

Strong and safe communities – effective interventions for adult victims of sexual violence

Report on workshop for Pacific stakeholders, Manukau City

Background

1. On 7 November 2007, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA) held a workshop in Manukau City to discuss the sexual violence research project with Pacific stakeholders. The workshop was organised with the support of the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (MPIA).
2. The purpose of the workshop was to outline the project's scope and aims and to hear the views of Pacific stakeholders on the project. The agenda is attached (Appendix A). Eight women from government and non-government organisations participated (Appendix B).
3. Lea Cowley facilitated the workshop. Lea began the meeting with the maxim that "forgiveness must go hand in hand with justice". This recognises that the strong family and religious focus of Pacific communities must be balanced with regard for the protection offered to victims and the notion of offender accountability upheld by New Zealand laws.
4. After a round of introductions the Research Manager, Dr Denise Lievore, gave an overview of the project's objectives and approach and a presentation on the prevalence and nature of sexual violence against adults in New Zealand, with an emphasis on what we know about sexual violence against Pacific adults.

Summary of key themes

5. The discussion centred on:
 - raising conversations within Pacific communities
 - issues related to the criminal justice system and sexual violence services
 - conducting the research
 - additional ideas.

Raising conversations within Pacific communities

- 6 The participants appreciated the opportunity to speak openly about sexual violence, as it had not previously been addressed within Pacific communities in New Zealand. They saw this workshop as the beginning of a new journey for Pacific women. They acknowledged it would be a hard task, but were committed to being in it 'for the long haul'. They captured the importance of the meeting by saying that:

'The journey begins from here today. This is a very historical point and we want to see something happen. It is very important for us to take a step forward now. If we do not, more children will suffer.'

- 7 The women emphasised that the consequences of sexual violence can be severe and widespread, including:

- physical and mental health effects
- suicide
- costs to employers when women are off work
- links to prostitution
- female criminality
- decreased ability of victims to protect their own children.

- 8 The long-term and irreparable harm of sexual violence was captured in the poignant observation that: *'A young victim of sexual violence will grow up to be someone else – not the person they want to be.'*

- 9 They acknowledged that the need to initiate discussions on this sensitive topic must go hand in hand with an appropriate cultural approach. Acknowledgement and consideration of other issues is also central. These include the distinct and separate ethnic identity of each Pacific nation in New Zealand and the emerging identity of New Zealand born Pacific people.

- 10 Individuals who wish to raise the issue in their communities may put it in the 'too hard basket' due to the fear of community backlash. The participants phrased it as awareness that: *'If I touch that, I am going to get it'*.

- 11 One way of doing this would be to find well-respected people, or champions, to lead the discussion. It would be necessary to develop criteria for champions and for care to be taken about who is chosen to profile the issue publicly.

- 12 Champions could be athletes - as in the *Like Minds* campaign to reduce discrimination due to mental illness - or prominent community members such as theologians. Alternatively, the message could be spread by women, survivors of sexual violence, or other community members, as in the *Family violence - It's not ok* campaign.

- 13 Discussions on sexual violence should include a strong focus on the inclusion of men and families in responding to the problem. Key points about initiating community discussion included the following:
- Loyalty towards the family can be a major barrier to disclosure.
 - Pacific men need to take responsibility for perpetrating violence, rather than blaming victims.
 - Strong attitudinal barriers need to be overcome. These include men regarding their wives as property, or mothers siding with their sons and thereby endorsing violence.
 - It is preferable to talk about healthy relationships and processes for addressing violence, rather than using the language of 'victims' and 'blame'.
 - The church has enormous influence among Pacific Peoples; concepts such as the sacredness of relationships (for example, among siblings, children and parents), could be used to promote discussion.
 - The increasing sexualisation of young people is a concern. Pacific media could present good opportunities for skilled debate on the issue.
 - Sexual violence prevention and intervention could be addressed within the education system.

Issues related to the criminal justice system and sexual violence services

- 14 There is a general distrust of the criminal justice system among Pacific Peoples. This often results in victims walking away rather than reporting sexual violence to Police. Three main points in relation to the criminal justice system were that:
- Women are telling their stories but no-one is listening.
 - Sexual offending by adolescents is not effectively dealt with due to their age. Young sex offenders who are not held accountable or provided with therapy are likely to re-offend.
 - There are no Pacific men working with Pacific sex offenders.
- 15 Parallel to the criminal justice system, support services are needed on the ground. Adequate financial resourcing of community-based groups is considered essential; without it, services cannot provide effective support. The participants called for government funding for these groups.
- 16 A number of comments were made in relation to service providers. Many of these related to counsellors and ACC funding.
- There are few experienced Pacific counsellors.

- The criteria for accreditation make it difficult for Pacific counsellors to gain recognised qualifications.
- Access to counselling is limited for many Pacific victims who cannot afford counselling unless ACC provides coverage.
- More applicants are being excluded as a result of ACC guidelines being tightened.
- ACC guidelines were also perceived as being restrictive in the number of counselling sessions available.
- Claims can no longer be made for events that happened more than two years earlier, whereas the time limit used to be six years. This does not take into account individual circumstances and needs following disclosure of historical offences.

Conducting the research

- 17 The participants believed that the low prevalence rate of sexual violence among Pacific adults found by national victimisation surveys does not reflect the true situation. Any statistical information coming out of the research will be useful.
- 18 The participants advised that it is vital for researchers and other agencies to build relationships with Pacific communities in order to avoid transgressing community beliefs and ways.
- 19 Talking to service providers was seen as a priority for the research project. A number of pointers were given about potential contacts for the key informant survey.
- Church ministers were identified as key informants due to the huge influence of the Church within Pacific communities. However, they should be carefully selected.
 - Ministers' wives could be a useful point of contact as they are a strong push behind most communities.
 - Pacific counsellors with ACC accreditation could be useful contacts for the researchers.
 - The MPIA database may have information on Pacific specialist services.
- 20 The methodology for the victim study was seen as a critical issue. Concerns covered:
- ensuring adherence to Pacific protocols
 - ensuring a good cross-section of participants: schools are a huge catchment area for young women; older women should be included

- how NGOs could recruit participants without breaking confidentiality
- conducting the interviews: many victims would prefer individual interviews to group discussions when talking about personal issues
- keeping participants safe
- provisions for follow-up counselling and de-briefing
- providing information on how the information will be used
- choosing researchers who are trusted by the communities
- continued involvement of MPIA to ensure the success of the project.

Additional ideas

21 The participants put forward the following additional ideas and observations.

- Many reports written in the past are now gathering dust. The participants challenged all agencies involved in this project to implement a sexual violence programme that is fully funded by government by 2010.
- Government action plans could include non-classroom education programmes. These would provide information so people know what to do, what to say, and where to go, if they or someone they know is sexually assaulted.
- There was support for the idea of training Pacific men and women to work within their communities to reduce sexual violence.

Agenda

**Effective Interventions for
Adult Victims of Sexual Violence
Stakeholder Workshop for Pacific Peoples**

Wednesday, 7 November 2007

Agenda

Objectives

The purpose of the workshop is to introduce the research project to organisations representing Pacific Peoples and to establish a sound platform for the research by gathering their ideas on key issues.

Time	Task
10.00 am	Welcome (Sonya Rimene) Opening prayer Introductions
10.30 am	Effective interventions for adult victims of sexual violence project (Denise Lievore)
11.00 am	Discussions on these topics:
	In terms of this research project, what are the particular interests and priorities of Pacific Peoples?
11.30am Morning tea / light lunch	How can we engage with people from your national group - what are the challenges and sensitivities the researchers might face?
	What is the role of theological education within Pacific communities?
	How can we raise conversations about healthy sexuality and sexual relationships in Pacific communities?
	How / where do Pacific Peoples who are victims of sexual violence go about seeking help?
	Are there other important issues we haven't addressed?
	Summary of key points
1.00 pm	Conclusion

Participants

Non-government organisations

Consultant (Facilitator)
Victim Support/Ministry of Justice
Pacific Island Education
Victim Support/Samoan Student Association
P.A.C.I.F.I.C.A.
Pacific Island Community, Christchurch
Pacific Island Safety and Prevention Project
Waipareira Pasifika

Government Ministries

Ministry of Women's Affairs
Ministry of Justice
Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs

Apologies

Pacific Island Women's Health project
Pasifika Mana
Pacific Island Women's Refuge
Fale Lalaga Organisation
Mangere East Family Service Centre Inc