy. (Lose, female)

The worry of a single mother with daughters is also heightened by the safety issues of her daughters. Her decision to remarry was also influenced by the way in which such concerns were discussed. As described by Solo:

I stay up at night sometimes thinking whether I would remarry or not, but am unsure as to when, I wonder about the safety of my children. Like whether their stepfather would love them, like whether he would see my daughter any different [in the case of rape/incest], or if he would treat them right. That's why I really need to rethink things, my mother said to think things over, 'You saw what happened before in your previous marriage'. I hope to make the right decision, my priority is my children. (Solo, female)

Recommendations — Opportunities to improve safety

The following themes provide key recommendations as voiced by the women and service providers who took part in the study. These were aligned with the holistic opportunities to improve safety in the home. These include improving one's relationship with God, rebuilding the family unit, creating a safe space against overcrowding, the importance of showing love, compassion and care to our daughters, our girls, choosing one's husband wisely and the creation of policies and legislation to improve safety within institutions. These are discussed below.

Improving one's relationship with God as an individual and collective

As a Christianised country, nurturing one's relationship with God was seen as an important factor in resuming peace and harmony within the home. As mentioned in the quote below:

There was no prioritisation of our Heavenly father in our marriage. I think if we were close to God, to the church, then I don't think we would've had problems. Satan is alive and awake to destroy many families. Families that are unified and at peace. (Lolo, female)

Reigniting Tongan morals and values of Tonga

The teaching of Tongan morals and cultural values starts from home. Paula refers to the important role of mothers as the main caregivers and nurturers of their young children, referring to the *kaliloa*:[13]

The mother gives her arm [for her children to lie on] and here she uses that time to *akonaki* (counsel) her young. That's *kaliloa* or *kali fanafana* which means counselling. The safety you felt from the past, is the same today. But is there a *kaliloa* today? No. (Paula, male)

Paula challenges families to revisit and reignite Tongan morality through the wise counsel of mothers to their children through the *kaliloa*.

Rebuilding the family unit, nofo 'a kainga

The safest place for our youth is their home. However, a home is not a home if it is unsafe, and a family is not a family if there is no love. This theme emphasises the importance of rebuilding the home to what it once was in Tonga, where cultural values of respect, nurturing relationships and love ought to be practised, reclaiming safety. As discussed by Tevita:

If we go back to the true essence of a family, where it connects to the Tongan culture; *Nofo 'a kainga* (Tongan family/community/village/society/country that aligns with Tongan values and morals, and nurturing kinship ties, in Tongan ways of knowing, being and doing). Prior to missionary contact, Tonga already practised respect between brother and sister. And we already practised respect to our monarch and nobles. That was where we were safe as a family. When King George Tupou I gave Tonga to God. His dream, with respect to His Late Majesty was that he understood that God was his family. He gave God his family to safeguard and protect us. (Tevita, male)

Because His Late Majesty George Tupou I gave Tonga to God, it is arguably the main reason why the Kingdom of Tonga is the only remaining monarchy in the South Pacific region and to this day has never been formally colonised by any foreign power (Bade 2021).

'Oku mahu'inga 'ae 'ofa; the importance of showing love, compassion and care to our daughters, our girls

Despite seeking to gain financial security and/or safety, sometimes prioritising financial gains over family can negatively impact children. This theme relates to the importance of showing compassion,

love and care in the relationships we have with each other. One woman recalls her interaction with one of her female students who was a troubled student in high school. As Sela explained:

> After I hugged her, she cried. I wondered as to why she cried like that. She said to me, you know, my mum and dad they never hug me … her exact words were, 'I've never felt loved at home'. I told her, you're a smart kid. I'm your mother here. All the teachers, when they hear her [student's] name, there's a negative connotation carried with it-as she misses classes and so forth. They [teachers] don't know the depth as to why she's like that. If they [teachers] talked with her to understand the depth of the issues she was facing then they would understand. I said to her, every morning, I want to see you in my office to hug me. I'm going to ask the teachers if you're attending your classes. Go and make me proud, make a positive change in your life. She left. Man, when she turned to leave, I cried. (Sela, female)

Choosing one's husband wisely

A service provider discussed the issues she encountered when consulting with women who have experienced domestic violence in their marriage. There were discussions of the necessity to stay within the marriage irrespective of domestic violence. Choosing to stay within an abusive relationship seemed to be a matter of living out a woman's decision to marry their husband. However, choosing to stay in such a relationship does not warrant continual violence or abuse. The strong belief to stay within the abusive relationship due to one's covenant ought to be revisited on a case-by-case basis. As Peta discussed:

> We went to an island, this woman said to us, my husband when he's drunk he hits me with the coconut shredder and other things and so I leave with my children to another island. When we get there, my parents tell me to go back to my husband [my marital commitment I made]. That's the mindset of parents. Safety as a mother, as a woman? No, it's your vows [commitment]. Your obligation is to be with your husband. That's what I get, because of the environment and our belief in Tonga. (Peta, female)

The mindset that you only get married once holds true in most contexts in Tongan society. However, there is little support provided to young female adults concerning choosing a husband; such support is often limited to the family, friends and other female role models in a woman's life.

Creation of laws and policies that protect safety of society

> The need to create policies and laws that can protect workers, and safety of the community from social media issues, and other laws that can safeguard people from societal issues, in particular the organisation in which a person works for. To protect each individual and entity, not just in terms of physical safety, but also e-safety via social media platforms. (Uanita, female)

Conclusion

Findings from this research indicate various ways of defining safety and unsafety from a Tongan perspective. Perceptions of safety included the families to be *malu* and *tau'ataina*. It was clear from this research that Tonga is a highly Christianised country and is interwoven with *anga fakatonga* (Tongan ways of being, knowing and doing); however, violation of the breakdown of Tongan values, *anga fakatonga* and kinship ties related to the taboo system between brother and sister, father and daughter, the issue of drugs, incest, domestic violence, child sexual violence and so forth has contributed to a further 'crumbling' of the Tongan family unit in society, making it unsafe not only for women but for all. This research underlines the need for Tongan society to revisit and reignite Tongan morals and values embedded in *anga fakatonga* and *anga fakafonua*, with reference to *faka'apa 'apa* (respect and reverence for one another), *ofa* (love) in the home where there is *tau'ataina* (freedom) within the realms of the family unit to express oneself freely and respectfully with no judgement or fear of abuse. There were recommendations of the need to revisit one's walk in faith and belief in God, in knowing that God does not want His people harmed, let alone abused or violated. The recommendations put forward by the participants ought to be incorporated at all levels of Tongan society including the creation of laws and policies that protect the safety of women and all Tongans.

Glossary of Tongan terms

The Tongan terms or phrases and their translations listed below relate to the context in which this study was undertaken. The English translations are only a surface level description of the rich and deep meanings associated with the Tongan terms and phrases.

Glossary of Tongan terms

Tongan term/phrase	English translation
‘Alu pe ‘ae taimi moe kovi ‘ae ngaahi ‘aho	The days/things/generations worsen over time.
Akonaki	Counsel usually between parents and their children, or an elder and family members.
‘Api	House or home
‘Otua	God
Anga fakatonga	*Anga fakatonga* Iin this context refers to Tongan societal cultural values, which are usually tied to the *faa kave’i koula*.
Anga fakafonua	Patriotic values, traditions and customs of Tongan society
Faa kavei koula	The four golden pillars of Tongan society as described by Her Late Majesty Queen Salote III. These are *faka‘apa ‘apa*, *mamahi‘i me‘a*, *loto tō* and *tauhi vā* (see translations below). *Ofa* (love) is what connects the four pillars/values together.
Fahu	Paternal aunty (a person’s father’s oldest sister, or sisters)
Faka‘apa ‘apa	Respect
Famili	Family (Tongan-ised English word) can extend to non-related members.
Fonua	Land (and can also refer to the placenta, mother as the land and natural environment, patriotic factors (tangible and intangible)).
Holo ‘a e ‘api	In this context, the metaphoric crumbling of the home or house due to a ‘loss of’ or degradation of Tongan socio-cultural and spiritual morals.
Kainga	Family, community, society or country (can extend beyond blood ties)
Kaliloa	Can loosely refer to the practice of providing wise counsel by one’s mother. *Kaliloa* is a wooden headrest that Tongan people (and other Pacific peoples) would use as a pillow. In this context a child’s headrest is his or her mother’s arm, the *kaliloa* whereby during this time she provides wise counsel to her children, teaching them *anga fakatonga* and *anga fakafonua* values. Also known as *kali fanafana*. *Fanafana* meaning ‘whispers’ and *kali* is shorthand for *kaliloa*.
Loto tō	Humility
Luva	With reference to the Kalaka research framework (Thaman 2006), *luva* refers to the gifting of the garland or data dissemination.
Mahu‘inga	The importance or value of something
Malu	Shelter and protection from harsh conditions in the physical, social and spiritual environment
Mamahi‘i me‘a	Loyalty
Malu ‘oe famili	The protection of the family
Nofo ‘a kainga	In this context refers to the kinship ties of Tongan society/families/communities/villages and country that aligns with Tongan values, morales, ways of knowing, being and doing.
Ofa	Love
‘Oku mahu‘inga ‘ae ‘ofa	The importance/value of love
Tālanga	To talk with a purpose, formal discussions (see Ofanoa et al. 2015).
Talanoa	To converse, discuss in an informal manner (see Vaioleti 2016).
Tau‘ataina	Freedom
Tauhi vā	Nurturing one’s relationship with others
Toli	With reference to the *Kalaka* research framework (Thaman 2006), *toli* refers to the gathering/selecting of fragrant flowers and plants or data collection in research.
Tui	With reference to the *Kalaka* research framework (Thaman 2006), *tui* refers to the weaving/sewing together of the different flowers and plants. Or in research data analysis.

Chapter 3: Personal safety in public spaces: A pilot study of Port Moresby

Theresa Meki

Introduction

Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea, is notorious for its high crime rate and expensive housing. The Intelligence Unit of the *Economist* ranked Port Moresby 137 out of 140 cities as one of the least liveable cities in the world (cited in Cox and Underhill-Sem 2011). Port Moresby's urban landscape is a remnant of its colonial legacy, where the gap between elite and non-elite is illustrated by the location of residential suburbs — the rich residing closer to the coast and the low-income residents residing further inland and in squatter settlements (Cox and Underhill-Sem 2011). Demian (2017) identified the 'problem' of two types of women living in Port Moresby, (a) married women fleeing domestic violence and (b) unmarried professional women. For both groups, safety, on various levels, is a priority. Unless one has the social safety net of having relatives in the city (Rooney 2017a), the situation can be very bleak. In recent years, programs by the National Capital District Commission and their UN partners to create safe markets (Craig and Porter 2017) and transportation (UN Women 2014) have been intentional in addressing safety in shared public spaces. New commercial centres such as the Vision City mall and other multi-purpose venues also offer safe spaces for working professionals to mingle, shop and walk without feeling subconscious or anxious (Spark 2020). In the last decade Port Moresby has become increasingly unsafe for women. In 2020, Olto Thomas' 'PNG is not a safe to life as a female' placard held at a protest march in Port Moresby sparked a national conversation on social media and brought much needed attention to the plight of female residents (Wayne 10/7/2020). Women experience significant anxiety in public spaces particularly when commuting and when using public transport. One young female student from the University of Papua New Guinea who recently visited Canberra said, 'not being apprehensive about your safety in public spaces is a luxury … sadly, this is not a luxury that is available for Papua New Guineans' (Banuk 12/4/2023). Yet Port Moresby is home to thousands of Papua New Guineans. Hence the aim of this pilot study is to understand how Port Moresby residents look after themselves and ensure their personal safety.

The following section is a brief description of Port Moresby as the study site. Followg this is an explanation of the data collection method of this pilot study and basic demographic information about its participants. The major themes pertaining to personal safety and keeping safe in Port Moresby's public spaces are then discussed. In summary, all people involved in this study, including researcher and participants, acknowledged that Port Moresby is unsafe — this is regarded as general knowledge, a fact and an aspect of living in Port Moresby that is consistently considered and navigated. The recurring themes in the discussion unequivocally centred around keeping and maintaining one's personal safety. Advice given included avoiding various 'hot spot' or unsafe areas, although any place can be deemed unsafe if one is unfamiliar or perceived as a stranger. Venturing out in night is an unwise and risky endeavour. All 20 people interviewed either had an experience with petty opportunists stealing their belongings or they knew of someone with such an experience. So common are such occurrences that a certain 'spider sense' or 'gut feeling' has been developed amongst city dwellers. Unfortunately, so common is bag snatching, pocket picking and so on that victims do not even bother to report such occurrences to the police. There is consensus among the interviewees that the police either cannot or do not have the means or resources to help them. Therefore, they've concluded that the onus is on them to be responsible for their own safety by being alert to their own surroundings and aware of their personal belongings as they commute in public spaces. Moreover, if they experience a mishap or fall victim to pick-pocketers, their best option to retrieving their lost item or getting some form of justice or closure would be through the informal network or their own relatives and or '*wantoks*'.[14] This latter consensus is worth exploring in further research, as this report just concerns measures for personal safety when commuting in Port Moresby's public spaces.

Port Moresby: Study site

Port Moresby, colloquially referred to as 'Moresby' or 'Pom City' was 'discovered' by Captain John Moresby of the Royal Navy when he was exploring the south-east corner of the island of New Guinea in 1873. In 1884, Port Moresby became the colonial headquarters for British New Guinea and later, by 1906, it became the administrative headquarters for the Australian Territory of Papua. According to Nigel Oram, Port Moresby then was like an Australian town which excluded Papuans both socially and physically, only allowing them as workers (Oram 1976:27). During World War II, Port Moresby was a major military base for the Allied forces. After the war, it was named the capital of the United Nations Trust Territory of Papua and New Guinea. Unlike other well-planned cities such as Canberra, Port Moresby's growth

and development evolved in a rather ad hoc and sprawling manner. In fact, 'town councils were not established anywhere in PNG until 1971' (Demian 2017:406). In 1975, when the country became independent, Port Moresby became the capital city, although the official name of the capital is the National Capital District (NCD). Most of the land in Port Moresby as well as other parts of Papua New Guinea is still customary land and is owned by clans and/or tribes. Traditionally, the Indigenous landowners of Port Moresby are the Motu and Koitabu people; about a third of Port Moresby's land belongs to them (McGrath 1992:245). The Motu-Koitabu Interim Assembly was established under the National Capital District Government Act 1982. This Act legislates the 10 recognised Motu and Koitabu villages to exercise authority over their customary land. The rest of the land is alienated land now owned by the state. This alienated land can be leased by individuals or companies to develop for rental and or other urban business purposes (McGrath 1992:245).

Since Port Moresby's establishment as the capital, migrants from all over the country have moved to the city in search of employment opportunities, education and other development services. One particular reason that enables people to move from rural villages to Port Moresby is the understanding that they can reside, sometimes indefinitely, with their relatives and *wantoks*. This constant flow of one-way migration has dramatically increased Port Moresby's population. The National Capital District according to the 2011 national census had a population of 364,125 persons and 47,559 households (PNG NSO 2011). Note that more often, a household houses an extended intergenerational family as opposed to just a nuclear family. Aside from the planned suburbs of Boroko, Waigani, Gordons, Hohola, Gerehu, Sabama, Korobosea, Togouba, Kaugere and Tokarara, there are numerous sprawling settlements on the outskirts of these suburbs and further inland. Most informal or squatter settlements are typically characterised by poor planning and illegal attainment, which results in poor quality housing and limited services such as electricity, power and water (Jones 2012:152). While it is not a strict convention, these settlements are often composed of migrant populations from specific provinces. For example, migrants from Oro Province reside in the ATS settlement. Informal settlements house nearly 50 per cent of Port Moresby's population (Rooney 2021). Returning to the village or one's home province is not an option as many migrants have lived in Port Moresby for decades and have either lost land or the socio-cultural ties to maintaining land in their home province. In the last decade, Port Moresby residents in the informal settlements have experienced a series of evictions from the state. A discussion on these evictions, the causes and the implications, is beyond the scope of this report (for more information, see Rooney 2017a:126–28, 2017b, 2021). The reality is that Port Moresby is a precarious place; it is not cheap and not safe.

Data collection method and participants

This pilot study is component of a larger pilot research across the Pacific (specifically, Tonga, Vanuatu, Fiji, Australia and Papua New Guinea) investigating perceptions of safety in various settings. For the PNG urban component of this pilot research, I chose to investigate and understand how Port Moresby residents lived and moved around the city given its damaging reputation as an unsafe place. Initially, I had planned to interview women only as they are the most affected and most vulnerable residents in Port Moresby. However, at the eleventh hour, I decided to include a few men in the pilot study to gain a different perspective.

In November 2023, I utilised the snowball method and working through my network of professional associates, I contacted and interviewed 20 adult Port Moresby residents. These adults were in the 20 to 40 year age bracket (the oldest being 37 years old). All participants were literate, educated and employed in the formal sector; only five of the female participants either did not have a tertiary qualification or were still completing their program of study. Of the 20, five were men and 15 were women, eight of whom were part of two separate focus group discussions and the rest were individually interviewed. Of the 20 people I interviewed, only three (female) reportedly were fortunate enough to not have experienced any encounter with thieves and opportunists.

Participation in this scoping research was voluntary. Prior to commencing the interviews, all the participants gave informed consent and were compensated for their time with ample taxi fare and lunch money. Aside from obtaining basic demographic information from the participants, they were asked the following questions:

- What does safety mean to you?
- What makes you feel insecure or unsafe?
- What are some safety precautions that you personally take when leaving your place of residence?
- Have you experienced any form of harassment or life-threatening situation?
- Have you experienced any form of violence in the last 12 months? If so, did you notify the police? If you did not, why not?
- Who is the first person you call when you are in trouble or need help?
- Are you active on social media?
- Do you use online banking and if so how confident are you with using online banking?
- In the last 12 months, have you encountered some type of confrontational situation with people trying to steal from you or harm you?

These questions and others that followed conversationally helped to establish the participants' perception of their personal safety as residents of Port Moresby. The clear theme or recurring issue that most of the participants reflected on was their safety

precautions; what they did to either ensure personal safety or to avoid being a target. Therefore, the rest of this report is organised to reflect these precautions and associated discussion.

Administering personal safety in Port Moresby

Port Moresby today is a dangerous place; this is not hyperbole, it is a fact. The city is notorious for carjacking and pickpocketing. According to a *Post-Courier* article in October 2010, it was publicly reported that crime in Port Moresby has reached epidemic proportions with 'thugs mugging people at the bus stops and public venues' (*PNG Post-Courier* 10/10/2010:5 cited in Jones 2012:155). The high rates of youth unemployment coincide with the high levels of crime (Woo and Naidoo 2018:11). There is a demographic youth bulge in PNG as 62 per cent of the population is aged 15 to 64 years (PNG NSO 2011:18). Youth in PNG are economically marginalised due to limited employment opportunities. In 2021, out of 8 million people, 67 per cent were below 35 years old, and every year, only 10 per cent of the 80,000 youths who graduate from educational institutions secure employment (Timothy 9/4/2021). Looking specifically at urban areas, 60 per cent of youth are unemployed and less than 7 per cent are employed in formal wage jobs (Timothy 9/4/2021).

As the region's largest city, Port Moresby also contains the region's largest informal settlement. The situation has not improved since 2010; it has only gotten worse. In the period when this research was conducted and written (late 2023–24), Port Moresby and the rest of Papua New Guinea were experiencing an economic crisis, with inflation and the price of goods and services reaching an all-time high (Luma 15/8/2024). On 10 January 2024, Port Moresby experienced the worst looting and public property destruction ever recorded. Known as 'Black Wednesday', it was prompted when the police force learnt that their first salary of the year was being cut. While the police force stopped work to protest, the public seized the shops and began looting and setting fire to shops. A total of 22 people died, and businesses reportedly lost over K1.27 billion in damages to property and stock (Faiparik 18/2/2024). One commentator accurately acknowledged that 'Black Wednesday' is evident of deeper social issues. He said, 'the riots brought to surface the simmering social tension among the people caused by the country's high cost of living of living, high unemployment, crime and corruption' (Mako 19/1/2024).

Post 'Black Wednesday' life in Port Moresby is still precarious, expensive and unsafe. Port Moresby residents, particularly the ones who participated in this pilot study, offer the following advice — precautions that they habitually adhere to when commuting in 'Pom'.

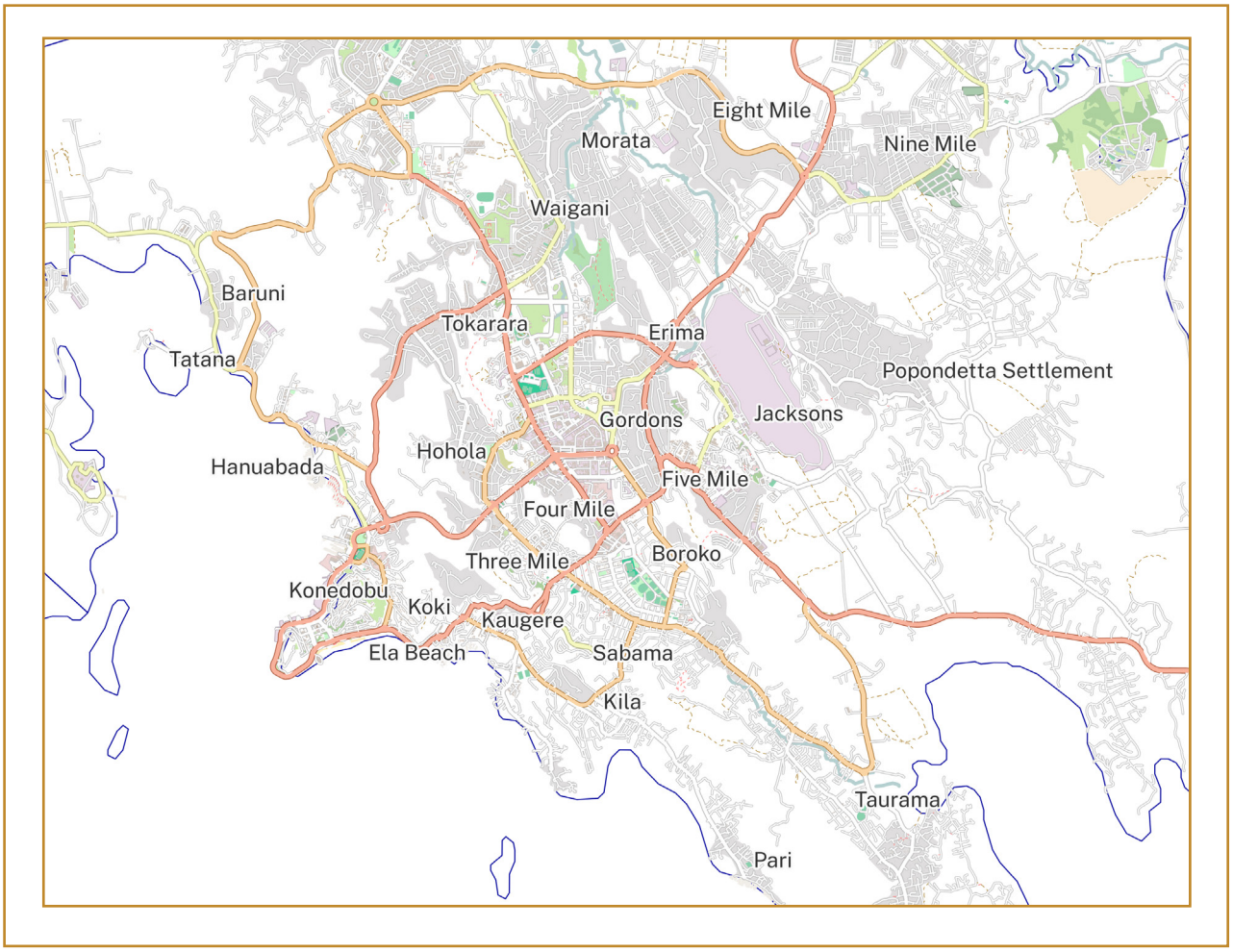
Safe spots and no-go zones

For their own safety, participants were quick to point out which areas of Port Moresby they travel to and which areas they avoid due to its reputation. Figure 3 is a map of Port Moresby showing most of the major suburbs.

Areas that have a bad reputation or are notoriously unsafe are regarded as no-go zones or hot spots. Common hot spots include Gerehu, Koki, Sabama, Hohola, Boroko, Four Mile, Erima (near Jackson's airport) and Gordons. It is usually the bus stop areas in these that are the most dangerous because aside from the commuters, betel-nut,[15] smoke and newspaper vendors also congest the area making it easy for opportunists to pick pockets and snatch bags. Gerehu bus stop is a regular 'hot spot' for petty crimes such as bag snatching and harassment of women and young girls. Places like Koki and Erima have had a bad reputation for a long time for being hostile to public commuters and pedestrians. Koki is infamous for its regular clashes between various ethnic groups. In 2018, there was a clash between the Goilala and the Wanigela people at the Koki betel-nut market. Two men were left seriously injured (Apala 3/12/2018). In 2021, there was a clash between Goilala and Tari people (*PNG Post-Courier* 4/5/2021). A contributing factor in these regular clashes is past and ongoing animosity amongst its residents, especially those residing in the Koki settlements. On 3 July 2023, there was a massive riot in Koki with shops looted, and vehicles of commuters smashed and pelted by the rioters. This violence was prompted by someone's death and 56 people were arrested and detained (Mado 6/7/2023). Such incidents make Koki an unfavourable location for many public transport users and vehicle owners as well as business owners and services providers.

According to one male interviewee, in early November (2023), a series of daylight robberies and an instance of rape had occurred in the suburb of Gerehu. This incident was not reported by the media but is known among the residents. This incident prompted the young men in the community to create a community watch group to patrol the bus stop areas during the peak afternoon hours when workers and students are travelling home. According to two participants from Gerehu (local male and female from Gerehu), the Gerehu for Gerehu Youth group stand every Thursday and Friday at the Stage Two bus stop looking out for commuters. They are trialling voluntarily for a month and after that, it is anticipated that the National Capital District City Council will step in to sponsor this community watch initiative. The Gerehu police are supporting the young men engaged in this community watch by being present. This initiative is active during peak hours. The community watch group is active in the afternoons during rush hour at the bus stop, and a police officer will park their car and keep the siren and flashing lights on to show that there is police presence nearby. In that way, they prevent those thugs who want to attack young women and other vulnerable people. A similar incentive occurred in 2022 when young people residing in Gordons formed the 'Gordons Youth Association'.[16] This is a voluntary activity with unemployed youths in the area working together to curb crime in the market area and bus stop because Gordons is also infamous for pickpocketing, bag snatching and fights. Such initiatives as well as neighbourhood watches only work when everyone in the community is invested;

Figure 3: Map of Port Moresby



Source: Map created by Thiago Cintra Oppermann, base layers from OpenStreetMaps.org and PNG National Mapping Bureau.

without funding or official government support, they tend to die out until another major crime occurs.

In public areas like bus stops, there is a mixture of people occupying the public space at the same time; some are workers travelling to and from work. Others are school-age children; people employed in the informal sector also commute to their work areas. Then there are the opportunists who harass or steal from commuters. Some opportunists can also pretend to be regular commuters; they get on the bus and then they steal from the passengers, grabbing *bilums*,[17] phones and whatever valuable items they can and then they get off at the next bus stop, so it is difficult for people to track them down. As the people themselves are in transit, even if they call out for help, no one will help them for fear of being attacked by these thieves. One interviewee said:

> I had to always make sure that I am walking with someone down to the bus stop. Even when I get off, I have to see that there's someone walking up so I can follow them and go with them. I cannot walk myself. Because once you single yourself out too, that's a high risk too, to be attacked.

Commuters must always be vigilant and develop a heightened sense of awareness about their surroundings.

Another interviewee retells how her bag was almost taken while on a bus in Koki:

> The bag was really full and looked bulky, the square shape, they thought it was a laptop, so he wanted the bag from me … he came and grabbed it. He had a butter knife, so he is like trying to stab me with the knife and then trying to take the bag … so I fought him over the bag, and he let go. I told him that it was just books inside the bag but he kind of cut me, so I still have scars from that.

Being inside a bus can be just as unsafe as waiting for the bus at the bus stop area. When asked, do you feel safe once you get on the bus, the following response from a young woman (in her twenties) reveals that state of helplessness that women experience even when sitting on the bus. She says:

> Sometimes, it is not safe, because these thieves who are mostly men come in the bus and they literally hold out a knife against our

skin and others as well and get their *bilums*. They'll check it and see if there's money in there, they get it, they'll also get your phone and they'll throw back your *bilum* at you. While they will take your phone and your money. At those moment, you will try to find people to help you, but no one will. You will just cry and go home.

Even inside the bus, women passengers in particularly will look out for 'safe seats' in public buses. There are a few seats in the bus that interviewees have marked out as safe seats. For example, the seat directly behind the bus driver's seat is a safe one, as well as the shot gun seat and the seat behind the shot gun seat. These were deemed safe because they are within earshot of the driver and boss crew (the person who collects the bus fare). Window seats also pose a threat; therefore it is advisable for windows to be always closed. Most passengers, if they can help it, will try to avoid the window seats, as thugs from outside tend to reach in and grab bags, *bilums*, and phones as the bus drives away or they'll grab and run and there is no way of retrieving your belongings. While passengers are getting more alert about their surroundings and taking what they regard as necessary precautions, opportunists and thieves on the streets are also diversifying the ways they operate. One participant expressed that sometimes the thugs will dress up smartly, board the bus and pretend they too are on their way to work and then when it is their stop, they will grab bags from fellow passengers in the bus and run out. The buses or public motor vehicles (PMVs) and the bus stops have been problematic for a long time.

In 2014, UN Women in Port Moresby carried out a scoping study in the city and found that more than 90 per cent of women and girls experience various forms of violence when using PMVs, such as verbal sexual remarks, inappropriate touching, robbery and intimidation (Gibbs and Yakam 2021). Women on public buses who have experienced violence stated that the common perpetrators were 'male youths under [the age of] 29, "drug users" and "drunkards"' (UN Women 2014:23). To address this problem, Meri Seif buses were introduced from 2014 to mid-2019. These buses were for women passengers only and provided space for women to commute (UN Women 2019). The concept of introducing women-only transport options has been introduced in other countries such as Japan, Egypt and the Philippines (UN Women 2014:15). I recall this Meri Seif bus initiative getting a lot of attention when it first started; however, when I asked the participants about it, they said it was no longer running. In 2022, the office of the National Capital District under the leadership of Governor Powes Parkop introduced the Eda City Bus Service, an attempt to improve the dire state of public transport in Port Moresby. Further research is needed to investigate whether this new bus service has improved the experiences of female passengers.

Dressing down and dummy phones

Another theme, one of the questions that I asked the participants, relates to precautions that people take when leaving home and entering public spaces. A precaution or rather advice that most of the female interviewees expressed was to intentionally dress down. Wearing expensive clothing or accessories will surely attract unwanted attention. Not only in reference to potential catcalling but also in relation to attracting thieves. One participant said:

You have to dress up, fit the other, you know, dress up normal, and as much as possible, and don't be too revealing and wear all these expensive things on your body that will attract. Jewellery and all that. Even when I got my watch, I was a bit afraid to, because it looked like, they might steal it. So sometimes I don't wear the watch and go out to Four mile.

A lot of the women said, 'do not wear unnecessarily things that would attract attention to you, for example immodest clothing or fancy jewellery', as this brings unwanted attention. This view of dressing down was also shared by my acquaintances — people who were not part of the research. It is considered general knowledge as a safety measure to not dress in a way that brings attention to oneself because dressing up indicates that one has money and can therefore be a target for thieves.

Included in the list of precautions is the instruction to not hold one's phone in public. One male interviewee revealed that he carries what he refers to as a 'dummy phone'. This dummy phone is usually one of a lesser quality than that his primary phone. This interviewee said that in the event of a hold up, if the thieves ask for his mobile phone, he will give them the 'dummy' phone. Items like laptops and iPads should be left at home. If people must carry their electronic devices from one location to another, they are encouraged to take a taxi.

Daylight saves, group travel and community

Another common piece of advice was in relation to the time of day and when one ventures out of their yard or private space. A female participant commented, 'I think it depends on the timing, during the day, it's a bit okay, but when it's late, that's when we feel unsafe, from walking out in the night. But generally, it's safe around there, I mean, only because you go out the right time'. Another male participant advised:

If possible, walk in a group, walk in a group, the timing of the day as well. So, in the morning when you're going to get on the bus, if it is weekdays, a lot of working-class people are getting on the bus and also returning from work. It's when you stay a bit late, it becomes a bit risky. Or it's a bit risky when you leave early in the morning. During the day it is a bit okay. So just managing the timing, so you don't leave your workplace very late or try to get on the

bus around 7.30 am or 7 am. Maybe get on the bus around 8 am or going towards 8.30 am.

While this piece of advice may work in his experience, it is not reliable advice as it mostly depends on chance. There is safety in travelling with a crowd (i.e. the working people in the morning); however, that is also when opportunists are at 'work'. Group travel is doable for high school and tertiary-aged students but may not be practical for other sectors of the public. As security is such a real threat, as well as the need for prompt arrival to work, most organisations and companies in Port Moresby have company shuttle buses that do pick-up and drop-off services for their employees.

For single people, women in particular, it is not uncommon for them walk to work, to the bus stop or to the market/shops with a male escort, whether it be a brother, cousin or male relative. One female participant said, 'If you want to Gordons or Erima, if you see that it's a need, then you can go but don't go by yourself. Go with some boys or probably your private car or get a cab, you know K20.00 won't hurt you. So, get a cab and go to places that you need to go. Otherwise, if you have shops near your house, just use them.' This comment denotes the type of restrictions associated with being and keeping safe. Most participants admit that they do not attend large events or gathering such as Independence Day celebrations or cultural festivals as freely as they did a few years ago. It has become too unsafe for them to enjoy themselves socially in open spaces due to the security risks.

The Gordons market is huge in Port Moresby and Erima may have shops selling certain items that aren't available anywhere else, but as they are listed in the no-go zones, extra precautions must be taken or, better yet, people should avoid the place altogether. One of the male participants reflected that he ensures his safety by restricting his movement to his locality. He said, 'My thought about safety is, it's around this particular area. If you are new to a particular place and people will haunt after you, or follow you to grab anything from you, or physically harm you, are the people who will see you as a stranger, as a new person in the area.'

There is safety in familiarity and establishing a community. This applies both to people restricting their commute within their locality and a precautionary measure for someone relocating to or moving to a new area or suburb. Another term that participants used when discussing this aspect of maintaining safety is 'public relations' and recognition, known in Tok Pisin as *luksave*. One male participant explained that it is his public relations that keeps him safe and he advises his sisters the same.

Mostly my public relations, like I used to tell my sisters at home, I tell them that, if you hold a K2.00 and if someone from the street or that guy asks for a K2.00, you're just giving it for one time, just one time. You will not give it to him every time, but that K2.00 can become your security because the police will not be there all the time. But your community will always be there, watching you and your whereabouts.

Another male participant said, 'the other thing, you have to mingle with people, if you are going somewhere you have to say hi or you know, *monin o avinun* [Tok Pisin for morning or afternoon, greetings]. That's the kind of approach where you make yourself part of wherever you stay.'

In almost every neighbourhood and bus stop area, there are street vendors who sell betel-nut, cigarettes and lollies. It is also becoming common for loiterers to beg for money when they see commuters walking past them. This male participant advises his sisters to spare a K2.00 when confronted with those who ask. Even if one does not need a lolly or chew betel-nut, just buy something from these vendors and spend a few minutes talking to them. In that way, you build familiarity with the locals (most vendors are locals who regularly sit and sell at the same spot), and they recognise you as a familiar face. In the event you find yourself in trouble or someone tries to rob you, those very people that you've developed a friendship with can come to your aid. They are more likely to be available and ready to help than any police officer.

Unlike safe societies where one can afford to be aloof, hurried or too busy to interact and be social, in Port Moresby and indeed other town centres in PNG, this sociability becomes a type of insurance and safety net for personal safety. One is generally safer in a setting when one is considered a local; the danger becomes apparent when one is a stranger or unknown.

Furthermore, another female participant shared her view on whether she would help someone in need. She says:

I think different communities, different, like my experiences at the different communities. But yeah, for Boroko, when fight breaks out, but most times if it concerns us, then we will, we'll see that people will go and, or especially the public and the women who, their bags are stolen. Then you will see that everybody is running to the guys who are standing nearby, or they try to help that particular and chase that person. But in terms of fighting, most times they try to leave them, that's their own problem. If it only concerns us, yes, we will be involved or anybody within our compound, customs family,[18] if one of us gets attack, okay, that's when we will step out and, but otherwise, if other people, our neighbours, we will not be bothered, we'll just go and watch.

This reflection is quite disheartening, but it reflects daily realities. Gone are the days when the public would look out for a stranger. Nowadays, in public places, if someone screams out for help, only those who

know them personally will help. Of the five men that I interviewed, a few of them revealed that they are likely to not help a stranger in need because that would put them at risk of being attacked. It is well known that a lot of the jobless loiterers who go around bag snatching, and the like usually work in groups. For example, in a group of opportunists, a few of them might work as distractors who cause a commotion either through a stage fight or banter while the others in the group would go around to do the actual pocket picking or bag snatching. In a busy setting such as a bus stop, one cannot tell who all the group members are. Therefore, it would be unwise to meddle in their business as the thieves can retaliate and attack the person who tries to be a good Samaritan.

Social media, internet banking and online safety

Participants were also asked about their use of social media, what platforms they used, whether they used internet banking and online safety precautions. Of the 20 people interviewed, 16 said yes to social media use and four said no. Of the 16, only three people used Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, the rest of them using Facebook and WhatsApp. Only one person had a personal blog and only one person used LinkedIn. Of the five that answered no to using social media, three of them did not have a phone at the time of the interview. Of the 20 people interviewed, only six people answered yes to using internet or online banking. The rest were a bit apprehensive about banking online. Two of the participants reportedly stopped using internet banking provided by the Bank of the South Pacific due to the glitches that that occurred in May 2023 (Nangoi 10/5/2023). A few others have since switched to Kina Bank for their internet banking. Most participants said they preferred SMS banking over internet banking.

When asked about online safety precautions regarding social media, most of the participants expressed that they do not post much content online as a means to remain private. One male participant advised that one should not click unnecessary links when on Facebook as that would lead to some type of malfeasance. This advice was based on his own experience as he revealed that his Facebook account was hacked when he was prompted to log into the site multiple times. While logging in, the scammer retrieved his password and username.

Others have heard unpleasant stories of online bullying. For example, one participant shared the story of a teenage girl who committed suicide after consistent bullying on Facebook. Another concern raised by two female participants was in relation to the increasing use of AI technology, especially its capabilities for altering images. Apparently, there is a smartphone application that removes a person's clothing. Hence the advice given is for young teenage girls to not post photos of themselves, even with clothes on, online. This type of application would significantly aid sextortion and have serious implications for the mental health of young people. Another concern expressed by a few of the female participants was in relation to scams happening through text messages. For example, there is a scam in which criminals pretending to be from the Trukai Rice Company send messages to people stating that they have won prizes (i.e. large sums of money), and that the only way the person can claim this amount of money is to send a smaller amount of money (e.g. K100.00 or K200.00) to them so that they can process the 'winner's' information and release their 'funds'. Several people have fallen victim to these types of scams and each time someone is deceived, it creates an avenue for more awareness. Overall, there did not appear to be much stress about online safety; the general sentiment was to go online at your own risk.

The gendered aspect of personal safety

Earlier in this report, under the data collection methods and participants section, I explained how I initially planned to interview only women for this pilot research but then at the last minute decided to include five men to get an insight into how safety is experienced by men. While five is a very small sample and hardly representative of the male population in Port Moresby, it would be remiss of me to not write about information derived from speaking with these five men. To begin with, men and women experience safety or insecurity differently. There is no doubt that women are more at risk, more vulnerable and feel more anxious about their safety — various kinds of safety such as safety from sexual violence — more frequently than men. The men I spoke to also experience anxiety when it relates to how they react to confrontation. For example, in a confrontation, do they react by fighting back or giving in? Is it worth potentially losing their life or getting slashed over a phone. The two young men that introduced me to the concept of having a 'dummy' phone do that as a way of 'giving in'. Moreover, one male participant said, 'I am a male too, still I cannot defend myself from 10, 20 people coming at me.'

Another insight gleaned from talking to men is that men may be the target for revenge or attack. Here I paraphrase and share an encounter from one of the male participants — James.[19]

It was around 9 pm at night. James had escorted a female friend to the University of Papua New Guinea's Waiani campus. After dropping her in the one of the buildings, he headed back to the bus stop. It started to rain, and he pulled up his hoodie to shield his head from getting wet. As he walked, he assured himself that he will get home safely as usual. As he walked on, he heard coins rattling as if inside a pocket. He turned around and saw a guy following him, and another one was also running after him holding a machete. James started running, but then he slipped and his phone fell out of his pocket. When he got up, he saw two other men walking towards him.

They saw the men behind James and started to chase them away. James quickly went to the university security forces to report what happened and they returned to the site to look for his phone. His phone was there lying on the ground. They were not after his phone or any of his belongings. This was a murder attempt. James later learnt from the university security forces that a few men from Enga Province were on campus trying to kill male students from Enga as retaliation for a tribal fight that had occurred in Enga a few weeks ago. James, although he looks like he is from Enga, is from the coastal region of PNG. Were it not for the two other men that night, he would have been killed or seriously injured.

While this is an isolated incident, it is not uncommon for PNG as ethnic clashes and tribal fights do still occur in certain parts of the highlands.

Conclusion, recommendations and areas for further research

This report is based on interviews with 20 people (five men, 15 women) who live and work in Port Moresby. The interviews covered a range of questions pertaining to safety both online and offline; however, the issue of ensuring personal safety was paramount. State services such as the police are not reliable or helpful when it comes to preventing crime or reporting crime. Instead, people rely on their own family or community for help. For the participants, many of whom have lived in Port Moresby for over a decade, they unequivocally concluded Port Moresby today is no longer a safe place.

For improvement, a few of the participants suggested drastic and implausible recommendations such as an introduction of a vagrancy act that allows only formally employed people to reside in Port Moresby. Another participant suggested that maybe the National Capital District Commission could create a zoning system to separate the formally employed from those employed in the informal sector. Other participants were able to identify the underlying issues and suggested for more integrated and holistic planning in the education system so that no child is left behind. It is evident that the current state of, and problems in, Port Moresby are a manifestation of poor planning on various fronts, whether that is with educational pathways for high school dropouts, recruitment of police personnel or integrated urban planning for a growing population.

This pilot research is very limited in scope and sample size. However, many of the themes identified with this sample of participants are echoed by the 2014 UN Women report which was based on a survey of 160 people (124 females, 36 males) and held focus groups discussions with 192 people (130 females, 62 males). This suggests that there has been very little improvement with regard to women's safety in public spaces in the last decade. This pilot research presents data with implications for future research. For example, this practice of having good public relations, being local and creating community watch groups is reminiscent of a village setting where everyone is either related or connected to each other in some way. Some settlements in Port Moresby are primarily occupied by people from the same ethnic group. But what are the advantages or disadvantages of such urban village communities? Such groupings may function as a form of social safety net, but do they retard the efforts of national unity especially in the country's national capital? Another potential area for further research would be to investigate the spillover effects of ethnic clashes and tribal fights from rural areas to urban centres. Are there other stories like James's near-death experience? If so, what can be done to prevent or curb such spillover acts of violence from rural to urban areas? It is apparent from discussions with the participants that most people (individuals and groups) have become quite resilient in protecting themselves through safety precautions, help seeking and communal initiatives such as community watch groups. But such efforts are temporary and cannot address the structural issues of limited police personnel and high unemployment rates. It remains the responsibility of the state and development partners to intervene.

Chapter 4: A glimpse of women's safety country wide — Women's understanding and experiences of personal and community safety in Papua New Guinea

Cathy Alex

Introduction

Papua New Guinea is a beautiful country with a people deeply rooted in their ancestral ways, trying to chart a path through life in a world where technology has brought the civilised world right to their fingertips, either by oral stories, watching on smartphones or television. The current PNG is somewhat worse than it used to be when I was growing up, from the perspective of women's and girls' safety.

I remember the place I grew up to be very safe for a women or girl to walk around. I remember, the only way I knew of carrying my *bilum* was on my head hanging toward my back without bothering that someone would snatch it away from me. I remember my grandmother would be going to her gardens, over a few mountains, very early in the morning and would ask myself and my other cousin to clean up the house, bring the reared pigs outside closer to the coffee gardens and tie them there while they dig for worms to eat. Then bring them to shade when the sun gets hotter and then walk up to meet her in the garden to carry the food back home. It was very safe to walk with my cousin by ourselves in the jungle tracks to go meet her. We were in our teenage years. We would then bring all the sweet potato she dug to the nearest creek on our way, quickly wash them and then we all shared the *bilums* of food and would carry them back home, arriving just before the sun began to set.

I remember while my cousin and I who live in the village were walking up to the garden, everyone that passed by would call her by her name and would ask if I was one of my mothers' children on holiday. She would say yes, and they would come and hug or smile and would walk past. Everyone in the village knew each other and if they didn't, then it required one to introduce yourself by telling them who your parents are. As for me, because this was my mother's place, I would always introduce myself by saying I am the third daughter of my mother (I usually would call her name), and those hearing would then in language acknowledge my mother by saying that she is the firstborn daughter of my grandfather. I remember, in the small place where I grew up as a child, our male family, clan and tribe members and as well clans and tribes who our ancestors were friends with, or related to in marriages or friendships, always looked out for us (females) as in rural villages, everyone knows each other. PNG is a place where people live and thrive within extended family and friendship relationships.

Currently, PNG already has high rates of gender-based violence, and rapid social change is creating new challenges for women, in the terrestrial and online environments, that impact on their physical and online safety, and financial security. A lived experience is that I was held at gun-point, being kidnapped at 3 am by 10 gunmen (from a border sharing province) in a very remote community in PNG that is only accessible by walking for 10 hours from the nearest road and airstrip that is no longer operating. It is hard to fathom but also a realisation was made that PNG is no longer safe for women, girls and community members even in rural remote communities and as well the urban areas that we hear of often on the mainstream news. Safety is a fundamental human right, and ensuring women are safe and reducing fear of crime and violence is integral to efforts to maintain and build socio-economic and political stability.

The ANU-led research on women's safety in the Pacific was timely to understand what safety means for a woman and girl in Papua New Guinea currently as part of the contribution to the Pacific wide research. The purpose of the study is to investigate in depth the meaning of personal and community safety to women, which includes their perceptions of risk and how they seek to reduce or prevent harm. The objectives of the study included:

1. To improve our understanding of women's experiences that make them feel safe and unsafe, in different contexts, and
2. To document and learn from the strategies and measures adopted by women to protect themselves and others in the community.

Methodology

Sampling techniques and data collection methods

Using the collaborative and safety-first approach the research was undertaken in one province each of the four regions of Papua New Guinea to give a very quick glimpse of women's and girls' safety in Papua New Guinea. Utilising the Advancing PNG: Women Leaders Network (APNG:WLN) membership, their partners and their willingness to participate in the research, it was carried out in the following provinces: Morobe Province for the Momase region, Gulf and Central Province for the Southern region, Manus and East New Britain for the Niugini Islands region and Hela and Southern Highlands for the Highlands region. Only the Niugini Islands participants filled the online survey. The rest of the participants were interviewed in person and via phone, and answers were then entered into the online survey forms.

Logistics

Each province had a leader who is a member of APNG:WLN or a leader of the partner organisation on the ground in that province. In this case, Morobe, Manus, East New Britain, Central, Southern Highlands, Hela and Gulf provinces were the focal points for the research. The focal point leads provided logistics budget to gather participants for the survey. They organised printing of the consent forms, survey research questions and research introduction information. During the gathering of the participants who were randomly selected from the women's group, family and friends participated in the research. Each person was introduced to the purpose and objective of the research, given a consent form and asked to read, understand and sign it if they would like to participate. Participants in Gulf, East New Britain and Hela used this methodology. Participants in Morobe gathered and looked at the survey questions while I interviewed them one at a time and filled their answers into the survey forms while in Port Moresby. Participants from the Central Province gathered in the Port Moresby APNG:WLN office. I interviewed each of them and recorded their answers into the printed survey forms. Participants from Manus were coordinated by the leader in East New Britain to do the survey online. Each of the leaders were then interviewed to get more context to most of the answers given per location. Almost 90 per cent of the interviews were in Tok Pisin, translating the English written questions into Tok Pisin when interviewing the participants for their ease of understanding and to help them provide the required answer.

The research questions were designed for individuals to easily fill but interviews were conducted to get more context to the answers the participants were giving per the short-hand survey questions. Also, translating the English written questions to Tok Pisin and Motu was needed for the participants to understand and answer accordingly. In a typical PNG context, questions are best answered verbally rather than written in English. English is a foreign language and most times finding the right English word or words to translate the Tok-Pisin/Motu or the mother tongue is challenging as some of the English words do not exist in the mother tongue. Also, generally a typical Papua New Guinean will mostly never give straight to the point answers but will provide the answer within a long paragraph or story. As a Papua New Guinean interviewer, it is very easy to pick up the point of the research participants' story, summarise and paraphrase it back to them to verify what they meant. This was practised throughout the interviews to better understand the context to why participants gave their answers.

Findings and analysis

The survey collected responses from 15 participants, all women, residing in the four regions of Papua New Guinea. The respondents were 17 to 65 years old; 47 per cent were unemployed, juggling domestic duties, small table sales and gardening. Those that were employed had jobs spread across the government, NGO and private sectors; one earned an income from a small stall and another was a student. Almost two-thirds of the women had either completed primary or secondary school education, and more than half were married.

Here is the summary of the key findings, themes and insights from the research results on women's safety in Papua New Guinea and analysis.

Perceptions of safety

The survey results indicate the following about the participants' perceptions of how safe they are in different contexts:

- That the situation where respondents felt safe was walking around their community during the day, with 100 per cent of those that answered saying they felt safe or very safe (see table 3).
- Walking around their community at night was when respondents felt least safe with 92.3% of those that answered saying they felt not safe or not at all safe. More felt safe during big occasions or events with just under half (46.7%) saying they felt not safe or not at all safe (see table 3).
- It was the online environment where the respondents who answered felt the most unsafe with 80 per cent feeling they not safe or not at all safe from bullying and insults on social media, and 73.3 per cent feeling not safe or not at all safe because of scamming and the risk of being defrauded online (see table 4).
- Respondents perceived the following groups as the least safe in their communities — children, teenage boys and girls (see table 5).

Factors influencing safety

The most important person or service in maintaining community safety, out of six options, was identified by participants as local community leader/chiefs, family members, and police.

It was interesting to note respondents indicated police to be the least important when it comes to maintaining safety in the communities. It is the local

Table 3: Perceptions of personal safety at different times, number, PNG sample

	How safe during day time?	How safe during night time?	How safe during big occasions?
Very safe	4	0	4
Safe	10	3	4
Not safe	0	8	6
Not at all safe	0	4	1
No response	1	2	0

Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024

Table 4: Perceptions of online safety including banking, number, PNG sample

	How confident are you that your money is safe in the bank?		When on social media, how safe do you feel from bullying and insults?	When online, how safe do you feel from being scammed or defrauded?
Extremely confident	4	Very safe	0	4
Very confident	10	Safe	3	4
Somewhat confident	0	Not safe	8	6
Not so confident	0	Not at all safe	4	1
Not at all confident	0	No response	0	0
No response	1			

Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

Table 5: Perceptions of the safety of different groups in the village or neighbourhood, number, PNG sample

How safe do you feel these different groups are?	Very Safe	Safe	Not Safe	Not at all Safe	No response
Young children	1	0	12	2	0
Teenage boys	0	0	15	0	0
Teenage girls	0	1	10	4	0
Women	0	5	8	2	0
Men	0	7	8	0	0
Elderly men	0	6	6	1	2
Elderly women	0	7	7	1	0
Disabled people	0	5	3	6	1

Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

leaders, church pastors, magistrates, village court and family members that are viewed as being responsible for maintaining safety. This is a typical situation in mostly semi-urban to rural PNG communities as the police to people ratio in Papua New Guinea is 1:1,845,[20] which means the police lack resources to maintain law and order across the country.

Respondents were also asked which of the eight categories they would ask for help from if there was a major dispute. Again, it was local community leaders and family members, followed by the church elder/pastor, village court, police and the magistrate's court that were selected when the multiple responses were ranked.

Compared with the results for all the participants in the survey across the sub-projects, it seems that in other countries and settings there is more likelihood that the police would be called upon to help (see chapter 8, table 11).

Social problems in the local community

Based on the participants' responses, significant problems in the communities included drug abuse, fights, and land disputes. There were 14 categories of social problems: alcohol-fuelled violence, domestic violence, sexual violence or abuse, child abuse, theft, damaging property or gardens, black magic or sorcery accusations, land disputes, vehicle accidents, money disputes, young men out of control, drug use, and kava use/home brew.

Participants ranked drug use as the biggest problem followed by land disputes, young men out of control and fights. Other significant problems were alcohol-fuelled violence, domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse, and theft.

In the upper Highlands of PNG, tribal fighting using powerful weapons is the biggest social disorder causing fear among women, girls and children. One of the woman leaders interviewed said:

> We are scared of letting our girls go to school by themselves. We escort them to school and we wait to pick them and come back straight home in fear of the gun men getting our daughters and raping them. More families are moving out of the provinces with their children into other provinces for the education of their kids especially girls.

Another women leader said:

> I can't believe I had to also fix my home door to ensure it provides the safety to me and my family though I am living within the semi-urban area where the limited number of police is accessible. The local people involved in the tribal fighting have guns that are stronger than the policeman's and also police will not be around all the time to provide safety.

It was a light-bulb moment for me to see this result that showed drug abuse as the biggest problem as it was a reminder of 20 kilograms of marijuana that was sent into Port Moresby from one of the remote places of PNG. It was addressed to someone else, but in their system, it had me as the sender. I went to pick up my two traditional crafts boxes labelled artefact (I have been a regular client since 2018 with the airline) and was informed my boxes are in question and will await the Drug Squad. I found out that I had a third artefact box which I had no idea of that was in question. Anyway, I was asked by the Drug squad to follow them into the police station for an interview and statement. I told them, this wasn't from me and must be foul play within the airline system, so I had to call the manager of the airline directly in charge of that port where the items were shipped from in the presence of the police man, she checked the system and realised one of their staff did the foul play by adding one more box mentioning in their system that I was the sender while I was in Port Moresby. The police who got me to do a statement eventually didn't end up chasing the culprit. It was suspected that the police man had a direct contact from the supplier and used the airline employee to facilitate the drug delivery. When the police storeroom (where evidence is kept) staff was contacted to see if 20 kg marijuana ended up in the store room, it was realised that the marijuana never ended up in the store room. This demonstrates the breakdown of law and order in Papua New Guinea and to get a survey result demonstrating drug use as the highest big problem in PNG from the sample population was revealing the obvious: that enforcement of drug sales and use is lacking.

Experiences of crime

Out of the 15 participants, four said they had been a victim of crime in the previous year. Of these, two indicated they had reported the crimes to the police. Two have been victims of domestic and/or sexual violence, and the other two of property trespass and damage. This is a higher proportion than found among participants in the other sub-projects, but the numbers are too small to draw any conclusions.

How to improve safety

A participant urged for an end to crimes that harm and make women unsafe: 'Family violence, rape and theft needs to be stopped'. Several participants stressed the importance of women's safety — for example, one said, 'Women are very important in the community, and they play a very vital roles, therefore their safety is paramount'. Another focused on the impact of phones on safety by saying, 'The use of phones make communication very fast and easy, especially young people [in] relationships without [their] parents' knowledge'.

From the interviews, the respondents provided some insight into how they are ensuring they are safe and suggestions on improving safety for women, girls and the vulnerable within their communities:

The role of male relatives

Having more male relatives in a family provides the first security for the communities. Families are vulnerable when they have fewer male or no male relatives especially those that are young and energetic. Tribes and clans in PNG are stronger and feared when they have more male relatives because these relatives will always protect their own, especially women, girls, children and the vulnerable. Some of the respondents felt safer in their communities, especially the tribal fighting communities, when they live together in larger numbers than in a nuclear family as highlighted by one of the respondents from the upper Highlands: 'Living together with a lot of boys/men is safe, especially with a lot of male family members'.

Curfews

The respondents also suggested communities to have community regulations/by-laws including curfews to keep the drunkards in their residences at certain times of the night and as well as ensuring people in public places, communal facilities and pathways are free from harassment. Some comments from the respondents of the Southern region, especially communities near Port Moresby, illustrate this:

> There should be a curfew by the councillor in the village at 10 pm so that the young people should be in their houses, especially young girls.

> We need strong safety that will govern our people walking from inside and outside the community ... community is not as safe anymore ...

Good local leaders

The survey results showed local leaders make a significant contribution to maintaining community safety. A participant emphasised how important it is to have a good leader: 'Young girls are not safe but having a good leaders in the community helps to keep the place a safe place for everyone'.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Strengthen community-based approaches to address safety concerns, particularly involving local leaders, families, and the police.
2. Implement targeted interventions to address the high prevalence of domestic violence, sexual violence, and other crimes affecting vulnerable groups.
3. Improve financial and digital literacy to enhance confidence in banking and online safety.
4. Undertake further research to better understand the nuances of women's safety in Papua New Guinea, given significant challenges that require a comprehensive, community-driven approach to address.
5. This research is from a very small sample of the population. Another study of such research needs to be conducted country wide with a larger sample including men.

It would be very interesting to survey men and see their responses. I fear if they have similar perceptions about personal safety and social problems, PNG will truly be in crisis.

Conclusion

This survey highlighted problems contributing to making an environment not safe for women and girls in Papua New Guinea. Drug abuse is seen as the biggest social problem, out of 14 listed problems, followed by alcohol fuelled violence and young men out of control. From a practitioner's point of view, and based on an understanding of the local context, reducing drug and alcohol abuse and undertaking more research into why boys or men are becoming out of control would be the first actions recommended to be taken. Further investigation of how women and men feel unsafe in the online environment and how they seek to reduce risk is also a priority. Surveying a much larger sample of the population would be the best next step to confirm these small-scale results. All current PNG statistics demonstrate that PNG is one of the worst countries in the world for a woman and a girl to live, and this study again demonstrates and justifies this perception and fosters a very bad image of the country.

Western Union, Lini highway, Port Vila, Vanuatu
Photograph by Rochelle Bailey

Chapter 5: Women's financial safety project — Port Vila, Vanuatu

Rochelle Bailey

Overview

For the past 18 years Vanuatu has been participating in cross-border labour schemes to Aotearoa/New Zealand (since 2006) and Australia (since 2009). These employment opportunities have provided a significant cash injection that goes directly to families in Vanuatu. However, they also attract new expectations and obligations within families, communities, church and other social networks. Since the establishment of the seasonal worker programs and other internal banking initiatives in Vanuatu, practices associated with financial institutions and safety have changed. This report highlights perceptions of women's safety and how they are interwoven with financial safety. Understanding perceptions of women's safety was essential in order to examine how financial safety was conceptualised. Workshops in Vanuatu revealed that financial safety revolved around how money is seen, used and understood socially and culturally, and the use of financial institutions from micro-credit schemes to corporate banking systems. The themes that came through the workshops revealed that although there are positive outcomes from increased incomes there are often unintended negative impacts that are associated with these that need to be negotiated within the family, church and the broader community. These often came with an additional security worry of unbalancing social ontologies from their *Kastom* villages. For example, in some communities holding large sums of wealth can disturb spiritual systems (Bailey 2014). They also highlighted that increased incomes attracted new attention from people with deceptive behaviours.

Aims

This research aimed to gain an understanding of women's safety in Vanuatu with a specific focus on financial safety. Vanuatu has engaged in labour mobility programs with New Zealand since 2006 (pilot program inclusive) and Australia in 2008 (pilot program inclusive). Over this period, research participants noted changes in behaviour with increased financial resources, which had impacts such as improving safety while, at the same time, compromising safety and security. Studies have raised the issue of changed perceptions of safety during these cross-border labour schemes (Bailey 2019; Bedford et al. 2020). These have ranged from new practices such as locks on doors to revealing vulnerabilities when a spouse is absent. Various aspects of women's safety in Vanuatu have been noted in the past, and it was essential to gain a preliminary understanding of this from both men and women to scope out what would be a valuable contribution to a potentially more extensive study on the topic. This report feeds into a broader study of women's safety in the Pacific.

Objectives

The objectives were to use focus groups in Vanuatu to discuss women's safety including financial safety and analyse how participants recognised and defined these. This would lead to further evaluation of what was important to participants to understand how concepts of safety and financial security were perceived. The three key areas were:

1. Perceptions of women's safety
2. Financial safety and the links to livelihoods
3. Risks associated with financial safety.

Methodology

The workshops were primarily conducted in Bislama with the help of a research assistant. The research assistant aided in all preparations for the workshops, hosting an information-gathering event and reaching out to potential participants to capture a wide range of perspectives. We also agreed to utilise a locally run venue and catering company to ensure that we were giving back to the communities hosting us and assisting with the research.

Each workshop began with an opening prayer, followed by an introduction of the research objectives and what the research was hoping to achieve, an agenda for the day, and a list of local support systems should participants feel the need to seek them. The workshops consisted of individual and group work, during which participants reflected on their perceptions of women's safety in general terms and financial safety in particular.

The questions were semi-structured to align with the larger regional safety project. Nonetheless, follow-up research would reconsider these pilot questions with further consultation with Vanuatu stakeholders for the cultural and social relevance of the questions. In addition to the questions, a PowerPoint slide had pictures, and participants discussed how safety could be related to the images. After the workshop, we concluded with a closing prayer and photos. Participants then filled out the study's survey and received a small *koha* (gift) for their contributions, after which we had refreshments and our conversations about safety continued.

Demographics of participants

Most participants were 25 to 45 years old, with a close split between being married and single. Over 50 per cent claimed to be self-employed, and only 17 per cent were unemployed. However, in Vanuatu, people often claim

to be unemployed even when they work full-time in the informal sectors (Bailey 2014). Although the project's overall aim was interrogating women's financial safety, there needed to be gender balance in the discussions for a broader understanding. Therefore, two workshops were held, one in the morning for women and one in the afternoon for men. There was an even split of 10 women and men in each group.

All participants were residents of Port Vila, Efate. Further research should be conducted in other islands of Vanuatu to gain a more representative perspective, as safety is often experienced differently depending on locality. Many islands within Vanuatu have different customs and approaches to gender norms, restrictions and perceptions. All of the men who participated in this study work in the Australian and New Zealand short-term seasonal worker schemes. Because of this, most of the men reflected on safety in terms of livelihoods and absences from their families. Nonetheless, they also discussed safety outside of the larger family unit and highlighted wider community issues around women's and men's safety.

Introduction

Early in the morning before the workshops, at approximately 1.30 am, a strong earthquake in Port Vila was measured at 6.5 on the Richter scale. After this, several aftershocks were felt. The earthquake impacted the tone prior to the beginning of the workshop. I have experienced many earthquakes in the 17 years that I have conducted research in Vanuatu. However, none have given me any grave concerns about my safety like this one and the subsequent aftershocks. I brushed it off, thinking that I had become more sensitive as I aged. However, those thoughts soon disappeared when the participants arrived for the morning session and validated my feelings, stating that it was a big earthquake, and they were scared for their safety.

Once all of the participants arrived, we entered the building and took the stairs to the top floor. At the time, it was not spoken about, but later, over morning refreshments, many noted the concern of being high in a building after such a strong earthquake. I applaud the participants who showed up on the day and braved the heights to discuss safety in Vanuatu. There was talk about relocating to a different venue prior to the meeting. However, it was decided to remain.

Once inside the large and uninviting conference room, we arranged furniture in a more intimate setting for everyone to converse. We began with an opening prayer, followed by introductions to the research, and an agenda was given to participants. We opened the session with an icebreaker exercise, where participants who had never met were paired, including the researchers. Even if participants had met each other previously, they had to pretend that they had not met each other and say, 'They thought that they had seen them from before, guess their name, what island they belonged to and who they reminded them of'. It was a fun exercise which the participants enjoyed. Afterwards, we went around the table and gave proper introductions about where everyone was from, what they did, and why they were interested in attending the workshop. The next step was to get participants thinking about what safety meant to them.

Ol ples we oli makem yu felim yu seif? (What makes you feel safe?)

We provided participants with post-it notes to write down what they thought safety meant to them. This was done individually. Afterwards we posted the notes on the whiteboard and discussed the various concepts and ideas that the group had around safety — participants provided examples of what they meant by what they had written down and spoke about how this affects their daily lives.

The main associations women made with safety and feeling safe were notions of care, church and happiness. When asked about what makes them feel safe in the individual task, women raised these issues as being key:

- Gladness
- Not worrying about dangers and being protected from dangers
- Family protection — including keeping families together — especially spouses and children
- Family health and finance
- Essential to have spiritual guidance
- Protection of wellbeing
- Keeping away from serious crimes
- Feeling protected — taking actions to be protected and being aware of dangers to minimise the threat of dangers
- Abuse — all types. It was discussed that it is difficult to prevent abuse, as it is present in many homes and outside in the wider community.
- Concerns about the safety of their children were strongly expressed.

This also resonated with the group work. Many mentioned that having a 'good life' with secure financial stability would increase safety. However, they were also aware that gains from a 'good life' — such as receiving earnings from overseas — could have the opposite effect on people's jealousies. The concept and impacts of jealousy in Vanuatu are fundamental when discussing safety. It is often related to physical and spiritual security. While examining social ontologies in Ambrym Island, Vanuatu, both Bailey (2014) and Rio (2002) have reported how money, and the way it is used, can compromise safety through ideologies of jealousies and ownership. Alongside the impacts of jealousies, black magic occurrences related to incomes were also raised as a safety concern by both women and men in this study. Jealousies are often associated with perceptions of gendered roles and the perception that money is often controlled or owned by men. Women either earning or receiving additional money outside of the household can lead to increased gender-based violence, as some men are threatened by women earning, for

multiple reasons. Provided reasons have included: a threat to their manhood, a threat of earning money and leaving relationships or the ownership of money seen as belonging to the head of the household. As noted by Eves (6/7/2018) women's economic empowerment can also create negative impacts such as increased violence.

Wanem nau hemi makem yu no fil seif? (What makes you feel unsafe?)

The discussion on feeling safe led to conversations about what made participants feel unsafe. Participants raised 16 main points that made them feel unsafe, which revolved around financial stability, natural disasters, housing situations, family safety, and physical and emotional safety. All participants stated that being financially secure is important in their overall safety. Yet there was fear and concern that job security, either in seasonal worker programs or employment in Vanuatu, also contributed to anxieties about permanence and insecurity. Likewise, participants raised the problem of having low-paying jobs that did not meet the needs of their families as something that threatened their security. Not owning land or having 'improper' housing was also associated with feeling physically and emotionally unsafe in the community.

Housing situations

In terms of housing situations, the main topics of the conversation were owning land, having a good house, overcrowding, and informal settlements. As in other places in the Pacific with the rural-to-urban drift, many communities have created informal settlements. These spaces are often seen as areas of insecurity for a number of reasons, and residents are often referred to as vulnerable to a number of safety concerns. There is much literature on informal settlements in the Pacific and concerns about their safety for residents due to inadequate housing and access to resources, such as clean drinking water, and the impact of natural disasters on these communities. The residents' vulnerability and common reputation as being landless migrants, poor or low-income earners with a perceived attitude of having no regard to common law or *kastom*, can lead them to be seen as a security threat to other communities. For some in the workshop it was important to help secure good housing for those in settlements as a way of also protecting their own financial wellbeing.

From conversations with her research participants R. Smith (2016) argued that seasonal workers were building more permanent homes that lasted longer than traditional homes and this was referred to as safety for the family. Nonetheless, there are debates on traditional vs Western forms of housing that this study does not engage with. However, like Smith's, my research has also shown that participants refer to new Western style housing in terms of safety and permanence. This is also often seen as financial safety in the fact they have acquired land and built houses and businesses. Yet even this land and the concepts of 'proper' landownership can still be contested, and this too can compromise safety.

Natural disasters

Although natural disasters such as cyclones were raised as a concern for safety, for some of the participants it was the natural disasters that they regularly experienced, such as flooding of riverbanks, that were seen as the greatest and most immediate threat to security. The threat was not only to the damage of land, properties and belongings but also to lives or livelihoods. The given examples of livelihood security were damage to gardens and work tools; broken bridges and roadways blocking access to markets for livelihoods or workplaces, and concerns with hygiene and sanitation.

Safety of the family

Ensuring the safety of families, financially, physically, emotionally, spiritually and through the environment was a priority for participants. This was linked to overall wellbeing of families and communities. The main safety concern raised here was the insecurity of marriages when a partner was overseas for seasonal work, and this was also linked into having positive relationships with children. In the past some participants from a previous study (Bailey 2024) have reported violence from their children to either themselves or within the community, where teenagers have acted out while a partner has been absent. Women in Bailey's (2014) study highlighted compromised emotional safety of both spouses and children of seasonal workers, as well as seasonal workers themselves.

Physical and emotional safety

Physical and emotional safety was raised for various types of abuse within the household, communities and workspaces. The household security issues discussed ranged from abusive partners to absent partners. Although communities are often seen as a safe place, they too can be an area where security can be compromised. This can occur in various ways: community scrutiny and rumours (Bailey 2014), being seen as a target of a remittance receiver or physical security. Emotional security also plays into this, where female spouses know that they are being watched and judged in their interactions (Bailey 2014); this is regardless of whether a partner is absent or not.

Men's workshop group

The men arrived at 1.30 pm for their session. There were interesting differences between the two groups. The workshop for the men was conducted in the same way as the women's workshop with the icebreaker, individual work and group work. However, we noted differences in the individual work where the men would often be reserved and when it came to sharing their thoughts they often followed each other, unlike the women where the individual work was more variable in answers and conversations. Having a female team of researchers may have contributed to this. In addition, none of the male participants had ever participated in the researcher's prior work. However, only one of the female participants was a known collaborator of the

researcher's previous studies and this did not impact the flow of conversation.

In the individual work that discussed perceptions on women's safety the men drew on several key themes. The most common were respect, helping with family, care, prayer, staying at home, and eating right. These were reflected again in the group work where overall they depicted women keeping safe by making a good home, love and care, and providing a happy life for the family. According to most male participants, women must stay together and look after children and their spouses. Additionally, good health, life and prayer were central to the discussions on women's safety.

There was one noticeable difference with the men when they discussed safety. The men's group all reflected on their concerns that making the wrong decision, financial and otherwise, for the family could impact the safety of their families and on women's safety in general. This was only raised by one female participant, and although noted as important in the women's workshop, it dominated conversations in the men's workshop. This was mainly discussed in terms of livelihoods and while they were away working on farms in seasonal worker programs. There was pressure in making the right decisions; even the decision to leave the household in search of paid employment was seen as a risk to safety and security of all family members. Changes in security practices — such as locks on doors, fences, putting money into bank accounts — were also mentioned in the group discussions.

Financial safety

In 2024, there were over 50,000 people in the Pacific participating in cross-border labour schemes in Australia and New Zealand. Similar to other international labour mobility schemes the percentage of women participating in these schemes is low, though it has been increasing in the past decade: 18 per cent in Australia and 11 per cent in New Zealand. In Vanuatu, however, women not only participate in these schemes directly but also indirectly; approving a partner to work overseas, looking after businesses acquired, controlling the household incomes and being remittance receivers are among other expectations outside of what their normal roles would be, whether in full-time informal or informal employment (Bailey 2019).

With the average remittances being AU$9,000, millions of dollars are returning to the Pacific in formal and informal ways (Bailey 2023; World Bank 2017). The various types of remittances provide an expectation of increased financial security through predicted economic and social development. However, these have to align and be negotiated through family, community, church and other customary obligations that can also often lead to financial insecurities. This section highlights the role of financial institutions, women's remittance and savings practices, and the double-edged sword of increased income in Vanuatu households.

In Bailey's (2009) study, 90 per cent of participants reported not having a bank account prior to working in New Zealand, and much of the finance to get to New Zealand was either via micro-credit schemes with extremely high interest rates or community loans with expectations on what they will have to achieve with their earnings. These were the only options as securing a bank loan was not possible due to most never having been in any type of full-time formal sector job or not having enough capital to draw on.

Once participants became more trusting of financial institutions in New Zealand there was still an initial hesitation to opening an account in Vanuatu. It is not only a distrust of the institutions but also of those that control and work in them. Even several years later, seasonal workers were still returning home with envelopes containing thousands of dollars in cash and then lining up at a Goodies money exchange store on the main street. In regard to financial safety in banking systems, we have to remember that although banks have been in Vanuatu for a long time, trust in banks, especially from seasonal workers who I discussed this with, was not demonstrated for a long time. The same can be said for conversations in regard to using Vanuatu's National Provident Fund (VNPF). However, this concern stems from past mismanagement of public funds to the VNPF, which resulted in riots in Vanuatu in 1998 (Wittersheim 1998) over the management of funds. This attitude continued with the hiring of a foreign general manager.[21] Furthermore, in the case of many rural communities, there is a general distrust of institutions they have no oversight of, including banks.

Perceptions of banking systems have changed in the past decade, and seasonal workers are using banking institutions more than informal practices and other loan arrangements. Additionally, many seasonal workers have increased the number of banking products they use, such as loans and additional savings accounts. Although the reason for this never came up in conversations in the workshops, it could reflect a newfound trust in the banking system and further safety of people's finances. In some cultures in Vanuatu, being seen with additional money can cause friction with both the physical and spiritual worlds; it is not unusual to hear of people burying money, as the concept of money and ownership of it has its own cultural practices in many places (Bailey 2019). However, access to banks has not always been possible in Vanuatu. Often there may be one branch on an island. I observed people on a weekly boat that travelled on Tuesdays from North Ambrym to Craig Cove in West Ambrym, located 2–3 hours away at a cost of AU$300, to access the bank as rural banks often have limited operating days and hours. Due to the high costs to access the bank the boat was often at capacity as people tried to share these costs.

Another contributing factor to the increase of banking clientele in Vanuatu was the work by Mr John Aruhuri of the National Bank of Vanuatu (NBV). He was given a mandate to increase rural banking. The article 'Banking the Unbanked in Vanuatu' highlighted this work, as well as banking perceptions, accessibility and program delivery:

> As head of Rural Banking Services, Mr Aruhuri's work had to begin by raising awareness about the need to save and counter the negative attitudes that banking was only for the rich. He also had to get people to stop keeping their money under their mats and beds, and bring it to the bank. (The Commonwealth 4/4/2013)

The educational programs that were delivered to rural Vanuatu were extremely successful:

> Within one year of commencing the training and radio programmes, 9,000 new bank accounts were opened for rural customers, raising an additional US$3 million in savings. In a country with a population of just over 250,000 people, this was no mean feat. (The Commonwealth 4/4/2013)

Since that 2013 report the use of banking services has contributed to changed social practices in banking. The Financial Services Demand Side Survey Vanuatu (2016) (UNDP Pacific Office 2017) highlighted that 32 per cent of women owned a bank account and 41 per cent of men. This has continued to increase, as shown by a survey conducted by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF 2023) which revealed that 58 per cent of men and 48 per cent of women reported owning a bank account. This is a significant increase. As well as other national initiatives, such as the NBV above, participation in international labour schemes is a contributing factor to increased uptake of banking accounts and products. Bailey (2009) argued that many ni-Vanuatu workers in the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme had never had a bank account in prior to coming to New Zealand and her research participants highlighted the distrust of banks in keeping their money safe. In the early years of seasonal worker programs many workers had negative experiences engaging banks for loans to participate in seasonal work. Due to restrictions on not being able to provide capital for a loan, people have often sought financial assistance from micro-credit lenders or loan sharks that has resulted in financial insecurity and losses (Bailey 2014). These systems have provided cautionary tales and a distrust of banking systems that need consideration when discussing financial security.

Finances in Vanuatu are often practised differently depending on gender. I observed this a number of times on Ambrym and research conducted by Elise Howard[22] highlighted that women are more likely to report that they save and use their bank accounts frequently. This is not only in the Pacific: a number of international scholars have written about the gendered use of incomes, and remittances (Naerssen et al. 2015). It has been argued that women use remittances and savings differently from men. This has normally been highlighted by women spending more on education, health and daily household expenses. A recent World Bank–ANU study by Doan, Dornan and Edwards (2023:51) attempted to highlight these differences for Pacific seasonal workers, but they found there were negligible differences in all spending areas except where they argued men tended to spend more money on fixing family dwellings. Remittances from cross-border worker programs are a major factor in uptake of savings bank accounts but there are also other contributing factors to consider in Vanuatu, such as new businesses being established, the increased value and export of kava, and newfound knowledge and trust of banking systems over some informal financial systems. It is also important to note that other forms of banking are also becoming more prominent in Vanuatu such as digital banking. This was not raised by participants; however, it is currently part of a pilot program with RSE seasonal workers. There is hesitation amongst some that using these types of transfers will make their earnings vulnerable to scammers.

Double-edged sword — opportunities and insecurities

Increased household incomes can be both a blessing and a curse. For many in this research and in my previous research (2007–24) participants have reported both positive and negative impacts of having additional money. I would argue for women in Vanuatu that this has often placed them in more vulnerable positions. This resonates with other research of women's economic empowerment in the region (Eves 6/7/2018). Nonetheless, beginning with the positive outcomes, women have said, similar to the discussion above, that having additional finances puts them in a better position in regard to all forms of livelihoods, natural disasters and even their positions in the communities, as well as providing a means to create new forms of independence and freedoms. The latter was mentioned in terms of marriage arrangements and opportunities to leave abusive relationships. The female participants in this study revealed that financial safety was associated mainly with job security, ownership of land, building of quality homes, and having financial resources to improve livelihoods.

Conversations on risks to financial security were intertwined with those on other types of safety, such as domestic violence, inadequate healthcare access, natural disasters, social media scamming, pressures of social obligations, and not being able to care for the family. Customary land disputes, black magic and natural disasters added risk to financial safety and insecurity. Remittance receivers are often seen as a target. People know that they will be receiving incomes from family overseas and there are opportunists that take advantage through deceptive behaviours. Our group spoke of cases that they were aware of. Further to that is the recent establishment of a popular money transfer company in Port Vila where receivers often line up outside of the establishment. This makes collecting remittances a public affair in a normally private practice, creating further targets and vulnerabilities. Not only are remittance receivers at risk; so are those that send remittances. It is often joked that seasonal workers are walking ATMs (Bailey 2014), but this also comes with potential financial insecurity through theft, fraud, expectations and social obligations or 'forced' cultural reciprocity. However, the male seasonal workers in the

workshop group were more concerned about how their decisions impacted women's or the household's financial security than their own personal security.

The survey results

Only 17 of the 20 participants finished the survey. This may have been due to difficulties in submitting or not realising a question was unanswered when they pressed 'submit', which caused a form to not submit. I noted this with a participant who used my phone. Nonetheless, this section determines whether the survey closely aligned with the conversations in the workshop or if there were variations to note.

As indicated earlier, the majority of participants were aged 25 to 34 years old. There was a near even split between married and single participants. However, the costs associated with bride price in Vanuatu can be a contributing factor in not getting married. Therefore, de facto relationships are often the norm, so I possibly would consider them as being aligned with the married grouping in a future study. The majority of participants reported to be self-employed. However, as indicated in the survey results, that employment was in gardening or farming. Given that many of participants work overseas on farms this may also have generated this response. There was no discussion in the workshops regarding participants' education status; however, the surveys revealed that over half of the participants had education up to secondary school with nearly a quarter being involved in tertiary education.

Approximately 65 per cent of participants said that they felt safe to walk around the community during the day; at night this figure reduced to 35 per cent. This aligns with the group conversations in the workshop. However, in the workshops, outside of the community is where people discussed that they felt less safe. Nearly half of the participants reported not feeling safe at sports events and social occasions, such as weddings, birthdays or public holiday celebrations. This was also observed by the researcher weeks before, when one of the attendees of the workshop did not arrive at a function because there was a wedding celebration near her house, and she reported that she was too afraid to leave the house and walk through all the different, often drunk people that were in the vicinity.

Interestingly, the numbers related to the safety of members of society change when thinking of not safe and not at all safe. When in the not at all safe category, the numbers even out. Whereas, in the not safe category, participants highlighted teenage boys and disabled people as a higher risk. Women and elderly women were ranked low in the not safe category (see table 6). Exploration is needed to find what type of evidence may be supporting these perceptions.

There were no surprises in the roles of community groups in keeping people safe. Although some may be surprised that church pastors or elders were ranked the highest, there will be deeper meanings to this that this study did not explore, such as in what ways do participants think they are responsible for these roles.

Table 6: Perceptions of the safety of different groups, number and weighted average, Vanuatu

	Very safe	Safe	Not safe	Not at all safe	Total no.	Weighted average
Young children	5.9%	41.2%	29.4%	23.5%		
	1	7	5	4	17	2.71
Teenage boys	0.0%	35.3%	52.9%	11.8%		
	0	6	9	2	17	2.76
Teenage girls	0.0%	41.2%	29.4%	29.4%		
	0	7	5	5	17	2.88
Women	0.0%	64.7%	17.7%	17.7%		
	0	11	3	3	17	2.53
Men	0.0%	52.9%	29.4%	17.7%		
	0	9	5	3	17	2.65
Elderly women	11.8%	47.1%	11.8%	29.4%		
	2	8	2	5	17	2.59
Elderly men	5.9%	41.2%	23.5%	29.4%		
	1	7	4	5	17	2.76
Disabled people	0.0%	29.4%	47.1%	23.5%		
	0	5	8	4	17	2.94

Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024

Table 7 reveals a number of challenges to safety that respondents face in the community. Although these issues were discussed in the group discussions, the data in this table highlights how much of a concern these problems are in their villages or neighbourhoods. All of the 14 social problems were viewed as a problem or a big problem by almost all of the respondents. Based on the weighted averages for responses, the most common or serious are drug use, kava use, vehicle accidents and land disputes. In contrast, fights, theft and domestic violence were the least likely to be seen as problems.

The Vanuatu survey revealed that village chiefs and leaders are still the primary points of contact in Port Vila when there is a dispute. However, it would be beneficial to investigate further and see how this question was answered based on gender. Only one respondent reported being a victim of crime in the past 12 months. The question on reporting may have been confusing for some respondents as they answered 'no' after already recording in the workshop that they had been victims in the past.

The results showed that 76 per cent of respondents felt unsafe on social media. Social media has only become popular and widespread in the last decade in Vanuatu, and over the years of research conducted there, even when not part of studies, social media has been a conversation of concern for many ni-Vanuatu spoken to. Like those of many other countries, Vanuatu citizens are dealing with fraudulent and unsolicited contacts, personal attacks and the sharing of intimate pictures and videos through social media. Nearly 60 per cent of respondents reported not feeling safe from online scams. During the women's workshop, the notorious Facebook Samsung scam and another pyramid scheme were discussed at length and most knew of someone that had either lost money or had to change their Facebook accounts because of inappropriate behaviour on social media.

Discussion

Information from the workshops and data from the survey reveal that there are concerns around personal and financial safety for ni-Vanuatu women. The workshop examined what they considered safety was and what made them feel unsafe. An area to examine further is how to mitigate safety issues, as this was not extensively canvassed in the workshop. Looking at the first section on what safety meant to participants, the top three key points for women were having a good home, financial security and health security. These were interlinked with each other. For the men, women's security appeared to be related to keeping a good home (this is inclusive of family relationships); associated with this was the perceived gendered roles in the family and community. Another was to remain close to God. Nonetheless, men were concerned how their own actions and decisions could also risk the safety of their family members, and this was a strong point in the workshop. It was clear that women being outside of the community was seen as more of a

Table 7: Perceptions of social problems in the village or neighbourhood, number and weighted average, Vanuatu

	Response					
Problem	**Very safe**	**Safe**	**Not safe**	**Not at all safe**	**Total no.**	**Weighted average**
Fights	9	7	1	0	17	1.53
Alcohol fuelled violence	13	4	0	0	17	1.24
Domestic violence	9	8	0	0	17	1.47
Sexual violence or abuse	14	2	1	0	17	1.24
Child abuse	11	5	1	0	17	1.41
Theft	9	8	0	0	17	1.47
Damaging property or gardens	12	4	0	0	17	1.29
Black magic or sorcery	11	4	1	0	16	1.38
Land disputes	14	3	0	0	17	1.18
Vehicle accidents	12	3	2	0	17	1.14
Money disputes	8	9	0	0	17	1.53
Young men out of control	11	6	0	0	17	1.35
Drug use	14	3	0	0	17	1.18
Kava use	14	3	0	0	17	1.18

Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

Source: Lindy Kanan and Judy Putt. Graphic design by Georgina Ryan.

threat. However, there were also issues within their home communities. Yet, the onus of safety of women and the extended family appeared to fall mainly on women. In my past research I observed that any type of compromised security is often associated with, or even justified by, the actions of victims. For example, if someone is sick, they must have gone somewhere and upset the spirits. Or if a woman was sexually abused, she must have been wearing something inappropriate or not acting appropriately. This is not only limited to women; the same is often said when men's safety is compromised. Future research plans include looking at opportunities and challenges to women's financial safety in cross-border labour schemes. This will involve researching cultural and social norms and practices of securing finances in informal and informal banking institutions, examining how temporary incomes and paid employment uncertainties influence savings and spending practices and how these are impacted by expectations and cultural obligations of families and communities.

Conclusion

Although one of the objectives of this study was to get a wider understanding of and definition of what safety meant to participants, this did not eventuate and perhaps could be tabled for a much larger study. There are takeaways that can be built on from this study. However, questions that are still unanswered but have been noted by participants in previous studies relate to various types of safety of seasonal worker families while there is an absent household member. These need to be explored further in order to gain a holistic picture of financial safety and the gendered securities of these. Nonetheless, this pilot, and the eagerness and interest it generated from participants and those outside of the study, highlighted the reality that this kind of study is of interest and wanted. Many participants said that they would like to continue and see how the study goes and mentioned that a large-scale project that was inclusive of rural and urban areas and all six provinces would be beneficial.

Chapter 6: Perceptions of safety of PALM workers in Australia

Judy Putt

Overview

Building on earlier research into the safety and wellbeing of Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme workers in Australia (Kanan and Putt 2023) and a current project that focuses on the meat processing sector, this pilot sub-project involved meetings and interviews with PALM workers in a New South Wales (NSW) country town. It builds on earlier research in late 2023 in other NSW country towns where Pacific workers were employed in the meat processing sector. These interviews provided insights into the wellbeing and safety of PALM workers in this sector, and informs the more recent sub-project. Conducted in March 2024, the study revealed that both male and female workers revealed few concerns about their safety in the NSW town. The main area of concern was their online safety, which was an environment they felt less confident about, especially as so many of their work and financial transactions are completed online. Several strategies were adopted or in place to make them feel more at ease in the country town, with some faring better than others due to the effort and personnel of the Approved Employer (AE) and/or host employer. These included accommodation arrangements, links with a local church and its congregation and with sporting groups, moving around in groups of three or more, and not drinking. However, most participants had not been in Australia for very long, and had limited interactions with the local community outside of the workplace. Only a few said they had encountered what appeared to be racist curiosity by residents. One group in particular, Fijian women, noted that they felt physically safer in Australia than in Suva, the rapidly changing capital city of Fiji. In keeping with the earlier research, much of the workers' discontent, where expressed, centred on workplace matters, pay and deductions.

Background and context

In the past 20 years New Zealand and Australia have introduced labour mobility schemes that enable adults from agreed Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste to work in a limited range of sectors on temporary visas. New Zealand has had the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme since 2007, and Australia followed suit with a similar seasonal worker program (SWP). Both of these, as the names imply, were for short-term periods and involved employment in the agricultural sector. Australia introduced a longer term Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) in 2018, which focused on designated sectors in rural areas such as aged care, tourism and meat processing. The two Australian programs were combined in 2022, as the PALM scheme.

The focus of this research is workers employed in Australia under the PALM scheme. COVID-19 border closures and restrictions had a big impact, with a dramatic downturn in both SWP and PLS visas in 2020–21 and a subsequent surge in numbers in 2021–22 (Bedford 8/8/2023). Notably, the workers recruited under the PLS were hurriedly recruited to work in the meat processing sector, which had lost many of its temporary skilled workers from Asian countries who had comprised a significant proportion of the workforce. Trend data on the PLS workers (now known as long-term PALM workers) from 2018 to October 2022 shows the rapid increase in numbers from late 2020 and how the majority of workers were men. Back in October 2022, 80 per cent of long-term workers were men and 20 per cent were women. The increase in the proportion of men was primarily due to the rapid growth of long-term workers in the meat processing industry, of which 89 per cent were men (Jeffress et al. 2022; Kanan and Putt 2023).

As at August 2024, the total number of PALM workers in Australia was 30,805, with 6,105 based in NSW. Of the total number, 39 per cent, almost all of them on long-term visas, were in the meat processing sector. For the whole of Australia, 12,135 PALM workers were recorded as being in the meat processing sector, of whom almost all (98%) are on long-term visas. In the past year, the monthly total number in the sector increased by 2,000 and has since stabilised at around 12,000 workers. There was no specific data on the country of origin for PALM workers in the meat processing sector, but the long-term visa holders were as follows — Fiji (27.4%), Solomon Islands (21.9%), PNG (9.8%), Samoa (9.6%), Timor Leste (8.6%), Tonga (7.3%), Kiribati (7.3%), Vanuatu (6.1%), Tuvalu (1.8%) and Nauru (0.2%).[23]

Conducted in early 2023, a large-scale survey of workers from three Pacific Island countries under the RSE, SWP and PLS schemes showed that the majority of workers were satisfied with their experience, including their earnings, employment and accommodation, which highlighted the overall economic and social benefits for the workers and their home families and communities (Doan et al. 2023). In relation to safety, the survey only canvassed the workers' perceptions in relation to workplace safety. Several questions also asked about the impact of the scheme on their family relationships, and on conflict or disagreements with employers. In relation to the latter, approximately a quarter said it had

a negative impact on spousal relationships, and less than 10 per cent of PLS workers indicating that they had disagreements or conflicts with their employers. However, more than a third of PLS workers from the three countries said they would prefer to work for an alternative employer, which is high compared with the low levels reporting disagreements and conflict with employers, and unfair treatment. Those that said they knew another worker who had absconded (57% of the PLS workers) indicated that the main reason was not being happy with the employer, followed by finding a better job and/or because of the low salary or high deductions (Doan et al. 2023).

In the survey, a large majority of women said their participation in the programs had fostered greater 'agency' and that they had greater access to and control over financial resources. Smaller qualitative studies underline the impact — both during the period of work overseas and upon the return home — on gender relations and household responsibilities. Women were reported to feel greater self-confidence and economic independence (Doan et al. 2023:73). Both men and women survey participants indicated that their participation in the three labour mobility schemes had had a positive impact on their relationship with children, while a smaller proportion said it had had a positive impact on marital relationships (62% of female workers compared with 81% of female workers). A recent survey in Vanuatu revealed that the most positive aspect of the labour mobility schemes (out of six categories) was viewed as helping to improve household income, while the most negative (out of six categories) was worse family relations (Mudaliar et al. 2024). In the large-scale survey conducted by the World Bank and ANU, approximately a quarter of respondents reported it had 'strained relationships' (Doan et al. 2023:69), which is a strong theme that emerged from earlier qualitative research with Vanuatu seasonal workers (Bailey 2014) and is fundamental to the notion of transnational care practices (Withers and Hill 2023).

For many PALM scheme participants coming to Australia it can be their first time overseas, and many are recruited from village settings. Although efforts are made to prepare them for life in Australia, for example, with pre-departure briefings, the actual experience can be very different to what was expected, and sometimes it can be a difficult time.

A study undertaken in 2023 sought to find out more about the factors that contribute to a positive experience, and the factors that contribute to unhappiness and lack of safety (Kanan and Putt 2023). At that time the PLF was seeking to implement a 'community of care' model to bring together critical stakeholders at regional fora in order to identify what more could be done to improve the way the scheme operated. The study therefore centred on seven sites where such forums were held. It involved surveys of stakeholders and workers, interviews, attendance at the fora and other events, and an analysis of PLF critical incident data.

The report concluded that there were employment, workplace, personal and social factors that contribute to levels of wellbeing and safety. Workers expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work in Australia and earn money, and employers acknowledged how having the workers was keeping their industries and businesses alive, especially where there were labour shortages. Despite the considerable effort and investment in providing a welfare and safety net for workers, such as contracts that placed a duty-of-care onus on employers, and designated initiatives such as a telephone helpline, Country Liaison Officers, and the appointment of pastoral care positions, our study found that many workers were experiencing difficulties. Grievances were raised about employment matters such as pay parity and deductions, and sadness voiced about being separated from family, partners, children, and their home communities. Many workers felt shy or worried about complaining or raising concerns, and some were not fully cognisant of their entitlements despite pre-departure and post-arrival briefings. Support was found through churches, fellow workers, telephone contact with home, sympathetic advocates in the community, and responsive employers.

There were gendered dimensions to the findings, in addition to the significance of the country of origin, including perceptions of social problems and safety. Women workers often have to face exacerbated challenges and occasionally overt discrimination, which affects their access to jobs, accommodation, healthcare and social activities, as well as making them more vulnerable to intimate partner violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault (Kanan and Putt 2023).

In the report, a case study was done of abattoirs in NSW, using critical incident data and interviews with stakeholders and workers. It found that women were more likely than men to be in certain jobs, and to be in separate accommodation. In general, there were not many discernible differences from the men in their experiences of work and leisure, although it did appear that the women exercised more caution about going out at night. More generally, among the PALM workers who participated in the survey and the interviews, it was apparent that there are specific issues that concern women related to their risk of sexual harassment and assault, domestic violence, and to their health needs (Kanan and Putt 2023).

To follow through on some of the key areas of concern, small follow-up studies were conducted in 2024: one on reproductive health (Kanan) and another that concentrated on the meat processing sector (Putt). For the latter project, field visits were completed in October and November 2023 with two PhD students, one from Fiji and one from Kiribati, in a regional centre and a NSW country town. This project is ongoing, with a report due mid-2025.

PALM workers employed in meatworks

For this project, interviews were held in late 2023 in two NSW towns with 16 stakeholders and 23 PALM workers, who were employed in the meat processing sector in three red meat abattoirs. In late 2023, women workers,

most of whom were from Fiji or Kiribati, were interviewed or participated in group discussions.

In terms of the workplace, among the Kiribati women there was the belief that they carried a similar load to men, and areas of complaint such as the coldness of the workplace, deductions, and accommodation seemed to affect everyone equally. The most difficult work in the abattoir, on the kill-floor and in the boning room, was more likely to be done by men, although based on interviews with other PALM workers, more women are increasingly to be found in these positions. Both Fijian and Kiribati women acknowledged that they were in the minority at the workplace, and certainly in comparison to the number of men from their home country, but one interviewee said the women make friends with other PALM female workers and do not feel isolated or unsafe. A Fijian woman said that the 'Pacific workers look after each other on all work fronts especially during night shifts'.

A marked area of difference, which also some thought had caused discrimination against the recruitment of women from Pacific Island countries, was the fact that women may become pregnant while in Australia. Several women from Kiribati said that the proportion of women in the first three cohorts of Kiribati workers employed in the abattoir was 1:6, and they believed this had dropped to zero after a number of women under the PALM scheme had become pregnant. The Fijian women thought the ratio of men to women was about 100 men to 20 women in the previous two and half years, which illustrates why the PALM workforce in the sector must feel that it is very male dominated.

Domestic violence was raised by a number of women. A Samoan team leader said there was 'drinking, boyfriends, relationships with other workers' and that her partner, who had remained at home, was very suspicious of her having an affair and kept asking her about who she was with in Australia. A Fijian woman described sharing a house with a woman whose husband lived in a different house. The couple reputedly drank and fought at the weekend, with the wife being bruised and beaten, which was not reported to the police; neither was help sought for the woman, as she and the other workers did not want to 'meddle in the affair which they regard a private matter for the couple to deal with'.

Outside of work and in the community, the local town and its public areas were viewed as very safe or safe by the women interviewed. The social life of both men and women outside of work seemed very similar — sport, church, domestic duties, shopping — as the job took up so much time and they often felt tired.

It was stressed by all worker participants that they 'look after each other' at work and in the community. The crucial factors that affected these group relationships were country of origin, the cohort that workers arrived with, gender, and accommodation. A few men made it clear they 'keep watch' over the women who are from the same country, in their roles as protectors. They were mindful that women are very much in the minority in the workplace and, in their view, are more vulnerable in the community.

Similar to the earlier research, it was found that informal mentoring occurred, with reference made by men and women to mature age colleagues who lived in the same accommodation. More generally, the support of friends was mentioned, along with the important role of team leaders, as the workers said they found it difficult to approach employers. A female team leader from Samoa said she always attended the team leaders' meetings with the AE as she could give 'a voice' to matters raised by the workers with her, such as money, accommodation and health. She asserted there had been a significant improvement in the past year with the AE 'helping a lot'.

Another means of support was the fellowships that happened every week, organised by a pastor who worked at the abattoir. An interviewee spoke of the spiritual benefits such a program had on shaping her life and the way it helped workers discuss and address welfare issues and concerns.

Women's safety sub-project

From March to May 2023, three visits were made to the NSW town, one with a Fijian PhD male student, Mr Jope Tarai. A total of 29 workers participated in five group discussions, of whom the majority were Fijian (16 men and 4 women), and the rest were from PNG (4 men), Samoa (4 women) and Solomon Islands (1 man). In addition, five interviews were conducted with stakeholders including representatives of employers and a local resident. All participants who were PALM workers were asked to complete the questionnaire and, in total, 12 did.

There were two meatworks in the local area that employed PALM workers, and both used labour hire companies, who are the nominated AEs under the PALM scheme. The majority of workers in the town were employed by Meatworks A, which used two labour hire companies, one with a focus on recruiting for the meat processing sector more broadly, while the other focused on recruiting PALM workers from a specific country for one meat processing company, and adopted what they saw as a culturally appropriate model of care.

Meatworks A is going through a rapid and large expansion, with PALM workers being recruited since the end of 2023. The majority of the project participants had arrived in the previous four months. Only the men from PNG and Solomon Islands had been in Australia for a longer period of time, and they were engaged by the largest AE in the meat processing sector, a labour hire company.[24] The abattoir they worked in was in another town, and they had a lengthy journey to and from work. In addition to working at what was described as a far more demanding workplace, these men were also described as 'more shy and quieter, with not the same connections in Australia'.

Of the 24 workers employed by Meatworks A, which was close to the centre of the town where they lived, the majority were very positive about being in the country town. The women liked the 'quiet', and its relatively small size was in its favour. For the main, they reported that the locals were very welcoming, particularly through the

church they belonged to, and only a few had encountered hostile or fearful stares and, in a few instances, what were interpreted as racist reactions, in shops. Fijian women for example describe how in the supermarket, some customers reacted by saying 'Oooh, she's black' or 'A black one coming' and then avoided the workers.

We were told of one incident in which a shop had printed and pasted a picture of a 'coloured man, accusing him of stealing from the shop'. Fijian workers were then accused of being part of this group and therefore had to avoid the establishment. This culminated in a senior worker in the group seeking an audience with the town mayor to discuss the issue. The worker was invited to a dinner, where he interpreted a flippant joke about Australian farmers owning rifles as a veiled threat to the Pacific workers. Despite this, the worker expressed gratitude for the dinner invitation and the opportunity to at least share his concern on behalf of the workers to what he described as senior town council or community members.

The women workers seemed to be involved in local sports competitions but to a lesser extent than their male counterparts. A few had joined a volleyball competition upon arrival in town, but that was at the behest of the AE's welfare officer. The Samoan women said they went to the oval and did exercises while the men were involved in rugby training. One of the women had joined the local rugby sevens team. When discussing cultural values and practices that focus on respect and helping others, the women said it was also the men who mainly undertake voluntary work at the local church.

A local resident said that the general attitude was welcoming, with 'people enjoying having PALM workers here'. There did not appear to be a high level of crime, except for some petty theft and what was called 'pub fighting' which did not involve, nor was it attributed to, PALM workers. The local police station was manned on a part-time basis, and when police personnel were not present, a phone call had to be made to the regional centre. Local crime or social problems were attributed to local 'druggies' by this resident.

Both workers and several residents referred to the impact of cultural performances by the PALM workers at Christmas time, and the appreciation of the choral singing at church services. The strongest community 'reciprocal' connections appeared to be through the church, where English literacy classes were being given by volunteers on Mondays and Fridays. Even though the workers belong to a range of Christian churches, it seemed a relationship was formed with a particular church, through a welfare officer being part of that congregation.

Given what was said in interviews and discussions, it is unsurprising that all of the 12 workers who participated in the online survey said they felt safe or very safe walking around during the day and night, and on special occasions. They were all confident that their money was safe in a bank. No one reported being a victim of crime since arriving in Australia. About half said none of the listed social problems were a problem in the local community. Those social problems most likely to be seen as a problem were theft, followed by alcohol fuelled violence and young men out of control.

A group of Fijian women stressed that living in the NSW town felt safer than back home, as the 'lifestyle in Fiji is changing, especially at night in clubs. This is when it feels risky'. They agreed it was worse for women, in town in Fiji, as they get hassled by men. 'Fiji is worst, you have to beware of flying bottles.' In contrast, 'The pub is okay here, nobody bothers us'. They did say buses and taxis were fine in Fiji (which is different to what was reported in chapter 3). In the villages in Fiji they said they were not so much scared by sorcery/witchcraft, but that it was more of a worry, and they shrugged and a woman asked: 'What can you do? Pray a lot'.

Overall, the Fijian women described a simple and quiet life in the NSW town, as 'work, shopping, staying at home'. One of them had a driver's licence and they had visited nearby towns to shop or to attend a sporting match. They had limited contact with local women, saying that the old women at a church had been friendly, the young women less so. They had heard about women on the PALM scheme becoming pregnant in Australia, sometimes not by their partner back home, and there was interest in finding more about the services offered at a women's health centre that would cover a range of reproductive health issues.

It was the online environment that seemed to generate the most uneasiness. As a few women explained, it was different in Australia to home because once here, so many transactions and communications are conducted online. Certainly there is other research of an increasing use of digital means to transfer remittances by workers back home (Doan et al. 2023:54–55), but from what was raised in the discussion group, it takes a while to adjust to virtually all financial matters being dealt with, including pay and payments, in the online environment. Several Samoan women said they believed scams were more common here, while back home they go to the bank, and do a lot more in person. 'Here, everything or a lot more done is on the phone. Texting, parcels, bank, food' and they are aware of the risk of scams.

The survey results highlight the worry the workers feel about social media and the online environment. Half of them said they saw social media as not safe, and almost half of them (42%) responded that they felt not safe or not at all safe online because of the fear of being scammed or defrauded.

Preventing harm and addressing problems

As the report on wellbeing and safety of workers in Australia underlined, there are significant processes and frameworks in place under the PALM scheme to reduce the risk of exploitation and of other forms of harm (Kanan and Putt 2023). This includes information being provided through pre-departure and post-arrival briefings, and online fact sheets. At a local level in the meat processing sector there are also inductions related to the work that are run by the employer. The AE (and in particular the welfare officer) also have a critical

role: to organise accommodation and bank accounts, and provide orientation and information about the local community and services. Certainly, in the NSW country town, the police give a talk about drink driving and violence, although the workers were not sure or could not remember whether domestic violence or sexual assault was included.

Throughout the group discussions with workers it was evident that intermediaries — such as local community organisations and key individuals — because of their jobs can play a crucial role in providing information and fostering networks. Social networks can be a vital source of information and advice. The World Bank–ANU survey found that workers had strong social networks in host countries, in that they knew a family member or other people from their home country in the host country. This was most noticeable for the workers from the two countries with the largest diaspora. The survey found the workers were more likely to approach friends and relatives to seek financial and other help, followed by a church and the wider diaspora group or NGOs. However, the workers indicated a work-related matter would be most likely to be raised with a team leader or with the employer directly (Doan et al. 2023).

The possibility of making local social connections is primarily generated through sport and the church, and such activities are viewed as 'benign' by the welfare officers employed by the AEs, as a way to promote health and mental wellbeing.

A degree of segregation is imposed or is self-selected by the workers. Accommodation arranged by the AEs, for example, is single sex, both in terms of shared houses and larger accommodation, such as former pubs. An abattoir manager observed that there was not much mixing at the workplace, that though they 'got on', the workers lunch at their 'own' tables. He believed groupings did hinge on language and faith; for example, with Muslims occupying their own table.

'Sticking together' was characterised as a form of protection. Samoan women explained that they were goal oriented and wanting to save to change the lives of their families, and were not interested in going out. When the women go out shopping, they go with 'friends' from their home country, never alone, and they always carry mobile phones.

There has been trouble between women from the same country, which was described by one stakeholder as being rooted in 'jealousy'. Conflict has also occurred when individuals were intoxicated. Welfare officers and team leaders are the essential intermediaries in situations like these, both to prevent escalation and to manage the incident, and people in these positions complained of how much is expected of them and how unsocial the hours can be.

One of the AEs, a labour mobility company, takes a very strict line about drinking. The rules include a curfew, no alcohol, no extra-marital affairs, and stopping phone use after a certain time at night. Women are expected to go into public spaces in groups of three or more. The company owner explained that they are trying 'to establish a village setting' like back home, and as a result the company plays a big role in their lives so that their welfare is paramount on and off-site. Sport and church attendance is encouraged, and the company 'keeps an eye' on them.

A lot of the male PALM workers had problems with a wife or girlfriend back home, according to the company owner. He acknowledged that what might be culturally accepted back home was not necessarily accepted or understood in Australia. He explained that to reduce the suspicions of wives or husbands back home, because phones were not being answered, he went back to the home villages and showed videos of the workplace, to highlight how physically demanding the work is, how draining it is for the workers so that they need to rest at the weekend and after shift, and turn off phones to rest and sleep. He also talked to village chiefs about how they can help by talking with families. He said the wages in Australia mean there is huge demand to join the scheme, but it is mainly men who are recruited, which he favours if a couple have children.

When asked about how they protected themselves in the online environment, women workers said they use social media mostly for news from home through familiar channels. They said they had not joined new groups when here, nor had they used dating apps. Although they asserted that they are 'pretty aware of fraud' and didn't feel the need for training or extra awareness, they did remain fearful of being hacked or scammed.

Conclusion

Similar themes and findings emerged from the small sub-project to that found in the larger and earlier study on workers' safety and wellbeing (Kanan and Putt 2023). What was noticeable was the general sense of wellbeing and relative contentment with the place of residence, which was considered, for the most part, to be a safe town to live. In addition, there was not the same level of dissatisfaction expressed about the workplace or work conditions as was encountered in other places where PALM workers were employed in the local abattoir. The only exceptions to this were PALM workers who had been here for several years and were employed in an abattoir some distance away, which has had a bad reputation for some time. This is not to say risks do not exist, nor that the largely positive experiences of those employed in the small NSW country town are necessarily the case throughout the country. As the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner (Office of the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner 2024) outlined in his report, there are multiple potential opportunities to exploit PALM workers and those that have left the scheme and are no longer covered by its requirements and its protection.

There were a number of factors that are likely to have contributed to the largely positive reports from the workers. The local AE representatives, and a very experienced manager at the local abattoir, were acting as important intermediaries. The former, in particular, made a difference by organising participation in church

and sporting activities. One of the AEs, by adopting a 'village'-centric approach to managing the workers in their non-work time, fostered a very regulated and close-knit grouping of workers.

Another factor is the timing of their employment, and the length of time workers had been in Australia. There have been changes in the way the PALM scheme is administered and more careful provision of information and support since 2020, and all stakeholders have settled more into their respective roles. More recent workers are not as likely to experience some of the tough workplace conditions in the meatworks reported in the earlier study (Kanan and Putt 2023). Moreover, as several workers acknowledged, most of them are recent arrivals and in the 'honeymoon' phase of having finally been able to come to Australia and participate in the scheme.

More constraints do exist for women workers. Their understandings and experiences of gendered roles, rooted in the mores of their home countries, mean they are more at risk of facing harassment and threats of domestic violence from partners back home. Their time away from work, as well as job options, is more carefully limited and managed by them and others. This is not to lose sight of what the women workers saw as gaining from the experience, which for some included being in an environment where they have opportunities not found at home and where they felt safe.

It was clear that both men and women workers were anxious about the online world, and were having to engage with it in a way they had not needed to back in their home countries. Hearing of big scams that had occurred back home only added to the worry of being duped. However, although the women in particular perceived social media as a potentially dangerous arena, they seemed confident that by adopting a familiar and conservative approach to their use of it, they would not encounter negative experiences.

A lesson from the pilot project was that several survey questions are more suited to participants resident in Pacific Island countries, as for this project, several participants answered these questions in the survey based on their knowledge and experiences back home. The survey should be modified in any future research to address this. It would also be very useful to gauge how perceptions of financial, online and physical safety alter over time, as workers continue to reside in Australia with only infrequent visits back home. Future research could focus on this, with a larger group of participants in a range of locations.

Chapter 7: Perceptions of online safety: A pilot study with Pacific Islander students in Australia

Amanda H. A. Watson

Introduction

Internet access and uptake have increased across the Pacific region (Foster 2024; GSMA 2023; UN ESCAP 2020) due to a gradual transition of most second generation (2G) network coverage to third generation, fourth generation or fifth generation (3G, 4G or 5G) coverage and the availability of cheap, internet-enabled mobile telephones (Media for Development Initiative 2023; Watson 2022; Watson and Park 13/8/2019). Despite this general trend, there are substantial differences between and within Pacific Island countries in terms of type of mobile network coverage (GSMA 2023:11), rates of uptake (GSMA 2023:9), internet speeds (Watson and Fox 2021) and internet affordability (UN ESCAP 2020), all of which impact upon accessibility of the internet.

The internet can be used for a range of purposes, including access to social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn, Instagram and others, which allow 'content sharing, public communication, and interpersonal connection' (Burgess et al. 2018). While internet use can be enjoyable and can be used to beneficial effect for a range of purposes, such as to document and revitalise dying languages (Otlogetswe 2024), or to seek emotional support from peers and other online sources (eSafety Commissioner 2022; Nasier et al. 2021; Trnka 2021), there can also be challenges arising from online safety concerns. These could include, but are not limited to, online hate speech (Dunn et al. 2024), cyber bullying (eSafety Commissioner 2022, 6/9/2024), image-based abuse (Dunn et al. 2024:3; eSafety Commissioner 27/8/2024; Online Safety Commission 2024) and misinformation (Khosla and Pillay 4/10/2023). As is explained by Third and colleagues, use of the internet can expose users 'to harmful experiences that negatively impact their mental and physical health and safety' (Third et al. 2020:14).

Definitions of the term 'online safety' differ. It can be thought of as ensuring there is a 'safe online culture and environment' (Hogeveen 2020), protecting users 'from the risks posed by negative influences in the online environment' (Martin and Rice 2012), and ensuring that 'stakeholders are protected from unscrupulous digital criminals' (Antwi and Asante 2024). A broad definition of 'online safety' can encompass the terms 'technology-facilitated abuse' and 'technology-facilitated coercive control', which consider efforts to limit device access as well as online activities (Attorney-General's Department 5/3/2024; eSafety Commissioner 15/2/2024). The concept 'online safety' can also be referred to as 'e-safety', 'cyber safety', 'internet safety' or 'digital safety'. In this chapter, the term 'online safety' is used.

This chapter presents the findings of a small pilot study that investigated perceptions regarding online safety amongst Pacific Islander adults studying in Australia. The chapter covers research involving two group interviews in which topics of conversation included understandings of the term 'online safety', reflections upon any changes in attitudes towards online safety since moving temporarily to Australia, and strategies employed by group members to enhance safety in online environments. The chapter provides insights into differing views and a range of strategies employed by a small group of research participants. It suggests ideas for further development of research exploring the attitudes of Pacific Islanders with regard to online safety. The chapter describes the research design and then presents the findings. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

Research design

This study aimed to investigate perceptions of online safety. It was a pilot research project with Pacific Islanders studying in Canberra. The intention was to allow students from Pacific Island countries to define what the term 'online safety' meant for them and to invite them to share their experiences.

Group interviews were conducted with tertiary students who were temporary residents in Canberra ahead of their return to their home countries. Through an appropriate student association, which had members from various Pacific Island countries, students were informed about the research and given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in group interviews.

The aim of the group interviews was to ascertain Pasifika views about and understandings of online safety. Questions were broad and facilitation was minimal, to allow for discussion and debate amongst participants. In each of the group interviews, the facilitator used the following six questions:

- Tell me about your understanding of the term 'online safety', which is also known as 'e-safety'.
- Has your understanding of 'online safety' changed since you have been in Canberra? If so, how? Why?
- Can you share experiences of times when you felt safe online?
- Can you share about times when you felt unsafe online?
- What strategies do you use to increase your safety online?
- I have no more questions. Do you have anything else that you want to share regarding the research topic?

Two group interviews were conducted by the author in April 2024. There were 13 participants in total, with seven participants in the first group interview and six in the second. In both group interviews, men and women participated in the discussions. Of the 13 participants, five were female and eight were male. They were from Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Tuvalu. All participants were enrolled in tertiary degrees. Their length of time in Australia varied from just a few months to almost two years. Discussions were predominantly in English, although on some occasions participants from Papua New Guinea used words or phrases in Tok Pisin, which is a language familiar to the researcher.

This pilot study focusing on online safety was part of a larger project led by Dr Judy Putt, for which human research ethics clearance was granted by The Australian National University prior to the commencement of the research. In the case of the online safety pilot, a thorough informed consent process was undertaken with each potential participant. Initial contact was made with the executive officers of a student association. With the approval of all the executive officers, one of those officers sent an email to all members that had three attachments: a brief outline of the online safety pilot, a participant information sheet and a written consent form. Members then contacted the executive officer and/or the researcher to volunteer to participate in the research. In two cases, volunteers returned signed consent forms with their email response. The researcher then identified two suitable dates for the group interviews that suited the volunteers. The venue was a small dining room at a restaurant close to the campus where the students were studying.

Upon arrival at the venue, each person was provided with a printed copy of the participant information sheet. Once questions had been answered and people were comfortable with going ahead, they were invited to sign a consent form, printed copies of which were on a side table. No incentives were given to participants other than refreshments, beginning with a light refreshment provided at the outset while people were discussing the consent process and asking questions about the research. A full meal was served an hour into each discussion.

The group interviews were recorded with audio recorders, with the permission of the group members. Each time a recorder was turned on or off, group members were informed. Two recorders were used, to reduce the likelihood of material being lost. The first group interview recording was 99 minutes long, with a break after about an hour for a meal, during which time the recorder was turned off. The second group interview recording was 97 minutes long, again with a break for a meal. Although the sample size for this pilot project was small, the audio recordings captured rich information and detailed insights on the topics discussed. The generation of such deep and valuable personal reflections can be a benefit of using the group interview technique in which contestation of ideas and positions is possible (Bryman and Bell 2008; Neuman 2014; Tacchi et al. 2003; Watson et al. 2020).

Participants were assured that their confidentiality would be maintained during research dissemination processes. However, participants' identities were in some cases known to other participants in the room, and thus participants were asked not to share later with others what was said during the discussions and, in particular, not to identify other participants or link them with specific comments or experiences. Apart from the participants, only the researcher was present in discussions. Although waiters came in and out of the room when the meal was being served, the door was kept shut at most times, including during the first hour of discussions.

Analysing data generated by the group interview data collection method can be challenging because of the volume of data produced (Bryman and Bell 2008). In this case, the small sample size allowed for identification of key themes in an iterative and manual manner that involved listening to the audio recordings and noting key points, interesting stories and moments of contention or debate amongst the group members.

Research findings

This section of the chapter presents the findings of the pilot study. The main points from the discussion of the first five questions that were asked during the group interviews are presented in turn below. The sixth question, which allowed respondents to add anything they wished to, was a valuable tool for eliciting further thoughts that had not yet been raised during discussions. Information generated by the sixth question is incorporated into the sections below as appropriate.

Tell me about your understanding of the term 'online safety', which is also known as 'e-safety'.

A participant defined 'online safety' in a general sense as 'interacting [and] communicating freely'. Discussion related to this point included the notion of protecting confidential information. Several examples were provided of Pacific Islanders posting things online that they should not have, to the understanding of the group members, such as bank account details, personal telephone numbers, images of passports, driving licences and certificates, and details or images of documents such as contracts. An example was given of a person discussing the particulars of a family dispute in a social media post and there seemed to be a consensus amongst the group members that such detail should not have been shared in that manner.

The point was made that different groups of people might view the notion of online safety differently, with a contrast being posited between 'techno kids' in urban areas and people with less awareness who might reside in rural areas with limited internet access. A participant suggested that a sense of online safety would be engendered by a space in which 'you're really able to express yourself in a way that you feel safe about [... and] you're aware of potential risks'. A different participant felt that the term online safety referred to 'being protected from scammers [and] financial scams'.

Several participants were parents and immediately thought of the safety of their children in online environments when answering this question, with reference to 'child predators' and children being 'exposed to pornographic content' online. As one parent said in response to this question, 'from the perspective of a mother, [...] I am more concerned about the safety of my children [than my own safety]'.

When explaining their understanding of online safety and related risks, a participant said that 'it's always a risk when we're online'. One participant explained their view that 'there are more risks as technology evolves'. A different participant then argued that work-related risks were low, in their view, but risk was 'very high' on social media platforms. There was discussion of online purchases, such as booking a hotel room, and the amount of personal information that users were required to provide. Concern and uncertainty were conveyed about what happened with the information and whether it was given to third parties. A similar concern was raised with regard to the information required when applying for a visa to enter Australia. A participant commented that it was 'a bit scary' how much personal information was remembered by their computer, presumably referring to the auto-fill function of some internet browsers.

The concept of online safety was linked to offline safety, with the suggestion that adulterous relationships, jealousies or suspicions could be generated by new online contacts and develop into offline violence. In the other group, a participant gave an example of a violent incident they knew about that had been sparked by a negative comment made online. By contrast, participants remarked that online tools can be used to increase offline safety. For instance, participants felt that the police in Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea, were quicker to respond to reports of issues in the Facebook group named 'NCD Alert', compared to reports of issues made via telephone calls.

Has your understanding of 'online safety' changed since you have been in Canberra? If so, how? Why?

This question was contested, with differing views amongst participants. On at least one occasion, there was laughter as group members begged to differ from the views of others. There were two different positions held by group members and these will be outlined below.

A view shared by a number of participants was that they felt safer online in Australia than in their home Pacific Island country. As one participant put it, 'Australia has those better laws and regulations to regulate online behaviour', compared to the situation in their home country. An example given was that those hacks of Australian companies that had caused breaches of data security had been reported publicly in preceding months in Australia. As a participant explained, the mobile network operator that they were using in Australia was monitoring for 'spam' text messages.

Related to this position, people described having a heightened awareness of online safety since being in Australia due to there being a much greater use of online services in their daily lives in Australia compared to their infrequent use of online services during their lives at home. People had learnt about online safety and felt more informed since arriving in Australia. They noted the need to use security tools such as two-factor authentication and other identity verification systems, which were novel to them. They described having gone through a process of learning strategies to protect themselves online since being in Australia.

A second and alternative view was that people felt safer in their home country than in Australia because they did not spend much time online at home and they did not use many digital services there. A key factor articulated by one participant was that they came from a small community and therefore they tended to limit their online activities in that context. A related point was that people felt safer at home than in Australia because there were fewer people in their home country and therefore there were 'less people trying to scam you'. Indeed, there was lack of internet access in some home contexts in the Pacific Islands.

Can you share experiences of times when you felt safe online?

Typically, scholarship conditions require that payments are made to Australian bank accounts. Therefore, it is common for students to open a bank account upon arrival in Australia. Participants in the discussions described the systems operated by Australian banks and seemed impressed or reassured by them. Specific banking mechanisms that were mentioned included daily transaction limits and in-built delays in transfers of payments to new accounts. A group member had successfully reversed a payment made using an Australian bank and said that 'it was easy', which was a novel experience. A participant explained that financial transactions were conducted at home using cash whereas they had to conduct many transactions online in Australia and they felt this had increased their awareness of online safety.

Several participants expressed confidence with the online systems of their Australian university. A parent mentioned that their child had been issued with a device by their school in Canberra and they 'felt it was safe' whereas standard tablets or smartphones were not considered safe for children. A participant described feeling safe when 'communicating with or interacting with others of the same interest groups, like my church group or university'. One participant described finding it helpful to be able to follow developments in their home country while away from home using the social media platform Facebook and the messaging service WhatsApp.

Can you share about times when you felt unsafe online?

A participant described feeling 'unsafe when browsing unfamiliar sites' and hesitant about making purchases on such sites. A parent said they felt 'scared' with regard

to their children's online exposure and what content they might have seen or what interactions they might have had online. A married man referred to multiple 'friend' requests on Facebook from women he did not know. A woman also described unwanted approaches from men on Facebook. There was concern raised about fake social media accounts and the possibility that someone could set up an account using a person's photograph without their permission. A participant's family member had received a WhatsApp message that was a scam purporting to inform the recipient that they had won a large sum of money. It was explained that it can be unsafe for women and girls to post photographs of themselves online because images of faces had been used to create fake photographs that appeared to show them nude.

What strategies do you use to increase your safety online?

Strategies employed by participants to protect themselves and their family members online were many and varied. Strategies shared in the group interviews were sorted into four types: child-related strategies, finance-related strategies, social media strategies, and other strategies. These strategies are outlined below.

Child-related strategies

A parent stated that they put cartoon faces on images of their children's faces before posting them, so that their children's faces could not be used in the creation of fake images. Another parent described a strict rule in the family home whereby no children had access to any device or technology after a set time each evening. A parent referred to a parental lock on a tablet, which could be monitored from Australia even while their children were in their home country. Another parent had installed a child safety application in their smartphone.

Finance-related strategies

As was explained earlier in the chapter, there was a general sense that participants were confident with using online banking platforms in Australia. With regard to purchases made using websites of businesses, three specific strategies were mentioned. A participant explained that they used PayPal for online purchases in a deliberate attempt to minimise the number of online outlets that had their credit card details. Another participant said that they did use a credit card but they chose not to allow businesses to save their credit card details on their websites. Another used a travel card online rather than their credit card because of its low limit.

Social media strategies

In terms of social media, the married man mentioned above deleted Facebook 'friend' requests from unknown women. Other participants also agreed that it was wise to be careful about handling friend requests, with one stating that they were 'very particular' about which friend requests they accepted. Another participant expressed the need for care when composing social media posts and others discussed giving thought to determining who would be able to see them. A group member felt that it was important to bear in mind that people in their home country would be able to see the posts they uploaded while in Australia. Another pointed out that there were cultural taboos that dictated material that certain relatives were 'not supposed to hear or see'. A woman in the other group also mentioned 'cultural norms and traditions' that informed what women were 'allowed to say and certain things they're not allowed to say'. She said that she kept this context in mind when thinking about what to post online, with certain male relatives blocked from seeing specific posts. There was also discussion about the need to be careful when posting on social media, with a view to future employment application processes. Platform selection was raised as a consideration, with one participant explaining that they felt safer when using the messaging service WhatsApp than they did when using Facebook.

Other strategies

One participant felt that it was easier to identify scam telephone calls in Australia than in their home country because scam calls received in Australia tended to feature a foreign accent, rather than a local accent (an Australian accent in the Australian context). Group members described unwillingness or reluctance to use websites that did not utilise two-factor authentication, security questions, a one-time password, an authentication application or some other mechanism for verifying the identities of users. There was the sense that a private internet connection, such as a home internet service, would be safer than a public wireless internet (Wi-Fi) offering. A participant expressed the view that people must take personal responsibility and honour the 'social contract' that existed in online spaces, as it did in offline contexts, arguing that efforts must be made in 'protecting others as well [as ourselves]'. For instance, it was suggested that users think about how a comment might affect others.

Suggestions for further research

Given that this is a small sample, there are limitations regarding the conclusions that can be drawn from this pilot study and the comparisons that can be made to existing literature. It is not appropriate to make policy recommendations. Nonetheless, the pilot suggests the value of undertaking further research into the perceptions, experiences and strategies of Pacific Islanders in online contexts. An area of the study that revealed unexpectedly rich and diverse data was the question of whether participants' views regarding online safety had changed since they had been in Australia. Expanding research to explore this question in more detail might allow for policy recommendations to be generated in two key areas: how best to support Pacific Islanders with learning about online environments when they first arrive in Australia, and how to improve online protections in Pacific Island countries.

Further research could incorporate larger numbers of Pacific Islander students. Such research could aim to include separate group interviews for women and men, which may allow for identification of any differences between the views of women and those of men. This pilot study with Pacific Islander students consisted of group interviews at which both women and men were in attendance and it was not possible to distinguish between their views. Research that extends to other Pacific Islanders residing in Australia is likely to reach people who have been in Australia for years and therefore may generate different findings, which could reflect their experiences in Australia as much as or more than their experiences in their home countries.

Research into people's perceptions could be undertaken in Pacific Island countries, although the internet is inaccessible and/or unaffordable for some communities and therefore care would need to be taken when identifying possible communities to approach about research participation. One option may be to conduct research with students enrolled in tertiary institutions in the Pacific because they may have access to the internet at their university campus (Fox and Watson 2021). If research could be undertaken at sufficient scale and with a robust sampling strategy appropriate to the methods employed, differences between communities could be compared. This could include differences between Pacific Island countries or differences between Pacific university campuses, depending on the populations invited to participate. If possible, it would be interesting to ascertain whether there are differences in the experiences and strategies of people from small communities, such as very small Pacific Island countries, compared to those from places with larger populations.

A specific area of research that could be explored that is beyond the scope of the present project would be to test the assertion made about the 'NCD Alert' Facebook group. Earlier research found that a police telephone hotline in one province of Papua New Guinea worked to good effect (Putt et al. 2020) and it may be possible to compare the effectiveness of social media communication with the effectiveness of telephone communication.

Top: Bus stop, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea
Photograph by Sterling Don Alia

Bottom: Telecommunication tower in Tonga
Photograph by A. H. A. Watson

Chapter 8: Survey of Pacific women's safety: Summary report

Judy Putt

Context and method

As part of the pilot study on women's safety in the Pacific, all participants across the research locations were invited to participate in a short survey. The aim was to see whether there were common responses across the locations, as well as distinctive patterns in certain places or with certain groups. It was also a test of the usefulness of such an instrument to prompt and guide further in-depth research. There was interest in determining whether the instrument may be useful in informing or contrasting with the analysis of the themes that emerged from the qualitative research in the pilot study.

The questionnaire included 21 questions that covered socio-demographic characteristics, perceptions of safety in different situations, perceptions of the safety of different social groups, views on responsibilities and roles of groups or services in maintaining safety, and on social problems and crime victimisation. Some participants entered their responses directly into an online survey platform, while others completed the survey by answering the questions on paper or through being asked the questions by a researcher. In the latter two cases, the responses were then entered into the online survey.

As is clear from the next section on sample characteristics, the numbers who participated in each country and in each of the seven projects were small, and in no way a representative sample of the countries or of the group that a project focused on. However, the results of the survey give a snapshot of participants' perceptions and attitudes that can contribute to discussions of key themes that emerged from individual projects. The survey findings are examined for how much they appeared to apply across different settings and socio-economic backgrounds.

Sample characteristics

In total, 124 adults participated in the survey. The place of residence of participants at the time of completing the survey was spread across the five countries, with the largest numbers from PNG (29.8%), where two projects were conducted, Fiji (22.6%) and Australia (20.2%), where two projects were conducted. An equal number of respondents were either from Tonga or Vanuatu (n=17 each) (see table 8).

Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are summarised in table 9. The majority (72.1%) were women, while more than a quarter (27.0%) were men. The majority of respondents were between 25 and 44 years old, and were either married (34.1%) or single (40.6%). Approximately half of the respondents were educated at a tertiary level (52.5%) and were employed (53.2%). However, as a reading of the individual project reports shows, the socio-economic characteristics of each project's respondents varied considerably, with, for example, only women participating in Tonga, and only tertiary students participating in one of the Australian projects. Ni-Vanuatu participants were more likely to be subsistence farmers than those in the other research sites.

Table 8: Country location of respondents

Country	Number	Percentage
Australia	25	20.2
— PALM workers	(12)	
— Tertiary students	(13)	
Fiji	28	22.6
Papua New Guinea	37	29.8
— Port Moresby professionals	(22)	
— Women leaders' network	(15)	
Tonga	17	13.7
Vanuatu	17	13.7
Total	**124**	**100.0**

Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

Table 9: Socio-demographic characteristics*

Characteristic	Proportion
Gender	Female (72.1%), male (27.0%), prefer not to say (0.8%)
Age	25–34 years (35.0%), 35–44 years (24.4%)
Marital status	Single (40.6%), married (34.1%)
Employment status	Employed (53.2%), unemployed (22.6%)
Type of work	Evenly spread, e.g., student (17.1%), domestic duties (14.6%), government job (13.8%), private sector (12.2%), NGO job (8.1%)
Highest level of education	Tertiary/vocational/university (52.5%) senior secondary school (21.3%) junior secondary school (14.7%)

*Note: Rows do not always sum to 100% as only the most common categories are included

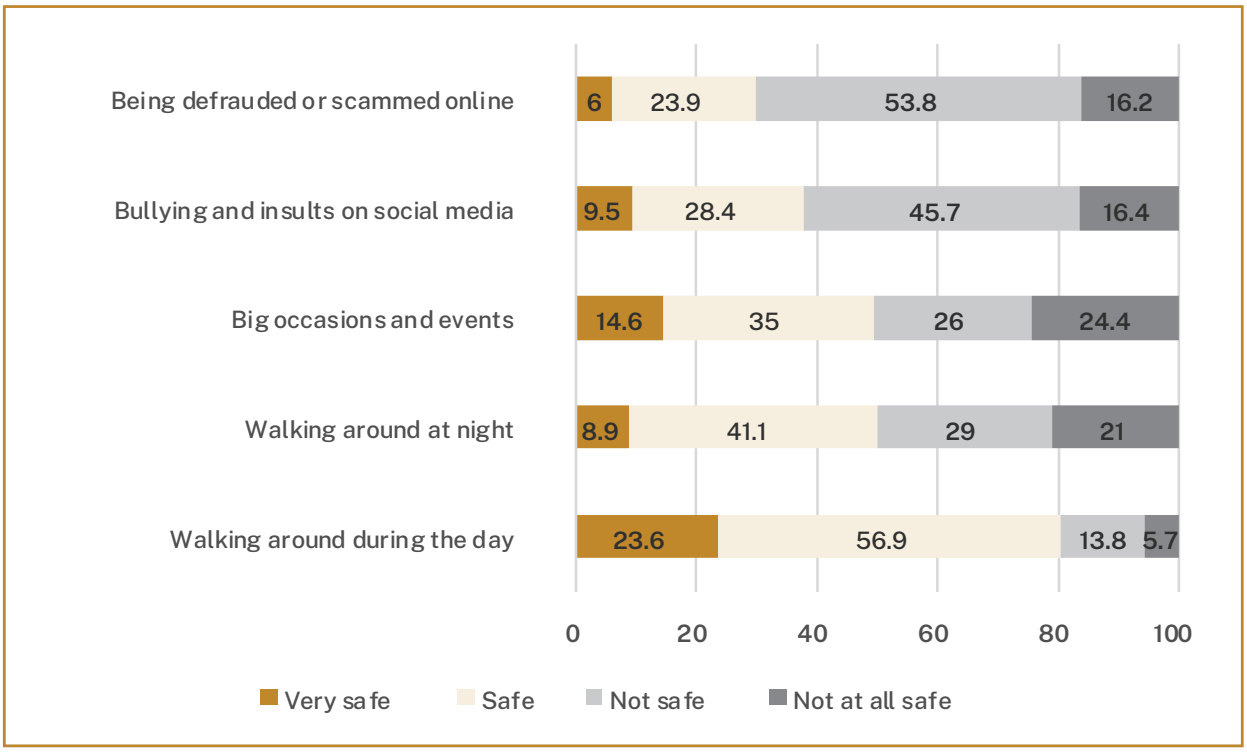
Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

Main findings

Five questions in the survey asked about the respondent's perception of their level of safety in five different contexts. Figure 4 shows that the situation where most respondents felt safe was walking around their community during the day, with 80.5 per cent saying they felt safe or very safe. Walking around their community at night, or when big occasions or events were held, had similar levels of feelings of unsafety, with 50.0 per cent saying either they felt not safe or not all safe at night, and 49.6 per cent saying they felt safe when big occasions or events are held. It was the online environment where the respondents felt the most unsafe, with 62.1 per cent feeling not safe or not all safe from bullying and insults on social media, and 70.0 per cent feeling not safe or not all safe because of scamming and the risk of being defrauded online.

As figure 5 shows, most respondents did feel confident that their money was safe in a bank, with 87 per cent saying they were somewhat, very or extremely confident. However, the survey did not include a question about whether they felt a similar confidence with online banking or whether they used it. Given the level of concern indicated about the online environment in the answers to earlier questions (as shown in figure 4), it may be advisable to add such a question to the survey if it is to be used again.

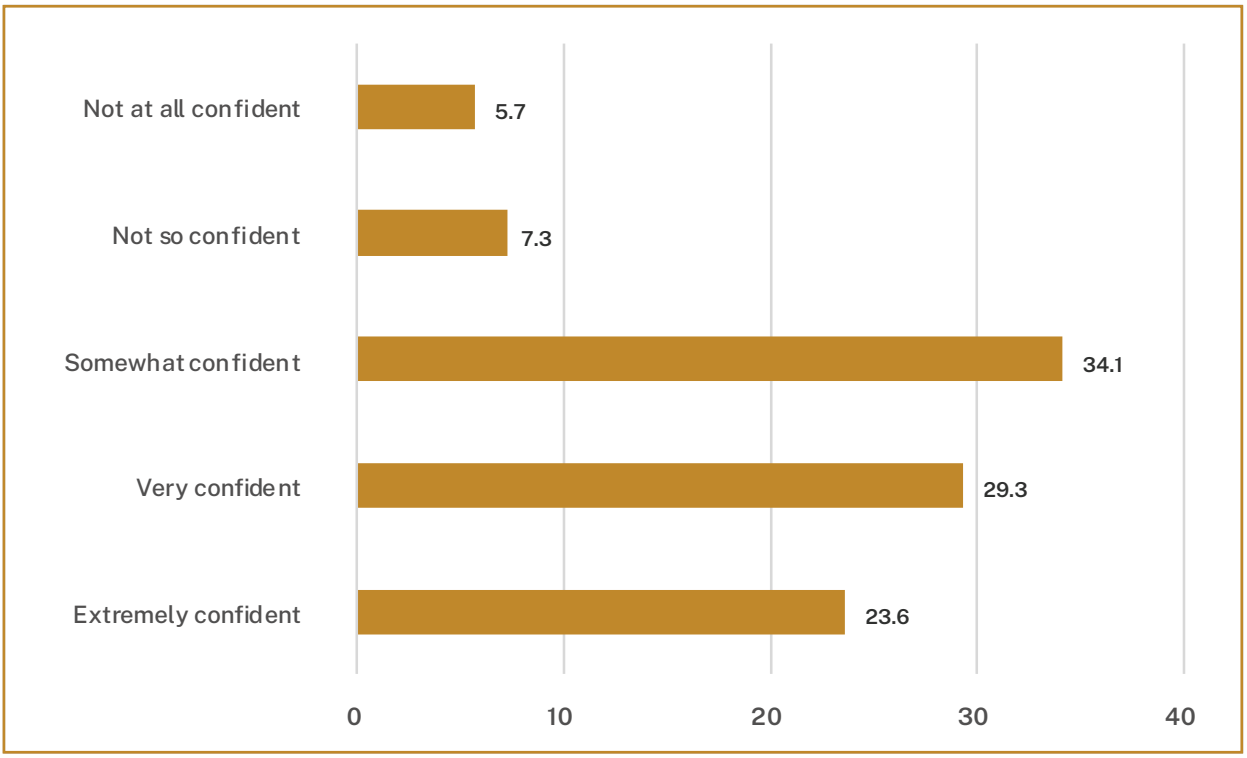
Figure 4: Perceptions of safety, %



n=124

Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

Figure 5: Perceptions of whether money is safe in the bank, %



n=124
Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

Respondents were asked to indicate how they assessed the safety of different social groups. The range of responses to each category was combined to create a weighted average. Based on these averages, table 10 presents the ranking of the social groups from those seen as least safe — teenage girls — to those that are seen as the most safe — men.

Role of groups and organisations

Two questions were asked about individuals, groups or services and their responsibilities in relation to safety. As table 11 shows, the same categories were used for both questions, but one question asked about maintaining safety while the other asked about help to resolve disputes. Village or island courts were the most likely to be seen as responsible for maintaining safety, followed by local community leaders/chiefs. In contrast, those who were viewed as helping with resolving disputes were family members followed by police.

Social problems and crimes

Participants were given a list of 14 social problems and asked how much of an issue each problem was in their community. Based on their responses, which resulted

Table 10: Perceptions of the safety of different groups; ranking from least safe to most safe

Social group	Weighted average	Ranking
Teenage girls	2.73	1
Disabled people	2.63	2
Women	2.57	3
Young children	2.55	4
Teenage boys	2.45	5
Elderly women	2.39	6
Elderly men	2.20	7
Men	2.17	8

n=124
Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

Table 11: Perceptions of groups or organisations most responsible for maintaining safety, and for help to resolve disputes, in descending order

	Maintaining safety	Help to resolve disputes (ranking)
Village or island court	1	=5
Local community leaders/chiefs	2	3
Church pastor/elder	3	4
Magistrate's court	4	=5
Family member	5	1
Police	6	2

n=124

Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

Table 12: Perceptions of the size of social problems in the local neighbourhood/village from the biggest to the smallest

Social problem	Weighted average	Ranking
Drug use	1.6	1
Theft	1.69	2
Young men out of control	1.79	3
Alcohol fuelled violence	1.82	4
Land disputes	1.86	5
Kava use	1.95	6
Domestic violence	2.01	7
Damaging property or gardens	2.05	8
Fights	2.07	9
Sexual violence or abuse	2.13	10
Child abuse	2.19	11
Money disputes	2.25	12
Black magic or sorcery accusations	2.26	13
Vehicle accidents	2.42	14

n=124

Source: Women's Safety Pilot Survey, 2024.

in weighted averages, a ranking of social problems emerged. Table 12 presents the rankings, with drug use, theft, young men out of control and alcohol fuelled violence as the biggest problems and the smallest being money disputes, black magic/sorcery accusations and vehicle accidents.

Crime victimisation

More than one in seven of the participants who answered the question (14.7%, n=17) said they had been a victim of crime in the past 12 months. In descending order, the most common most recent crime in the 12-month period was theft followed by criminal trespass, property damage, sexual violence and domestic violence. Of those who identified that they had been a victim of crime, half said they reported the most recent crime to the police.

Results by gender

The majority of participants were women, with 27.3 per cent (n=33) men. Male participants were mainly Pacific Islander respondents based in Australia or living in Vanuatu and Fiji. As stressed previously, there were socio-demographic variations across the sub-project

samples. Overall, in the total survey sample, women were more likely to have government jobs, and men to be subsistence farmers. The women were more likely than men to have a tertiary education. Numbers were too small to compare crime victimisation.

The cross-tabulation of the results by gender revealed that women were more likely to:

- Feel unsafe in all nominated situations
- See all listed social groups as unsafe
- Be less confident that money was safe in a bank
- See social problems as a big problem or a problem except for property damage, sorcery accusations, land disputes, vehicle accidents and money disputes, where the proportion was similar to men
- See all listed groups/organisations as very important to maintain safety
- See community leaders/chiefs as important in helping to resolve disputes, while men were more likely to see police as important.

Results by site/country

The cross-tabulations of the results by site/country of residence of the participants need to be treated with even more caution because of the differences in the sub-project samples.

In general, respondents felt safest in Australia while PNG had the highest proportion feeling unsafe, followed by Fiji and Vanuatu. PNG respondents had the least confidence that money would be safe in banks. Other differences included:

- Vanuatu and PNG respondents felt the most unsafe online, and on social media, followed by those in Tonga and Australia.
- Domestic violence was perceived as a big problem or problem in all countries except Australia.
- Reported crime victimisation was highest in PNG, followed by Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu and, finally, Australia.

There were noticeable differences in which individuals, groups or organisations were viewed as important in maintaining safety and resolving disputes. For example:

- Village/island courts were important to maintaining safety in PNG, Tonga and Vanuatu.
- Pastors/church leaders were important to maintaining safety everywhere except for Fiji.
- PNG had the highest proportion of respondents who nominated family members as important in helping to resolve disputes, while Fiji respondents had the highest proportion who nominated police.

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked an open-ended question as to whether they had any further comments. The fewest comments were added by the students and PALM workers in Australia, while the most comments were from those who felt the most likely to feel unsafe — urban and rural participants in PNG, and the settlement residents of Fiji.

In an urban context, the participants referred to the lack of safety being 'normalised' and the targeting of women and girls as the primary victims of bag snatching and harassment. Public transport was viewed as risky, with one participant saying she spent a lot of money on taxis. One respondent called for tougher laws, and another complained that law and order personnel were not trustworthy nor reliable. Knowing fellow residents and neighbours was stressed as important by several respondents, as well as being aware of one's surroundings. To quote one respondent, it was important to interact and know neighbours as they would help if one is threatened or a crime is committed, hence it was vital to have 'social networks and ties in the community'.

One of the women leaders in the PNG network said that local communities were 'not as safe anymore' with 'teenage boys and adult men drunk' and another stressed that young girls and women were especially not safe from violence. One comment was that 'family violence, rape and theft' needed to be stopped. Mobile telephones were mentioned as making communication fast and easy, and enabling young people to have relationships without their parents' knowledge. Several respondents underlined that living with a lot of male relatives improved safety, another wanted to ban alcohol and several wanted the local councillor to introduce a village curfew at 10 pm so that all people were in their houses, 'especially young girls'. The comment was made that having 'a good leader in the community helps to keep the place a safe place for everyone'.

Several of the Fiji respondents referred to the lack of electricity as a problem, and one mentioned the absence of fences. The police were called 'useless' by a respondent, and another said they do not help members of the LGBTI community. The lack of safety clearly had an impact on some respondents when they said they do not go anywhere, or only go out to church or are 'careful to mind [their] own business'.

In Tonga, comments were made that stressed that safety is the concern of the family and a collective responsibility of the community. Ni-Vanuatu respondents referred to 'love' as the key, described being in the right place at the right time, and emphasised the importance of putting God as the first priority. In relation to the latter, a respondent wrote that safety should be the second priority after God, 'so our families, church families and our Nation will be a happiest nation always'.

In general, the country town and the capital city in Australia were viewed as peaceful and generally safe. One respondent did mention racist slurs and behaviours, and another noted the need to be responsible and take heed of dangers. Improving induction of students upon arrival was recommended in one comment.

Implications

The survey results highlight the gendered differences in perceptions of safety and social problems, with

women more worried about their own safety as well as that of others in the community. Meanings of safety were explored in the qualitative research and will shed more light on how to interpret these differences. Given the relative recency of access to the internet in many parts of the Pacific (Third et al. 2020; Watson and Park 13/8/2019), the identification of the online environment as the most 'unsafe' compared to other situations in the physical world may refer to a lack of certainty or confidence about what can occur online and the potential harm, rather than acting as an indicator of seriousness of the experience and its impact. Both men and women shared similar views about who is responsible for maintaining safety, although it appears that when it comes to direct intervention in disputes then there are somewhat different views as to who to contact in the first instance. This distinction should be explored in further research.

Based on the workshop discussions, the questionnaire provided some useful findings, but to better interpret the findings, it should be expanded to include questions about online banking, and about cultural and financial safety. Moreover, for Pacific Islander respondents based in Australia, a question should be added to ask about their country of origin, as answers about their current experiences in communities in Australia are influenced by the participants' past experiences of being at home. A larger sample would also have the benefit of providing large enough numbers to look at the reported level of victimisation in the previous year, whether it differs by age or other factors, and whether it correlates with responses to the questions about perceived safety.

Endnotes

1. University of Amsterdam, Globalsport.
2. Revitalizing the PNG Dictionary of Biography, DPA, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs.
3. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (adopted 20 December 1993) UNGA Res 48/104 art 4(f).
4. iTaukei is the term used since 2010 to refer to the major indigenous group of Fiji.
5. *Sevusevu* is a Fijian tradition of presenting a gift to a person of authority (usually an elder/chief) as a sign of respect and to seek acceptance into the community. The most common gift presented is *yaqona* (kava).
6. *Talanoa* refers to a process of inclusive, participatory, and transparent dialogue. Its use in research with communities in Fiji has been underscored as culturally appropriate (Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba 2014).
7. Sacred prohibitions or practices that ought to be abided by.
8. Patriarchal, Kingdom of Tonga ways of knowing, being and doing.
9. The Tonga ministries involved in the MICS survey include: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Internal Affairs — Women's Affairs and Gender Equality Division and other government ministries as part of the Global MICS Programme.
10. Altogether there were 2,903 women who took part in this portion of the survey (Tonga Statistics Department 2020).
11. Tevita Vailea, the Acting Police Commissioner in Tonga at the time, reported the statistics to a journalist in 2020; see Moala (3/8/2020).
12. See Bott (1981).
13. In Tongan, *kaliloa* refers to a wooden headrest that people would use as a pillow. In this context a child's headrest is his or her mother's arm, whereby during this time she provides wise counsel to her children, teaching them values of *anga fakatonga*.
14. Tok Pisin term literally translated as 'one talk' meaning one language and or ethnic group refers to people who speak the same language or are from the same ethnic background and or province.
15. Betel nut is the seed of the fruit of the areca palm. It is also known as the areca nut. The common names, preparations and specific ingredients vary by cultural group and the individuals who use it. In PNG, it is used/chewed with lime and mustard. It is a stimulant drug. It is culturally significant in numerous PNG societies. However, these days it is chewed socially. It can be quite addictive, and it is an important commodity in the informal sector.
16. This community incentive was captured here by 2022 North East political candidate Tania Bale (Bale 19/6/2024).
17. Tok Pisin term for woven string bags.
18. PNG Customs Services, this person works for Customs; by saying customs family, she is referring to her colleagues. This usage of the term 'family' refers to a group of people working in the same organisation, not kin.
19. Pseudonym.
20. Peter Tsiamalili n.d. Minister of Internal Security, personal communication.
21. Government worker in Port Vila May 2018. Personal communication.
22. Unpublished research paper, 2023.
23. These figures are based on the PALM scheme data publication April 2022–August 2024, found on the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations website, accessed August 2024.
24. FIP Group (now part of Regional Workforce Management (RMW)).

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Appendix: Questionnaire given to participants

1. What country are you currently residing in?
   - ◯ Australia
   - ◯ Papua New Guinea ◯ Fiji
   - ◯ Tonga ◯ Vanuatu
   - ◯ Other (please specify)

   _____

2. What is your gender?
   - ◯ Male ◯ Female
   - ◯ I prefer not to say
   - ◯ Other (please specify)

   _____

3. Please indicate which age category you belong to?
   - ◯ Under 18
   - ◯ 18–24
   - ◯ 25–34
   - ◯ 35–44
   - ◯ 45–54
   - ◯ 55–64
   - ◯ 65+

4. What is your current marital status?
   - ◯ Married ◯ De facto ◯ Single ◯ Widowed
   - ◯ Separated ◯ Divorced
   - ◯ Other (please specify) _____

5. What is your employment status?
   - ◯ Employed ◯ Unemployed
   - ◯ Self-employed
   - ◯ Other (please specify)

   _____

6. What type of work do you do?
   - ◯ Gardening/farming ◯ Fishing
   - ◯ Market/petty trading ◯ Day labourer
   - ◯ Private sector job ◯ Government job ◯ NGO job
   - ◯ Student
   - ◯ Domestic duties (housework)
   - ◯ Do not work
   - ◯ Other (please specify)

   _____

7. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

8. At this point in time, how safe do you feel when you walk around your community in the day time?
   ◯ Very safe ◯ Safe
   ◯ Not safe
   ◯ Not at all safe

9. At this point in time, how safe do you feel when you walk around your community at night time?
   ◯ Very safe ◯ Safe
   ◯ Not safe
   ◯ Not at all safe

10. At this point of time, how safe do you feel at weekends and during big occasions and events such as large sporting events, Christmas and Independence Day?
    ◯ Very safe ◯ Safe
    ◯ Not safe
    ◯ Not at all safe

11. At this point in time, how safe do you feel these different groups are?

	Very safe	Safe	Not safe	Not at all safe
Young children	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teenage boys	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teenage girls	◯	◯	◯	◯
Women	◯	◯	◯	◯
Men	◯	◯	◯	◯
Elderly women	◯	◯	◯	◯
Elderly men	◯	◯	◯	◯

12. How important are the following in actually maintaining safety in your community?

	Very important	Important	Not important	Not at all important	Inapplicable
Local community leaders/Chiefs	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Family member	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Village or Island court	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Church pastor/elder	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Magistrate's court	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

13. How confident are you that your money is safe in a bank?
    ◯ Extremely confident ◯ Very confident
    ◯ Somewhat confident ◯ Not so confident
    ◯ Not at all confident

14. When you are on social media, how safe do you feel from bullying and insults?

○ Very safe ○ Safe
○ Not safe
○ Not at all safe
○ Other (please specify)

15. When you are online, how safe do you feel from being scammed or defrauded?

○ Very safe ○ Safe
○ Not safe
○ Not at all safe
○ Other (please specify)

16. How much of a problem are the following in your village or neighbourhood?

	A big problem	A problem	Not a problem	Not a problem at all
Fights	○	○	○	○
Alcohol fuelled violence	○	○	○	○
Domestic violence	○	○	○	○
Sexual violence or abuse	○	○	○	○
Theft	○	○	○	○
Damaging property or gardens	○	○	○	○
Black magic or sorcery accusations	○	○	○	○
Land disputes	○	○	○	○
Vehicle accidents	○	○	○	○
Money disputes	○	○	○	○
Young men out of control	○	○	○	○
Drug use	○	○	○	○
Kava use	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

17. If you had a major disagreement/dispute with someone in your family or community, who would you ask to help you resolve it? (tick all that apply)

☐ Local community leaders or Chiefs
☐ Family member
☐ Police
☐ Village or Island court ☐ Village council/*nakamal* ☐ Magistrate's court
☐ Customary land officer ☐ Church elder/pastor
☐ Other (please specify)

☐ None of the above

18. Have you been a victim of crime in the last 12 months?
    ◯ Yes ◯ No

19. If yes, what was the most recent crime?
    ◯ Theft
    ◯ Break in
    ◯ Assault
    ◯ Domestic violence
    ◯ Sexual violence (rape, incest, unlawful sexual intercourse, act of indecency)
    ◯ Fraud or scam
    ◯ Property damage
    ◯ Criminal trespass
    ◯ Inapplicable, as not a victim of crime
    ◯ Other (please specify)

20. If yes, did you report this crime to the police?
    ◯ Yes ◯ No
    ◯ Not applicable, as not a victim of crime

21. Are there any other comments you would like to make about safety?

Australian National University

Department of Pacific Affairs

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