

Stop Violence Against Women and Children in Papua New Guinea



free[🦋] from violence and exploitation

ChildFund
Australia

ChildFund
Papua New Guinea



ChildFund understands that violence against women inevitably hurts children, too.

THIS report features interviews conducted in Papua New Guinea by Diana Mason, communications and marketing director, ChildFund Australia; Vlad Sokhin, documentary photographer; and Heather Wiseman, National Press Club of Australia's Health Journalist of the Year 2012.

It also draws on qualitative field research and a literature review conducted by independent consultant Sarah Martin on behalf of ChildFund Papua New Guinea, and edited by ChildFund Australia staff Terina Stibbard, international program coordinator, and John Fenech, program and partnerships development coordinator.

ChildFund Papua New Guinea staff contributed significantly to this project. Special thanks to Manish Joshi, country director; Fiona Fandim, senior program officer; Margaret Gebai, supporter relations officer; and Namuel Nungwehim, procurement officer.

ChildFund Australia would also like to thank and recognise the important work being done by City Mission Haus Ruth, Family Support Centre, Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee and Papua Hahine.

ChildFund Papua New Guinea is a representative office of ChildFund Australia, which is an AusAID-accredited, independent and non-religious international development organisation. Our vision is a global community free from poverty, where children are protected and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

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Margaret and Sammy

Sammy experienced so much violence in his first few months of life that sudden noises scare him.

Women and children are hurting

FOR years, Margaret endured her husband hitting her with knives, stones, metal and bottles. He said he would find boys to pack-rape her and she lived in fear of his chilling death threats: "You see this stone? It is nice and hard and round. If I put it on your head you are dead. When we are at home I will really kill you."

When Margaret speaks of the violence she has lived through, the real pain surfaces when she explains how her husband hurt their little boy. Sammy experienced so much violence in his first months of life that when he hears a sudden noise, he cries and needs Margaret to hug him.

When Sammy was just one month old, Margaret's husband tried to punch her in the face and missed, knocking the baby unconscious. Sammy's pupils constricted and Margaret watched on, terrified, as her husband shook the baby to revive him. He then threatened to

kill Margaret with the iron bar in his hand as he demanded, "Come and get the child."

Hopefully Sammy won't remember his father trying to hit Margaret while she was breastfeeding him, or his father picking him up and using his little body as a weapon to hit her.

Margaret's story is extreme, which, sadly, makes it representative. In Papua New Guinea, women are raped, killed and maimed on a shocking scale. The brutality is severe, often involving bush knives, axes, burning and even biting. In the following pages, you will hear from a woman whose bottom lip was bitten off in a random attack, and another who was relentlessly belted and raped by her husband over three consecutive days. Two grieving women tell how their sister died after her husband smashed her head against a car, leaving her young children motherless. Young women who grew up without mothers to

defend them speak of the brutal beatings they have experienced at the hands of relatives.

ChildFund understands that violence against women inevitably hurts children, too. That is why, with the benefit of almost 20 years' experience working in Papua New Guinea, we have developed an innovative new program focused on family violence, which we will roll out in Central Province, east of Port Moresby (see details, page 14).

In this report, we share what we have learnt through field research that was conducted to inform this new support and education program. We also share devastating personal stories, told by women who feel compelled to speak out because they do not want the men they fear to silence them. These women want to raise awareness in Australia and Papua New Guinea. They want the violence to stop. Please consider helping ChildFund to support them.

Kay and her daughter, Wendy, have both been violently assaulted by Kay's husband.



Kay with her children, Michael and Wendy

When Daddy is a dangerous man

AT just five years of age, Wendy has felt her father's fury firsthand.

"[He] got the little girl, bashed her up and then lifted her up, face down, and threw her on the concrete," says her mother, Kay. He split Wendy's lip and injured her jaw.

Wendy has also stood, watching in horror, as her father whipped and stabbed her mother's back and legs.

"[Wendy] just stands there and stares at us and cries and cries. It's like a nightmare to her. In the night she doesn't sleep properly. When

she sleeps, she's always calling my name."

Kay's husband has hit her with a hammer, stabbed her feet with kitchen knives, cut her with bush knives and whipped her with extension cords. Once, he belted her from 10pm until Kay escaped at 5am. She hid in the bush before running to the police station.

"He used an empty bottle to hit me on the head and he also used a very big, long twig; it wasn't dry. He used it to hit me on my back and on my legs. I have bruises on my back.

I have marks on my arms."

Realising that her life was in danger, police brought Kay and her children to Haus Ruth women's refuge in Port Moresby. Her husband continues to menace them, making threats from behind the refuge's security gates.

Kay, 24, insists her story be told with a clear image of her face and her real name. She refuses to let her husband silence her. It's unclear where she will next find safety. She desperately wants to "live somewhere where he won't bother me and the children again".



Little hope of legal redress

RUGGED terrain, poverty and a shortage of village courts are just some of the issues preventing the law from protecting vulnerable women and children in Rigo District, where ChildFund works in partnership with 19 villages.

ChildFund met six senior men with roles related to the court system, including district planner Murray Konido. He says there are remote areas in Rigo that are lawless, as there are only six village courts to serve 228 villages. More than half of Rigo's population has to walk to access legal services, some travelling for a week and sleeping on the side of the road as they make their trek.

"We have no village courts up in the mountains – nothing. Even [some] murder cases ... are not being addressed," says Murray.

"There are children and women exposed to violence, but they are not helped. The [court] coverage is very, very small. Women or children or even men are out there, and their voices and rights are not heard."

Village magistrates, who hear civil cases for a fee, have no formal training or background in law, mediation or counselling. They are given a manual of penalties to follow, so fines are uniform.

District community development officer Jeffrey Gei, who has paralegal training, says many women can't afford to pay a magistrate to hear their cases. He is concerned that some criminal cases, such as rape, are handled by police when they should be heard by district or national courts.

"How [these cases] are addressed at the police stations we don't know because there is no working relationship," he says, adding that some police impose illegal fines and do not execute the District Court's warrants for arrest.

The National Court visited the district for the first time last year. Crowds of people came to watch as two men were found guilty of having wilfully murdered their wives.

"Lots of people come to hear," says Murray. "It is important because that is another way of teaching people."

A huge problem that's hard to measure

It is widely reported that violence occurs in more than two-thirds of families in PNG. Some studies say one in two women will be forced to have sex in their lifetime; one small study found 86% of women had been beaten during pregnancy.

In truth, there is no official data on violence against women and children, but the incidence is likely to be higher than two in three. Many researchers believe this is just the tip of the iceberg, a view supported by ChildFund's research. Most women interviewed during our field research in Rigo District, Central Province had experienced violence, and not one claimed to have a husband who had never beaten them. Women said their children were often present when their partners were violent towards them.

Monica Richards, who manages Haus Ruth, Port Moresby's main women's shelter, says about 60% of children who come to the refuge with their abused mothers have also been hurt. "Most [men], when they touch the women, they touch the children as well," she says.

According to former PNG parliamentarian Dame Carol Kidu, children younger than 16 represent half the people who seek medical help after being raped. One in four is younger than 12. One in 10 is under eight.

¹ Ganster-Breidler, M., 2009. Gender-based Violence and the Impact on Women's Health and Wellbeing in Papua New Guinea.

² Dame Carol Kidu, Transcript: Sex, Women and 21st Century in Papua New Guinea, 2012. Speech given at Australian National University to celebrate International Women's Day. Dame Carol Kidu www.pameladenoonlecture.net/the_pamela_denoan_lecture/pamela-denoan-lecture-2012.html



A man bit off Helen Michael's bottom lip in a random, violent attack

Disfigured in a random, violent attack

TO protect people from being upset by her appearance, Helen Michael wears a large bandaid on her face. It sits across the hole where her bottom lip once concealed her lower teeth.

Helen's lip was bitten off in an attack one night about two years ago on the streets of Port Moresby. Walking to get her husband a meal, she was hit to the ground and after a fight, knocked unconscious.

"When I was lying down, he came just fall on top of me and opened his mouth and then started biting my lip," says Helen.

Helen's husband heard her screams and helped her fight off her attacker. They got him to the police station, but he was released without charge a few days later.

"I asked the police what has happened to this man and the policeman said there was not good enough evidence so they released [him]. So I just stood in front of the station and I cried."

Surrounded by her seven children, with another she has adopted on her knee, Helen says her husband is supportive.

"He [says], 'My woman, you were not like this when I marry you. But you are mother of children. We can stay together forever.'"

The family lives in a makeshift settlement where there is no running water or electricity. Their tiny one-room house is made of tin sheets and has a dirt floor. Helen cannot afford surgery to repair her injured face.

"I don't feel good about myself when I am putting on this [plaster]. I should have a normal lip," says Helen.

"Sometimes when I sleep, I dream he will come to me and I am really scared about it. I think he is coming back again."

Helen is not alone in having been disfigured by being bitten. While visiting the Family Support Centre in Port Moresby, ChildFund saw images of women who had lost chunks of skin, cheeks, noses and ears, having been bitten in violent attacks.

"I don't want violence against women today," says Helen.

"I want these women who are experiencing this violence to come out, and we can join our hands and we can fight for our women's rights."



Why some women don't go to the police

WOMEN interviewed in Rigo District as part of the field research were overwhelmingly negative about the district police, commenting that they "treat women like criminals", "act like criminals" and "cannot be trusted". Women said police were not interested in responding to violence against them and that they were sometimes perpetrators of the violence. Some women were scared of police; it seemed to be a last resort for serious attacks, when women were frightened for their lives, rather than a potential source of support.

The police officer interviewed at Rigo Station acknowledged that women were afraid and reluctant to report incidents to police. Instead, they were more likely to try to resolve the issue through their village magistrates, or rely on mediation.

The officer said police lack basic resources, such as petrol, that there were no female police officers at the station, and police hadn't been trained to deal with violence against women.

PNG has no form of social security, so when a husband is a family's chief breadwinner, his wife may be left with no income if he is jailed. One woman told ChildFund, "When we go to see [the police], they might put the man in jail. We do not want to see them in jail. The women will suffer if the men are in jail. What will happen to our children?"

Another woman showed a scar on her thigh and said, "This is where my husband speared me." She had considered going to the police after the incident, but decided not to as she didn't want him to be arrested.

Inadequate medical care

ChildFund's field research in Rigo District, Central Province found that survivors of sexual violence did not have adequate access to medical care. District hospitals and subdistrict health clinics were not able to provide survivors of rape with emergency contraception or post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV. They also lacked safe, confidential spaces where women could be supported.

A second attempt to achieve justice

IT was a simple pamphlet that inspired Amanda to try to achieve a life free of fear and pain. She'd spent six years of her married life being physically and sexually assaulted, so when she read that it was a crime for a husband to beat or rape his wife, the message resonated. The next time she was brutally attacked, Amanda took the brave step of reporting the violence to police.

Police arrested her husband and he spent two years in jail awaiting trial. Then he was released. The case was dismissed due to inadequate medical evidence. Amanda had not been able to afford to pay 20 kina (\$10) for a medical certificate.

Police were concerned for Amanda's welfare, but her interim protection order was delayed and her husband forced her to return home.

"He didn't change his ways," says Amanda. He accused her of having affairs with other men while he'd been in jail and assaulted her over three consecutive days with a rubber hose and a long screwdriver.

"He was continually punching my face," says Amanda. "He said he would make me paralysed. I was really injured.

"When he bashed me up he didn't leave me alone. He had sexual penetration with me again, without my consent. I was really in pain.

When I said no, he said, 'I am going to bash you up.' He had sexual penetration with me again."

After the three-day assault, Amanda's husband insisted she go to work. Her boss allowed her to go to hospital, where health workers offered to write a medical report. This time Amanda had 20 kina.

Equipped with a medical report, Amanda is feeling more confident about facing court a second time. Given the broad acceptance of violence against women in PNG, she hopes her story will encourage other women to act, too.

"I feel proud to tell the other ladies, 'There is the law to protect us,'" she says.

Amanda's first attempt to have her husband convicted failed, as she could not afford a medical certificate.



Taina Gebai is a community elder who regrets once having been a violent man



Some men have changed for the better

TAINA Gebai grew up in a family where he respected his mother and sisters. He married a “very beautiful girl” who he says was “a friend to all and an enemy to none”. He built her a home so she would not have to do domestic chores for his relatives and they lived happily until he became an alcoholic.

“Priority number one was a carton of beer and the rest I buy food for the family,” he says.

Taina says he hit his wife twice “out of frustration – not like other men do”, but he was more violent

towards his children. Whenever he had an argument with his wife, he would hit them.

“They were scared,” he says. “I regret [it] because those were the things that I should not have done.

“So with all this hard times I give my wife and my children, something clicked,” says Taina, who says he was asked to join the church. He says going to church every Sunday “made me move away from the bad side of life” and he and his wife lived happily, as equal partners, until she passed away.

PNG needs programs for men

ChildFund’s field research shows PNG does not have enough national programs that work with men in order to change prevailing social norms that allow widespread and obvious violence.

Cries for help often go unheeded

SOMETIMES Regina's husband hit her at home, but usually it was in front of other people. The mother of five remembers the humiliation of him ripping her dress off and bashing her, naked, out the front of their home.

"People watched," she says.

She also remembers the trauma of him turning up at her workplace.

"I lost a couple of jobs," she says.

"At work they told me to stay away because this was an industrial area for people to work, not to fight. The police station was nearby and still there was not help there.

"There are a million other women who are facing the same problem."

Like many other women ChildFund spoke to, being hit in public didn't

make it any easier for Regina to get help. Neighbours, friends and extended family are often unwilling to meddle in what is seen as private family business. They are also scared that they will be assaulted, too.

One woman who heard her neighbour being bashed unconscious told ChildFund, "I feel so guilty. Someone should have helped. Next-door neighbours were there, but [in PNG] we say it is their own business."

Another in a rural community says women from small villages find it hard to help women who are being abused. "They are scared of the husband, too," she says. "They might tell the husband [to stop] and he would say, 'This is our family matter, so don't include yourself.'"

Regina's husband broke her nose several times. He did not beat their children, but when he belted and humiliated his wife in public, he hurt them, too.

"They didn't like the violence," she says. "The worst thing is a mother coming home with bruises and blood and all of these things. It was really hurting them. They were already at school and I didn't want them to be part of it. They were hurt because I was hurt."

Regina's faith in men has been eroded by her violent married life.

"I was scared that if I remarry, the person might molest my children," she says. "That is why I haven't settled down yet. I am not sure that I want to get another husband."

Education makes a difference

"MAN hitting the woman is a big wrong," says Matthew Vagi. It's a message you would expect to come from Matthew, given that he is a village court magistrate, but it's one he hasn't always known.

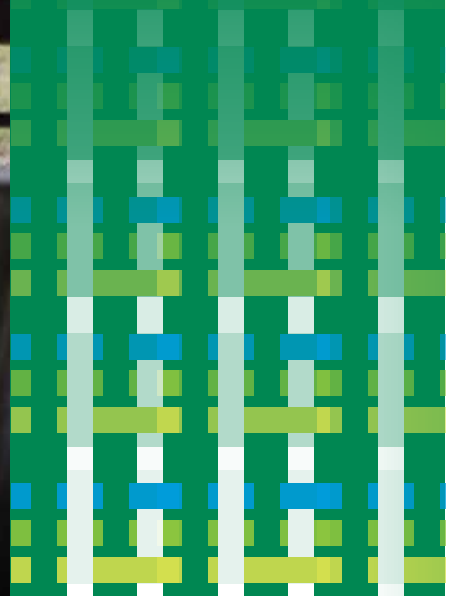
For many years Matthew used to beat his wife, Rebecca, but when he became a magistrate he was given a government-issued law and order book to follow when imposing fines. Reading the book taught him that assaulting wives is wrong.

He now hears domestic violence cases and fines men who beat their wives. Rebecca says she is proud of Matthew and he is now a good husband.





Susan was in grade two when she fled home, scared for her life.



A child terrified in her own home

WHEN she was just eight years old, Susan was asked to boil rice for a family meal. She used too much water and ruined the rice, so her stepmother attacked her with a bush knife. Susan, now 14, remembers locking herself in a room, terrified and screaming.

"She was bashing on the door saying, 'Let me peel your skin off.' I was really scared. She was yelling, 'You will go to the hospital!'" says Susan.

"The whole neighbourhood came and she got shy. Because everyone came she couldn't belt me. The neighbours told me this is child abuse."

Susan was often assaulted by her stepmother, particularly after her parents had been fighting.

"She takes it out on me," says Susan, whose mother died when she was a toddler.

"She punches my eyes. She can throw me from one side of the room to the other side."

Susan says her father regularly bashed her, once breaking her jaw and often splitting her lips.

"He is very violent. He belted me up to a point where I slept for two whole weeks and my bones were sore," she says.

"He hits me because I do things, like get something to eat. He is stressed so he belts me up."

Susan fled her home when she was eight and has since been living with neighbours and other families. She feels unwanted by the people she

lives with now and is concerned they want her to leave.

Services hard to access

ChildFund's field research highlights that expensive and inadequate transport makes it difficult for women in Rigo District to access medical attention in Port Moresby. ChildFund interviewed one woman who ran out of money while her husband was working away for weeks. He returned home one night when she had gone to get food from her parents. He accused her of adultery and beat her and their baby with a stick. The woman would not have been able to afford to get medical attention in Port Moresby but for the help of a local pastor.

Taking a brave stand for her baby

ROSE knew her husband was violent. He had often attacked her with a knife and she feared he would kill her. But the threat he posed became even more ominous when he hurt their baby girl.

Rose was confused when she saw her three-month-old daughter's injuries. Suspecting her baby had been sexually assaulted, Rose took her to hospital, where medical staff confirmed her worst fears.

"She was examined by the nurses and they told me that someone has been playing with her private parts," says Rose of injuries that had left her baby crying in pain.

In a society with no social security, Rose was grateful to find safety at Port Moresby's Haus Ruth, while she waits for a medical certificate and further legal advice.

She's had little support from her family, as they did not believe her baby had been molested and insisted she should stay with her husband.

"People were scared," says Rose. "They said, 'No, go back. He is going to kill you.' But I said no, it is a crime, so I have to go get help and put that man to court and move on with my life."



Rose's family thinks she is risking her life by leaving her husband, but she refuses to put her baby at risk of further sexual abuse.



Rose with her baby



Jessica and Molly hugging near their sister's grave

Jessica and Molly grieve for their older sister, Margaret, who died after her husband bashed her head on a car.

Devastated by a senseless, violent death

JESSICA and Molly were just toddlers when their mother died. Their eldest sister, Margaret, aged 11, stepped into her mother's shoes and raised them.

Now, Jessica and Molly are struggling to comprehend their older sister's violent death and the sad irony that they will raise Margaret's young children.

Jessica learnt that Margaret's husband was violent when she visited them in the city and saw him belt her sister up at a bus stop. Despite the family's attempts to protect Margaret, he continued to assault her, giving her black eyes, a swollen face and once breaking her arm.

"My sister is short and the man was tall," says Jessica. "He used to punch her. He is a big man."

Margaret was so scared for her children's safety that she sent them to live with her sisters. Needing to earn enough money to support

them, she sought refuge with relatives in the city and kept working. But her husband tracked her down.

"He went and found her and smashed her head on a car," says Jessica. "No-one stopped him. He belted her too much. There was blood pressure. She couldn't see properly anymore."

Margaret sent her sisters a text saying she was badly injured and couldn't walk, so they took her to hospital.

"One week at the hospital and Margaret left us," says Jessica of her sister's death.

"I didn't believe. I was crying and asking them and they said that's true, Margaret has left us.

"The doctor told us when the husband hit her... the blood was too much in her brain. There was blood running from her eyes and nose and

mouth when she died. The doctor thought she died because she was hit on the car."

Jessica and Molly reported Margaret's death to police, but Jessica says "they did nothing". The sisters, who are saving for Margaret's tombstone, are angry there has been no justice.

"I do not feel good. Margaret is not supposed to die and she died," says Jessica.

She is sad that Margaret's children saw their father's attacks and tell stories about their parents fighting. But she finds some solace in being able to care for them, as her big sister cared for her.

"I am missing my sister but her kids are with me," she says, adding that she's pleased the eldest looks like Margaret.

"I feel like my big sister is with me."



We will work with children, too, engaging schools in an early learning pilot that will teach conflict resolution, open communication techniques, and the importance of respecting girls and women.

What ChildFund will do

CONTRIBUTING to our Stop Violence appeal will help fund a significant new program that will provide better medical care for women and children who have been assaulted, and prevent violence in the long term.

ChildFund Australia CEO Nigel Spence says the program will run in the 19 villages ChildFund partners with in Rigo District, Central Province.

“Despite being just a few hours’ drive east of Port Moresby, these villages are isolated and lack adequate medical care,” says Nigel.

“Five of the most isolated villages rarely have access to public transport and some women who are assaulted have to walk 22km for medical attention.”

The program includes a roving mobile health clinic, which will be

staffed by two counsellors and two nurses. It will:

- provide potentially lifesaving medical assistance (preventing HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, etc);
- provide counselling and referrals;
- support women to report incidents of violence and equip them with medical certificates, if required;
- provide information on women’s legal rights and services that can assist them; and
- train 50 village health volunteers to treat and support women more effectively.

ChildFund aims to influence men through a culturally appropriate social justice program designed to change attitudes towards violence and gender equality, and normalise respectful, equal relationships.

ChildFund PNG country director Manish Joshi says the program will work with men to help them understand the reasons behind individual acts of violence and abuses of power.

“We will also give them access to respectful techniques, such as negotiation, that will help them achieve peaceful conflict resolution and provide motivation by highlighting what they have to gain by changing violent attitudes and behaviours,” he says.

ChildFund understands the importance of partnering with local services and working to strengthen them. We are partnering with the national Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee, the provincial and district departments of health, Papua Hahine and school boards of management. We also assist Haus Ruth to support the needs of children sheltering at the refuge.

What women said

ChildFund explained its new program to a group of women from a village in Rigo District, Central Province. This is what they said:

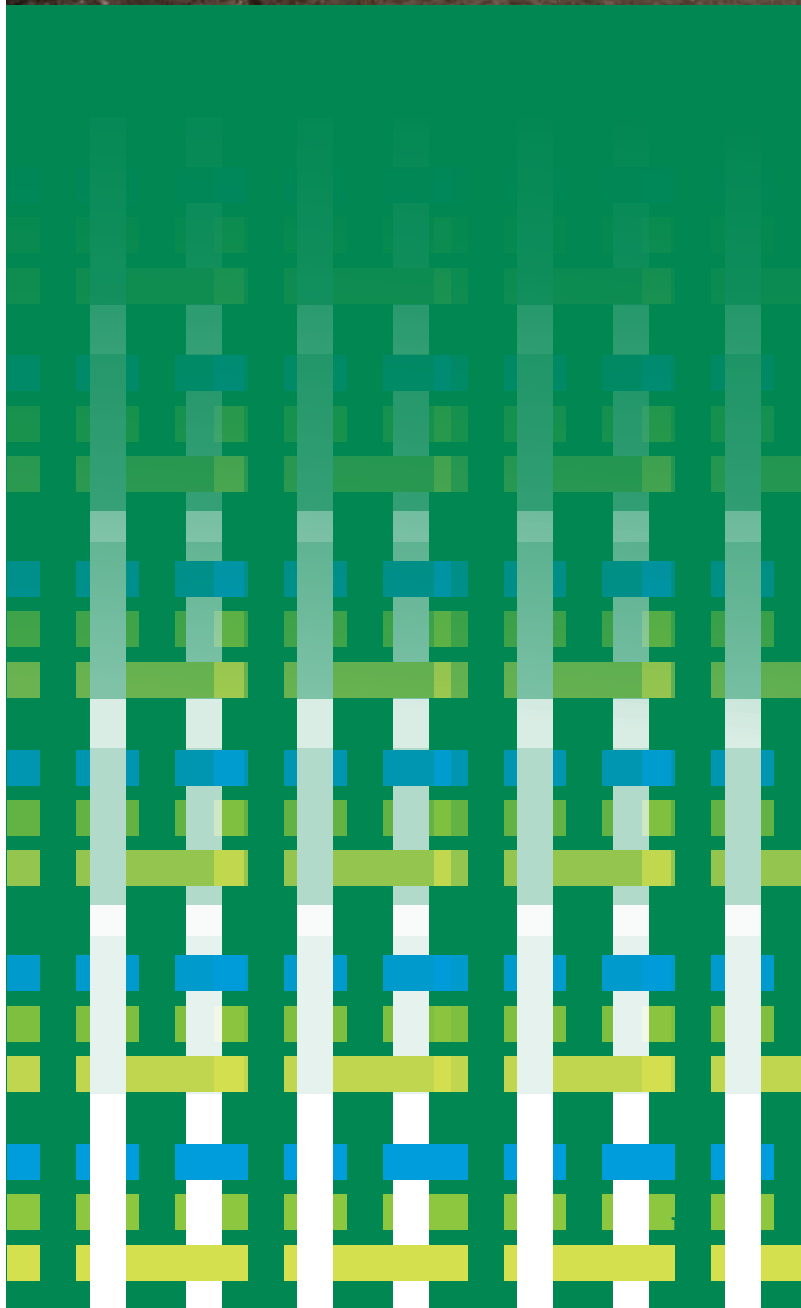
“When the woman has been bashed she has no money to go to the hospital. A bus could help them.”

“Most men do not know about women’s rights. It is a good idea to have training.”

“The training should be given to both men and women. A man should be made a leader in that area so he is appointed by the community and he has every right to go in and stop the fights.”

“Women, we understand [that violence is not OK], but men do not understand. We must have awareness for men and children for their rights.”

“We need to bring men and women together so both of them are aware [of training to prevent violence] at the same time.”





**Stop Violence Against
Women and Children in
Papua New Guinea**

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