



Samoa Victim Support Group

PROJECTS 2010-2023



CURRENT PROJECTS

EVIDENCE FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN THE EXTREME PROJECT (THE EVE PROJECT)

Donor Agency: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding for the University College of London (lead researcher Dr. Jenevieve Mannell), led by Samoa Victim Support Group in Samoa, and supported by the Centre for Samoa Studies at the National University of Samoa, Ministry of Women, Communities, and Social Development, and Samoa Bureau of Statistics.

Duration: March 2020 – December 2024

Summary: The EVE Project is a research study conducted in partnership with local villages to develop an indigenous approach to preventing violence against women. Locally, the EVE Project is referred to as *A Le Saua Lele Alofa* (Love Shouldn't Hurt). SVSG selected 20 village representatives from their existing network to develop an approach for researching violence against women that works within *Fa'a Samoa* ('the Samoan way'). The EVE Project involves four different activities conducted over a four-year period:

1. **Collecting artefacts** (myths, proverbs, photographs, drawings, maps) from participating villages about the reasons why they think violence against women happens or how their village is preventing it. The project team identified which villages are doing something to prevent violence, and what they are doing. These villages became case studies for collecting additional artefacts to describe what is happening in the village and how violence prevention is working. This activity is completed.
2. **Conducting interviews** with community members (village and religious leaders, health professionals, families and survivors of violence) about what violence against women means, how community members/leaders are responding to situations of violence, and what the community should be doing to prevent it from happening in the first place. As a team, we talked about common ideas from different communities in Samoa about violence against women and how it should be prevented. We then discussed these ideas with community members in a series of village meetings and used them to develop a set of guidelines for the research project and its activities. This activity is completed.
3. **Developing a tool** for measuring the number of women who experience violence in Samoan communities. While many measurement tools exist, the project team worked together to develop a survey that fits the culture and customs of Samoa. The team asked a small number of community members to complete the survey and conducted interviews with key stakeholders in government and leadership positions to check that the questions are being asked in the right way. Finally, the team conducted the final survey across a larger selection of villages to estimate the prevalence of violence against women. This activity is completed.
4. **Developing an intervention** to prevent violence against women in partnership with community members. Community advisory committees have been established in five different Samoan communities to work with the project team to develop a set of community-based activities for preventing violence against women. Village representatives will meet regularly to practice, plan and test different activities in their communities. The committees will assist the project team and give them feedback on the activities throughout.

By the end of the EVE Project, we will have developed a new approach to researching violence against women that is uniquely Samoan. We will have better understandings of how communities are trying to prevent violence against women in local villages, and how we can support them in these efforts. We will also have a uniquely Samoan tool for measuring the prevalence of violence against women and an understanding of what violence means to local community members. Finally, we will have developed an intervention that can be used across the country to reduce violence and improve the lives of women in Samoa.

Media:

<https://www.samoagovt.ws/2023/01/media-release-satitua-village-takes-part-in-the-samoa-village-health-survey/>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/101743>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/86687>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/104034>

PAST PROJECTS

SAMOA GOVERNMENT FINANCING ASSISTANCE (POLICY ROLL OUT) TOWARDS ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Donor Agency: The Government of Samoa

Duration: May 2022 - March 2023

Summary: The funding assistance provided by The Government of Samoa enabled Samoa Victim Support Group to implement six priority activities to eliminate violence against women and girls:

Counselling: The upgrade of the counselling room at SVSG main office in Apia for one-on-one counselling sessions for victims of violence, included an air-conditioner and a lounge set. Renovation work was also carried out for the community room used for rehabilitative counselling programs for men and women offenders of violence referred to SVSG from the Family Court.

Information brochures: SVSG produced 10 legal information brochures which provided the community with useful information should they need relevant assistance relevant to gender based violence – Domestic Violence, Assault, Sexual Crimes, Protection Order, Going to Court, Supporting Victims, Sexual Harassment, Young Offenders, Divorce & Families and SVSG Services. SVSG distributed brochures between July to September 2022 at 12 locations in Upolu (Ministry of Police, Ministry of Justice, Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Health Outpatient and Pharmacy, Central Bank of Samoa, Vodafone Matafele, ANZ Bank, Samoa Stationery & Books, Nelson Memorial Library and St. Mary's School Savalalo); and three locations in Savaii (Tuasivi Police, Ministry of Justice and Tuasivi College).

Advocacy programs for male leaders and young boys: SVSG selected male leaders from seven villages to participate in the program to eliminate violence against women and girls. The engagement with village leaders from these communities (Fusi Safata, Vailuutai, Matautu Falealili, Saleapaga, Lalomauga, Avao, and Vaipu'a) builds on a preventative approach fronted by male leaders themselves. It was during the initial gathering of representatives from selected villages that the theme for the project, *E le Saua, le Alofa*, was formulated from the village leaders themselves. All seven villages have completed a Community Prevention Guide; drawn up Declarations to validate their commitment to the guide, installed roadside signboards with key messages, and reviewed By laws based on the guides. The Boys Against Violence program focused on young boys breaking the cycle of violence by fronting up key messages and an educational documentary on issues affecting children in school. The six colleges that participated in the activity were Tuasivi College, Maluafofua College, Don Bosch School Alafua, Chanel College, Wesley College, and Seventh Day Adventist College, Lalovaea. The educational documentary on EVAWG produced by the young boys is now a resource material available on social media to educate, sensitise and raise awareness amongst boys on their role in breaking

SVSG Projects 2010 to 2023

the cycle of violence. All of the six colleges filmed documentaries and key messages from them were also printed on signboards installed in school compounds for awareness raising.

Support for shelters: Government funding enabled SVSG to renovate and refurbish shelter facilities, install equipment to operate a computer lab for the children's rehabilitation, and improve the counselling space. A total of 136 survivors of violence (125 children and 11 women) staying the Campus of Hope at the time benefited directly from these improvements.

Welfare: The empowered Nofotane women were supported with market spaces previously set up as part of the SVSG project with the European Union that ended in March 2022. They include Avao Nofotane Market, Vaiafai Iva Nofotane Market, Vaovai Falealili Nofotane Market, Lautuanuu Nofotane Market, and Satuimalufilufi Nofotane Market. The Nofotane Market at Lautuanuu was included in the European Union delegation site visit during its mission trip to Samoa in November 2022. Five Aumaga groups were selected to submit proposals for projects to support livelihood building and income generating activities valued at \$5,000 each. Five youth groups also submitted proposals for projects to support livelihood building and income generating activities.

Awareness & advocacy: SVSG worked with men and young leaders to advocate for eliminating violence against women and girls. They included Government leaders, Church leaders, village leaders, male role models, rehabilitative male offenders of violence and program facilitators, and youth. A total of 13 documentaries by the selected leaders were recorded and uploaded on social media for educational and awareness raising purposes. The videos have reached thousands of viewers with very positive comments noted on the messages being promoted by the speakers. The Youth Festival featured the drama, *The Power of the Last Words*, on the theme 'Reviving the Cultural aspects that supports Male respect towards Female'.

Child labour (vendors): Forty-five (45) child vendors aged 6 to 15 years were removed from the streets and enrolled in five primary schools during the 2022 school year. Thirty-five (35) parents of the child vendors completed the Positive Discipline Parenting modules adapted by SVSG from the UNICEF Pacific's Save the Children Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting. Twenty-five (25) parents of the child vendors have completed life skills training under the SVSG Nofotane Program and are now earning a living from selling the products they have created from the skills learnt.

Media:

<https://samoaglobalnews.com/government-partners-with-samoa-victim-support-group-to-eliminate-violence-against-women-and-girls-500k/>

<https://www.samoagovt.ws/2023/01/media-release-2/>

<https://talamua.com/2022/04/03/govt-signs-500k-direct-assistance-to-fight-violence-against-women-and-girls/>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/98189>

SUSTAINABLE INCOME GENERATION & SELF EMPLOYMENT OF NOFOTANE WOMEN PROJECT

Donor Agency: European Commission

Duration: March 2020 - March 2022

Summary: This project funded by the EC Civil Society Support Programme II, builds on the success of recent projects by SVSG and development partners where 5,000+ unemployed Nofotane women were trained on livelihood skills as part of an economic empowerment

program. The goal of this project was to ensure that the self-employed Nofotane women have increased access to resources and support to sustain their income generating activities. The project attracted over 6,000 registered members and created over 600 active earners. To address the identified problem of unsustainable income generation, the Nofotane Shop next to SVSG's head office opened in June 2021 to sell products made by Nofotane women under the Nofotane brand. In June 2022, SVSG launched the [Nofotane online shop](#) due to increasing local and international demand for the products.

Media:

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/100398>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/73326>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/72513>

<https://www.samoagovt.ws/2023/02/media-release-european-union-delegation-visits-toamua-nofotane-market/>

https://www.samoagovt.ws/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/04.03.2022_Joint-Press-Release-SVSG-Nofotane-Women-Seminar.pdf

<https://samoaglobalnews.com/market-for-change-set-up-for-vaiafai-iva-savaii-sui/>

<https://newlinesamoa.com/nofotane-women-growing-stronger-with-hard-earned-success/>

MOBILIZING CREATIVE SECTOR & TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOR ENDING DV & IPV

Donor Agency: The Spotlight Initiative Samoa led by UNESCO with the support of the Resident Coordinators Office, the UN Women and the UNDP.

Duration: May 2021 - April 2022

Summary: The *My Village, My Pride* project empowered eight communities to use their traditional performing arts as a channel for creative expression to raise awareness of the importance of ending domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV). The creative outputs in the form of audio-visual tradition/culture-based artistic communication were published as videos on social media and shared with UNESCO and other stakeholders. The community also worked together to make roadside signboards with creative messages (some with local artefacts) about ending violence. This campaign led to the church and traditional leaders, youth and women leading and taking courageous and creative actions to end DV and IPV. The campaign encouraged 'new thinking' to use traditional values to prevent domestic and intimate partner violence. Representatives from participating villages came together to share insights about their project experiences at the SVSG Sharing of Lesson Learnt Workshop in mid-2022. In Samoan culture, male high chiefs are normally responsible for the decision-making in the village. Awareness raising through the performing arts resulted in many men accepting that community awareness on ending violence requires the engagement of the whole community. For women, the community-wide engagement process for this project reassured them that they are not left behind in community matters, particularly those pertaining to their safety. The *My Village, My Pride* 2021 project reminded all of us that Samoans are natural artists and are proud of their indigenous culture.

Media:

<https://samoa.un.org/en/138208-performing-arts-and-creative-actions-end-violence-against-women-and-girls>

<https://spotlightinitiative.org/news/using-performing-arts-raise-awareness-violence-against-women-and-girls-samoa>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/88588>

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE: MEN & BOYS ENGAGE TO END VIOLENCE

Donor Agency: Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union in partnership with five international organisations: Centro Rural Joven Vida (CERUJOVI), Spain (leading agency), Emancipator (Netherlands), Youth First [Madagascar], the Foundation for Innovative Social Development (Sri Lanka), the Centre for Health and Social Justice [India], Samoa Victim Support Group (Samoa).

Duration: January – December 2019

Summary: The project builds on the capacity of youth to engage men and boys to promote gender equality and ending violence against women. It created an advocacy plan that involved young people in advocating for change; empowering youth by creating an environment where they can both voice their concerns and be heard by decision makers. The project included an initial meeting in Apia, Samoa 21 – 25 January 2019 (one participant from each organisation); a Seminar in New Delhi, India 11 – 15 March 2019 (two participants from each organisation); a study visit in Amsterdam, Netherlands 6 – 10 May 2019 (two participants from each organisation); a Youth Forum in Sri Lanka in July (two participants from each organisation); and a youth gathering in Spain in October 2019 (five participants from each organisation).

Media:

<https://www.emancipator.nl/en/breakingthecycle-2/>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/99678>

BUDDYING UP WITH CHILD VENDORS

Donor Agency: International Labour Organisation

Duration: January – February 2019

Summary: The SVSG (Juniors) started its first activities for 2019 with its Buddying up with Child Vendors Program. Funded by the International Labour Organisation, 30 child vendors from Vaiusu, Tafaigata, Falelauniu and Nuu-fou were buddied with SVSG (Junior) youths from Luatuanuu CCCS Youth, Fasitoo-uta Youth, Shrine of the Three Hearts Youth, SVSG Youth Empowerment Program, and Sisters of Hope. Out of the 30 child vendors participating in the Buddy up Program aged 7–17 years old, 95% of them have never been to school before, and as such, needed a lot of help with writing their names, reading, and basic learning. The Buddy Up Program gave some of Samoa's child vendors a glimpse of hope. The aim of the program was to get the children back into the classrooms and away from the danger of the streets during school hours. For 10 days, the child vendors were introduced to life out of the streets and the importance of education. The program was a success. It started off with 30 child vendors and upon completion of the program, 13 or 43% of them have been assessed as eligible for primary school education. The SVSG Juniors then worked together with our supporting partners to secure sponsorship for each child. By the end of February 2019, all of the 13 children are now attending the Vaigaga Primary School and the Aele Primary School.

Media:

<https://www.samoobserverws/category/samoa/6685>

<https://www.samoobserverws/category/samoa/6685>

http://samoobserver.ws/en/23_01_2019/local/40411/Glimpse-of-hope-for-child-vendors.htm

<https://www.samoobserverws/category/samoa/15274>

<https://www.samoobserverws/category/article/26811>

<https://www.samoobserverws/category/editorial/17395>

BUDDYING UP WITH CHILD VENDORS

Donor Agency: National Human Rights Institute of Samoa

Duration: December 2018

Summary: The Samoa Victim Support Group celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 2018 with child vendors on the streets of Apia. The activity aimed at working on the child vendors' self-esteem, that they can rise up from the challenges of the streets to a much better environment such as the classroom, and for SVSG's case, the Hot Soup Skill Building Training. Each child vendor buddied up with a youth member of the SVSG (Junior) for the whole day at the youth's workplaces, such as the Samoa National Orchestra at the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture where a few members of the SVSG (Junior) work. The children very much enjoyed the opportunity to try the different musical instruments used by the National Orchestra. Some even talked of becoming musicians in the future. The final part of the activity was taking the children across the other side of the Campus where the Hot Soup Skills Training is located. Seeing the children trying on different tools used for skill building and the excitement in their faces upon completing a product, was enough to justify the need for education for these young entrepreneurs. From the NHRI and the SVSG's human rights celebration, 10 more child vendors have enrolled at the Hot Soup Skill Building Training for 2019.

THE POSITIVE MOVEMENT – 'WE CAN, YOU CAN'

Donor Agency: One Sky Giving Circle

Duration: September 2018 – August 2019

Summary: The Positive Movement is people sharing on the positive changes in their lives. From SVSG's experience, being a provider of support services to the abused and the helpless in Samoa for close to 20 years, there was no problem too big, or too small that cannot be resolved. It is a mindset challenge. The **'We Can, You Can'** Campaign is an idea born from the female survivors of gender-based violence, who were once residence of the Campus of Hope, and now called themselves, the Sisters of Hope. It was their way of sharing their story that If **We Can** rise up and live on, **You Can** too! The Movement is led by the International Children's Peace Prize Award 2018 finalist, Ms. Leilua Lino who at the time was a residence at the Campus of Hope.

HOT SOUP SKILL BUILDING FOR CHILD VENDORS

Donor Agency: US Embassy (Samoa)

Duration: September 2018 – August 2019

Summary: The project addressed the maltreatment and/or exploitation of children exposed to the dangerous life on the streets as child vendors. Based on the results of the Operation ABC carried out by SVSG in January 2018, SVSG started a Skills Building Training for Child Vendors in February 2018 as a solution to the child vending problem. The program includes basic education in reading and writing as most of these children are illiterate as well as skills building in the areas of carving and carpentry as most of the child vendors are young boys. The workshop was self-funded by SVSG. Funding from the US Embassy enabled SVSG to continue skills building training to assist 30+ children from the rubbish dump and from the streets, to help give them hope and a future. The funding provided materials for the skill building workshop; tools for carpentry and carving and for the children's transportation. Out of the 45 students that attended the training program in 2018, eight of them were enrolled for the first time in the mainstream education in January 2019 (two boys aged 9 and 10 and six girls aged 7–10).

Media:

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/65072>

<https://www.samoanews.com/regional/us-embassy-supports-samoas-ngos-and-fosters-exchanges>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/40687>

SUSTAINABLE INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES OF NOFOTANE WOMEN

Donor Agency: Canada Fund for Local Initiatives

Duration: September 2018 – February 2019

Summary: From July 2017 to April 2018, SVSG has been providing livelihood training workshops for over 5,000 unemployed Nofotane women as part of its economic empowerment program with UN Women Fund for Gender Equality. From these 5,000+ Nofotane women trained, close to 800 have registered to start a small business, with 400 (50%) of these women earning an income from the skills being trained on. The project therefore targeted the sustainable income generation & self-employment of 400 Nofotane women who have previously attended SVSG's livelihood program with the UN Women FGE and have earned a living from it. The project goal was for self-employed Nofotane women to have increased access to resources and support for sustaining their income generating activities, Other achievements are follows:

- SVSG sourced out 120 successful women mentors to provide mentorship for the 460 self-employed Nofotane women reached by the program.
- 32 women to women partnerships were created amongst the Nofotane earners (with the assistance of the SVSG village rep.) to mentor and encourage each other.
- 299 Nofotane women were allocated to the local financial institutions for account set up, the rest of the women have opened bank accounts of their own.
- SVSG linked 386 Nofotane women (excluding the 74 commercial cooking earners) to the relevant market affiliations.
- The Nofotane Market was held on 8th March 2019 at the Malaefatu Reserve in Apia to close off the project. It was well attended by the local community including the delegation 8-members delegation from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) of Canada.
- The Nofotane Shop next to SVSG's head office opened in June 2021 to market and sell products made by Nofotane women under the Nofotane brand.
- In June 2022, SVSG launched the Nofotane online shop due to increasing local and international demand for the products.

Media:

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/15240>

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN SAMOA

Donor Agency: UN Women Fund for Gender Equality

Duration: August 2016 – July 2018

Summary (1 August 2016 Press Release):

Nofotane is translated as 'stay or live with husband', that is, women who marry outside their home village. As Nofotane women are often regarded as the lowest class of women in Samoan society, they are highly vulnerable to exploitation and lack control over their lives. SVSG's case

SVSG Projects 2010 to 2023

management team has identified that the majority of female victims are Nofotane women. With a vision to empower these women to become business owners, SVSG applied to the UN Women Fund for Gender Equality (FGE) to establish the Nofotane Project (2016-2018). This project delivered livelihood training workshops to over 5,000 unemployed Nofotane women across Samoa as part of the fund's economic empowerment program. More than 600 (12%) of these women started a small business and earned an income from the skills they acquired.

The project influenced a mentality change in village, church and government leaders in addressing social issues such as violence against women through the economic empowerment of unemployed women, with a specific focus on Nofotane women. Legislation provided protection for domestic workers in the informal labour (majority are Nofotane women) as per the Labour & Employment Regulation 2016. In some villages, a Nofotane woman now sits in a village council meeting, and men and women alike are changing their attitudes about gender equality. The topic of the Nofotane woman was discussed during a Parliamentary sitting in June 2017, gathering support for the Project. From the 5,000+ unemployed Nofotane women trained in livelihood skills, close to 800 of them have become self-employed, earning a living from selling products they have created. Many are now breadwinners in their families, supporting the family's daily needs; The Nofotane woman now has a voice, recognised in her family, village and the community.

This project supported other projects funded by UN Women, such as the UN Women Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and the UN Women Pacific Regional Ending Violence against Women Facility Fund, which funded the 24hr National Help-Line 800-7874 and has provided counsel for thousands since its establishment in April 2013.

Media:

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/38039>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/73326>

<https://www.samoobserver.ws/category/samoa/72513>

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/10/feature-samoa-nofotane-women>

<https://www.samoagovt.ws/2016/08/nofotane-project-launched/>

WITH AND FOR GIRLS AWARD

Donor Agency: NoVo Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation

Duration: January 2017 – December 2018

Summary: With funding support from the NoVo Foundation Fund of Tides Foundation as an award winner for the With and For Girls Award 2016, SVSG's work with the older girls at the shelter reached new heights. The WAFG Award is coordinated by the Star Foundation of London. The With and For Girls Collective is a group of nine organisations united by a common belief that girls are agents of change. Comic Relief, EMpower, FRIDA, Mama Cash, Nike Foundation, NoVo Foundation, Plan International UK, Stars Foundation – the Collective's convening partner – and The Global Fund for Children have come together to co-create a global awards initiative to find and fund locally-led girl-centred organisations working with and for girls. As one of the Award Winners for 2016, SVSG received funding to further support the rehabilitation programs of the young female survivors of gender-based violence under its shelter care.

CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

Donor Agency: UNICEF Pacific

Duration: October 2015 – December 2017

Summary: Funding support from UNICEF Pacific for two years enabled SVSG to recruit a 3-member Child Protection Team comprising of a Court Officer, Case Officer, and Child Protection Officer. The team deals with daily cases of gender-based violence lodged with Samoa Victim Support Group. Each child is supported when his/her case is lodged with SVSG as well referral of the case to the Police for further investigations all the way to the Courts. The team provides counselling support and rehabilitation programs for the abused child while under SVSG's care at the Campus of Hope shelter facilities.

In 2016, Laura Gibbons, a Communication Specialist with UNICEF Pacific visited SVSG and captured the following Human-Interest Stories from some of the survivors at the Campus of Hope:

[Turning the tide on violence against children in Samoa](#)

Mele, 16, was sexually abused by her father and has lived at the Samoa Victims Support Group for three years © UNICEF Pacific/2016/Mepham

"My favorite story is Cinderella," Mele told me as we sit together at the Samoa Victims Support Group (SVSG) in the capital, Apia. She is 16 years old but already she has lived a life that no one should.

When she was just 13 years old, her father began to sexually abuse her. Confused and scared, she confided in her mother what was happening. To her dismay, her mother didn't believe her. This crushing betrayal left Mele without hope and at her lowest point she considered suicide.

The word resilience does not have a direct translation in the Samoan language, but this is what Mele showed when she built up the courage to approach another trusted adult, a priest, to alert him of what was happening to her. Thankfully his response was very different, and he immediately contacted the staff at the SVSG who placed Mele in a secure shelter where she has remained for three years.

What is most impressive about Mele is her ability to forgive her parents (her father is now in jail) and her newfound commitment to wanting to help other children deal with situations similar to her own. "I am grateful that I feel safe and secure, and I want to encourage other children never to give up because someone will listen."

Breaking the silence of violence in Samoa

Violence against children, of widely varying degrees, is commonplace across the South Pacific region. Recent Pacific research undertaken by UNICEF and UNFPA, found there is a strong correlation between violence perpetrated against children and violence perpetrated against adult women, particularly in the home.

In Samoa, 46 percent of ever-partnered women between the ages of 15-49 have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. 62 percent of women have experienced physical violence by a non-partner. 11 percent of women have experienced sexual violence by non-partner. Perpetrators of non-partner physical abuse before the age of 15 are: Father, 36 percent; Male in a family, 4 percent; Female family member, 39 percent; Teacher, 19 percent.

Violence against children can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation. Violence can also affect children in an indirect way – witnessing domestic violence between parents, for example, or between a parent and his or her partner. Violence against children is typically perpetrated by those entrusted with their care: parents or other family members, teachers and community members. There is clear

evidence that suggests that violence can affect children's health and well-being on many different levels – physical, psychological, social and emotional.

One of the most concerning elements related to violence against children is the silence in which it breeds. Similar to other countries, reporting on incidents of violence is minimal in Samoa in large part due to the cultural implications that tend to manifest in two distinct ways: those affected or witnessing violence don't speak up because they have come to believe this practice is socially acceptable and they have no right or desire to prevent it. The other reason why violent incidents go unreported is because of the shame (personal and familial) and stigma that is often associated with survivors of sexual or physical violence and violence.

Child rights advocates in Samoa are adamant about tackling these practices and perceptions and underscore that religion or cultural beliefs and practices are not a justification that warrants causing harm to a child.

One such advocate is Supreme Court Judge Tafaomalo Leilani Tuala-Warren, who says the root of many of these issues stems from the somewhat erosion of the family unit which can be attributed to shifts around urban drift, economic empowerment and generational changes to family coping mechanisms. "Samoa has made many judicial strides in passing legislation and establishing a Family Court, a Family Violence Court and a Youth Court but all too often I see members from the same family appearing in these different courts. This points to a greater societal shift that is having a knock-on effect for younger generations. Family is the foundation, and we need to get that right."

There is broad consensus that increased focus and efforts around supporting the family unit are critical to ensure the protection of children, since, in spite of the challenges it faces, the family remains the primary unit of social and personal identity in the Pacific.

Another long-time child rights advocate in Samoa, and current sitting member on the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, Justice Vui Clarence J. Nelson, agrees with this sentiment. "As a judge, you often see the worst end of the spectrum and the grave impact violence can have on individuals, especially children. Too often, children who come from disruptive and dysfunctional families fall through the cracks and often themselves become both a survivor and perpetrator of violence. The establishment of the Olomanu Juvenile Centre was an important move in trying to give young offenders a second chance at a better life. Rates of re-offending are low so we can see that the targeted approach is working."

House of dreams in a life of terror

The House of Dreams is the name of the living quarters at the Campus of Hope shelter run by the SVSG in Apia © UNICEF Pacific/2016/Mephram

The Samoa Victims Support Group (SVSG) is another strong advocate for the protection of children and their rights. SVSG is a volunteer organisation founded in 2005 with the aim of creating a safe space for victims of violence. It is now regarded as a key player in the response and prevention of violence and abuse throughout Samoa. The large sprawling space for the Campus of Hope shelter and the downtown administrative office in Apia were both donated to the SVSG by the Samoan Government.

As well as the main shelter, which offers comprehensive care services, the SVSG has also expanded its support services to include a phone helpline, counselling, youth employment and education programmes, assistance with legal processes, men's advocacy groups and a growing network of SVSG representatives that operate at the village level. SVSG President Siliniu Lina Chang says of the organisation's evolution, "It wasn't easy at first because nobody wanted to talk about [violence]. But the more we keep hiding it, the worse it gets."

UNICEF funds three staff members within the SVSG and provides technical support around child protection training and procedures.

A chance to be great

Ruta, 19, has found her passion in cooking and transforms from a shy and reserved teenager into an extroverted confident trainee chef as soon as she enters the kitchen © UNICEF Pacific/2016/Mepham

Ruta, 19 years old, is dressed in her chef's uniform and speaks with intense pride about being the only female graduate of her culinary training course, which she participated in via SVSG's youth employment programme.

Ruta came to the SVSG aged 16 after being sexually abused and violently threatened by her uncle. Soon after, she received some additional upsetting information: that her mother had been raped by her own father (Ruta's grandfather) and fallen pregnant with Ruta.

These intense experiences shattered Ruta's confidence, sense of identity and her ability to trust. In finding her passion for cooking however, Ruta has been able to regain these lost abilities and begin to rebuild her self-belief.

She says, "I have never returned to my home, but I am stronger now and I have found support through my new colleagues who feel like family."

Shared cultures leading to collective learnings

With so many shared values and cultural patterns, the Pacific region prides itself on neighbouring nations working closely together to address common issues, otherwise known as South cooperation.

Lessons and skills have been shared across multiple disciplines, but this is especially true in the case of stemming the tide of violence against children and strengthening protection systems.

One such initiative is The Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme (PPDVP), a joint initiative of New Zealand Aid Programme, NZ Police, and the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) organisation also supported by The Australian Federal Police – Pacific Police Development Programme Regional (AFP PPDPR). The programme focuses on establishing and increasing capacity around domestic violence units as part the police service in several Pacific countries. Kiribati, Fiji and Samoa have all seen success with the programme and the improved visibility on domestic violence issues has helped instigate a shift in cultural norms and reiterate that domestic violence is a criminal offence that will not be tolerated.

Deputy Police Commissioner in Kiribati, Eeri Aritiera, notes the programme has been a positive way to encourage attitude shifts even within the police service, "It's none of my business' is not an ok attitude – we are no longer observers but need to be agents of change."

The South Pacific Council of Youth and Children's' Courts (SPCYCC) is another successful example of inter-Pacific knowledge and skills sharing, all the more so as youth justice is a new area for many countries. The council brings together youth and children's' court judges on an annual basis for capacity building workshops and presentations on lessons learned and legislative best practices.

The SVSG's success in Samoa has led to an expansion of its operation to New Zealand, Australia and soon Hawaii, providing culturally appropriate services to diaspora. Visitors to these new locations tend to be not only Samoan but from across the Pacific. Information sharing between the centres has led to refining programmes based on shared experiences and practices.

Sustaining the momentum

Two survivors of violence unite together to form a heart at the Campus of Hope in Apia, Samoa © UNICEF Pacific/2016/Mepham

Notable progress has been made in Samoa as it relates to strengthening child protection systems and underling the need to uphold children's rights more generally; establishment of the Youth Justice Court and Young Offenders Act, establishment of the juvenile centre, as well as recently reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva for the second time. More positive progress will come with the child protection and safety bill and the sex offenders' bill, both of which are currently in the process of legislative review.

Chief Executive Officer for Ministry of Women Community & Social Development, Fuimapoao Naea Beth Onesemo-Tuilaepa, says the objective is to create "an articulated child protection system bolstering recent legislative advances with community engagement and education. We need to focus on unpacking myths around cultural and religion mindsets, attitudes and beliefs in order to encourage positive and sustained behavioural changes."

She adds that this can be achieved by harnessing structures that are already in place such as village councils, community leader, faith-based groups and teachers, "If we don't have true community led improvements, we will continue to see the same issues."

For the tide of violence to turn in Samoa, both prevention and response measures are needed. Children deserve to grow up free from fear, pain and harm.

***Names of survivors of violence have been changed to protect their identity.**

The author

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HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING PROJECT

Donor Agency: Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Regional Rights Resource Team

Duration: February 2015

Summary: Human Rights training for SVSG Executive, staff and supporting partners was conducted by the RRRT. The training focused on unpacking the Family Safety Act 2013 which governs SVSG's work on violence against women and children.

HELPLINE PROJECT

Donor Agency: UN Women Pacific Regional Program to End Violence Against Women

Duration: April 2013 – September 2015

Summary: The Project focused on both the women survivors' ability to communicate the need for assistance to SVSG through an emergency Helpline as well as SVSG's ability to reach out to these women survivors through an established Community Alert System. There were two major components to the Project: 1) Establishing a Helpline giving women survivors increased access to support at all times; and 2) Establishing a Community Alert System in villages to provide women survivor immediate access to SVSG and its support services.

The 24-hour Helpline was established, co-sponsored by Digicel (Samoa) and Bluesky (Samoa). The Helpline created a whole new workload for SVSG. The community uses the Helpline to call in for a variety of matters. Children scared of their parents started calling. Parents called in for assistance with their children as they cannot seem to handle them. People called from the hospital for assistance with dealing with the to get appropriate treatment. Some called for assistance for children who are hospitalised and require medical evacuation assistance to go overseas in order to obtain the appropriate treatment. Others called for support in dealing with the Police in handling their matters. SVSG also received calls from those who witnessed

SVSG Projects 2010 to 2023

violence upon women and children in their communities. And then of course, SVSG received calls from women who were beaten up and running away from their partners and seeking refuge for themselves and their children. They have nowhere else that they feel they can be safe to go to. SVSG utilises its network of SVSG village representatives within each village as its Community Alert System.

Media:

https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2015/01/PacificFund_brief_Sept30.pdf

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2013/11/samoan-helpline-saves-lives>

SAMOA WOMEN SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMME (ECONOMIC)

Donor Agency: Canada and New Zealand

Duration: December 2013 – February 2014

Summary: The project aimed to empower women survivors of violence and women at risk, in rural Samoa with skills that would give them economic independence, as well as increase their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Out of total 530 women survivors of violence identified by SVSG from its casework database 2010-2012, it was estimated that at least 350 of these women survivors in rural Samoa would attend the program. The actual number was 430. Women at risk who attended the program amounts to 353 taking the total number of participants to 783 women survivors of violence and women at risk. By the end of the project, around 30% of the participants started their own businesses selling food stalls around the village and at the school canteen; delivering fabric materials to local shops; and making flower arrangements for churches.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES PROJECT

Donor Agency: UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women

Duration: October 2011 – October 2013

Summary: The project involved building a grassroots advocacy campaign to implement strategies at the village level to end violence against women. Part of the campaign's strategies included livelihood programs for village women to empower them and to form networks to combat violence in their community. According to the SVSG President, ***"A strong, proud and successful community does not tolerate any form of violence against women."*** SVSG was one of 22 organisations around the globe to have a project funded by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women in 2011. Selected from over 3,000 applicants worldwide, SVSG was humbled by this milestone achievement for Samoa as a whole. Around 500 registered SVSG Village Reps participated in this two-year project, putting into practice what they have learned from the Caritas Project of 2011. The project also further developed themselves as agents of SVSG in the village community.

Torch of Peace: The Stronger Communities approach saw church, village and government leaders taking on the responsibility to end violence in Samoa. This was evidenced by their embracing of the Torch of Peace, carried by women survivors as a symbol of hope throughout Upolu, Savaii and Manono-tai for 16 days. It was a normal Monday morning but at the end of the day, 10 December 2012 would be noted as one of the celebrations of history in the making for Samoa. This was when the final leg of the Torch of Peace journey culminated to this one last round, gathering supporters from Toamua to Taufusi, to Town Clock to Mulinuu and finally, to

SVSG Projects 2010 to 2023

the front of the Government Building for the closing ceremony of the 16 Days of Activism. For 16 days, SVSG had taken to the streets all over Samoa to encompass the whole of community in this peaceful proclamation of our 'Calling it ENOUGH', to domestic violence against women and children. And after 16 days, we believe that the message had been declared louder and clearer thanks to our community in solidarity.

One would think that we are taken back to the celebration of our nation's 50th Anniversary as we see supporters from all facets of the community crowding the streets, some alongside the torch, some following the torch, and many more going before the torch to capture this unique moment. All our families, friends and supporting partners along the way came out to take part in passing the message along to the Judiciary, the Parliament and finally to the Government. The highlight was the final leg of the journey from the Court House to the Government Building where we saw the Judiciary lead by Honorable Chief Justice Pate Tiavaasue Falefatu Sapolu receiving the torch and congratulated SVSG for the initiative "I acknowledged and congratulated Samoa Victim Support for sending this message out to the whole of Samoa and may the people of Samoa learn to stop this increasing crime of violence against women and children of Samoa." From there, CEO of the Ministry of Justice passed the torch on to the Attorney General's Office, to the Law Society, to Brenda Heather-Latu, Kosi Latu of SPREP and to Chad Berbert, Charge de Affaires of the US Embassy.

With SVSG's work with UN Women through a two-year project to combat violence against women, UN Women Representative Ms Mele Maualaivao took the message across to Masiifo Filifilia Tamasese who represented the mothers of Samoa in delivering a request to Government as part of this peaceful process. "I am so happy to present this "TORCH OF PEACE" to the Hon. Prime Minister with the request to the Govt. to please support the move to stop violence against women and children of Samoa," Afioga Filifilia said in tears. "We have to stop it before it's too late, women of Samoa have a very important role in the development of Samoa's future," she concluded. And always one not to mix too many words, Hon. Prime Minister Tuilaepa Lufesolia Dr Sailele Malielegaioi, acknowledged that "It's a special time of the year as this 16 Days of Activism concluded. I want to urge all men to stop these animal actions you are doing to your children and wives and also to women to stop abusing the children of Samoa, they are the future of the country."

And following dances and entertainments by villages that travelled specifically for this occasion, SVSG President again reiterated the success of this peaceful message being each and everyone's responsibility to live it within our families, our villages and our churches in our daily lives. As only then would we be able to say that we have conquered this evil from invading the security of our homes, specifically our dear mothers and children.

CHANGING LEGISLATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (CLVAW) PROJECT

Donor Agency: Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) in Fiji

Duration: May – June 2011

Summary: SVSG had been working in conjunction with the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development under the CLVAW Project to further empower SVSG village reps on human rights and legal literacy under this project.

VILLAGE RESPONSE PROJECT

Donor Agency: Caritas New Zealand

Duration: December 2010 – December 2011

Summary: This project aimed to:

- improve the skills of the SVSG staff and representatives in responding to domestic violence and sexual abuse cases in the 166 villages in Samoa.
- provide support and crisis care accessible to at least 1000 community members by establishing support networks and safe houses in 166 villages.
- conduct monitoring and proper documentation of sexual crimes and domestic violence cases.

Close to 500 SVSG village reps received training on the basic SVSG support services under the Village Response Project. These village reps have been instrumental in referring cases to the main office, assisting Police and the Attorney General in locating witnesses for court cases, as well as accompanying victims to the main office for shelter assistances. Two financial assistances from the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme (PPDVP) catered firstly for the SVSG Village Reps retreat in Savaii to further develop their understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and secondly, to finance working bags and stationery supplies for the Reps.

COMMUNITY LEGAL INFORMATION PROJECT

Donor Agency: Canada New Zealand

Duration: October 2010 – June 2011

Summary: This project provided legal information to those groups in Samoa who have economic, social or cultural disadvantages. There were 11 topics (in English and Samoan) included in the information brochures: Assault, Domestic Violence, Theft, Rape & Indecent Acts, Going to Court, Sexual Harassment, Maintenance, Dealing with Debt, Divorce & Family, Young Offenders, and Supporting Victims of Sexual Crimes.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGN AGAINST RAPE & INDECENT ACTS: TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Donor Agency: Government of Samoa

Duration: April – September 2010

Summary: The project aimed to minimise rape and indecent acts affecting young people. It brought the nation together by including Government leaders, church leaders, diplomatic corps, Alii ma Faipule, villages, schools, youth, and the business Community. The awareness campaign represents an important shift away from a silent acceptance of gender-based violence and sexual crimes (which has been apparent in Samoa in the past) towards vocal and visual community solidarity and action. As a result of the campaign, people's minds about the acceptance of gender-based violence in Samoa as the norm began to change. Our people started to speak out and report sexual crimes.