



Media release

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NEW REPORT SHOWS CRITICAL UNDERINVESTMENT IN PACIFIC CHILDREN'S SAFETY AND PROTECTION

Children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste experience shockingly high levels of physical, emotional and sexual violence and not enough is being done to address this, according to a new report released today.

Unseen, Unsafe: The Underinvestment in Ending Violence Against Children in the Pacific and Timor-Leste shows that over 70 percent or 4 million children across eight Pacific countries experience violent discipline at home, including 2.8 million (75 percent of the child population) in Papua New Guinea.

Analysis of existing research, conducted by child-focused NGOs – Save the Children, World Vision, Plan International and ChildFund – found that:

- 1 in 4 adolescent girls aged 15-19 experienced physical violence, and 1 in 10 sexual violence;
- In Papua New Guinea, more than half of all sexual violence cases referred to medical clinics in Port Moresby and Tari were against children; and
- In Papua New Guinea, 27 per cent of parents or carers reported beating their children “over and over as hard as they could”.

“The statistics in the report make for distressing reading,” said Save the Children NZ CEO Heidi Coetzee, “and show the extent of the complex issue we’re facing. Violence against children is always wrong and often has a lifelong impact on physical, cognitive and social development.

“The fundamental principle of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to leave no one behind. Working to prevent violence and sustain peace for children, including by prioritising action on SDG 16, is crucial to progress all other SDGs and build healthier, safer and prosperous societies.”

The report found that in 2015-17, only a tiny fraction of Official Development Assistance (ODA) by major donors to the Pacific and Timor-Leste, including New Zealand, was spent on activities targeted at ending violence against children. The NGOs are calling on the New Zealand Government to increase ODA allocations specifically focused on ending violence against children to at least 1.5% of total ODA budget by 2022.

World Vision National Director Grant Bayldon said, “It’s clear that more targeted aid expenditure on ending violence against children is needed to really address this challenge.

“We are joining with other child-focussed NGOs in Australia and New Zealand to call on our respective Governments to prioritise ending family and sexual violence in the Pacific through our aid programmes. Our Pacific partners need much more support than they currently receive.

“Every child should be free to play and learn and just be a kid without fear of violence. If we’re serious about that we need to make changes now.”

ChildFund New Zealand CEO Paul Brown said, “It’s imperative that governments allocate additional resources for prevention and response measures and service provision in order to end violence against children, as per Target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).”

“Research show that the estimated economic costs of physical, psychological and sexual violence against children ranges between 3% and 8% of global GDP. So, while violence against children is harmful to children, it is also harmful to all of society and has significant negative financial impacts.”

Vivien Maidaborn, Executive Director UNICEF New Zealand said, “At community levels we are seeing an increase in the number of grassroots organisations offering interventions that prevent and respond to family and sexual violence. These include programmes to change cultural norms in rural communities, school education programmes which focus on respectful relationships, and the establishment of safe houses for women and children. However, there is still much to be done.

“It's time to put children at the heart of all of New Zealand’s development programmes and play an active role in supporting our Pacific neighbours to reduce violence against children with policies and resources that prioritise child protection and child rights.”

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For a copy of the full report or for interviews please call: Gabriel Thomas, Media Advisor at World Vision NZ, 021 360 098