

Intimate partner violence in Port Moresby: drivers and outcomes

by Minetta Daniella Kakarere

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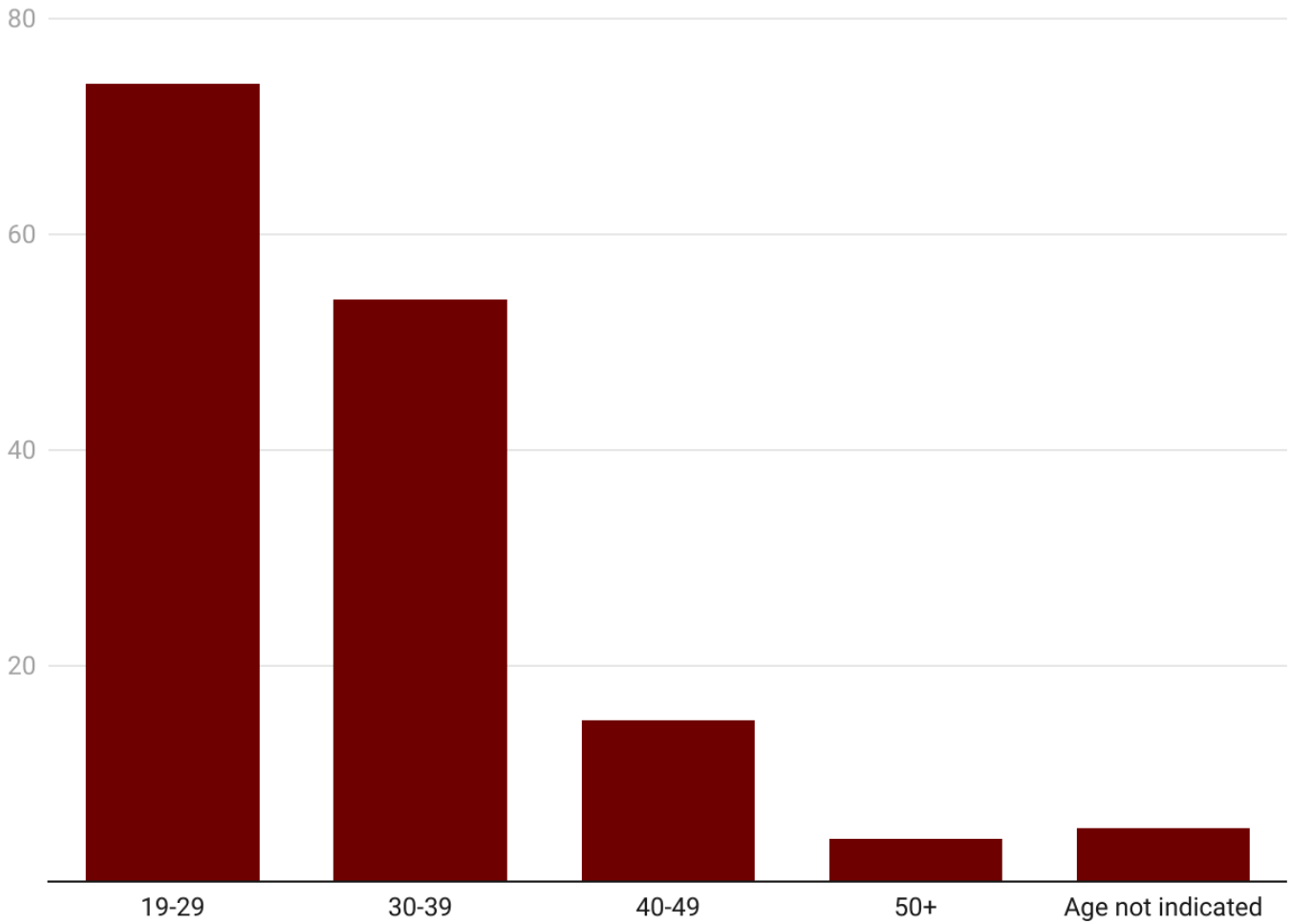
Intimate partner violence (IPV) affects **80% of women** in Papua New Guinea, a rate that may be the highest in the world. This blog draws on a sample of 152 cases (out of over 2,000 cases in total) maintained by the **Royal PNG Constabulary Family and Sexual Violence Unit** (FSVU) in Port Moresby for the year 2020, to understand the factors driving incidents of IPV in that location. It also examines outcomes of the cases in terms of justice for victims.

Sexual abuse cases are largely excluded from the analysis as the FSVU does not deal with serious offences under the *Criminal Code Act 1974*; these cases were instead referred to the Sexual Offence Squad Unit at Boroko Police Station.

Sixty of the 152 IPV victims experienced only physical abuse, while 46 experienced only psychological abuse, and 45 experienced both. Of the 152 cases analysed, there were 141 male perpetrators and 11 female perpetrators.

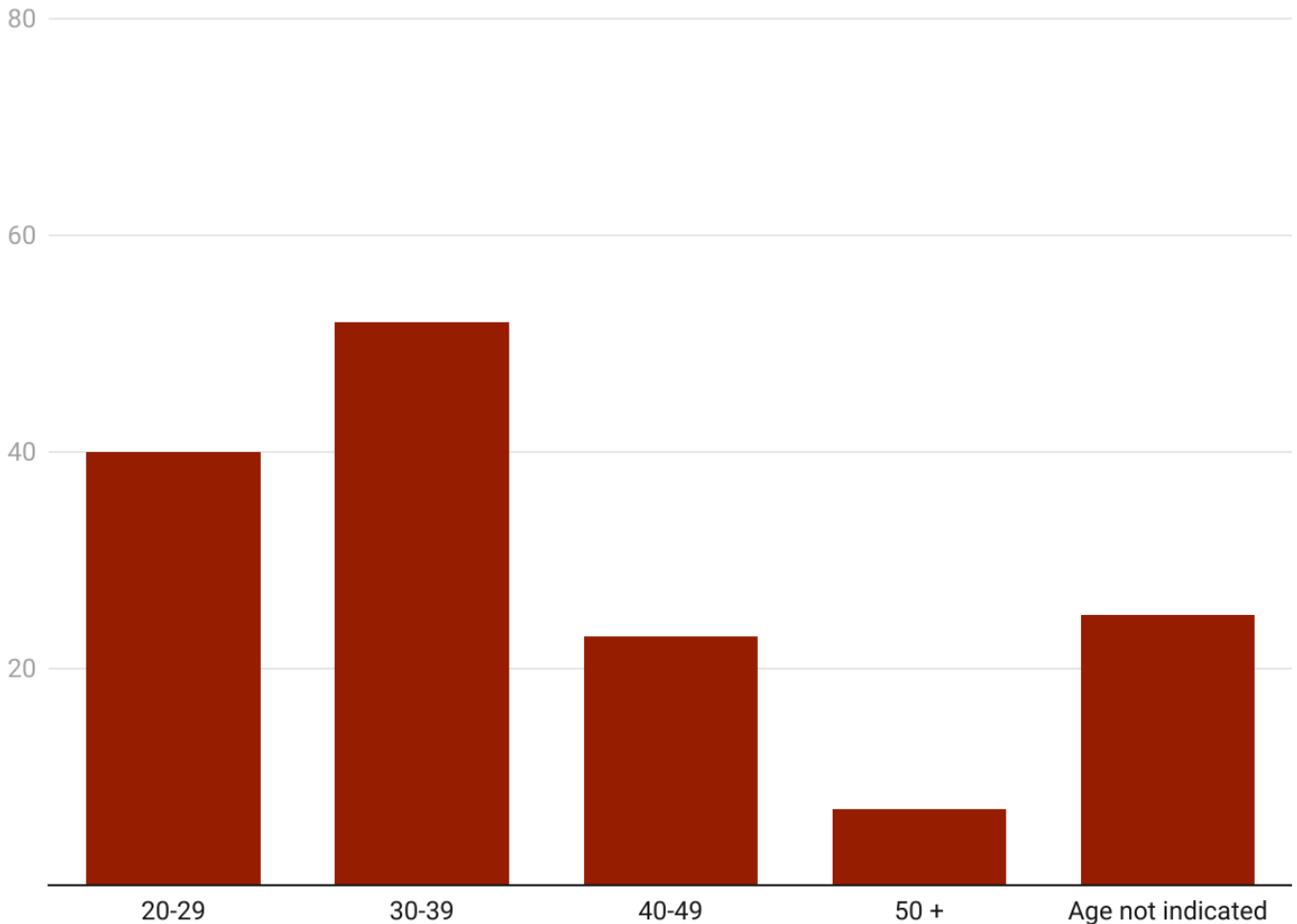
It is clear that more young women suffer incidents of IPV compared to older women (Figure 1). Perpetrators were on average slightly older, with a plurality in the 30-39 age group (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Age of IPV victims in Port Moresby, 2020



Source: Royal PNG Constabulary Family and Sexual Violence Units • Created with Datawrapper

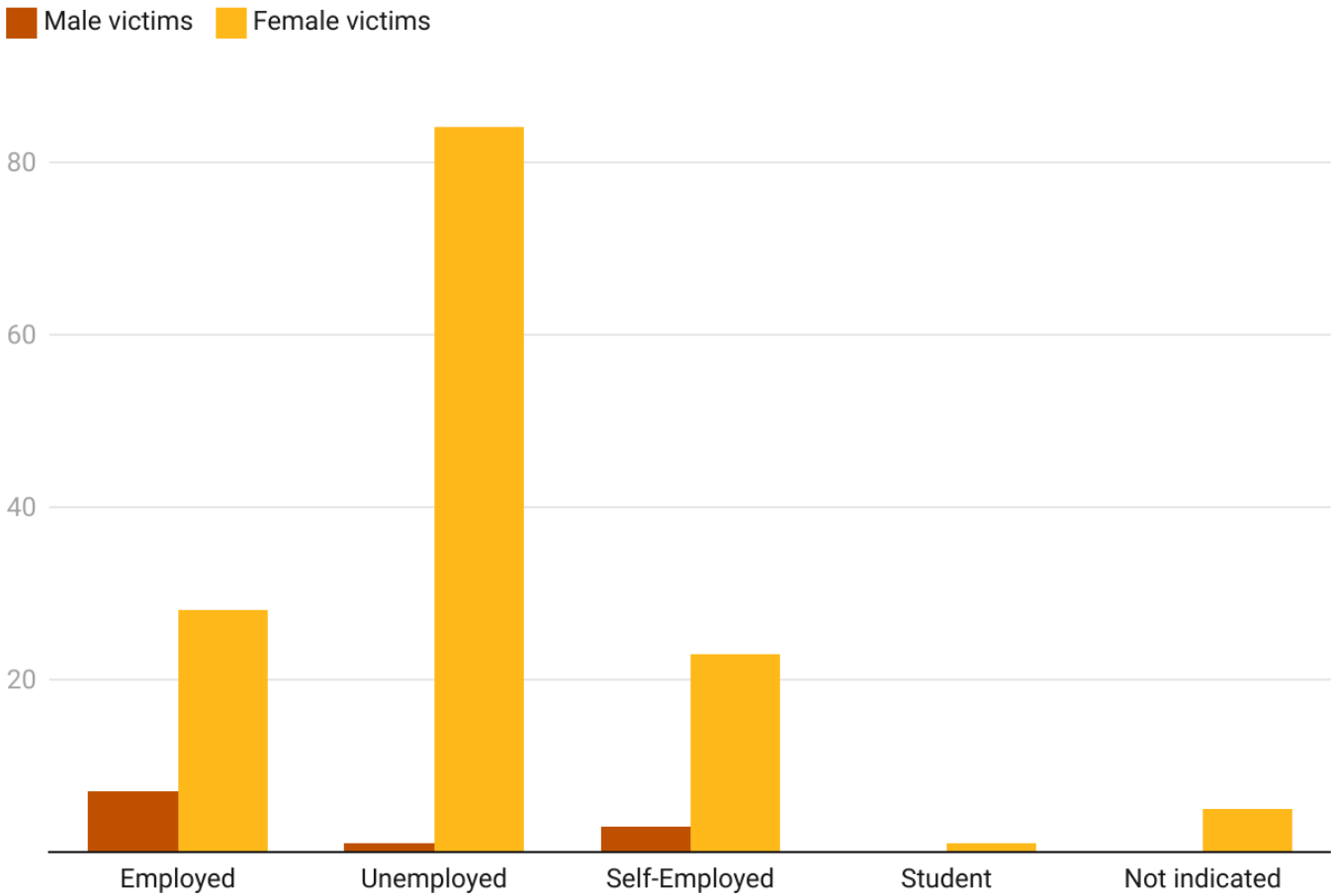
Figure 2: Age of IPV perpetrators in Port Moresby, 2020



Source: Royal PNG Constabulary Family and Sexual Violence Units • Created with Datawrapper

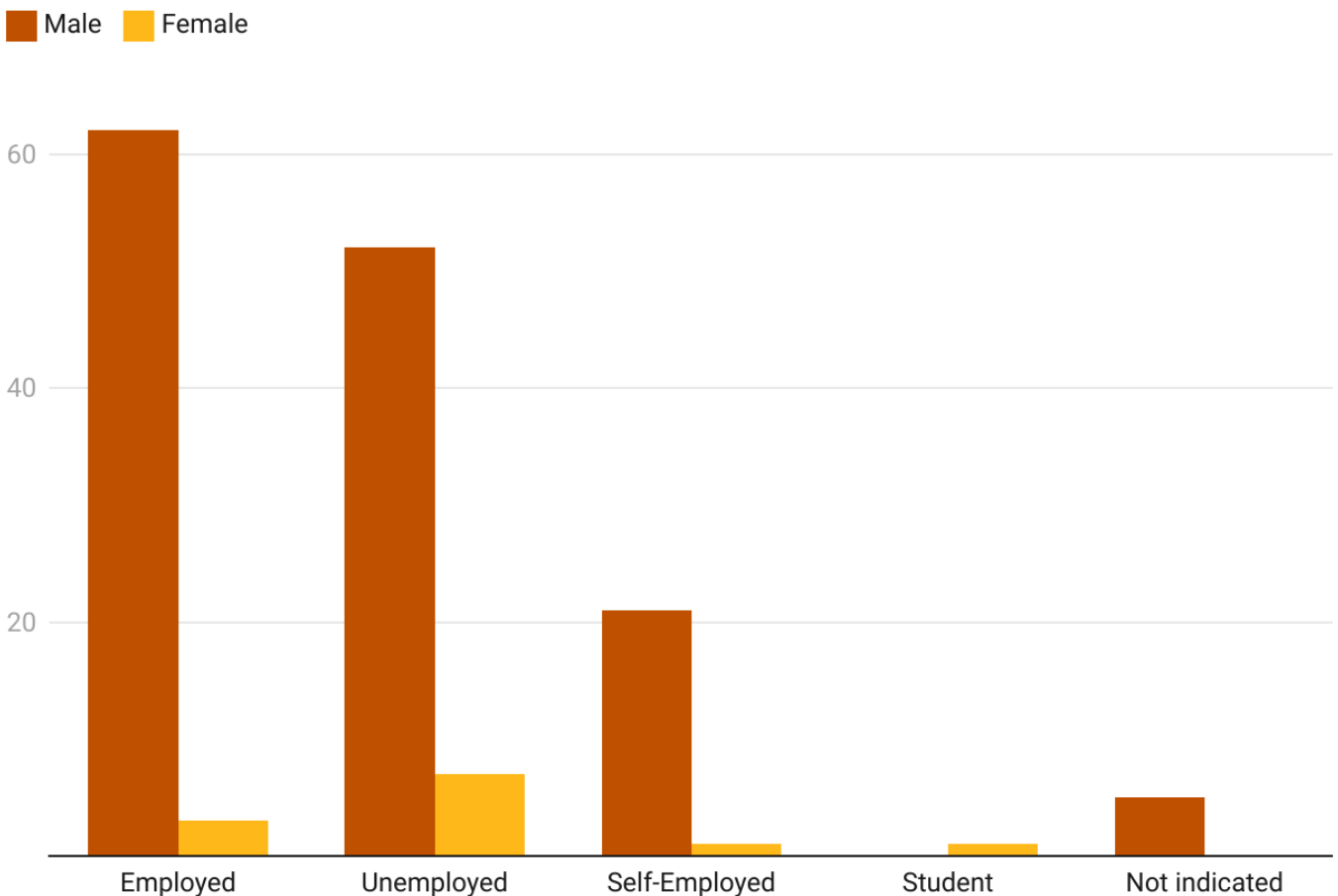
It is also evident that females who are unemployed experience more incidents of IPV than women who are employed and self-employed (Figure 3), while a plurality of perpetrators were employed males (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Employment status of IPV victims in Port Moresby, 2020



Source: Royal PNG Constabulary Family and Sexual Violence Units • Created with Datawrapper

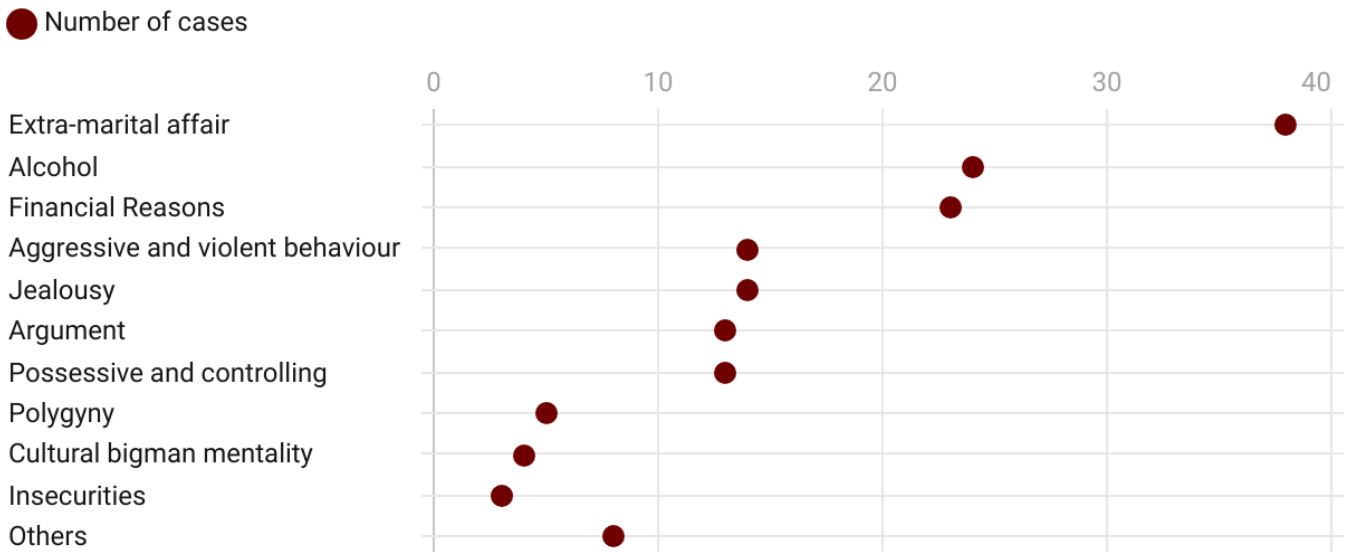
Figure 4: Employment status of IPV perpetrators in Port Moresby, 2020



Source: Royal PNG Constabulary Family and Sexual Violence Units • Created with Datawrapper

The most frequently cited driver of these incidents of IPV (as captured in the case notes) was extra-marital affairs, which accounted for 25% of cases analysed (Figure 5). Of these 38 cases, four females and 34 males were the perpetrators. The next most common factors were the influence of alcohol and financial reasons (24 and 23 IPV cases respectively). All alcohol-driven incidents featured male perpetrators and all the female victims sustained physical injuries. In financially driven cases, employed women were physically assaulted by their partners, who were either employed, self-employed or unemployed, because they did not give money to their partners when they requested it. Perpetrators who were employed also financially neglected unemployed and self-employed women and their children.

Figure 5: Determinants of IPV cases in Port Moresby, 2020



Source: Royal PNG Constabulary Family and Sexual Violence Units • Created with Datawrapper

Of the 152 cases, only 20 obtained a successful outcome in which court orders such as interim protection orders (12) or permanent orders (8) were served to the perpetrators. 50 cases were unsuccessful, meaning that the perpetrators were not punished. This was because the complainants had to withdraw their cases, due to threats from their partners and families. One of the main reasons was because the perpetrator was the sole breadwinner of the family, which meant the victims could not continue with the case. Some victims also withdrew their cases because the issue was resolved through compensation. 33 cases were referred to the family court and the welfare centre for appropriate action, and 40 case results were still pending at the end of 2020.

Separate interviews with officers in the FSVU suggest that several challenges affect the ability of the police to help IPV victims get justice. First, the FSVU space is small, and there is no privacy between the perpetrator and the victim. This can prevent complainants from telling the full story of the abuse they have faced for fear of being abused again when they return home. Also important is the court process. According to four police officers, many complainants have given up pursuing their cases because the court often adjourns cases, even if all necessary evidence and paperwork are presented, and it can take two to three months for the final decision to be made. Additionally, complainants who were unemployed often encountered financial difficulties travelling to and from court, while complainants who had family obligations were unable to continuously follow up on the court decisions. Similarly, self-employed victims or complainants saw that coming and going to the court, just to hear that their cases were adjourned, was a waste of time. These reasons contributed to complainants giving up the pursuit of their cases and the large

number of unsuccessful cases in 2020.

What can be done to both reduce the prevalence of IPV and facilitate justice for victims? A short-term measure would be for the government and its partners (including international organisations, NGOs and church groups) to train community leaders on how to take ownership of addressing IPV cases, as well as helping victims get assistance through legal means in their communities. In that way, both young and old people would be educated about how to resolve relationship conflicts by peaceful means, and about the importance of seeking assistance when they are faced with IPV or gender-based violence more broadly.

In the longer term, education is needed to lead behavioural change for future generations. Teaching principles and values around gender equality, respect and non-violence, based on gender-aware teaching materials for students, teachers and other staff, will hopefully help to shift the patriarchal norm, so that men and women will be more likely to see and appreciate each other as equal partners. Importantly, parents and families should send their daughters to school, and help and encourage them to continue with their studies and get a good job. Most victims of IPV in Port Moresby and PNG are women who are uneducated and unemployed, and financially depend on their husbands. When their husbands abuse them, they cannot report the incident because the husband is the sole breadwinner of the family. The husbands, also knowing that, continue to inflict violence on women.

Ultimately, gender-based violence is preventable, but it will only be defeated when it becomes a public concern that is addressed collectively by families, communities and the country as a whole.

Disclosures:

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