

Vanuatu leads the way in reducing violence against women

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Survey team travel through the mountains in Vanuatu

Photo Credit: Vanuatu Women's Centre

Vanuatu's prevalence of physical or sexual violence against women by husbands and partners has fallen by nine percentage points over the last 15 years — from 44% of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 in 2009 to 35% in 2024. This is a faster decrease than the global average, and is not surpassed by any other country in the Asia-Pacific region with **comparable studies** over **two points in time**.

This good news is a headline finding from Vanuatu's **Second National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships**. The study was undertaken by the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) in 2024 in partnership with the Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics (VBoS) and was launched on 9 March 2026. It compares findings with the **first Vanuatu national survey**, which was undertaken in 2009.

Table 1: Annual rate of change (percentage points) in physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, ever-partnered women aged 15-49, Vanuatu 2024 (unweighted) and global comparisons

	Change in Vanuatu prevalence rate 2009-2024	Vanuatu annual rate of change	Global annual rate of change (2000-2023)
Lifetime	-3 pp (from 60% to 57%)	-0.2 pp/year	-0.2 pp/year
Current (last 12 months)	-9 pp (from 44% to 35%)	-0.6 pp/year	-0.2 pp/year

Sources: VWC and VBoS; and WHO (global estimate).

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The **global prevalence** of physical and/or sexual partner violence has reduced by

0.2 percentage points annually, for both lifetime and current prevalence. For Vanuatu, the lifetime annual reduction in prevalence is also 0.2 percentage points. However, the pace of change for current prevalence (in the 12 months before each survey) is faster in Vanuatu at 0.6 percentage points annually.

Although Vanuatu's reduction in the prevalence of intimate partner violence is undoubtedly still too slow at less than one percentage point per year, it is nevertheless a welcome finding, indicating that the prevention and response strategies of the Vanuatu Women's Centre in collaboration with the Vanuatu Government, provincial governments, chiefs and other stakeholders are having an impact, as demonstrated in the [research report](#).

Like other autonomous and locally led Pacific women's organisations such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, VWC has consistently implemented — over more than 30 years — the strategies that various evidence-based reviews (for example, [Htun and Weldon](#), the [WHO](#), [Garcia-Moreno et al.](#) and a further [WHO review](#)) conclude are essential for reducing prevalence. These key strategies include: a survivor-centred and comprehensive approach to responding to women and girls subjected to violence; community mobilisation and group education with women and men to change harmful social norms; national legal advocacy to improve accountability coupled with client-based advocacy; and persistent long-term efforts in collaboration with other national and provincial Vanuatu agencies and community leaders to strengthen prevention and response efforts across the country at all institutional levels.

Inevitably, comparisons of prevalence rates between (and within) countries present methodological challenges. One of these challenges was addressed by the fact that the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provided funding which enabled VWC to use the same methodology that was used in 2009. Both the 2009 and 2024 surveys used the World Health Organization (WHO) survey tool (adapted to the Vanuatu context), rather than a small module in a larger survey focused on a range of other social issues. This methodological choice significantly enhances the reliability and validity of comparative findings.

Another [recent study](#) compared changes in prevalence in several South and Southeast Asian countries where comparable methods of data collection were available across different points in time. Comparing the changes in Vanuatu since 2009 with the findings of this study provides further confidence in the conclusion that the pace of change in Vanuatu compares positively with other countries (Figure 2). However, it should be noted that Vanuatu and Melanesian countries in general have some of the highest prevalence rates in the world, and thus are starting from

very high baselines compared to most countries, and that there are currently **no other published studies** across more than one data point for comparison within the Pacific region.

Table 2: Percentage-point change in current (last 12 months) physical and/or sexual partner violence, ever-partnered women aged 15-49, Vanuatu (unweighted) and six other countries

	Time-frame	Change in current prevalence (percentage points)	Annual rate of change (pp/year)
Vanuatu (2009 and 2024)	15 years	- 9 pp	- 0.6 pp
India (2006, 2016 and 2021)	15 years	+ 1 pp	+ 0.7 pp
Nepal (2011 and 2017)	6 years	- 3 pp	- 0.5 pp
Cambodia (2000, 2006 and 2014)	14 years	- 4 pp	- 0.3 pp
Philippines (2008, 2013 and 2017)	9 years	- 5 pp	- 0.6 pp
Timor-Leste (2010 and 2016)	6 years	+ 4 pp	+ 0.7 pp
Vietnam (2010 and 2019)	9 years	- 0.1 pp	- 0.01 pp

Notes: Countries selected have more than one data point using comparable methods.

Sources: VWC and VBoS (Vanuatu); and Vyas et al.

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Despite the good progress made, data from the 2024 survey reveals a complex picture of progress, with emotional intimate partner violence (in the last 12 months) reducing by only three percentage points since 2009. The prevalence of **coercive control** remains extraordinarily high, with 59% of women currently facing this form of abuse from husbands or partners.

Data on non-partner violence, and particularly **childhood and adult sexual abuse**, are confronting. These abuses put women at significantly greater risk of living with

violence in their adult intimate relationships, and underscore the challenges ahead: 21% of women have been sexually abused by non-partners in their lifetimes, including attempted rape and unwanted touching; and 30% of girls were sexually abused under the age of 15.

VWC pioneered the incorporation of several new areas of study into the **2024 survey**: it was the first using the WHO methodology to incorporate questions into the survey tool on violence against women during disasters / emergencies, technology-facilitated abuse (by both partners and non-partners), and sexual harassment. It is also the only country survey (to our knowledge) to assess the extent to which intimate partner violence causes permanent disabilities among women. The incorporation of each of these issues into the survey tool came from the grassroots: they were informed by VWC's day-to-day counselling, training, legal advocacy and prevention work across the nation.

Without ongoing core support from both DFAT and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, it would not have been possible to incorporate these new areas of research, to confidently compare prevalence rates over 15 years, or to achieve the good progress made to date.

Nevertheless, the findings require an urgent and renewed commitment to action by all stakeholders — to continue the investment in evidence-based strategies, and to accelerate and sustain the changes already made.

Disclosures:

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