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Is Australia doing enough to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Pacific workers in Australia?



Strawberry farm, South East Queensland (Lindy Kanan)

Research Project Overview

Research team:

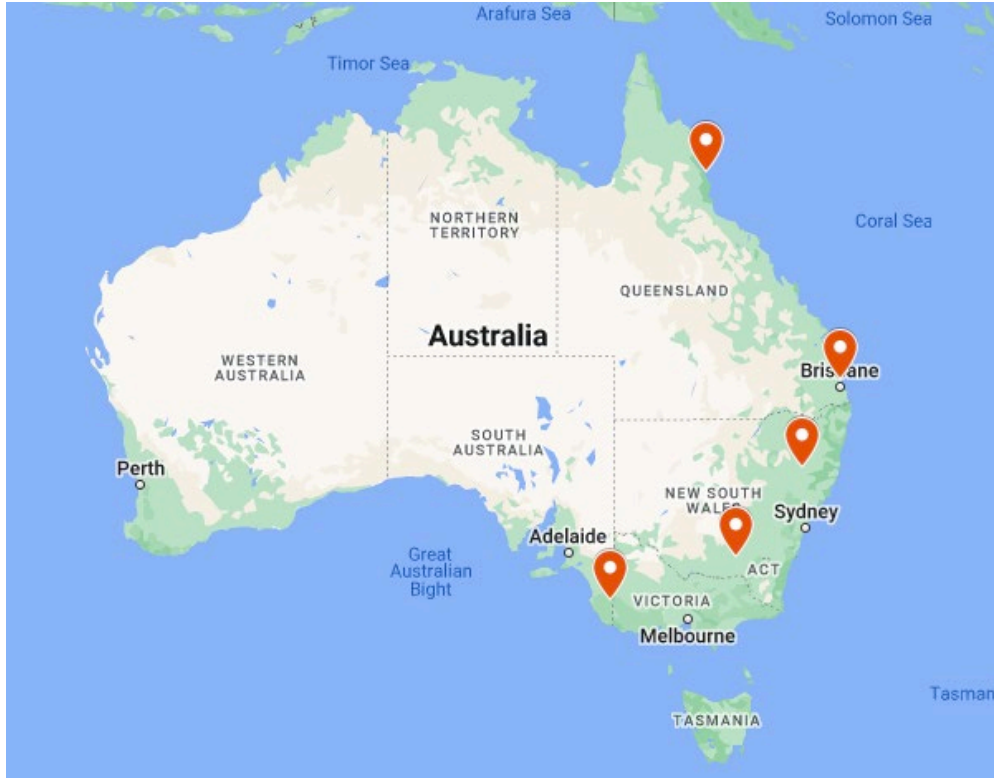
- Lindy Kanan, Senior Research Officer, ANU Department of Pacific Affairs (and PhD Candidate, University of the Sunshine Coast)
- Dr Judy Putt, Senior Research Fellow, ANU Department of Pacific Affairs

Objective:

- To investigate the safety and wellbeing experiences of men and women participating in the PALM scheme in Australia.



Banana packing shed, North Queensland (Lindy Kanan)

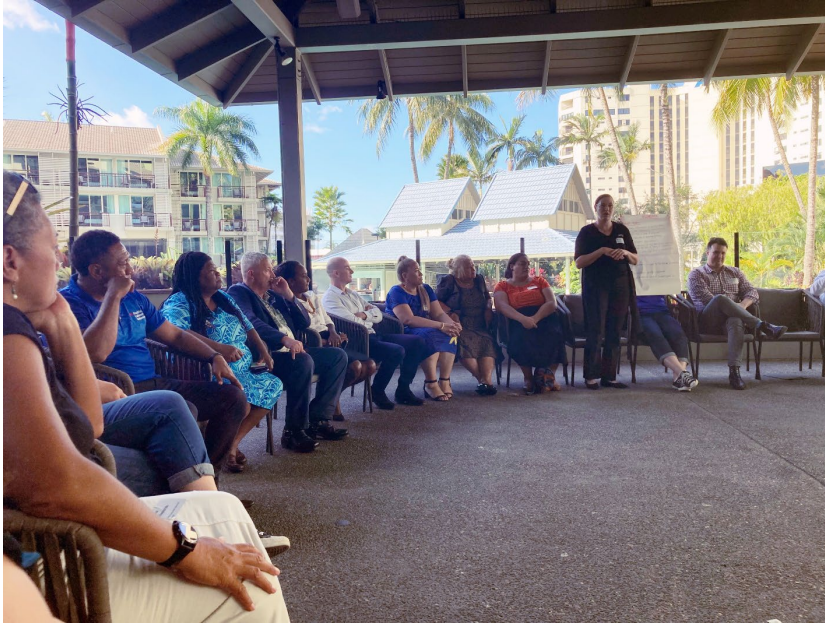


Source: Google Maps

Locations

- Cairns, Qld
 - Caboolture, Qld
 - Tamworth, NSW
 - Wagga Wagga, NSW
 - Naracoorte, SA
-
- Data collection: Apr to Nov 2022

Methods



Talanoa session, Regional Accelerator Forum, Cairns, September 2021 (Lindy Kanan)

- Worker survey (303 responses)
- Stakeholder survey (54 responses)
- Interviews (107 people)
 - 47 in person
 - 60 phone or video call
- Observations (8 events)
 - Regional Accelerator Forums:
 - » Caboolture
 - » Cairns
 - » Tamworth
 - » Wagga Wagga
 - Regional network meetings:
 - » S.E. Qld (online and in person)
 - » South Australia (online)

People we spoke with

Category	No.
PALM scheme workers (short and long term, disengaged, team leaders, horticulture, meat processing and aged care sectors)	44
Community sector (civil society, Pacific diaspora, sport etc)	19
Approved employers (direct employers, labour hire companies and labour hire host sites)	15
Government sector (local councils, federal government, state police services, Pacific Labour Facility staff, Pacific Country Liaison Officers)	15
Health sector (e.g. health insurance provider, General Practitioner, sexual health nurse, state public health worker, hospital employee)	7
Religious (pastors or religious affiliated organisations)	4
Accommodation providers	2
Union representatives	1
Total	107



Banana farm, North Queensland (Lindy Kanan)

Worker survey respondents (n=303)

Program	No.	%
Pacific Labour Scheme	226	76.3
Seasonal Worker Program	22	7.4
PALM scheme	42	14.2
Don't know	3	1.0
Other	3	1.0

Gender	No.	%
Male	226	75.6
Female	72	24.1
Transgender	1	0.003

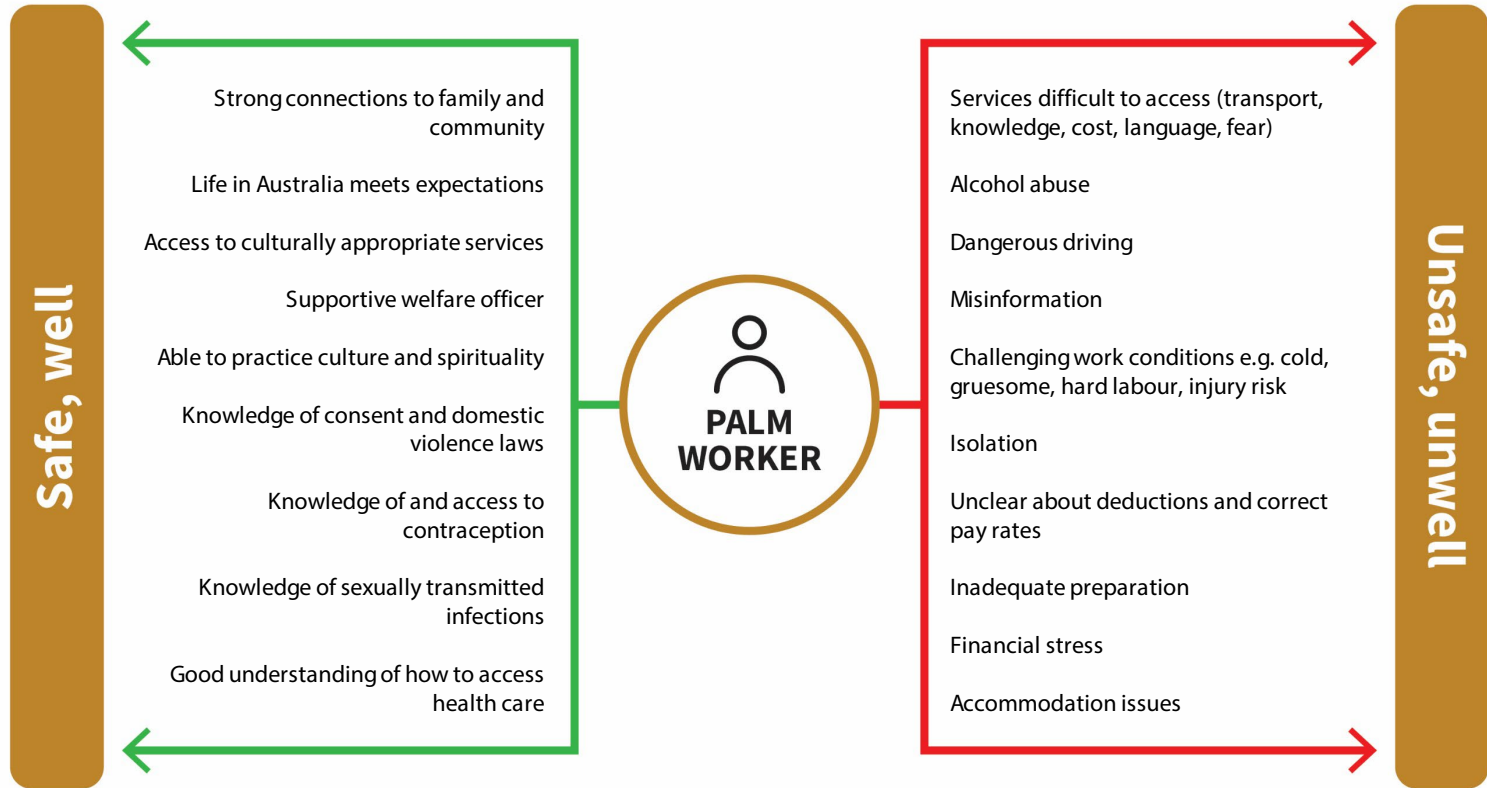
State	No.	%
Queensland	109	36.3
New South Wales	82	27.3
Victoria	40	13.3
Western Australia	31	10.3
South Australia	17	5.7
Northern Territory	13	4.3
Tasmania	6	2.0
Australian Capital Territory	1	0.3
Other	1	0.3

Stakeholder survey respondents (n=54)

Stakeholder type	No.	%
Approved employer - direct	17	31
Community sector	8	15
Approved employer – labour hire	6	11
Religious affiliated	4	7
Local/regional service provider	4	7
Other	3	6

Stakeholder type (contd)	No.	%
Labour hire host site	3	6
Pacific Labour Facility staff	3	6
Local government	2	4
Federal government	2	4
Police	1	2
Accommodation provider	1	2

Factors influencing safety and wellbeing



*What mechanisms
have been in place
to support safety
and wellbeing?*



A word cloud of various support mechanisms and roles, arranged in a circular pattern. The words are in different colors (blue, orange, green) and sizes, indicating their relative frequency or importance. The words include:

- Welfare Officer
- Country Liaison Officer
- Community organisations
- Approved Employer
- Labour Sending Unit
- Community Connections Program
- Regional Relationship Manager
- Pacific Labour Mobility Officer
- Local services
- Unions
- Church
- Regional Initiative
- Phone Hotline
- Fair Work Ombudsman
- Team Leader
- Pacific Diaspora
- Regional Accelerator Forum

Who workers turn to for help if a problem with safety

(From workers survey, n=300)

	Number	%	Ranking
My employer	96	32.0	1
Team leader	82	27.3	2
Pacific Labour Facility/PALM support phone line	54	18.0	3
Friends or family in home country	31	10.3	4
Pacific friends or family in Australia	15	5.0	5
Australian friends	7	2.3	6
Church pastor/minister/priest	6	2.0	7
Other (please specify)	9	3.0	NA

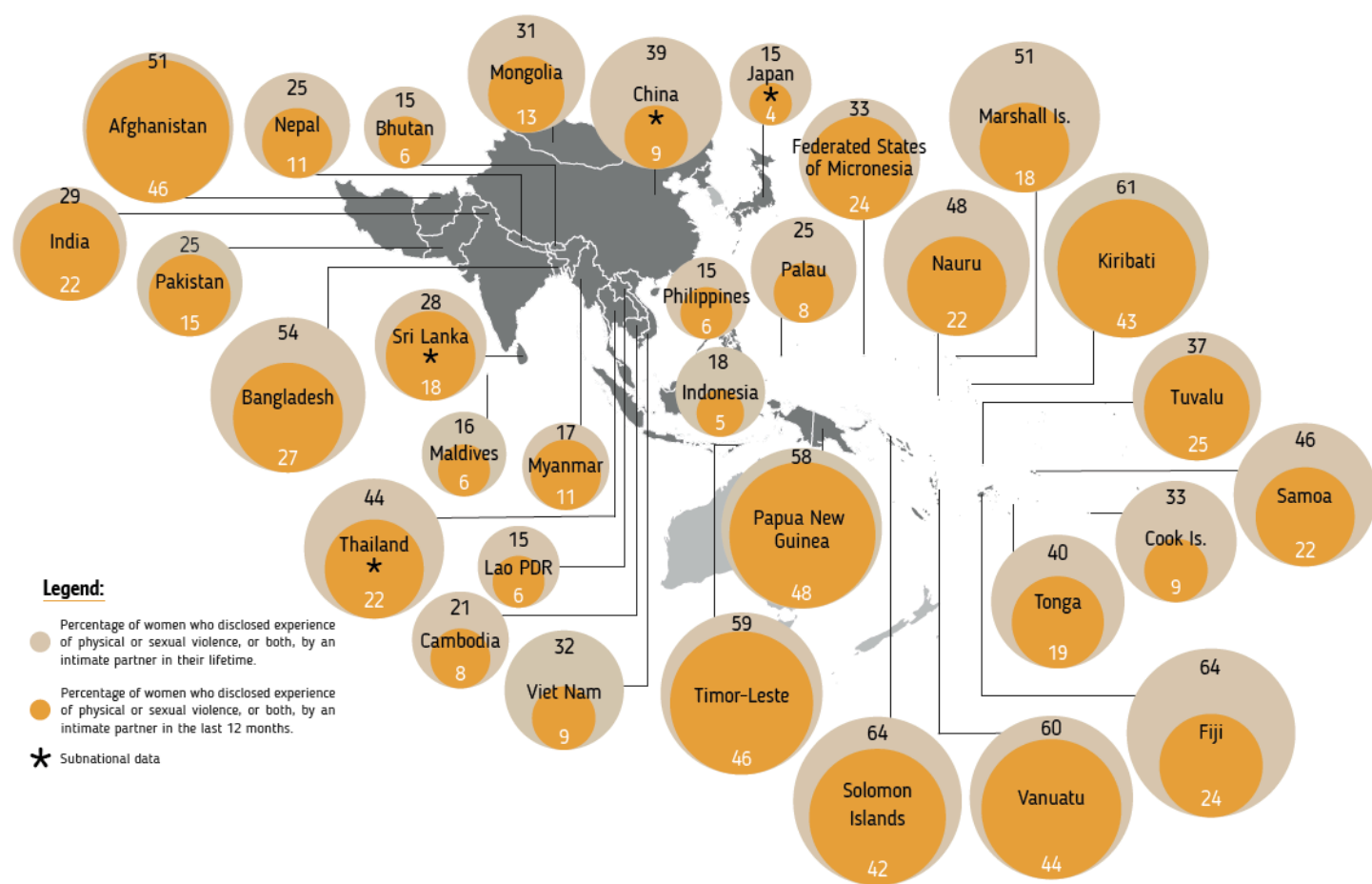
Barriers to safety/wellbeing support

Stakeholder responses	No.	%
Workers are shy or embarrassed to seek support	40	75.5
Language barriers	37	69.8
Cultural barriers	36	67.9
Lack of services in regional areas	27	50.9
Lack of culturally appropriate services	26	49.1
Lack of information	25	47.2

Worker responses	No.	%
Worried about losing job or visa	164	56.4
Shy or embarrassed to ask for help	156	53.6
Not confident speaking English	122	41.9
Not sure where to go	105	36.1
Services don't understand Pacific culture	78	26.8
Hard to get transport	65	22.34



Women who experience intimate partner violence 2000 – 2022



Source: UNFPA, <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/resources/>



Findings relating to violence against women

Workers' perceptions of how big a problem is 'men hurting women', by gender, number and percent

	Women workers		Men workers	
	Number	%	Number	Percent
Very big problem	15	20.8	24	11.0
Big problem	8	11.1	16	7.3
Small problem	7	9.7	19	8.7
Not a problem	28	38.9	100	45.7
Don't know	14	19.4	60	27.4
TOTAL	72	99.9	219	100.1

So yes, I suppose domestic violence, it's not as visible in the program as assault or sexual assault, but I have seen a few instances of DV.

There's a lot of domestic violence cases that we've dealt with. Many of those do go through to a sort of a police involvement scenario. What complicates that is, compared to a typical Australian context, that the woman in that relationship may not have the networks, the freedoms, that sort of thing to get away from that person who is perpetrating the violence.

Findings relating to violence against women (con't)

In the case of non-consensual sex, we have a really good sexual assault service, and we explain the options and the pathway. To date, no one has wanted to pursue it further with police or another agency.

There are definitely cases of sexual coercion, but we don't feel like we're always able to get the full story. There's such a cultural reluctance to talk about anything related to sex.

Even if a woman knows about domestic violence orders in Australia, there is probably a lot of fear about going down that sort of process, fear of what it might mean for her own visa.

There's a lot of sexual harassment issues and cases that are not handled properly and look into.



Types of violence against women



Turalba Worker's Accommodation, North Queensland (Lindy Kanan)

- Intimate partner violence – couple travels to Australia together to work or new relationship in Australia
- Coercive control – partner is home in the Pacific but he is controlling the woman while she is in Australia
- Sexual violence
 - Sexual health service reports
 - Sex worker interactions
 - Worker accommodation

Meat industry

- Large and difficult work places, very hyper-male dominated culture
- Impersonal, often rude and abusive language, pay lower than fellow workers
- Critical role of labour hire – local representatives can be good and very bad
- Long hours, difficult to mix in local community, involved in fellowship, sport and drinking
- Shorter weeks in (non-feedlot) beef abattoirs (seasonal) – income doesn't cover costs



Photo: iStockphoto.com

Range of practices

Good practices

- Increases in pay to reflect skills and comparable to other workers in the area of work
- Clear and regular statements about deductions
- Effective worker representation through team leaders and welfare officers
- Direct engagement of meat works' management and HR staff in workplace issues and social activities
- Outreach work by labour hire welfare officers, and reasonable ratios
- Key driver (NGO/voluntary assoc) to advocate and build networks of support

Bad practices

- Threatening to send workers home if they raise issues or walk off
- Labour hire company staff sit in offices; do not respond or never follow up
- Unrelenting work output, lack of interest in workers' wellbeing at work (incl injury)
- Not dealing with racism, sexism and bullying in the workplace
- Advocating workers take annual leave during low season

Is Australia doing enough?

- Australia and the PALM scheme is doing a lot!
- Opportunities:
 - Program alignment – take the best of each program e.g. Community Connections, regional engagement model
 - Prevention and response of violence against women
 - Sharing of data
 - Leverage existing culturally safe services e.g. migrant settlement services, Pacific focussed programs in metro Qld
 - Compliance monitoring of new deed – grievances, cultural competency



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THANK YOU

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