

# Researching Sorcery Accusation Related Violence in PNG



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# Background to project

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# Sorcery accusation related violence is a global phenomena

- Particular problem in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, India and Nepal
- Increasing problem in countries in the global North
- UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (2009): “the number of so-called witches killed or otherwise persecuted is high in the aggregate.”
- First ever international conference on the issue to be held in Geneva this year at the UN Human Rights Council

# Overview

- Background
- Research questions
- Methodology
- Preliminary findings

# The problem of sorcery accusation related violence

- Sickness or death triggers an accusation of sorcery, which can lead to violence
- Violence often sanctioned by community
- Range of impacts (torture, death, displacement, etc) including ongoing insecurity - *“this thing is like a life time thing”* (survivor)



A number of people accused of witchcraft in the Highlands tied up awaiting torture, image uploaded onto Facebook

# Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP)

- Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP) passed by National Executive Council in 2015
- SNAP based on adoption of a holistic response to the problem of sorcery accusation related violence
- Multi-sectoral and based on partnerships with NGOs, Churches, local activists etc
- Core national committee (led by FSVAC and DJAG) and plans for provincial committees
- Need for evidence base to support SNAP: research part



Participants at workshop in Port Moresby in 2014 to draft Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP)

# The main research questions

1. Who is being accused of sorcery, where, why, how often, by whom, and how does this change over time? (and why?)
2. Why do accusations lead to violence at times and not at others?
3. What regulatory levers exist to overcome sorcery accusation related violence, and what is the context or conditions necessary for them to work effectively?
4. How is the PNG Sorcery National Action Plan (“SNAP”) working as a coalition for change network? What are its impacts, failures and challenges?

# Mixed methods methodology

## Quantitative

- **National scope** (1998 – 2016)
  - Newspaper analysis (mostly Post Courier and the National)
  - Reported National Court judgments
  - Census data
  - Available state data sets (prosecutions, village courts, police etc): planning a 6 month collection blitz
- **Provincial/District/Ward** (2016 ->)
  - Case study forms (violence and no violence)
  - Starting with Bougainville, Enga and NCD

## Qualitative

- **National scope** (2016 ->)
  - SNAP Committee planning and national activities
- **Provincial/district/ward** (2016 ->)
  - Semi-structured interviews with broader range of stakeholders
  - Participant observation of training, workshops etc
  - Enga and Simbu done to date
  - Movie competition



# What have we found to date about the numbers of victims/ survivors?

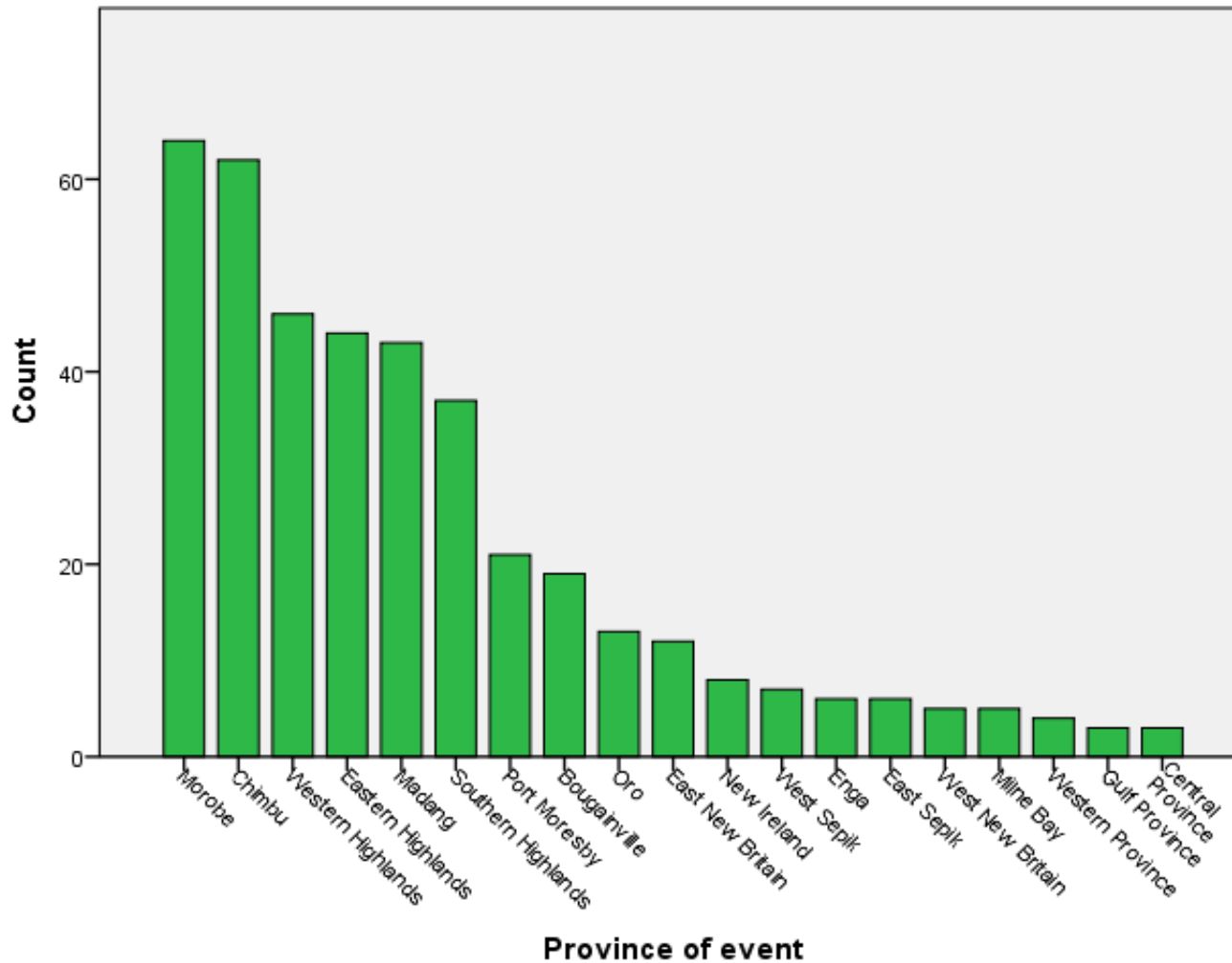
Newspaper analysis (The Post Courier and the National and Factiva search and reported cases) (1996 – 2016):

- 451 cases of sorcery accusation related violence reported in the period
- 610 persons were killed (**avg. 30.5 per year**), and 342 were wounded
- Figures include “secondary victims”
- Additional 491 victims suffered no physical harm (just arson etc) or were rescued before harm
- Total: 1,443 people were victims of sorcery-related violence whether directly or indirectly (**avg. 72 cases per year**)
- Minimum figures: certainly not every case is reported to the media, but what is the dark figure?



Margaret, survivor of sorcery related violence speaks in Enga workshop

# Where? (Total number of cases)



# Who?

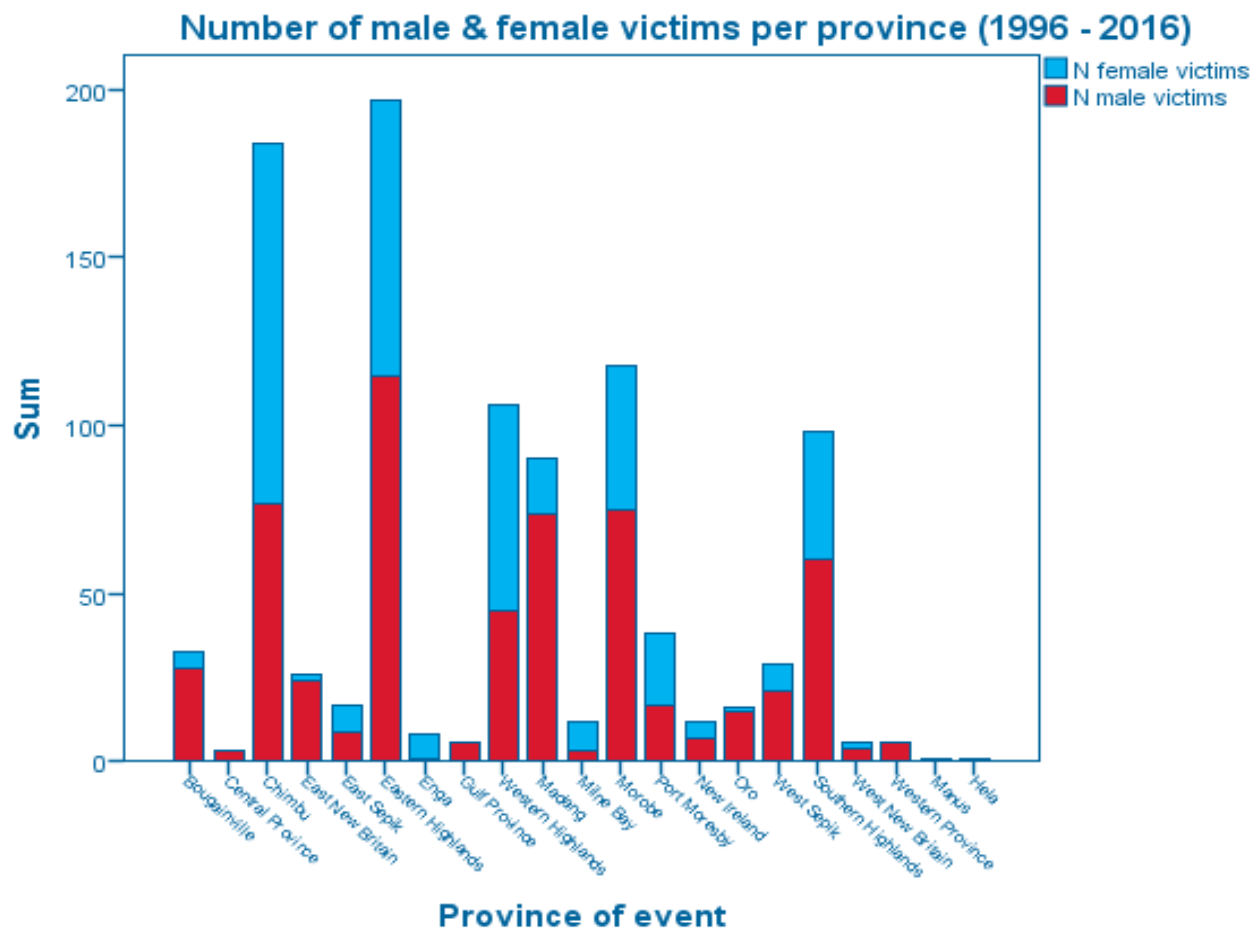
Red: gendered  
division towards  
women as  
victims (2/3 or  
more)

Yellow:  
gendered  
division towards  
men as victims  
(2/3 or more)

Green: roughly  
equal gender  
split (within 20%  
difference)

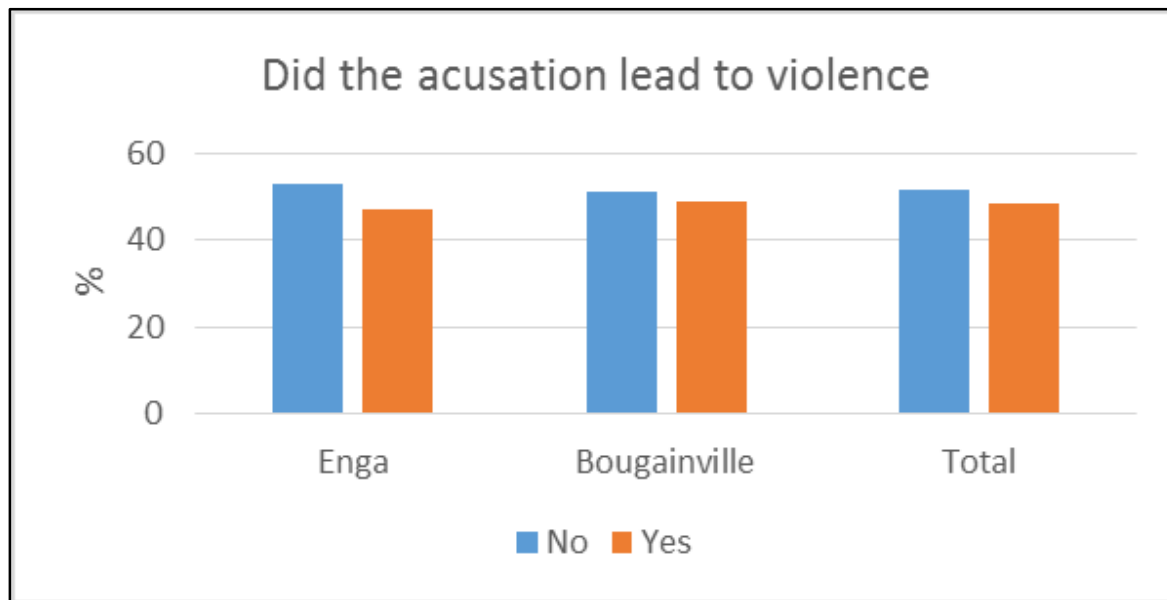
Province	N female victims	N male victims	% female victims	% male victims
Eastern Highlands	87	118	42.4	57.6
Chimbu	106	75	58.6	41.4
Morobe	43	72	37.4	62.6
Western Highlands	60	45	57.1	42.9
Southern Highlands	39	57	40.6	59.4
Madang	15	69	17.9	82.1
Port Moresby	21	16	56.8	43.2
Bougainville	5	28	15.2	84.8
East New Britain	0	20	0.0	100.0
West Sepik	2	13	13.3	86.7
East Sepik	8	4	66.7	33.3
New Ireland	5	7	41.7	58.3
Oro	0	12	0.0	100.0
Milne Bay	8	3	72.7	27.3
Enga	7	1	87.5	12.5
Western Province	0	4	0.0	100.0
Central province	0	3	0.0	100.0
Gulf province	0	3	0.0	100.0
West New Britain	1	2	33.3	66.7
Total	407	552	42.4	57.6

# Gender of victims by province



# How often do accusations lead to violence?

- Case study data on when accusation leads to violence indicates approximately 50% of cases stop at accusation stage



# What encourages violence?

- Drugs/alcohol seem less significant than originally thought
- Glasman/glasmeri really problematic in some places
- Gossip/ tok win
- Some encouragement by leaders
- Large groups of perpetrators

# Interventions before violence erupts

Attempts to deal with accusation  
in non-violent ways in  $\frac{3}{4}$  cases

	Enga	Bougainville	Total
No	23.5	25.5	25.0
Yes	64.7	70.2	68.8
Don't know	11.8	4.3	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Examples of interventions from fieldwork:

- Anti-sorcery taskforce (Enga police)
- Village court strategies
- Catholic church 5 point plan
- Human rights defenders network

Who were attempts made by?

Who were these attempts  
made by? - Enga



■ By State actor  
■ By Non-State actor

Who were these attempts  
made by? - Bougainville



■ By State actor  
■ By Non-State actor

# Prosecution/arrest for sorcery accusation related violence

- In 134 cases (29.7%) suspects were arrested by police between 1996 and 2016 (newspaper analysis)
- 70 cases got to trial 1996 – 2016 (17% cases)
- Gender gap in victims: in only 14 cases were women the sole victims (vs 50 cases of men as sole victims)
- Long delays in courts getting to trial
- Often the “least” culpable the one who is punished



# What actually does (seem to) work?

- Credible threats of state action
  - Eg/ holding a statement of complaint, preventative orders
- Involving individuals and communities in law making and law enforcement (“participative justice”)
  - Eg by-laws, transforming perpetrators
- Coalitions and partnerships of motivated citizens, police, religious leaders, community leaders
  - Eg Simbu rapid response team
  - Eg catholic papas group (Enga)
- Creative officials
  - Eg Deputy Police Commissioner in Enga
- Historical literature: beliefs don’t disappear but violence response can



Above: New leaders of SNAP provincial committee in Enga;  
Left: survivor and her rescuer and leader of local Catholic papa’s group

# Advocacy strategies

	Enga	Bougainville	Total
No proof of sorcery	7	25	32
Sorcery doesn't exist	6	14	20
Deal with existing conflict	5	11	16
Payment of compensation	5	7	12
Promise not to do it again	10	3	13
Violence against the law	7	1	8
Impact on relationships	6	3	9
Exorcism/ rel or cult ceremony	1	1	2
Other	1	7	8

**Key finding:** Multiple different advocacy strategies being used at once

# Village court strategies

- Use of preventive orders
- Threat of District Court
- Addressing accusation in public places (awareness)
- Awareness of the Law.



Village court, NCD

# Conclusions

- Study at preliminary stages but methodology seems to be working
- Big disparities in rates of violence across PNG, and variations over time
- In many places strong gendered divisions in victims; marginally more men overall than women in newspaper analysis
- Creative solutions are being developed at local level, need to be supported by state authorities; some may be able to be scaled, others need to happen almost at an individual level