



The Impact of Domestic and Sexual Violence on the Workplace in Solomon Islands

Executive Summary

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AN INITIATIVE OF THE PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP



IN COLLABORATION WITH





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Executive Summary

Fifteen of Solomon Islands' largest companies have signed up for the *Waka Mere Commitment to Action*. *Waka Mere*, or 'She Works' in Pijin, aims to advance gender equality in the country's private sector by promoting women in leadership; building respectful and supportive workplaces; and increasing opportunities for women in jobs traditionally held by men. *Waka Mere* is led by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, in collaboration with the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), the apex representative organisation for the country's private sector. The initiative is supported by the Governments of Australia and New Zealand.

1,248 people, a third of all employees, from nine *Waka Mere* companies, participated in this survey on 'How problems at home affect employees at work'. This survey was conducted in 2018 and was designed to identify:

- Employees' views of domestic and sexual violence and the impact it has on workplaces
- The prevalence and dynamics of domestic and sexual violence experienced by employees
- The effects of domestic and sexual violence on employees' ability to attend work, to be safe and productive at work, and the associated costs to businesses
- The availability and helpfulness of various kinds of support to employees affected by domestic and sexual violence, both provided by employers and in the community.

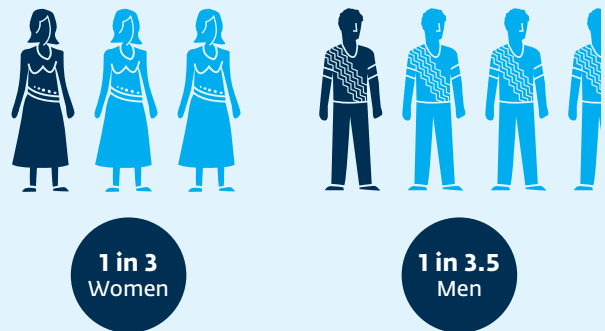
The survey findings will inform ongoing development of appropriate workplace responses and provide an early benchmark to measure changes in the ways that staff are supported. It is not a pure baseline as some companies have already started to implement aspects of workplace responses.

Experience and Acceptance of Violence

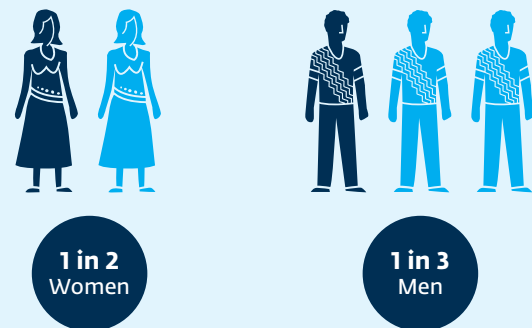
One in three of surveyed employees experienced domestic or sexual violence in the 12 months preceding the survey. In two companies, the rate was even higher, with approximately half of employees

Experience of domestic and sexual violence

Experienced domestic or sexual violence in the 12 months preceding the survey



Experienced domestic or sexual violence in their lifetime



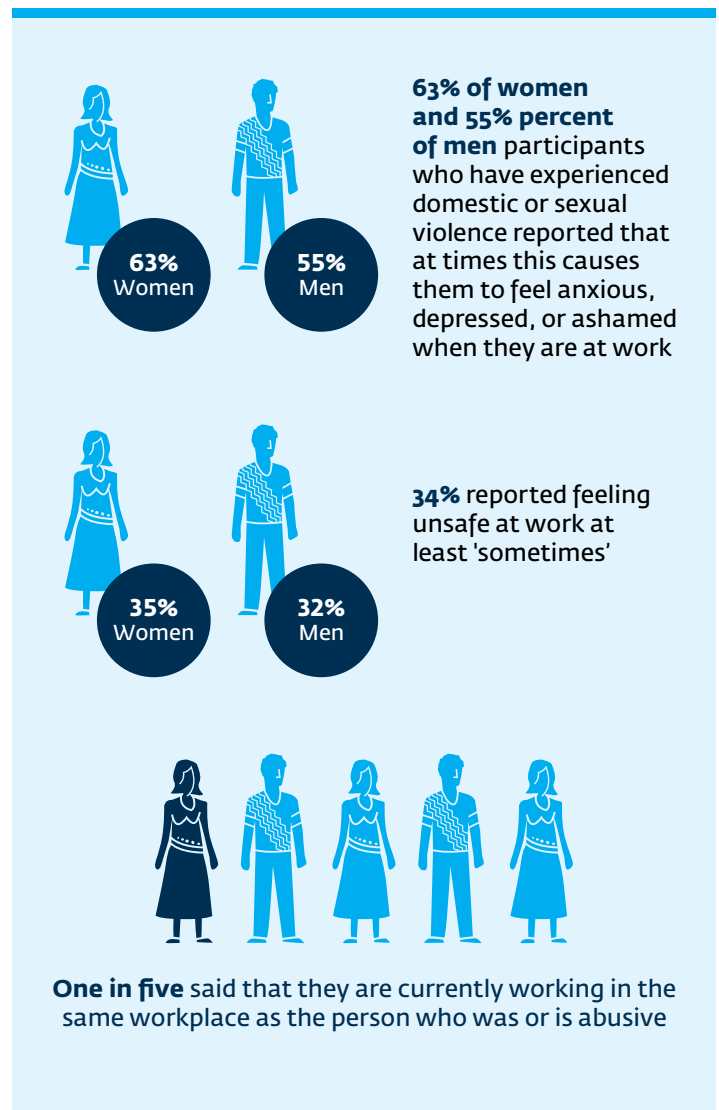
reporting domestic or sexual violence in the preceding 12 months. Overall, 44 percent of respondents (49 percent of women and 38 percent of men) reported that they had experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. In addition, 6 percent of participants who did not report experiencing violence themselves, said that they had close family that had. For many who reported violence, occurrence is regular—a quarter said violence occurs at least once monthly.

Encouragingly, the survey found much lower levels of acceptance of domestic and sexual violence than in previous studies; such as the 2009 Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study and the 2015 Solomon Islands Demographic and Health Survey. In the current survey, 31 percent of participants said they believed that domestic and sexual violence is sometimes acceptable, with men more likely to have this opinion than women (36 percent and 27 percent respectively). This compares positively with 71.2 percent women, and 56 percent men, employed in income-earning jobs, who had agreed with at least one specific justification for wife beating in the Demographic and Health Survey.

This emerging trend, at least in part, may be due to the work that has already been done in *Waka Mere* participating companies. Many of their employees are already involved in activities aiming to raise awareness of domestic and sexual violence, its consequences, and support services, with the central message that violence is unacceptable. Companies can now reinforce this positive finding and encourage an ongoing shift away from victim blaming. This will help to build an open and supportive environment for more affected people to come forward.

Impacts of Violence on the Workplace

Eighty-four percent of participants recognised the potential (13 percent) or actual (71 percent) effects of domestic and sexual violence on workplaces. Of those who reported experiencing domestic or sexual violence, 81 percent reported at least one workplace impact. This represents 35 percent — or one in three — of all employees who participated in the survey.



The most frequently reported area of impact was in relation to employees' ability to get to work, stay at work, or how they feel when they are there. Sixty-three percent of women and 55 percent of men who experienced domestic or sexual violence reported that at times this causes them to feel anxious, depressed, or ashamed when they are at work; 34 percent reported feeling unsafe at work at least 'sometimes' (men, 32 percent; women, 35 percent); and one in five said that they are currently working in the same workplace as the person who was or is abusive.

Estimating the Cost to Business

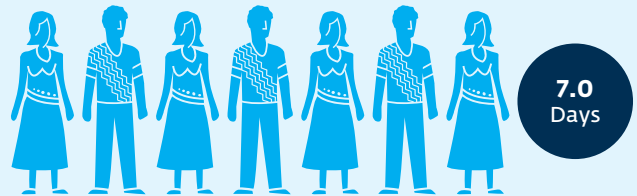
The stress of domestic and sexual violence, as well as any physical consequences, follows people to work — as may the perpetrators. As well as the significant personal toll, this has a cost to business.

We calculated this cost in the following ways:

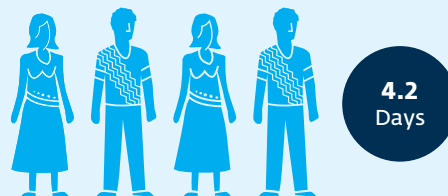
- For survey participants who reported feeling distracted, tired, or unwell, we applied a productivity-loss multiplier based on the frequency of the effect reported, as follows: rarely = 5 percent; sometimes = 10 percent; often = 15 percent; always = 20 percent. That is, for someone who reported 'always' feeling distracted, tired, or unwell at work, we estimated that they lost 20 percent of their nine-hour work day¹, or 1.8 hours.
- For employees who reported being late to work, we calculated lost productivity on the basis of one hour per time. For this, and for employees who reported being absent from work, we used the frequencies for the four-week period (as per the survey question) in our calculation for the year.
- For time spent by employees responding to the effects of domestic and sexual violence in the workplace, we used the mid-point of the answer category (less than 1 hour per week = 0.5 hours; 1-5 hours per week = 3 hours; 6-10 hours per week = 8 hours; more than 10 hours per week = 10 hours).

The above calculations were applied to the whole workforces based on the experience of the sample. We assumed the same prevalence and the impact among the workforce. As the sample was not randomly selected, this is not a statistically accurate approach. It does however illustrate the cost of domestic and sexual violence to businesses.

In one year, for every employee:



7 person-days are lost due to employees feeling distracted, tired or unwell due to domestic or sexual violence



4.2 person-days are lost due to employees being absent from work due to domestic or sexual violence



0.6 person-days are lost by employees being late due to domestic or sexual violence



5.6 person days are spent responding to the effects of domestic and sexual violence in the workplace in an unstructured way

¹ All calculations use a nine-hour work day (as per the Solomon Islands labour law (1996)), and a 48-week work year.

Often employee absences and occasions of low productivity are unexplained. Staff feel too ashamed, or are otherwise unable, to tell their employers why they are missing work or why their performance is suffering. In this situation, employees may just resign, or their employer may choose to end their employment. Recruitment and training new employees incurs further costs to businesses. Given that a third of those affected are at mid or senior level, and 70 percent have been at the company for two years or more, this can be substantial.

Help-Seeking

Eighty-one percent of survey participants—more men (86 percent) than women (77 percent)—thought employers should help affected employees. Slightly less than half of employees affected by domestic or sexual violence, with no variation between men and women, have spoken to someone at work about the violence, most commonly to another colleague, followed by a supervisor or manager. There is some evidence that employees who go through more formal channels—their supervisor or manager, human resources officer, or the domestic-violence contact officer² (where they have been set up)—have better outcomes, compared to those who discuss the violence with a colleague. Shame and a fear of gossip were the main reasons selected for not speaking to someone at work.

More women (63 percent) than men (52 percent) reported that they did not receive any assistance from their employer after they spoke to someone at work. Of those who did receive assistance, for women, the most common form was unpaid time off (11 percent of those speaking to someone at work), and for men, assistance with transport to and from work (17 percent). The number of survey participants that reported accessing various services outside of the community was low. The police, counselling, and other support services (indicated to be primarily connected with the church) were the main services accessed. Twenty four percent of women and 16 percent of men who reported that they had experienced domestic or sexual violence had accessed at least one service outside the workplace.

Several participants commented on the need for greater awareness within workplaces about domestic and sexual violence, including what it is, services available, workplace policy, and the impact it has on the workplace.

The Importance of a Workplace Response

This survey on *'How problems at home affect employees'* at work clearly shows a wide range of effects on individual employees, their employers, and their colleagues. The survey also shows that positive changes are already happening – it appears that there is lower acceptance of domestic and sexual violence within these nine participating companies, and where employees do access various forms of support, it is usually helpful. This benefits both employee and the business.

It is noteworthy that the survey demonstrates that while more women experience violence and report slightly more effects, both men and women are affected. This is something that is not surprising to many employees throughout the Pacific region. Women are more vulnerable because of the severity and prevalence of violence against women specifically and the additional dimension of unequal power, often fewer options to leave, and differences in physical strength. However, the fact that both men and women are so affected is an important entry point for workplace responses and a powerful motivation for change. Workplace strategies to address violence are beneficial to women and men.

Companies involved in the *Waka Mere* commitment are beginning to implement a range of workplace responses and are starting to see the benefits of these. With such high losses to productivity, a likely contribution to staff turnover, and the positive outcomes that can be realized for both employees and employers, these workplace responses make good business sense.

² The domestic violence contact team is a workplace specific group of people trained by IFC under the *Waka Mere* initiative to be a point of call for those experiencing domestic or sexual violence. Team members refer employees to appropriate support services, and coordinate the assistance provided by the company.

Waka Mere Participating Companies

The following companies participated in the survey:



Bank South Pacific



Bulk Shop



Hatanga Construction Ltd



National Fisheries Development



Solomon Airlines



Solomon Islands National Provident Fund



Solomon Islands Ports Authority



Solomon Islands Water Authority



SolTuna



Visit www.ifc.org/gender/EAP to find more testimonials and inspiring stories about Waka Mere.

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