

# **Addressing sorcery-related violence through peace building: The Yuri experience**

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The Yuri and Bari people of Papua New Guinea



## Outline

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- Prevention strategies
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# Introduction

- Sorcery accusation-related violence (SARV) is a particular form of violence that is attributed to the belief that sorcerers possess supernatural powers to cause harm or the deaths of other people. Violence targeted at sorcerers ranges from accusations, banishment, torture, and killing. Collective violence is referred to as SARV (Forsyth & Eves, 2015).
- Contemporary occurrences have been reported in countries such as India, Nepal, South Africa, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Tanzania, Angola, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Congo as well as England and the USA. It has been estimated that between 2009 and 2017 at least 20,000 people were killed, attacked, maimed, or trafficked as a direct result of sorcery accusation or witchcraft (WHRIN 2020)
- In PNG, SARV has been new in some communities while in other communities, SARV predated colonialism.
- Contemporary SARV has increased in many parts of PNG, placing lives of men, women, children and the community at risk and require multiple responses (Thomas, Kauli, & Rawstorne, 2017).
- The consequences of SARV are devastating to victims, perpetrators, families and communities.
- The issue of SARV has been gaining public and government attention in PNG over the past ten years. The horrific 2013 murder of Kepari Leniata, a woman accused of sorcery in Mt Hagen town, in the Highlands region, resulted in renewed national conversations and actions against SARV. This included establishing National Action Plan (SARVNAP) consisting of multiple, coordinated approaches to better understand and address SARV (Forsyth 2014).
- Many Yuri people have been suffering from SARV but has not been documented until 2013, they found a way to address it collectively.



## Triggers of SARV

- Illness & deaths
- Jealousies
- Glass man & woman in Enga Province (Gibbs, 2015)
- Kumo doctor, who are hired for fees to identify sorcerers in the community.
- The glassman and woman acerbate SARV in many parts of the highlands provinces.
- New and repeated accusations (Forsyth et al, 2021)



## Prevention strategies

- State-law and order-policing.
  - a) Protect victims
  - b) Investigate, arrest and prosecute perpetrators. Rely on reports from victims or a family member and courts require witnesses to testify.
- Some churches are at the forefront of addressing SARV at the community level through their extensive pastoral and social network.
- International development partners, research institutions and universities
- Community and civil society organisations are at the forefront of addressing SARV through networking, establishing community laws and communication networks to report SARV.
- Village courts, councilors and community leaders mediate SARV at the community level to keep peace.
- Yuri peace-building offers a unique, inter-clan, practical and sustainable response to SARV.



## Research method

- Semi structure interviews & integrated kaporì and photovoice in a workshop
- 26 participants for interview and 14 participants for kaporì representing 13 clans of Yuri tribe participated in the research.
- The Arts Based (Barone & Eisner 2011) and Participatory Action Research (Barbutiu, 2016) methods are consistent with Indigenous Knowledge and relational values, experiences and motivations to respond to SARV.
- Semi structure interviews allowed me to ask people about their own experiences and responses to SARV. They listened and responded. I listened and asked again to gain more insights to their knowledge and experiences of responding to SARV.
- Integrated kaporì and photovoice workshop occurred in a community hall. It is a safe space where old men, women, youth and community leaders came together to share their stories and take photos to represent their stories.
- The stories and photos have been documented.



## Research findings

- Peace building created agencies to respond to SARV.
- Old men, women, youth, community leaders, perpetrators and victims of SARV openly discussed responses to SARV.
- The stories of the agents have been documented in a photovoice book for further educational and awareness on SARV.
- SARV violated tribal objectives of peace-building. Thus, it is not treated in isolation at the family or clan level. It becomes a communal issue where community leaders from other clans in Yuri step up to condemn SARV.
- Community leaders and village courts strengthened the voices of the people against SARV by imposing heavy compensation payment on perpetrators.
- Community leaders aimed at keeping peace in the community. Thus, prevent SARV accusations from escalating into family and inter-clan wars.
- Research method can be replicated in other social studies because it amplified the voices and responses of the Yuri people to SARV.



## Conclusion

- SARV is a form of violence at the community level which can be dealt with and prevented in different ways.
- There are many community based, civil society and churches at the forefront of addressing SARV. The efforts of these organisations must be recognized and supported.
- Peace-building based on local knowledge, relationships and inter clan approach based on reconciliation and restorative justice principles offer a unique response to SARV which can be replicated in other communities.
- Yuri tribe did not have inter-clan and tribal fights for over a decade since peace building started in 2013. The tribe has been working hard to maintain peace including addressing SARV. .



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