

Combating the family and sexual violence epidemic in PNG: a submission to the Joint Standing Committee inquiry

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Earlier this year, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Hon Julie Bishop MP, asked the human rights subcommittee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to inquire into and report on the human rights issues confronting women and girls in the Indian Ocean – Asia Pacific region.

There have been some 46 submissions made to the inquiry from a wide variety of stakeholders, which can be viewed [here](#), including [our own](#) [pdf].

Given the wide scope of the terms of reference for this inquiry, we chose to focus our submission on addressing the family and sexual violence (FSV) epidemic in Papua New Guinea (PNG), with particular reference to the [PNG Family and Sexual Violence Case Management Centre](#) project.

The family and sexual violence epidemic represents a significant constraint on the rights of women and girls and is a barrier to achieving gender-equitable development in PNG. Our submission focused on the significant gaps in the provision of services for survivors of family and sexual violence in PNG, and what can and should be done to address this.

Our key recommendations were as follows:

Recommendation 1: Family and sexual violence must be recognised as a long-term human rights problem and constraint on development that requires sustained and serious engagement and investment from aid donors, including Australia, and the PNG government.

Recommendation 2: Support and services for survivors of family and sexual violence are desperately needed. Integrated case management for survivors is largely absent in PNG and is an area of particular need, identified as such by both national and international organisations working on the ground. Long term investments by Australia and other donors, in partnership with the PNG Government, in the development and strengthening of services for survivors of family and sexual violence have the potential to provide direct, immediate and concrete outcomes.

Recommendation 3: There is also a need for donors to support the development of services for survivors of family and sexual violence in order to fully capitalise on investments in other sectors such as behaviour change, education and economic empowerment aimed at improving the status of women and girls in PNG.

Recommendation 4: There is a need to balance investment in government initiatives (i.e. the provision of health, legal, and protection services by the government) with adequate investment in civil society initiatives that support survivors to meaningfully assert the rights and services granted to them through policy and legislative change. Past experience in all settings demonstrates the essential role such NGOs play in catalysing effective government action. Therefore it is critical for Australia and other donors to support national NGOs and civil society in their service provision and advocacy roles alongside their support to government.

Recommendation 5: Supporting and strengthening technical and mentoring partnerships directly between organisations and individuals in Australia and PNG to tackle family and sexual violence has great potential, and should be further emphasised.

You can [read the full submission here](#) [pdf].

The PNG Family and Sexual Violence Case Management Centre project is progressing well, with operations set to begin soon. To keep up to date on this project, [sign up to the mailing list](#) or [visit the website](#).