



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN NIUE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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SUMMARY

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a product and manifestation of gender relations that inflicts harm disproportionately on women and girls. In the Pacific island country of Niue, there is a lack of research and attention on the issue which has given rise to this research aimed at considering the challenges and opportunities in addressing GBV.

Not having spaces to talk about GBV is one way in which it can persist. By making space to discuss GBV at the community level, there is room to craft solutions. The aim of this research is to examine ways of creating spaces for safe discussion which allow for Niue women's narratives in order to eliminate violence in social relations in Niue and promote healthy relationships.

This research took place in October and November 2019 and involved 27 informant interviews with 32 total key informants and 14 family-tree mapping interviews. Guided by a genealogical approach, I explored spaces in which GBV is raised and piloted a family-tree mapping approach for an in-depth exploration of family spaces. The careful work of Pacific scholars and artists around relationship and empathy provided valuable guidance in how I positioned myself as a non-Pacific researcher.

The findings suggest that the transgression of gender roles in Niue contributes to GBV incidents in interpersonal relationships. While there are challenges to addressing GBV in Niue, this analysis of spaces with an emphasis on family spaces also presents several opportunities for transformation. Additionally, the framework presents a new way of engaging with the issue of GBV in terms of research and intervention through family-tree mapping.

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MATAULU HE KUMIKUMIAGA

Ko e falu a tagata taane ne keli fakamamahi e tino mo e vagahau tau kupu fakamamahi
E loto he tagata fifine ne nofo mo ia ko e hoana.

Ko e tagata fifine ke totoko atu mo e tau mena kua lata ke taute ke fakaoti e moui nofo tupetupe
Ha koe mahani vale he tagata taane poke haana a taane.

Ko e fakafetuiaga nonofo he magafaoa I Niue he tagata taane mo e tagata fifine kua nakai mitaki
ha ko e mahani he falu a tagata taane kua mahani vale e tau kupu vagahau mo e keli fakamamahi
e matua fifine mo e tau fanau fifine he nonofo he kaina. Kua nakai faka makutu e kumikumiaga ke
he tau vahalo to pehe nei he tau tagata taane mo e tau tagata fifine ko e ha ne pihia ai e fakafetuiaga.
Ko e mena ia kua taute ai e kumikumiaga nei ke
talahau he tau matua fifine ka fakatutala kua mooli e talahauaga nei poke nakai ke he mahani vale
he tagata taane he moui magafaoa he tagata fifine nofo motu I Niue.

Ka nakai fai magaaho ke tutala e matematekelea nei to tumau ni ke matutaki e moui nofo tupetupe
he tagata fifine. Ko e matapatu manatu he kumikumiaga nei ke moua e magaaho mo e matakavi
he Maaga ke haha I ai e ataina he tagata fifine ke talahau haana a tau manatu ke he lekua nei. Ko
e amanakiaga he kumikumiaga ke moua lagomatai ke he moui fakafetuiaga he tagata fifine mo e
tagata taane ke kapitiga mo e fiasia.

Ko e mahina Oketopa mo Novema 2019 ne kamata ai e kumikumiaga nei ,ne fakatutala ai ke he
puhala he huhu atu mo e tali mai kia lautolu ne toko 27 e fifine mo e 32 a lautolu he tau faahi
gahua mo e tau matakau kehekehe he motu mo e 14 a lautolu ne fakatutala tali huhu hagaa ke he
tau akau he magafaoa ke hokotia haaku a kumikumiaga ke he tuaga he tau magafaoa. Kua gahua
ni au ko e tagata kumikumi ke he tau hatakiaga he tau tagata pulotu he Pasifika mo lautolu ne
pulotu ke he tau aga fakamotu ha ko au ko e fifine motu kehe mai he taha faahi mamao he lalolagi.

Kua iloa ai he kunikuniaga nei ko e agahala he matafakatufono e mahani vale e tagata taane ke he
tagata fifine I Niue. Ko e mena ia kua vaha loto kelea e fehagaiaga ha laua ko e tagata taane mo
e tagata fifine ha kua pule lahi ni e tagata taane ko ia e ulu he magafaoa, nakai fai tuaga takitaki
magafaoa e fifine poke fai talahauaga ke he tau fifiliaga he magafaoa. Pete ni e haha I ai e tau
matolitolu ke he matakupu nei I Niue, ka e haha I ai e tau faka vaha ke moua ai e tau lagomatai ke
moua e hikiaga he mahani fa vale mai he falu a tagata taane. Lafi ki ai e falu a tau matapatu manatu
kua tuku ke he kumikumiaga nei ke Tamau aki e tau manatu kua moua mai ke maeke ke moua
ai e mitaki mo e fiasia he fakafetuiaga he tagata taane mo e tagata fifine fakalataha mo e tau fanau
fifine.

CONTEXT

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been a key focus area for gender and development because, by World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates, up to 70 percent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence by men in their lifetimes. The WHO prevalence studies in the Pacific report particularly high rates, and this has brought external attention to the issue in the region. In the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu, these prevalence studies indicate that 38-60% of women have experienced physical, sexual, and/ or emotional interpersonal violence (IPV).¹

Pacific women have led change in many spaces from the community mobilisation efforts in Papua New Guinea² to the Fiji Women's Rights Movement winning legislation change.³ Individual women and children, their families, and communities across the Pacific who have lived with the effects of GBV have developed various ways of managing but the stresses are enormous.

In all of the GBV research and programming in the Pacific, Niue has fallen through the cracks. From an international perspective, Niue is not a UN member state which means it is excluded from several of the international human rights mechanisms that draw attention to GBV. One of these tools is the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Under this treaty, Niue is understood to be New Zealand's responsibility for reporting on human rights despite the fact that New Zealand does not actually report on Niue's behalf. A little-known provision⁴ required Niue to ratify CEDAW separate to New Zealand as the Cook Islands has done in 2006.

REPORT OUTLINE:

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GBV includes all tactics employed by men to control women and may involve “physical, psychological, sexual and/or economic abuse, in domestic environments and public spaces, with known or unknown assailants.” It occurs as a result of social relations that normalise violence as a tool to reinforce gender roles and norms. GBV does not occur in the same way around the world, and the central theme of this research is that GBV cannot be essentialised, nor can its respective interventions.

In the Pacific, as well as other parts of the world, prevalence studies conducted with the WHO methodology have been the main source of research on GBV. These studies have helped to make the problem of GBV visible and provide some insights into its context-specific risk and protective factors.⁵ However, knowing that the problem exists is not enough to craft effective interventions to address the problem. Instead of focusing on prevalence in Niue, this research is aimed at the problem of the silences around GBV as a way to better understand the complexities involved in crafting interventions that can more effectively eliminate GBV.

There are no universal tools that will successfully eliminate GBV around the world, and much of the literature on GBV interventions focus on standard tools derived from the Global North.⁶ These tools often fail to account for salient differences in culture, history, and politics in the Global South, and consequently fail to improve gender equity.⁷ Further, there is growing literature from the Pacific exploring uniquely local strategies for addressing GBV that are found among existing cultural values and practices.⁸

In Niue, there are notable silences on the issue of GBV including the lack of research on the topic. The research that has been done has highlighted the issue of GBV. Reports highlight only that GBV is an issue.

“IN THE COOK ISLANDS, SAMOA, TONGA, AND TUVALU, PREVALENCE STUDIES INDICATE THAT 38-60% OF WOMEN HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, AND/ OR EMOTIONAL INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE (IPV).”



A 2004 UNICEF report found that sexual assault of children under 15 years old is a “regular occurrence” and that, contrary to the silence on the issue, domestic violence is a problem.⁹ A report from the Pacific Community¹⁰ highlighted domestic violence as a problem as well as the conflicting challenge of the perception that gender inequality is not a problem in Niue. My own research with the International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD) in 2017 confirmed both the problem of GBV in Niue and the silences around the issue.¹¹

Now, it is time to explore how to work from the silences to craft more effective policies and interventions. In this research, I identify the spaces that exist and those that can be created where people talk about GBV. I also propose a new family-tree mapping approach as a research tool and approach to considering the family space as a way of talking about and addressing GBV.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many ways of going about GBV research in the Pacific, and there are several approaches that aim to centre the lived experiences of people who experience GBV. However, choices are left to be made about how to strike the balance between accessing lived experiences—through Talanoa for example, ensuring collaborators’ wellbeing, my role as a non-Pacific researcher, and how to make the approach specific to the topic at hand.

GBV is a sensitive topic to study. Asking research questions about GBV can bring up past trauma and can put collaborators at risk of harm. There are several approaches that have been used in response to these research challenges, with the WHO methodology being the most popular, but they have shortcomings particularly in the context of Niue. In particular, they fail to capture the complexities and contradictions around the topic that are highly context-specific.

In my 2017 research, which used semi-structured qualitative interviews, collaborators in Niue were interested in quantitative data. Statistics on GBV do tend to raise the profile of the issue especially in policy spaces. However, upon deeper discussion, ethical and methodological

challenges to conducting such a survey in Niue would be too difficult in a small place. It also raised the question of how impactful that data or insights would be given that many in Niue already recognise the prevalence of GBV.

Recent Pacific literature on GBV interventions as well as our own intuition reminds us, too, that the pathway to transformation of social relations really lie within the communities themselves.¹² In exploring possible spaces, public health research on Niueans in New Zealand provided guidance in how to conceptualise spaces around this topic.¹³ This research as well as my own work from 2017 pointed to the family space as a crucial one in terms of GBV.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following research took place over four weeks from 19 October to 15 November 2019 in Niue. Building from my 2017 scoping report on GBV in Niue, this research sought to explore the challenges and opportunities of addressing GBV in Niue. The research involved two parts: 27 fact finding interviews with 32 total participants and 14 family-tree mapping interviews with one woman over 40 from each village. Context is crucial, and the first set of questions I took up in my interviews with government and community leaders were around the landscape of current spaces in which people talk about GBV. Building from this knowledge, I then explored how a genealogical approach could be used to expand these spaces and our understanding of GBV while remaining rooted in Pacific research methodologies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the current spaces where people talk about GBV in Niue?

How is GBV framed by community and government leaders?

What opportunities do community and government leaders see with regard to the creation of spaces to address GBV?

How useful is the family-tree mapping approach employed in this research in creating new spaces for talking about GBV?



FACT-FINDING INTERVIEWS

Informants were selected with the help of Charlene who understood the appropriate representatives from the government and community. Most collaborators held multiple roles in both the government and community and could speak from multiple perspectives. Informants were recruited via email by Charlene and were given the option to not participate or to send another representative from their organisation/ department. Three collaborators either elected not to participate or sent a different representative.

The informant interviews were focused on the three research questions around spaces. The interviews were semi-structured in order to systematically assess how government and community leaders frame GBV and where it is discussed while allowing for the conversation to flow to other topics. The semi-structured approach also created more space in the interviews for collaborator narratives which provide their analysis of the problem. The interview questions were categorised into the overarching questions of “what is happening?” and “what else could work?” These interviews were focused on understanding community and government leaders’ perceptions about the spaces in which GBV is discussed as well as their ideas for creating new spaces. In several cases, these interviews became a collaborative space to think through the challenges and opportunities for addressing GBV in Niue.

In order to avoid prompting collaborators to discuss actual GBV incidents, probing questions focused on trends and public narratives. However, some collaborators raised actual GBV incidents and even personal experiences. When this happened, I reminded the collaborator that it was not necessary for them to share all of the details of such incidents, but they were welcome to if they were comfortable. All collaborators were offered referral pathways for counselling by contacting myself or Charlene.

TABLE 1. INFORMANT AFFILIATIONS

- Taoga Niue
- Crown Law
- Police Department
- Justice Department
- Fono Ekepule
- Health Department
- Department of Education
- Ministry of Social Services
- Department of Statistics and Planning
- National Women’s Council
- Ekalesia Kerisiano Niue
- Fellowship for Christian Women
- Niue Youth Council
- University of the South Pacific
- Niue Public Service Commission

*Other organisations not named to protect the identities of participants.



FAMILY-TREE MAPPING

As an alternative and more ethical approach, the family-tree mapping was used to focus more on the ways GBV happens and is dealt with rather than prevalence. In the 2017 report, the family was highlighted as an important space for addressing GBV. As such, the family-tree mapping portion of the research looked specifically at how the family space works around GBV.

There were a total of 14 of the family-tree mapping interviews which averaged 120 minutes each. During the interviews, we mapped their social family tree focusing on family members living in Niue. Then, questions were asked around the areas of disclosure, accountability, education, and talanoa/ gossip in the family. The additional benefit of these interviews was that they avoided re-traumatising participants by focusing on GBV indirectly through family relationships.

LOCATING MYSELF IN THE RESEARCH

The title of this work is intentionally centered on “challenges and opportunities” because one of the key challenges to address from the outset is the fact that I am not Niuean (Palagi), and I am not married to a Niuean. I am an unmarried white woman from the United States and living in Aotearoa New Zealand. I became interested in GBV in Niue when I started working with the social justice organisation, the International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD). I had the chance to visit Niue and build relationships during my research in 2017 in which I was looking at the landscape of discussion on GBV in Niue. In this research and my prior work in Niue, I have come with my own set of subjectivities which inevitably shaped interview spaces as well as the analysis and writing of this research. To reiterate, this research is only as useful as it resonates with the experiences of tagata Niue.

As such, this research is and will continue to be a collaborative project in which I can offer what I see as “challenges and opportunities” that might be able to support potential interventions in the future. It is then up to those who understand and are invested in shifted social relations in Niue to lead the way.

KEY FINDINGS

This research produced several key findings that can inform work towards addressing GBV on Niue and other small Pacific islands. These include findings specific to Niue as well as new methodological understandings for GBV research and interventions.

SPACES

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT SPACES WHERE PEOPLE TALK ABOUT GBV IN NIUE?

FAMILY SPACES

As anticipated, the family space, typically the home, came up in nearly every interview. The definition of family varied from the immediate family involving the survivor, perpetrator, and children to the survivor or perpetrator among their extended family. If a survivor reaches out for help, the magafaoa is often the first and only space in which she discloses her experiences. There were two trends in responses about this space. First, many collaborators expressed a satisfaction with a family response with some suggesting it was a better alternative than other spaces. When digging deeper into what actions are taken in the magafaoa space, other collaborators described that domestic violence was as a “marital issue” to be worked out within the marriage and that it was never resolved in the family space at all.

CHURCH SPACES

The church came up as another space in which GBV is discussed. There are seven different churches on Niue but Ekalesia Kerisiano Niue is the most popular. As such, informant interviews were primarily concerned with the Ekalesia Niue. The church as an entity consists of several spaces where GBV is discussed including in related leadership groups like the deacons' meeting and the Fellowship for Christian Women (FCW), preaching in services, and pastors' counselling directly with community members.

Church leadership groups have been involved in awareness programming since around 2015, and they have been encouraged by the police to report cases that they are aware of. Cases can be heard about in deacons' meetings, and although some suggest that faith-based leaders are reporting everything to the police, others express the importance of pastors as confidential resources for the community. Individuals involved in incidents of GBV often approach pastors and church leadership directly despite the potential for conflicts of interest. While many spoke positively about the role of the pastor and their family in providing counselling in the community, the church also became a gatekeeper for if, how, and when incidents are dealt with as opposed to centering the survivor in moving the process along.

Several collaborators raised the issue of pastors writing favourable character letters on behalf of perpetrators that are used in mitigation in GBV court cases. Others raised the withdraw of reports and cases in which women are dissuaded by family or their pastors from further pursuing their case. The Ekalesia also plays an important role in shaping gender relations through preaching during services. While some key informants described their frustration with the representation of women in leadership roles in the church, others remarked upon how far the Ekalesia has come in allowing women to preach as well as shifting gender norms which has come from church leadership and outside awareness programming.





Figure 1 represents these spaces as frangipani blooms which each offer opportunities for shifting narratives which they all share the same roots.

POLICE AND JUSTICE

The police and justice departments are relatively obvious spaces in which GBV is discussed. These spaces are critical because of the consistent theme of impunity for perpetrators as well as their complicity in perpetuating GBV by not seeking to understand it and take it seriously. In a small place, most people are privy to GBV incidents and abusive relationships, and this is especially true for police. In terms of the police responding to GBV incidents, several collaborators perceived the police, as well as those with close relationships to the police, as seeing themselves and their own friends and family as above the law.

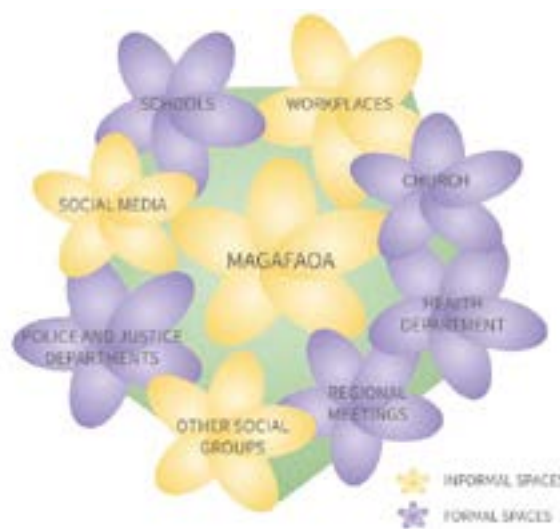


FIGURE 1. MAPPING GBV SPACES IN NIUE

When a police officer, likely a man as the police department had 3 sworn police women out of their 12 officers, first responds to a case of domestic violence, they can take the offender into police custody for 3 days and then bail them out on conditions on weekdays or after the weekend when businesses are closed. There was a perception among the police that, as emphasised in other spaces, domestic violence is a private husband-wife matter. Some collaborators noted that in cases deemed minor by the police officer, the offender or the survivor can be asked to stay somewhere else for the night to let things settle down.

Collaborators shared that while many reports and cases are withdrawn by the survivors, if a case is pursued in court, the most common punishment for domestic violence offenders is a fine of \$100 or \$200. In terms of punishment, some considered the role of the shame and stigma in the community that turned offenders around more than anything else. Niue is a small place and news spreads quickly. The shame and stigma were noted to be a powerful form of punishment. However, the police and justice departments viewing domestic violence as private matters that do not need to be taken seriously is a dangerous form of complicity.



SCHOOLS

The schools were also noted as spaces where GBV is raised. Collaborators noted that children will share what is happening at home in class or in their diaries which can expose domestic violence. Schools are also a space for education around sexuality and healthy relationships. The schools run their own age-appropriate lessons on puberty and sexuality, and the police department used to run awareness programmes with students on various topics including domestic violence and inappropriate touching.

HEALTH

GBV also comes up in the health department. In severe physical abuse and sexual violence cases, survivors seek medical attention at the hospital. Health practitioners are aware of the signs of GBV and are aware that some survivors tell a different story to others in order to prevent the community from finding out about an incident. Health practitioners function as a confidential resource until their records are requested from the police department or the survivor chooses to report. The police department is sometimes unaware of cases that have reached the hospital because they are never reported, even if the survivor is at risk. The hospital was also raised as an important space for survivors because in the small community, people do not question why you are going to the hospital. The same privacy and safety concerns are why a women's shelter would not be ideal in Niue. At the hospital, the community is unaware of your reasons for visiting the hospital and because it is easier to hide the purpose of your visit, and it becomes a safe space for survivors to receive medical attention when needed.

REGIONAL MEETINGS

Another formal space that was raised is regional meetings on topics related to GBV. Several collaborators raised how GBV is more of an alarming issue elsewhere because they have heard about the rates of GBV in other countries in the Pacific while attending regional or international meetings. This also appeared in recurring narratives framing GBV. A challenge with these spaces is that New Zealand and the Pacific regional organisations have a major influence on agenda setting which may or may not include grounded perspectives from Niue. For example, collaborators mentioned workshops and trainings run by the New Zealand police for different institutions on responding to GBV in the community.

INFORMAL SPACES

Social groups, workplaces, and social media are informal spaces that host important discussions around GBV. For example, group chats on social media platforms, socialising in the workplace, and women's groups are all spaces for potential disclosure, education, accountability, and talanoa. Several collaborators mentioned "Coconut Wireless" which refers to the speed at which news travels around the island. Embedded with recurring narratives, I describe this as talanoa which is an important and impactful process of collective meaning making. Discussing GBV can be positive and supportive of the family involved, but it often becomes the community determining who was at fault, who deserved what, and what the incident means for the characters of the individuals involved.

The talanoa space also functions as a space for survivors to disclose their experiences with trusted confidants. Women's groups were described as spaces for women to vent and complain in a relaxed way without pressure to report. At times, talanoa in the community has raised the attention of the police department to investigate the situation. While talanoa takes place in social groups, gatherings, and workplaces, it is also increasingly taking place online. There were mixed opinions on social media. While some saw it as a positive way to connect with others including Niueans overseas, others saw it as an avenue to expose Niueans to harmful content.

RECURRING NARRATIVES

HOW IS GBV IN NIEUE FRAMED BY COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS?

In addition to the family space, a focus of this research was to explore the spaces in which GBV is discussed in Niue, the ways in which it is characterised, and the possibilities that government and community leaders see for change. There were several recurring narratives around how GBV is characterised. They are summarised here:

It depends what you consider to be violence. Everyone has arguments here and there.

People don't like to talk about GBV, especially sexual violence.



*When domestic violence is really severe, alcohol is almost always involved.
They are having relationship problems (i.e. extramarital affairs, jealousy, financial challenges).
Maybe she's not making him feel like a man.
It's their relationship though, she should either go or make peace.
It's not as common as it used to be though.
Niue is not nearly as bad as other countries or ethnic groups.*

It depends what you consider to be violence. Everyone has arguments here and there.

The blurring of what constitutes violence extended to domestic violence. While some of the professionals who deal directly with GBV survivors clarified their definitions of domestic violence, typically as the most severe cases, many ended up describing all disrespectful behaviours in relationships as domestic violence leading to a narrative of “everything is domestic violence, so nothing is domestic violence.”

People don't like to talk about GBV, especially sexual violence.

While the informant interviews did not surface narratives on sexual violence, the silences suggest the concept is still considered fakatapu or at least, was not appropriate to discuss in the space of our interview. In the family-tree mapping interviews, the space was more focused on these personal narratives and were not specific to collaborators' leadership roles in the government or community, so sexual violence came up more explicitly.

“I THINK IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT, AS SMALL AS YOU ARE, AS MUCH AS YOU WANT TO THINK THAT IT'S NOT HAPPENING, NO, IT'S HAPPENING. PEOPLE JUST DON'T SEEM TO KNOW.”





When domestic violence is really severe, alcohol is almost always involved.

Collaborators recognised that most relationships will have conflict at some point but identified domestic violence as happening when there are issues in the relationship that cannot be overcome. Almost all collaborators mentioned that alcohol is frequently involved in domestic violence incidents. While some older collaborators described alcohol as a cause of domestic violence or implied it was a somewhat valid excuse, most described it as a trigger for existing emotions and sentiments.

“SHE WAS ABUSED. THE MAN WAS A NICE GUY, BUT HE WAS DRUNK. HE LOST HIS SENSES.”

“ALCOHOL TRIGGERS THOSE THOUGHTS YOU KEEP IN YOUR HEART.”

They are having relationship problems (i.e. extramarital affairs, jealousy, financial challenges).

Collaborators had different definitions for the relationship issues that could instigate domestic violence. Some brought up jealousy, extramarital affairs, and withholding money. However, I pressed on the question of why domestic violence happens in some couples and not others when all couples could come upon the same relationship issues. At this point, gender relations and expectations were used to explain both why domestic violence and how it is dealt with.

Maybe she’s not making him feel like a man.

These gendered dynamics resonate with literature from the region that highlight the place of masculinity in GBV.¹⁴ This research highlights the power of gender roles and the construction of masculinity in GBV. In their New Zealand-based literature review on Pacific men and family violence¹⁵, Malungahu and Nosa conclude that men can use and condone violence as a tool to reassert power when their masculinity is threatened, for example, when women express their masculinity. This type of transgression can have an emasculating effect on men which unsettles their masculine identity. In Niue, the context of the questions and responses from one interview informs more of this narrative.



The increase in women taking on traditionally masculine roles like the breadwinner of the family disrupts gender expectations on both men and women. Collaborators linked this to men taking action, for example attacking women, when they can no longer handle the challenge to expectations. This took a different shape in narratives that blame women and excuse men for their roles in domestic violence.

INTERVIEWER: “HOW HAVE GENDER ROLES CHANGED OVER TIME?”

COLLABORATOR: “THE ROLE OF WOMEN HAS CHANGED A LOT. IN THE PAST, THEY [WOMEN] DIDN’T WORK [PAID WORK]. THEY [WOMEN] COULD ONLY BE TEACHERS OR NURSES. NOW, WOMEN ARE IN HIGHER LEVEL POSITIONS. WOMEN ARE MAKING MORE THAN MEN, BUT THEY HAVE TO MULTI-TASK IN ORDER TO SURVIVE. HUSBAND IS STILL ALWAYS THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD. HE IS A PROVIDER, AND THAT SHOULD BE RESPECTED. WE JUST CAN’T GET THE SAME RESPECT. MEN FEEL LET DOWN WHEN THEY CAN’T BE THE PROVIDER. THEY HOLD ONTO THEIR MONEY. THEY NEED TO HAVE A STRONG MENTALITY TO BE ABLE TO KNOW THEY’RE STILL A PROVIDER. THE MAN IS USUALLY THE ONE WHO LOSES THEIR PATIENCE. THEY’RE THE ONE WHO GETS VERY ANGRY AND LOSES THEIR TEMPER.”

INTERVIEWER: “WHY DO YOU THINK IT’S MAINLY MEN?”

COLLABORATOR: “MEN SOMETIMES TAKE IT TOO MUCH TO MAKE THEMSELVES AS A BIG BOSS OVER WOMEN. WOMEN ARE SUPPOSED TO AGREE, BUT THEY HAVE RIGHTS TO SPEAK UP AND TO DISAGREE. MEN TAKE NEGATIVE ACTION.”

It's their relationship though, she should either go or make peace.

This was evident in the continued ideas around the change in gender roles over time. Many described how women have more power in terms of representation and decision-making power in government, villages, and households in Niue than they used to, and that, in terms of domestic violence, they have many more options than they used to. They can go overseas and leave their families now. However, this narrative of women having options further puts the onus on women to resolve the domestic violence without a strong theme of accountability for the perpetrator. Collaborators recognised women's responsibility to make and keep the peace in relationships, families, and the community.

These narratives were troubling. While I can see the importance of the strong Niuean woman narrative, I also see how that is used to blame women for domestic violence they can suffer from and to absolve any empathy because "she has options" and can resolve it herself. With the narratives of broad and vague definitions of domestic violence and the positivity around

"I THINK IT'S DEALT WITH IN A SOFT WAY WHERE YOU TEACH TO BE KIND, TO BE MORE LOVING, TO BE GIVING TO YOUR NEIGHBOURS. TO BE SERVING. WE DON'T DEAL WITH IT ON THE OTHER END. WHEN THERE'S A WRONG, WE NEED TO ADDRESS IT. WE NEED TO SIT DOWN. WHEN THERE'S A WRONG, PEOPLE TURN AWAY FROM THAT AND HOPE THAT YOU DEAL WITH IT. THEY DON'T DEAL WITH IT."



“FEMALES CAN JUST LEAVE. BACK THEN, IT WAS TAPU FOR WIVES TO JUST LEAVE THEIR FAMILIES. NOW, YOU KNOW THEY HAVE THE FREEDOM TO JUST JUMP ON THE PLANE AND GO TO NEW ZEALAND. GET AWAY FROM IT ALL.”

the improved status of women in Niue over time, the narrative of transgressions of gender expectations instigating domestic violence logically fits. However, because women are also understood to have the options and choices to resolve domestic violence, there is little perceived need or urgency for intervention.

It's not as common as it used to be though.

In each informant interview after discussing the spaces in which GBV comes up, I asked a hypothetical question about prevalence. This question came out my 2017 work which highlighted the curiosity around prevalence rates in Niue. I introduced a broad range of types of GBV and the continuum and asked what a hypothetical prevalence study might find in Niue if you could look into every household, what kinds of relationships would you find. While collaborators identified that domestic violence happens in Niue, the narrative shifted to relative prevalence both spatially and temporally. It is worse among other ethnic groups, in other countries, or back in the “old days.”

“IT'S [DOMESTIC VIOLENCE] NOT SO BAD HERE ON NIUE AS IT USED TO BE BEFORE.”





The question of prevalence also raised a method of silence on the topic. Collaborators avoided discussing GBV now by considering perceived progress over time and comparing Niue to other countries in the Pacific and other ethnic groups.

Niue is not nearly as bad as other countries or ethnic groups.

While many collaborators named the relative prevalence over time either due to fewer people or higher awareness, they also identified moral equivalence when comparing to other ethnic groups in Niue and other countries in the Pacific. In GBV cases brought up, collaborators were quick to identify if those involved were from another ethnic group, like Samoans, Tongans, Tuvaluans, and Indians on the island. Of all the recurring narratives, this was the most consistent across all interviews. Nearly every collaborator raised an element of what I will describe as Niue exceptionalism, a moral equivalence with other ethnic groups and/ or countries.

“IT’S UNIQUE HERE. YOU CAN’T JUST TAKE IT AND TREAT IT AS WHAT HAPPENS IN SAMOA OR TONGA. IT CANNOT BE APPLIED TO NIUE.”

DISCUSSING GENDER

In several interviews, there was a desire to distance the conversation from feminism and gender equality which warrants a Niue-specific framework. In Niue, there are many social positions that can give some groups more power than others including class, ability, ethnicity, and hierarchies within the church and government. From these power relations, we can consider GBV in Niue in terms of asymmetrical power relations based on gender.



The frustration with mainstream Western feminism is well-founded. Western media sources tend blame GBV on culture despite the fact that it can be found across cultures around the world.¹⁶ There is nothing inherent about women or women in the Pacific from which we can derive any example of oppression, including GBV. Discrimination comes after a woman, with all her intersecting identities, enters social relations. Further, when we construct men as all-powerful against powerless women, it establishes the only possible outcome as an inversion of the status quo, not equity.¹⁷

There are mixed opinions about the focus on women and women's rights in Niue, and there is a common perception that gender inequality does not exist.¹⁸ The report highlighted another reason for the lack of focus on gender in Niue being the small size of civil society and limited attention on social change and human rights.¹⁹ Further, without knowledge in the past of what is happening on Niue, the gender context is difficult to understand let alone consider pathways for transformation. Expressions of gender are culturally-specific, and their complexities and contradictions are crucial to understanding gendered social relations in their context.

In her doctoral thesis²⁰, Niue scholar Jessica Pasisi covers some of the historical influences on gender relations in Niue. The Christian church and colonial administration brought in certain expectations of gender expression. Despite these influences on gender relations, Pasisi describes how "Niue culture tends to skirt these boundaries in favour of complementarity"²¹. She writes, "[o]ften Niue women go where they are needed in order to serve our family and community. Niue women are highly mobile and their networks and an ability to serve larger national, regional and global communities seems second-hand to many of the women I've met".²²

It is important to note that the focus on women for this research is derived from both the asymmetrical power relations based on gender as well as my positionality as a woman. Leveling the gender hierarchy inherently requires and benefits men and boys, and that should not be discounted in any way. This is a high priority area for future research, but for family-tree mapping with men, it would likely be better for a man to conduct the interviews.

CHANGING THE NARRATIVES

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DO COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS SEE WITH REGARD TO THE CREATION OF SPACES TO ADDRESS GBV?

Informants also raised possibilities for addressing GBV which can be grouped by education, disclosure, accountability, and belonging. In terms of education, most participants raised the need for greater awareness around what GBV is and what to do if you see or experience it, including creating safe spaces for disclosure. Accountability was a contentious issue in that not everyone agreed how to deal with people who commit GBV, but most agreed at the current approach is not sufficient, either because it is too punitive and not embodying Niue values or that it is not punitive enough and fails to reform those who have caused harm. All participants agreed that there needs to be a greater sense of belonging in the community in general. Weaving this into the GBV narratives, part of this should include the acceptance and welcoming of different expressions of gender.

NIUE-SPECIFIC APPROACHES

While the informant interviews were a productive space for considering possibilities for addressing GBV in Niue, they were between the collaborators and myself. In some interviews, responses to these questions started with why things that might work in New Zealand or other Pacific countries will not work in Niue. For example, safe houses were raised as a highly ineffective and potentially dangerous option because there would be no way to maintain privacy and secrecy.

DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION

The church, police, justice, schools, and health spaces are prominent institutions and spaces in which GBV comes up, but their coordination was questioned by some collaborators. The police attempted to spearhead this coordination with the Domestic Violence Committee with leadership from these institutions among other community groups, but it remained active only in 2015

and 2016. The strain on human resources and the few number of reports discouraged their regular meeting. While there is significant pressure on human resources, this feedback raises the question of why low intensity but widespread coordination across departments is not happening. It could even reduce pressure on individual departments by making space for them to share the load.

EDUCATION

Education was a central theme when considering transformative possibilities, and almost every collaborator mentioned a desire for great awareness. There were several ideas around using different spaces including the church and church-related groups, media like TV, radio, and social media, and village-based community meetings. The goals for awareness programming were around identifying what domestic violence and other forms of GBV are, what the early signs are, and how to deal with it. Many connected this awareness programming to encouraging reporting and helping people share their experiences.

PATHWAYS FOR DISCLOSURE

While some mentioned the need for survivors and community members to report incidents to the authorities, others mentioned that they need to talk to just talk to someone, whether it is a friend, family member, or counsellor. Several collaborators raised that many do not know how to report, what will happen when they report, or that they would not know what to do if someone disclosed GBV to them. In terms of transformative possibilities, this was considered as something to include in awareness programming to develop guidelines and clear pathways for the community on what to do if someone discloses GBV to them or if they themselves are in trouble.

INCREASING COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY

While some shared that they were satisfied with formal justice system, others preferred GBV to be dealt with in the family and community. While some cited the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation, others found all current accountability strategies to be insufficient.



BUILDING COMMUNITY BELONGING

Several collaborators emphasised the need for advocating for community and the belongingness of each person to the community. With busy schedules, many are unable to make time to slow down and connect. This could mean that people are not able to talk when they need to share something. One collaborator mentioned the gendered ways that belongingness could be improved in supporting men and women as they are and in whatever they choose to do. This stood out given the recurring narrative of transgressing gender expectations leading to domestic violence. Collaborators raised the importance of human connection and belonging in informal spaces like family and community settings that are typically unstructured.

FAMILY-TREE MAPPING: METHODS & INTERVENTION

WHY FAMILY SPACES?

My 2017 report pointed to the family as a crucial space for navigating GBV. Other research has also discussed the role of the Niuean family in the prevention of sexual violence. Public health researchers at the University of Auckland School of Population Health led a study on the prevention of sexual violence in Pacific communities in Auckland.²³ The section on Niue is rich with participants' reflections in focus groups resident in both New Zealand and in Niue. While the research captures important cultural context to sexual violence, it is conducted in New Zealand and does not directly discuss barriers for Niueans who spend most of their time in Niue. With this caveat, participants considered the role of the family in talking about GBV. When asked about the education on sexual violence prevention, three Niuean women responded:

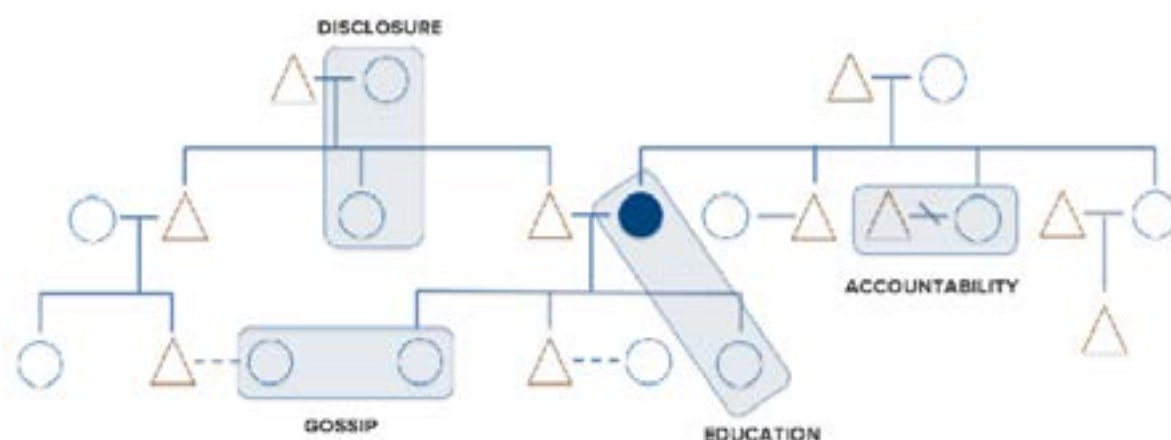


FIGURE 2. EXAMPLE OF A FAMILY TREE DIAGRAM.

It is our fakaakoaga (teachings) handed down from our mamatua tupuna to our families, especially our families who know how to promulgate these principles; but our families without these matutakiaga (teachings) about these matters, it is not easy for them to have understanding.

There are those things in place like our traditional principles like fakaalofa (love), feofanaki (caring) within families.

It happens but not for general use; it only happens within families who believe it, and what happens if you don't believe it - it doesn't happen.²⁴

These responses suggest that if a family understands the importance of preventing sexual violence, the matutakiaga (lessons) are passed down generationally perhaps alongside cultural principles of fakaalofa and feofanaki. This suggests that intergenerational knowledge can be useful for understanding spaces for talking about GBV. The men's focus group in this research discussed that education in the family can involve modeling positive behaviours, warning others about violent community members, and encouraging family members to share their experiences with someone they trust. From that intergenerational perspective, the questions become: How is the space for these discussions made among family? Who specifically is involved? And who is involved in preventing GBV?

BUILDING THE FAMILY-TREE MAPPING APPROACH

Drawing from Pacific research methodologies help to frame these questions. A major thread within these frameworks is genealogy. In Pasisi's research²⁵, Niue women's stories about climate change included stories of their genealogies which allowed Pasisi to access the richness of women's knowledge embedded in ancestry. The Hiapo methodology is connected to genealogy in that the practice of Hiapo making was passed down generationally. In the same sense, stories of how gender expressions are understood within ancestry can provide context for understanding gender today. Because gender is socialised with the family being a major social space, the lessons from our family including our elders speak to the way our living ancestors and the stories of other ancestors who live within them influence how descendants express gender.



After exploring how and where GBV is currently discussed, the second part of the methodology was to pilot a method of creating space to talk about GBV. Ethically, in GBV research it is challenging to centre survivors’ experiences while avoiding retraumatising them through interviews.²⁶ In this research, family-tree mapping was used as a way to access genealogies as a potential space to talk about GBV in Niue. This methodology is in the spirit of Fakatupuolamoui, the Niuean conceptual framework developed by Niueans in New Zealand for addressing family violence which leans on positive aspects of aga fakaNiue (Niuean culture, the Niuean way).²⁷ In this sense, the research design is centered on those spaces which currently exist to discuss GBV as well as creating space for this positive development in the magafaoa.

Collaborators were recruited through the village women’s councils with one in each of the 14 villages. Some villages had a second women’s council which were primarily social groups, so for this research, the official women’s councils were chosen. Chairpersons were given the details of the research in English and Vagahau Niue through Charlene and asked to select a collaborator in a manner appropriate for their group. The councils could refuse to participate as a collective. If they chose to participate, the selected collaborator could also withdraw at any point. If the selected collaborator withdrew, we would contact the Chairperson again to, if their council still wanted to participate, select another collaborator. This approach was chosen in order to include a range of families and to ensure that the data collected was exhaustive enough to be publicly accepted in Niue, meaning as representative as possible.

TABLE 2. FAMILY-TREE MAPPING INTERVIEW THEMATIC AREAS.	
Disclosure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How/where/when/with whom do individuals come forward about their experiences with GBV?
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How/where/when/with whom does education about healthy relationships happen within families?
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does accountability look like for perpetrators of GBV in the formal system? In the family? Were the accountability measures effective? What does accountability within the family look like?



There was a total of 14 interviews ranging from 60-180 minutes, averaging 120 minutes. There were no age restrictions, but members of the village women's councils were mainly women over 40. Collaborators were all between 40 and 80 years old with an average age of 64. During the interviews, we mapped their social family tree focusing on family members living in Niue. We went back and down no more than two generations. This took 30 minutes on average with each collaborator. Then, questions were asked around the areas of disclosure, accountability, education, and talanoa in the family. At the start of the sessions, it was explained that the focus would not be on any situations or events whereby the collaborator was directly involved in the violence.

The benefit of these interviews was that they considerably reduced retraumatising collaborators by focusing on GBV indirectly through family relationships. For example, collaborators were asked to describe the relationships of couples close to them like their cousins. A semi-structured approach was used in these interviews to explore family relations while probing events or incidents that changed family relations and the feelings those events brought up. When GBV was raised, as it was in every interview but one, I flagged it in my notes, did not probe around it in the moment, and revisited it at the end asking the collaborator if it was okay to explore the incident further. The deeper exploration of these incidents involved questions for further clarification and probing about the feelings it brought up, the actions various actors took, and how and when it was disclosed to the collaborator. This guided the collaborators in their narratives.

FAMILY-TREE MAPPING FINDINGS

As a culturally-specific approach to GBV, family-tree mapping can be effective in creating spaces both in research and general practice to talk about GBV in a way that honours individuals' knowledge and authority while centering the family as context for disclosure, education, accountability, and talanoa/ gossip. These 14 family-tree mapping interviews illuminated new insights around gender roles and family responses to GBV.

The interviews themselves held very sensitive storytelling, and as such, present barriers to sharing out any specific details without identifying participants, especially in a small place like Niue. In my thesis, I share a dialogue of a fictionalised focus group interview with two fictional women



who had already participated in family-tree mapping interviews. In this storied conversation, we explore the ideas about marriage and gender relations that reflect some of the ideas that came out of the family-tree mapping interviews. I suggest that these ideas represent a recognisable reality, in all its sensitivity and complexity, although the conversation presented here avoids directly attributing ideas or actions to any one person. My intention is that this upholds my ethical commitment to collaborators to protect their privacy.

The central finding from the family-tree mapping approach is that it was an effective approach for opening a space to share about GBV experiences (disclosure), to discuss and consider gender roles and expectations in our relations (education), to explore how we respond, formally or informally, to those who cause harm (accountability), and to navigate how we talk about GBV (talanoa / gossip). This framework, even in informal conversations with no family-tree physically laid out in front of you, can lead to rich conversations about GBV.

The shame and stigma around GBV, both for victims and perpetrators, often prevent families from seeking external help. Further, it is often left to the victims, predominantly women, to resolve the pattern of violence. However, supportive family members can go a long way in healing harm. It is important to create safe spaces for disclosure particularly around sexual violence within marriages which came up in several interviews.

RECURRING THEMES

- The meaning of marriage
- Gender roles and expectations in marriage and in general
- Domestic violence within marriage
- Sexual violence and marital rape
- Family education

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

The main limitation of this research is that the findings are specific to the time in which participants were interviewed. Since then, the COVID-19 crisis has changed the way we interact and has contributed to our understanding of GBV. Practitioners and researchers should be wary of relying on the findings from this research on their own. Further, they should take the lessons of relationships, cultural competency, and empathic apprenticeship from this research into their own work in uncovering new insights.

In terms of further research, there is a need to explore GBV accountability in Niue in terms of both the criminal justice system and existing informal methods of accountability. There should also be experimentation with belonging and gender relations at a community level that provides

insights into culturally-specific transformation. The family-tree mapping method also warrants experimentation as an intervention both in counselling and in community-led development. This research should also be carried forward with a focus on men and their experiences with GBV.

CONCLUSION

- More awareness is needed around helping the community identify GBV especially sexual violence in marriages.
- GBV can occur when one partner fails to meet culturally-specific gender expectations. As such, it is important for communities to ensure all community members can feel like they belong regardless of gender expression.
- GBV interventions cannot ignore the family space as abusive behaviours often never leave the family space. The family space is also critical in primary prevention.
- The family-tree mapping approach piloted here can be a useful tool to both understand the family space as research and to shift social norms as intervention.

While there are challenges to addressing GBV in Niue, the analysis of spaces with an emphasis on family spaces presents several opportunities for transformation. These spaces are opportunities to support one another when they disclose experiences with GBV, learn and educate each other about healthy relationships among genders, hold members of the community accountable for their actions in appropriate ways, and to critically consider how we respond and contribute to community discourse about GBV-related gossip and talanoa.

When I was in Niue, I heard many stories of harm and hurt that had not been shared before. Stories that some might have had suspicions about but did not ask. Stories from women who might not have seen the space, support, or need to share. I hold these stories close to my heart hoping that one day, both those who were harmed and those who caused harm will heal. Sometimes that does happen in silence, but other times we need space to breathe life into our experiences and to be heard by those who matter most to us. This is where the conversations must continue, beyond direct experiences and including bystanders to harm, and in many spaces, they are. For many collaborators, engaging with family around this topic was familiar. Examples of disclosure, education, accountability, and talanoa could all be found in their stories. Genealogies live through descendants, and families, chosen and biological, are spaces where we shape these stories together.

This research was approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) on 9 October 2019 (reference 023589).

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