

“Bashed Up” – new HRW report on family violence in PNG

by Ashlee Betteridge
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A **new report** from Human Rights Watch (HRW) on gender-based violence (GBV) in Papua New Guinea outlines the problems in national and local responses to this critical issue, emphasising the importance of service delivery, referral pathways and case management services.

Through interviews with survivors and other stakeholders, **the report** paints a harrowing picture of the GBV epidemic in PNG, and the impact it has on women and children and their rights.

The report strongly points a finger at a poor police response, and says that despite national level action such as the passage of the Family Protection Act in 2013, little has changed for many women on the ground.

It writes that police still view family violence as a domestic issue even in very severe cases, push for reconciliation even when a woman is seeking charges against their partner, refuse to act without a medical report, charge prohibitive fees to act, or tell women in remote areas that they must bring the perpetrator to the police station.

Importantly, the report also focuses on the urgent and widespread need for services.

“There is a dire lack of services for people requiring assistance after suffering family violence. Most areas have no safe houses, and no area has enough. Most counseling focuses on reconciling the survivor with her abusive partner. Qualified psychosocial counselors are all but nonexistent. Case management is rarely provided. Legal aid is almost entirely absent.” (p. 4)

The report also argues that the government should be doing more to address the economic reasons that many survivors feel compelled to stay with their abusers: “in spite of the fact that the government of Papua New Guinea, as a low-middle income country, increasingly has financial resources, there is no safety net for family violence survivors who need financial support.”

More broadly, the PNG government is criticised for being too reliant on civil society and international donors to mount responses to gender-based violence, and the report says the government needs to channel more domestic resources towards the issue. (Though in recommendations directly targeted at Australia, the report says PNG's largest donor should continue its work in the law and justice sector, and on supporting Family and Sexual Violence Units at police stations).

The recognition for the role of case management services for survivors in this report is commendable—this is an area that is often overlooked, and it has the potential to not only help survivors navigate challenging systems, but to have broader positive impacts on service delivery through the promotion of a coordinated approach among local service providers and the establishment of clear referral pathways.

In its recommendations to the Ministry for Religion, Youth and Community Development, the report suggests the establishment of “case management services for victims of family violence in every province to coordinate between agencies and follow up with survivors”. It also advocates for the Ministry to “lead the process to develop and implement a ‘referral pathway’ in every province”.

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Link: <https://devpolicy.org/bashed-up-new-hrw-report-on-gbv-in-png/>