Nossal Institute for Global Health and Macquarie University

Regional Child Protection Situational Analysis – Pacific

Final report

29 December 2023

Acknowledgements

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- Dolores Devesi, Prem Singh Shintan, Keryn Banks, Anna Lazar and Fiona Callen from SC New Zealand, and Karen Flanagan and Dr Betty Barkha from SC Australia.

The Situational Analysis was designed by the Nossal Institute and Macquarie University team, with significant input from the in-country researchers and the SC staff noted above. Researchers in each country independently conducted primary data collection. Data were analysed by the Nossal Institute team, with input from the in-country researchers.

Dr Holly Doel Mackaway from Macquarie University designed and guided the child-led research, analysed the data and authored a separate report. Iris Low played a significant role in overseeing the conduct of child-led research in both Fiji and the Solomon Islands.

The report would not have been possible without the time and perspectives shared by stakeholders, caregivers and children for this and past studies across each of the countries.

Suggested citation: Katherine Gilbert and Holly Doel Mackaway (joint first authors), Minhui Law, Cormac Mercer, Iris Low, Katrina Ma'u Fatiaki, Abel Yamba, Ruth Maetala and Anne Pakoa (2023) 'Regional Child Protection Situation Analysis,' Save the Children New Zealand, Wellington.

Contents

Acronyms and definitions

CSEC	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DSW	Department of Social Welfare (Fiji)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FWCC	Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
GSHS	Global School based Student Health Survey (WHO)
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersect
LPA	*Lukautim Pikinini Act* (Papua New Guinea)
MEHRD	Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (Solomon Islands)
MHMS	Ministry of Health and Medical Services (Solomon Islands)
MICS	Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey
MWCSP	Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (Fiji), formerly the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation
MWYCFA	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (Solomon Islands)
NGO	Non-government organisation
OCFS	Office of Child and Family Services (PNG)
ODPP	Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (Fiji)
PNG	Papua New Guinea
SI	Solomon Islands
SC	Save the Children
SWD	Social Welfare Division (Solomon Islands)
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

The Nossal Institute for Global Health, School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, together with Macquarie University and in-country research collaborators, was commissioned by Save the Children (SC) to undertake a regional situational analysis of child protection systems in Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

The aim of the situational analysis was to understand recent changes to the socio-ecological context in which violence against children occurs in five Pacific countries and to suggest potential strategies for SC to strengthen child protection systems, particularly at the community level.

This report presents data from a literature review, as well as primary research in each country. This includes engagement with over:

- 52 child protection stakeholders in interviews and 64 in online surveys;
- 179 caregivers in focus group discussions and 148 in online surveys; and
- 153 children aged between 8-16 years in focus group discussions (including child led research in Fiji and Solomon Islands) and 39 in online surveys.

Research question 1: Nature and extent of violence

1.1 Prevalence and nature of violence

Violence is a common experience of childhood across the five Pacific countries considered in this analysis. Over 80% of stakeholders responding to the online survey for this situational analysis perceived that emotional (87%), physical (82%) and sexual violence (87%) were significantly increasing or increasing in their country. Similarly, caregivers and adolescents expressed concern regarding violence against children, in particular, emotional, physical and sexual violence that children experience in the home, school and community. In addition, the online setting ranked the least safe for children by both caregivers and children in all countries with a sufficient sample size for the online surveys (Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu).

Data from each of the countries based on the most recent household survey (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Papua New Guinea National Statistical Office, 2019; Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017; Tonga Statistics Department, 2020; Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014) show:

- Over 80% of children experience violent discipline by their caregivers in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, higher than the global average of 74% (UNICEF, 2023b), with Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu having the highest rates across 40 countries in the Asia Pacific (Kennedy et al., 2020).
- Just under 4 in 5 adolescent girls (78%) aged 15-19 years in the Solomon Islands believe a husband is justified in hitting his partner on one or more grounds, the highest rates across 40 countries in the Asia Pacific (Kennedy et al., 2020), with the same figure being 69% in PNG, 56% In Vanuatu, 31% in Tonga and 20% in Fiji.
- Over 50% of adolescents experienced bullying in the past month in the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, with the Solomon Islands having the highest rates across 40 countries in the Asia Pacific region (although data are dated) (Kennedy et al., 2020). The rates in Fiji are lower, below 30% for both boys and girls.
- Over 1 in 4 girls in PNG, 1 in 5 girls in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, 1 in 10 girls in Tonga, and 1 in 25 girls in Fiji are married before 18 years, compared to 1 in 20 boys, with rates of child marriage before 15 and 18 years in PNG unchanged since 1993 (UNICEF, 2022).
- Almost half of boys and girls in the Solomon Islands aged 5-17 years are engaged in child labour, the highest rates across 40 countries in the Asia Pacific region (Kennedy et al., 2020).

There are limited data for PNG on the above and almost no trend prevalence data for any country across the region – hence the importance of stakeholder perspectives on trends noted above. Administrative data on reports on violence against children is emerging as child protection information systems strengthen. In Fiji, reports of child abuse and neglect compiled for this analysis almost tripled between 2014 and 2022. This could reflect both increased awareness of and trust in reporting systems and/or prevalence.

1.2 Drivers of violence

The literature review identified a number of interrelated structural drivers of violence, which were confirmed by the primary research. The primary driver across all countries considered in this analysis is socio-cultural and religious norms and practices regarding gender and violence, which permit men's and boy's violence against women and children, creating cycles of violence which also facilitates women's violence against children, and limit children's reporting. Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors on Pacific economies and poverty, as well as continuing trends with respect to increasing migration (including urbanisation), climate change impacts and digitisation, the evidence presented in this report suggests that violence against children has likely increased, consistent with stakeholder perspectives noted above. Although there is an absence of literature on the impact of colonisation as a driver of violence against children, recent global literature, as well as evidence from several countries included in this analysis suggest that it led to fundamental changes with respect to gender norms and practices, and political and economic structures, that initiated cycles of violence against children.

The relationships between these drivers and violence against children revealed in this situational analysis across the five countries are shown in black arrows in Figure 1 below, with red arrows noting drivers that have a direct impact on violence against children. There is significant interaction between each of the drivers – for example gender norms shape children's experience of online (for example, the nature of pornography and the responses to it), the implications of poverty for children (for example, child marriage) and children's experience of migration. Evidence of climate change as a driver of violence against children emerged most strongly in Solomon Islands where it acted both to exacerbate both poverty and migration, and as noted above, recent global suggests a number of ways in which colonialism has exacerbated gender-based violence, which are consistent with the findings of this situational analysis, and reflected in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Drivers of violence against children in Pacific Island countries (Source: authors)
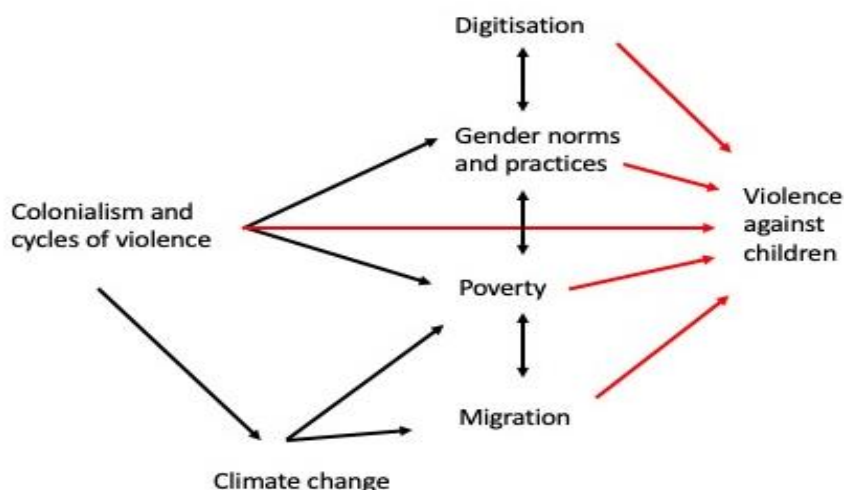
1.3 Risk and protective factors

While violence in childhood was a generalised experience for both boys and girls, the literature review identified a number of risk factors at the individual or household level that were confirmed by the primary data collection. Figure 2 shows the extent to which adolescents and caregivers agreed that factors make

children much less safe or less safe to violence. The most significant risk factors across the countries in the quantitative and qualitative data were:

- Children experiencing family violence;

- Children living away from one or both parents (including in a single-parent family);

- Children of caregivers who use alcohol and other drugs;

- Children who are not in school; and

- Children with a disability;

- Being female, gender and sexual diversity.

Age and location (rural and urban) had mixed effects, reflecting different experiences of children across the life course and in different settings.

Protective factors identified include wealth and caregiver tertiary education, as well as positive parenting.

Figure 2: Adolescent (N=33) and Caregiver (N=101) perspectives on factors that increase risk or protection for children from violence
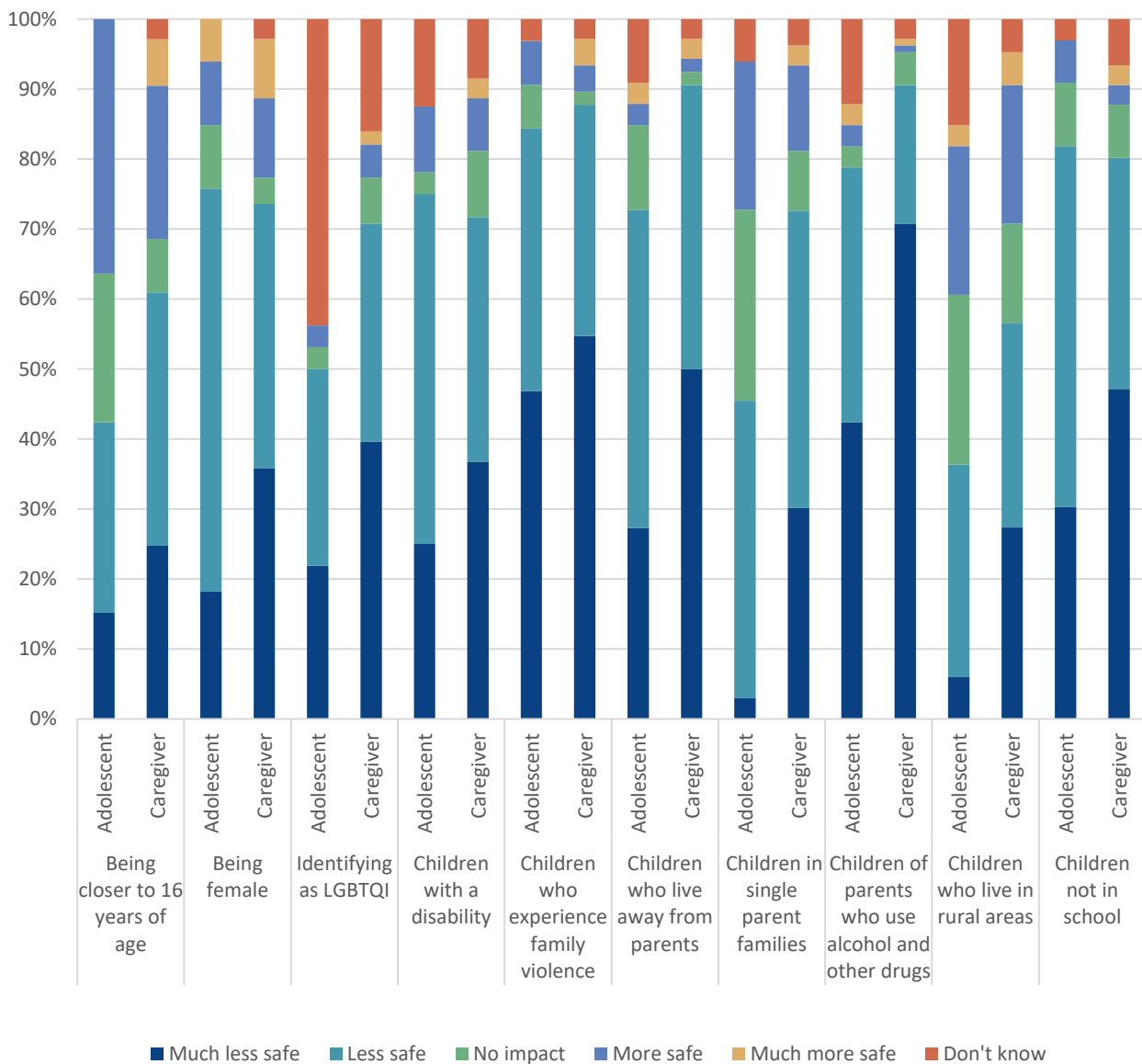
Research question 2: Strengths and gaps in child protection systems

All countries included in this analysis have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and have made significant progress over the past 10-15 years in strengthening the legislative frameworks. In Fiji, PNG and Solomon Islands, there is a relatively good level of legislative framework for care and protection, with some gaps being addressed, including, for example, the development of the National CSG Policy together with the review of the Care and Protection Bill in Fiji. Vanuatu is developing a Child Protection Bill (alongside other reforms), and Tonga is in the early stages of developing a legislative framework for its child protection system (although it is first waiting for Cabinet approval of its Child Protection Policy).

Key priorities for future legislative reform include advocating for the prohibition of corporal punishment in the home and all other settings, which currently remains legal or legally ambiguous in all of the countries in this situational analysis, as well as lifting the age for child marriage and/or removing exceptions in PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Fiji and Solomon Islands – the second and third largest countries in this analysis - also currently lack a child protection policy to prioritise and drive reform. Strong national policies with government commitment to increasing the allocation of resources to the sector are needed to implement existing legislation, policy and governance reforms.

In all countries, the priorities lie with increasing both financial and human resources available in emerging child protection services, with child protection government agencies in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu receiving less than 0.06% of the total government budget in 2023. Stakeholders in all countries called for greater investment in the number and quality of child protection officers, as well as additional training and/or guidelines for police to facilitate reporting. While strengthening formal child protection tertiary services, countries are working to improve primary prevention and response within the health and education sectors, as well as linkages between formal services and community-based action.

Community-based mechanisms for responding to violence against children include both indigenous and traditional approaches to reconciliation, as well as the establishment of child protection focal points, volunteers or committees that seek to link to formal response services. These approaches show promise as part of broader community-based primary prevention programs that seek to address socio-cultural and religious norms regarding gender and violence. There is yet minimal evidence on the sustainability efforts to establish community level focal points, volunteers or committees outside of program timeframes, and warrants further research as existing programs evolve. Program evaluation has found that strengthening linkages between community-based mechanisms and formal services at the sub-national level requires investment both at the community level and in service delivery.

Data gathered in this situational analysis suggest that traditional reconciliation processes are the primary response mechanism in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with the reach of formal services still limited. Concern has been raised over the extent to which these practices take into account women's and children's voices, the best interest of the child and the imperative to prevent further violence. In Fiji, reconciliation practices (*bulubulu*) are also common, yet there is a greater reach of formal services, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has discouraged traditional leaders from using such mechanisms for cases involving violence against children and encouraged them to use the formal justice system.

Significant work is taking place across the Pacific with respect to primary prevention at both the community level and through religious and sporting organisations, with demonstrated effectiveness at addressing knowledge, attitudes and practices at the individual level during the lifespan of programs. To expand the impact of such programs, there is a need to develop coordinated national strategies with funding to support implementation, as well as a commitment to mutual accountability and shared learning, and linkages both across child protection partners and with efforts to prevent violence against women.

Research question 3: Recommendations to Save the Children

Recommendations are included in each country chapter, which articulates suggested actions to be taken by SC in its own programming, SC and government partners, and SC and other actors in each context. Across the five countries, the findings of the situational analysis point to a need to significantly increase efforts at all levels of the child protection system to realise commitments made by governments, SC and other child protection actors to end violence against children. This will not be possible without government leadership, including by prioritising relevant legislative and policy reform, by securing a long-term increase in financing for the child protection system and by stewarding formal and community-based prevention and response services.

Moreover, given the evidence of the role of colonialism, poverty, migration and climate change in driving violence against children in the Pacific, global child protection partners – including donors – also have a key role in addressing violence against children, including by supporting locally led initiatives that are aligned with government strategy, through long-term funding.

While specific country chapters highlight a range of recommendations for the specific country context, three key themes emerged with respect to potential recommendations for Save the Children, governments, and other child protection partners:

1. Importance of child participation within the child protection system

- Engage with children, including children with disability, children with diversity with respect to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics and children with lived experience of violence, within the process of strengthening the child protection system and in its ongoing governance at the national, district and community level.

2. Strengthen primary prevention, community-based programs, linking prevention of violence against women and children

- Engage with children and caregivers through a comprehensive, evidence-based and long-term strategy for primary prevention based on evidence of what is working in each context. Such programs should address the gendered nature of violence against children, linking and potentially integrating, where appropriate, efforts for the primary prevention of violence against women and children and integrating online safety for children and adults. Advocate with governments and donors for multi-year and core funding to NGOs/CSOs.

- Document principles to guide community-based child protection mechanisms – define the context in which such mechanisms are appropriate, basic principles governing the use of such mechanisms, including when referral to formal services is necessary, and the involvement of women and children in decision-making regarding dispute resolution.

3. Advocate with national level institutions in primary prevention and response

- Advocate for the prohibition of the use of violent discipline in all settings and marriage before 18 years. Where this emerges, support child-led campaigns.

- Advocate for budget targets to establish and appropriate staff in the child protection response services and pursue appropriate opportunities to increase pre-and in-service training.

1. Introduction

The Nossal Institute for Global Health, in the School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, together with Macquarie University and in-country research collaborators, was commissioned by Save the Children (SC) to undertake a regional situational analysis of child protection systems in Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. The study was guided by a Reference Group comprising SC staff across five countries and the Australian and New Zealand offices.

This draft report presents the aims and objectives (Section 2) and methodology (Section 3), summarises the regional literature review (Section 4), and presents the findings by country (Sections 5-9).

2. Aims, objectives and research questions

Drawing on the literature review and through a series of discussions in February – March 2023, with input from in-country researchers, the Reference Group revised the research questions set out below. The aims and objectives were subsequently revised to reflect the priorities in the questions.

The research aims to understand recent changes to the socio-ecological context in which violence against children occurs in five Pacific countries and to suggest potential strategies for SC to strengthen child protection systems in preventing and responding to violence, particularly at the community level.

Drawing on this aim, the objectives of the research are to understand:

(i)   The nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online, with a focus on child marriage and child sexual abuse;

(ii)   The changes to these risks brought about by climate change, digitisation and COVID-19;

(iii)   The extent to which formal child protection systems have been strengthened through funding, staffing and training to adapt to these changes;

(iv)   The opportunity to strengthen child protection systems, with a focus on the community level, and how SC may pursue these priorities in its programming and advocacy; and

(v)   The extent to which gender, age, disability and other factors serve as risk and protective factors and how this can be taken into account in the above.

Changes will be explored over the past five years, and children aged 6-16 years will be the focus of the research.

RQ1. What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online?

> 1.1 How are recent factors, including climate change, digitisation, and COVID-19, changing the dynamics and behaviours that drive such violence in the home, school, community, and online?

> 1.2 How are the risks and protective factors associated with such violence, including but not limited to gender, disability, and age, changing?

RQ 2. What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues studied in this research?

> 2.1 Has funding and staffing changed to enable formal child protection services to respond to the last five years' changing context?

> 2.2 Are there past, existing or emerging approaches, including kastom, traditional or religious approaches, to learn from?

> 2.3 What is needed to support the emergence of and sustain such approaches?

RQ 3. What ideas do key stakeholders suggest for future child protection programming and advocacy work at the national, provincial and community levels?

    3.1 Are there specific recommendations for protecting girls and children with disabilities?

3. Methodology

3.1 Conceptual framework

Given our aim of informing SC's future programming and advocacy strategies, we drew on the version of the socio-ecological model, which is used as the basis for SC's approach to child protection system strengthening (shown below in Figure 3) to guide the situational analysis.

Figure 3: Socio-ecological model for SC's approach to strengthening child protection systems (Source: Save the Children (2019))
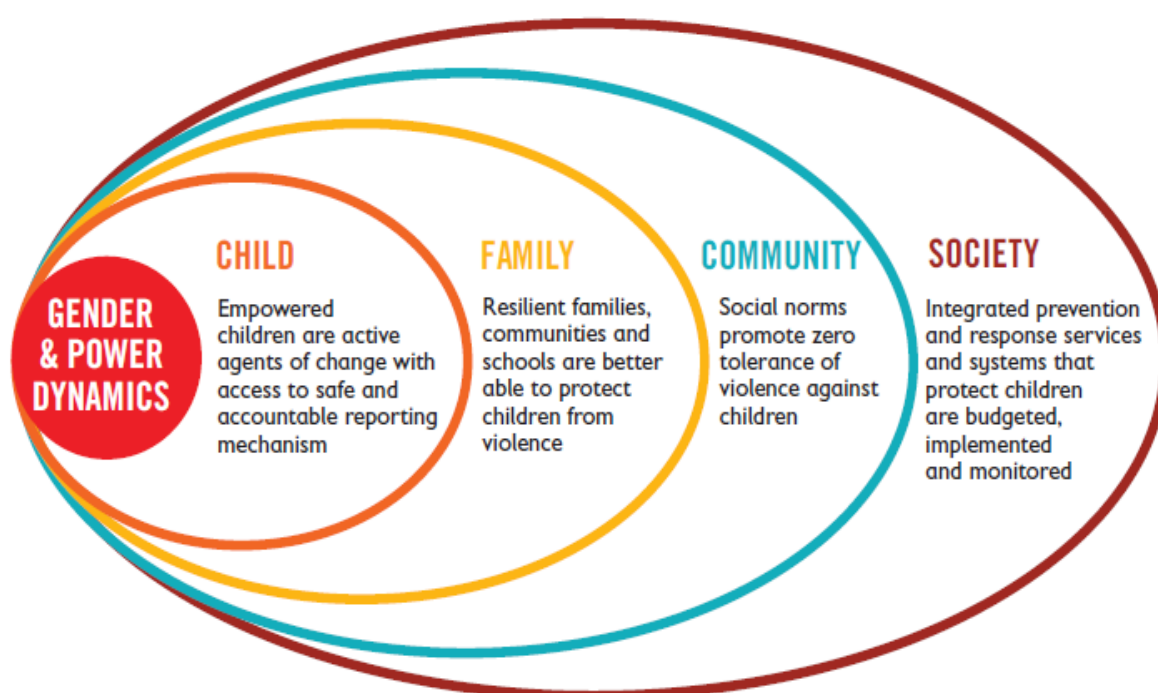
The socio-ecological model has significantly influenced child protection scholarship, including recent definitions of child protection systems (or the protective environment), which have been defined jointly by SC and UNICEF as:

> *Certain formal and informal structures, functions and capacities that have been assembled to prevent and respond to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of children... It also includes different actors – children, families, communities, those working at subnational or national level and those working internationally. Most important are the relationships and interactions between and among these components and these actors within the system. It is the outcomes of these interactions that comprise the system. (UNICEF et al., 2013).*

As per this definition, child protection systems include actions related to primary prevention (population level), secondary prevention (focus on vulnerable communities) and tertiary response (child protection services). Child protection services are thus one part of the child protection system, with specific responsibility for responding to reports of violence against children (UNICEF, 2021). They are often a standalone service, with links for response and referral purposes to the education, health and justice systems.

The socio-ecological model enables consideration of both structural drivers and risk and protective factors which underlie the prevalence and patterns of violence against children. We will use the following definitions:

(vi) **Drivers:** socio-cultural norms and practices; poverty and food insecurity; migration, including of labour to and from the Pacific; climate change; digitisation; and COVID-19.

(vii) **Risk and protective factors:** age; gender; sexuality; disability status; location (urban/rural); school status; living at home/away from parents; living in two-parent/single-parent family; living with their parents and extended family; parental use of alcohol and other drugs; and exposure to family violence.

3.2 Methods for literature review

We took an exploratory approach to the literature review and summarised the evidence in relation to each research question. The literature review encompassed a review of both academic and grey literature, including reports from UN bodies and NGOs working in the Pacific. The review also included recent government legislation, policy, program and budget documents not considered in recent literature. The search strategy included:

- Search of academic literature: Search of Scopus – country name, child* and violence* or protect* (with the asterisk including all possible endings of those terms) over the past 10 years (since 2013);

- Grey literature (including child protection programming documents), shared by SC, obtained through searching child protection partner websites and snowballing of relevant references;

- Databases/reports of household surveys: As suggested in the Terms of Reference (TOR), we reviewed global and regional databases with relevant data on violence against children to review the profiles of at-risk and affected children across the five countries by looking at data on violence against children by gender, location, age and where possible, disability; and

- Government budget and official development assistance data: reviewed to assess trends in funding for child protection.

Reports were included if they were focused on the determinants, prevalence or consequences of violence against children in one of the five countries, described the child protection formal or community systems, or included monitoring or evaluation of programs to prevent or respond to such violence. Relevant data were extracted from the documents in Microsoft Word in accordance with the research questions.

3.3 Methods for data collection and analysis

The literature review informed the development of methods for primary data collection. These included, as shown in Table 1, online surveys, interviews with child protection stakeholders, focus group discussions with caregivers and children, with child-led research conducted in Fiji and the Solomon Islands. The research design, fully described in the Inception Report, varied between countries based on complementary research projects taking place at the same time. Ethics approval was obtained from SC's ethics review process in the United States and the Solomon Islands Health Research and Ethics Review Board. Data from the literature review and the different primary sources were triangulated to present country reports.

3.4 Limitations

There were a number of limitations to the situational analysis:

1. The breadth of the research questions means that the depth of the data is limited in some key areas. Researchers and survey respondents noted that the interviews and surveys were too long, minimising in-depth discussion and leading to a drop-off in survey responses;

2. The breadth of the study design is also reflected in small sample sizes across a broad range of respondents, although stakeholders likely represent a large proportion of the workforce;

3. Stakeholder availability was limited in some contexts, as well as challenges with remote supervision of research; and

4. The division in the research team between data collection and analysis may lead to errors in interpretation, which was mitigated in design through holding stakeholder validation workshops. The efficacy of the stakeholder validation workshops in mitigating this risk were in themselves constrained by limited participation amongst SC staff and stakeholders.

Table 1: Methods for data collection and sample size achieved against target (n)

	Fiji	SLB	PNG	Tonga	Vanuatu
Literature review	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Online survey with formal stakeholders (self-administered)	24 (15) *16 F; 6 M; 2 other*	20 (15) *8 F; 12 M*	7 (15)*	16 (15) *11 F; 5 M*	4 (15)*
Online survey with caregivers (self-administered)	60 (20) *48 F; 9 M; 1 other; missing 2*	15 (20) *5 F; 10 M*	1 (20)*	28 (20) *25 F; 3 M*	45 (20) *29 F; 14 M; 2 other*
Online survey with adolescents (self-administered/facilitated)	19 (20) *12 F; 7 M*	1 (20)*	1 (20)*	20 *13 F; 7 M*	N/A
Interviews with CP stakeholders at the national level	13 (10) *11 F; 2 M*	8 (10) *6 F; 2 M*	5 (5) *4 F; 1 M*	8 (5) *5 F; 3 M*	4 (10) *3 F; 1 M*
Interview CP stakeholders at the subnational level	3 (5) *1 F; 2 M*	3 (5) *0 F; 3 M*	5 (5) *5 F; 0 M*	2 (5) *2 F; 0 M*	1 (5) *1 F; 0 M*
FGD with parents and other caregivers of children 6-16 years (M/F or mixed)	4 (4) *16 F; 14 M*	4 (4) *13 F; 16 M*	2 (4) *19 F; 14 M*	10 (4) *39 F; 13 M*	3 (4) *17 F; 18 M*
Child-led FGD with children aged 8-11 (mixed)	2 (2) *10 F; 10 M*	2 (2) *10 F; 8 M*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Child-led FGD with adolescents aged 12-16 (M/F)	4 (4) *14 F; 13 M*	4 (4) *15 F; 14 M*	N/A	N/A	N/A
Adult led FGD with children aged 8-11 (mixed)	N/A	N/A	2 (2) *11 F ; 9 M*	1 (2) *4 F; 3 M*	N/A
Adult-led FGD with adolescents aged 12-16 (M/F or mixed)	N/A	N/A	3 (4) *10 F; 10 M*	2 (4) *6 F; 6 M*	N/A
Sites for primary data collection in addition to the capital city	Central division	Malaita	East Sepik		Shefa

* Sample size not considered sufficient for analysis – qualitative data has been used

4. Summary literature review

RQ1 What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online?

Recent research in the Pacific has described the ways in which "forms of violence permeate all spaces" in children's lives, including homes, schools and communities (Feinstein et al., 2022; Langridge et al., 2021; Naughton-Watt et al., 2023, p. 9). The five countries that form part of this situational analysis represent the highest rates of violent discipline, child labour and bullying in the Asia-Pacific region (Kennedy et al., 2020), according to household and school-based survey data, which is demonstrated below in Figure 4 and Table 2.

In the home, both girls and boys are subject to emotional and physical violence as a form of discipline from their caregivers and, in some contexts, older siblings. Data for all countries, except PNG, on the use of violent discipline, are presented in Figure 4, ranging from 81% in Fiji to 87% in Tonga, which is higher than the global average across 92 countries of 74% (UNICEF, 2023). Data show caregiver use of violent discipline is slightly greater amongst boys in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Tonga (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017; Tonga Statistics Department, 2020). With respect to location, data also show caregiver use of violent discipline is slightly greater amongst children in rural areas compared to urban areas (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017; Tonga Statistics Department, 2020; Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014).

With respect to sexual violence, data from the prevalence studies on violence against women and girls show that between 25-35% of girls aged 15-19 years have experienced physical and sexual violence in the last 12 months, and between 8-37% of girls have experienced sexual abuse before 15 years of age across the five countries (WHO, 2023). Country-level data is shown in Table 2.

Data from the Global School Health Survey, shown in Figure 4, show half of students aged 13-15 years in Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu report experiencing bullying in the last month, higher than the global average (WHO, 2011-2017). The rates are slightly lower in Fiji, with under 30% of girls and boys reporting bullying. There are slightly higher rates of bullying amongst boys compared to girls in all countries except the Solomon Islands. There is limited data related to violence experienced by children online.

RQ1.1 How are recent factors, including climate change, digitisation and COVID-19, changing the dynamics and behaviours that drive such violence occurring in the home, school, community and online?

Research on violence against children has found that the prevalence and nature of violence within communities are "intimately connected" to the combination of broader institutional and structural factors or drivers in operation within a community at a given time, which creates the "...forms of harm that create the conditions in which violence occurs" (Maternowska et al., 2020, p. 143).

The impacts of colonisation

The colonisation of Pacific Island nations by Europeans, beginning in the 19th century, had enduring and ongoing impacts in Fiji, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Recent global research has pointed to the association between high rates of violence against women and the processes of colonisation: countries which were colonised are 50 times more likely to have a high prevalence of violence against women (Brown et al., 2023).

The envisaged pathways between colonisation and violence against women include the imposition of "patriarchal beliefs that devalue women;" the creation of "structural inequities", including political and economic relations, and enabling "intergenerational trauma" (Brown et al., 2023). Given the interconnections between violence against women and children with respect to the experience of IPV amongst girls aged 15-19 years, the co-occurrence of violence against women and children in households,

their consequences across the life course and their shared risk and protective factors (Fulu et al., 2017; UNICEF & UNFPA, 2015), colonialisation and its complex impacts of socio-cultural norms and practices and political and economic structures, is likely to have had a similar impact on pathways associated with violence against children in the Pacific.

Socio-cultural norms

The influence of gender on violence against children in the Pacific is evident in variations in the prevalence of different forms of violence against boys and girls, particularly during adolescence (Kennedy et al., 2020). Socio-cultural and religious norms and practices set different standards of behaviour or roles for men and women, including in relation to the use of violence and sex and sexuality, and are referred to as gender norms. Evidence suggests that they are a significant driver of violence against women and children at both the global level and in the Pacific (Fulu et al., 2017; Mannell et al., 2022) and are reflected in women's acceptance of violence against women in the household across each of the five countries, which range from 24% in Fiji to 77% in Solomon Islands (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017). Over half of caregivers in Fiji (54% women and 60% men) think that a child needs to be physically punished (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Poverty

Globally, socio-economic status is a central determinant of women's and men's use of violence against children in the home (Fulu et al., 2017; Maternowska et al., 2020) and operationalises vulnerabilities in schools and workplaces. Jewkes (2002) found that it is difficult to determine risk groups for violence against children, however, "...poverty is the exception." Poverty leads to additional household stress, impacting family relationships, particularly for men who see their role as the breadwinner (Masta, 2021), and being associated with violent parenting in PNG (Feinstein et al., 2022).

Poverty often necessitates (i) children work to afford essential items such as food or assist with school fees, which may have protection risks if the work is unsafe and/or interferes with their schooling; (ii) children leave schooling; and/or (iii) children or their parents migrating for schooling or paid work also creating protection risks (ILO & IPEC, 2010, 2011). Household poverty is a gendered experience, with girls at greater risk of child marriage (Burn & Evenhuis, 2014) and work in riskier settings (e.g., as domestic workers), which adds vulnerability to commercial and sexual exploitation, as well as the potential of child trafficking (Davy & Tppou, 2022; ILO, 2014; Kumar, 2020; Singh, 2020).

Migration

Across the Pacific Islands, internal migration of parents and/or children occurs in the pursuit of economic and/or educational opportunities in urban centres, tourist centres or places of economic activity, such as mines, logging or tourism. In addition, the migration of children away from their biological parents to live with an extended family is common across the Pacific and a risk for child protection (Sheehan, 2021). Sudden changes in home and community dynamics can pose an increased risk of violence. Further, when placed in a context reflecting a 'new family constellation', children can be at greater risk of exposure to violence, especially when combined with inadequate integration within the specific community (Maternowska et al., 2020, p. 146). For example, a 2019 Study into the Trafficking of Children in Fiji for Sexual Exploitation found that most child participants engaged in commercial sexual exploitation were living with one parent or with relatives/extended family (Fatiaki, 2019).

Climate change

Each country considered in this situational analysis is listed in the top fifteen countries in the World Risk Report with respect to vulnerability to disasters and climate change (Behlert, 2021). The vulnerability of Pacific Island countries to rapid, slow-onset and conflict-driven climate change events, and resulting short or long-term displacement, is clear. There are a number of pathways through which climate change may

exacerbate violence against children, including reduced livelihoods, relocation of gardens and water sources further away from villages, and displacement and migration arising from increased climate-related emergencies and sea level rise. For example, following major flooding in Fiji in 2012, it was found that the economic burden on families as a result of displacement had resulted in children being kept home from school to care for younger siblings and/or to earn money at night through sex work (UN Women, 2013). In the longer term, displacement may lead to tensions or local conflicts over land, with embedded gender dynamics. For example, in PNG, displacement has led to increasing intercommunal tensions "leading to more PNG women and girls facing 'sorcery' accusations from men in an attempt to psychologically coerce them into forced labour or sex trafficking" (U.S Department of State, 2022, p. 440).

Digitisation

To date, there has been limited research in the Pacific on protection risks associated with children's increasing use of the internet and social media, and whether and/or how it changed in the context of COVID-19, as well as the prevalence of digital forms of harm that impact children and children's, parents'/carers' and broader communities' preparedness to respond to online risks of harm (Third et al., 2020). Research conducted in 2018 in PNG and Solomon Islands found broad awareness of internet usage risks among children and their parents/carers, with both groups citing exposure to "inappropriate content" (primarily via social media) as their key concern (Third et al., 2020). A 2021 mapping study of comprehensive sexuality education curricula across the Pacific also found that there was a general lack of discussion about the use of online media in children's sexual and reproductive health education initiatives in the region (UNFPA & IPPF, 2021).

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic affected children's risk of violence in their homes, communities and online, due to disruptions to schooling and the exacerbation of existing socio-economic inequalities (Bhatia et al., 2021; Cappa & Jijon, 2021; Herrenkohl et al., 2020). The increase in children's risk of violence reaffirms the experience of past epidemics, evidence from which indicates an increased risk of violence against children (Bakrania et al., 2020). To date, there are no formal research reports relating to increases in violence against women and children during COVID-19 in the five countries forming part of this situational analysis (Centre for Global Development, 2021). However, service data demonstrates that violence against women surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, with increasing household stress due to reduced livelihood and restrictions on movement attributed as contributing to increases in violence (Bettinger-Lopez & Bro, 2020; QUILT.AI, 2021; UN Women & Women Count, 2022).

RQ1.2 How are the risks and protective factors associated with such violence, including but not limited to gender, disability and age changing?

The extent of how specific risks and protective factors, including age, gender, disability, poverty, education status, geographical location, living away from parents/family breakdown and separation, gender diversity and sexual orientation, and the use of alcohol and/or other drugs (parents and children) were explored in each country, and are reported in the country chapters.

RQ2 What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues studied in this research?

Change has been most successful in legislative and policy development. All five countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu have additionally ratified the two optional protocols (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023). Fiji, PNG and Solomon Islands introduced the *Child Welfare Act 2010, Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015* and *Child and Family Welfare Act* 2017, which establish a framework for child protection services, including referral processes

regarding welfare concerns (Tichener, 2018; UNICEF EAPRO, 2020). Tonga and Vanuatu have child protection policies in draft form or are enacted, with their child protection services in an earlier state of evolution. A number of other bills are reportedly in progress to address identified gaps, including the Child Protection, Adoption and Juvenile Justice bills in Vanuatu, and a Youth Justice Bill in Solomon Islands (Coram International, 2021; Solomon Islands Government, 2022a).

Notable legislative gaps – in terms of both legislative coverage and enforcement of laws – still remain. These include child labour with variable regulation of children in work, in hazardous work and also in relation to commercial and/or sexual trafficking, the age of marriage (U.S Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e), and action on corporal punishment of children in homes and schools (Coram International, 2021; End Violence Against Children & Punishment, 2021).

Furthermore, many countries are yet to establish critical networks, processes and infrastructure for meaningful inter-agency cooperation. Each country lacks centralised systems for data collection, management and analysis required to inform and evaluate the implementation of national policies and delivery of services (Coram International, 2021; Szamier & Attenborough, 2017; UNICEF, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d; UNICEF EAPRO, 2020). Operational shortcomings in the collaborations between child protection actors in Fiji and Vanuatu, as well as between responses to violence against children and violence against women in PNG, have been highlighted (UNICEF, 2017a, 2017d; UNICEF EAPRO, 2020). Limited collaboration between stakeholders has been noted regarding action against child labour in Vanuatu (U.S Department of Labor, 2022).

RQ2.1 Has funding and staffing changed to enable formal child protection services to respond to the last five years' changing context?

Resourcing remains a significant challenge in the development and delivery of formal child protection services, though progress on the number of positions within social welfare divisions has been made. For example, the Solomon Islands government has appointed social welfare officers to some provincial governments (Tichener, 2018). In Vanuatu, child protection officers increased from four to 10 for the whole country in 2021, covering all provinces, which has reportedly resulted in a higher reporting rate (Tabi, 2023), although whether this increase is adequate to meet the need is unclear. PNG has trained more social workers, which have also been appointed to provincial government levels, with trained child support staff in some hospitals (UNICEF EAPRO, 2020). However, resourcing issues are a common impediment to implementation (UNICEF EAPRO, 2020).

RQ2.2 Are there past, existing or emerging approaches, including custom, traditional or religious approaches, to learn from?

A recent review of the development of child protection systems across the Pacific concluded that community child protection projects across the Pacific Islands are "…highly variable and inconsistent in terms of funding, staffing, commitment and ideas about desirable outcomes" (Sheehan, 2021). In addition, there has been limited learning (with some exceptions) (Feinstein et al., 2022; Thuso Limited, 2022) as to what works at the community level to reinforce norms and practices that are protective for children and how those that have a harmful impact have been co-opted and may be recovered (Sheehan, 2021; Thompson et al., 2019; Thompson & Wadley, 2019).

Analysis of some recent evaluations and studies relating to community-level child protection programs suggests the emergence of a few broad themes in terms of beneficial approaches and focus areas for future community-level programming. These relate to long-term involvement and relationship-building, contextualisation and adaptability in programming, adopting or incorporating Indigenous or traditional approaches and frameworks, pursuing linkages with other community development programs, pursuing linkages with formal child protection networks and specific target groups (Feinstein et al., 2022; Homan et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2021; Save the Children, 2021; Thompson & Wadley, 2019).

Figure 4: Key data on violence against children (Source: data are from the most recent household survey unless noted (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Papua New Guinea National Statistical Office, 2019; Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017; Tonga Statistics Department, 2020; Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014)
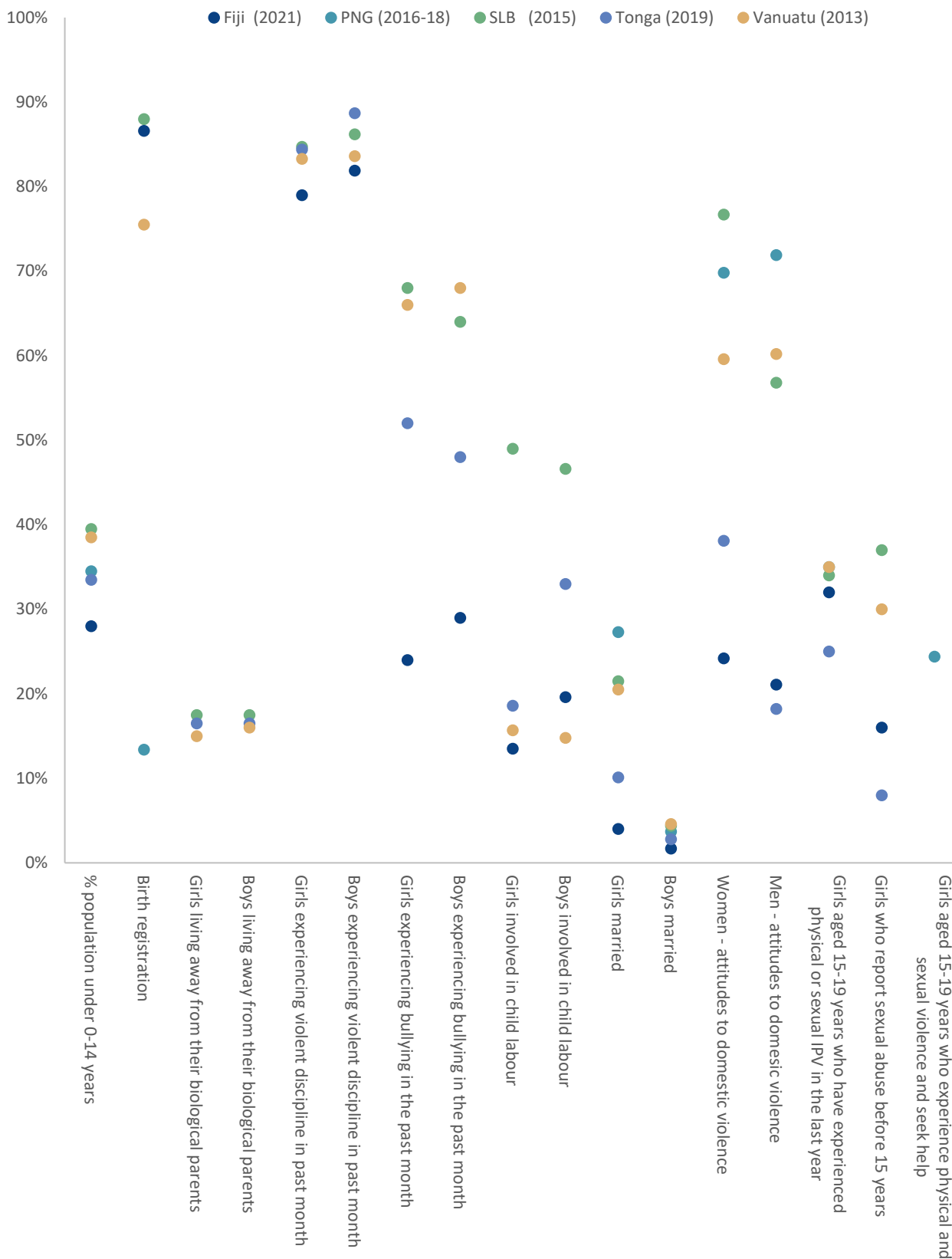
Table 2: Key data on violence against children (Source: data are from the most recent household survey unless noted (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022; Papua New Guinea National Statistical Office, 2019; Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017; Tonga Statistics Department, 2020; Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014)

	Fiji (2021)	PNG (2016-18)	SLB (2015)	Tonga (2019)	Vanuatu (2013)
Income per capita ($US current, 2021)[1]	4,500	2,460	2,320	4,930	3,240
Population (2023)[2]	936,000	10,330,000	740,000	108,000	335,000
% population of children 0-14 years[3]	28%	34%	39%	34%	39%
Birth registration (% of children under age 5 whose births are reported registered with a civil authority)	87%	13% (7% had cert)	88% (26% had cert)		76% (24% had cert)
Children aged 0-17 years living away from their biological parents (%)[4]			17% girls; 17% boys	17% girls; 17% boys	15% girls; 16% boys
Violent discipline (% of children aged 1-14 or 2-14 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past one month)	81% total 79% girls; 81.9% boys (65% emotional 68% any physical 13% severe physical)		86% 85% girls; 86% boys (78% emotional 68% any physical 22% severe physical)	87% 84% girls; 89% boys (73% emotional 79% any physical 23% severe physical)	84% 83% girls; 84% boys (77% emotional 72% any physical 36% severe physical)
Bullying in the past month[5]	24% girls, 29% boys (2016)		68% girls, 64% boys (2011)	52% girls, 48% boys (2017)	66% girls, 68% boys (2016)

[1] World Bank Open Data

[2] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). *World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision*

[3] Ibid

[4] Kennedy, E., Binder, G., Humphries-Waa, K., Tidhar, T., Cini, K., Comrie-Thomson, L., Vaughan, C., Francis, K., Scott, N., Wulan, N., Patton, G., & Azzopardi, P. (2020). Gender inequalities in health and wellbeing across the first two decades of life: an analysis of 40 low-income and middle-income countries in the Asia-Pacific region [Article]. *The Lancet Global Health*, *8*(12), e1473-e1488. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30354-5

[55] WHO. (2011-2017). *Global School-Wellbeing and Health Survey* WHO. https://extranet.who.int/ncdsmicrodata/index.php/catalog/GSHS

Child labour (% aged 5-17 years who are involved in child labour)	17% total 14% girls; 20% boys		48% total (5-14 years) 49% girls; 46.6% boys	25% total 19% girls; 33% boys	15.2% total (5-14 years) 16% girls; 15% boys
Child marriage (% aged 20-24 years first married or in a union):					
Before age 15	0.2% girls; 0% boys	8.0% girls; 0% boys	5.6% girls; 0% boys	0.4% girls; 0% boys	2.5% girls; 0% boys
Before age 18	4.0% girls; 1.7% boys	27.3% girls; 3.7% boys	21.3% girls; 4.4% boys	10.1% girls; 2.8% boys	21.4% girls; 4.6% boys
Attitudes towards domestic violence: % of women and men aged 15-49 years who state that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife[6]	Women: 24% Men: 21%	Women: 70% Men: 72%	Women: 77% Men: 57%	Women: 38% Men: 18%	Women: 60% Men: 60%
% of girls aged 15-19 years who have experienced physical or sexual IPV in the last year[7]	32%	35%	34%	25%	35%
% of girls who report sexual abuse before 15 years[8]	16%		37%	8%	30%
% of girls aged 15-19 years who experience physical and sexual violence and seek help		24%			

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[6] In at least one of the following circumstances: (1) she goes out without telling him, (2) she neglects the children, (3) she argues with him, (4) she refuses sex with him, (5) she burns the food

[7] WHO. (2023). *Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women*.

[8] UNICEF, & UNFPA. (2015). *Harmful Connections: Examining the relationship between violence against women and violence against children in the South Pacific*. https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/political_declarations/east_asia_and_pacific/harmful_connections.pdf

5. Fiji

5.1 What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online? (RQ1)

5.1.1 Prevalence of violence

Data gathered through this situational analysis from children, caregivers, and stakeholders suggest that emotional and physical violence in the home, community and school is a common childhood experience, impacting children's development, as well as their well-being and sense of safety. Stakeholders and caregivers were also concerned about sexual violence, which they perceived to be increasing.

This is consistent with available data, shown in Table 3, that shows a high rate of violence against both girls and boys in Fiji. In particular, the prevalence of violent discipline in the home and physical or sexual violence by partners against girls aged 15-19 years remains higher than the global average (UNICEF, 2023b; WHO, 2021).

Table 3: Prevalence of violence against children in Fiji based on household or school surveys (Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2022), FWCC (2013), WHO (2011-2017))

	Violent discipline in past month (% of children aged 1-14 years)	Sexual violence (% of females who report sexual abuse before 15 years)	IPV (% of girls aged 15-19 years who have experienced physical or sexual IPV in the last year)	Bullying (in the past month)	Child labour (% children aged 5-17 years who are involved in child labour)	Child marriage (% adults aged 20-24 years first married or in a union before 18 years)
Female	79%	16%	32%	24%	14%	4%
Male	82%			29%	20%	2%
Source	MICS survey conducted in 2021	FWCC survey conducted in 2011/12	FWCC survey conducted in 2011/12	WHO GSHS conducted in 2016	MICS survey conducted in 2021	MICS survey conducted in 2021

While there are limited prevalence data on violence against children, administrative reporting data from the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) in the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (MWCSP) compiled from annual research and media reports, as shown in Figure 5, indicate increasing reports of child abuse and neglect (long term trend data are not available on forms of violence). Increased reporting may reflect an increased trust in and availability of reporting pathways and/or an increase in prevalence.

Figure 5: Reports of child abuse and neglect to DSW in Fiji, 2014 – 2023 with trendline (Sources: Fiji Ministry of Women Children and Poverty Alleviation (2018a, 2018b, 2019); Plange et al. (2023), Naivalurua (2023a, 2023b))
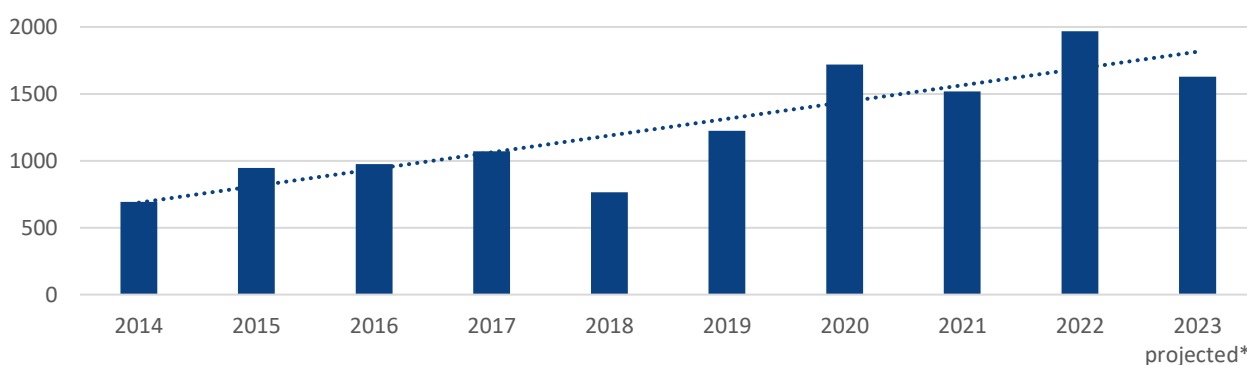
* projected based on estimates from January to July 2023.

Most child protection stakeholders from Fiji who participated in the online survey perceive that violence is increasing, as shown in Figure 6. More than 70% of stakeholders perceive that there has been a significant increase or an increase in sexual violence (100%), physical violence (95%), forced work and trafficking (81%) and the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) (71%). Consistent with the prevalence data described below suggesting a decline in child marriage across age cohorts, only 33% of stakeholders perceived child marriage to be increasing, with a higher proportion being unsure.

Figure 6: Stakeholder perspectives on trends in the prevalence of violence over the last five years in Fiji (N=21)
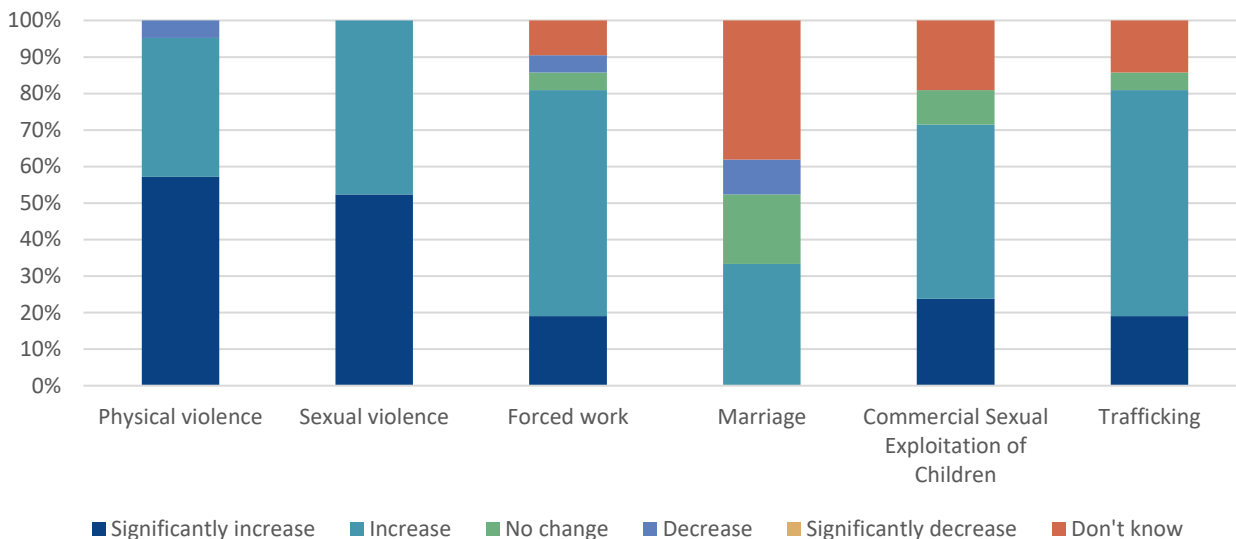
Caregivers and children who responded to the survey reported that children are most concerned[9] about physical and emotional violence, as shown in Figure 7. A high proportion of adolescents also reported that they were concerned about sexual violence, with 11 of the 12 girls who responded to the survey reporting that children worry a lot or a little about sexual violence.

Figure 7: Caregiver (N=49) and adolescent (N=15) perspectives on children's level of concern regarding different forms of violence in Fiji

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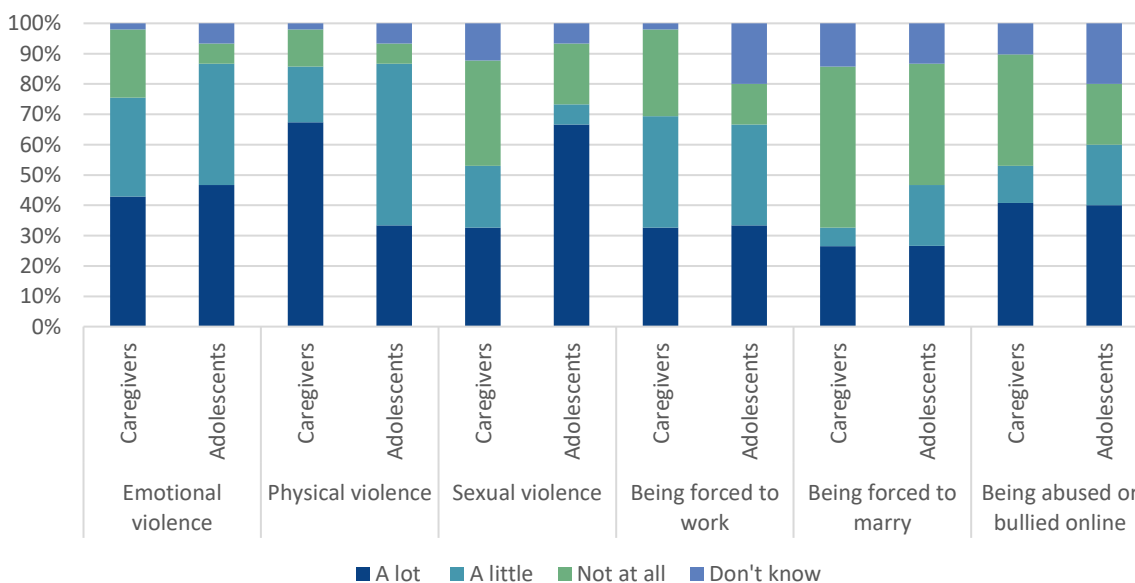
[9] Scale used in the survey asked the respondent if children are "a lot" or "a little" concerned

Although adolescents and caregivers reported children were less concerned with being abused or bullied online compared to emotional, physical or sexual violence, both adolescents and caregivers reported the online environment as the least safe (refer to Figure 8).

Figure 8: Caregiver (N=60) and adolescent (N=19) perceived level children's safety in different settings in Fiji on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least safe
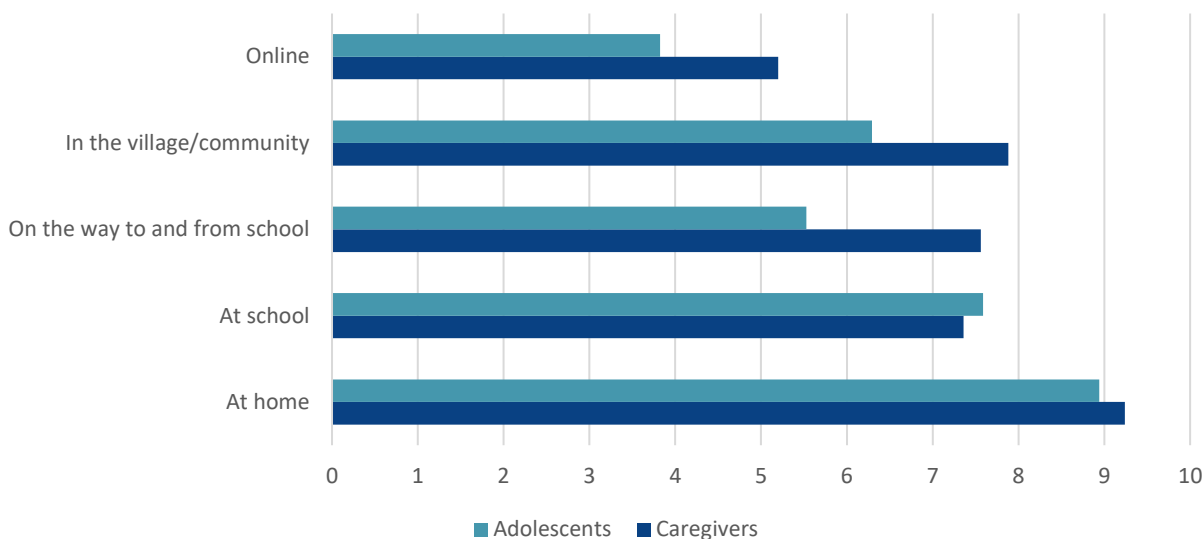
a) Violent discipline in the home

There was widespread recognition of the near generalised use of violent discipline by caregivers, including both emotional and physical violence, such as hitting, beating, punching, slapping, pinching, using a belt or stick, and flicking the ear. Stakeholders described this violence as normalised and "*not something they [caregivers] see as wrong*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female), as it is culturally acceptable and reflective of how caregivers were themselves raised. Physical violence remains permissible under the *Juveniles Act 1973*.

> *When children see a belt, they are scared because they are hit with it. (FGD, Caregivers, Men)*

The use of violent discipline in the home was a significant concern raised in the child-led research. Children explained many ways caregivers engage in corporal punishment of children, including pinching or hitting children with their hand or an implement such as a "*hosepipe*", "*sasa broom*", "*stick*", "*knife*", "*spoon*", "*father's belt*" (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed) or "*mother's rolling pin*" (FGD 12-16 years, Male). One young participant said the kitchen was a place that could make children feel very unsafe "*because [there is] a lot of sharp stuff there for smacking, the fire, the pan, the belt*" (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed). Two females in the younger group said, and all other participants agreed, that children feel unsafe when parents threaten to or "smack" children (FGD, 8-11 years, Girls). Nearly all the youth participants, across both sites, emphasised the prevalence and detrimental impact of corporal punishment in the home on children's lives. Most children and young people spoke about parents using corporal punishment, however, two male youth participants mentioned "*pinching*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Male) by grandparents as a form of corporal punishment. Young children also emphasised that when parents, particularly fathers, are intoxicated, this threatens children's sense of safety and is a major source of worry for them (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed).

Participant perceptions are consistent with data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) carried out in 2021, in which caregivers reported that 81% of children aged 1-14 years had experienced violent discipline in the last month, as shown in Figure 9 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2021). 68% of children experienced physical violence, with fewer (12.5%) experiencing severe physical punishment, defined as being hit or slapped in the face, head or ears, or being beaten up, that is hit over and over again (Fiji Bureau of Statistics,

2021). Prevalence rates were slightly higher for boys, children aged 3-9 years, children from poorer wealth quintiles and children in rural areas. The overall prevalence rate for Fiji is higher than the global average; UNICEF data suggests that across 92 countries, the average prevalence of the percent of children who have experienced violent discipline is 74% (UNICEF, 2023b).

Figure 9: Proportion of children aged 1-14 years in Fiji experiencing violent discipline in the last month, 2021, by background characteristics (Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2022))
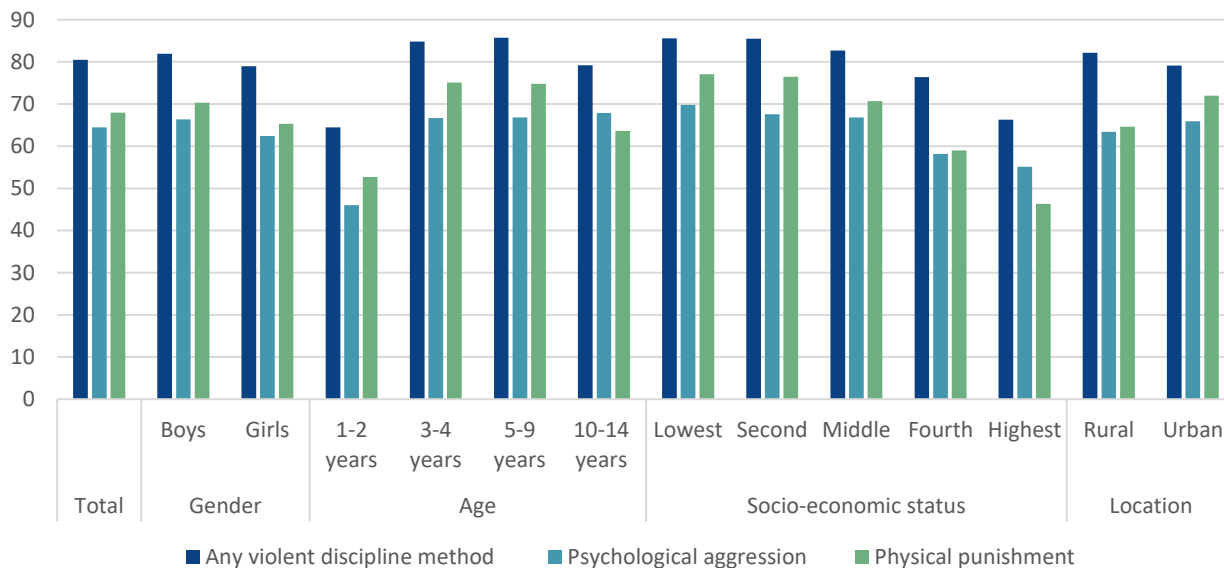
As this was the first MICS conducted in Fiji, there are no trend data available. Administrative data from Fiji Police of reports of physical child abuse show an increase in cases related to physical violence against children, as shown in Figure 10. There were more Police reports of violence against boys than girls, although data show a consistent increase in cases related to girls between 2012 and 2020. The most common offences were assault causing actual bodily harm (74%) and common assault (16%) (Fiji Police Force, 2021).

Figure 10: Number of reports of physical child abuse received by Fiji Police 2012-2020 (Source: Fiji Police Force (2017), Fiji Police Force (2021))
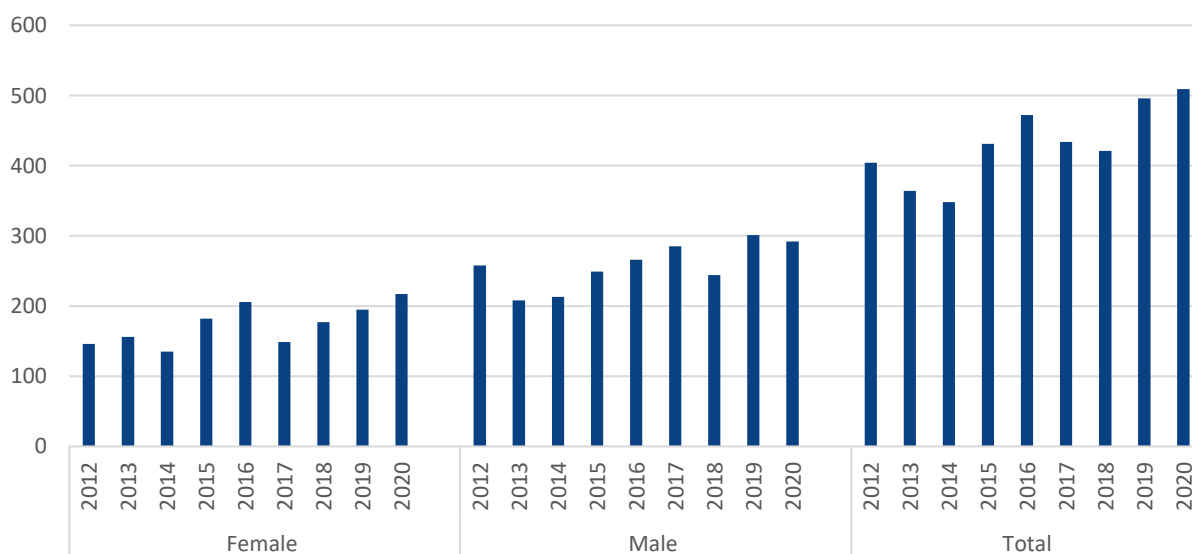
Another key concern that makes children feel unsafe and worried in the home is family conflict, fighting and verbal abuse. This concern was most evident in the older participants' FGDs where "*fighting with siblings*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls), including with "*smaller siblings*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Boys), was identified as a problem. This, said older male participants, included "*violent fighting with siblings*", "*name calling*" and

"*swearing at each other at home*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Boys). Female participants in the older cohort said this involved "*fighting [and] teaching your child to do bad things like violence*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls). This dynamic was also raised by caregivers:

> *The younger children are the main target of older children – can bribe them to do the wrong things. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)*

b) Other forms of violence in the home and community

Neglect

Neglect is a cause of concern amongst children, caregivers and stakeholders and is reflected in administrative data. Children said they felt unsafe when left alone at home without their parents and when their parents went to work. Stakeholders and caregivers noted that children were either left alone or not cared for and considered it a contributing driver to a perceived increase in children living on the street and using drugs. Stakeholders described the drivers of neglect as having worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic and assessed children whose caregivers used alcohol and other drugs and children with a disability as particularly vulnerable to neglect. They were concerned that children who experience neglect may also experience other forms of violence at home and be vulnerable to other forms of abuse.

> *We receive mostly (cases involving) neglect of care from parents. Unsupervised children which can lead to things like substance abuse because they were left on their own and then they turn to experiment thing. For example, a case came to us where the child was presented to the hospital for falling off a flight of stairs three times. When we questioned the parents – the mum said she was doing household chores. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

The above is consistent with data from DSW: neglect was the most common form (30%) of child abuse reported to DSW between 2016-19, with slightly more cases amongst boys (52%) compared to girls (48%) (Plange et al., 2023).

Sexual violence

Stakeholders and caregivers expressed concern regarding sexual violence (including harassment) in the home and community. One stakeholder noted that sexual abuse is most likely to happen in the home, and another noted that sexual harassment commonly happens in the community and at school.

> *A community I am working with now, there is a lot of incest in that community, so we are developing a program now to go into that community again because the women raised concerns about what was happening in the village. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Girls are most vulnerable to child sexual violence: 81% of sexual abuse cases reported to DSW are girls (Plange et al., 2023); 92% of cases reported to police are girls (Fiji Police Force, 2021), and 94% of sexual offence charges (including those perpetrated against adults) are female (ODPP, 2023). However, stakeholders stressed that both girls and boys are vulnerable to sexual abuse, as per the quotation below. Stakeholders reported that children with a disability are particularly vulnerable.

> *Violence against young boys – referral lately of a 14-year-old on the way to school who decided to take the shortcut, and there were men drinking, and they raped him. We are telling parents to look after their boys and girls, not just girls. (KII, National Stakeholder, Feale)*

Data show that most perpetrators are adult men, although between 14-20% of persons charged with sexual offences between 2019 and 2022 were under 18 years of age (14% in 2019, 9% in 2020, 20% in 2021 and 13% in 2022) (ODPP, 2023). Most perpetrators are known to the victim.

Data with respect to cases known by police and sexual offence charges (refer to Figure 11) show a slight decrease in sexual offence cases known to the police and a slight increase in offences charged by the Office

of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) between 2021-2023. The trend in recent years may represent improvements to the increased trust and confidence in reporting and/or administration of criminal justice rather than prevalence, although it is consistent with stakeholder perspectives on increasing prevalence shared above in Figure 6. One stakeholder also suggested that cases of sexual violence are increasing based on their interactions with communities, while other stakeholders suggested that there is still very little reporting from children. Another stakeholder thought that cases of sexual violence had "slowed down" (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Male).

Figure 11: Number of sexual offence victims under the age of 18 reported to the police and charged by ODPP in Fiji from 2016-2023 (Source: Fiji Police Force (2017) for 2012-2016, Fiji Police Force (2021) for 2016-2020; ODPP (2023) for 2019-2023)
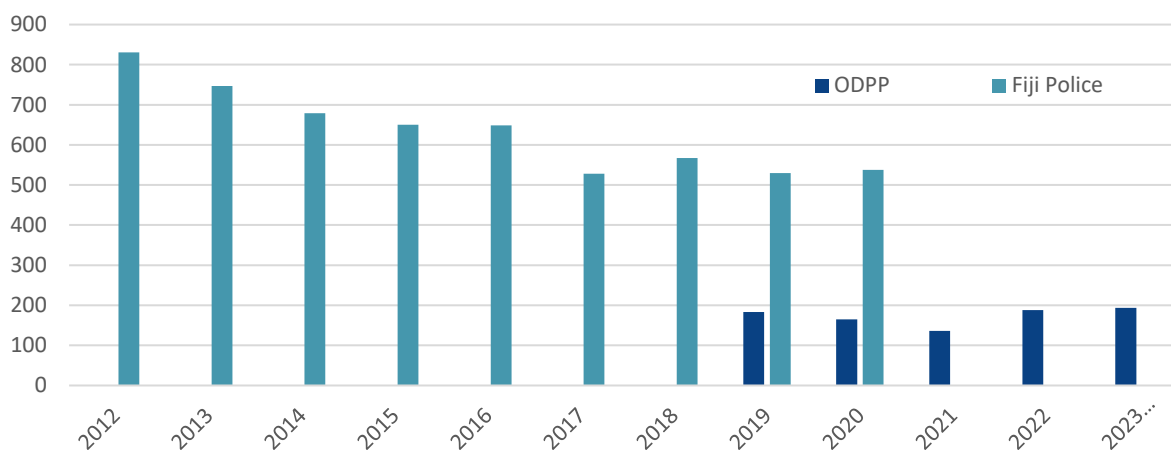
* 2023 projection based on monthly average between January – September 2023

Child marriage

The overarching finding of the situational analysis is that child marriage continues to take place despite the minimum age for marriage being 18 years of age, yet stakeholders participating in the survey (as noted above in Figure 6) and interviews had mixed perspectives regarding trends with respect to child protection. Those who were unsure or thought it may have been declining attributed the decline to greater community awareness of the legislative reform that took place in 2009, lifting the minimum age for marriage to 18 years.

Stakeholders described cases of child marriage as a common response to teenage pregnancy in Indo-Fijian communities. As discussed below, MICS data also show child marriage rates are highest amongst girls with primary education or lower (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022), as shown in Figure 13. This is consistent with a recent survey conducted by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (2023), which found that the main causes of child marriage were unintended pregnancy, poverty, unemployment and low education levels.

> *Young girls seeking a better life can be pushed into early marriage – as a means to gain the benefit of a family or to gain support. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *Had a few cases of residents who requested to be married after giving birth (having a child) – mostly from the Indo-Fijian Community. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Cases reported by stakeholders also included circumstances in which arrangements were made before children were 18 years of age, with formalities taking place after they turned 18 years of age.

> *Children get forced to marry – [for example, it happened to] a child from this community, but it happened in her village. It was cultural, in order to forgive…, his daughter had to be forced to marry her cousin, and she was very hurt by it. Something that was done against her will. Even though she was 18 years, the discussions and arrangements were done before she turned 18 years. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

[There have been] a few cases [of child marriage] reported where arrangements were made for the girl and boy to stay together while they wait for their legal age to be married. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Male)

Child marriage – have not heard of cases in Fiji, just teenage pregnancy. Indo-Fijian communities tend to sometimes have this, but not so much iTaukei communities. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

The most recent data from MICS, which shows 4% of women aged 20-24 years were married at 18 years of age (compared to 2% of men), with age-group data suggesting that this rate has declined over time from over 13% amongst women aged over 40, as shown in Figure 12 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022). An overall decline in child marriage would need to be confirmed through the next household survey. Fiji has the lowest rates of marriage at 18 years of age out of the five countries considered in this situational analysis (refer to Figure 4 and Table 2).

Figure 12: Proportion of women aged 20-49 years in 2021 who were married before 18 years in Fiji, by age group, with trendline (Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2022))
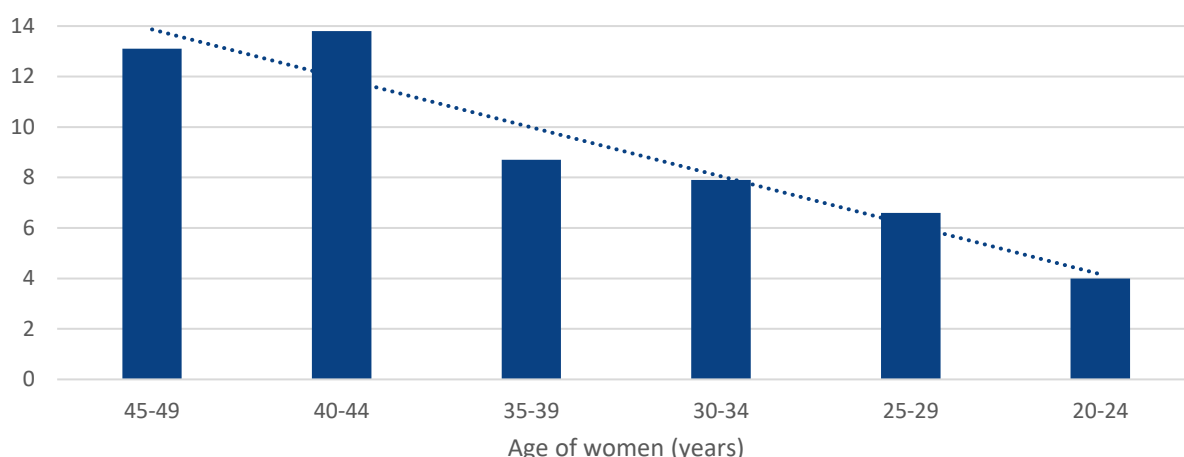
There are higher rates of child marriage amongst women aged 20-24 years without primary education, living in rural areas and amongst the three poorest quintiles, as shown in Figure 13. The rates amongst women aged 20–24 years did not significantly vary by Division (although it did for women aged 20-49 year). There were not a sufficient number of women with functional disabilities represented in the MICS survey to provide a prevalence estimate with respect to marriage amongst children with disability.

Figure 13: Proportion of women aged 20-24 years in 2021 who were married before 18 years in Fiji, by background characteristics (Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2022))
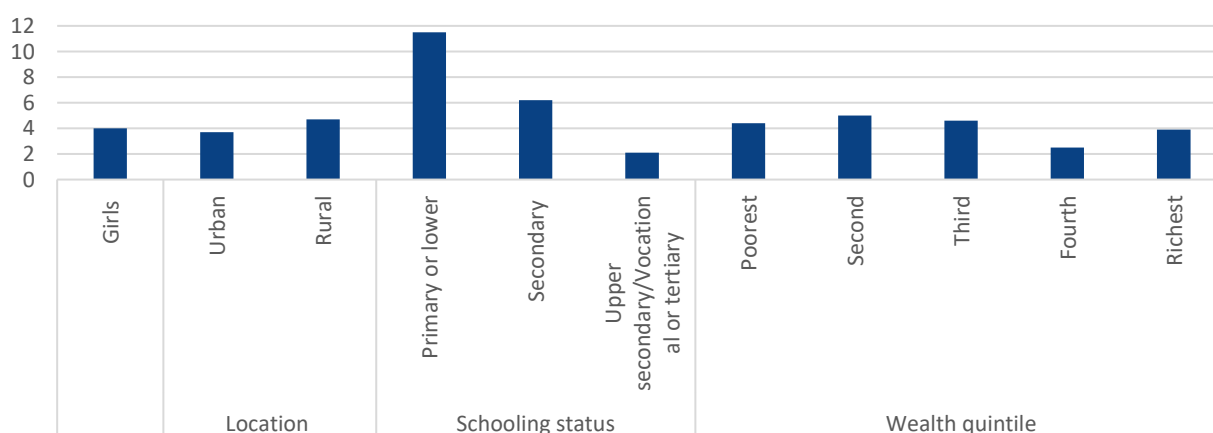
There were no cases of child marriage reported to DSW between 2017 and 2019 (Plange et al., 2023), which stakeholders suggested was because "*communities are trying to save face*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). Stakeholders informally noted that some reports had been made to DSW in recent years.

Child labour and commercial sexual exploitation of children

Child labour was raised by a small number of stakeholders, although it was not raised in the child-led research. One caregiver noted that "*especially if they have to help their family financially, children are forced to work*" (FGD, Caregivers, Female). MICS data show that 20% of boys and 14% of girls aged 5-17 years were engaged in child labour in 2021 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The highest prevalence was amongst children aged 5-11 years,[10] as shown in Figure 14, who mostly spend more than one hour a week engaged with their families in economic activities. The prevalence of children aged 5-11 years engaged in economic activities was slightly higher amongst boys (30%) compared to than girls (21%) and children in the poorest quintile (33%) compared to the middle (18%) and the richest (22%) quintiles.

Figure 14: Prevalence of child labour amongst children aged 5-17 years in Fiji by background characteristics (Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2022))
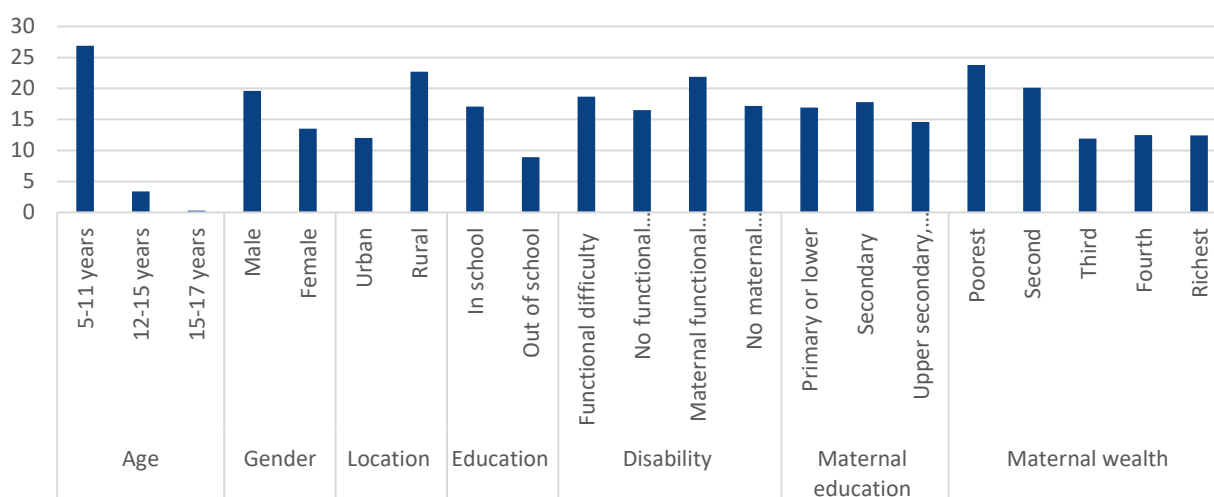
Prior research has reported child labour being present in the agriculture sector and other sectors listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Activities associated with child labour in Fiji (Source: U.S Department of Labor (2022))

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Cutting and harvesting sugarcane
	Fishing and deep-sea diving for fish, shellfish, and sea cucumbers
Services	Street work: vending, washing cars, and selling fruit and other foods
	Domestic work
	Working in garages, retail shops, or roadside stall
	Garbage scavenging
	Collecting scrap metal
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labour	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking
	Use in the production of pornography
	Forced labour in domestic work
	Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking

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[10] For children aged 5-11 years child labour is defined as at least 1 hour of economic work or 21 hours of unpaid household services per week; and for children aged 12-14 years child labour is defined as 14 hours of economic work or 21 hours of unpaid household services per week (UNICEF (2023a)

Some stakeholders raised CSEC as a concern. Qualitative data suggest that CSEC takes place in foreign-owned yachts, fishing vessels, hotels and motels and may be facilitated by family, taxi drivers, pimps or through direct contact between children and perpetrators online (refer below Section 5.1.1d) (Davy & Tppou, 2022; Fatiaki, 2019; UNODC, 2023b). A 2023 study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that 126 out of 192 respondents knew 882 people who were in, or had been in, an arranged sexual relationship, mainly females, and almost half were children, including 404 girls and 141 boys below the age of 18 years.

Past research has found children engaged in CSEC are commonly between the ages of 13-17 years, although they can be as young as 10 years of age, with poverty, homelessness and migration, including living with extended families, as factors associated with CSEC (Davy & Tppou, 2022; Save the Children Fiji, 2019). The iTaukei community has been reported as particularly vulnerable (Save the Children Fiji, 2019). The 2019 IOM analysis also linked CSEC to child marriage as well as sex trafficking (Davy & Tppou, 2022).

With respect to child trafficking, an IOM analysis suggests that the trafficking of children may be more of a domestic issue (within Fiji), with children as young as 11 being sex trafficked (Davy & Tppou, 2022). ILO research found that approximately one third of children participating in CSEC were not financially benefitting, suggesting forced CSEC (ILO & IPEC, 2010). While UNODC estimates there were over 5000 trafficking cases in Fiji between 2017-2021, there were no trafficking cases formally reported since 2017 (UNODC, 2023b).

The 2023 UNODC study also reported qualitative evidence that there has been an increase in child labour and CSEC since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

> *According to informants, since the outbreak of COVID-19, there have been more children out of school and involved in street vending or loitering on the streets, begging or working as casual labourers, for example, in carwashes or on farms. There is also an increase in the number of youths between 15 and 24 years old, both female and male, involved in the commercial sex trade in urban and rural areas or in hotspot areas where motels, hotels, yachts and fishing vessels are located. An increasing number of situations have been identified where there has been evidence of family complicity in this exploitation (UNODC, 2023b, p. 23).*

Other forms of violence in the community

Children in the FGD, as well as some caregivers and stakeholders, also expressed concern regarding children's safety in the community. Participants across age groups express fears related to children's safety in the community, emphasising concerns about bullying between peers in the community, encountering intoxicated individuals, and a heightened awareness of external threats such as drug dealers, kidnapping, and disturbances caused by outsiders, as well as concern regarding a lack of child-friendly infrastructure in communities. These fears underscore the need for comprehensive interventions that address both immediate environmental issues and broader community dynamics to ensure the well-being of all children.

Children's concerns involve physical safety during activities like playing and walking in the community alone, as well as the threat of kidnapping. In the younger age cohort, participants expressed concerns about physical safety when undertaking outdoor activities such as "*running*", "*playing*" and "*walking alone*" (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed). Participants explained their neighbourhoods feel unsafe because of the likelihood of encountering "*drunk people*" as "*people drinking on steps, footpaths and on the street*" is very common (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed). The older cohort expressed worries about bullying in the community as well as external threats such as kidnappers and disturbances caused by intruders in the community, including drug dealers.

c) Violence in Schools

Stakeholders and caregivers suggested that although corporal punishment is not permitted within schools based on a High Court ruling and Ministry of Education policy (Fiji Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts, 2015), teachers continue to use psychological and physical violence as an approach to classroom management. Violent discipline by teachers was also raised as a significant concern by children in the FGD, reporting concern of a range of physical discipline used by teachers, including being hit by, or having the following items thrown at them: "*dusters, sasa brooms, throwing chalk and dustpans*" (FGD, children 12-16 years, males). Non-compliance with school rules leading to visits to the principal's office and potential disciplinary actions like '*growling, screaming, or smacking*' contributes to children's sense of unease at school (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed).

Older female participants shared fears about specific teachers, indicating that teachers can be perceived by children as bullies: "*I am scared of my Basic Science teacher*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls). This fear was attributed to some teachers' potential to wield authority and power in ways that make students feel unsafe and uncomfortable. Older participants across the genders expressed concerns about teachers' anger, particularly when teachers were unaware of students' backgrounds, reflecting a desire for understanding and empathy. A participant said: "*I feel unsafe as a student when the teacher gets angry at me because some of them do not know our background*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls).

Stakeholders described violent discipline as being perceived as necessary and/or the most effective way to maintain behavioural boundaries.

> When children know they [teachers] cannot hit, they [children] play around. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Stakeholders and caregivers, as well as children who participated in the child-led research, also referred to students being bullied, with a trend towards violence from older children towards younger boys and girls.

> *Bullying is also happening in school – my child experienced this where the bully was telling her to do his work or else he will eat her lunch. Victims are the younger grades and then the senior boys are sending the younger boys to buy cigarettes or drugs when caught they (younger boys) are caught, they will not tell who the senior boys are... They cannot share [this is happening] because... they were in the wrong place at the wrong time – so when things happen, they keep it to themselves – when the parents find out, they will get angry again, and they give the child a hiding. (FDG, Caregiver, Male)*

In addition to the above, children highlighted travelling to and from school as a setting of concern.

Stakeholders noted that there is limited reporting of school-related violence by schools to DSW, despite this being mandated under the Child Welfare Act, and no formal child protection information system within the education sector. This is discussed further under Section 5.2.1b).

d) Online violence

As reflected above in Figure 8, both adolescents and caregivers were most concerned about children's safety online, compared to forms of violence in other settings. Of 15 caregivers who reported having a child in their household who has access to an internet device as part of the online survey, 14 (93%) reported that they were very concerned regarding their children's safety online. This also reflects the broad concern of stakeholders regarding the protection of children online in the qualitative data.

Of the seven adolescents who reported that they had access to a device as part of the online survey, two reported that they use the internet for 1-2 hours a week, three for 1-2 hours a day and two more than this, for a wide range of activities, with six out of seven reporting that they use the internet with family. Four reported that their friends had:

- Been sent content that they had never seen before or made them scared because the images or text were violent and/or sexual;

- Been contacted by a stranger or someone they did not know;

- Had someone misuse their personal information/photos online in a mean way; or received online threats or abuse and

- Had people saying things about them to damage their reputation;

While the survey sample is small, the findings above are largely consistent with perspectives shared by stakeholders, caregivers and children in the interviews and focus group discussions, with concern raised regarding cyberbullying, sharing of images and photographs of children, grooming and viewing inappropriate material.

Consistent with past research (Save the Children Fiji, 2019), cyberbullying was raised as a concern by both children and parents. Children in the younger FGD (8-11 years) expressed concern about "*name-calling,*" "*teasing each other,*" and "*swearing*" online, underscoring the impact of negative interactions in their online spaces. Participants in the older groups stressed the impact on children of negative comments and the importance of being cautious about social media connections and identified that many children and young people in their community had negative experiences with TikTok and that sometimes communicating on Messenger is risky because people can say "*bad comments*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Male). Stakeholders also expressed concern.

> *The risk is so high as there is less interest in taking a book to read but using the phone. Especially when unsupervised. Have to look at the role of parents. Cyberbullying and abuse also happen online due to peer pressure. Children are harming other children – sometimes being unaware of their actions. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *It's like going into the ocean, the deeper you go, the higher the risk. Our children are so deep into social media but lack the basic understanding of the right reasons for being online. In a school, year 7 student, had own chat group, brought phone to school, secretly take pictures of children and slander the children with nasty words, and this was picked up by the teacher. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

Stakeholders and caregivers raised concerns about the sharing images of children on social media:

> *We have had some cases reported in schools of inappropriate photos on Viber groups and social media, and the latest case is an adult involved. It was the adult who circulated the photos, so it goes back to the responsibility of parents – supervision. Is it the right age to allow them to have mobile phones? Have we spoken to them about good and bad behaviour and sites they can access? (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, male)*

> *Cases where girls reported to us from Muslim culture, and it's so sad to hear that explicit content shared (for example, she is in a towel), but it is taken as seriously in their culture [as nudity]... (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *Latest emerging cases – young children being involved in sharing of nude pictures online. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Male)*

Children noted that encountering people operating under fake accounts and negative experiences communicating with strangers online ("online stalkers") was expressed as commonplace (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed). Children noted that "communicating with strangers is very scary" (FGD, 12-16 years, Female). Stakeholders also raised the issue of grooming of girls through social media:

> *A father and content creator teamed up against their 13-year-old, and the content creator presented himself as a young person, and she was ready to meet. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

When we speak to our [clients], we see how they get in contact with people on Facebook or Instagram, and they become friends, start dating or seeing each other, and end up getting pregnant. Sometimes, when they are talking to someone on Facebook, the gap is 10 – 12 years, but their picture is so young, and they think it's a young person. In the conversation, the person knows how to groom the child – give you recharge, send expensive things, food for money, data, and so looking at the child's development. We can see the love and affection the child will get drawn to, compared to that from the family, and they end up getting so close to the person, and their sense of belonging increases because of this online connection. They meet once or twice, and the child becomes pregnant, and then the person is gone – the account is deleted. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Children, caregivers and stakeholders also raised concerns regarding children's viewing of inappropriate material online. Children also said the online environment has "*plenty of bad things*" and said that "*bad photos*", "*pornography*" and '*bad links*' make the online environment unsafe for children (FGD, 12-16 years, Male). This is discussed further under Section 5.1.2(g).

5.1.2 How are recent factors, including climate change, digitisation and COVID-19, changing the dynamics and behaviours that drive such violence occurring in the home, school, community and online? (RQ1.1)

Key drivers of violence against children were identified in the literature review and, together with emerging drivers, were further explored in the primary data collection.

a) Impact of colonialism and cycles of violence

Socio-cultural and religious norms relating to gender and authority, which underlie violence against women and children, are deeply embedded within society, as discussed in Section 5.1.2(b). There is limited understanding of how these socio-cultural norms and practices have changed since colonisation and how they may be reimagined. There are two distinct implications of this reflected in the perspectives shared in the qualitative data:

First, notwithstanding the work of Fijian activists and academics on the synergies between traditional and indigenous values and human rights (Jalal, 1998), human rights and in particular, children's rights to be free from violence, are perceived by some as external and imposed, and inconsistent with traditional values, such as respect and forgiveness. Although respect and forgiveness may be enabling human rights, "respect" has a particular meaning related to authority and "forgiveness" to traditional restorative practices rather than resorting to the legal system, and in tension with child and victim-centred justice processes, as discussed in Section 5.1.1. With the pace of change in Fiji in recent years through the influence of migration, urbanisation and digitisation, resisting the notion of rights has become key to protecting traditional/indigenous values.

Respect is gone when you bring in rights… Even the role of chiefs – people are losing respect. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)

The authority of parents lost when rights came in, and they [children] just do what they want, they take us to court and when we go to court, we cannot defend our rights. Rights take away our culture. Culture taught us to forgive one another, respect one another, but rights took control of the culture. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)

In order for child protection to be seen as something valuable rather than something imposed by the CRC… we need a shift in attitude in the way people see children… unless the shift happens, the onus and blame are put back on the child and child protection can continue to be seen as foreign which it isn't. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Second, violence against children and the underlying gender norms have become normalised within socio-cultural norms, leading to inter-generational cycles of violence – stakeholders noted that perpetrators who

experience violence as children are more likely to inflict violence themselves on younger family members and their own families. Stakeholders also describe violence in the home, including stigmatisation of teenagers who are pregnant, pushing children to live on the street and being exposed to other forms of violence, including unsafe work and CSEC (Davy & Tppou, 2022; Fatiaki, 2019).

b) Socio-cultural norms and practices relating to gender and violence

Socio-cultural norms and practices were both underlying violence against children and the responses to them. Stakeholders described significant progress in gender equality in their lifetimes, for example, with respect to child marriage and girls' education. However, they noted that gender inequality remains in the home given '*the way women have been perceived through generations and men are the decision-makers in the home and hold all the power… Men make the decisions. When women feel disempowered and fight back – this is a cause for conflict, and then men want to teach women to adhere and gain the power and control back*' (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

Gendered expectations for boys and girls, including notions of boy's and men's strength, were deeply embedded in children's socialisation in childhood, including parenting approaches, with one stakeholder noting that boys are commonly told to "*toughen up*" and "*be a man*" (KII, National Stakeholder, male). Prior research in Fiji has documented that boys and men are seen as dominant, and girls and women who transgress gender behaviours or roles, for example, by earning more money than men, are seen as challenging men's status (Newland, 2016). Consistent with this, a caregiver noted girls increased participation in sports leads them to "*change their physical body, and they think they are men*" (FGD, caregiver, men). There are significant differences with respect to sexual freedom and entitlement, where sex outside of marriage is accepted to some extent for boys and men but not for girls, with sex and sexuality remaining a taboo topic, impacting prevention and response efforts.

> Taboo to talk about sex, our culture of silence. Our culture of respect creates barriers for us to talk about issues that are happening in our society. Our children need to understand these [things]. Most children are scolded, and things like "ulukau" (stupid) are said to them, and we don't realise that this reduces children's confidence or has an impact on children's lives when they are in school. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

As the household head, men are seen as the gatekeepers of moral and religious standards for both women and children who are living in their home, and disciplining women and children to enforce these standards was seen as a core part of their role to maintain household and community harmony (Newland, 2016). This role derives from the patriarchal nature of communities and men's authority to determine how communities are governed and organised, which was and continues to be reinforced by the Church, and is deeply embedded in notions of masculinity (Masta, 2021). In Fiji, the iTaukei word for good behaviour, *"vakaturaga"*, means 'in the way of the chief' or behaviour that 'befits a chief', embedding the concept of good behaviour within a male hierarchy, and the Chiefs are thought to "represent God's order" (Newland 2016 55). While navigating traditional and religious obligations and structures can be difficult, particularly for men adopting different gender norms, men continue to meet them due to the recognition and respect gained from their community and family members (Masta, 2021).

Violence against children can be seen as part of the intersection of gender norms relating to men's and women's behaviour and roles, and to the normalisation of men's violence against women and children in the household. Evidence links women's violence against children as part of this gendered violence; in Fiji, Newland (2016, 67) conducted qualitative research with women who "*acknowledged that women participate in the perpetuation of violence in families by beating their children: 'You pass on what has been done to you—women to girls also.'*"

Norms relating to violence against children are strong, with the most recent MICS finding that there is a greater acceptance of violence against children compared to violence against women - 24% of women and 21% of men think that a husband is justified in hitting his wife for one of five reasons, while 60% of men and 54% of women think that a child needs to be physically punished (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Stakeholders noted that while religious text (bible) is used as justification for violence against children (physical discipline) in the home – it has "*not been interpreted right, but to suit the majority of what men had wanted*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

> *It is us, parents, who are hurting the child (FGD, caregiver, women)*

Men's violence against women and children is also supported by the priority given to community or social relations over individual rights, particularly in i-Taukei communities in the process of reconciliation or forgiveness. Through the practice of *bulubulu,* male relatives of girls or women who have experienced physical or sexual violence may seek compensation in the form of payment of money or gifts from the family of the perpetrator to redress the harm (stigma) caused to the family (Newland, 2016). Mothers or victims do not play a role in these practices and are required to accept the outcome of the process. These processes, in turn, shape children's understanding of violence and its normalisation within communities. This practice is discussed further under Section 5.2.

c) Socio-economic status and its gendered implications

While lower than PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, poverty has increased in Fiji since 2010. While declining from 7% in 2010 to 5% in 203, poverty measured according to the lower middle income poverty line (US$3.65/day) increased to 14% in 2021, before declining again over the past two years to 9% in 2023 (Sachs, 2023). This increase in poverty is reflected in the data with respect to hardships, particularly with respect to families living in urban settlements.

> *Poverty is a big problem. Our community is where poor people live, we cannot afford to send them to school, buy land, or houses. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)*

> *Major root cause at village level is the income source of each level. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

As reflected in the above quotation, poverty was considered by stakeholders and caregivers to be a strong driver of violence against children, with 13 out of 14 adolescents (93%) who responded to the online survey agreeing that poverty makes children much less safe or less safe. Prevalence of both violent discipline and child labour varied by wealth quintile as shown in Figure 15, although additional statistical analysis is needed to assess interaction between wealth, education and location. A recent analysis of child abuse and neglect by Plange et al (2023) assessed the receipt of poverty vouchers and cases reported to DSW by location and did not find evidence of a relationship between poverty and child welfare cases, which may reflect the challenges of using reporting data as a proxy for prevalence, and/or the complex relationship between violence against children, poverty and other drivers such as gendered norms.

Figure 15: Prevalence of violent discipline and child labour in Fiji by wealth quintile (Source: Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2022))
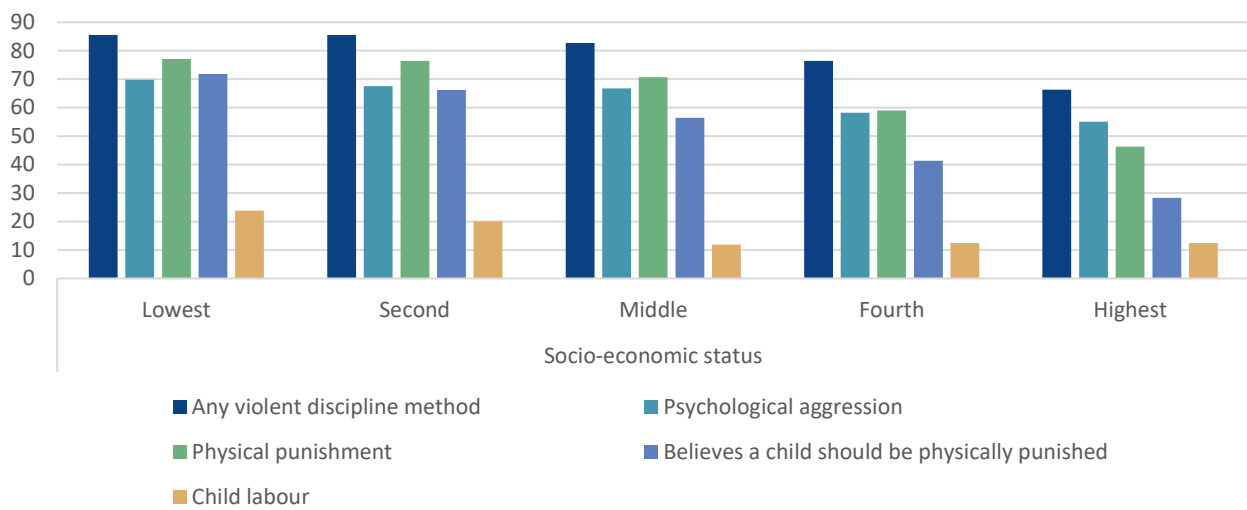
A number of pathways between poverty and different forms of violence against children were evident in the data. Firstly, poverty was considered a household stressor, particularly in the context of unemployment and food insecurity. Stakeholders also noted the increased financial pressures associated with caring for a child with disabilities in Fiji as an additional stressor.

> *"The root cause at the village level is income" leading to "repercussions that come up in households – pressure with children" (KII, National Stakeholder, male)*

Second, stakeholders noted that poverty leads caregivers to take on more than one job and children being unsupervised and at risk of neglect and other forms of violence. This is a particular risk in single-parent families (IOM, 2019).

Third, stakeholders and caregivers, as well as other recent research, highlighted the pathway between poverty and unsafe work for children, with children selling drugs (or drug peddling), CSEC and/or begging to support themselves and/or their families (Davy & Tppou, 2022; Fatiaki, 2019; Save the Children Fiji, 2019). Other common implications of poverty reported by stakeholders included an increasing number of children living on the streets, despite efforts to reduce them and girls having to stop education to look after siblings.

The contribution of the costs of schooling in the relationship between poverty and child labour and CSEC warrants further exploration; Fiji has introduced increased social protection measures over the past 10-15 years, including free primary education and vouchers to help children with books and transport costs, yet stakeholders reported that some parents remain unable to provide necessities for children to attend school.

Stakeholders described these pathways between poverty and violence as a particular concern for children living in single-parent households or living with extended families. In the context of poverty and financial stress in households, stakeholders and existing literature suggest a fraying of the role of the extended family safety net, which has historically provided the basis for the community-led care and protection system for children and helped facilitate educational opportunities (IOM, 2019). Consistent with this, stakeholders noted that it was more difficult to find alternative care arrangements for children with their extended families, given the financial pressures that households face.

d) Migration and displacement

Migration – itself driven by seeking poverty of basic needs, economic and educational opportunities and climate change – was described as, in turn, driving violence against children in a number of ways.

Stakeholders described risks where children migrate by themselves or with one family member or with another parent or both parents migrate without the child, as well as risks associated with family migration to urban centres.

A number of studies have found that child migration to urban centres with one parent or extended family is a risk for CSEC. A 2019 Study into the Trafficking of Children in Fiji for Sexual Exploitation found that the majority of child participants engaged in commercial sexual exploitation were living with one parent or with relatives/extended family (Fatiaki, 2019). Of the 30 children victims of CSEC that Fatiaki interviewed, 19 had migrated to live with relatives, friends or on their own elsewhere, with the drivers of migration being the need to stay with relatives for their education or running away from home due to family separation, conflicts or sexual abuse (Fatiaki, 2019).

Stakeholders referred to parent migration to Australia and New Zealand for seasonal work and/or study without their children as putting pressure on remaining carers, e.g., single parents and grandparents.

With respect to migration as a family unit, prior research has found that the tourism sector is considered a major migration pull for employment opportunities. This involves families leaving their extended family structure to relocate to towns or cities where employment opportunities are available. The children of these parents are often left alone outside of school hours and are vulnerable to commercial and sexual exploitation and child trafficking (ILO 2010; Davy, D et al. 2022).

Stakeholders also discussed the weakening of socio-cultural norms and practices that help prevent violence against children within growing informal settlements in Suva resulting from urbanisation. For example, stakeholders perceived that it was more difficult to maintain cultural norms and practices in urban contexts, particularly in informal settlements, where both parents may be working full time, and Chiefs have less authority over the community.

e) Climate change

The impact of climate change in Fiji is well documented - over 800 villages are affected by erosion and sea level rise (Behlert, 2021), threatening access to housing, drinking water and land for growing root crops and vegetables (Bharadwaj, 2022; Mutha-Merennege, 2023; Windbreak, 2021).

The primary data collection for the situation analysis (which was limited to this topic) and the literature review suggest two primary linkages between violence against children and climate change. The first is the impact of the loss of the home and the implications for parental and/or caregiver supervision. In the context of weather-related emergencies, caregivers described their own experiences of being in evacuation centres or in the community trying to put their lives back together (fixing house, looking for food and water), while schools may be closed or unreachable, and children may be unsupervised. Consistent with the documentation of sexual assault in emergency contexts elsewhere, stakeholders referred to anecdotal evidence of cases of sexual assault reported in evacuation centres.

The second is the financial impact of disasters, leading to poverty pathways outlined above. Economic analysis suggested that 14% of the population could have fallen below the poverty line in Fiji following Cyclone Winston (2016), which would exacerbate the poverty drivers noted above (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021).

f) COVID-19

Of 17 stakeholders who responded to the survey question, 13 (77%) thought that COVID-19 increased or significantly increased violence against children. The literature review and the primary data collection suggest

a number of ways in which COVID-19 moderated existing and created new pathways leading to violence against children.

First is greater exposure to violence within the home during lockdowns. During the pandemic, public health measures were implemented across the Pacific Islands, including limitations on movement, to minimise virus exposure to the community. In Fiji, the national domestic violence hotline experienced a record number of calls in April 2020 after lockdown measures were introduced, which included calls related to child abuse, although the numbers were unclear (United Nations Pacific, 2020).

Second, COVID-19 affected those who were already vulnerable and experienced economic hardship, again exacerbating the pathways noted above. As of June 2020, a phone survey found that 37% of households in informal settlements had experienced economic hardship (RISE, 2020). Stakeholders perceived that this led to an increase in children living on the street, putting pressure on homeless shelters and services. Cash assistance was provided by the Fijian government, including with SC as a partner, to support households during COVID, which was documented as useful and valued by recipients; it is unclear to what extent this was sufficient or achieved needed coverage, as well as its protective value for children.

Third, with the closing of school, children's use of internet devices increased, discussed further below, although other factors had a less clear impact. Caregivers had different perspectives on whether not being in school for 10 months had a protective component. In one community in which an FGD was conducted, men reported that COVID led to greater "control" whereas the women reported that it led to a lack of supervision of children – "*our children would roam around the neighbourhood*" until a curfew was introduced. Caregivers observed that drug use amongst children increased in the context of COVID-19, a risk factor described below under Section 5.1.3.

g) Digitisation

Stakeholders and caregivers described children from as young as primary school possessing unrestricted access to the internet in Fiji, with stakeholders noting that there has been no attempt at national regulation of children's access to the internet. For example, SIM cards are registered to adults, and there are no national restrictions on children's access to specific sites. In particular, stakeholders and caregivers described the education curricula as driving children's use of the internet, with caregivers having to allow them to use devices at home or allow them to go to an internet shop to complete assessments.

The data gathered through this situational analysis suggest that this drives violence in three main ways. First, the use of the internet by children and caregivers is described as changing the nature of family time and weakening relationships between parents and children, with peer relationships playing more of a central role in children's lives.

> *In our days, we did not have access to mobile phones but now children have access – the world is at their fingertips. No restrictions on things for children online. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)*

> *There was discipline before, but now this is changing. We had a lot of family time before as there was no TV or mobile phone. We did not roam around much in our days, we engaged in conversations, and there was more family time. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)*

> *Children become at risk of being harmed because parents do not read the* signs, and most become harmed through their peer groups and the peer group becomes the educating forum for the child and when parents are not there, the right guidance is affected. When children access technology – they tend to go with the flow and do things that are not good for them. For example, young girls are not in school but are involved in money-making activities. (KII, National Stakeholder, male)

Second, there was a sense amongst caregivers that there's nothing they can do to stop children's use of the internet and the sites that they access - "*it's hard to stop children from going on the internet… they can misuse it*" and "*children practice what they see online*" (FGD, Caregiver, Male). Of caregivers who responded to the online survey, 30/35 (86%) believe that the use of the internet makes children much less safe or less safe and noted that this puts children at risk of different forms of violence, including cyberbullying and online grooming.

Third, as in other countries considered in this analysis, stakeholders and caregivers expressed concern regarding children's viewing of pornography online. While the relationship between viewing pornography and harmful behaviours, including sexual abuse, is complex and with no specific evidence of causation, it is likely that viewing pornography reinforces widespread socio-cultural gender norms and unrealistic ideas about sex and sexuality, which is concerning in the absence of comprehensive sexuality education (Newman, 2023). There is more evidence of a harmful relationship between viewing violent pornography and sexual violence, although little is known about the nature of pornographic materials viewed in Fiji.

> *Pornographic sites are unrestricted, and the amount of research required from school makes children more vulnerable if parents don't have the means to do the research so going to internet shop – so how do we measure the risk and exposure of this? (KII, National Stakeholder, male)*

> *Programs are not censored on the internet – cartoons, Tiktok – they cartoons are telling our young girls how to have sex and for boys about information on dating for very young age. In PNG, they have sites banned and hopefully that could be done in Fiji. Fiji is highest users/access on pornographic sites in the world. FGD, caregiver, female).*

> *Some children are not talking about it, they see it and depends on their capacity to process or withstand what they are seeing, some keep in in their mind and then try to practice is somewhere. They are displaying it in school or amongst friends in school. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Stakeholders noted the influence viewing pornography on the perceived increase of sexual violence.

> *In this community, I asked them what could be the reason for this (incest) if it never happened before but now it's happening and you are not talking about it. They blamed the phone – that families and children are accessing inappropriate content on their phones especially the men and the children. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *Child on child sexual violence, makes you ask the question – why did this child become a perpetrator? Influenced by social media or something that has happened to them so they act it out on another child. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

5.1.3 How are the risks and protective factors associated with such violence, including but not limited to gender, disability, and age changing? (RQ1.2)

While data suggests that emotional, physical and sexual violence is a generalised experience in childhood, the literature review as part of this situational analysis shows some key risk factors. These factors were further explored in the survey as summarised in Figure 16 and Figure 17, which show the extent to which stakeholders, caregivers and children assessed risk factors as making children as much less safe or less safe.[11]

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[11] The survey asked caregivers and adolescents if the factors made children much less safe, less safe, no impact, more safe, much more safer, don't know in relation to any form of violence. The survey asked stakeholders do the following factors put children at risk of or protect them from (a) child marriage; (b) child sexual abuse or (c) another form of violence that they nominated. Responses were significant risk, risk, not a factor, protective, significantly protective, don't know.

Table 5 summarises existing data in relation to these factors, together with the findings of the stakeholders, caregivers, and children's survey on how each factor impacted children's safety.

The most significant risk factors as assessed by stakeholders, caregivers and adolescents (as shown in Figure 16), included children who experience family violence (93% of adolescents, 83% of caregivers, and 100% of Stakeholders agreed that this made children much less or less safe), children who live with their extended families (79% of adolescents, 88% of caregivers, and 100% of Stakeholders agreed that this made children much less or less safe) or experience family breakdown (64% of adolescents, 64% of caregivers, and 100% of Stakeholders agreed that this made children much less or less safe). These factors are consistent with the qualitative data. In particular, some participants noted that if women leave abusive partners, they may leave the children with the father, or they may become under the care of a stepfather, which results in greater VAC.

On the other hand, with respect to what keeps children safe, all participants in the child-led research emphasised the importance of close family for children's sense of security. Parents and teachers were identified as the key people who facilitate children feeling safe and cared for athome, in school, community and online. This speaks to the importance of positive parenting and broader community engagement for children's safety.

The use of alcohol and other drugs was another significant risk factor, with 86% of adolescents, 90% of caregivers and 100% of stakeholders agreeing that this made children much less or less safe. This is also consistent with the qualitative data, in which participants also described alcohol and drug use amongst both caregivers and children as a concern. In particular, children participating in the child-led research raise caregiver use of alcohol and other drugs as a key concern. Stakeholders also noted an increase in glue sniffing among children as increasing their vulnerability to violence.

While not assessed as part of the survey data, the MICS data described above, stakeholder and caregiver perspectives described the difficulties faced by children who are poor, especially if families cannot afford necessities for school, including both in rural areas and informal settlements. This is reflected in the survey data, with 93% of adolescents, 63% of caregivers, and 93% of stakeholders agreed that being out of school is a risk factor for children's experience of violence. On the other hand, MICS data also suggest that both child and maternal education are associated with lower rates of child marriage and child labour, respectively (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Maternal education was not a protective factor for the use of violent discipline.

With respect to gender, 71% of adolescents, 73% of caregivers and 80% of stakeholders agreed that being female made children much less or less safe. Participants noted that girls, particularly older adolescent girls, worry about physical and sexual violence, whereas boys worry more about being bullied. Younger children, in particular, worry about violence perpetrated by older children.

Stakeholders see disability and gender, and sexual diversity as a key child protection knowledge gap. With respect to disability, 79% of adolescents, 59% of caregivers and 86% of stakeholders agreed that having a disability is a risk factor for experiencing violence as a child. In the qualitative data, stakeholders noted that children with disability are not in school or are neglected or abused at home – this is consistent with MICS data that showed children with a functional difficulty have a slightly higher rate of child labour than other children, which was driven by greater time spent doing household chores. Stakeholders highlighted that the protection needs will vary amongst children with disabilities as to whether children have physical or intellectual disabilities. For example, the former may have the skills to report, whereas the latter do not. Others noted that the lack of access of children with disability to reporting lines makes them more vulnerable.

> *It is challenging for a child with a disability, for us, to determine if they have been abused – there is a gap in the level of providing that service to children, even in our work, we may not be able to identify this (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

While fewer survey respondents assessed gender and sexual diversity as increasing risk to violence, stakeholders – caregivers and stakeholders interviewed observed that they are always getting teased by peers.

Figure 16: Adolescent (N=14) and caregiver (N=41) perspectives on risk factors of violence in Fiji

Legend: Much less safe | Less safe | No impact | More safe | Much more safe | Don't know
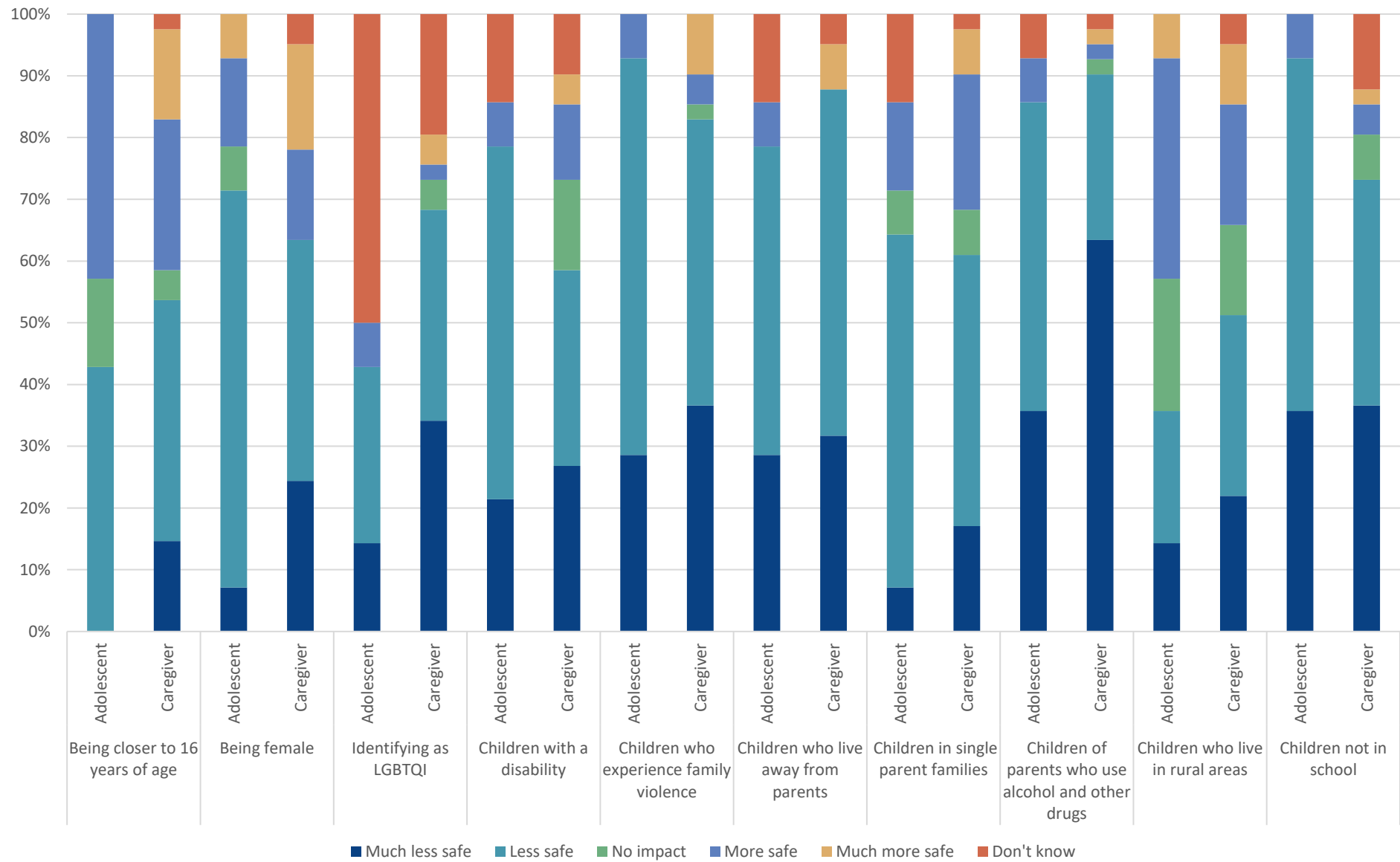
Figure 17: Stakeholder (N=15) perspectives on risk factors of violence in Fiji*
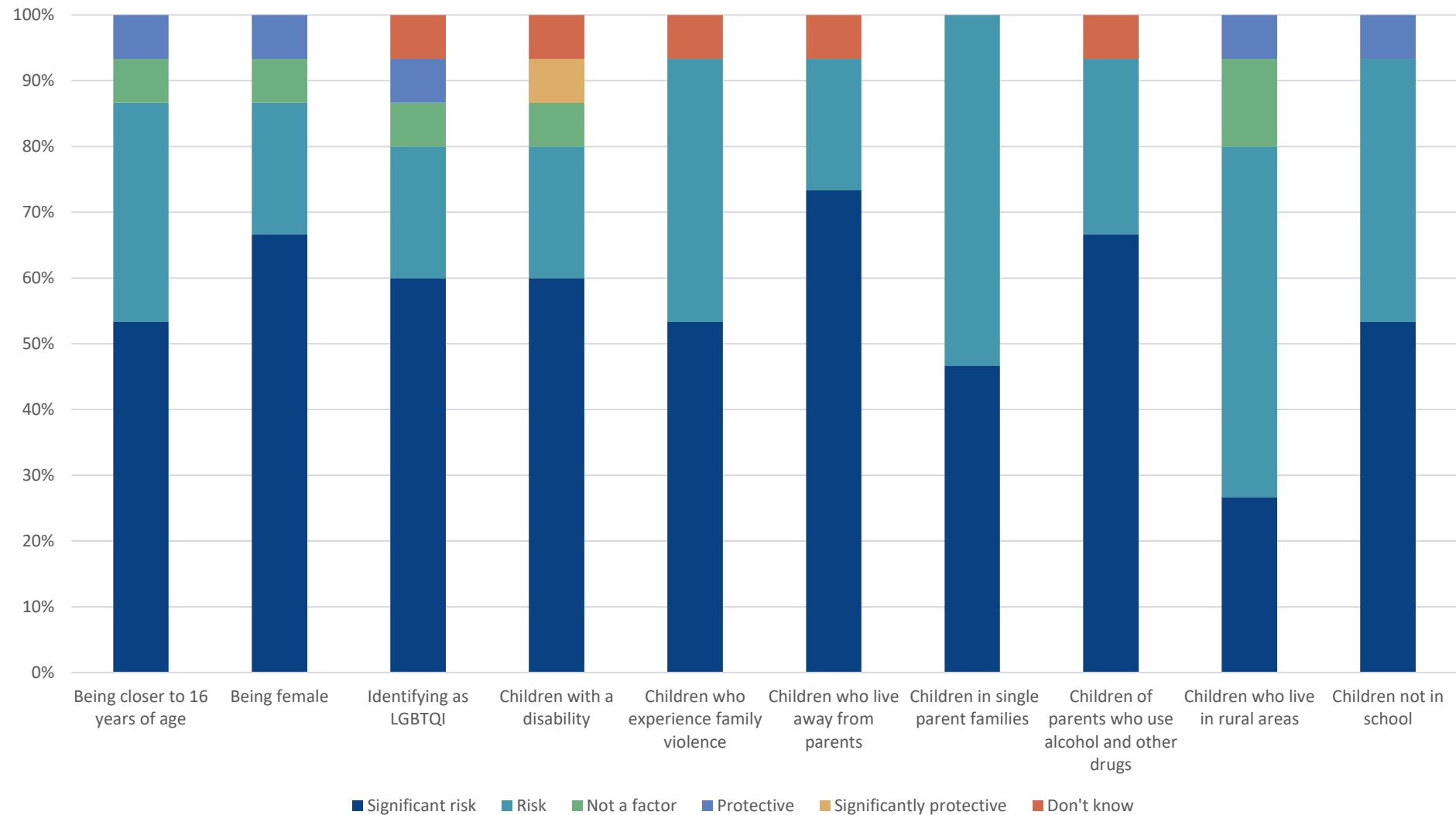
 * The survey asked stakeholders: do the following factors put children at risk of or protect them from (a) child marriage; (b) child sexual abuse; or (c) another form of violence that they nominated. Of the 15 responses in Figure 17, eleven stakeholders considered child sexual abuse, three considered another form or violence, and one considered child marriage.

Table 5: Summary of evidence of risk and protective factors related to violence against children in Fiji

Factor	Risk or protective nature	Evidence	Stakeholder, caregivers and adolescent Survey
Age	**Risk:** younger children may be at greater risk of physical discipline in the home. **Risk:** Older children are at greater risk of child sexual exploitation and peer violence and may actively engage in their own sexual exploitation.	*2021 MICS:* Caregivers reported slightly greater use of physical violence amongst younger children in Fiji (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022) *2019 survey of Pacific* frontline *child welfare workers:* Children aged 14-18 were the most commonly reported victims of child sexual exploitation for the preceding 12 months (ECPAT International, 2019b)	Agree makes children much less safe or less safe: Adolescents 43% Caregivers 54% Stakeholders 85%
Gender	**Risk:** Female children are more vulnerable to child sexual abuse and exploitation than male children.	*2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers:* Girls made up 68% of total reported child victims of sexual exploitation for the preceding 12 months, and the majority of victims in all age categories (ECPAT International, 2019). *2022 Study into Trafficked Persons in Fiji:* Informants identified gender discrimination as a contributor to girls' vulnerability to trafficking. Teenage pregnancy (and the resulting community ostracising and poverty) was identified as an additional source of vulnerability for girls (Davy & Tppou, 2022)	Agree makes children much less safe or less safe: Adolescents 71% Caregivers 63% Stakeholders 86%
	Risk: boys may be more vulnerable to physical violence than female children in some contexts.	*2021 MICS:* Caregivers reported slightly greater use of physical violence against boys, including physical punishment and child labour (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022)	
Gender diversity and sexual orientation	**Risk:** Gay (particularly male), bisexual and transgender children are more vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and violence.	*2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers:* Observations by Pacific frontline child workers (ECPAT International, 2019).	Agree makes children much less safe or less safe: Adolescents 43% Caregivers 68% Stakeholders 86%
Disability	**Risk:** Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse (physical and psychological), neglect and sexual violence – contributing factors include general limitations on their social participation. Parents/caregivers	*2022 Study into Trafficked Persons in Fiji:* Despite the lack of available data, informants highlighted disability as creating vulnerability to trafficking (Davy & Tppou, 2022). *2021 MICS*: children with functional difficulties had higher rates of child	Agree makes children much less safe or less safe: Adolescents 79% Caregivers 59% Stakeholders 86%

	are less likely to correctly identify violence against them as abuse.	labour (household chores) (but lower rates of violent discipline (compared to other children). (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022)	
	Risk: Children with parents with a disability may be at risk of violence	*2021 MICS*: mothers with functional difficulties reported slightly greater use of violent discipline and higher rates of child labour compared to mothers with no functional difficulties.	
Family violence	**Risk:** Children whose caregivers experience violence as a child are at greater risk	*2013 National Study on Violence Against Women*: Experience of violence as a child makes men more likely to perpetrate family violence, and 55% of women who experienced physical violence said that their children had witnessed the violence (FWCC, 2013)	Agree family violence makes children much less safe or less safe: Adolescents 93% Caregivers 83% Stakeholders 100%
Living away from parents /family breakdown and separation	**Risk:** Children living away from parents and children are more vulnerable to forced labour and sexual exploitation	*2019 Study into Trafficking of Children in Fiji for Sexual Exploitation:* Responses from child-participants engaged in commercial sexual exploitation – the majority were living with one parent or with relatives/extended family (Fatiaki, 2019). *2022 Study into Trafficked Persons in Fiji:* Responses from interview participants (Davy & Tppou, 2022)	Agree living away from parents makes children much less safe or less safe: Adolescents 79% Caregivers 88% Stakeholders 100%
Use of alcohol and other drugs (parents and children)	**Risk:** Parental use of alcohol may contribute to children's exposure to family violence	*2013 National Study on Violence Against Women*: Frequent alcohol use as a risk factor for perpetration of violence against women/family violence (FWCC, 2013)	Agree use of alcohol and other drugs makes children much less safe or less safe: Adolescents 86% Caregivers 90% Stakeholders 100%
Location (urban/rural)	**Risk:** Children in rural areas may be at greater risk of different forms of violence	*2021 MICS:* Caregivers reported slightly greater use of physical violence amongst children, child marriage and child labour in rural areas Fiji	Agree makes children much less safe or less safe: Adolescents 36% Caregivers 51% Stakeholders 79%
Education status	**Risk:** Lack of education increases children's vulnerability to trafficking for forced labour and/or sexual exploitation.	*2022 Study into Trafficked Persons in Fiji* (Davy & Tppou, 2022) *2019 Study into Trafficking of Children in Fiji for Sexual Exploitation:* Out of 30 child participants engaged in commercial sexual exploitation, 25 were out of school.	Agree being out of school makes children much less safe or less safe: Adolescents 93% Caregivers 73% Stakeholders 93%
	Protective: maternal education protective against child labour	*2021 MICS:* Girl's higher educational attainment was associated with lower	

		rates of marriage before 18 years (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022)
		2021 MICS: Maternal education (tertiary and above) was associated with lower rates of child labour (but not violent discipline) (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2022)
Poverty	**Risk:** Poverty increases the vulnerability of children to violence in the home, child marriage, trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour.	*2021 MICS:* Children whose caregivers were in poorer wealth quintiles reported greater use of violent punishment and child labour.
		2022 Study into Trafficked Persons in Fiji: Poverty was found to be the key factor making Fijians vulnerable to trafficking (Davy & Tppou, 2022).
		2019 Study into Trafficking of Children in Fiji for Sexual Exploitation: The majority of child participants who were in the sex trade reported living under financial pressure – whether from family or due to living alone (Fatiaki, 2019).

5.2 What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues studied in this research? (RQ2)

5.2.1 Strengths and Gaps in the Child Protection System (RQ2.1)

a) Governance

The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) within the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection (MWCSP) is responsible for the stewardship of the child protection sector, including promoting child rights, preventing child abuse; receiving and responding to reported cases of children in need of care and protection; regulating children's homes and adoption; and providing probation services for children in conflict with the law (UNICEF, 2017a). The MWCSP chairs the National Coordinating Committee for Children (NCCC) and administers the *Child Welfare Act*. These responsibilities are, in effect, administered by the Child Services Unit within the DSW, which the MWCSP is seeking to upgrade into a Department of Children.

The NCCC was established in 1993 to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* within legislation, policy and programmatic initiatives, and has broad membership across government and NGOs, including DSW, the Fiji Police Force, the ODPP, the Solicitor General's Office, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations and NGOs including SC (U.S Department of Labor, 2022). Stakeholders expressed disappointment that the NCCC did not meet in 2023, at a time when stakeholders have been calling for a consistent and coordinated response to children on the streets, drugs and substance abuse and sexual violence; however, they also acknowledged political sensitivities around this question.

While MWCSP has clear responsibility for stewardship of the child protection sector, there is some fragmentation with respect to governance mechanisms related to violence against women and children and forms of violence. The MWCSP chairs the Technical Working Group advising on the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls 2023 – 2028 (Government of Fiji, 2023). In terms of other specialised or issue-focused coordination structures, while the NCCC serves as the main coordinating body in relation to child labour, the Ministry of Defence and National Security, which oversees the police, chairs the

Interagency National Trafficking Committee. Prior analysis of this committee suggested meetings have historically been ad hoc (U.S Department of State, 2022).

Given the importance of strong governing mechanisms in the protection sectors and the challenges faced in small island states where the degree of specialisation is limited and the civil service is small, there is a need to consider the potential rationalisation of governing mechanisms at both the leadership and working levels to promote their effectiveness.

Child participation is also a missing component of governance at all levels of the system, which two stakeholders identified as a gap:

> *Child participation is very important because when we allow them to participate, we empower them, making them feel relevant and provoking their thinking and decision-making. Children are not really participating in the creation of order – we make the rules and decide, and then we do what we think needs to be done, and they are left to just follow our lead. We fail to empower them at the same time. We do not prepare them for leadership. Children are not thinking like leaders and managing the things that come to their contact – someone else has to tell them what they need to do otherwise, they cannot do what they should do. Increase our programs for children – not only consult them when they are old. Set up child clubs – make them run it, have programs where they build their association (club), and they align to rules, protocols and how to grow up guided by rules. We prepare them for adulthood. Impart our understanding to their context. When we involve them, thinking that they are seeing what we are seeing, or expecting them to know what we know – that is the gap. They want to know what we know. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

Stakeholders were of the view that relationships within the sector were strong, having been reinforced through the approach set out in the *Child Welfare Act* and associated interagency guidelines. In addition, stakeholders referred to examples of good collaboration between government and NGOs, with the I am Digital Campaign, and Children Are a Precious Gift from God shared as examples.

Others were of the view that stakeholders were not yet working together to achieve a holistic approach. Consistent with the above, stakeholder reflections shared in interviews regarding child rights and corporal punishment suggest that there is a need for child rights training at the highest levels of government.

> *There are a lot of passionate people in this country, but it depends on leadership and collaboration with partners (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).*

b) Legislation and policy

> *A good CP system on paper. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Fiji has made considerable progress with respect to legislation and governance, including the enactment of the *Child Welfare Act 2010*, mandatory reporting obligations for professionals and establishment of *Inter-Agency Guidelines on Child Abuse and Neglect*. These changes have streamlined reporting to DSW and provided a holistic picture of what child protection looks like, as presented by Plange et al. (2023).

Stakeholders suggested the need to pass the *Child Care and Protection Bill 2023* to redefine the grounds under which care and protection orders can currently be made under the *Juveniles Act 1974*. They have also called for the passing of the *Child Justice Bill 2022*.

In addition, and notwithstanding the progress made, there are gaps in the legislative protections provided to children, as summarised in Table 6:

- Corporal punishment: is not a crime under the *Crimes Act 2009*. While the 2013 Constitutional Bill of Rights recognises that '[every child has the right] ... to be protected from abuse, neglect, harmful

cultural practices, any form of violence, inhumane treatment and punishment, and hazardous or exploitative labour.' The judicial interpretation of this constitutional protection should override provisions in the Juveniles Act 1974, which allows parents, teachers, and others responsible for children to administer 'reasonable punishment.' However, there is yet to be an explicit interpretation of this outside of the education system. Given the high rates of violent discipline, stakeholders and advocates have called for explicit legislative protection from such violence (End Corporal Punishment, 2020).

- Sexual violence against children aged 13-16 years: the *Crimes Act 2009* sets the age of consent at 16 years of age but allows a defence of belief that a child 13-16 years was over 16 years, for the crimes of rape, defilement and indecent assault, with greater punishments for crimes committed against children under 13 years of age.

- Notwithstanding the passing of the *Online Safety Act 2018*, stakeholders have called for the passing of comprehensive protections for online violence, including online grooming and online production of pornography. These gaps are proposed to be addressed through the *Child Care and Protection Bill.*

Other stakeholders noted that the age of consent is 16, but they can only access family planning over 18, putting girls at risk of unintended pregnancies, which leads to child marriage,, as noted above. This reflects gaps that can emerge with varying definitions of children across legislation and policy settings and the need to ensure that the evolving capacities and autonomy of adolescents are fully recognised and protected.

Table 6: Legislative protection against different forms of violence in Fiji

	Summary	Criminal Offences
Emotional	Gaps relating to emotional violence in the home, but good protection online	Not a crime under the Crimes Act 2009. Constitutional protection from any form of violence, but the High Court has not yet considered implications for the Juveniles Act 1974 (s57), which has the offence of neglect and ill-treatment of children under 18 years but allows by parents or other persons having control of the child to administer reasonable punishment. Online Safety Act 2018 establishes the offence of causing harm (meaning emotional distress) through electronic communication; there is no specific offence relating to children, but the age of the individuals may be taken into account
Physical	Gaps relating to corporal punishment in the home	Not a crime under the Crimes Act 2009. Constitutional protection from any form of violence, but the High Court has not yet considered implications for the Juveniles Act 1974 (s57), which defines the offence of cruelty and neglect of children under 18 years but allows parents or other persons having control of the child to administer reasonable punishment. With respect to education, the High Court has ruled that teachers cannot administer corporal punishment.
Sexual		
Rape and contact sexual violence	Gap relating to defence where children aged between 13-16 years (ECPAT International, 2019a)	Crimes Act 2009: The age of consent is 16 years, but there is the defence of believing a child between 13-16 years was over 16 years for rape, defilement and indecent assault. Greater penalties relating to the defilement of children under 13 years and people with intellectual disabilities

Non-contact sexual violence	Gap relating to online grooming and sexual harassment (indecent assault/insulting covers, but some stakeholders have noted a gap in an explicit offence (UNFPA & The University of Melbourne, 2022)	Indecent assault and insulting, although the defence of consent and belief that the child was over 16 years Online Safety Act 2018 establishes the offence of posting or threatening to post an intimate electronic recording, and consent is not an offence where children under 18 years are involved.
Child Marriage	Consistent with international standards	Fiji Marriage Act (Amendment 2009): The minimum legal age is 18 years, with no exceptions
Child Labour	Consistent with international standards	Employment Relations Promulgation 2007: The minimum age for employment is 15, although light work is permitted for 13-year-olds. The minimum age for hazardous work is 18 years.
Commercial Sexual Exploitation	Consistent with international standards, but stakeholders have called for specific online offences (ECPAT International, 2019a)	Crimes Act (s225-227); Employment Relations Promulgation (s91); Juveniles (Amendment) Act (s62A). One gap identified by stakeholders is that the production of pornographic material does not explicitly mention online production.
Trafficking	Consistent with international standards, but some stakeholders have noted a gap as requires movement (U.S Department of State, 2022)	Crimes Act provides protection (s114 and 117) with specific penalties for trafficking of children under 18 years of age, but crime requires domestic or international movement.

There is currently no other overarching child protection policy or strategy. Stakeholders also noted that the Child Safeguarding Policy for government agencies and NGOs, including civil society organisations and faith-based organisations, is in draft and has key implications for stakeholders, but it has not been enacted in two years.

As noted above, the government recently launched the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls 2023-2028 (Government of Fiji, 2023). The policy includes five strategies:

- Strategy 1. Transformative public education, awareness and social norm change
- Strategy 2. Strengthen equal and respectful relationships between intimate partners and within families and kinship networks
- Strategy 3: Survivor-centred and multi-sector coordination of services for survivors before, during and after emergencies
- Strategy 4: Coordinated legal services, legal protection and safety for survivors with strengthened mechanisms of accountability for acts of violence
- Strategy 5: Enabling an environment for gender equality and the prevention of VAWG

The implementation of these strategies offers an opportunity to make significant progress on reducing violence against children and learn more about what works in addressing all of the structural drivers and risk factors described above, yet does not set out to or offer a comprehensive approach to strengthening the child protection system.

Following the introduction of the *Child Welfare Act*, *Interagency Guidelines on Child Abuse and Neglect* were established and sector-specific approaches, including the 2015 Policy on Child Protection in Schools (which included the introduction of Child Protection Officers), 2012 Child Protection Guidelines for Health Workers

in Fiji (2012) and the Fiji Police No Drop Policy. The implementation of these policies is discussed further below.

With respect to the mainstreaming of child protection within climate change policies, Fiji has been recognised as one of the first nations across the Pacific Islands to develop a national framework that guides the relocation process of communities and infrastructure to avoid the social disruption of climate change and to save lives. The Fiji National Government's implementation of Planned Relocation Guidelines (Republic of Fiji, 2018) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) (Republic of Fiji, 2023b) have seen the relocation of villages affected by the impacts of climate change, with at least eighty villages identified for potential relocation (Pacific Community, 2020). The guidelines refer to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* as applying to all persons resettled, as well as establishing a human rights-based approach as one of the core principles underlying its approach to relocation. The SOP describe the importance of child participation in community decision-making regarding relocation (although consent is only required by those over 18 years) and includes a summary of UNICEF's principles relating to children on the move, which include the importance of family unity and protection, safety and security for children. They also refer to the need to consider children's needs as part of the relocation process.

c) Reporting

Children or adults seeking to report violence may report to the professionals or directly to one of three helplines:

- The MWCSP also established the Child Helpline in 2015, which is administered by Medical Services Pacific and receives calls from both children and adults. Recent media reports note that 50% of these cases reported to DSW are via the Child Helpline (1325) (Naivalurua, 2023b).
- The Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations also provides a 24-hour phone line for reports of child labour.
- The Online Safety Commission has an online form that can be completed to report a "complaint" that requires caregiver consent for the complaint to be actioned.

The *Child Welfare Act 2010* mandates reporting for welfare officers, police, health workers, teachers, and legal officers to the Permanent Secretary of MWCSP if they suspect that a child is being harmed or is likely to be harmed. While policies or guidelines have been established across the police, education and health sectors to support professionals to comply with their obligations (noted above), and training has taken place in all three sectors, there is very little evidence on the implementation of the interagency guidelines and how mandatory reporting is playing out. For example, there is no publicly available information on the reports provided by different sectors. Reporting via police and schools is discussed further below.

Disability advocates noted that specialised referral pathways for children with disability are needed –

> *They will not disclose because different impairments have different levels of understanding of what is happening to them. They do not understand the violence, and they may think that it is normal care. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

With respect to children's reporting of violence, there is some evidence that children have increased confidence in sharing experiences of violence, although there remain barriers to their care-seeking. Of adolescents who completed the online survey, 54% reported that children were likely or very likely to do so, as shown in Figure 18. This was similar to the child-led research in which 57% of children said that they would disclose an experience of violence.

Figure 18:Adolescent respondents' (N=13) perception on whether children were likely to seek help if they experience violence
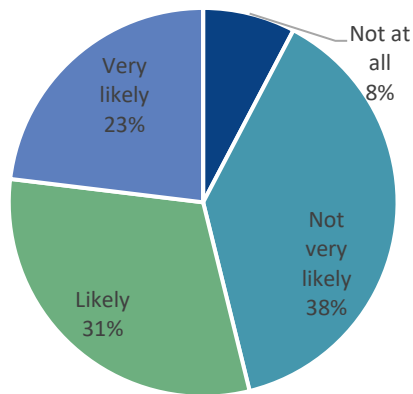
Consistent with the data, some stakeholders were of the view that children have increased awareness of their rights and increased confidence with reporting, partly associated with community programs, programs in schools and the child helpline.

Others note that there are still challenges associated with reporting, and children are often ignored, not taken seriously or not reported. This was especially so if abuse was happening inside the home, in which case children would be fearful of the abuser – "*sometimes they would get a scolding or making wrong decisions if they told their parents*" (FGD, Caregivers, Female). "*In most cases, they won't tell, they will hide it – it's taboo to discuss things like sex, so that is why children keep it to themselves*" (FGD, Caregivers, Male)

> *They are conditioned to accept the abuse in the name of discipline or religion and that it is part of life. When we tell them it is wrong, they are mindful of the repercussions that will happen to them. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

> *Culturally, as a society, children do not have a voice, not given a voice... Still a whole lot of silence around these things. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *For us boys, they will call us girls. (FGD, 12-16 years, Boys)*

This is consistent with the child-led research and adolescent survey data on why children do not report (refer to *Figure 19*).

Figure 19: Adolescent respondents (N=13) perception of why children do not seek help
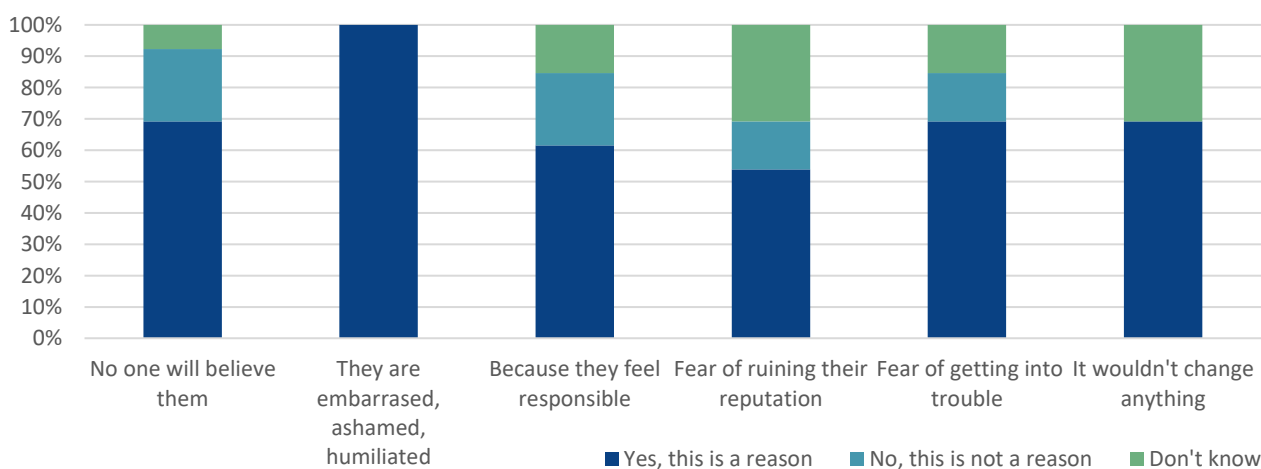
When children did report, they were most likely to tell their friends, followed by sister or aunty and mother or father, as per Figure 20. Children were less likely to report to brothers or uncles, community leaders and church leaders. Half of the children thought that children would be unlikely to report to a teacher, nurse, police or social welfare officer.

Figure 20: Adolescent respondents' (N=12) perception of who children are likely to seek help from
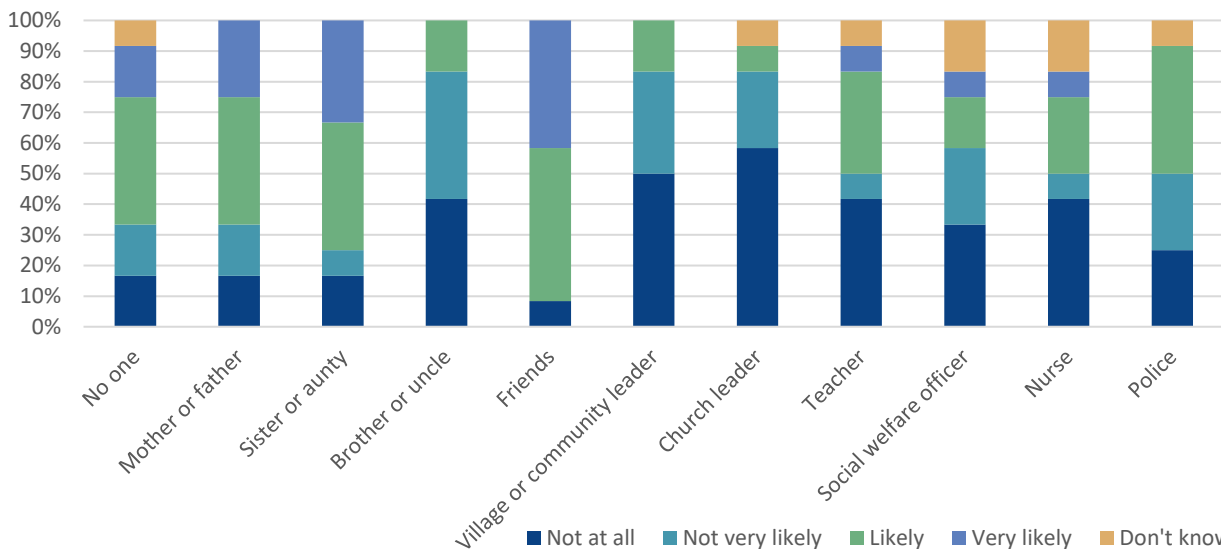
Caregivers expressed different perspectives about how they would respond to learning about violence against children. Caregiver survey respondents were evenly split as to whether they were not at all or not likely to report violence against children to police (10/20 respondents) or likely to do so (10/20 respondents). Some noted that they would encourage children to report to the police, while others noted that they would report through the church hierarchy. Some explained that whether or not they report would depend on their relationship with the perpetrator, given the shame involved, and that they may seek to reconcile through traditional practices (*bulubulu*), discussed further below under Section 5.2.1(i).

> *To some extent, issues can be resolved using traditional systems or reporting to community leaders because this has been the practice for a long time. (FGD, Caregiver, Male).*

d) Child Protection Response Services

As noted above, the DSW has responsibility for the care and protection of children who experience or are at risk of experiencing violence. Stakeholders expressed concern regarding both the availability (numbers) and quality of DSW officers to fulfil this function.

With respect to their availability, stakeholders noted that they often "flag" cases to them, and they do not have the resources to follow up. Stakeholders from service organisations with responsibilities for the care of children reported that DSW officers do not have time to visit them or prepare care service orders and to link children with their family. Other stakeholders pointed to the differences in time allocated to child adoption cases between Fiji and other countries. DSW officers are also currently doing work across child protection, family protection and social protection – stakeholders noted that as social protection has budget implications for the MWCSP, it is given priority by staff.

> *We need dedicated officers, and then maybe we can have justice for children in Fiji (KII provincial stakeholder, SWD)*

Moving to a more specialised child services department will be welcomed by the sector - stakeholders noted that there is a need for increased pre-service and in-service training of DSW officers in child protection case management and interaction with children, as well as a review of the position descriptions and recruitment processes. There was a perception amongst multiple stakeholders that to achieve quality CP services, DSW needs the right personnel in place.

> *Those mandated by law to safeguard children lack the knowledge, but they want to tell children about the authority they have (KII national stakeholder, police)*

Government financing of DSW's child protection work is not specified within the budget – it is included within the budget for "Social Welfare", which includes social and disability pensions, as well as child protection payments (care and protection allowance). Analysis of the trends with respect to salary budget shows that the DSW has received a slightly declining share in the overall government budget for salaries between 2021-22 and 2023-24, as shown in Table 7. It is important to note that this slight decline in the share of the salary budget is taking place in the context of increasing caseloads of reports under the *Child Welfare and Protection Act*, as noted in Figure 5 above.

Table 7: Share of the government staffing budget (establishment and wage earners) allocated to Social Welfare (Source: author analysis based on Republic of Fiji (2023))

Budget line	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
DSW (MWCSP Program 2), staffing budget FJD thousands	3,784	3,888	3,943
% of the total government staffing budget	0.41%	0.38%	0.37%

Other aspects of the government seem also to have limited resources or capacity to fulfil their mandates. The Online Safety Commission currently only has four staff and is in need of a Child Protection Specialist if it is going to lead in this area. The Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Industrial Relations is responsible *for undertaking inspections to ensure compliance with child labour, yet the US government notes that – "The [Fijian] government did not report how many labour inspections it conducted in 2022 or 2021, compared with 843 inspections in 2020, nor did it identify any child labour violations in 2022 or 2021 (41 identified in 2019*)" (U.S Department of Labor, 2022).

Stakeholders recognised the contribution of international partners, including SC and UNICEF, for their work in child protection and recent work through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership to conduct safeguarding training. Some also commented on the positive influence of the mainstreaming of disability inclusion within child protection programs, which has created greater linkages between the Office for People with Disability with the police or DSW. However, there were calls for more funds for child protection and greater linkages with donor-financed programs related to the elimination of violence against women and climate change. Stakeholders also called for greater south-to-south collaboration.

> *Everyone should have the mindset that they need to include children as part of the funding for women, and they are not two separate issues – they impact each other (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

e) Police

With respect to the Fiji Police, one of the KPIs of police is reducing crimes against children, suggesting that it is an institutional priority. There are a number of different specialised police units relating to child protection. These include the Sexual Offences Unit of Fiji Police (which responds to cases of both adults and children, although it is limited to divisional centres), the Human Trafficking Unit of Fiji Police and the Juvenile Bureau of Fiji Police. There are also Child Focal Points (in each police station) (UNICEF, 2017a). The practice of these units is supported by standard operating procedures, as well as the Fiji Police Pocket Guide on Dealing with Young People (UNICEF, 2017a).

In addition, under the *Child Welfare Act* and the Interagency Guidelines, police have an obligation to refer cases where children may be at risk of violence to the MWCSP. Police have a "No Drop" policy relating to gender-based violence – meaning all complaints of gender-based violence must be registered and responded to.

Notwithstanding the policy commitment, there are reported gaps in the implementation of the above. Data from this situational analysis are consistent with past assessments, which have found that referrals from police to the MWCSP under the Child Welfare Act 2010 have improved, but referrals are not always done consistently and in a timely way, and the 'no-drop policy' is not being consistently applied. With respect to timely referral to MWCSP, some stakeholders shared concerns that while police may make a referral to the MWCSP, they may at the same time allow schools or communities to facilitate a resolution.

> There are still gaps in how legislation is implemented. We have the No Drop Policy, which states that reports cannot be withdrawn. We have seen that police try to reconcile with the perpetrator... If a child is seeking justice and has gone to the police to report, they should do their role in protecting the child. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Similarly, prior analysis has found gaps in the treatment of child victims. A 2015 UNICEF evaluation (UNICEF, 2017a) found: about 50/50 split between positive and negative experiences with police, for child victims interviewed (police uninterested, threatening, judgmental or not respectful or privacy). Stakeholders who worked with children and police generally thought police lacked interviewing skills when it came to child victims.

> Police are key stakeholders in the child protection system and have their own set of challenges. Young recruits are not trained on how to address these issues. Must have skills to deal with children's issues in a sensitive way. In police stations, we noticed children are handled in not appropriate ways, in terms of interviewing them, how to maintain their dignity – services are still patchy and capacity very weak. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

As part of protocols, the DSW has committed to ensuring that "*in all cases, welfare officers are present during police interviews with children to support the best interests of the child where necessary or a person trusted by the child should be present to support the child*" (Ministry of Women Children and Poverty Alleviation, 2018, p. 54). It is unclear to what extent this takes place.

Stakeholders thus suggested that there was a greater need for pre-service and in-service training on child protection in the Police Force, with concern over policy officers' knowledge of the legal frameworks related to child protection and their ability to manage cases in a confidential and sensitive manner. Prior analysis has also raised concern about the capacity of police to cope with workload regarding children, and notified that there is no dedicated police budget for child protection (comes under the operational budget) (UNICEF, 2017a).

f) Justice

Like other parts of the formal justice system, Fiji has made significant progress in strengthening the justice system for children over the past 10-15 years. This includes the establishment of specialised courts, legal services and court proceedings, as described in Table 8. Examples of recent progress by the ODPP in 2019 include the revision of Guidelines on Prosecuting Child Sexual Abuse Cases and Other Crimes Against Children and the establishment of a Victim and Witness Assistance Unit. These developments specifically addressed a gap noted in a 2015 evaluation and 2017 assessment regarding the lack of comprehensive victim/witness support services (UNICEF, 2017a).

The main constraint presenting in the gap in the literature relates to resource constraints. This includes the lengthy investigating and court processes leave children and families frustrated and unsafe where perpetrators at large continue to harass and abuse victims.

Table 8: Overview of courts relating to child protection in Fiji

SYSTEM ACTORS/BODIES AND ROLES	STRENGTHS/GAPS
COURTS: Magistrates' Court (including its Family Division) High Court (including its Family Division) **Employment Relations Tribunal (for alleged violations of child labour provisions**	Strengths: • Judicial Department issued a comprehensive Bench Book on Children (guidance for judges and magistrates on handling cases involving children) (Coram International, 2021) • Screens used in all courts/live-link facilities used in some courts to facilitate children's testimony and reduce secondary victimisation (Coram International, 2021).
Magistrates' Court (children in conflict with the law) **Juvenile Court (for children in conflict with the law)**	Dedicated Juvenile Court in Suva, Magistrates Court declared a Juvenile court when hearing children's matters in other areas. Strengths: • As a matter of practice, many matters involving child offenders are listed for magistrates who are supportive of juvenile justice principles and child-friendly procedures, such as removing formal court attire, modifying language and closing the court. • Some magistrates report involving parents, church groups, village elders and school teachers in the sentencing process. (UNICEF, 2017a)
SPECIALISED LEGAL SERVICES **Office of the DPP**	Child Protection Division and Sexual Crimes Division: Prosecutes all sexual and gender-based violence (including child sexual abuse) and other crimes where children are victims. Includes a Victim and Witness Assistance Unit, (Coram International, 2021)
Legal practitioners/Legal Aid Commission	Legal Aid provides services to those who are unable to afford assistance, including women, children and those with special needs and takes cases including Assault, Unlawful detention, Corporal punishment, Bullying, Parental neglect and Child custody.
SPECIALISED COURT PROCESSES **Child-friendly procedures and measures for legal proceedings**	Strengths • Juveniles Act: courts be closed to observers (other than bona fide journalists) whenever a child is giving evidence. Publication of any information about the child's identity prohibited. (UNICEF, 2017a) • Criminal Procedure Act 2009: range of measures that may be used for vulnerable witnesses (including children), such as the use of video-taped statements, testimony from outside the courtroom via closed circuit television, use of screens to block the witness' view of the accused, pre-recording of the witness' evidence at a location outside of the courthouse and questioning through an intermediary Gaps: • Officers are not consistently doing pre-trial court familiarisation with child victims due to pressure on their time. • Sometimes, the misapplication of the requirement to close court proceedings – excludes support persons who are there for the child's benefit as well. (UNICEF, 2017a)

g) Education

The Ministry of Education has made significant progress in strengthening the legislative framework relating to the *2003 Guidelines Banning Corporal Punishment, the 2010 Policy on Behaviour Management in Schools* and the *2015 Policy on Child Protection in Schools*. This latter policy also introduced Child Protection Officers

within schools. Together with the *Child Welfare Act* and the *Interagency Guidelines*, this policy framework and associated trainings, have led to some improvements with respect to reporting.

> *Those reported cases coming to the homes are reported through the schools – teachers are reading the signs, asking them why it is happening, and in the process of that interview, they are disclosing these things (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

However, data suggest that school leaders were not providing timely and systematic notification to DSW or were proceeding with formal reporting to comply with their obligations and traditional reconciliation processes, knowing that the case would be resolved before DSW was able to investigate, thus saving the school or community/perpetrator reputational damage. While the education policy noted above introduced Child Protection Officers to each school, stakeholders suggested that they do not have an independent role in deciding whether to report, and that this decision rests with the head teacher.

> *If a teacher is involved and the Head of School comes to know of it, they decide to reconcile and not report to a higher authority. There are incidences where a child is physically assaulted in school, and we get the notification, [yet] before our officers go to attend, the school sends an email that the perpetrator has gone to police and parents to sort it out… That is when children lose trust in adults, so if it happens again, they think that nothing will be done (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Male)*

> *What we gather from prominent schools is that they don't want to report because you get a red flag, and the Principal does not get a job and title the next year. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

With respect to the Ministry of Education's Child Protection Policy, some stakeholders thought that the policy was not fit for purpose and that the role of the Child Protection Officer is too demanding. There is a need to revisit and conduct further training on these policies.

> *The Ministry of Education Child Protection Policy is so thick, they do not understand it, it's mandatory to sign, but they don't understand it. Principals do not know their reporting mechanisms and referral pathways. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *All Child Protection Officers have been trained by UNICEF, but there are just too many things to do; referral pathways need to be more consistent (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Other key stakeholders noted that there is a need to improve safeguarding practices within schools.

> *For example – people who have been publicly released and pardoned – those who have abused children like teachers (are going back to schools) (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

h) Information system

As reflected in the data presented in Section 5.1.1, there are administrative information systems within Child Helpline, DSW, police and OPDD that continue to, or have in the past, published information regarding cases, reports, or prosecutions relating to violence against children. A key strength of these systems is the use of a common definition of child – under 18 years of age – enabling analysis for monitoring, evaluation and learning across the data sets. Ensuring annual publications assessing trends across the information systems will facilitate dialogue on long-term and recent trends and appropriate system responses. Consideration of strengthening and including information from the education and health sectors, as well as the Online Safety Commission, will help ensure a comprehensive of these sectors and place greater accountability on these sectors.

The effectiveness of these information systems to support responsive case management was not assessed as part of this situational analysis.

i) Community

There is significant work taking place in Fiji with respect to establishing capacities at the community level for the prevention and response to violence against children. The Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has adapted the *Children are a Precious Gift from God* training package, developed Child Protection Policies for villages, and is in the process of conducting training in communities. The *Children are a Precious Gift from God* package developed by UNICEF, also used in SC's Collective Action to End Violence against Children program in Fiji, was designed as a one-week training program, which was theorised would lead to community-level child protection mechanisms, including through the creation of child protection plans (Szamier & Attenborough, 2017). While it is beyond the scope of this situational analysis to assess the current iteration of these packages, which appears as one component of more comprehensive approaches, it is important to highlight that a past review found:

> ... *limited evidence that the package is delivering results consistent with expectations and objectives, or that measurement of results is part of the approach at all. Stakeholders widely considered the package an awareness-raising programme aimed at positive parenting, and there were none that described the package (manual and training) in terms of its role in developing a community child protection system. The development of plans and community child protection mechanisms is an expected output of the training, and the proportion of communities with child protection plans a key indicator. In the absence of data on the existence of these plans, this output cannot be reliably assessed. (Szamier & Attenborough, 2017, p. 31)*

In view of the above, ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning with respect to the above are essential to understanding the effectiveness of the resources and implementation with respect to the development of community-based child protection mechanisms in iTaukei communities and more broadly across the country.[12] Other aspects of these programs are discussed under Section 5.2.2.

As noted above, in iTaukei communities' cases involving child victims (as well as children in conflict with the law) are often not referred to the police and justice system or are withdrawn, and are instead resolved informally through community mechanisms. While the use of traditional justice mechanisms can be seen as a positive, restorative justice option for children in conflict with the law, it is of concern in cases regarding violence against children, or where cases with children in conflict with the law that result in violence against children given the focus is on reconciliation between families, rather than the best interest of the child, including keeping them safe from further violence (Sheehan, 2021; Szamier & Attenborough, 2017; UNICEF, 2017a).

Efforts have been made by the government and NGOs to discourage the use of such practices. Stakeholders reported that the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has, through dialogue with traditional leaders, encouraged the use of the formal justice system for involving violence against children.

> *[X] voiced a strong instruction through the Ministry to report cases and not to entertain bulubulu (traditional forgiveness ceremony) – he urged communities against going to traditional reconciliation when things like abuse of children happen. The traditional leaders at the Provincial Office and Provincial Council Meetings were reminded so that they are aware that the law will come into play. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

Stakeholders noted that *bulubulu* is a much-discussed topic in communities. Some caregivers noted that other parents need greater confidence with reporting – "*it is bad when they want to reconcile because the child is hurt*" and they need the "*confidence to know its right to report, to go to the police*" (FGD, Caregivers, Male).

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[12] It is unclear if the above initiatives are part of a broader national strategy for community level prevention and response.

Big shift in society – traditional leaders are the ones reporting, even pastors – they rely on the message to us, and we take necessary action. The taboo culture is slowly breaking up e.g. violence in the home is openly talked about. When I was doing outreach, I was surprised with the information children have right up in the interior of Fiji – I can see that the majority of the children are growing up in a different environment to what their parents are exposed to. More vocal, not shy. Reporting situation on the ground is much better than it was 5-10 years ago, and they are opening reporting."
(KII, National Stakeholder, Male)

Given that the use of traditional reconciliation mechanisms is common in Melanesia, as reported in the country chapters from PNG, Solomon and Vanuatu, it will be important to learn from the approach to discourage the use of such practices in Fiji. Questions include:

- Change at the community level – what approaches or combination of approaches were effective at shifting community responses to violence against children?

- Readiness of the formal system – at what point is/was the system considered an accessible, timely and acceptable method of justice to resolve cases involving violence against children?

- Effectiveness – was the formal system able to cope with this change? Were children and communities satisfied with the outcomes? Was this associated with a perceived loss of cultural autonomy? What were the implications of this?

- Children in conflict with the law – how did this shift impact the approach to resolving cases involving children in conflict with the law (and not violence against children)?

5.2.2 Are there past, existing or emerging approaches, including kastom, traditional or religious approaches, to learn from? (RQ2.2)

This is something I am researching and invested in – a community protection system. A lot of what we have come to know as child protection is from experts and professionals – what child protection is, and a lot of time, we have not heard from the communities about what they think and feel child protection is. This is the biggest gap that is driving me professionally and personally. We look at what is given to us and what we learn from other countries – but not what the community is telling us or not telling us or communicating to us. Really need to understand communities, the dynamics in there, and different community characteristics. What we give and share as professionals is what the outside is telling us about what child protection is. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)

As reflected in the above quotation, stakeholders were deeply aware of the importance and complexity of engaging with communities in relation to both the prevention of and response to violence against children, drawing on socio-cultural strengths and grappling with the need for socio-cultural change. While there was limited documentation of the effectiveness of programs in Fiji working to address socio-cultural norms over the past five years[13], a couple of key themes emerged from the data:

First, challenging cultural practices can be addressed with communities in multiple ways by different stakeholders. For example, as noted above, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has encouraged communities not

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[13] As per the full Literature Review prepared for the first stage of this Situational Analysis, one evaluation of a primary prevention program in Fiji was identified. Trocaire and Rising Voices ran their SASA! Faith Programme in Fiji and five other countries from 2017 to 2020. The evaluation was limited in scale of the evaluation (only two informants from Fiji, and aggregated findings), it has not been included in this analysis. Feedback from implementation stakeholders noted the programme's success in achieving positive change in community norms and behaviours relating to violence against women LeRoux, E. (2022). *There is a forest of stories!: Learning from SASA! Faith Implementation in Six Countries*. https://www.trocaire.org/documents/learning-from-sasa-faith-implementation-in-six-countries/.

to practice *bulubulu* and to report cases to police/DSW at the Provincial Council Meetings. CSOs are also addressing it through dialogue with communities.

> *Most of the time we experience that – bulubulu (traditional way of seeking forgiveness) to seek forgiveness or try to settle. When we do awareness in communities – this is one of the most debatable things that gets discussed. Elders will ask us if there is something wrong with our culture or the bulubulu, so during our dialogue, we create awareness - we do a scenario of a perpetrator and the cycle of abuse and how that can continue if he remains in the community. Sometimes it's Turaga Ni Koro (village headmen) or the chief's son (perpetrator), then the community will not want to take action – we have gone through that as well. (KII, national stakeholder, female)*

Second, stakeholders are challenging claims that violence is consistent with socio-cultural and religious values, including by working with champions within religious institutions. Working with faith-based institutions was seen as particularly important in urban contexts where more traditional governance structures are not as influential.

> *Somewhere along the line, the interpretation tried to change, and they used the biblical scripture to justify the abuse. Challenge tradition with tradition and religion with religion… I challenge the 'rod' biblically and to challenge this and realise that what they have been promoting is not what our belief is based on. Bring out tradition – in the past, we had a place for refuge and if there is conflict, the women and children are taken first to the place of refuge – that was the thinking then and most of our tradition, our grandfathers we call them our elder brothers because the thinking is that when they become old they become like a child and society looks after them. This is our culture. I believe we can change if we begin to challenge the thinking that what they been led to think and do all these years is contradictory to what our forefathers and challenges the basis they are not willing to accept. Thinking that rights is against our religion and culture (KII, national stakeholder, male)*

> *Stigmatisation of child sexual abuse – culturally, we do not talk about it (rape, sex) as it is seen as taboo and is a hindrance to efforts, so need to find advocates – chief etc. who can advocate on behalf of children. We have a talatala gase (older pastor) who has become a big advocate for child protection. He has moved from community to community – 11 different communities. He has been moved by Methodist Church to province of X and as an advocate, he… initiated an introductory training on child protection – about having those difficult conversations about corporal punishment and child sexual abuse – when you unpack it, even though taboo subject, they see the need for this to be addressed. Understand that it takes time and one-off activities can sow the seed but need more long-term investment (KII national stakeholder, female)*

Third, as noted above, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has contextualised the training manual on the *Children are a Gift from God,* and developed Child Protection Policies for villages and is supporting training in communities with implementation in its early stages. SC is also working in communities with both children and caregivers with its program design drawing on a number of resources, including *Child Safeguarding*, *Parenting with Violence* and *Children are a Gift from God*, which combines an integrated approach to parenting, children's participation and child safeguarding. A recent mid-term review of SC's five-year program showed very modest but positive changes in children's knowledge and caregiver behaviour (Save the Children, 2023). The SC program is working not just with champions in formal leadership positions but also with community members (Focal Points) and children (through Child Clubs) who seek to play a role in leading change in their communities.

These initiatives reflect the lessons from the literature review regarding the importance of reflecting traditional or indigenous approaches and frameworks, adapting approaches to context and long-term relationships. The analysis of program documentation in the literature review also highlighted the importance of linkages to efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women. In this regard, a previous

review of the *Children are a Gift from God* package found "*evidence that the rights-based principles and components of the training package are being diluted or intentionally bypassed by some facilitators*" (Szamier & Attenborough, 2017, p. 32). This again reiterates the importance of ensuring rigorous monitoring, evaluation and learning of these programs to understand the effectiveness of both the resources used and their implementation.

Fourth, organisations are creating space for conversations and encouraging families to spend more time together, including by reinstating family meetings.

> *In [iTaukei] culture, children are not allowed to talk, but we have to include them in conversations. For other races, children are free to talk – open conversations. A lot of taboo. Parents should spend more time with children (FGD, caregivers, rural)*

5.3 Recommendations

Key findings

The situational analysis found violence against children in the home, school and community is a common childhood experience, with growing concern regarding children's experiences of violence online. In particular, children, supported by stakeholders and caregivers, as well as existing data, reported that the use of violent discipline in the home is widespread and leads to children's feeling of being unsafe and impacts their relationships with caregivers and other adults.

With "reasonable" physical punishment in the home remaining legal, and children clearly identifying violent discipline as a concern, there is scope to pursue a child-led campaign for legislative reform. However, lessons from the education sector, where corporal punishment is prohibited but an ongoing practice, indicate that legislative action needs to be conducted in tandem with efforts to strengthen knowledge and skills of alternative parenting and classroom management approaches.

Other forms of violence of concern also included sexual violence in the home, community and online, as well as bullying both in schools and online – these experiences are largely gendered, or reflective of gender and/or power dynamics and in necessitate whole of sector responses, as discussed below, including primary prevention programs. Cases of neglect, child marriage, child labour, and CSEC reflect the gendered norms above, as well as economic inequalities, and may necessitate targeted secondary prevention programs.

The primary drivers of violence include socio-cultural and religious gender norms and socio-economic inequalities and their gendered implications, which lead to an ongoing cycle of violence. Migration, in part driven by climate change and poverty, as well as digitisation, are also contributing to violence, including in new settings – informal settlements and online, which require continued innovation in programming responses.

While the experience of violence was widespread and generalised, the situational analysis identified risk factors as children living away from one or both parents, experiencing family violence or breakdown, or with caregivers who use alcohol and other drugs, and children who are not in school or living in poverty. Children with a disability and who identify as LGBTQI+ were also considered at risk, with stakeholders suggesting a need for greater knowledge and strategies to ensure the child protection system effectively caters for these children.

There has been significant progress in strengthening the child protection system in Fiji over the past 10-15 years, including through the enactment of the *Child Welfare Act* and the associated *Interagency Guidelines*, which led to policy development in key actors in child protection: police, justice, health and education. Findings from this situational analysis suggest further support for implementation of these policies (including

training, resources and simplification of reporting practices) in the police and education sectors to comply with the Interagency Guidelines and No Drop policy (in the case of police) is needed.

The government is seeking to strengthen the role of DSW as the steward of the child protection system, particular the response to cases of violence, through the establishment of a specialised Department of Children within the MWCSP. In addition, the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs has encouraged communities to shift from a reliance on community resolution of cases involving violence against children to the use of formal systems. With DSW already experiencing a tripling of cases between 2014 and 2022 (refer above *Figure 5*), and data from this situational analysis suggesting that officers are too few to fulfill to meet the Ministry's role under the *Child Welfare Act* and Interagency Guidelines, there is a need for additional human and financial resources for the new Department.

In addition, the opportunity exists to consider the role of DSW officers with respect to primary prevention at the community level. There is scope for the MWCSP to play a greater role in establishing a national strategy for such efforts, alongside the implementation of the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls 2023-2028, with a focus on coordination of civil society organisations (CSO) and faith-based organisations (FBO) undertaking community-based work, as well as monitoring, evaluation and learning of CSO and FBO programs, rather than direct implementation.

We need to find solutions rather than blaming each other. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)

The study findings broadly endorse the approach set out in the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls and recommendations made in the recent report by Plange et al. (2023), a joint collaboration between the MWCSP, UNICEF, USP and FNU. The recommendations below are drawn from children, caregivers and stakeholders who participated in this study, SC staff at the validation workshops, as well as gaps identified in the analysis presented above.

Recommendations for this situational analysis

- Discuss in depth the findings of this situational analysis with SC staff and close partners in Fiji and deliberate and agree upon any changes to the existing strategy. Consideration should be given to tabling a summary report, as well as other recent reports from UNICEF and Fiji Women's Rights Movement, together with recommendations, with the NCCC.

- Consider the appropriate manner and fora to share the report with children.

- Use the opportunity to discuss priorities and plans for future child protection-related research and analysis and consider opportunities for co-commissioning research.

Recommendations for Save the Children Programming

- Increase internal funding allocated to child protection programming in Fiji.

- Build on the multi-decade work of SC Fiji in advocating for child protection and support the design and implementation of mechanisms for child participation in the governance of the child protection system.

- Continue to engage with children and caregivers at the community level through a comprehensive, evidence-based and long-term approach for primary prevention:

  o Programs should include comprehensive sexuality education for both parents and children delivered in communities and/or schools.

  o Programs should aim to address the gendered nature of violence against children, integrating, where appropriate, efforts for the primary prevention of violence against women and violence (for example, regarding pillars 1 and 2 of the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls).

- Programs should include, as a core component, a curriculum on online safety and digital literacy for children and caregivers, building on the I Am Digital campaign.
- Rigorous monitoring, evaluation and learning plans should be developed and shared with partners.

- Engage with police and schools on ways to strengthen reporting and referral processes and inform the revision of national policies in the two sectors.

- Pilot and provide input into the development of secondary prevention programs in communities in which primary prevention programs are taking place, with a view to informing national-level policy.

- Seek to engage with mechanisms governing the response to VAWG, such as the NAP Technical Working Group (TWG) , to help integrate efforts to further integration.

Recommendations for Save the Children partnership with national and subnational government institutions

Children's forum and symposium and having the children tell us what is not safe for them and having that manifesto – have them participate – do not assume for them or make decision for them but let them speak for themselves as the issues are very different. When there is new legislation – consult with children (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

- Engage children, including children with disability and lived experience of violence, within the process of strengthening the child protection system, and in its ongoing governance at the national, district and community level.

- Develop a comprehensive, evidence-based and long-term primary prevention strategy, targeting children and their caregivers, through increased multi-year and core funding to NGOs/CSOs, based on evidence of what is working well in Fiji.

- Consider revising and reinvigorating governance mechanisms of child protection, including child participation. Launch any revisions through child protection and child participation leadership training to members.

- Pass the *Child Care and Protection Bill* and *Child Justice Bill*. Take the opportunity of the passing of the Bill to assess the level of implementation of the *Interagency Guidelines* in consultation with stakeholders and children, with a view to strengthening referral practices and developing inclusive reporting and referral pathways, including for children with disabilities. Consider developing guidelines for the development of community-based reporting mechanisms.

- Develop a National Child Protection Policy, in line with the *Child Care and Protection Bill*, and building on the *National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls*. Set budget increases to increase staff levels in the Department of Child Services Department, with an effective training budget for DSW officers working in child protection. Support the development of specialised online child safety expertise in DSW or the Online Safety Commission.

- In accordance with any revisions to the *Interagency Guidelines*, review and support the design of in-service training for police relating to child protection and the implementation of the 'No Drop policy.'

- In accordance with any revisions to the *Interagency Guidelines*, review the 2015 Ministry of Education Policy on Child Protection in Schools, with training for school leaders, teachers and child protection focal points, and consider the appointment of external mentors for child protection focal points in schools.

- Review and increase the existing social protection payments to support children staying in school and to provide residential care for children. Consider initiating secondary prevention programs for children at risk, which could be piloted in informal settlements.

- Pass the *Child Protection Safeguarding Policy* to establish and mandate national standards for child safeguarding for all organisations working with children, and work towards the establishment of a sex offenders register.

- Publish annual reports that are disaggregated, including by gender, disability status, location and the nature of the caregiving relationships analysing reporting data across the DSW, police, ODPP, education and health sectors.

Recommendations for Save the Children partnership with other actors

- Advocate for increased government and external funding for strengthening the child protection system, including by considering how funds designated to support violence against women and VAWG can best be used to strengthen the child protection system

- Strengthen coordination between child protection external partners, including UNICEF and SC, based on recognition of respective strengths, through:

  o Sharing multi-year and annual work plans for support to the child protection system

  o Coordination and co-commissioning of research and evaluation relating to child protection

- Consider child protection responses to climate change, drawing on the evidence presented in this situational analysis in other country chapters and the literature review.

6. Papua New Guinea

6.1 What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online? (RQ1)

6.1.1 Prevalence of violence

Research conducted for this situational analysis described that the extent of physical and emotional violence against children within both their home, community and school environments in PNG was both accepted and a near generalised experience, and that children lack safe pathways to disclose such instances of violence. A large number of respondents noted the prevalence of sexual abuse against children, as well as CSEC, and stressed that such abuse often occurred within households, often perpetrated by the family members of victims. Respondents, including children, noted that these experiences of violence were highly gendered: *"girls might be more worried about being raped, and then boys might be more worried about being bullied or things like that. So, being a male or female has its own worries"* (FGD, 12-16 years, Boys).

There are no prevalence data for PNG for the last five years, although respondents who participated in FGD and interviews perceived that violence against children in PNG was increasing. The most recent DHS was conducted in 2016-2018 and provides fewer data than other countries considered in this analysis, with no module on child discipline or child labour, and no separate national study on school-related violence. The DHS does include data on child marriage - which show no overall decline since 1993 - and violence amongst girls aged 15-19 years, discussed below.

a) *Violent discipline in the home*

Violence against children in the home was raised consistently by participant respondents as accepted and widely practised. Children who participated in FGD noted that living with their parents is something that makes them feel safe and that their parents treat them with love and respect. Others raised violence in the home as something that concerns them, as well as family violence:

> *Interviewer: What are the sorts of things that you think make children feel unsafe and worried?*
>
> *Interviewee: People fighting*
>
> *Interviewee: My answer is people throwing bottles.*
>
> *Interviewee: People drinking and fighting*
>
> *Interviewee: Child abuse*
>
> *Interviewer: Child Abuse … what kind of child abuse?*
>
> *Interviewee: Parents hitting children.*
>
> *Interviewee: Parents swearing.*
>
> *Interviewer: What do children worry about at home?*
>
> *Interviewee: Mother and father.*
>
> *Interviewer: Mother and father fighting at home. (FGD, 8-11 years, mixed)*

Respondents stated where children face violence in the home or other settings and report the initial incident of violence, they may be subject to further violence perpetrated by their parents – this culture of violence is difficult for children to overcome on their own and in isolation.

> *If I go and tell my parents, my parents will hit me and hit the other girl (FGD, 8-11 years, mixed)*

Stakeholders agreed violent discipline was still common, with one stakeholder describing it as more common in rural areas.

I see back in the village is still very violent and brutal to some extent, parents using sticks and stones to belt the children. In rural PNG, child discipline still involves physical discipline. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)

There is no national prevalence data on the use of violent discipline amongst caregivers for comparison, as the most recent DHS in PNG did not ask questions relating to the use of violent discipline. However, a recent phone survey conducted in PNG during the COVID-19 pandemic found that in relation to a child aged over 3 years of age in the household in the last 15 days:

- 40% of respondents reported that the child had been hit with a bare hand; and

- 27% that the child had been hit with an object, in the last 15 days (World Bank & UNICEF, 2021).

The same survey found that 96% of adult and caregiver respondents believed in order to raise or educate a child properly, "a child sometimes needs to be disciplined", and 82.2% agreed that "a child sometimes needs to be physically punished" (World Bank, 2021). There was limited variation among the survey respondents on the use or attitude to violence, aside from respondents with a tertiary education, with 66% of respondents with a tertiary education agreeing that a child sometimes needed to be subject to physical punishment (World Bank & UNICEF, 2021).

b) *Other forms of violence in the home and community*

Neglect

A number of stakeholders raised neglect as a growing concern: it is associated with economic pressures, women's increased working hours, and family breakdown and makes children vulnerable to other forms of violence.

These days, because of the financial crisis, mothers are spending more time at the table market or trying to find something to do and put food on the table, they don't have enough time at home. With this scenario, it also places the children (at risk), the children being abused at home, there's a lot of breakdown in marriages, broken homes, domestic violence, and someone leaves the daughter behind. Broken marriages (scenario); mum's got a new partner, so the new partner abuses the girl – child at home. So, there are a few drivers of sexual abuse. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Sexual violence

All respondent types raised concerns regarding sexual violence against girls ,including girls with disabilities, in the home and community. This is consistent with administrative data from PNG, which show the majority of sexual assault victims under 16 years of age were girls, although with some variation: boys represented 5.9% of victims at a gender-based violence service (Lokuge et al., 2016) and 29% at health centres (Government of PNG, 2023). With respect to children under 16 years, 87.8% of the perpetrators were known to the victim (Lokuge et al., 2016), with stakeholders and caregivers participating in this study identifying fathers and stepfathers as common perpetrators.

Sexual abuse is very common in girls with disabilities. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)

A number of respondents stressed that child sexual abuse is common in households, with flow-on effects in relation to other aspects of children's lives, particularly the safety of girls in the community.

I have three little girls, and sometimes I am worried about leaving them alone with the family or other people that I'm not really used to or they are not used to. During the weekends, there is a lot of abuse of alcohol; although I live next to a store, I'm afraid to send my little girls down to the store (by themselves), …generally I'm worried about the kind of abuse that might happen to them on their way to the store. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)

There are some instances where abuse has been going on in the village, but just because that kind of topic is a… harsh thing in the village, people don't report it; …which is [a] very sad case… instances (of abuse) that happened to other families, and I wish they had more courage to come out and report those to the authorities. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)

Respondents stated that there are real issues as to the inability of the existing systems to protect children from abuse, given that where *"the family member is staying in the house living with them, in the same household, he or she can always be perpetrators"* (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

In one study that we (did during) a visit to Niugini Islands; one particular school that we went to, the teacher told us, "they had 10 reported cases of incest, and those students left school because of stigma and discrimination."' (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

Stakeholders interviewed for this study were of the view that sexual abuse was increasing. According to the most recent DHS, which was conducted in 2016-18, 15% of women aged 15-19 years had ever experienced sexual violence (Papua New Guinea National Statistical Office, 2019). Prior surveys in Bougainville have found a higher prevalence of perpetration of rape amongst men (60.7%) (partner or non-partner), with 24.6% doing so before the age of 15 and 41.7% between the age of 15-19 years (Jewkes et al., 2013). Data from the Health Information System show a decline in sexual violence cases perpetrated against children 0-16 years from 2019 to 2021, although this may represent a decline in the utilisation of health services in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Child marriage

Do children worry about being forced to marry?

Yes, some will be worried because they think that the person that they will marry will abuse them or they will not treat them the way their parents treat them.

Some children are forced to get married; some say that it's not good because if you get married, you have children, and how would you look after [them] when you don't have …. a good job to work, and you cannot look after or afford that?..

Some people are worried about their education. If they get married, they'll have a hard time looking after the children (they will have). Some people don't want to get married, so they get educated, and then they can find jobs.

Some people get scared to get married because marriage life is very hard. (FGD, 8-11year, Mixed)

As reflected in the above responses from children in PNG, child marriage is common in PNG and has serious ramifications for the child's emotional, mental and physical well-being, further contributing to the existence of a culture of violence: *'they violently force their daughter to marry a man'* (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female).

Civil marriage is legal in PNG for girls at 16 years and boys at 18 years, or 14 years and 16 years, respectively, with the court order, and customary marriage is legal at any age (refer to Section 6.2.1). The gendered legislative standards are reflected in the prevalence rates: the most recent DHS, for which data were collected from 2016-18, found that 28% of women aged 20-24 years were married before 18 years of age, compared to 4% of men aged 20-24 years (Papua New Guinea National Statistical Office, 2019). Longer-term trend data compiled by UNICEF (2022) show no change in the prevalence of child marriage at 15 years or 18 years for girls in PNG since 1993, as shown in Figure 21.

Spousal gaps are higher in PNG compared to other countries, with a recent analysis by UNICEF and UNFPA (2022) on child marriage in the region finding that women in PNG are, on average, six years younger than their husbands/partners and 20% of women are married to men more than 10 years older. This report suggested that large age gaps, such as those found in PNG, are associated with arranged/forced marriages,

as opposed to early union/cohabitation (UNICEF & UNFPA, 2022). However, data from the FGD with caregivers suggest that cohabitation is also taking place in PNG, which may or may not include a transactional component.

Figure 21: Child marriage before 15 and 18 years in PNG, 1993 – 2018 (Source: UNICEF (2022))
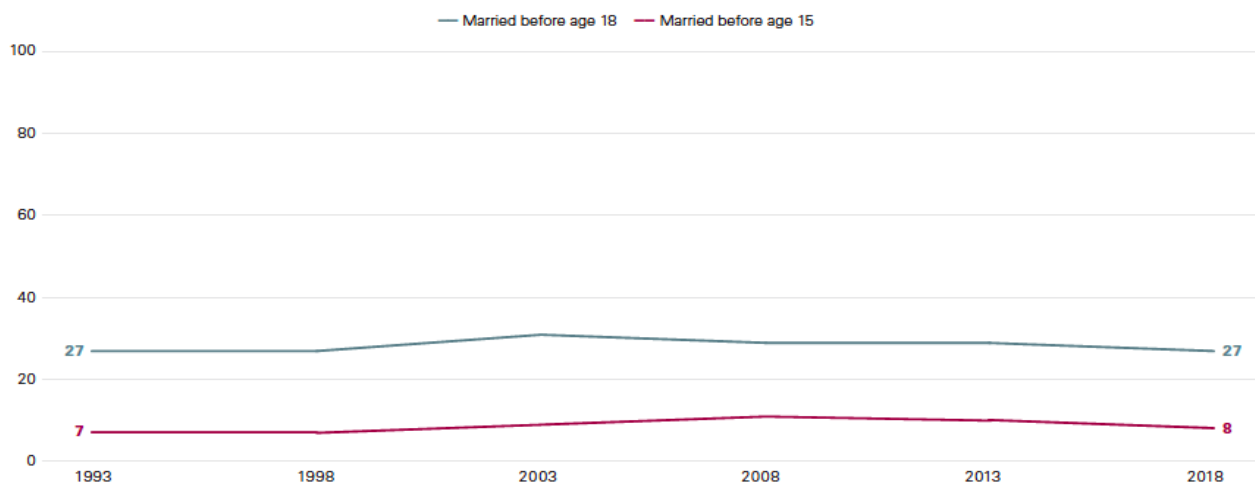
Girls who are married before 18 years of age also experience high rates of violence perpetrated by their partners. Girls/women aged 15-19 years who had ever been married – with 69% ever experiencing physical, sexual or emotional violence committed by their current husband/partner, including 68% ever experiencing physical or sexual violence committed by their current partner (Papua New Guinea National Statistical Office, 2019). Consistent with this, a higher proportion of girls/women aged 15-19 years who are married reported that their husbands/partners displayed three or more controlling behaviours (56%), compared with women aged 20 years and above (30%-47%) (Papua New Guinea National Statistical Office, 2019). Girls/women aged 15-19 years also had high rates of acceptance of violence against women (69% agreed a husband was justified in hitting or beating his wife for one or more reasons) and were less likely to seek help to stop violence than women aged 20 and above (24% versus 33%-39%) (Papua New Guinea National Statistical Office, 2019).

Child labour and commercial sexual exploitation of children

Minimal data exists relating to child workers, child labour and the worst forms of child labour in PNG, and the most recent DHS did not include the child labour module. According to the National Action Plan to eliminate Child Labour in Papua New Guinea (2021), prior estimates suggest 19.3% of children aged between 10-14 years (1995) and 31.4% of children aged 14 years or over were economically active (2011). Forms of child labour by sector and activity are listed in Table 9.

Respondent data reflected awareness of the tension between children's contribution to the household and their well-being/education.

> *As a mother, when I see my child working, overloading himself (with work), when the father gives him work, 'go chop this firewood, go do this, and do that,' he is a child; that's why he can't talk back to the father ('this is too much for me to do'), so he goes ahead and he does the first work (task), and then, even though he is tired, he goes onto the second work (task)... parents, when we give work to the children, limit it (the work). Give the work to his (child's) limit. Not to overload. As (a) mother, I will feel sorry for him; that's too much for him; after chopping the firewood, let (him) go and play or sit around or watch a movie and then he can come back and do another work (task). (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

Table 9: Activities associated with child labour in PNG (Source: U.S Department of Labor (2022))

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Working in agriculture, including on coffee, tea, copra, and palm oil plantations
	Deep-sea fishing
	Herding of livestock
Industry	Work in manufacturing
	Mining and quarrying, including gold mining
Services	Manual labour
	Domestic work
	Street work, including begging
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labour	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking
	Forced labour in domestic work, portering, and begging
	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs.
	Forced mining, including panning for gold

There has been no specific survey or qualitative study on child labour or CSEC in PNG since 2011. Respondents perceived that there was an increasing prevalence of the commercial sexual exploitation of children as a result of economic pressures, greater levels of isolation and less monitoring of young children, specifically young girls, at risk (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021). Prior analysis has found that "*men reportedly engage in transactional sex with girls as young as 15 in exchange for money, gifts, or mobile phone credits. Tribal leaders reportedly trade the exploitative labour and service of girls and women for guns, to forge political alliances, and to settle disputes with one other*" (U.S Department of State, 2023). Data gathered through this situational analysis suggests CSEC is facilitated online or through peer groups or family members.

> *This time, things are changing, young boys and girls are just having sex by choice anywhere. They just get married, and parents allow that. Now parents, we don't have a choice, peer group is very strong now, for the children, girls, and boys, they do anything that they like, where is it coming from? Now we have this modern technology, …. mobile [phones], laptops… Marriage without parents' consent is the main issue now. You see one girl going to [Port] Moresby and (coming) back with (a) lot of plastic [bags], shopping [implication that it is likely given as gift shopping in exchange of befriending men or for sexual favours]. This little girl is unemployed, and her parents allow that to happen. That's abuse. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)*

> *I feel worried because, when I see lives on the streets of Port Moresby, very young little girls are taken by their own relatives … for trade, like commercial trade. Something that they give to other people [for] money or goods that they want. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)*

Associated with the risk of child labour and CSEC is trafficking, with the U.S State Department (2023) reporting that NGO research in PNG found that 30% of sex trafficking victims were under 18 years of age, with some as young as 10 years. Victims of trafficking in PNG include both migrant teenage girls working in CSEC in extractive industries and PNG girls who are subject to paid formal adoption practices or child marriage and work as domestic servants (U.S Department of State, 2023). This report also noted the risk of CSEC is exacerbated by child marriage, in which "*young girls sold into polygamous marriages may be forced into domestic service for their husbands' extended families or exploited in sex trafficking*" (U.S Department of State, 2023).

Other forms of violence in the community

Children in the FGD described feeling unsafe in their communities, which led to children being reluctant to play and connect with other children in their community. There was a gender component to this, with boys perceiving that girls were more vulnerable to harassment and sexual violence and boys needing to protect them, which in turn subjects them to other forms of violence.

> *Like if you go, say, now if your parents send you to the junction market and you are walking on the road, there will be drunkards, aggressive people... (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls)*

> *Sometimes, the kids could worry about the drunkards because when the drunkards see them, they might do bad things to them, like hurting them. (FGD, 12-16 years, Boys)*

> *If you are with your mother or your sister on a road to somewhere, and someone just comes up, you will have this feeling to protect your sisters, and sometimes you can get hurt. (FGD, 12-16 years, Boys)*

> *People carrying around bush knives, axes and slingshots and swearing around the streets, sometimes, they make children feel unsafe, so they always stay in the house. They never want to come outside and open up to other children and feel safe and play around. (FGD, 12-16 years, Boys)*

c) *Violence in Schools*

Violence against children in schools in PNG remains an under-researched area, with no school-based student survey being conducted, nor any other survey on children's experience of violence in school. Respondents noted that teachers use of violent discipline is accepted as it is in the home, and occurs in schools often in situations where students make mistakes or do not follow instructions:

> *Sometimes the teachers may speak violently to them…use objects to beat them, that's not right. Sometimes they make the students feel unsafe in the school (FGD, 11-16 years, Boys).*

Consistent with other qualitative studies which have reported safety concerns regarding the school environment:

> *The conflict between teachers and students was common, and sometimes teachers engaged in physical violence and verbal abuse. They reported being afraid of the school security guard, who chased them with a bush knife, and they were reluctant to spend time on the school oval, where they encountered drunks who harassed them and tried to steal their phones. (Spark & Macintyre, 2022, p. 99)*

Where children do report instances of violence, respondents stated caregivers often reacted in a violent manner. For example, a common occurrence raised amongst respondents included children reporting being violently punished by a teacher at school, with the parent then responding by attending the child's school and seeking violence against the teacher to whom the report was made.

There was less discussion in the FGD regarding peer-to-peer violence or bullying, but children in one FGD did raise concern regarding "*peer groups, children who are bigger than us*." Similar to the analysis above relating to teacher violence, respondents stated that a pathway of violence often occurs if a child were to raise bullying allegations against another child within the school, after which their parents would seek out the child and inflict violence on the child.

d) *Online violence*

To date, there has been limited research in PNG on children's experience of online violence (Third et al., 2020). The online setting was not discussed in depth by respondents participating in this situational analysis.

Consistent with research conducted in 2018 in PNG, this situational analysis found some evidence regarding children being exposed to pornographic material through their own internet use or internet use in the household. One respondent did note that '*some fathers show pornographic material to their own children*' (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female). Another respondent noted that caregivers '*access the internet and see all kinds of (bad) things, and they practice such illicit acts on their children*' (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female). These findings fall in line with the findings above relating to the prevalence of incest and sexual abuse against children within households.

Both parents/carers and children also identified various "contact risks", i.e., those relating to online engagement with other people. As noted above, caregivers perceive online contact to be facilitating CSEC. This is consistent with anecdotal reports from NGOs and law enforcement agencies in PNG, indicating an increase in online child sexual exploitation, some of which may be child sex trafficking, in connection with increased internet usage during the COVID pandemic *(U.S Department of State, 2023)*.

Both caregivers and children also expressed concern about the risk of cyberbullying and the sharing of digital images (Third et al., 2020).

> *Individuals online can get your pictures and do anything or can ask you unnecessary things if you are online (FGD, 11-16 years, Mixed).*
>
> *Interviewer: Okay, so do you feel safe when you use a mobile phone?*
>
> *Interviewee: No*
>
> *Interviewer: So what makes you not feel safe when you use a mobile phone?*
>
> *Interviewee: See scary things.*
>
> *Interviewee: People making false pictures.*
>
> *Interviewee: People make bad things (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed).*

6.1.2 How are recent factors, including climate change, digitisation and COVID-19, changing the dynamics and behaviours that drive such violence occurring in the home, school, community and online? (RQ1.1)

a) Impact of colonialism and cycles of violence

Papua New Guinea was formally colonised by Britain towards the end of the 19th century, achieving independence in the late twentieth century. Recent global research has found that countries which were colonised are 50 times more likely to have a higher prevalence of intimate partner violence (Brown et al., 2023). The authors hypothesize that three pathways lead to this higher prevalence of violence: imposing "patriarchal beliefs that devalue women;" creating "structural inequities", including political and economic relations; and leading to "intergenerational trauma" (Brown et al., 2023). These pathways are equally relevant to violence against children. Consistent with evidence gathered in this situational analysis and reflected in the prevalence of childhood trauma presented in Table 10, respondents raised cycles of violence as an ongoing concern. As demonstrated by Table 9, a high proportion of adults who have experienced child abuse or trauma in Bougainville.

Table 10: Proportion of adults reporting experiencing child abuse or trauma in Bougainville (Source: Fulu et al., 2017)

	Emotional	Physical	Sexual	IPV/household violence	Any childhood trauma
Men	17·2	67.4	31.7	56·2	91.9
Women	29·1	49.0	11.5	49·6	84.0

There is evidence from the existing literature of the connection between childhood trauma and violence against children from PNG. Childhood trauma is associated with male perpetration of IPV in adulthood in PNG (Feinstein et al., 2022; Fulu et al., 2017; Jewkes et al., 2013; Jewkes et al., 2017), as well as with women's justification, acceptance (Aboagye et al., 2023) and experience (Fulu et al., 2017; Jewkes et al., 2017) of IPV. In PNG, the association was the weakest where men witnessed IPV towards their mother and stronger where they as children experienced emotional abuse, stronger again for physical abuse, stronger again for sexual abuse, and strongest for children who experienced both physical and sexual abuse (Fulu et al., 2017).

b) *Socio-cultural norms and practices relating to gender and violence*

The literature review found strong evidence that violence against children in PNG is driven by socio-cultural and religious gendered norms and behavioural standards for boys and girls and men and women, with men holding responsibility for enforcing these standards within the home and community, and violence being an acceptable way to enforce these standards (Feinstein et al., 2022). Further, in PNG, men's use of violence against women and children in the exercise of their authority was normalised and embedded in notions of masculinity, with strong rewards or sanctions for men to perpetrate violence against women and children and not doing so would represent a "…failure to conform with others' expectations" which "was a real threat to their reputations and to their place in society" (Feinstein et al., 2022 p.60).

Participants, particularly adults, described culture as being in a state of flux, yet their comments reflected that gendered norms regarding the role of girls and boys and women and men are deeply embedded.

> *Sometimes, it's the parents; we differentiate them in our houses… that's a boy's job, and this is a girl's job; that's when they start understanding who they are. (FGD, Caregivers, Mixed)*

With respect to child marriage, some respondents were of the view that practices were changing, whereas others noted that while they are familiar with the law, the cultural practice continues.

> *Our cultural practices… [are]… virtually nonexistent to this day, in our village… Children get married without their parents' consent; they get married to whoever they want, the boy of their choice or girl of their choice. Children are not forced to live in... menstrual (isolation) houses, like in the old days, or go through those practices. We don't have those things nowadays. (FGD, Caregivers, Mixed)*

> *It's a challenging question according to the cultural background and the setting of this community. If we force a child (female) to get married below the age 18, that is abuse. That's according to the child protection act. But that goes back to the cultural way of [doing] things at home. If we do things according to the government [law], that's the government's way, but we do things at home [that] might be in contradiction to the question that you are [asking]. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)*

However, even as cultural practices continue, the underlying meaning may shift, with the influence of the cash economy and other trends. For example, whereas bride price once had a protective role in Melanesia (Thompson et al., 2019), it has shifted through colonialism and the move to the cash economy, and is now used to reinforce men's authority and use of violence against the child bride:

> *He has the mentality that when he pays for the bride price, he owns the girl, so whatever abuse or treatment he does to her is not his concern as he has paid for her (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

Linked to taboos around sex and sexuality, unmarried girls who are pregnant are often forced by their families to leave school and marry the father of the child to reduce the stigma for the girl and their family associated with pregnancy outside of marriage (Feinstein et al., 2022; Harvey et al., 2022). A recent UNICEF and UNFPA (2022) regional report on child marriage and motherhood conducted an analysis of DHS in PNG and found that: 35% of girls aged 15-19 years reported their pregnancy was unwanted or preferred later, and one-in-

three adolescent pregnancies were conceived before marriage/union, as reported by ever-married/in-union women (20–24 years). Marriage was also reported to occur in some cases in PNG where girls were not pregnant but thought to be in a sexual relationship with a boy/man and were asked to leave the family home and live with the boy/man (Feinstein et al., 2022).

The gendered nature of violence was most clearly reflected in caregiver respondents' fears for the safety of young girls within their community, in particular at nighttime:

> *My daughters, trying to tell them that you cannot walk around at 11 [o'clock] in the night, it is out of bound. You have to be here by 6 o'clock because anything can happen to you, you're a girl (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female).*

The placing of the burden on young women to ensure their own safety in the face of violence and abuse within communities was common among all respondents. This is opposed to the development of solutions which are oriented toward communities assuming responsibility for the promotion of children's, particularly young girl's safety and wellbeing within the community. Respondents provided further insight into how embedded the existence of such norms are within communities in PNG, in particular how this can create considerable difficulties for assisting and supporting victims of violence and/or abuse in developing levels of agency and autonomy to take carriage of the abuse and/or violence they have endured to the formal referral pathways and authorities.

> *It's really like, I'm talking to a brick wall. It's like none of your business, we can sort it ourselves…it's like I'm hitting a brick wall… [the family] cannot acknowledge the shame then embarrassed, any of that. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

> *It's like finger-pointing, blaming; yeah, instead of listening to them, and really trying to help them, to see where, they have gone astray, how you can help them to boost their morale, because children suffer in silence. But a lot of people, from what I have seen here, are spectators, start pointing fingers (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

Respondents affirmed the existence of such norms within communities which limited the capacity of children to make reports against their abuser and/or to seek out a bare minimum level of support from within their family network and/or from formal service providers:

> *[l]et's say if a daughter in the family is sharing something if the papa or the stepfather has done something to the girl and the girl is saying that to the mother, the first thing is…you are telling lies, don't say this. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

This culture of silence within the context of the prevalence of violence and abuse against children across the Pacific Islands is well-documented and is a strong factor which contributes to and consolidates the overall vulnerability of children within communities to further instances of violence and/or abuse (Sheehan, 2021). The experiences of the respondents, as outlined above, affirm the existing literature regarding the belief relating to violence against children within Pacific Island countries, including in PNG, that violence and/or abuse against children is prevalent in all spheres of a child's existence and is a scenario which is to be resolved as a 'family matter' (Save the Children, 2015).

c) Socio-economic status and its gendered implications

Recent economic conditions in PNG, already the poorest country considered in this analysis, have created considerable economic pressures on households and families within communities across the country; the COVID-19 pandemic saw prices for food and services increase as well as retrenchment within the Papua New Guinea public sector, with up to 7,000 people in the public service losing employment (UNDP, Government of Papua New Guinea 2020). PNG is off track to meet the SDGs with respect to poverty reduction and food

security (Sachs, 2023). While there has been an overall long-term decline in the proportion of the population living below the lower middle-income country poverty line of $3.65/day since 2010, progress has stagnated since 2017, with an increase in poverty in the context of COVID-19 (Sachs, 2023). The proportion of the population living below this poverty line remains 52% in 2023 and is off track to meet SDG 1 (Sachs, 2023). While overall population undernourishment has declined since 2000, child stunting under 5 years of age increased from 37% to 52% between 2000 and 2022 (Sachs, 2023).

Participants described a number of pathways identified by poverty and violence against children. First were risks associated with caregivers (particularly mothers) needing to leave the household in order to undertake work or other duties, and, in doing so, are required to leave their child at the household. The absence of parents, who have to leave the family home to undertake work, is regarded as a '*big security problem*' for young people (FGD, children 11-16 years, mixed). Respondents stated that this is a common scenario in which incest occurs, and in this situation, the child is unable to escape from their abuser within the household, who is a relative.

These changes were driven by economic challenges, which means that households have had to transition to a double-income household in order to meet rising expenditures and this affects the security of children, who may be left without a carer for the duration of the day:

> *Both parents need to work, [so] then you find that kids get neglected. In the case for work parents come back [from work] they are either exhausted, the parents [time spent with] with the children become lesser. The likelihood of the child being physical[ly] assaulted because you are getting in the way when the parents return tired or caregivers can contribute to these things (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).*

Second, there was a clear recognition that overcrowding within households is prevalent, with large numbers of extended family members residing within the domestic setting driven by poverty.

> *A lot of poverty in the home as well. Keeping a lot of people to feed. One too many mouths to feed. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

> *Parents are struggling to cope with the high cost of living, and there may be three or four families living together in one small apartment or house, and kids are open to child abuse. With difficult times economically comes difficult times for children. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

Third, among respondents, there was a clear recognition that unemployment is a significant cause of household stress and familial breakdown.

Fourth, with respect to child marriage, child labour and CSEC, there was recognition that parents seek out child marriage in order to generate a source of earning: *'Parents are doing this because they want money; they want bride price'* (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, female).

> *So, girls tend to leave school early these days, because the older men can provide her mobile phone, with money, because of the family at home, they cannot manage their home, so they say it's okay for a girl to get married early. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

The costs of schooling and/or adolescent pregnancy may be an additional driver of child marriage, pointing to gaps in access to universal education and sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents. As noted above, unmarried girls who are pregnant are often forced by their families to leave school and marry the father of the child to reduce the stigma for the girl and their family associated with pregnancy outside of marriage (Feinstein et al., 2022; Harvey et al., 2022). A recent household survey in PNG found that among school-age girls who were currently not enrolled in school, 22% said they were not attending school because they were married or were getting married, yet the trigger – the interaction between the costs of schooling, pregnancy, or schooling are unclear but likely intertwined (UNFPA, 2023).

Economic challenges and the prevalence of poverty within households were posited as a driver for children being subjected to commercial sexual exploitation and, often, as a solution to the economic hardship which households within communities are facing.

> *One that is now on the rise is financial constraints or financial struggles that families are going through. Fathers are unable to put food on the table, girls are now going out doing sex work at a very young age; this is sexual exploitation. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *Families who are really struggling to make ends meet may end up selling their daughters or their children for prostitution…at a very young age to people with money… They [parents] are basically selling their children, selling their young girls, abuse girls…some of them are so hopeless that they may have no other means of earning an income (KII, National Stakeholder, Male).*

Respondents also outlined that trafficking practices do occur within communities, in which young girls, in particular, are subjected to trafficking:

> *So then there are these men, sugar daddies who come here, and they (girls) don't have the money that they need, and they get it from the sugar daddies, they get handouts from these sugar daddies… (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

> *There was this really nice girl who was lured in by an older man who pretended to be a sugar daddy, and then she became pregnant, and he left. And this year, we had a case like that down the road. It is a young girl who is marketing at the moment and who has a child with her now. She is hearing impaired, and he lured her as well with K10, K20, and then left her pregnant. But the parents didn't want the case to go to court because they were so embarrassed; he's an elderly man. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

This affirms existing research, which found evidence of cases of girls younger than 15 years being "sold" into marriage with foreigners based on the exchange of money or goods to their immediate or extended families in PNG (ECPAT International, 2019; U.S Department of State, 2022).

d) *Migration and climate change*

Migration is a driver of violence against children, given that rapidly changing home dynamics can lead to a denial of the necessary support which children require in order to foster positive development and overall wellbeing satisfaction (Maternowska et al., 2020).

Respondents in this situational analysis affirmed existing literature that children living away from their parents have an increased risk of violence. This is in line with 2021 Save the Children Project Endline Report in PNG, which reported that Child welfare professionals from both study locations identified adopted children as the most at-risk of abuse in communities, with orphans also at particular risk (Save the Children, 2021).

There are a number of underlying push factors associated with the migration of children and/or their families in PNG. First, stakeholders noted that children migrate to flee violence, including rural areas such as Wewak and Sandaun. Some respondents also noted that where abuse and/or violence against children occurs, children are often relocated to *'other towns in the country. And so, we have carers, grandparents who take care of the children'* (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female).

Second, climate change was described as another driver of migration and linked to poverty, including lack of income as well as lack of opportunity for education and employment:

> *Limited food goes around for all the family so sometimes, you know, it's not enough, kids miss out on basic meals, basic opportunities to go to school, because of climate change, parents cannot have*

access to ways to make an income, that's also leading to rural to urban dri[ft] (KII, National Stakeholder, Male

[O]ur island is almost eroded by sea and a lot of people are migrating to mainland Buka in search of land, proper schools and housing so basically, the community at home has no services, there's hardly any shipping services, schools there, it's been 3 years in a row where the local school there…didn't sit for their exams so they missed out on opportunities to attend high schools in the mainland, all those types of issues, it will impact the next generation of children, the next generation of leaders for our country (KII, National Stakeholder, gender Male)

In addition, prior analysis has pointed to the risk for other women and children following weather-related disasters: "*individuals—particularly women and girls—displaced as a result of frequent natural disasters and communal conflict, are at higher risk of trafficking due to poor or non-existent IDP camp security and loss of livelihoods*" (U.S State Department, 2022).

The respondent data provides a clear affirmation of the effects which climate change is having within, often rural, communities in PNG, demonstrating the capacity of climate change to diminish existing economic organisations, in turn depressing the labour market within rural communities, leading to migration, particularly amongst young people, to urban settlements in search of employment that is both adequate and sufficient (Burton et al., 2011; Sheehan, 2021).

Beyond the linkages between climate change and migration, there was limited respondent data which provided insight as to how climate change has affected and is affecting the prevalence and extent of violence against children. There was a recognition amongst respondents from the welfare sector that there is a clear linkage between climate change and the overall wellbeing of children:

Parents [are] unable to take their children to the villages because their villages are covered by high tide (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)

A level of fear was stated to exist amongst respondents, in particular relating to rising sea levels and the impact of this:

I feel scared when the water comes up because I think that maybe it will be like big waves coming and destroying the place (FGD, 8-11 years, Girl).

Experiences of distress in relation to the effects of climate change-induced events have been found to cause significant distress, often at levels which cause impairment to individuals in areas of daily life, demonstrating the significance of the issue, particularly for young children in communities across PNG (Gibson et al., 2020). Furthermore, the respondent data underscores the existing literature relating to the linkage between the effects of climate change, and climate change accelerated events and the wellbeing and mental health of communities across the Pacific Islands, particularly in relation to the ability to cultivate Indigenous worldviews and belief systems (Sheehan, 2021; United Nations Children's Fund, 2021).

e) COVID-19

There was limited information shared by respondents in relation to COVID-19 and the effect which the pandemic has had on the extent and prevalence of violence against children. One respondent noted that COVID-19 may have had an impact on increases in forms of violence against children; however, most respondents noted that COVID-19 caused greater pressures on families, in particular in relation to financial pressures.

This is in line with existing research, which has found that the COVID-19 pandemic greatly affected children's risk of violence in their homes, communities and online due to disruptions to schooling and the exacerbation of existing socio-economic inequalities (Bhatia et al., 2021; Cappa & Jijon, 2021).

Respondent data, which suggested constrained household budgets as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, is in line with a longitudinal study in PNG, which showed that household finances were impacted during COVID-19, with an increase in those that could not afford food in rural areas, exacerbating poverty which we know to be a driver of violence (World Bank, 2021).

The prevalence of these practices is occurring within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in increased impacts from economic downturns, greater levels of isolation and less monitoring of young children, specifically young girls, at risk (United Nations Children's Fund, 2021).

f) Digitisation

The extent of digitisation and technology uptake was discussed at length by respondents, with particular concerns relating to the usage of technology by children and the effect that such an uptake both has and will have on cultural ways in PNG, which has seen the use of the internet increase by 200% in PNG amongst adults (World Bank, 2023a).

There was minimal discussion by respondents relating to digitisation as a driver of violence, yet three main themes emerged. The first is a broader socio-cultural shift occurring amongst young people as a result of technological use, affecting intergenerational relationships:

> *The culture [h]as changed, and children are more exposed to pornography today than ever before… The media/social media/internet have a direct impact on one's life that changes the mindsets and thus culture, lifestyle and way of living of an individual. Today, violence is evident and shared almost everywhere on the internet, and this is where most are influenced and become victims of such. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).*

Second, and reflected in the above quotation, was concern regarding children's exposure to pornography. While the relationship between viewing pornography and harmful behaviours, including sexual abuse, is complex and with no specific evidence of causation, it is likely that viewing pornography reinforces widespread harmful socio-cultural gender norms in PNG and unrealistic ideas about sex and sexuality, which is concerning in the absence of comprehensive sexuality education (Newman, 2023). While little is known about the nature of pornographic materials viewed in PNG, there is stronger evidence regarding the viewing of violent pornography and sexual violence, which warrants further exploration.

Third, as described above, in addition to online settings as being a space in which cyberbullying and other forms of violence against children occur, social media has become a means to facilitate CSEC.

6.1.3 How are the risks and protective factors associated with such violence, including but not limited to gender, disability, and age changing? (RQ1.2)

The findings of this research align with existing evidence, shown in Table 11, on the differentiation of risks between genders, age and location, and additional risks faced by children with disabilities, children from lower socio-economic groups, children not living with their parents and children whose parents use alcohol and other drugs.

Gender is a significant risk factor, and female children are more vulnerable to child sexual abuse and exploitation than male children (ECPAT International, 2019), as well as child marriage, as described above in Section 6.1.1. Evidence presented above shows that child marriage also makes girls vulnerable to CSEC, particularly for children in poverty.

Respondents noted that sexual abuse against girls with disabilities was incredibly common; this aligns with existing research, which has found that girls with disabilities may be especially vulnerable to sexual abuse (refer to Table 11). There was a clear consensus amongst respondents that violence and/or abuse by parents

and/or caregivers against children with disabilities is common in PNG. There was also a recognition that there exists within communities a lack of understanding of children with disabilities who *'may not show those physical handicaps or disabilities that are obvious'* (KII, National Stakeholder, Female) and that these children are particularly vulnerable, which aligns with existing research (Save the Children, 2021).

There was a clear consensus amongst respondents that the extent of children with disabilities was a source of shame for families within communities, to the extent that respondents outlined:

> *They [families] keep those kids behind the doors. They [families] don't want other people to know that they have a child [with a disability]. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

Respondents noted that within blended family households, children are at greater risk of facing abuse and/or violence; this is a result of a perception amongst respondents that step-parents often use violence within the household. For example, one respondent noted that *'step-fathers are on top of the list as perpetrators'* of *violence and/or abuse against children* (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female). Similarly, children living away from both parents were also found to be at risk, as noted above under migration.

> *We worry because we are scared. Interviewer: Scared because they are not staying with their parents? Yes. Interviewer: So, who are you living with? My mother's sisters. (FGD, 8-11 Years, Female)*

There was a clear consensus amongst child respondents relating to the relationship between drug and/or alcohol use by parents and/or caregivers and the prevalence of violence; a common occurrence was described amongst respondents in which parents and/or caregivers would engage in alcohol and/or drug use and proceed to use emotional, physical and/or sexual violence and/or abuse against children present within the household. Such respondent data aligns with existing research, which has found that alcohol use is associated with intimate partner violence and family violence more generally (Jewkes et al., 2017).

> *Nowadays, men smoke illicit drugs and get drunk, and when they see women, young women, they see them as their prey. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

Stakeholders had concerns regarding the vulnerability of children in rural areas, as well as children in poverty in urban areas, such as urban settlements.

With respect to protective factors, existing data suggests that education is the primary factor. In addition to education, as noted below in Table 11, stakeholders raised parenting skills as a potential protective factor.

Table 11: Summary of existing evidence of risk and protective factors regarding violence against children in PNG

Factor	Risk or protective nature	Evidence
Age	**Risk:** Older children are at greater risk of child sexual exploitation and peer violence and may actively engage in their own sexual exploitation.	*2019 survey of Pacific* frontline *child welfare workers:* Children aged 14-18 were the most commonly reported victims of child sexual exploitation for the preceding 12 months (ECPAT International, 2019).
Gender	**Risk:** Female children are more vulnerable to child sexual abuse and exploitation than male children.	*2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers:* Girls made up 68% of total reported child victims of sexual exploitation for the preceding 12 months, and the majority of victims in all age categories (ECPAT International, 2019).
		2021 Endline Report of the Save the Children "Safe Communities, Safe Children" Project: Parental

	Risk: boys may be more vulnerable to physical violence than female children in some contexts.	attitudes that were more accepting of violence against boys, which was considered less harmful than violence against girls, children with disabilities or adopted children (Save the Children, 2021)
Poverty	**Risk:** Poverty increases the vulnerability of children to violence in the home, child marriage, trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour.	*Household survey data:* Children from poorer households had higher rates of child marriage or a lower median age of first marriage
Education status	**Protective:** Higher child education attainment may reduce children's risk of child marriage	*Household survey data:* Girls who had greater educational attainment had higher age of first marriage (19.9 years no education or primary vs 21.5 years for secondary and 23.5 years for higher education)
	Protective: Higher parental education attainment (tertiary or higher) may reduce children's risk of violence in the home and community.	*2021 World Bank Survey on COVID-19 Impacts (Papua New Guinea):* parents with tertiary education attainment or higher were less likely to be supportive of corporal punishment than other groups (80.3% compared to 96.1%) (World Bank, 2021).
Disability	**Risk:** Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse (physical and psychological), neglect and sexual violence – contributing factors include general limitations on their social participation. Parents/caregivers are less likely to correctly identify violence against them as abuse.	*2021 Save the Children "Safe Communities, Safe Children" Project Endline Report (Papua New Guinea)* (Save the Children, 2021) *2019 Save the Children Child Protection Baseline Study (Papua New Guinea)* (Suthanthiraraj, 2019).
Living away from parents /family breakdown and separation	**Risk:** Children living away from parents and children are more vulnerable to forced labour and sexual exploitation	*2021 Save the Children "Safe Communities, Safe Children" Project Endline Report (Papua New Guinea):* Child welfare professionals from both study locations identified adopted children as the most at-risk of abuse in communities, with orphans also at particular risk (Save the Children, 2021)
Gender diversity and sexual orientation	**Risk:** Gay (particularly male), bisexual and transgender children are more vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and violence.	*2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers:* Observations by Pacific frontline child workers (ECPAT International, 2019).
Use of alcohol and other drugs (parents and children)	**Risk:** Parental use of alcohol may contribute to children's exposure to family violence	*2013 Studies into Partner and Non-partner Violence (Papua New Guinea):* Participant responses, men's use of alcohol was linked to both intimate partner and non-partner violence (Fulu et al., 2013; Jewkes et al., 2013) *2021 Save the Children "Safe Communities, Safe Children" Project Endline Report (Papua New*

		Guinea): noted the contributory effect of drugs and alcohol over-consumption to family violence.
Location (urban/rural)	**Risk:** Children in rural areas may be at greater risk of child marriage	*Household survey data:* Children from rural areas had higher rates of child marriage or a lower median age of first marriage
	Risk: Children living in urban areas may be exposed to higher rates of corporal punishment and a more violent environment (although this may be specific to *deprived* urban areas) (Feinstein et al., 2022)	*2022 Save the Children study on men's attitudes towards violence (Papua New Guinea):* Responses from men in urban areas more often favoured violence than those from men in rural areas – but most urban respondents in this study originated from deprived neighbourhoods (Feinstein et al., 2022).

6.2 What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues studied in this research? (RQ2)

6.2.1 Strengths and Gaps in the Child Protection System (RQ2.1)

a) Governance

The establishment of the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), within the Department of Community Development and Religion through the *Lukautim Pikinini Act 2015* (LPA), was seen as a significant step forward for the child protection system in PNG (Anderson et al., 2022). The OCFS is responsible for implementing the LPA and establishing an effective child protection system at all levels of government, including the community level. Respondent stressed the importance of this progress made in strengthening coordination between child protection actors in PNG, with increased levels of financing being provided.

In addition, the OCFS also serves as the secretariat for the National Family Services Council, which was established under the Act to oversee its implementation. The LPA also enables the establishment of the Council in every province, with the first being established in Enga province in 2021. Under the Act, the OCFS also has responsibility for organising the *Pikinini Bung*, a national forum for children to be held twice a year, although stakeholders it has been held a small number of times since the revision of the Act.

In addition, the Department of Community and Religion is also responsible for the governance of a number of other child protection mechanisms, including the Interagency Working Group on Child Protection and the humanitarian sub-cluster of the Protection Cluster (Anderson et al., 2022). The Department also houses a separate Office of the Development of Women and GBV Secretariat.

Notwithstanding the progress in establishing the governance frameworks, the extent of collaboration and integration between response services within child protection was regarded, by respondents, as in need of strengthening at both the national and provincial levels. Respondents noted clear gaps in the extent of collaboration between response services and that linkages are either not forged between response services and/or collaboration is lacking:

> *The linkages are not so strong with the partners, but also logistic[al] support [is] weak. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Respondents held particular criticisms at a provincial level. The lack of a coordinated approach amongst response services and agencies was acknowledged amongst respondents continually, to the extent that it was stated those working in one agency may not be aware of the functions of other agencies:

The governance structures are missing. The agencies and agents to affect that in the province are also missing, so there is pretty much no strength of that in place at the moment. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, female)

Back to what they were doing, I am not sure. Because, I haven't heard or seen them implementing child protection issues for children (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, female).

This is consistent with the perspectives shared in the government's Second State Party report on CRC in PNG (Government of PNG, 2023) and existing research, which has found operational shortcomings in the responses to violence against children and violence against women (UNICEF EAPRO, 2020).

b) *Legislation and policy*

Progress has been made over the past 10 years, particularly with the enactment of the *LPA 2009* and its revision in 2015, which reformed the formal child protection system and established the Office of Child and Family Services. Yet the literature review and other recent work (Anderson et al., 2022) has comprehensively mapped the legislative and policy framework relating to the child protection system in PNG, as summarised in Table 12, suggesting significant gaps remain.

The LPA represents a significant step forward, although some of the definitions of violence and offences listed in the Act are inconsistent with other legislation which has an effect on the well-being of children in Papua New Guinea are not reflective of international best practice, with uncertainty with respect to interpretation in some areas. For example, the LPA defines violence against children as including emotional and physical violence for the purposes of care and protection orders, yet the criminal code does not reference emotional violence and a defence of "reasonableness" is permitted with respect to physical violence in homes, schools and alternative care settings.

Legislative prohibition relating to child marriage is also unclear. The LPA makes the facilitation of child marriage an offence, with no definition of child marriage, but with children being defined as under 18 years of age under the Act. The *Marriage Act 1963* has a gendered standard of 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys, with a two-year reduction permissible on court order to 14 years for girls and 16 years for boys, contrary to the international standard of 18 years. Customary marriages have no minimum age and do not require women's consent, only the absence of excessive pressure or hardship. Stakeholders were of the view that even these standards are not enforced by the relevant authorities; this is in consideration of the high prevalence of child marriage rates within communities across PNG. This is notable in legislative enforcement, and respondents recognised this as a major failing of both state and non-state actors; consistency in the age of consent should be sought as a matter of urgency alongside enforcement mechanisms.

A similar uncertainty with respect to differences in the minimum age of child labour between the LPA and the *Employment Act 1978* exists, as noted in Table 12.

The forward period of policy implementation and enforcement will provide further scope for improvement within this context, specifically in relation to Papua New Guinea's National Child Protection Policy 2017 – 2027. The National Policy seeks to integrate core guiding principles, including the best interests of the child principle, communal values that seek to nurture good practices of child protection within communities, greater integration between child protection service providers, greater levels of participation, accessibility, transparency and accountability.

Reflecting the findings reported under governance above, while efforts have been made to strengthen referral pathways, there remains significant work to do at the provincial level. UNICEF reported that efforts were made in 2021 to strengthen the existing interagency referral guidelines between partners (UNICEF Papua New Guinea, 2022). It is unclear to what extent the implementation of these guidelines has taken place at the local level, with stakeholders calling for greater clarity on referral pathways. This was recognised

in the Government's Second State Party report on CRC in PNG, with some (but not all) provinces calling for the strengthening of referral pathways and underlying resource availability (discussed further below) (Government of PNG, 2023).

Table 12: Summary of legislative provisions in PNG by form of violence (Source: Anderson et al., (2022))

	Summary	Care and protection orders	Criminal Offences
Emotional	Gaps for protection in the home, school (from teachers and peer bullying)	Yes	Criminal Act 1974: No prohibition on emotional violence. Neglect and abandonment offence for children under 14 years.
Physical	Gaps for protection in the home, schools (from teachers and peer bullying) and alternative care	Yes	Criminal Act 1974: Prohibited, although there is a defence of reasonable force
Sexual	Gaps for the age of consent for sexual activity in marriage. Criminalisation of same-sex relationships amongst adolescent boys.	Yes	Criminal Act 1974: Age of consent is 16 years, or 18 years where the perpetrator is in a position of authority. Age of consent is 14 years in marriage. Also criminalises consensual same-sex (male) activity amongst adolescents. Cybercrime Act 2016: prohibits online sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment but not peer violence, i.e.: bullying
Rape			Criminal Act 1974: Prohibited in line with international law.
Non-contact sexual violence	Gap for grooming and sexual harassment		Criminal Act 1974: Indecent acts are defined and criminalised, but not grooming or sexual harassment
Child Marriage	Significant gaps: Inconsistency between Lukautim Pikinini Act and Criminal Code as to age. Bride price is not prohibited.		LPA: Offence to facilitate "child marriage" by law or custom. Child marriage is not defined, but children are defined as under 18 years. Marriage Act 1963: minimum age at 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys, or 14 years for girls and 16 years for boys with the court order. Customary marriages have no minimum age and do not require women's consent, only the absence of excessive pressure or hardship.
Child Labour	Significant gaps: Inconsistency between the Lukautim Pikinini Act and the Employment Act		LPA: minimum age of 18 years for work that is hazardous or interferes with education and development Employment Act 1978: minimum age of 16 years for work and hazardous work, and 11 years for participation in family undertakings
Commercial Sexual Exploitation	Gaps for boys and some girls, but otherwise comprehensive		Criminal Act 1974: Prohibited prostitution and pornography, although some only apply to girls and unmarried girls under 16 years

| Trafficking | Comprehensive, but need to establish means of trafficking (threats, force or coercion) | Criminal Act 1974: Prohibited but need to establish means of trafficking |

c) *Reporting Mechanisms*

PNG has established various reporting mechanisms for child protection issues. Under the LPA any person who thinks a child is in need of care and protection may notify the OCFS, and specified professionals (including police, health workers, teachers, welfare officers, clergy and in some cases even community members) are under an obligation to report. However, the scope and implementation of these obligations can vary and may be inconsistently applied due to a lack of supportive frameworks (UNICEF, 2017a).

Children can report via their trusted confidants, service providers or, in Port Moresby, via the 1-Tok Kaunselin Helpim Lain for family violence, operated by ChildFund Papua New Guinea. Respondents indicated that children may or may not report instances of violence. Reasons for not reporting include fear of a lack of confidentiality and further violence.

> *Interviewer: If you had a problem at home or in the village or online, would you be able to tell another person or an older person (adult) like us?*
>
> *No, (interviewer: why no?) because they will spread it.*
>
> *No because we are feeling scared too because our mother and father will belt us. (FGD, 8-11 years, Female)*

Children in the FGD noted that they may tell their friends, parents, or other relatives. Others noted that children will often report to their neighbours as the first individual to disclose their respective experiences of violence and/or abuse.

> *They will normally go to their neighbours…Their neighbours always try to talk to their parents (FGD, 11-16 years, Boys).*

Adults who are aware of violence may encourage children to report it to police. Respondents noted that adults, for example, neighbours who are aware of the violence or are told by children, may seek to confront the parents of the child who has made the allegation of abuse and/or violence and seek to create change through such confrontation. Afterwards, make a report to the police within the local community if this approach fails.

Respondents noted that parents will often make reports directly to the protection services, if available within their local community, in relation to sexual exploitation. Respondents indicated that this was not the same for the use of physical violence, for example, against children in communities.

However, overall, there was extremely limited discussion amongst respondents in relation to the victims of abuse and/or violence proceeding to formal reporting mechanisms in place in PNG. Rather, while respondents noted that there was a formal reporting pathway for instances of child abuse and/or violence, they consistently acknowledged a lack of engagement by community and professionals, including teachers, with such formal referral pathways. Reasons included a preference for communal practices and the time taken to pursue formal pathways, during which "*people tend to forgive each other*" (FGD, Caregiver, Male) as discussed under Section 6.2.1i) below.

d) Child protection response services

The LPA recognises the primary role of the caregiver in ensuring children are protected from violence. The OCFS is tasked with both supporting caregivers to ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities under the Act, and has powers to protect and promote families and their well-being. On receiving a notification that a child is in need of care and protection under the LPA, the OCFS may investigate, if necessary, and issue care and protection orders, including temporary or permanent removal of the child (Government of PNG, 2023). The use of temporary and/or permanent removal is low, with only 14 children being temporarily removed and one child being permanently removed in the National District Capital between 2017 and 2023 (Government of PNG, 2023).

The existing response services in PNG remain insufficient in number and quality to adequately fulfil the above obligations. Child Protection Officers (CPOs) are based at the OCFS, with one office also based in each province.

> *And, for [X location] especially, the Child Protection Officer, I really wish and am praying that she would be changed, and we need a trained one to be [working], that knows what she[/he] is doing. We need to trust people [working partners] in order to work with so that's why I work in isolation. My reason for that is I don't really send my kids, when they come to me, I don't send them to the Community Development Office [Child Protection Officer]. That's… because one time, she represented a child that came through here, and she did not represent her (properly) appropriately in the court; that really upset me. And I didn't go there myself [to represent the victim], because she is the one that will be standing. So that upset me, and I said no, I don't want. A child's voice needs to be heard, not the parents', that need to decide what happens to the child. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

While some stakeholders noted that some CPOs provide adequate services, other respondents noted that CPOs were too few, insufficiently trained and ill-equipped to go out into the community. According to the Second State Party report on CRC in PNG, the number of CPOs is 188 nationally (Government of PNG, 2023). This means that the ratio of CPO to children is 1:20,000, which is an overload and inappropriate for one CPO, given the nature and prevalence of violence outlined above. In addition to being overworked, there is also a lack of appropriate resources, including child-safe spaces.

> *The gap now I see is that with the Child Protection Officers, we should have them right down to the district and community level. We have those people down there, so if a child experiences a problem, then the person at the community level is able to assist the child to the district to the provincial (level). At the moment, we only have one CPO sitting at the provincial office. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

The underlying financing of response services was raised as a major gap amongst respondents in responding to reported cases of violence against children in a manner consistent with the LPA (UNICEF EAPRO, 2020). Overall, respondents indicated that there were chronic issues with regard to the inability to provide services in the face of a high prevalence of cases and an insufficient amount of funding.

> *[Child protection and response services] have some funding, but we know that it's not adequate for the severity of the issues. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *On my end, I still have issues with sending clients on public transport to the hospital, which is not safe, only if we had our own vehicle we would safely transport them. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female).*

With decentralisation in PNG, both the national and provincial governments are responsible for funding the child protection system. While there has been little analysis to date on the different contributions of government, there was some suggestion that provincial governments are failing to match contributions from the national government:

You know we deal with the national affairs of children's matters. It has some funding, but we know that it's not adequate for the severity of the issues. Of course, it's not at the national office, but (at the) provincial level, we expect provinces will also budget adequately. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

The LPA led to the establishment of the OCFS. Analysis of the national budget shows that while the budget for the OCFS has increased and is projected to increase further between 2020 and 2026, it is projected to remain less than 0.04% of total government expenditure at its peak in 2024 and is projected to decline thereafter, as shown in Figure 22. Future projections also show a decline in the share allocated to the Office for Child and Family Services, although salaries will remain consistent. While total government expenditure is projected to increase between 2024 and 2026 by 9%, the amount allocated to the OCFS is due to decline by 19% over the same period.

Figure 22: Salary and operational budget for the National Office for Child & Family Services, and its share of the total budget 2020-2026 (Source: Independent State of PNG (Undated))

In addition to strengthening the OCFS at the national and provincial levels, stakeholders noted that there are currently no safehouses specifically for children in PNG run by government or NGOs (only for women) and very limiting counselling services for children living at safehouses for women and children.

I was in East New Britain and spoke to the person in charge of the Safe House, and she told me they have a child counsellor in the province, and if a child needs assistance or counselling, just for one session, one hour, it costs the Safe House, K160.00. For children, it must be free. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

With respect to non-government services, across PNG, there is a heavy reliance on faith-based and informal actors. While the work of these organisations is highly valued, their staff sometimes lack training in child protection, with respondents stating that they lacked ongoing training, with some stating that:

I'm not comfortable; I'm not confident in (practice)… I really need (training) again. There are five Catholic Safe Houses in the country, and a lot of us are saying we need that to upgrade those policies so we know exactly what is happening and what we do. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)

I did not have training to be a child protection officer, but we do work related to child protection. The engagement with the organization is also expanded beyond management and operations to include

some elements of child protection. And that has been the case since 2014. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

e) Policing

The government's Second Report on the CRC noted that Royal Papua New Guinea has established 26 Family and Sexual Violence Units (FVSU) across the country to respond to domestic violence (Government of PNG, 2023).[14] The FVSU receives referrals from hospitals regarding cases of child abuse. The report notes that the FSVU is constrained in fulfilling its function due to inadequate resources to extend its reach to remote police stations and respond to cases, as well as inadequate staff training. The report also notes that the FVSU curriculum is in the process of being updated to include gender-based violence (including sorcery) and policing procedures, yet it is unclear to what extent approaches to responding to reports of violence against children are specifically covered in the FVSU curriculum revision.

Stakeholders also raised concerns regarding the child-friendly nature of the FVSU:

> *If you go to the police station, have someone who can deal with and handle children's cases. We don't have that now. We only have the FSVU. But we don't have a place or a section for children; say he had a problem at home with their parents, and they can go straight to that unit and talk to the person there. We don't have that. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

One stakeholder noted that co-locating the FVSU within hospitals strengthened stakeholder collaboration and eliminated the logistics of referral.

Although an FVSU exists in every province, given the geography of PNG, most reports of violence against children made to police are likely to be received by the local station. Stakeholders noted that there are deterrents to reporting to police and that police are not an immediate port of call for those fleeing or seeking to make a report of child abuse and/or violence, given the lack of child-friendliness in the policing protocol and/or practice of local police operating within communities. *'They don't go to the police'* (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female). Stakeholders also held concerns that children feared taking to local police given their relationships with the perpetrator of the violence which the child has endured. This was especially so in relation to instances of victims of child abuse and/or incestual relations with family members. Stakeholders also suggested that *'parents must come with them'* (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female) to report to police, which warrants further exploration as a potential barrier to reporting given that perpetrators commonly lie within the family.

In cases where, in fact, reports are made, stakeholders acknowledged that these are not always followed up by police, with media reports suggesting that this is because cases are resolved by compensation. In response to this, in May 2023, the Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality in PNG proposed that the government adopt a "no drop policy" in relation to gender-based violence, obliging police to investigate and charge such cases (The National, 2023). It is unclear if this policy proposal extends to crimes against children.

UNICEF also supported the development of a pre-service training module on child protection for all police recruits, which was launched in 2022; time is needed to assess if this leads to improved practices.

f) Justice

Respondents expressed a clear desire for the adoption of child-focused measures within both the judiciary and legal proceedings in PNG in general. As noted in the government's Second State Party report on CRC in

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[14] Police Sexual Offence Squads have also been established to investigate sexual offences, although these only exist in two provinces.

PNG, while the family court is mandated to hear and determine child protection matters, only two out of 22 provinces in PNG have a functioning Family Court, leading to reliance on the magistrates in most provinces for both care and protection and criminal hearings (Government of PNG, 2023). Respondents reported that the judiciary, in particular magistrates, is currently ill-equipped to respond to cases of violence against children and that there needs to be much deeper training and socialisation of the LPA.

> *So here we lack this, and that's why so many children are abandoned. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, female).*

> *The law is there; if you can ask the village court magistrate how much he knows about the Lukautim Pikinini Act and if he has already implemented that act. He will say, I don't even know one single thing. So, we need to get the Lukautim Pikinini Act down to the community level. We need to train our village court magistrates, we need to train our community leaders, and they need to know that we have a... Lukautim Pikinini Act. For people like the village court magistrate, he needs to know how to implement it. If there's an issue with the child in the village, he's well versed, and he will go; he needs to report it. In any child abuse case, the community leaders are not supposed to handle it in the village. It had to go straight to the district court. But how much do the village elders know about all these things? (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Respondents indicated that if reports of violence against children do proceed through to the formal justice system, magistrates should be required to possess skill sets which are tailored to in an appropriate manner, which affords respect to the victim and their family and maintains and ensures the confidentiality of the victim and their respective story of enduring abuse and/or violence against their abuser:

> *We should have family court magistrates; they will deal with child protection thing. Once a child is abused or has been abused, that magistrate must know how to deal with this matter. Now in Wewak, we don't have a family magistrate (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female).*

In the same regard as the discussion above relating to the police, respondents stated that there was a perceived risk of magistrates and/or judicial officers being related to family members who are perpetrators of violence and/or abuse, which diminishes the agency of children who have endured such violence and/or abuse.

g) Education

While corporal punishment remains legal in schools, as noted above in Section 6.2.1b), PNG has made considerable progress in establishing child protection strategies and protocols in education, including guidance and training to teachers on non-violent classroom behaviour management strategies (UNICEF EAPRO, 2020). Despite this, respondents indicated that verbal and physical violence against children remains prevalent within educational environments in PNG:

> *Sometimes, the teachers may speak violently to them…use objects to beat them, that's not right. Sometimes, they make the students feel unsafe in the school. (FGD, 11-16 years, Boys)*

Respondents outlined that there was a perception that, in particular, within early childcare and education settings within communities, there was a clear lack of appropriate training for workers in such settings.

As a result, respondents indicated that children found it considerably difficult to speak to teachers, often citing a '*lack of trust*', as part of the reasoning for not confiding in teachers about allegations of violence, either by other staff or peers within that specific setting and/or relating to violence within their home.

The respondent data indicates that significant gaps remain in the enforcement of PNG's recent progress in the implementation of child protection strategies within educational settings and that, whilst further

research is warranted, these initiatives have enjoyed limited effectiveness, given the continued reporting of corporal punishment within educational settings.

h) Information systems

As reflected in the data above, in Sections 6.1.1 and 6.2.1, some administrative data relating to violence against children is collected by the OCFS, police and health information systems. It is unclear if there is any formal system for reporting within the education system. Limited enquiry was made into the strength of these existing systems as part of this study, yet respondents consistently sought to raise the need for improved information systems. Stakeholders noted that the lack of data on violence against children contributes to a poor allocation of time, energy and resources of staff and recommended that information systems for case management, as well as broader analysis regarding trends in violence against children and system capacity, be embedded with the sector moving forward.

PNG became a "pathfinder country" in the global partnership to End Violence Against Children in May 2021 - one of the commitments in doing so is for countries to "*collect, structure and analyse data on violence against children*" but it is unclear to what extent this has taken place.[15] There is also a need for unified data collection to hold the Govt accountable for reporting against SDG 16.2.

With respect to strengthening information systems, harmonization of standards for data collection is vital given both the decentralised nature of government child protection services, the mix of both government and NGO service providers, and different age definitions of children across the care and protection and criminal legal frameworks.

i) Community

As described above under Section 6.1.2b, community mechanisms play the primary role in the resolution of cases of violence against children that come to the attention of adults in the community. Data amongst both stakeholders and caregivers reflected the ongoing use of these mechanisms, as well as ongoing consideration as to whether cases should continue to be resolved using such mechanisms "inside" the family, village and religion or "outside" through formal justice systems. The contributions below also reflected a tension between wanting to utilise "outside" formal systems but adults not having an agency to make the decision, in part due to fear of perpetrators being imprisoned or seeking retribution.

> *They don't go to the police, they don't go to the welfare, they go back to the custom, customary arrangement (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female).*

> *In the village… it's a different environment… In the village it is mostly family living. We have law and order; like magistrates, [village] council(lor)… And these senior guys around here. Actually, it's the concern… of the parents when these accidents happen. Whether we put them through the law or otherwise, we sort [them] out outside. Sometimes, these things (like fighting, arguing) happen when you are sorting out outside. Otherwise, in the village, we want to use those systems, but it does not happen. It's all family around here, and they have Christian thinking and they don't want to do these sorts of things. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)*

> *We have this problem here. The problem is, who will take this matter up (to higher authorities)? They hide it; they don't want to talk about it. It happens here, but if the family, we are scared to take the*

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[15] See: www.end-violence.org/pathfinding-countries#:~:text=Pathfinding%20countries%20are%20those%20whose,to%20End%20Violence%20Against%20Children

matter up because they are scared, nogut ol go kalabus [in fear of them [perpetrators] been imprisoned]. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

Most respondents coalesced around a common informal reporting and referral pathway for instances of abuse and/or violence against children within communities, although caregivers noted that such processes are not child-centred.

As mothers or fathers, we have to follow the procedure first. We have to find out the problem properly, and then talk to both parties; both parties have to sit together and talk about it. If it is really serious, yes, we have to take it (to the village court); we have a procedure here, so we go by the procedure. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

In some of the rape cases... the child was neglected. The parents took [action] against the perpetrator, so it was always done in the church when the church leaders were sent out to visit these parents. The victim, the child – we don't concentrate on the victim; we only concentrate on finishing up there [the communal peace and cultural obligations]. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)

Given the complexities involved, and the realities of the strength of the child protection response services, including with respect to their accessibility for reporting, there are limited efforts to encourage communities to reflect on and strengthen these practices (in comparison to Fiji where organisations encourage dialogue and reflection on *bulubulu* processes, which has been discouraged by the Ministry of i-Taukei Affairs).

Stakeholders noted that, in the absence of significant investment in response services, the Child Protection Volunteers mechanism, also established by the LPA, could be used as a bridge between the formal and community-based systems. Village Health Volunteers were raised as a potential source of Child Protection Volunteers, although it is unclear as to whether there has been discussion on the specific nature of the model and its feasibility – for example, how it would link with community responses.

The evaluation of Save the Children's "Safe Communities, Safe Children" program, which sought to strengthen links between community leaders and formal service providers, reported that community leaders found Child Protection Officers remained inaccessible and that this limited reporting by community leaders (Save the Children, 2021). Community leaders also reported that Child Protection Officers often failed to take action even when successfully contacted about child protection cases (Save the Children, 2021). The biggest criticism received by the "Safe Communities, Safe Children" program from community leaders related to its lack of alignment with government objectives and frameworks and the related lack of support and follow-up on its initiatives from government authorities (Save the Children, 2021). Such a program would thus require adequate, long-term investment in both community and district or provincial services.

With respect to strengthening linkages to the formal system and recognising risk and protective factors that might shape secondary prevention programs, the Save the Children "Safe Communities, Safe Children" program evaluation noted the contributory effect of drugs and alcohol over-consumption to family violence and, accordingly recommended that the program form partnerships, or otherwise establish referral pathways and linkages to, other programs aimed at the reduction or prevention of substance abuse (Save the Children, 2021).

6.2.2 Are there past, existing or emerging approaches, including kastom, traditional or religious approaches, to learn from? (RQ2.2)

I come from the view that... in our culture, we love our children... I don't believe for a moment that our tradition was all about being harsh on our kids... Just look into the way we brought up our children in the past, (the) way that we share our information and how we address these issues. (KII, National Stakeholders, Female)

In PNG, we have a very good 'Wantok' system. For example, if a sister's daughter is having problems, the aunties and uncles step in to provide counselling, at the village level. They give their time to support the sister or the brother that is going through (problems). So, we have a good system to support the sister or the brother that is going through (problems). (KII, National Stakeholders, Female)

Evident in the stakeholder and caregiver responses were an interest and commitment to take a strengths-based approach in drawing on socio-cultural values to prevent and respond to violence against children. Stakeholders described the importance of family and community relationships, as well as the diversity of communities across PNG, as key strengths on which programs could be based.

Two programs recent evaluations of community-based child protection programs were also included in the evaluation. Save the Children's 2017-2021 "Safe Communities, Safe Children" program reported success in its aim of strengthening existing protective structures for children and promoting behavioural change among adults in 30 communities across the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARoB) and Morobe (Save the Children, 2021). Findings included:

- Significant improvement in the proportion of parents self-reporting use of positive discipline in everyday parenting, such as normally or always explaining to children why their behaviour was wrong (from 49% to 93% in ARoB and from 50% to 95% in Morobe) and refraining from using physical punishment (from 8% to 58% in ARoB, and from 16% to 47% in Morobe); and

- Significant improvement in the proportion of parents able to correctly identify all of the abusive practices on a given list (from 29% to 83% in ARoB, and from 42% to 94% in Morobe).

In the pilot stage, the evaluation of UNICEF's "Parenting for Child Development" program in PNG also found a positive degree of success in achieving its more limited aims, with consistent attendance at its activities (over the 3-month program in 2017, more than 70% of the 223 participants attended 10 or more of the 12 sessions), reported improvements in parenting (including significant decreases in harsh parenting behaviours, and moderate improvements in other indicators of family well-being), as well as generally positive and supportive feedback from community members (Robinson et al., 2021). However, note that in contrast to the evaluation of the Save the Children program, children were not involved in the evaluation. The program did not attempt to establish any linkages with formal services, instead keeping involvement with its partner churches, who the evaluation noted are the main providers of social welfare.

The importance of long-term involvement and relationship-building in community interventions and child protection programming is already well-known (Feinstein et al., 2022). Multiple sources stressed the diversity of PNG communities and the importance of contextualisation to local needs (including cultural needs and interests in protecting traditions and cultural values) - or at least having enough flexibility within a program so that it can be adapted to better serve local needs during the course of delivery if so required (Feinstein et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2021). This was reiterated by respondents participating in the situational analysis, who recognised that the community is required to participate, given that the community: '*own[s] this program in their community and they will be responsible*' (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, female).

Local consultation and input (including from marginalised groups) was recommended from the program design stage in order to ensure contextualisation and meaningful engagement with target participants (Robinson et al., 2021). For instance, the content of the UNICEF "Parenting for Child Development Program" in PNG was developed in close consultation with a wide range of local partners and stakeholders (including church leaders, community leaders, and prospective program facilitators), as well as an iterative process of training and testing (Robinson et al., 2021). This enabled the creation of a program that was, in the words of partners and community leaders, "*grounded in the real experience of people in PNG and not 'brought from the outside'*" (Robinson et al., 2021, p. 1280), and moreover informed by an awareness of culture and family processes. It also ensured that the program was ultimately well-received by its target communities, with content that was suitable for delivery by the implementing volunteers and that furthermore could be

translated into local languages and applied to local variations in families and communities (Robinson et al., 2021). In the same vein, male participants in Feinstein's PNG study on masculinities suggested that anti-family-violence messaging for men should be developed by the target male audiences in their local languages, and "draw on religion, tradition and culturally sound stories, proverbs and idioms that resonate with men's realities and lived experiences" (Feinstein et al., 2022, p. 8).

In terms of implementation, programs broadly found success where activity planning had been strongly informed by stakeholder consultation, the program had enough built-in flexibility to respond to participant feedback partway through, and where local partners and participants were allowed enough autonomy to adapt programming to their own contexts and needs (Robinson et al., 2021; Save the Children, 2021). This was true for scheduling: the "Parenting for Child Development" program planned the length and frequency of their program delivery in accordance with the needs of their participants (e.g. taking into consideration existing commitments, travel distances, the attendance of support people), enjoyed consistently high attendance (Robinson et al., 2021).

UNICEF's program was able to successfully leverage religion and religious structures by working with faith leaders and within established religious settings for program delivery and found that the involvement of key faith and community leaders as program facilitators was a key contributor to effecting change, but cautioned against over-reliance (Robinson et al., 2021). Indeed, the importance of cultural relevance in child protection programming (in terms of both communicating information and encouraging behavioural change) is echoed by local informants with regard to the SC baseline. (Save the Children, 2021)

Despite widespread recognition of the substantial overlap between violence against children, and violence against women (including shared drivers, co-occurrence and similarity in perpetrator justifications), programs exhibited a tendency to focus on one or the other. There was a notable lack of collaboration and/or other linkages between programs aimed at addressing violence against children and those aimed at addressing violence against women (Feinstein et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2021; Save the Children, 2021; World Vision, 2022). The "Parenting for Child development" program evaluation noted the strong association between trauma experienced in childhood and experiences of gender-based and intimate partner violence later in life but limited its recommendations to support the case for early childhood intervention (Robinson et al., 2021). Only the "Safe Communities, Safe Children" endline report recommended that future child protection programming incorporate a greater focus on gender-based drivers of violence against children and alignment with the gender equality, disability and social inclusion priorities (and possibly initiatives) of government and non-government actors (Save the Children, 2021).

6.3 Recommendations

Key findings

The overarching finding of this situational analysis is that violence against children in PNG demands greater attention from the government and global partners. Priorities are discussed in the recommendations but should encompass building evidence of the prevalence of violence against children, including by conducting specialised surveys or integrating relevant modules within generalised household surveys.

Data gathered for this situational analysis suggests that emotional, physical and sexual violence is a common experience for children in Papua New Guinea in all domains of their lives – home, school, community and online. Violent discipline is embedded as a way to punish or seek retribution against other family or community members, including children. Children themselves were aware of the gendered nature of the violence that they experienced, including child sexual abuse and child marriage. Long-term trend data relating to child marriage show that rates of child marriage at 15 and 18 years are unchanged over 25 years from 1993 to 2018.

Socio-cultural and religious norms are the strongest driver of violence against children – there is some evidence to suggest that practices associated with child marriage are changing, and warrants further exploration of the drivers of change of both practices and the underlying norms, and the nature of cohabitation and marriage. Other drivers of violence – poverty, migration, climate change and digitisation are stagnating or deepening.

As in other Pacific Island countries considered in this analysis, violence against children is widespread, necessitating primary prevention programs. At the same time, the analysis highlighted a number of intersecting risk factors, including gender, disability, living away from parents, the use of drugs and alcohol and poverty.

Significant progress has been made in strengthening the legislative framework for child protection with the enactment of the LPA, and the establishment of the OCFS, and the deepening of its reach in provinces alongside police FVSU. The LPA also made progress by formalising child participation at the national level. Yet, this has yet to be fully brought to life, and a common theme amongst respondents was the lack of a forum for children's voices in the home and broader community and a clear need moving forward to integrate the experiences of children within the programming and policy implementation work of organisations such as Save the Children.

There has also been significant work done by different actors in primary prevention at the community level – yet this work has taken place in the absence of an overarching, collaborative approach to primary prevention and policy on how these structures should be linked to response.

Recommendations for this situational analysis

- Discuss in depth the findings of this situational analysis with SC staff and close partners in PNG and deliberate and agree upon any changes to the existing strategy.

  o Prioritise efforts to strengthen the child protection information system(s) and develop a plan to analyse and disseminate existing administrative data. Within those data sets, consider how a harmonized difference of children aged 18 and under can be reflected.

  o With respect to building the evidence of the prevalence of violence, map opportunities to collect data on experiences of emotional, physical and sexual violence in different settings as part of upcoming household surveys (and in fulfilment of PNG's commitment as a pathfinder country for ending violence against children) and consider if targeted surveys should be commissioned.

  o Prioritise questions for a more in-depth understanding of the nature of violence and children's, caregiver's and community member's responses to it.

- Socialise the findings of the situational analysis and SC and partner responses with children, broader government and other partners.

Recommendations for Save the Children Programming

You [SC] can save us by doing some awareness in our school and sometimes in our community to help us know that parents should not abuse their children or do whatever they want. Thank you, that's all. (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls)

Because children come from different homes with different backgrounds, some are shy; some can easily talk to other people; therefore, specialised staff can work with them so children can easily talk to them (FGD, Caregivers, Female).

- SC should place high priority on its child protection programming in PNG, seeking to allocate a significant share of its own resources towards its staff and programs over a multi-year period.

- Given the nature and scale of challenges associated with violence against children in PNG, SC should look to ensure its programming responses reflect the socio-cultural context and are embedded within a whole of sector national approach, with commitment amongst partners to mutual accountability and learning.

- Respondents within child FGD indicated that children and young people should be involved in the development and application of Save the Children policies within the communities Save the Children is conducting work.

- SC should engage in long-term child-led programming to help children increase their knowledge of and skills to respond to violence in their homes, communities, schools, and online. Children requested that these programs be conducted both in schools and communities and include the distribution of paper-based information on violence against children. Such programs should seek to learn from and collaborate with comprehensive sexual education programs and community-based programs aiming to prevent and respond to gender-based violence from an early intervention perspective.

- SC should engage in long-term community-based programming with caregivers to build their knowledge of and responses to violence in their homes, communities, schools, and online, as well as their skills with respect to positive parenting practices. Such programs should seek to learn from and collaborate with community-based programs aiming to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

- The design of the primary prevention programs should consider how Child Protection volunteers could be trained, mentored and sustained as part of these efforts, seeking to build a community approach to secondary prevention and strengthening tertiary response. Community members specifically requested that Save the Children appoint a representative to liaise with and understand the community's needs.

- Consider system readiness for initiating secondary prevention programs (such as cash transfers), related to disability, poverty and drugs and alcohol.

- The above should be effectively monitored and evaluated, and reflect the above principles regarding mutual accountability and learning.

Recommendations for Save the Children partnership with national and subnational government institutions

I don't think there are enough voices that can speak out for children…the major contribution is the lack of acknowledgement of the rights of a child, and that right includes the right to be protected. We seem to feel that they are protected by their family but not in their [own] right…I don't think we speak sufficiently in the forums that we have the opportunity to, and even at the political level.

There have to be increased avenues where children can voice their feelings, and this (is) something we are taking out big time…for too long, we feel we ourselves, other adults have spoken for children. But it's time we find avenues to bring the child(ren's) voices out…so that we can hear directly from them…to be able to speak of the things they are afraid (of and) feel are happen(ed) to them that are not right. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

- SC and government partners should engage with children, including children with disability and lived experiences of violence, within the process of strengthening the child protection system and in its ongoing governance at the national, district and community levels, drawing on the Pikinini Bung mechanism in the LPA.

- Respondents noted that strengthening the enforcement of the full suite of child protection laws within PNG was required as a matter of urgency. This necessitates greater investment in both the number (availability) and quality of professionals working in child protection across OFCS and NGO response services, police, justice, education and health.

    o Through appropriate policy measures, set budget increase to establish and appropriate staff at national, provincial and district levels.

    o Review pre-service and in-service training curricula across key professions. In particular, stakeholders noted that there is currently no in-service training related to child protection for police, nurses and teachers.

- Consider the development of specialised reporting and response services for children with disability.

- Support the policy proposal for a no-drop policy (meaning that police are obliged to investigate cases) in relation to gender-based violence and advocate for the proposal's extension to crimes against children.

- Give consideration to the development of the Child Protection Volunteer Model. A feasibility study should be conducted as to the selection of volunteers, including Village Health Volunteers have sufficient time, commitment and skills to take on the role.

Recommendations for Save the Children partnership with other actors

- Increase funding for strengthening the child protection system, including by considering how funds designated to support violence against women and VAWG, can best be used to strengthen the child protection system.

- Strengthen coordination between child protection external partners, based on recognition of respective strengths, through:

    o Sharing multi-year and annual work plans for support to the child protection system

    o Coordinate and co-commission research and evaluation relating to child protection.

7. Solomon Islands

7.1 What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online? (RQ1)

7.1.1 Nature and prevalence of violence

The situational analysis indicates that, like other countries considered in this analysis, children's experience of violence pervades all aspects of their lives, including in the home, school, community and online. This includes emotional, physical and sexual violence, with gendered risks for girls and boys, in particular, continued concern regarding child marriage and CSEC for girls in the Solomon Islands.

Existing prevalence data, while dated, is consistent with the above analysis, as shown in Table 13. The Solomon Islands has the highest rates of violent discipline[16] and child labour and the second highest for bullying, compared to 40 low- and middle-income countries across the Asia Pacific region (Kennedy et al., 2020).

Table 13: Prevalence of violence against children in the Solomon Islands (Source: Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al. (2017), Pacific Community (2009), WHO (2011-2017))

	Violent discipline in past month (% of children aged 2-14 years)	Sexual violence before 15 years (% of females)	Physical or sexual IPV in past year (% of girls aged 15-19 years)	Bullying in the past month (% of children aged 13-15 years)	Child labour (% children aged 5-17 years)	Child marriage (% adults aged 20-24 years first married or in a union before 18 years)
Female	85%	37%	34%	68%	49%	21%
Male	86%			64%	47%	4%
Source	DHS 2015 (published 2017)	Family Health and Safety Study 2008 (published 2009)	Family Health and Safety Study 2008 (published 2009)	Global School-based Student Health Survey 2011	DHS 2015 (published 2017)	DHS 2015 (published 2017)

While no trend data with respect to prevalence (or reporting) are available with respect to the forms of violence in Table 13,[17] stakeholders perceive violence has significantly increased or increased over the last five years, particularly sexual (90%), emotional (80%) and physical (75%) violence and the commercial sexual exploitation of children (75%), as part of the online survey conducted for this situational analysis as shown in Figure 23. A smaller proportion of stakeholders thought prevalence was decreasing, given "*community awareness on child protection has shed light for people to understand the importance of their role as parents and how they should treat and care for their children*" (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Male).

Administrative service data from SAFENET (the referral network of government and non-government service providers in Honiara) are available for two years and show an increase in reported violence against children from 2020 (232) to 2021 (421), with no further trend data available (copy on file with author). This increase could reflect the strengthening of the SAFENET reporting and referral system or an increase in violence in the context of COVID-19 discussed further below under Section 7.1.2(f). Approximately 74% of child victims were

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[16] Note: Tonga's MICS was conducted after this analysis and was reported as higher than Solomon Islands.

[17] The exception to this that some trends are observable based on prevalence data available for child marriage, as discussed in Section 7.1.1(b).

girls. Cases involving child victims reported in 2021 included physical (30%), sexual (34%), psychological (37%) and economic abuse (44%).

Figure 23: Stakeholder perceptions on trends in violence against children in SI (N=20)
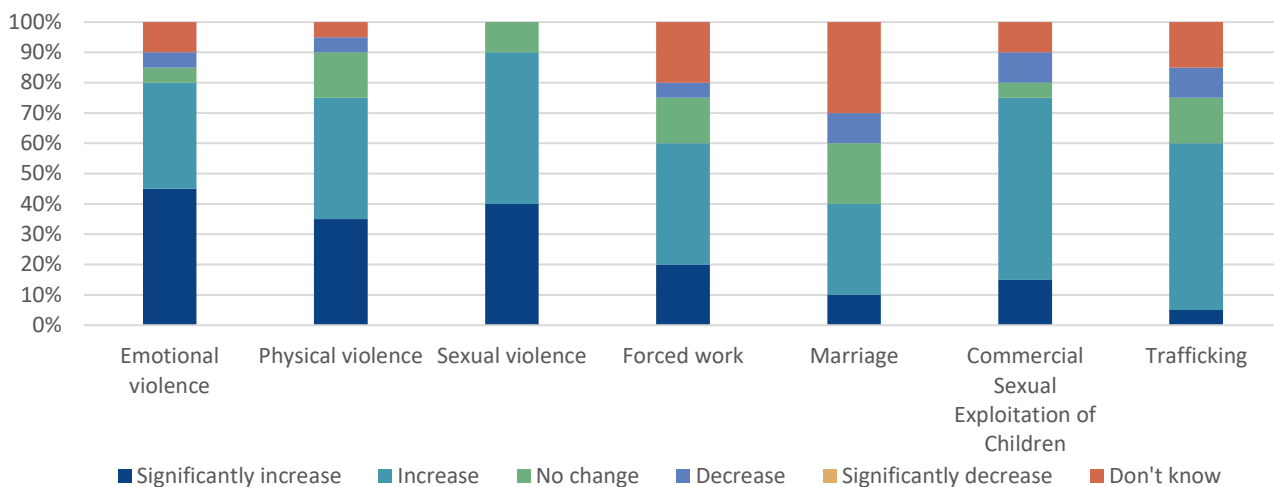
Caregivers reported concern regarding emotional and physical violence (refer to Figure 24) and were most concerned regarding children's safety online and on the way to and from school (refer to Figure 25). There are inconsistencies with respect to stakeholder's and caregiver's concerns regarding sexual violence. Caregivers participating in FGD also expressed concern regarding sexual violence as discussed below under Section 7.1.1(b) - given the small sample size for caregivers, data should be treated with caution.

Figure 24: Caregiver concern over forms of violence against children in SI (N=12)
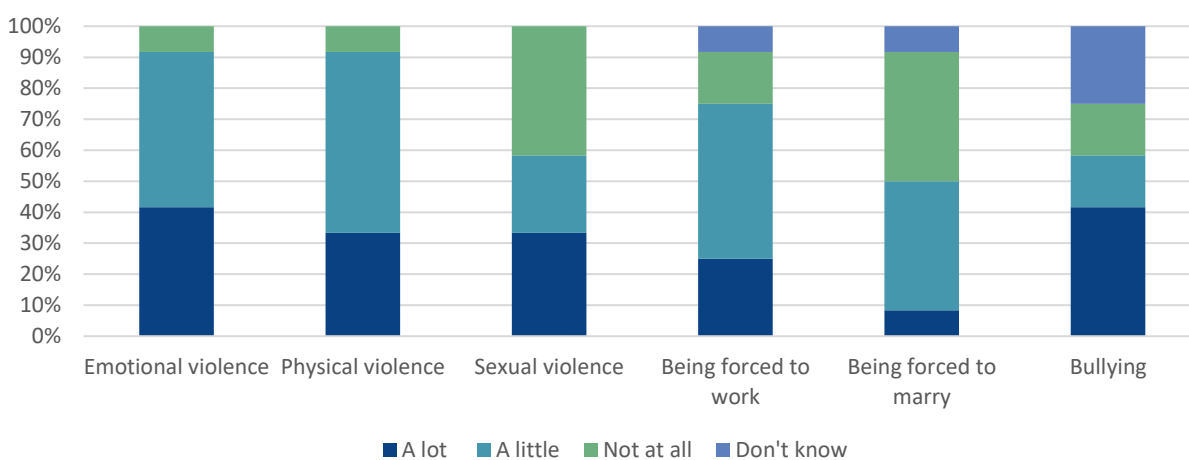
Figure 25: Caregiver perceptions on children's safety in different settings in SI (N=13)
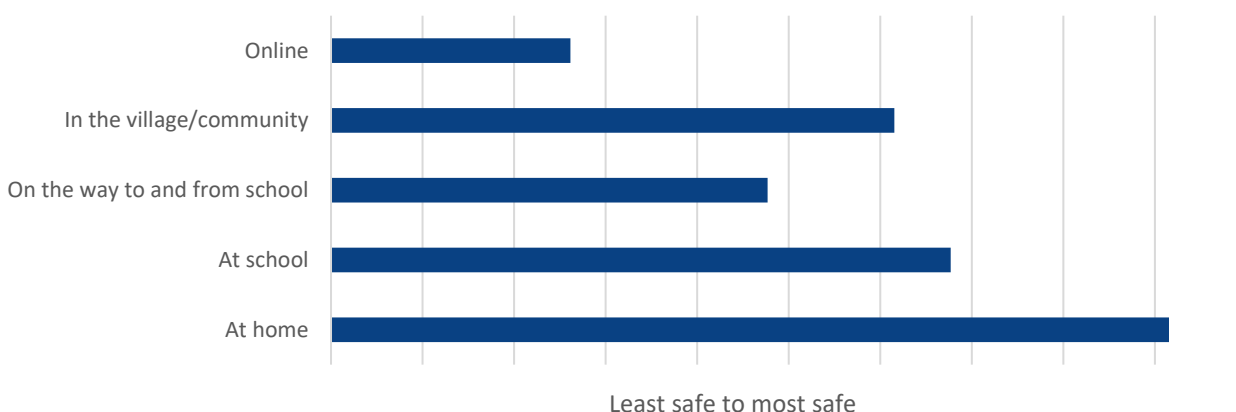
a) Violent discipline in the home

The child-led research also found that positive parenting helps children feel safe, they have significant concerns regarding violence in the home and school. Participants across the FGDs spoke about the prevalence of child abuse and violence in the home. Many participants spoke about the mistreatment of children in the home, including "*harsh talking*", "*threats*", "*swearing,*" and when "*parents sometimes treat their children badly*". Most participants also spoke about the high rates of corporal punishment in the home and how this makes children feel unsafe "*when parents smack with a stick*". Older female participants said children are "*hurt*" and "*bullied*" in the home.

> *At home, I feel unsafe about how my parents treat me and also other children. (FGD, 12-16 years, Female)*

> *I feel worried when I disobey my parents. (FGD, 12-16 years, Female)*

> *I feel worried when parents give harsh punishments to their children. (FGD, 12-16 years, Female)*

> *I feel unsafe when my parents smack me with a stick. (FGD, 12-16 years, Female)*

This is also consistent with the perspectives of stakeholders and caregivers who described violent discipline as legally and socially accepted within the home (and other settings).

> *Physical violence, on the other hand, is a major worry for children in homes due to parents' harsh treatment. (FGD, Caregivers, male)*

The near generalised and accepted use of violent discipline is reflected in the 2015 DHS data in Table 13: 86% of children 2-14 years experienced violent discipline in the past month, with 68% experiencing physical punishment (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017). There are slightly higher rates of violent discipline against boys, children aged 5-9 years, children living in rural areas, children whose mothers have lower educational attainment and the four poorest quintiles (refer to Figure 26). However, the differences are small and suggest that programming responses need to be generalised in reach. In addition, further statistical analysis is needed to determine how these risk factors are interacting (for example, the impact of education may be driving the differences across the wealth quintiles and vice versa).

Figure 26: Violent discipline in the past month amongst children aged 2-14 years in SI in 2015, by child and maternal characteristics (Source: Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al. (2017))
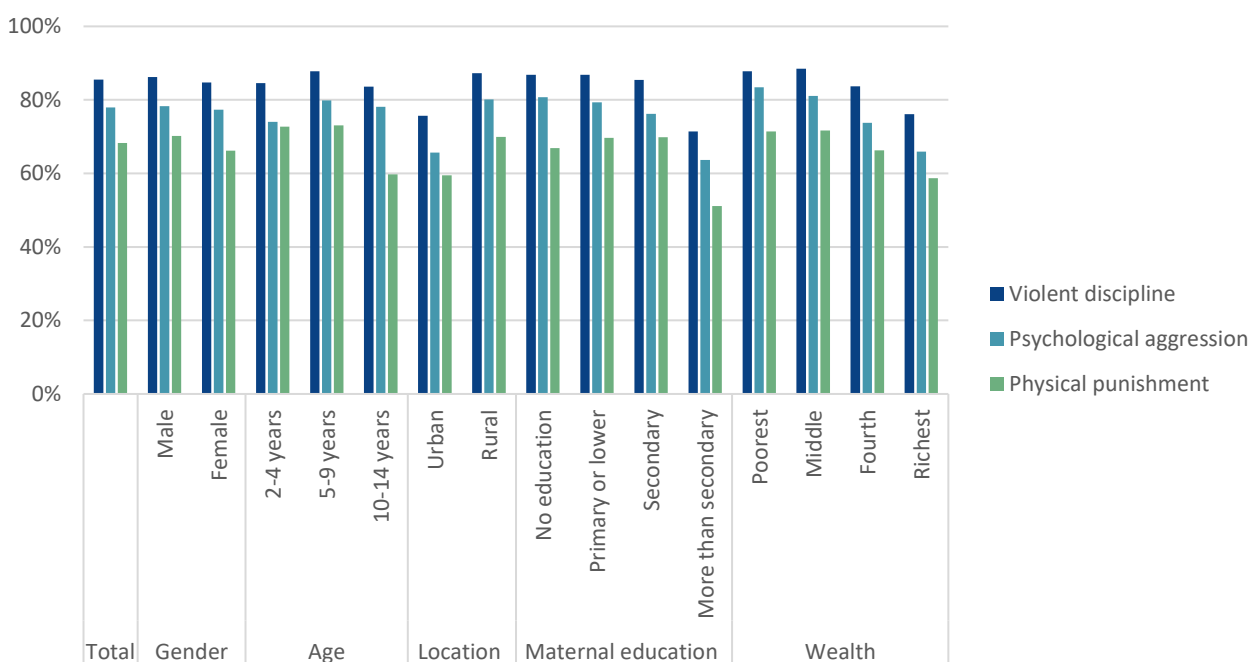
b) *Other forms of violence in the home and community*

Neglect

There is no prevalence or reporting data relating to neglect, and there is limited existing data describing its nature and extent. Previously, the *Wantok* system – the relationships between families from the same location or language group (one talk), which include obligations to share housing, food and money with those with less – has been considered effective at providing a safety net and care system for those in need.

> *Our Wantok system acts as a safety net the community takes to raise a child, not just the nuclear family but the whole extended family. Whatever happens with a child, the uncles, aunties and community members leaders can advise on situations. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Some stakeholders described the *Wantok* system as in decline in the context of greater economic pressures discussed further in Section 7.1.2(c).

Stakeholders expressed some concern regarding the lack of supervision of children regarding declining parental supervision of children, with parents needing to work extended hours to earn an adequate income/livelihood. Children expressed concern regarding parental neglect and reported that being children left alone in the home made children feel unsafe "*because of drunk men coming to the home*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Male), people stealing from people's homes in the community, and when "*houses are run down or incomplete*" (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed).

Sexual violence

Children, caregivers and stakeholders expressed concern regarding sexual violence, especially against girls, perpetrated by male relatives, neighbours, other community members and peers. Sexual violence was raised in the child-led research as something that children (particularly girl children) are concerned about. It was raised in discussion about what can be done to keep children safe: "*stop sexual violence of children—by strangers, big men, family members and adults*" (FGD, children 12-16 years, girls). Older girls also indicated concern about sexual assault occurring in their community by saying there are unsafe areas "*that we know that rape happened there*" (FGD, children 12-16 years, girls).

Concern regarding sexual violence was also reflected among female and male caregivers. Caregivers also discussed the implications of experiencing sexual violence, once known by others, including negative treatment from peers and neglect.

> *Yes, they do have some incidents in their communities that parents warned their children about that their children have that fear or worry about being sexually abused by relatives, neighbours or other people. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

> *Children obviously worry about sexual abuse because of how they were treated by other peers after knowing they have experienced it. The obvious behaviour in such a scenario is neglect, and this is what children worry about. Most of the children who experienced sexual abuse were from the age range of 8-16 years old, and they were abused mostly from someone they are close to so, it has made difficult to identify perpetrators. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)*

Sexual violence was also a primary concern of stakeholders, with 90% of stakeholder survey respondents reporting sexual violence has increased or significantly increased in the last five years (Figure 23). One stakeholder noted, "*Sexual abuse is on the rise now, especially rape*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). This is consistent with reporting data referred to by national stakeholders, which shows an increase in reports of sexual violence, although they acknowledged that increased reports may be due to greater awareness of what constitutes violence and reporting pathways rather than increased prevalence. Others noted that there are a lot of cases of sexual violence that remain unreported.

Sexual violence was the most common form of violence reported to the Social Welfare Division (SWD), constituting approximately 60% of cases (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). While there is limited prevalence data on sexual violence against boys, stakeholders and caregivers were of the view that girls are more vulnerable to sexual abuse, and this is also consistent with reporting to SWD. The Family Health and Safety Study, conducted in 2008, showed over one-third of women reported that they experienced sexual violence before the age of 15, with perpetrators most commonly including male relatives, community members and peers (Pacific Community, 2009).

Child marriage

Child marriage was not raised by children in the FGD, although it was raised by female caregivers as a concern that impacts girls as young as 13. The sociocultural and religious norms and economic context underlying child marriage are discussed further in Sections 7.1.2(b) and (c), respectively – a sociocultural practice that has become a source of income - is reflected in the quotation below.

> *The females have a strong feeling of insecurity towards this issue due to cultural practices and the stereotypical perspective of girls as sources of income. This has given rise to opportunities for parents to think less of females in encouraging them to pursue education and treat them as assets to support younger siblings. Their bride price could help finance school fees for the younger ones or to start up money-generating income to support families. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

As discussed further in Section 7.2.1, child marriage remains legal in the Solomon Islands from 15 years of age with parental or judicial consent. As noted above, the most recent DHS showed that over one-fifth of women aged 20-24 years were married by 18 years. As shown in Figure 27, there appears to be a slow declining trend over time. However, the drop in 20–24-year-old women who were married at 18 years only decreased slightly between the 2006 (22.4%) and 2015 DHS (21.3%). The trend is more variable for males. (Note: age at first marriage data are not disaggregated (only median age of marriage), providing no information on marriage before 18 years by background characteristics.)

Figure 27: Percent of females and males married before 15 and 18 years in SI in 2015 by age group (Source: (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017))
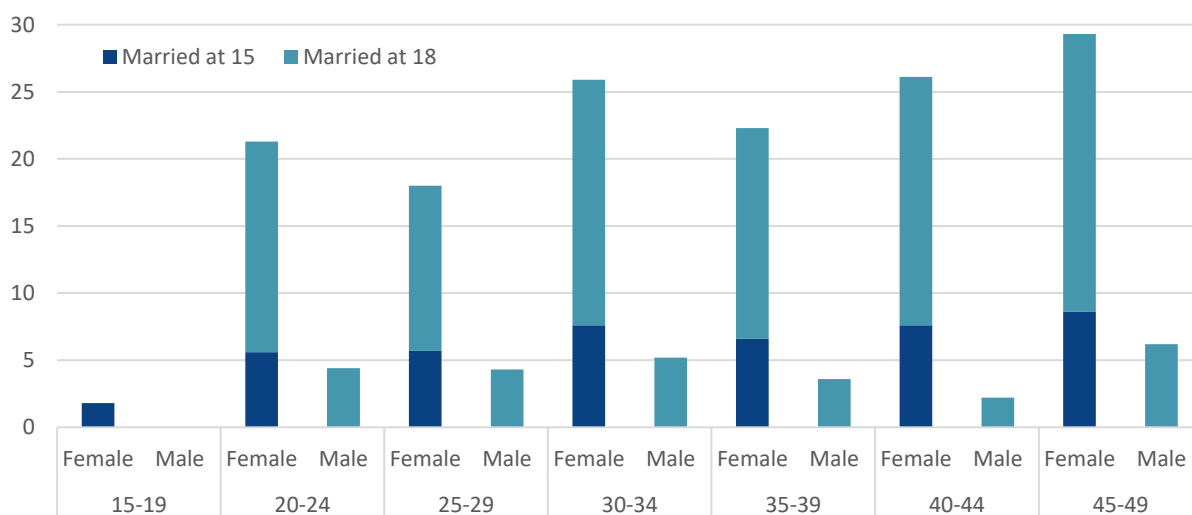
A recent analysis conducted by UNICEF and UNFPA (2022) on child marriage trends in the region described different typologies of child marriage – including cohabitation with partners of the same age and customary marriage, often with a significant age gap between partners. Data from the most recent DHS show that, of girls/women aged 15-19 years who are married, 29% had sexual relationships with men aged 10 years older in the past 12 months, suggesting customary marriages with older men are in part driving child marriage (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017).

Child labour, commercial sexual exploitation of children and trafficking

Children make a significant contribution to household labour in the Solomon Islands – this was of concern to a small number of children, caregivers and stakeholders with respect to its implications for children's education. One provincial education official noted that children living away from their parents are particularly at risk of child labour and that they are often absent from school on market days (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Male). Children and caregivers noted the association between children's responsibilities with respect to household chores and violent discipline:

> *Older girls noted that they are often made to do 'child labour.' (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls)*

> *In homes, children are given chores, and this is where it gets challenging for parents to teach them to be responsible. However, the mentioning of consequences that will happen if they do not comply is a teaching method that parents use. This is not seen as forcing them to work but developing a sense of responsibility. e.g." No work, no food in the evening,". (FGD, Caregiver, Male)*

Household survey data show that three out of five children (61.6%) aged 5–11-year-olds, and one in ten 12–14-year-olds (11.1%) are engaged in child labour (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017). The difference in prevalence between age groups reflects the different definitions of child labour for the two age groups: for children aged 5-11 years, child labour is defined as at least 1 hour of economic work or 21 hours of unpaid household services per week; and for children aged 12-14 years, child labour is defined as 14 hours of economic work or 21 hours of unpaid household services per week (UNICEF, 2023a).

Most child labourers are working in family businesses for more than one hour (5–11-year-olds) or for more than 14 hours (12-14-year-olds) (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017). Stakeholders noted that the implications of children not completing chores include emotional and physical violence perpetrated by their caregivers. Figure 28 below shows that child labour is more common amongst girls compared to boys (contrary to other Pacific Island countries) and in rural areas compared to urban areas, and declines as maternal educational attainment and household wealth increase. Sectors and activities in which child labour is common are shown in Table 14.

Figure 28: Prevalence of child labour in SI in 2015 by background characteristics (Source: Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al. (2017))
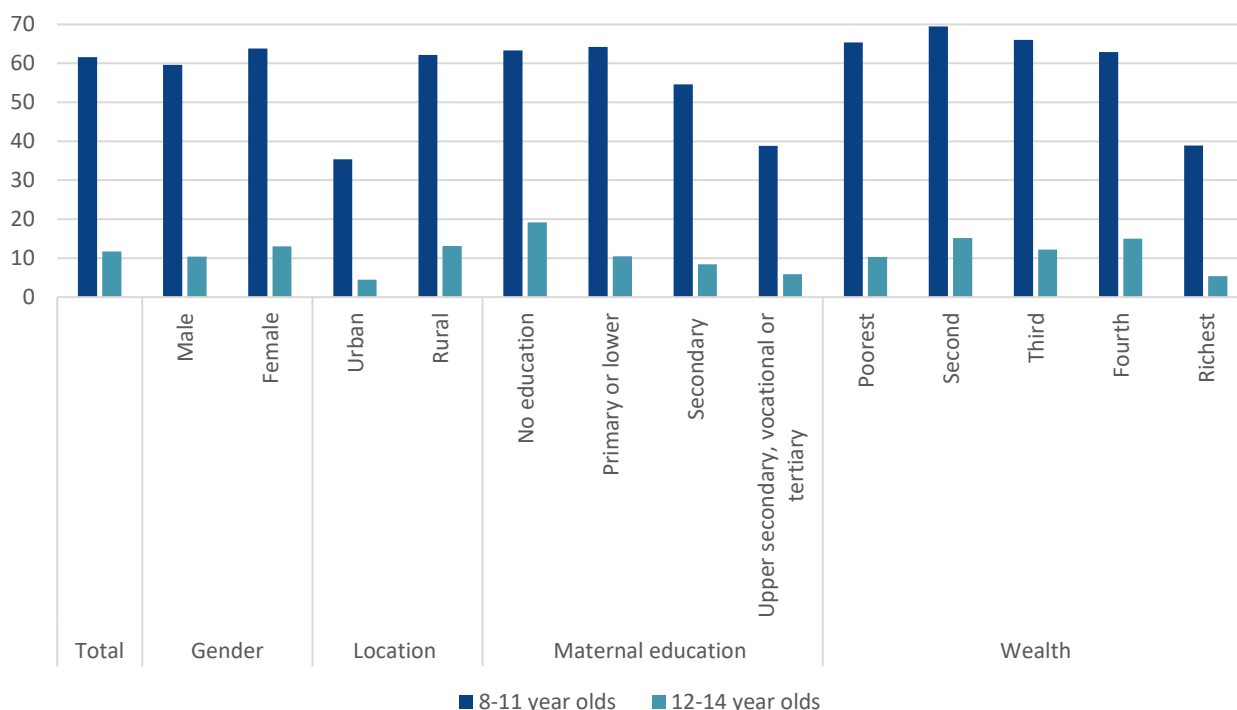
Table 14: Activities associated with child labour in SI (Source: U.S Department of Labor (2022))

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Working on plantations, including harvesting palm oil fruits
	Harvesting of seafood, including deep-sea diving
Industry	Alluvial mining
	Furniture construction
	Construction on roads and buildings
Services	Domestic work, including working as a cooks
	Working in nightclubs, casinos, and motel
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking
	Forced harvesting of seafood
	Use in illicit activities, including in the cultivation and trafficking of drugs.
	Forced domestic work, including working as a cooks
	Forced pickpocketing

Stakeholders and prior research in the Solomon Islands have documented reports of CSEC in the agriculture, fishing, hospitality and tourism industries in Honiara, as well as around extractive industries, particularly logging, with foreign workers (ILO, 2017; IOM, 2019; Tichener, 2018).

While there are no prevalence data on CESC and limited data from the primary data collected through this situational analysis, existing data suggests that it is not uncommon. In a survey undertaken near logging camps in Isabel and Makira published in 2019, 26% of adults had heard of children under 15 years of age having sex in exchange for goods or money in survey sites (IOM, 2019). In 2017, the ILO (with data collected in 2014) surveyed 54 children working in CSEC in Honiara aged 10-17 years – this sample of 54 children (which was not aiming to sample the total population) alone represents 0.22% of the population of 10-19-year-olds in Honiara (0.37% girls) (ILO, 2017).

The ILO study of 54 children engaged in CESC in Honiara included 47 girls, 6 boys and one transgender child (ILO, 2017). Most were engaged in prostitution (79%), and some were being forced to have sex for others' benefit (15%), and over half (30%) noted that they found out about sex work through their friends. Children may make contact with their clients by going to the places noted above, through middle people, or through family members. Most children had 1-2 clients a day, with some reporting up to 10. As discussed below, money (24%) and poverty (35%) were described as the main reasons for engaging in CSEC.

Reflecting the intersection of different forms of violence, 67% of the children surveyed by ILO referenced above had experienced sexual abuse (ILO, 2017). As reflected in the quotation below, it is also linked to customary marriage and bride price, which may be with approval or facilitation by parents:

> *From listening to what our stakeholders, we do have this Committee on the Anti Human Trafficking Advisory Committee, currently coordinated by the immigration division in collaboration with the police; they have cases of children, especially girls, being married to foreigners. Farmers can send off their daughters (young girls), to go and then work for foreign loggers to be like house girls and then maids, and then customary marriage. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Other forms of violence in the community

A significant finding of the child-led research is that all participants said children feel unsafe in their communities. This includes when they see "*people drinking on the street*" and when they witness "*street*

fighting" (FGD, 8-11 years, Boys). Alcohol fuelled violence in the community, says participants, has a profoundly negative impact on children because this makes children "fear strangers who may harm them" and it also leads children to "think that people can kill them" (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls). Other participants from the same group expressed children are "*afraid of untrusted people in the community and on the street*" and feel "*unsafe because a lot of people are taking marijuana*" and there are many "*drunkard people*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls). The interplay between substance abuse and serious community conflict and concerns about strangers are key factors that contribute to children's feelings of a lack of safety in their communities and on the streets.

The above is consistent with a 2020 study, which found only 7% of 236 girls surveyed always feel safe in Honiara, with the top 5 perceived safety risks being: drunk and intoxicated people, theft, verbal harassment, touching and rape (Plan International Australia & Plan International Solomon Islands, 2020).

c) Violence in Schools

The child-led research conducted as part of this situational analysis (and presented in a separate report) found that children are concerned about bullying and worried about physical fighting and 'negative talk and gossip' at school. In addition to emotional and physical violence, one caregiver also noted that sexual violence takes place in schools. Stakeholders also expressed concern regarding bullying and its gendered nature, consistent with prior research in the Solomon Islands that suggests that there is a gender dimension to bullying, with males bullying girls and older students bullying younger students, including both in and outside the classroom (Plan International Australia, 2019). Stakeholders also observed a link between bullying at school and cyberbullying – "*the reason for bullying is mainly related to social issues and social media (cyberbullying)*" (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Male).

As noted above in Figure 25, caregivers are most concerned about the safety of children on their way to and from school. This is also consistent with the child-led research which states that children feel unsafe in the communities (including travelling to and from school). One participant said children "*feel unsafe when walking alone on the street and meeting strangers on the street and about sexual abuse*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Female). Other participants from the same group expressed children are "*afraid of untrusted people in the community and on the street*" and feel "*unsafe because a lot of people are taking marijuana*" and there are many "*drunkard people*". It also aligns with existing research on adolescent girls in Honiara:

> *It can also be unsafe to travel to school, whether walking or travelling by bus. Being followed, harassed- and sometimes experiencing sexual or physical violence, especially by drunk boys who try to catch us girls, is a real problem. Sometimes, we don't feel safe, or our families don't think it is safe for us, so we are compelled to stop going to school entirely. (Plan International Australia, 2019, p. 15)*

Children noted that walking with other children, as advised by parents, helps them feel safer.

The above data is consistent with prior survey data on bullying in or on the way to school in the Solomon Islands. As noted above in Table 13, two out of three students in the Solomon Islands experience bullying each month, a rate that is approximately double the global average (UNICEF, 2018). Girls experience a slightly higher rate than boys, contrary to other Pacific countries considered in this analysis (WHO, 2011-2017). Boys reportedly have a higher rate of being in one or more physical fights in the last 12 months (53.5%) compared to girls (50.7%); girls were injured one or more times at a slightly higher rate (68.6%) compared to boys (67.7%) (WHO, 2011-2017).

Violent discipline by teachers was also discussed in the child-led research. Participants said, "*teachers shout and swear at students [and this] makes them feel unsafe*" (FGD, children 12-16 years old, females). Punitive punishment by teachers was also noted as a key reason why children feel unsafe and worried at school.

Several participants provided examples of this when they said, "*getting punished by teachers without good reasons*" and "*teachers give notes without further explanation*" makes children feel unsafe and worried.

d) Online violence

As noted above, caregivers who participated in the survey reported online as the least safe environment for children. Consistent with this, and while also recognising the advantages that it brings, there was concern amongst stakeholders regarding the lack of regulation of internet service providers and social media companies.

> *Uncontrolled and unsupervised use of the internet, especially with access to mobile phone usage, even by children as early as 3 years. (Stakeholder survey)*

> *Every child now has access to the internet. Most children use their parents' phone, tablet or laptop. Whilst the internet has so many advantages, there are disadvantages to which children can experience negative impacts. Children may watch videos which may trigger some unruly behaviour and may likely apply them. Some may be prone to online bullying. Most children's behaviour in their home, school and community may have changed. This may cause children to face violence, either physical or emotional abuse. (FGD, Caregivers, female)*

In line with findings across the five countries in this situational analysis, stakeholders, caregivers, and children who participated in the child-led research were concerned about the viewing of violent or age-inappropriate material online, cyberbullying through social media (e.g., Facebook, Messenger, Instagram, Tiktok and WhatsApp), sharing of images and contact from strangers or grooming).

> *The use of the internet increased the contributing factor to child abuse, e.g., usage by adults to lure children and display any form of pornographic pictures. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

With respect to online grooming, older children were aware that *"not all [online] friends are good friends'* (FGD, 12-16 years, Males), indicating the importance of children exercising caution when engaging with people online. Older children expressed anxiety regarding interacting with strangers online, and caregivers also expressed concern regarding *"contact with people who have the wrong motive in using the internet"* (Caregiver Survey).

With respect to exposure to inappropriate content, both young and older children participating in the FGD highlighted the fear of encountering bad photos and inappropriate content, indicating children did not want to see "*bad photos*" (FGD, 8-11 years, Mixed gender), although no further information as to what constituted "*bad photos*" was available.

With respect to cyberbullying, younger participants in the child-led research expressed worries about online interactions such as people swearing online and the emotional impact of people making fun of photos of children and taking and distributing photos without children's consent. Several older female participants in the child-led research said children "*feel bad [about negative] comments on Facebook*" and children "*feel unsafe when someone is swearing and making bad statements about them*".

> *Young people committed suicide because of cyberbullying. This is one thing that is really new… especially as a very young nation. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Five caregivers who responded to the online survey had children who used the internet regularly, for between 4 hours and 20-30 hours a week, either by themselves, with friends or with families. While most (4/5) of these caregivers supervised their children's internet use all the time or often, they and most (3/5) spoke to them about their experiences online; all wanted additional opportunities to increase their knowledge about how to keep children safe.

7.1.2 How are recent factors, including climate change, digitisation and COVID-19, changing the dynamics and behaviours that drive such violence occurring in the home, school, community and online? (RQ1.1)

Key drivers identified in the literature review were reaffirmed by stakeholders and caregivers as drivers of violence, as shown in Figure 29.

Figure 29: Perceptions of stakeholders (N=15) and caregivers (N=11) on drivers of violence in SI
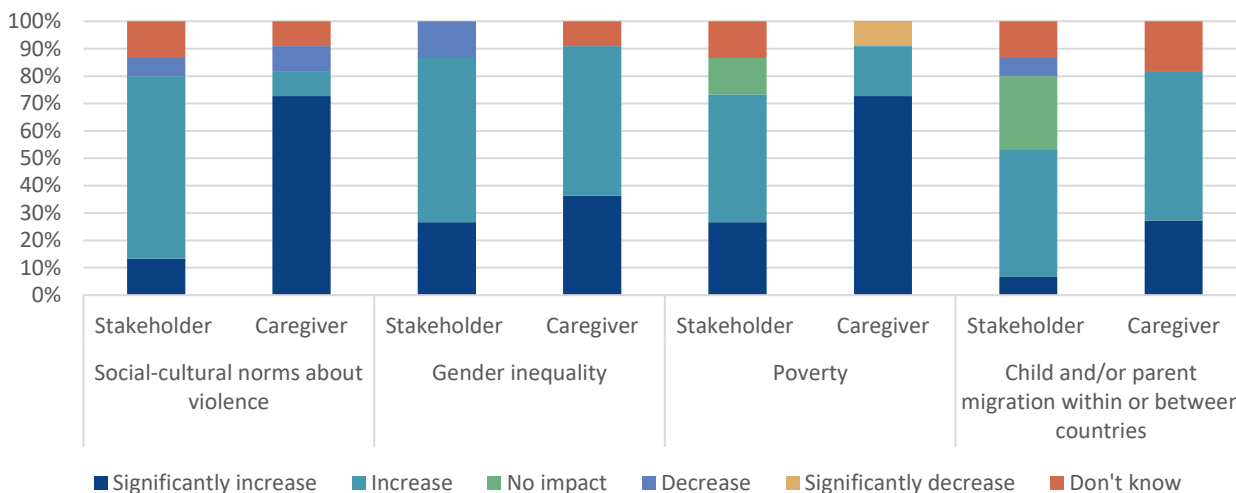
a) Impact of colonialism and cycles of violence

As noted in the literature review, recent global research has pointed to connections between colonisation and a high prevalence of intimatepartner violence, with the authors hypothesising three pathways associated with this link: imposing "patriarchal beliefs that devalue women," creating "structural inequities", including political and economic relations; and leading to "intergenerational trauma" (Brown et al., 2023). There is evidence that the colonisation of the Solomon Islands devalued women's socio-political and economic position in moving from the subsistence to the cash economy, from the localised governance of diverse languages to formalised ward, provincial and national governance structures, which excluded women (Hermkens, 2013). As noted in Section 7.1.1 and further elaborated in Table 15, there is a near generalised experience of violence or trauma in childhood in the Solomon Islands. Stakeholders described a context in which violence is normalised, beliefs and practices are passed from one generation to the next, and the lack of knowledge or experience of non-violent approaches to parenting.

> *Children who live in homes with family violence grow up seeing what their parents do and think violence is normal and part of life so they can be who they want to be. (KII National Stakeholder, female)*

Table 15: Proportion of adults reporting child abuse or trauma in Honiara (Lui et al., 2018)

	Neglect	Emotional	Physical	Sexual	IPV/household violence	Any childhood trauma
Men (Honiara)	44.3	51.7	30.8	34.0	77.0[18]	92.0[19]

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[18] This measure was defined as violence in the home, rather than IPV.

[19] This measure included a broader range of indicators; trauma was defined as experience of one measure.

b) Socio-cultural norms and practices relating to gender and violence

The influence of gender on violence against children in the Solomon Islands is evident in variations in the prevalence of different forms of violence against boys and girls and was widely recognised in the literature and the perspectives of different respondents. Gendered standards of behaviour and roles for men and women, as well as boys and girls, are embedded in local or traditional and Church values (Hermkens, 2013; Homan et al., 2019). These norms have been described as both "rigid" in their current expression in communities, meaning that there was currently limited scope for men and women to deviate from them, as reflected in the quotation from a male caregiver below, as well as changes in their expression over time and between generations (Homan et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2019; Thompson & Wadley, 2019).

> *The culture that children grow up in has given children little room for the child to express themselves fully and to choose for themselves what they prefer to be identified as, or what work they are interested in or how they are to be treated by communities and family. Culture structurally defines their roles down to the very concepts of marriage, making it hard for a child to contradict and change the way of life, except if exposed to other cultures. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)*

> *Children are taught how to respect each other, and girls are not allowed to go or sit around where boys are. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Caregivers described these norms as stemming from marriage and, in Malaita, the patrilineal system where "*women are seen as less important to man. This cultural norm plays a very important role in the upbringing of children*" (FGD, Caregivers, Male). Gender norms define the responsibilities of girls (relating to the household and preserving relations within the community) and boys (physical tasks relating to their reputation within the community).

> *For example, the boys are culturally obliged to do the physically involved jobs and therefore worry about fulfilling duties that are attached to masculinity. Females, on the other hand, attend to chores that are attached to femineity and accomplish household duties such as washing dishes, and clothes, cooking and preparing food for the family. These are some of the differences that gender diversity provides in the community. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)*

> *By engaging with the same gender in activities pertaining to contributing towards the overall society, children identify responsibilities and build character in becoming productive and well-behaved individuals. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)*

Homan et al. (2019) describe that gender norms limit the freedom of women, clearly defining what women should not do (e.g., disrespect or disobey their husbands), but ideas of what makes a good man gave men greater levels of agency or freedom. This is true with respect to sexual freedom and norms where sex outside of marriage is accepted to some extent for boys and men but not for girls, with girls and women marrying, including through customary marriage, at a younger age compared to boys and men.

Men hold power, authority and/or responsibility for decision-making in the home and community, including enforcing gendered behavioural standards for women and children, and men's violence against women and children is accepted and normalised, including as a mechanism to enforce gendered standards and reinforce gender norms (Homan et al., 2019; Pacific Community, 2009). Violence against women and children was an acceptable way for men to release anger and frustration, and men's violence against women and children was therefore viewed as socially accepted and expected (Homan et al., 2019).

As described above, violence against children can be seen as part of the intersection of gender norms relating to men's and women's behaviour and roles and to the normalisation of men's violence against women and children in the household and, as noted by stakeholders, in other settings such as school. Children in this context have "*little status*" in the family or community, with stakeholders describing the power that adults

have over them, with the use of physical violence as a disciplinarian measure is justified in a "*cultural or traditional context*" (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2009, p. 30). Stakeholders noted that there is a culture of silence that discourages children from reporting, which is discussed further under Section 7.2.1.

At the intersection of norms and norms around sex and sexuality, participants discussed that teenage pregnancy often leads to child marriage as a way to respond to the shame associated with sex outside of marriage and the families, potential loss of bride price (Plan International Australia, 2019). This is reflected in the mean age of first sexual intercourse, which is lower than the mean age of first marriage, as well as rates of motherhood amongst 15-19 year-olds: 15.7% of girls aged 18 years have had a live birth, and 4.3% were pregnant with their first child (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017).

> *Some girls at the age of 13 and up have experienced being forced to marry someone they are in a relationship with, or someone who is rumoured to have been dating the girl, or someone who makes them pregnant, or someone whom their family chose. With or without her consent, they were forced to marry, and that thought has mostly girls worried about being seen or heard with someone. Boys may also experience the same as girls for the same reasons. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

> *For girls, they would be forced to marry if the girl is pregnant, seen with a boy, does not listen to parents and involved in other social activities like doing drugs or alcohol. Few girls were forced to marry as their parents thought they had come of age, some because the parents needed the bride price or money. For boys, they would be forced to marry if he gets a girl pregnant, does not listen to parents, do drugs or alcohol. Some parents think by forcing their children to get married to save their family from shame and get their children to stop involving in alcohol and drugs. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

Stakeholders also noted the role of cultural practices used to respond to cases of violence when they come to the attention of the community. Reconciliation practices involve male relatives of girls or women who have experienced physical or sexual violence seeking compensation in the form of payment of money or gifts from the family of the perpetrator to redress the harm (stigma) caused to the family. Stakeholders noted that, given the limited capacity of formal services, such practices play an important role in resolving *the "problem at a family level rather than reporting to police. This helps keep peace and security within families and the community"* (KII National Stakeholder, female). Multiple stakeholders perceived this as being appropriate for cases that are not serious. These practices centre on community (male) relations over the children's safety. The extent to which these practices are effective at protecting children from further violence is unknown, nor is there evidence of the level of involvement girls have in such practices. These practices are discussed further under Section 7.2.1(i).

Most stakeholders recognised culture as changing. Some noted that culture needs to change, with practices related to child marriage being the most common example provided. Cultural change, the growing mixing of cultures through urbanisation, increasing reliance on the cash economy, and the greater influence of Western culture, including through internet use and the perceived weakening of the notion of respect within communities were described as underlying violence against children and responses to it. Research has pointed to the ways in which cultural practices, such as bride-price, once protective against violence against children, have been transformed through changes to family and community relationships and the introduction of new economic incentives to participate in the cash economy, emphasising its transactional nature over its protective role (Thompson et al., 2019).

> *The cultural practice of arranged marriage is no longer practised in the village; however, females especially marry to help with the financial needs of the family and to set examples for younger females. This behaviour and perspective of girls tend to give room for females, especially to consider less value on education. (FGD, Caregivers, male)*

c) *Socio-economic status and its gendered implications*

Solomon Islands has the second highest poverty rate in the Pacific; long-term trends now show an increase in poverty at both the international poverty line (US$2.15/day) and the lower middle-income country poverty line (US$3.65/day) (Sachs, 2023). While poverty declined between 2010 and 2019 (Sachs, 2023), the economic contraction in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic described below under Section 7.1.2f), together with a reduction in logging, has significantly impacted the Solomon Islands economy (ADB, 2023) such that poverty has increased since 2019. As of 2023, 39% of the population is living below the international poverty, an increase from 25% in 2019, and 71% are living below the lower middle-income country poverty line (US$3.65/day), an increase from 56% in 2019 (Sachs, 2023). The latest SDG report notes that the Solomon Islands faces major challenges in achieving SDG1 relating to poverty reduction (Sachs, 2023).

Multiple pathways linking poverty and violence against children were identified in the literature and in the participant responses in the Solomon Islands. First, poverty, including food insecurity, was described as a household stressor and exacerbating violent discipline and neglect in the home. Related to this, poverty was described as leading more parents to work more (e.g., travel or gambling) with less supervision for children and vulnerability to violence in the home/community.

> *Most of the families don't have enough land to grow food. They rely on sea resources for living. Parents may not have formal jobs, which causes children to be worried about what to eat or if they have to skip a meal. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

Second, poverty may lead households to make challenging decisions regarding their child's education or marriage, with gendered implications for girls. Recent data from the National Census and Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) show a decline in enrolment rates. The 2019 Census found that 23% of children aged 5-12 years, 20% aged 12-15 years and 30% aged 15-19 years are out of school (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, 2023), with the MEHRD (2022) reporting a 5% increase in out-of-school children for primary and junior secondary school between 2018 and 2019 and a decline in survival rates to Year 6 from 65% to 49% between 2016 and 2019. While Ministry of Education rates show parity in enrolment, the census shows that girls have a lower enrolment rate (0.5-2% difference) (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, 2023). For senior secondary school, the survival rate for the Year 12 cohort for girls declined from 23.5% (2016) to 12.1% (2019) (compared to 19% to 14% for boys), and the drop-out rates in Year 12 have increased from 76.3% (2016) to 88.2% (2019) for girls compared to 82.5% to 86% for boys (Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, 2022).

Caregivers may remove children from school as they cannot pay for the school fees and/or to work, including in unsafe conditions. There is a clear relationship between schooling and child labour: 80.8% of children not engaged in child labour are attending school, versus 47.8% of children engaged in child labour (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017). For example, a 2017 ILO survey of 54 children working in CSEC found that 41% (N=22) dropped out of school to work, with poverty reported 59% (N=32) as the reason for being pushed into CSEC (ILO, 2017). Literature and data gathered in this situational analysis suggest that it is common for girls who are the oldest in their families to leave school to care for younger siblings (Plan International Australia, 2019). This is also reflected in caregiver observations:

> *In the community, some parents could not afford to send their children to school [and] they forced them to work to earn money and do all the household chores. (FGD, Caregivers, Male)*

Similarly, poverty may lead families to seek bride price, which, as described above under Section 7.1.2b, now holds greater significance as a source of household income (Thompson et al., 2019). Data suggests that girls with no education are at greater risk of child marriage and early child rearing – of all girls/women aged 15-19 years, 12% had begun child rearing, compared to 32% with no education (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office et al., 2017).

Parents forced their children into marriage for money or the bride price. Some of these cases force the child to run away from home... Some girls were forced to marry early because their parents thought they were ready or the parents needed money (bride price) to support their family. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

The females have a strong feeling of insecurity towards this issue due to cultural practices and the stereotypical perspective of girls as sources of income. This has given rise to opportunities for parents to think less of females in encouraging them to pursue education and treat them as an asset to support younger siblings. Their bride price could help finance school fees for the younger ones or to start up money-generating income to support families. (FGD, Caregivers, male)

d) Migration

Data suggest that poverty (refer above) and climate change (refer below) are drivers of migration, with the most common migration trend in Solomon Islands is migration to Honiara, with the population of Honiara growing by 78% between 2009 and 2019 and a population density of 5950 people per square kilometre, compared to 24 people nationally (Solomon Islands National Statistics Office, 2023). Poverty in the form of lack of livelihoods, as well as government financing of education and investment of economic opportunities outside of Honiara, has led to the migration of children and/or their families to informal settlements, where at least 40% of the population of Honiara lived in 2016 with a 12% growth rate (ADB, 2018).

In the situation of climate change relocation of homes puts families in situations to live in crowded homes, [where there is] no privacy. Children are at high risk of being exposed to violence. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Migration may have risks for children who travel without their parents to live with their extended relatives or friends. Children living with extended families were historically part of the *Wantok* as a safety net, but it is now perceived by stakeholders as risky, as described further below and under Section 7.1.3. Stakeholders and caregivers noted that experience varies, and children who leave a home where they are subject to violence to a non-violent household may have a positive experience. Other children living with extended family may be vulnerable to sexual violence, particularly from male relatives.

e) Climate change

Climate change may drive violence against children through a number of pathways highlighted in the data. First, climate change as a household stressor; an example shared in an FGD, challenges in fishing communities, in particular, fathers face challenges in ensuring household food security, as well as earning cash selling fish to market. Coastal communities have sought to establish gardens to support their food security, but as reflected in the quotations below, they lack access to land to grow food. One stakeholder and caregivers expressed concern that these factors are exacerbating child marriage, given its links to poverty, as noted above.

Climate change affects the way family members take up responsibilities e.g., the usual way of fishing and gathering seafood by the father for a meal is no longer because of sea level rise. This may cause frustration and lead to domestic violence in the home. (KII Provincial Stakeholder, male)

Food shortage is a major issue in the coastal areas as some families don't have land to grow food. Most people experience their gardens not bearing good fruit. Some families get permission from landowners to grow food. This is also one contributor to forced marriage. To acquire land to build houses and grow food crops. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

Second, there is concern regarding the impact of climate change on food security and livelihoods for both fishing communities that do not have access to gardens, as well as communities that rely on gardens, given decreased production due to sea level rise in low-lying areas, or changes to the soil or weather. Climate change thus exacerbates the relationship between poverty and violence against children described above.

> *Seeing that this location is close to town, they have noticed that those in rural areas worry less about food compared to them, knowing that there is no access to gardening areas in their community and they depend entirely on fishing and what they sell for that day. (FGD caregivers male)*

> *Food shortage is a big worry for children if their family will have any food for any mealtime. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

Third, climate change has led to the relocation of gardens and water sources, which means that children have to walk longer distances to collect water and work in the gardens, and also more time working in the gardens.

> *The changes have worsened the situation for children, considering several factors, such as accessibility to nearby water sources and a decrease in garden produce due to soil pollution and over-cultivation. This gives rise to both children and parents worrying about safety when travelling long distances for water collection and gardening as well as labour-intensive work to create more gardens or move to a more isolated area. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

> *Climate change contributed to some changes; for example, water has been a problem in most surrounding communities, and children were forced to fetch water half-hour walk, which makes they are prone to sexual and physical abuse. Sometimes, they are worried about meeting drunk people on their way, and if they do not want to go fetch water, their parents might beat them. Food shortage is also increasing... Gardens were done a few kilometres from their home, which tends to be not safe for children... As it is expected for each child to help their parents after school to collect food for their household. Some will experience harassment while walking to their garden alone. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

> *I'll just give examples of where I know in the highlands of Isabel. We've had cases of rape happening, you know - against our girls because they had to travel distances to collect water. They experienced drought so this is common practice that we send our girls out to, you know, fetch water and so forth. So with that, putting them more vulnerable to violence. (KII National Stakeholder, male)*

Related to this, and reflected in the above quotations, climate change has increased efforts needed to collect food and protect communities from sea level rise in low-lying areas, leading to concern regarding increased hours that children are working and the potential school drop-out.

> *The issue of climate change has had an effect on children's emotions in this area relating to two specific areas discussed. The main source of income for this location is fishing and due to the effects of climate change on fish stocks children have been required to fish alongside their parents to assist in paying for school fees or household needs. This also places burden on children in terms of workload. This change was visible only recently and is worsening through time. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

Finally, weather-related rapid-onset disasters also have the same impact with respect to children's increased responsibilities:

> *King tides have also affected some of the coastal communities. The tides would come into their homes. It would affect children or parents not going home after school or work until the tide goes down. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

f) COVID-19

COVID-19 both exacerbated poverty and disrupted home and school life, with 100% of stakeholders who responded to the question (N=8) reporting that they believed that this led to a significant increase in the prevalence of child marriage, child sexual abuse or other forms of violence. This is also consistent with past surveys that found 81% of 1,249 respondents in the Solomon Islands in April-May 2021 reporting that violence against women and girls is getting worse (National Democratic Institute, 2021).

Caregivers in the FGD noted that caregivers employed in the informal sectors may have been unable to work and, therefore, without income, exacerbating poverty. This is consistent GDP data, which shows an economic contraction in 2020 (-3%), 2021 (-1%) and 2022 (-4%) in the Solomon Islands in the context of COVID-19 (World Bank, 2023a), with three-quarters of householders being very worried about their finances and over 95% of households using at least one coping strategy between July – December 2020, including "find ways to earn extra money" (72%) and "reduce food consumption" (59%) (Kastelic et al., 2021). Caregivers working in the informal sector in towns are likely to also have few other resources that they can rely on.

> *When COVID-19 reached communities, some parents were forced to leave their jobs and stay home. Some families don't have their own homes and tend to live with other relatives and are sometimes prone to worries that relatives may ask them to move out if they have a disagreement with them. That caused worries about financial support for their families. They can experience food shortages, kids not going to school, and a lot of other family needs not met. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

Some caregivers noted that this may have also led to specific risks for children associated with poverty, as noted above, including child marriage.

> *COVID-19 reduced people's income and might have forced some people into child marriage. (Stakeholder survey response)*

> *COVID-19 caused poverty and disorder to our normal way of life; hence, it increased child marriage as a result of family disorder. (Stakeholder survey response)*

> *During lockdown many children were forced to performed illegal activities. (Stakeholder survey response)*

g) Digitisation

Increasing digitisation is both a setting and a driver of conflict between parents and children. Stakeholders and caregivers noted that children are placing increased demands on their parents for cash to pay for phones and other devices, as well as data. Children also have increased expectations regarding screen time, with stakeholders and caregivers expressing concern regarding the impact of screen time on children's socio-emotional skills while expressing a lack of strategies to set healthy boundaries for and monitor children's use of devices and time management.

> *Children get addicted to the internet, which results in demanding parent's money to purchase data for internet usage; if parents do not respond to their request, then children turn to scream and accuse parents of not supporting them and start a fight in the home or else steal money from parents because did not give money to them. Some children, because of internet addiction, are too lazy to go to school, do housework after school, or have normal conversations with their parents, brothers, and sisters during dinner time because they are busy looking at their phones. Also, they imitate abusive words or actions and think it is fine to do because of the videos they watch on the internet. (Stakeholder survey)*

> *Amongst these three factors of change, this change specifically has had the greatest impact on children's behaviour in the rural setting. Even though distinguishing between cyberbullying and other cyber crimes is not visible, the one change that it has produced is the shift in time management.*

Having Access to the internet allows them to be more secretive about who they are communicating with, therefore exposing them to influences that might lead to abuse or harm them mentally or physically. In regards to time management, children have diverted their time for chores and family responsibility for "screen time" or with adolescents engaging with online friends/activities. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)

The Internet has also been one of the changes that have influenced the children. Children's behaviour develops rapidly in relation to their access to uncensored information and unmonitored screen time. This enables children to act and think differently towards opposite sexes and gives them room to engage in communication with adults who are likely to abuse or lead them towards danger. Time management also has been something that parents worry about as children tend to spend more time on the internet; being lazy and irresponsible has become a pattern that is visible. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)

Stakeholders and caregivers expressed concern about children viewing online content, including pornography, by themselves, with friends or family, that was violent or age-inappropriate and/or that was inconsistent with socio-cultural values. Multiple stakeholders linked viewing of pornography to increases in child sexual abuse. While the relationship between viewing pornography and harmful behaviours, including sexual abuse, is complex and with no specific evidence of causation, it is likely that viewing pornography reinforces widespread socio-cultural gender norms and unrealistic ideas about sex and sexuality, which is concerning in the absence of comprehensive sexuality education (Newman, 2023). There is more evidence of a harmful relationship between viewing violent pornography and sexual violence, although little is known about the nature of pornographic materials viewed in the Solomon Islands.

Drivers are changing due to a lot of access to social media. Online experience e.g.: pornography, other forms of sexual violence against children, encourages children to engage in bad behaviours. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Children learn things through the internet, which parents taught them that they were bad for them. (Stakeholder survey)

People are exposed to all websites, such as porn which damages the mentality of a person to do such stuff to a vulnerable person for his or her own satisfaction. (Stakeholder survey)

There is no restriction on media use, and therefore, kids can also accidentally access websites where offensive images and messages are posted, which is not good for children. This contributes to the pathway of increased child sexual abuse. (Stakeholder survey)

7.1.3 How are the risks and protective factors associated with such violence, including but not limited to gender, disability and age changing? (RQ1.2)

While prevalence data suggest violence is a near generalised experience for children in the Solomon Islands, a number of factors exacerbate child protection risks. These factors were originally identified through the literature review (refer to Table 16) and further explored in the qualitative and survey data (refer to Figure 30).

All stakeholders and caregivers survey respondents perceive that children who live away from their parents and children who are not in school are at significant risk or risk of violence (refer to Figure 30). This is consistent with the qualitative data described above, and both were linked to poverty.

The most at risk are children living without parents. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Children who live with relatives worry more compared to those who live with their parents. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

Living without a parent or both can mentally affect a child. In most cases, the child will be taken care of by relatives. The treatment from relatives will be different from their own parents, which can change a child. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

All caregivers and 92% of stakeholders also reported children experiencing family violence were at greater risk of violence. Similarly, 85% of stakeholders and 82% of caregivers thought children living in single-parent families were at greater risk of violence – qualitative data suggests that this risk is due to past history of family violence, the potential presence of non-family adult men (boyfriends and stepfathers), economic struggles and lack of caregiver supervision while single mothers are working.

In the rural areas, if a child lived with a single parent, relatives would help support their children in terms of food, clothing, shelter and other necessities, unlike in the city, it would seem like a financial burden to relatives to support another family. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

All caregivers and 77% of stakeholders thought that children with a disability were at significant risk or risk of violence, although this was not discussed in depth in the qualitative data.

All caregivers and 62% of stakeholders thought that children whose parents used alcohol and other drugs were at risk of violence, which is consistent with the child-led research, which found significant concern amongst children with respect to the use of drugs and alcohol in the home and community, as noted above under Section 7.1.1.

It frightens the children when they see or hear drunken people. How much more [would it frighten them] if it was a parent? (FGD, Caregiver, Children)

More stakeholders thought being female (92%) was a risk factor for violence compared to caregivers (73%). The qualitative, administrative and existing household survey data discussed above in Sections 7.1.1 and 7.1.2 overwhelmingly reflect that girls are at greater, although not exclusive risk of sexual violence, child marriage and CSEC, while other forms of violence are relatively even between the genders. Stakeholder responses to the question of whether gender reflected a risk factor reflected gendered stereotypes:

Being a girl, one has many responsibilities, such as acting as the second mother in her home. After school, she has to return early to do house chores. If she's not in school, her role would be the same. If she does not do some of chores, she might get scolded or even get physically abused. Some girls were forced to marry early because their parents thought they were ready or the parents needed money (bride price) to support their family. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)

Girls are most at risk; they can be easily lured by their perpetrators. Males are the same; however, they are strong and can deal with situations. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Male)

More stakeholders also thought living in rural areas (85%) was a risk factor for children compared to 45% of caregivers. This difference may be due to perceived differences in quality of life between urban and rural areas. Caregivers in FGD who lived on the peri-urban fringe of Auki in Malaita noted that communities in more rural areas of Malaita, who have access to gardens, have less to worry about than they do.

Over half of stakeholders (54%) and caregivers (64%) who responded to the survey perceived children who identify as LGBTQI+ as at an increased risk of violence, with one child raising concern regarding discrimination against same-sex couples, as per the quotation below. Caregivers also acknowledged the discriminatory attitudes that children identifying as LGBTQI+ children experience and how this may lead to emotional and physical violence.

It's so worrying when you walk around with a guy because same sex is not allowed (FGD, 12-16 years, Boys)

LGBTQI is a widely criticised behaviour; this, therefore, is an example of how culture could bring about risk for children. In deviating from the roles that gender is required to comply with in culture, children face abuse mentally, physically and socially. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)

Children who identify as LGBTQI worry about bullying as some children and adults tend to emotionally abuse them with discriminating words. They often worry about what people think about them and not being accepted in the community because of their identity. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

Existing household survey data shows that children's education is a potential protective factor relating to child marriage, child labour and CSEC, and maternal education is a potential protective factor for violence in the home (refer to Table 16). Additional statistical analysis is required to examine the relationships between poverty and education and these forms of violence to understand the relationship between them.

The -led research also revealed a number of additional protective factors associated with strengthening relationships in the home, school, and community. Across all age groups and genders, participants explained the multifaceted nature of parental nurturing, encapsulating love, care, shelter, sustenance, and protection. Additionally, children and young people expressed the importance of, and connection between, parental guidance and assistance from the broader community, specifically teachers, in their lives. Social cohesion, respect and abiding by school, family and community rules also featured as key factors related to children's sense of security. For example, children explained that they feel safe when they live in a happy community, and where rules are known and followed. Stakeholders noted that this trust helps to facilitate reporting by children, which in turn helps to prevent violence.

Figure 30: Stakeholder (N=13) and caregiver (N=11) perspectives on risk factors*
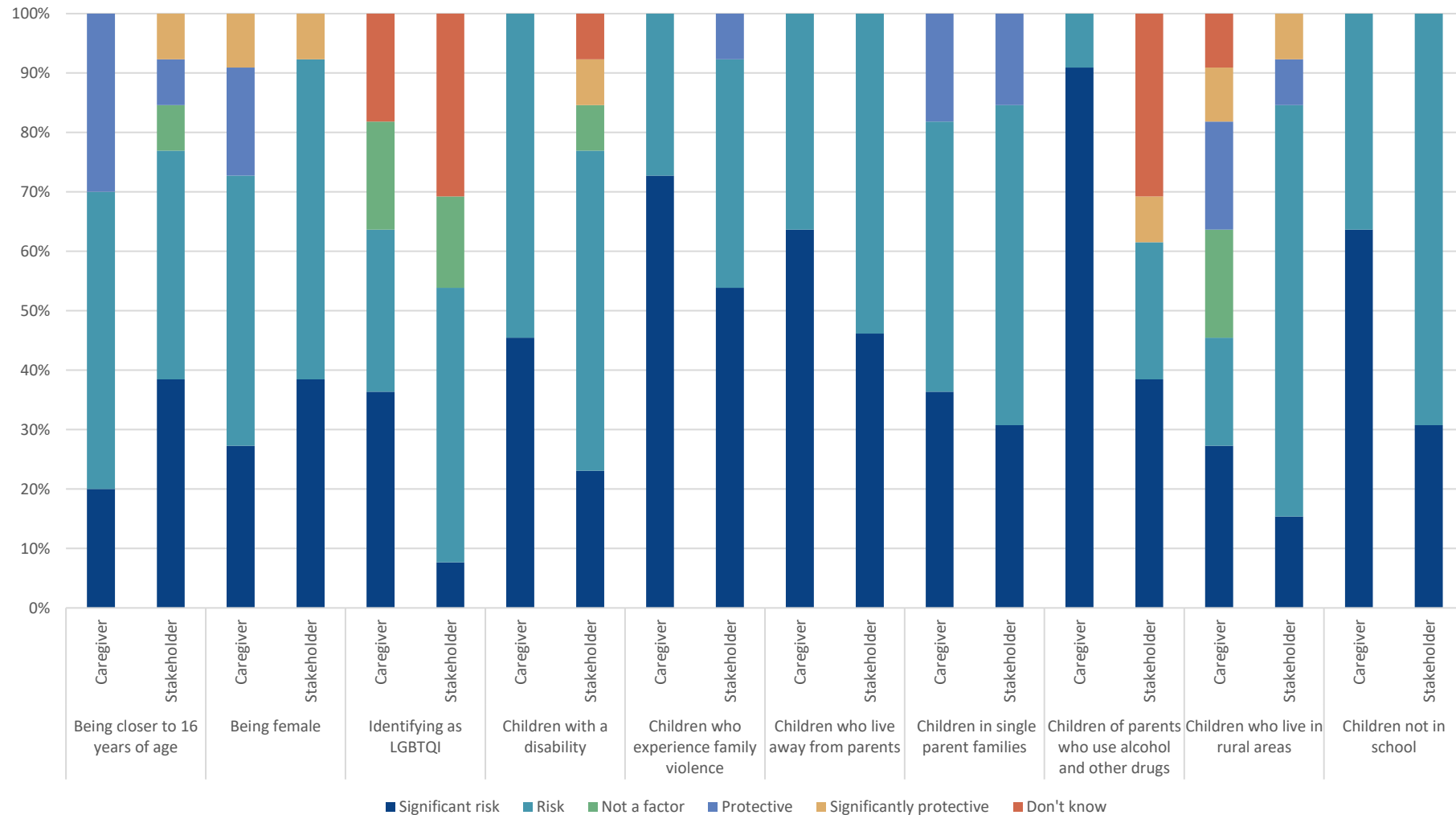
* The survey asked caregivers if the factors made children much less safe, less safe, no impact, more safe, much more safer, don't know in relation to any form of violence. .The survey asked stakeholders: do the following factors put children at risk or protect them from (a) child marriage; (b) child sexual abuse; or (c) another form of violence that they nominated. Of the 13 stakeholder responses in Figure 17, seven stakeholders considered child sexual abuse, five considered child marriage and one considered another form of violence.

Table 16: Risk and protective factors associated with violence against children in Solomon Islands from the literature and as assessed by stakeholder and caregiver survey respondents

Factor	Risk or protective nature	Evidence	Stakeholder & caregiver risk assessment
Age	**Risk:** younger children may be at greater risk of physical discipline in the home **Risk:** Older children are at greater risk of child sexual exploitation and peer violence, and may actively engage in their own sexual exploitation.	*DHS 2015:* Caregivers reported slightly greater use of physical violence amongst children aged 5-9 years *2019 survey of Pacific* frontline *child welfare workers:* Children aged 14-18 were the most commonly reported victims of child sexual exploitation for the preceding 12 months (ECPAT International, 2019). *2017 ILO survey of children engaged in CSEC*: of 54 children aged 10-17 years, 43% were aged 15-17 years (ILO, 2017).	Being closer to 16 years was seen as a significant risk or risk by: 77% of stakeholders 72% of caregivers
Gender	**Risk:** Female children are more vulnerable to child sexual abuse and exploitation than male children. **Risk:** boys may be more vulnerable to physical violence than female children in home settings.	*2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers:* Girls made up 68% of total reported child victims of sexual exploitation for the preceding 12 months, and the majority of victims in all age categories (ECPAT International, 2019). *2017 ILO survey of children engaged in CSEC*: of 54 children aged 10-17 years, 87% were girls (ILO, 2017). *DHS 2015:* Caregivers reported slightly greater use of physical violence against boys, including physical punishment.	Being female was seen as a significant risk or risk by: 92% of stakeholders 73% of caregivers
Gender diversity and sexual orientation	**Risk:** Gay (particularly male), bisexual and transgender children are more vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and violence.	*2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers:* Observations by Pacific frontline child workers (ECPAT International, 2019).	Being a LGBTQI+ was seen as a significant risk or risk by: 54% of stakeholders 64% of caregivers
Disability	**Risk:** Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse (physical and psychological), neglect and sexual violence – contributing factors include general limitations on their social participation. Parents/caregivers are less likely to	*2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers:* Over 80% of Pacific frontline child workers agreed disability a lot or somewhat increased children's vulnerability to CSEC (ECPAT International, 2019).	Being a child with disabilities was seen as a significant risk or risk by: 77% of stakeholders

	correctly identify violence against them as abuse.		100% of caregivers
Living away from parents /family breakdown and separation	**Risk:** Children living away from parents and children are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation	*2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers:* Over 60% of Pacific frontline child workers agree parent migration increases children's vulnerability to CSEC a lot (ECPAT International, 2019). *2017 ILO survey of children engaged in CSEC*: Over 60% of children engaged in CSEC in Honiara were not living with their parents (ILO, 2017).	Living away from parents was seen as a significant risk or risk by: 100% of stakeholders 100% of caregivers
Use of alcohol and other drugs (parents and children)	**Risk:** Parental use of alcohol may contribute to children's exposure to family violence	*2019 Study of the Oxfam Safe Families Program (Solomon Islands):* Interview respondents associated alcohol use with intimate partner violence and family violence more generally (Homan et al., 2019)	Use of alcohol and other drugs seen as a significant risk or risk by: 62% of stakeholders 100% of caregivers
Location (urban/rural)	**Risk:** Children in rural areas may be at greater risk of physical discipline in the home **Risk:** Children in rural areas may be at greater risk of child marriage **Risk:** Children in rural areas may be at greater risk of child labour	*DHS 2015:* Caregivers reported slightly greater use of physical violence amongst children in rural areas *DHS 2015:* Children from rural areas had higher rates of child marriage or a lower median age of first marriage *DHS 2015:* Children from the rural areas had higher rates of child labour	Living in rural areas seen as a significant risk or risk by: 85% of stakeholders 45% of caregivers
Education status	**Protective:** Higher child education attainment may reduce children's risk of child marriage, forced labour and/or sexual exploitation **Protective:** Higher parental education attainment (tertiary or higher) may reduce children's risk of violence in the home and community	*DHS 2015:* Education is associated with a higher age of first marriage *2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers:* Over 80% of Pacific frontline child workers agree being a 'dropout' increases children's vulnerability to CSEC a lot or somewhat (ECPAT International, 2019). *2017 ILO survey of children engaged in CSEC*: 85% of children (10-17 years) engaged in CSEC in Honiara were not in school (ILO, 2017). *DHS 2015:* Caregivers of children who had greater educational attainment reported lower use of violent punishment	Children not in school are seen as a significant risk or risk by: 100% of stakeholders 100% of caregivers

Poverty	Risk: Poverty increases the vulnerability of children to violence in the home, child marriage, trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour.	*DHS 2015:* Children whose caregivers were in poorer wealth quintiles reported greater use of violent punishment in the home in the Solomon Islands	Being poor was seen as a significant risk or risk by:
		DHS 2015: Children from poorer households had higher rates of child marriage	77% of stakeholders
		DHS 2015: Children from the poorest four quintiles had higher rates of child labour	100% of caregivers
		2017 ILO survey of children engaged in CSEC: 59% of children engaged in CSEC in Honiara did so because they or their families needed money (ILO, 2017).	

7.2 What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues studied in this research? (RQ2)

7.2.1 Strengths and Gaps in the Child Protection System (RQ2.1)

a) Governance

Responsibility for the governance of the child protection system in the Solomon Islands rests with the National Advisory Committee for Children (NACC), which was established in 1992 to advise the Cabinet on issues relating to children and child rights. It consists of high-level government (Permanent Secretaries) and non-government representatives, including Save the Children. The Secretariat of the Committee NACC lies with the Children's Desk in the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCA).

Responsibility for stewardship of both prevention and response efforts under the *Child and Family Welfare Act 2017* rests with the Social Welfare Division (SWD), in the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS). The SWD also chairs the Child Protection Taskforce, which serves as a mechanism for stakeholders to coordinate and discuss emerging child protection issues, chaired by the Director of Social Welfare. Conversely, the MWYCA leads SAFENET, a national coordination mechanism for referral and service delivery relating to women and children who experience violence, and the protection cluster as part of the humanitarian response under the National Coordination Structure (Solomon Islands Government & OCHA/Relief Web, 2022).

Stakeholders highlighted a number of challenges with respect to the sector's current governance and stewardship. First, while the NACC is operational with secretariat support, stakeholders noted that there was a need for greater political leadership to increase the resources available within the child protection system. Stakeholders noted that there was a need to ensure high-level participation of Permanent Secretaries in meetings, than their deputies, to promote accountability amongst Ministries that are responsible for making progress with identified reforms.

Second, the governance of the system and ultimate responsibility for stewardship of the system is split between two ministries, which to some extent is exacerbated by divides in the international community between efforts related to violence against women and violence against children and between non-humanitarian and humanitarian contexts. As noted above, the SWD, which has formal responsibility for stewardship under the *Child and Family Welfare Act 2017*, is housed within the MHMS. The MHMS receives the second largest share of the budget within the Solomon Islands government behind the Ministry of

Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD), yet the SWD only receives 0.2% of the MHMS budget (author analysis based on the 2023 recurrent budget), rendering it a small division within a large ministry that has a very broad mandate making it difficult to build political capital for greater investment (refer to Section 7.2.1(d)).

Third, meetings of the NACC and Child Protection Taskforce remain dependent on budget resources from UNICEF and Save the Children, and it is unclear to what extent these mechanisms are embedded within the system. Fourth, provincial coordination mechanisms are only emerging and ad-hoc (and at times donor-branded) structures have been created through externally financed projects at the community level. Finally, and most importantly, there is no systematic mechanism for the participation of children within the governance of the system.

b) *Legislation and policy*

There has been significant progress made in strengthening the legislative environment for children in the Solomon Islands over the past 10 years. This includes the enacting the *Child and Family Welfare Act 2017,* which governs the child protection system. The Act acknowledges the primary role of parents, families, and communities in ensuring the well-being of children and sets out the responsibilities of the Social Welfare Department in ensuring the care and protection of children.

The *Family Protection Act 2014*, *Penal Code (Amendment) (Sexual Offences) Act 2016,* and the *Adoption Act 2017* have also been adopted in the past 10 years. In addition to the above, Solomon Islands has also recently ratified the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography* (2022) and the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict* (2023).

Notwithstanding the progress made, there remain a number of key gaps with respect to child protection. Table 17 describes the definitions of violence against children used to define grounds for care and protection orders or criminal offences in the Solomon Islands. Key legislative gaps where there remains inconsistency with child rights standards include:

- While physical violence is recognised as a ground for care and protection orders, corporal punishment in the home, school and other care settings that do not cause injury or are "reasonable" by a parent or teacher is legally permitted;
- Customary marriage is permissible at 15 years of age, and children who are married before 18 years are not protected under the *Child and Family Welfare Act*;
- Cyberbullying and online sexual violence, including grooming, are not explicitly covered in the legislative framework, and
- Child labour, with the minimum age for work set at the age of 12 years.

Child protection stakeholders reported that the Ministry of Justice has been tasked with the review of the Islanders Marriage Act, including reform of the minimum age of marriage, but there have been delays in the review. In addition, steps to address online violence have been taken with the development of a C*yber Crime Bill*.

The broader legislative context with respect to child protection includes additional including:

- *Adoption Act 2017*
- *Affiliation, Separation and Maintenance Act*
- *Births and Deaths (Registration) Act*
- *Correctional Services Act 2007*
- *Education Act 2023 (discussed under Section 7.2.1(g))*
- *Juvenile Offenders Act 1972*

The Child Protection Policy is currently in draft and will be launched imminently with a multisectoral implementation plan. Stakeholders noted challenges with existing legislation and plans, including resourcing for implementation, particularly beyond Honiara, discussed below under part 'd'. Other relevant policies include the National Education Strategic Plan 2022-2026 and the MEHRD's Child Protection Policy, the National Health Strategic Plan 2012-2030 and the National Disability Development Policy 2022-2031, which provides for general equality of access to social services, health and education.

SAFENET is a coordination mechanism led by the MWYCA for government and non-government service providers, establishing and strengthening formal referral pathways to ensure the care and protection of children and women. This includes the Social Welfare Department, Police, Public Solicitor's Office, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration, Honiara City Council and NGO service providers such as the Family Support Centre, Christian Care Centre and Hope Trust. The capacity of the system to respond to reports is discussed further below under Section 7.2.1d.

Table 17: Summary of legislative protection for violence against children in Solomon Islands, by form of violence

Type of violence	Summary	Care and protection orders	Criminal Offences
Emotional	Emotional violence included under	Yes, including neglect	Penal code: offence to neglect a child if he [she] has failed to provide adequate food, clothing, medical aid or lodging for him [her] Online: cybercrime bill in development, but otherwise not addressed.
Physical	Corporal punishment is legal in the home, school and other care settings, although some progress has been made in education.	Yes, if it results in physical wounds or bodily injury	Penal Code: Offence to wilfully assault or mistreat a child under 15 if it causes suffering or injury to health, but with defence of reasonable punishment for parents, teachers or any other person having lawful control over the child, although Education Act 2023 gives new power to MEHRD to manage teachers and leaders with students' safety and welfare as the paramount consideration.
Sexual	Yes, although online offences are not covered	Yes	Penal Code: cybercrime bill in development.
Rape			Penal code: age of consent is 15 years, and 18 years if the person is in a position of trust or if the person is disability. Broad definition of rape under 2016 amendment, with significant imprisonment terms. Persistent child sexual abuse is also defined.
Non-contact sexual violence			Penal code: indecent act, with specific penalties if committed against a child under 15 years, or a child with a disability, or if the person is in a position of trust
Child Marriage	No protection for children aged 15-18 years.	Care and protection orders do not apply to children who are married before 18 years	Islanders Marriage Act: legal age of marriage is 15 years, with parental or judicial consent required up to 18 years.

Child Labour	Some gaps, with the minimum age for work in the Labour Act (12 years), not consistent with international standards (15 years)	Yes, inappropriate for age, hazardous, or impairs child education and moral development	Labour Act: Minimum age for work is 12 years, minimum age for certain types of hazardous work is 15 years, minimum age for working at night Is 18 years Penal Code: Prohibition on forced labour with additional penalties for children Immigration Act: Prohibition on child trafficking, but not transfer of children
Commercial Sexual Exploitation		Yes, under 18 years of age, although definition is poorly constructed	Penal code: offence to obtain commercial sexual services from a child under 18 years (greater penalty if under 15). Offence to procure a child under 18 years.
Trafficking		N/A	Penal code: trafficking is an offence but must prove means. Greater penalty if the victim is a child under 18 years. Also an offence to profit from trafficking.

c) Reporting pathways

At the intersection between the tertiary child protection response services and children who experience violence are reporting pathways. There are no mandatory reporting obligations under the Child and Family Welfare Act - people who have reasonable grounds to suspect a child is in need of care and protection may voluntarily report to SWD or police, with police being required to pass reports to SWD. Health workers have mandatory reporting obligations under the *Family Protection Act 2014*, and education providers who suspect that a teacher has committed an offence must report the matter to police under the *Education Act 2023*.

Stakeholders and caregivers were mixed in their responses as to whether children are likely to report experiences of violence – some stakeholders and caregivers thought that some would be too afraid to report, which is consistent with the nature of adult responses to disclosures of violence.

> *For some children, they might not be close to their parents and are afraid to approach them if they have any problems. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

> *If the parent has a very close relationship with their child, it is more likely they are the first people their child shared their problems with. For some children, they might not be close to their parents and are afraid to approach themometimes, this is because parents ignore their children and don't listen to them. If they lived with relatives, then it would be likely they won't share their problems with them unless they are comfortable and close with them. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

However, a contrary finding emerged in the child-led research, in which all children said that they would tell someone if they experienced violence. Males in one FGD expressed some qualifications about whether children would disclose if, for example, "*they are scared to tell anyone*" or if the person they told might be "*a friend*" of the person who caused the problem for the child. This is an important finding of this study, indicating children's willingness to share concerns with people around them and that children live in a context where their concerns are taken seriously, and they have trusted members of the community to talk with if they have a problem. This may also reflect a positive development following SC's work with children in these communities on child rights and violence against children.

If children do report, they are more likely to report to someone they trust. Girls are more likely to tell trusted friends and aunty or mother if they are close; boys are more likely to tell brothers or uncles that they feel comfortable with. Caregivers thought that children were unlikely to tell village or church leaders or health workers, but they may tell police if it was serious and may tell teachers about violence at school. Most caregivers thought that children would not know what a social worker is.

They are likely to tell others. This is to reduce the risk of further abuse. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)

Most children do not disclose their experiences to parents, only to any trusted person. In cases of sexual abuse, they disclose to their peer groups, trusted relatives e.g.: aunties or uncles. When disclosing some children cry, smaller ones when asked refuse to respond further, especially when the perpetrator is a member of the family. If a case is outside of the family, a child is [more] willing to disclose. In the case of girl children, they refuse to disclose to any man only to a female. Cases reported to police are mainly from parents, relatives and caregivers. Some cases are reported to my office however most cases to police. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Stakeholders and caregivers described parents as the key barrier to reporting to authorities. Reasons given by stakeholders and caregivers to why adults would not support children to report the cases include taboo, shame and concern that the child wouldn't be believed. Respondents noted that this would especially be the case if the perpetrator was a male family member. The above is consistent with existing data from a survey of adults in Isabel and Makira, which found that 97% of respondents agreed that it was wrong for children to have transactional sex, but over one-quarter of respondents said that they would do nothing about it (IOM, 2019).

It is seen as a taboo and should not be exposed. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Most adults in this community would react with anger if violence was involved. Some would react differently but then would want the issue solved soon to make it safe for them and their families in the community. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

In most cases where parents who are unaware of the risks of such behaviours do not take things seriously, some even shut children down, not allowing them to tell their stories, especially if it is a father-girl child or grandfather-child case. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Most of cases, people do not have the freedom to come out because of fear, the literacy rate is also a contributing factor; people affected do not come out bravely to report the case to the Police, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Communication due to illiteracy is a barrier. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, male)

Community resolution of cases is discussed further below under Section 7.2.1(i).

d) Child protection response services

Stakeholders described the broad framework for the child protection system as being in place:

Referral pathway in place, legislation that makes abuse of children illegal, legislation in place to deal with perpetrators, and a safe place for mothers and children to go to. (KII, national stakeholder, female)

Service providers across the child protection system also noted that there have been significant improvements in the strengthening coordination and referral pathways, with the establishment of SAFENET in Honiara, a coordination mechanism led by the MWYCA for government and non-government service providers relating to the care and protection of children and women. This includes the SWD, Police, Public Solicitor's Office, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration, Honiara City Council and NGO service providers such as the Family Support Centre, Christian Care Centre and Hope Trust.

There are relatively better services available for women and children who experience violence in Honiara – in addition to the main office of SWD, Family Support Centre provides legal services; Christian Care Centre provides housing, counselling and support services; and Hope Trust. Outside Honiara, while SWD has a presence in provincial capitals, there are far fewer services available for women and children – although

services offered by the Christian Care Centre in Honiara are offered to women and children throughout the country - and they recently established a centre in Malaita in 2022. This is discussed further below.

With stakeholders noted the widespread and significant challenges with responses to violence against children given the constraints with respect to financial resources, impacting both staffing and operational expenses, particularly for the SWD, which has primary responsibility for the care and protection of children who experience violence rests with SWD, as noted above in Section 7.2.1a). This is evident in the analysis of its budget: SWD receives less than 0.03% of the overall SIG government recurrent budget, which is equivalent to AUD 50 cents for every child under the age of 19 in the Solomon Islands (author calculations based on Solomon Islands Government (2023)). As noted in Figure *31*, the share of the SIG recurrent budget allocated to SWD has also declined slightly from 0.05% in 2019 to less than 0.05% in 2023. The share of the MHMS recurrent budget received by SWD has remained steady since 2020 at 0.2%.

While staffing within SWD has improved in the past 15 years, with the SWD officers now present in each province, staffing numbers (availability) were considered by stakeholders to be insufficient and a major constraint faced by the sector:

> *In terms of intervention and response service, the division does not have enough resources to do assessments and respond to emergency cases on time. Limited budget and provincial human resources overall 17 Social Welfare staff for the whole country… (KII National Stakeholder, female)*

Figure 31: Salaries and operational SIG budget for SWD, including as a share of the total government budget (Source: Solomon Islands Government (2021, 2022b, 2023))
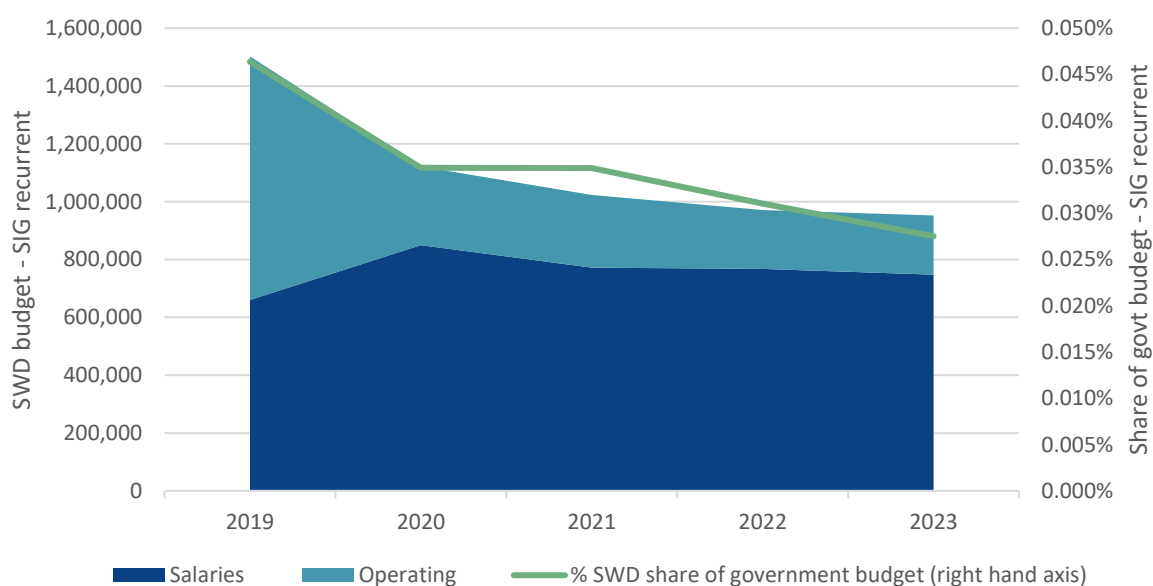
Stakeholders also raised the issue of workforce capacity (quality), calling for greater training and specialisation of the SWD workforce for child protection:

> *In terms of human resources training, there is a need for some officers to undergo professional training; most officers are graduates of social work only. (KII National Stakeholder, female)*

> *There needs to be child protection workers who should be trained in case management - child protection specialists in the country and at the provincial level. Multiple staff in provinces who are accessible and resourced with enough funds and transport to be able to travel to communities. Their role could be in response but also to educate to do preventive work. (KII National Stakeholder, female)*

SWD resource limitations also extend to infrastructure, with the main office in Honiara being housed in a demountable area and the lack of a child-friendly space to welcome or interview children.

In the absence of service availability outside Honiara, the role of police, teachers and health workers, as well as community-based response systems, is central to the effectiveness of response services. There has been significant work by the relevant ministries, SC, UNICEF, UNFPA and others to strengthen referral processes and workforce capacity within the education and health sectors. While limited data were gathered on the state of these services, data suggests that there remains significant work to be done, with stakeholders noting the lack of available human and other resources in the education sector and caregivers pointing to limits in the health sector:

> *[Children are] not likely to share with nurses. In our health centre, the nurses are not friendly and often scold their patients. Some teens who sought help were often scolded, and their issues were not confidential. The nurse would share confidential information with a neighbour, friend or relatives, which causes a lack of confidence in nurses. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

Stakeholders recognised the significant contribution of SC and UNICEF to strengthening the child protection system, including providing both financing and technical assistance. Stakeholders identified three main challenges with respect to external assistance received: this includes the timeframes for expenditure of project funds; the funding of pilots rather than strategic, collaborative long-term programs; and the use of external technical assistance where capacity exists, which has been noted in prior evaluations (Homan et al., 2019).

> *Technical support provided always gives direction and guidance to the organisation that implement. The weakness is that donors use their technical experts and never count on the organisation's existing human resources to support them in terms of knowledge transfer and capacity building. How do we do things differently? There are a lot of local resource people in the country; if they could pull together data to see the different areas of the resource personnel and build on their capacity to match international expectations to enable them to take on the advisory work when the technical expertise leaves. (KII National Stakeholders, female)*

> *International partners have contributed a lot in terms of capacity building of human resources and assistance to implement programs at the community level. The only weakness identified is most assistance is in the form of the pilot, does not give a good feature, and sustainability not anticipated. This could be done differently; instead of pilots, change to the program, so that it can be a continuous exercise that is co-funded by all stakeholders. (KII Provincial Stakeholders, male)*

e) Police

There was very limited data on the discussion of the role of the police in the Solomon Islands amongst both caregivers and stakeholders. Similar to PNG, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force has established Family Violence Units (FVU) of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force in all provinces and the Sexual Assault Unit of the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force only in Honiara (UNICEF, 2017b). The FVU receive reports of child victims of family violence from Health Workers under the Family Protection Act 2014 and refers to and from other services via the SAFENET network for family violence and GBV (Social Welfare Department, police, Public Solicitor's Office, and NGO service providers such as the Family Support Centre and Christian Care Centre.) In addition to specialised services for women and children, training on child protection issues is included in induction for all new police recruits.

Importantly, data from SAFENET shows that only 29% of adult or child victims receiving services from SAFENET in Honiara across 2020 and 2021 reported to police (copy on file with author). There is no time data available on whether this reflects an increase or decrease over time (see (Ngai, 2023) for some data . It does

suggest that there remain significant socio-cultural barriers in reporting, even in Honiara, where there is greater ease of access to specialised police services. This is consistent with prior research that child victims have not always been treated by police in a manner consistent with trauma-informed policing (UNICEF, 2017b).

These barriers are also reflected in the child-led research data. In both FGDs where this question was asked directly, several female participants said children would not go to the police if they had a problem because they may be "*worried that they may come to parents to discuss the issue*" or that children may be too "*scared or ashamed to go and report to the police*" (FGD, 12-16 years, Girls). This was confirmed by several other female participants in the younger cohort who said children wouldn't go to the police if they had a problem (FGD, 8-11 years, Girls). This contradicts some of the others about children's confidence in going to the police (and other stakeholders) if they had a problem, and it is notable that these sentiments were expressed by female participants across two age cohorts. However, this finding only arose in two FGDs thus, further exploration of whether female children and young people are less likely to take problems to the police would need to be undertaken.

Reflective of the distinction made at the community level between "serious" and "non-serious" cases, data suggest that police only deal with "serious cases" and that they do not include some forms of violence against children: "*most children think that police only deal with adult problems or big issues only and not with children unless it is a very big problem*" (FGD, Caregivers, Female).

Like other aspects of the child protection system, police also lack human and financial resources to play a more proactive role in community policing and youth crime prevention.

f) Justice

There is an emerging level of specialising both relating to child victims and children in conflict with the law in the Solomon Islands; however, this specialisation is largely limited to Honiara. This includes the establishment of a Children's Court in Honiara, a specially trained office of lawyers with the Director of Public Prosecutions receiving referrals relating to crimes against children, and a Family Protection Unit in the Public Solicitors Office (Legal Aid) to support care and protection orders. In addition, the Evidence Act specifies special measures for children to give evidence.

Yet, there are limited human and financial resources to implement these good practices. In addition, outside of Honiara, training for judges and magistrates in child protection remains ad hoc (UNICEF, 2017b).

The actors in the courts relating to the child protection system in the Solomon Islands, and strengths and gaps are outlined in Table 18.

Table 18: Overview of courts relating to child protection in Solomon Islands

SYSTEM ACTORS/BODIES AND ROLES	STRENGTHS/GAPS
Magistrates Court or authorised justices: for care and protection orders under the Family Protection Act and the Child and Family Welfare Act	Gap • Authorised justice may be a village leader with no formal training (Ngai, 2023) • No facilities to implement the Evidence Act provisions on alternative arrangements for children to give evidence, such as videotaped evidence and closed-circuit television. Screens are sometimes provided but are generally not available in the provincial circuit courts due to a lack of appropriate facilities. One magistrate reportedly uses a blanket to protect child victims from contact with the perpetrator during testimony. (UNICEF, 2017b)

Children's Court in Honiara: for cases of children in conflict with the law	Strengths: • Presided over by a Magistrate trained in juvenile issues Gaps: • Outside Honiara, some areas have no specialist Magistrates for children or no resident Magistrate. Matters must, therefore, wait for a provincial court circuit tour to be conducted. This causes significant delays in cases involving both children in conflict with the law and child victims and witnesses (UNICEF, 2017b) • As above relating to the Evidence Act

g) Education

With respect to violence in schools perpetrated by teachers, progress has been made with the enactment of the *Education Act 2023* and associated Administrative Instruction under the Act. The Act marks a shift from basic to compulsory education, recognising the right of children to receive an education, regulating school fees, and obliging the government to use its best endeavours, using available resources to ensure all children receive early childhood, primary and secondary education. The Act requires that "*protecting the safety and welfare of students must be the paramount consideration for exercising powers*" under the Division related to the power to manage teachers (s76(1)), giving the Ministry of Education and Resource Development (MEHRD) an obligation to investigate and powers to enforce standards relating to non-violent teaching. If a teacher has engaged in misconduct constituting an offence, the education provider or Permanent Secretary must make a referral to the police (s82).

The degree of progress reflected by the Act in relation to prohibiting violence against children will ultimately be dependent on the extent to which non-violent teaching methods are stipulated in the relevant administrative instructions under the Act. MEHRD has received ongoing support from UNICEF relating to child protection in schools - in 2022, UNICEF supported MEHRD in developing six draft administrative instructions related to child protection and initiated discussion on referral pathways for schools, with teacher training planned for 2023 (UNICEF Pacific Islands, 2023).

Lessons from other Pacific countries included in this analysis suggest that even when the legal and regulatory framework is well established, additional teaching resources are needed within schools to implement and comply with such regulations, including reporting pathways. In this regard, it is concerning that corporal punishment, violence or bullying are not mentioned in the current National Education Action Plan 2022-26. In addition, one stakeholder noted that schools do not have additional staff for bullying, with no specific educational materials available.

> *School administration can only deal with these problems when reported by victims, but this will also depend on if they have the means to report, or in the case of girls, they must have the confidence in reporting. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Male)*

h) Information systems

Stakeholders noted that there are ongoing efforts to design and implement a fit-for-purpose information system that supportschild-centred responsive services. Stakeholders interviewed agreed that the digitisation of administrative information systems relating to referral and secondary and tertiary response is a high priority. Having reviewed summative data from the SAFENET referral system for this situational analysis, it will be important to ensure harmonisation of definitions of forms of violence and of socio-economic characteristics (such as age, disability, education status etc.) across all partners. In addition, data across different partners should be regularly analysed and disseminated. The design of the system should be a collaborative effort across all partners.

i) Community

Community-based processes for responding to violence against children were discussed in depth by respondents. These processes typically involve male relatives of the victim and perpetrator, sometimes with the support of community leaders, reconciling through dialogue and often involving the payment of compensation (money or goods) from the perpetrators' relatives to the victims. The use of these processes for resolving cases of violence against children continues to be widespread, given the resource, geographical and logistical constraints of formal services described above.

Community members reflected on the contexts in which these processes are used. Some respondents described how cases of violence against children may be resolved between families through reconciliation and compensation if they were not serious. If they were more serious, they noted that community elders, the chief, as well as village and church elders may be involved in deciding whether to resolve it in the community or report it to the police or other authorities. No respondents reported calling the child helpline – this may be because of its more limited reach in the provinces where the FGD with caregivers took place.

> *The parents or the trusted person would try to help the child get help from the responsible authority if the case is extremely serious. Sometimes they would solve it between parties involved in the traditional way. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

> *If a child reports something that is not too serious, they will settle it in the family or between those involved. If it were somewhat serious, they would go to the community elders, which consists of the community chief, elders and church elders, to make a decision to solve it right there or go to the police. If it is too serious, then the family will go directly to the police or the responsible authorities. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

> *In terms of tradition or custom, there are minor family violence cases cultural leaders deal with. Regarding child abuse/sexual abuse, these are tabu issues that bring shame to parents or caregivers when people are aware. Most cases are reported to the police, and health facilities being the only confidential places to report sensitive cases. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Stakeholders and caregivers described the rationale for such practices as keeping the peace within families. There were no data on the extent of consistency in process and outcomes and to which such practices consider the voices or interests of women and children.

> *Some cultural norms and practices help efforts to respond to child abuse e.g., child victim of violence or child abuse settlement by compensation helps solve the problem at the family level rather than further reporting to the police. This helps keep peace and security within families and the community. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *The good thing about this is that the issue is resolved peacefully; however, the bad thing is that the offence is likely to be repeated or escalate to stages causing suicide or long-term effects of trauma. The relationship between the victim and the offender's family is always tense. (FGD caregivers male)*

Some communities have bylaws which detail guidelines with respect to reporting, although respondents noted that this would not have any effect if the perpetrator was a traditional leader.

> *In every community, there are bylaws which guide them. If there are ways to make these bylaws stronger and respected, then adults would respond to any child-related issues calmly and swiftly. These bylaws should be respected as guides to keep all members in the community safe. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

Some communities have bylaws that spell out the functions of leaders and the issues for which they are responsible. This encourages children to report to them; the challenge here may be if the perpetrator is a relative of the traditional leader. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

7.2.2 Are there past, existing or emerging approaches, including kastom, traditional or religious approaches, to learn from? (RQ2.2)

Working with communities is key to both the effectiveness of primary prevention efforts as well as responses to violence against children, given the limitations of the availability of formal response services. Stakeholders and caregivers affirmed existing on the importance of knowledge and understanding of traditional customs and values, as well as related practice, where appropriate, was a key factor in approaching and working with communities to achieve any change (Thompson & Wadley, 2019).

Stakeholders recognised the tensions in sociocultural norms and practices as both a driver and basis for prevention strategies, and that is a need for deep reflection and dialogue on the meaning and role of socio-cultural norms moving forward:

Our socio-cultural norms and practices can be vice versa, to expose or provide the best foundation for preventing child abuse. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, male)

There is a need for cultural owners to relook at their cultural norms to suit the changes today due to modernisation to provide a good foundation to respond appropriately to child marriage and sexual abuse. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, male)

Talking about the issues at the community level with a deeper understanding of why parents would sell their children and agree to marry their children off. Everyone should understand the impacts of those decisions on children's education, wellbeing and safety. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Stakeholders discussed the importance of engaging with church institutions and values. Some male stakeholders and caregivers referred to the need to strengthen the cultural norm of respect. While this has historically been used to refer to the authority given to male leaders and household heads, working to broaden the interpretation of the notion of respect may help expand recognition and acknowledgement of rights:

Past and present cultural norms help us understand what happens now. We can understand that in the past, there were strong cultural mechanisms in society. Respect is the fundamental norm upheld by different cultures. In the current modernised culture, respect is slowly dying out; the strength of respect is not there, so it hinders efforts to respond to child marriage and sexual abuse. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, male)

If practised properly, these cultural norms are meant to keep help, everyone, including children, safe. These norms are based on concepts such as love for each other, responsibility, respect and order. Children, therefore, are told to comply with their roles as they grow and, with each rite of passage, develop the understanding of becoming an adult. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)

Yet, while there is stakeholder interest in understanding how to ground child protection prevention and response efforts on socio-cultural norms, and there has been significant work undertaken at the community level, there is little evidence as to what works best or translation of evidence into national standards or strategy to guide such work. With respect to program evaluations published in the past five years, the Oxfam Safe Families program provide three cross-cutting lessons.

Training and engaging community members as resources in their communities is effective at changing norms

The Oxfam "Safe Families" Program displayed very promising early results in changing community norms and strengthening local responses to family and sexual violence over the three years of its first phase (2015-2018), including behavioural change and improved collaboration between child protection stakeholders (Homan et al., 2019).

In terms of particular approaches, the 2019 evaluation of Oxfam's "Safe Families" Program in the Solomon Islands provided robust validation for their use of "Community Engagement Facilitators" (CEFs), who were local men and women trained by the program and engaged in working in their communities over the course of three years (Homan et al., 2019). The evaluation found that prolonged contact, meaningful interactions and, critically, demonstrating their own reliability in the course of program delivery enabled CEFs to build a level of community trust that was key to enabling program participants to openly discuss sensitive subjects during discussions and other activities (Homan et al., 2019). Moreover, these relationships also influenced the CEFs themselves to modify their own parenting practices in line with the program's messaging after identifying inconsistencies between the messaging they were taking to communities and their own behaviour (Homan et al., 2019). The flexibility and autonomy built into the CEFs' ongoing liaison role allowed CEFs to tailor the program to their particular communities' needs, including by responding to community questions that were not anticipated in the program's content design and improving the accessibility of activities by modifying content delivery modes to accommodate participant needs (Homan et al., 2019). The sustainability of such models is unclear.

Training and engaging community members as resources in their communities is improving linkages with formal child protection services.

In contexts such as Malaita and Temotu in the Solomon Islands, where formal child protection networks were sufficiently resourced to both participate in networking activities and respond to the community concerns raised therein, the establishment of regular coalition meetings (attended by representatives from formal services such as the justice system, police force, and health services, as well as community stakeholders including women's organisations, church groups and community representatives) was able to foster better integration in referral and information-sharing networks, as well as cross-institutional collective planning for a more holistic, community-led response to family violence (Homan et al., 2019).

The program evaluation found that allowing local community committees to develop and implement their own local family violence action plans, enabled communities to focus on and respond to their particular needs (e.g. one community's concern that the need for women and girls to travel long distances to draw water was placing them at heightened risk of sexual violence) (Homan et al., 2019).

The program did not generate evidence on effective integration of programmatic efforts relating to violence against women and children

While its aims were framed in broad terms of "family violence", the Oxfam "Safe Communities" program focused mainly on addressing gender-based, intimate partner violence, rather than other types of violence occurring in the home. Its recommendations called for greater efforts to include young people in social change efforts regarding gender-based violence (in recognition that educational efforts should begin early), but stopped short of creating any more concrete linkages between VAW and VAC programming (Homan et al., 2019).

7.3 Recommendations

Key findings

The situational analysis has documented both tremendous progress in strengthening the child protection system and challenges with respect to violence against children in the Solomon Islands.

Stakeholders participating in this research were of the view that emotional, physical and sexual violence, including CSEC, were increasing. This is of concern given the prior household survey data (now eight years dated) showed the Solomon Islands had the highest rates of violent discipline and child labour and the second highest for bullying, compared to 40 low- and middle-income countries across Asia Pacific region (Kennedy et al., 2020).

The stakeholder perspective that violence against children is increasing is consistent with data on the underlying drivers of violence, including gendered norms and practices, poverty and its gendered implications, climate change and digitisation. In particular, poverty has been exacerbated since 2019 in the context of both COVID-19 and structural changes to the Solomon Islands economy.

In this context, poverty is a generalised experience. However, stakeholders and caregivers also identified several risk factors associated with such violence, including living away from parents or in a single-parent family, being out of school, experiencing family violence and disability, having caregivers who use drugs and alcohol and having children who identify as LGBTQI+. These risk factors should be reflected in primary prevention programs and given consideration as to how they could begin to form the basis of secondary prevention initiatives. In addition to formal education, the child-led research revealed that positive parenting and strong connections between the home, school, and community are what help children feel safe.

The analysis of the child protection system showed significant progress in establishing the legislative and policy framework related to child protection, with further work necessary with respect to corporal punishment, child marriage, child labour and cyberbullying. Child protection response services have expanded reach to the provincial level, and collaboration between partners in Honiara has strengthened through SAFENET. Human and financial resources limit the availability and accessibility of these services in rural areas and their accessibility to children in Honiara. Efforts should, therefore, continue to be made to strengthen the reach and quality of response services through the education and health systems, as well as community-based primary prevention.

Recommendations for this situational analysis

- Share and discuss in depth the findings of this situational analysis and other recent studies by Hope Trust within the NACC, the Child Protection Taskforce, and provincial authorities, and consider its implications for how the forthcoming Child Protection Policy is implemented, as well as priorities for building the evidence base relating to violence against children.

- Share the summary findings with children, caregivers and stakeholders who participated in the situational analysis.

Recommendations for Save the Children Programming

- With respect to community-level programming, children recommend a greater focus on community education about customs and religious beliefs to promote respect and collaboration.

- Building on engagement with children in the communities in Malaita, where the child-led research took place, where children called for bans on corporal punishment, support a child-led campaign for law reform to ban corporal punishment in homes and schools.

- In collaboration with other partners, engage in child-led programming in schools and communities for primary prevention, including children's rights and knowledge and skills for preventing and responding to violence against children. Such programs should include, as core components, comprehensive sexuality education and online safety for children, learning from and expanding on existing programs.

- In collaboration with other partners, expand on primary prevention programs with caregivers, on preventing and responding to violence, and alternative parenting approaches. Such programs

should include, as core components, comprehensive sexuality education for adults and online safety for children, building on and expanding existing programs.

- Community-based prevention programs for both children and caregivers should address the gendered nature of violence against children, linking and potentially integrating, where appropriate, efforts for the *primary prevention* of violence against women and children.

- Support communities to take action regarding the use of alcohol and other drugs. Build monitoring and evaluation efforts regarding these efforts.

- As part of community-level programming, pay attention to providing safe housing, play and recreation areas and facilities for children, and support activities that strengthen familial and community bonds and participation in recreational activities, like storytelling sports (swimming, fishing, soccer, and volleyball) as suggested by children.

Recommendations for Save the Children partnership with national and subnational government institutions

When making the Child Protection Policy, it would be great if we could involve and engage the children in it through consultations, provide feedback mechanisms, and support them in delivering suitable and appropriate programs. (Survey Stakeholder)

- Engage with children, including children with disability, gender and sexually diverse children, and children with lived experience of violence, within the process of strengthening the child protection system and in its ongoing governance at the national, provincial and community levels.

- As part of the implementation of the *Child and Family Welfare Act*, develop a nationwide comprehensive, evidence-based and long-term strategy for *primary prevention* through multi-year and core funding to NGOs/CSOs based on evidence of what is working well in the Solomon Islands.

Chiefs should set up committees that protect children's rights and safety in the community. (FGD, Caregiver, Male)

- Develop guidelines for communities on community safety, including community collaboration, enforcing bylaws, and police playing a more active role. Stakeholders should consider whether to include advice on reconciliation and compensation practices in instances of violence against children, and if so, what advice (with respect to participation of women and children, and principles for consideration) should be given.

- Advocate/prioritise the passing of legislation relating to increasing the age for marriage.

- Advocate for budget targets to establish and appropriate staff in the SWD, and pursue appropriate opportunities to increase pre-and in-service training for SWD

- Strengthen the child protection information system to support case management. Publish brief annual reports on violence against children and reporting/referral and case outcome trends that are disaggregated, including by gender, disability status, location and the nature of the caregiving relationships.

- Within the education sector, teachers should be trained on the child protection policy, non-violent classroom management strategies, and the comprehensive sexuality education curricula (FLE) and monitor implementation. Teacher training should also include knowledge and skills with respect to identifying and responding to violence against children through appropriate referral pathways.

- Within the health sector – support health sector efforts to strengthen health worker engagement with communities and their knowledge and skills with respect to identifying and responding to violence against children through appropriate referral pathways.

- Consider the initiation of secondary prevention programs, with consideration to:
    - Additional educational support to children living away from their parents;
    - Establishing fee waiver programs for upper secondary school to prevent violence against children, including child labour, CSEC and child marriage; and
    - Support to families and communities regarding the use of alcohol and other drugs (as well as relevant public health campaigns).

Recommendations for Save the Children partnership with other actors

- Recognising strong coordination between partners, commit to mutual accountability and learning and strengthen efforts to collaborate on a deeper level with respect to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of child protection programs to ensure national level reach and impact. Centre the technical capacity within service organisations as part of these programs.

- Increase funding for strengthening the child protection system, including by considering how funds designated to support violence against women and girls, can best be used to strengthen the child protection system. In addition, building on the evidence presented in this report, consider support for child protection as part of responses to climate change financing.

8. Tonga

8.1 What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online? (RQ1)

8.1.1 Prevalence of violence

While there is a lack of official prevalence data covering the time period, child protection stakeholders who participated in the study thought that there had been an increase in both reporting and incidence of violence against children in Tonga over the last five years, as shown in Figure 32. There was particularly strong consensus and confidence among stakeholders about the increased prevalence of emotional, physical and sexual violence against children. While respondents were less certain about trends in child labour, commercial sexual exploitation and child trafficking, overall, their responses indicated a likelihood of increased prevalence in those as well.

Figure 32: Stakeholder Estimates of Change in Prevalence of Violence Against Children 2019-2023, N=16
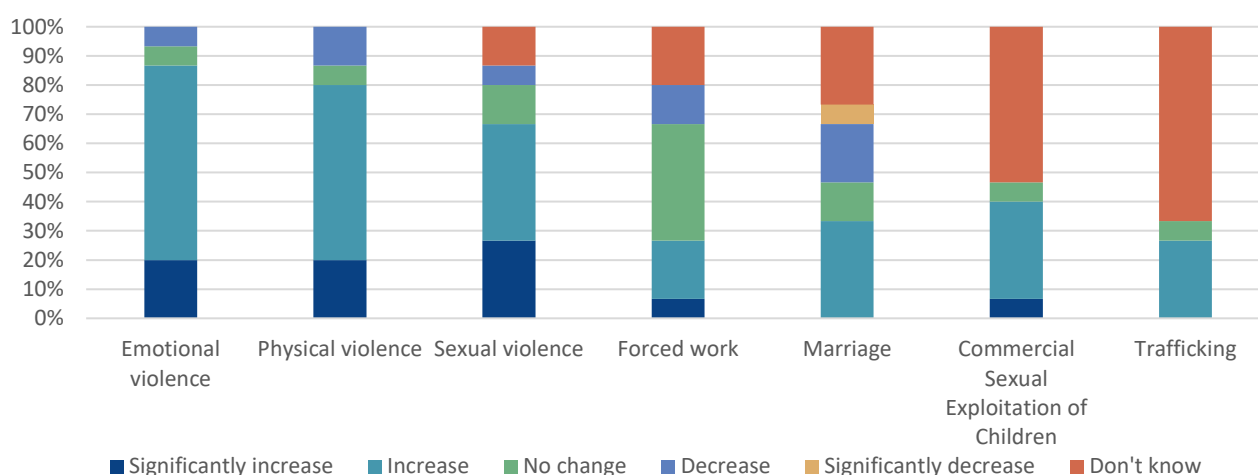
Adolescent and caregiver survey responses supported this, with physical and emotional violence emerging as the greatest concerns for children regarding their safety. More than two-thirds of adolescent respondents reported that children worried about physical and emotional violence to some degree, and roughly half responded that children worried about these "a lot". Online bullying and abuse, sexual violence and forced work followed in descending order as the next-most pressing concerns for children, while recent data show young people aged 18-19 years are severely deprived of voice and agency in their daily lives (Carroll, 2023), both adolescents and caregivers thought that forced marriage was a relatively minor concern for children in Tonga.

Adolescents felt safest at home, assigning an average safety score of 9.25 out of a possible 10. They felt a little less safe in the community (7.10) and at school (6.7), and the least safe online (3.6), as found in Fiji and Solomon Islands, although to a greater extent in Tonga. Caregiver responses tended to align with this assessment in overall terms, but aside from their evaluation of safety in the home (an almost exact match of 9.24), it is worth noting that they displayed a general tendency to overestimate children's feelings of safety in all spaces – most markedly online (5.2).

a) Violent discipline in the home

The 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey made the following findings on the experiences of children aged 1 – 14 years:

- An overall 87% had experienced some form of violent discipline or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month, which is higher than the global average of 74% estimated by UNICEF (UNICEF, 2023);
- 73% had experienced a form of emotional aggression;
- 79% had experienced physical discipline; and
- 23% had experienced severe physical discipline (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020).

Study findings did not suggest any material change in the prevalence of violent discipline by caregivers in recent years, with all participant groups referencing corporal punishment as commonplace, despite caregivers also recognising that it was something that made their children worry or feel unsafe.

b) *Other forms of violence in the home and community*

Study participants discussed a range of other forms of violence taking place in the home and community. More broadly, children in the FGDs expressed concern about witnessing violence, such as their parents fighting or neighbours shouting at their children. Boys, in particular, spoke about peer violence, and there was also some apprehension about violence from strangers who loitered around or might break into children's homes.

Neglect

A number of child protection stakeholders and caregivers named child neglect as a concern in Tonga, echoing the results of a 2021 study where 70% of participants reported that child neglect was an issue, and many further believed that it was a growing one (Langridge et al., 2021). Participants in the SITAN often linked child neglect to parents' work, and specifically to migrant work, where children were said to be left with one parent or extended family who then neglected their care.

> *Most forms of abuse I have come across are the abuse of neglecting children in Tonga. The children we visit suffer from neglect by parents and caregivers. Children are left unattended and uncared for during the day. Especially during natural disasters, the children are most vulnerable… It is evident that there are more signs of children being neglected. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Sexual Violence

The majority (10/16) of child protection stakeholders surveyed reported some degree of increase in child sexual abuse rates over the last five years. A majority of both adolescent and caregiver respondents considered sexual violence to be a worry for children, and various KII and FGD participants were able to discuss a small number of known cases from both community and school settings.

While there is a lack of official prevalence data, the Government of Tonga has in the past noted the difficulty of establishing the incidence and prevalence of child sexual abuse and incest in Tonga due to the sensitivity of the issue, consequent underreporting to the police, and limited resources for research into the causes of sexual exploitation and abuse in Tonga (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018). WHO prevalence studies on violence and girls on a global scale, however, estimate that between 25% and 35% of girls aged 15-19 years have experienced sexual violence in the last 12 months, and that between 8% and 37% of girls have experienced sexual abuse before reaching 15 years of age (WHO, 2023).

Child marriage

While participants did not raise child marriage as a concern, according to the existing literature, child marriage poses a higher risk for girls in Tonga compared to boys. While the minimum age of marriage is 18 years of age, it is permissible from 15 years of age with parental consent (refer to Table 20).

Over 10% of women aged 20-24 years reported that they had been married before 18, according to 2019 household survey data (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020). This is higher than the 6.6% of women aged 20-49 who report the same, which may indicate a concerning increase in child marriage rates in recent years (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020). The percentage of women who report being married before the age of 15 is low, at less than 1% across all age groups (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020). By comparison, the proportions of men who report being married before the age of 18 are 2.8% in the 20-24 age group and 2.5% in the 20-49 age group – both much lower and comparatively more stable over time (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020).

The same multiple indicator cluster survey also showed that the proportion of women *not* married before 18 increased with family wealth and women's educational attainment. However, in Tonga, as across the Pacific, there is a lack of analysis regarding the direction of causation (for example, are poverty and being out of school drivers of early marriage or a consequence) and the interaction between the factors (Tonga Statistics Department & United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). Other drivers reported for child marriage include parental pressure to marry men who raped girls or, in cases of teenage pregnancy, to prevent family shame (U.S Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor, 2022d).

Child Labour

While 2019 statistics report 25% of children aged 5-17 in Tonga being involved in child labour, the majority of this figure appears to comprise the 44.2% of children aged 5-11 involved in economic activity for an hour or more (which may consist of children helping their parents with small-scale family business ventures like market stalls. Further investigation into the details of this activity may be required for a more comprehensive analysis). By contrast, the percentage of children aged 12-17 working beyond the respective age-appropriate thresholds is 1.6%. Generally, rates were higher for children in lower-income families, those in rural areas, and those whose mothers had functioning difficulties[20] – factors which may interrelate to some degree. Child labour more commonly involved boys and took place outside the home (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020).

While the majority of children who were engaged in some form of economic activity did so without meeting the definition of "child labour", the US Department of Labor noted the lack of a coordinating mechanism for child labour, labour inspectorate and the absence of legal authority to conduct labour inspections in Tonga, leading to an overall lack of visibility for child labour issues (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). This implies a substantial possibility of underreporting. There is also limited data on children's engagement in hazardous types of work (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020).

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), including child trafficking

Although a small number of child protection stakeholders in this SITAN reported an increase in CSEC and child trafficking cases, most survey respondents reported being unfamiliar with the area. Notably, though, no stakeholders thought that the prevalence of either had decreased to any degree. Beyond this, a small number of participants were able to share anecdotal evidence, which serves to confirm the presence of CSEC and trafficking in Tonga, if not prevalence. One child trafficking case was known to have been reported to the Ministry of Education (although it does not appear to be reflected in enforcement figures), and in the FGDs, one caregiver provided anecdotal evidence of CSEC of girls by their parents, stating that:

> *I am aware of parents who agreed for their daughter to have an affair with a married man because the married man bribed them with goods, money, and other stuff. I think parents should not accept or do anything about it. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

While the Government of Tonga reported no detections of trafficking in children to, from or within Tonga as of 2018, the persisting lack of capacity for anti-trafficking data collection and lack of investigation into any potential trafficking cases in the years following again suggest that official figures may not be representative

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[20] Defined in the Tonga MICS according to the Washington Group on Disability Statistics.

of actual prevalence (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021; UNODC, 2023). By contrast, the US authorities have identified Tonga as both a source and destination country for CSEC and child trafficking and have found evidence that children have been recruited by methamphetamine drug dealers to assist with illegal drug deliveries, which has also exposed the children to drug use and addiction. Additionally, according to the Department of Labour, "children as young as age 13 have reportedly been arrested for possession of drugs for the purposes of distribution" (U.S Department of State, 2022; U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

c) *Violence in Schools*

School-related violence was a common concern for all groups of children who participated in the study. Violence by teachers and student peers was the main type of violence that children discussed in FGDs. A small number of adult participants also discussed the risk of stranger violence in connection to school settings.

Caregivers described violence at school leading to school refusal (whether this involved reluctance to attend classes taught by a particularly aggressive teacher or a disinclination to attend school at all), truancy or children dropping out of school completely.

Teacher Violence

There is limited data on violence perpetrated by teachers, and no comprehensive prevalence surveys have been found in the literature review. In terms of trends over time, two child protection stakeholders expressed the opinion that the use of corporal punishment by teachers has decreased in recent years. One attributed this change to the enforcement of school policies and offending teachers, who were consequently disciplined through formal reprimand or withholding of pay.

Despite this, both the literature and overall responses from participants suggest that, despite widespread knowledge of its illegality, the use of violent discipline by teachers (including both physical punishment and verbal abuse) is still common, and also largely accepted (Coram International, 2021; End Violence & End Corporal Punishment, 2022). For instance, a number of caregivers acknowledged the difficulties experienced by teachers in needing to control large classes comprising diverse mixes of students and, therefore, saw certain types of violent discipline as an effective and acceptable tool in achieving this.

Even so, violent discipline is commonly and openly reported by children to their parents, particularly when children seek adult action on acts of discipline that they feel are not socially justified. For instance, one child reported in FGDs that: "*I want my parents to confront my teacher if I know that I am right; if not, I would not tell my parents because I just might get into more trouble*" (FGD, Children Aged 12-16, Male). By contrast, reporting by parents to school and other authorities was more variable.

Participants also briefly touched on other forms of violence perpetrated by teachers, including bullying of particular children, "labelling" of students (i.e. calling them derogatory or degrading names), and sexual abuse.

Peer Violence

According to data from the Global School Health Survey, 38.1% of students aged 13 – 15 in Tonga reported that they had experienced bullying in the month leading up to the survey, with higher rates amongst boys (45.5%) than girls (30.5%) (WHO, 2011-2017). While there is no available data on recent changes in prevalence, two child protection stakeholders thought that bullying had decreased in recent years. One stakeholder attributed this change to the enforcement of "no tolerance" policies, which has resulted in offending students being suspended and warned and offending prefects being stripped of their roles. However, once again, study participants as a whole reported bullying – by peers as well as prefects, and in physical, verbal and digital forms – as still being common, with target groups including:

- Younger students: who are bullied by older students who take their money, clothes, books, food and other belongings;
- LGBTQI+ children: who become targets due to the social vulnerability created by their sexuality – or apparent/purported sexuality, in that some children are bullied after simply being accused of being "*fakaleiti*" or gay; and
- Children who are experiencing family breakdown: again due to their increased social vulnerability, although some participants described these children also being involved as perpetrators of bullying.

Children and adults mentioned the continued prevalence of schoolyard fighting, as well as after-school violence between students from different schools – both expressions of violence that were associated predominantly with boys. There are, however, limited survey data on other forms of peer violence experienced at or on the way to and from school, including sexual violence.

Stranger Violence

The danger posed by adult strangers at school entrances was also raised, with a number of adult study participants describing attempts by these strangers to harass or abduct students (mainly girls). One of these cases was reported as potential child trafficking to the Ministry of Education, although no action has yet been reflected in enforcement statistics.

d) Online violence

There is limited prevalence data relating to violence experienced by children in Tonga online, in part due to enforcement issues. For example, while no child pornography offences have been detected by authorities, the US State Department of Labor notes that the capacity of official agencies to detect and effectively enforce sexual exploitation legislation is considerably limited (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018; U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

However, adult participants from all study groups (stakeholders, caregivers and children) identified online violence against children as a serious risk. Participants described known cases of abuse perpetrated by both strangers (who used the internet to locate potential targets) and people known to victims (such as cyberbullying by peers). Interestingly, while two-thirds of adolescent survey respondents thought that children worried about online abuse and/or bullying to some degree, children in the FGDs (aged between 8 and 16) did not mention these risks at all, and only expressed concern about potential exposure to inappropriate content. Reasons for this difference (which could include lack of awareness or the patterns of/parental restrictions on the internet usage of the survey group) were unclear and may merit further investigation.

The survey responses from adolescents about their own internet usage, and caregivers about the internet usage of their children indicate that, at least in certain communities, the vast majority of children have regular access to the internet (although there may be some bias created in the survey populations through the delivery of the surveys via an online medium). Both groups reported an average daily internet usage time among children of 1 or more hours a day (or its weekly equivalent), although the overall range was quite large, spanning 1 hour a week to 6 hours a day. Responses from the FGDs suggested that children would use the internet (primarily through devices in the home) for as long as they were allowed or could otherwise manage, with caregivers from the capital and most provincial areas reporting similar usage levels to the survey respondents, and caregivers in settings where internet access was not readily available (i.e. a provincial boarding school) describing instances of older schoolchildren running away from class in order to access and play online games. Social media platforms used include TikTok, Facebook, Instagram and Facebook Messenger.

Child protection stakeholders also thought that the internet increased the capacity of predators to perpetrate child sexual exploitation and other forms of sexual abuse, including through greater ease of access to victims, and most of those surveyed thought the result was a significantly increasing effect on prevalence (but did not discuss the matter in any further detail). Despite being second to "inappropriate content" in terms of concern, contact risks made up the majority of actual negative online experiences that adolescents reported knowing of (in response to the question "*Are you aware of any of your friends having any of the of the following bad online experiences in the past 6 months?*") (see figure below). The top three most common experiences were as follows:

- Being contacted by a stranger or someone the child did not know;
- People saying things about the child to damage their reputation; and
- Being deliberately excluded from events/social groups

Table 19: Negative online experiences encountered by friends, as reported by adolescents (N=15)

TYPE OF NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE	No. REPORTS
Being contacted by a stranger or someone the child did not know	7
People saying things about the child to damage their reputation	7
Being deliberately excluded from events/social groups	4
Receiving online threats or abuse	2
Being sent content that made them scared because the images or text were violent and/or sexual	2
Other*	2
Being sent content that they had never seen before	1
Not aware of any negative experiences	5

*Other: one respondent clarified that this involved someone exposing private information online.

8.1.2 How are recent factors, including climate change, digitisation and COVID-19, changing the dynamics and behaviours that drive such violence occurring in the home, school, community and online? (RQ1.1)

a) Socio-cultural norms and practices relating to gender and violence

In alignment with the literature, stakeholder responses to the study survey showed strong consensus on the role of socio-cultural norms in driving violence against children, and both adolescent and caregiver respondents tended to agree that acceptance of violence in the community had a negative impact on children's safety (12/16 adolescents, and 18/28 caregivers). Participants in FGDs and KIIs provided further detail into the ways in which this took place, discussing a range of norms that can loosely be grouped into the following categories:

- Norms surrounding use of violent discipline in the home;
- Norms surrounding use of violent discipline in school;
- Norms surrounding gender roles, gendered behaviour and violence; and
- Norms that discourage reporting or discussion of violence.

Norms surrounding use of violent discipline in the home

Across the Pacific, the role of men is defined as the household head and provider of shelter, food, money and other resources needed for the family, whereas the role of women is defined as being the carer, with respect

to childbearing, cooking and cleaning, with different standards for men and women relating to sex and sexuality.

As described above, violence against children can be seen as part of the intersection of gender norms relating to men's and women's behaviour and roles and to the normalisation of men's violence against women and children in the household. Across the Pacific, data reflects generalised acceptance and use of violence against children by both men and women. In Tonga, violence against children can reflect a loving, culturally appropriate and religious approach to parenting:

> *Punishing children is a cultural thing in Tonga. It does not aim to hurt a child but aims to educate a child to do good things in life… It is biblical to punish kids according to the bible. It is not a punishment with hatred but with love so that they learn and follow the good things (Langridge et al., 2021 p.30)).*

In line with the literature, the current study overwhelmingly found that there is a continuing acceptance of the use of violent discipline by caregivers. The majority of responses from children and caregivers indicated a community-wide cultural acceptance of physical punishment in homes, with parents citing its effectiveness and importance in childrearing and appealing to both the Bible and the experience of past generations. It is noteworthy, however, that community acceptance did not mean that all instances of violent discipline passed unquestioned or unchallenged. For example, caregivers shared a number of instances where children would report being smacked to grandparents or other relatives, who would call the disciplining parent to account for their actions.

In addition, while not challenging the use of violent discipline in principle, some caregivers had begun to question its effectiveness or perhaps the overemphasis placed on it in childrearing in the contemporary context, saying.

> *We are in a generation where hitting doesn't affect our youth anymore, so we need to act it out and do some reaching out and do stuff like that to help each other instead of hitting them for the sake of hitting them (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown).*

Another caregiver stated:

> *Mothers back then would smack their kids, and they would sit down, nowadays, so my husband's brother has a son, the moment my husband's brother would shout to his son and he's already running as far as the volleyball field. We need to change our methods and bring our kids and talk to them, sit them down and talk to them. It was not like that back then; they didn't chase around their kids they sat them down and spoke to them. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

Moreover, two respondents explicitly criticised the practice, one citing the child's right to live free from abuse and another describing the adverse effects on parent-child relationships:

> *We Tongans believe that physical violence is the best way to punish our kids, but No, we can be a good example on [how] we deal with our kids because if we hit them, they would be afraid and would not feel safe to talk to us. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

Norms surrounding use of violent discipline at school

One of the strong themes emerging from the FGDs with children and caregivers was the tendency of caregivers to accept or support teachers' use of violent discipline (both physical and verbal) within certain parameters, such as where the child was "at fault" or "would learn from" the experience. Community acceptance of the practice was further evidenced by caregivers:

- referring to this type of violence as "the little abuse" (FGD, Caregiver, Female);

- recounting their own childhood experiences of running away from being smacked at school, only to be smacked again by caregivers and sent back; and

- recounting their responses to children's reports of being smacked, including to normalise the teacher's behaviour by explaining "that there must be a reason why the teacher is shouting and that [their child] is safe" (FGD, Caregiver, Female).

For discipline within the acceptable range, caregiver justifications for teachers' actions included that discipline was necessary for children to learn and learn to act appropriately, as well as that it would otherwise be too difficult for teachers to maintain students' respect and order in the classroom. Caregiver responses to their children being disciplined focus on teaching children to change their behaviour to avoid being hit or smacked in the future rather than changing the teacher's behaviour.

Beyond these limits, however – for example, where teachers hit children for no reason, or where children have suffered serious injuries as a result of corporal punishment – parents expressed willingness to act according to an order of escalation that was generally the same across accounts from both caregivers and children participating in the study. Generally, parents would confront the teacher, then report to the school authorities/principal, and then take the case to the police where the school had failed to take appropriate action or a satisfactory solution could not be reached. Perhaps indicating the existence of some wider community norms regarding violence as a way to resolve conflict, male caregivers in Masilamea added (albeit with disapproval) that in some cases, parents' "anger and frustrations" towards teachers who have committed unacceptable violence have manifested in their own violence against the teacher in question, which has led to injury or even death.

But while there was evidence of the normalisation of violent discipline by teachers among children's attitudes, this did not always equate to acceptance. Caregivers reported on school refusal by children who had experienced teacher violence, and their children explicitly asking to be sent to schools without violence. One child stated in an FGD that "I believe adults should react in a way [where] we would be protected".

Norms about gender roles/behaviour and violence

One theme that emerged from the data was the association between masculinity and violence, with a number of participants making explicit ties between cultural drivers and the greater tendency of boys to be involved in physical fights with peers, including via inter-school fighting between groups of boys from different schools on the way home from class. One teacher at a male boarding school added that these norms also prevent boys from reporting on violence that they have experienced, saying that:

> The school culture is very strong in the children, also the culture at home is evident in the attitudes and values of the child. If a child decides to report any violence, they are depicted as cowards and someone who is not strong enough to receive physical punishment like other children and considered a weakling amongst strong boys. They usually fear the backlash from students and communities when they tend to report events of violence. (FGD, Caregiver, Male).

A different stakeholder also noted that cultural norms have contributed to the sexual harassment of girls in community life, although the topic was not further discussed.

Norms that discourage reporting or discussion of violence

In addition to masculinity, a number of different norms (also often relating to gender) were identified as discouraging children from reporting or discussing experiences of violence, and thereby increasing their vulnerability.

In many cases, traditional parenting norms were seen as creating emotional distance between children and parents, often through fear, which decreased the likelihood that children would tell their parents about their problems. One caregiver (female) noted that *"it is a culture thing that most parent and children conversation is a one-way conversation"*. However, there was evidence that adherence to these norms was changing – for

example, the same caregiver added, *"but now we can open up for a two-way conversation, and even if don't like it, there's room for compromise"*. Other caregivers expressed similar sentiments, stating that:

> [W]e need to maintain and control our kids so that they won't be scared of us, if we know our kids are scared, then we should change our parenting methods so they won't have to look for comfort in other places and other people. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

> Us mothers now we can't handle our kids like how mothers back then handled their kids…we need to change our methods and bring our kids and talk to them. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

Stakeholders also described more general social norms that related to children's image and reputation as members of their communities and that also work to discourage disclosure of abuse in similar ways to masculinity. One adult participant observed that "*Tongan kids growing up in Tonga they are proud people. Most of them would just keep [experiences of violence] to themselves no matter how tough it gets*" (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown), and that often the abuse would only be discovered if the child acted out and was consequently taken to a counsellor as part of disciplinary measures. Others added that there was a stigma or shame that attached to children who admitted to having been abused, putting them at risk of "*mocking culture and being the centre of mockery*" from their peers (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

A related norm was the sentiment – expressed by some caregivers – that certain problems relating to the family were "private" and should not be disclosed to others. In enforcing this norm, caregivers described teaching children that certain disputes between parents were normal, and that they should neither interfere nor tell anyone outside of the family unit. The potential consequences of this were described by one mother in connection with her past experiences of domestic violence, which she felt had normalised experiences of general violence and not disclosing that violence for her son:

> He would come home with a bruised eye, and I would ask him what happened, and he would say it's alright, nothing's wrong, but when you got to the school and talk to the teachers, they know, and the kids know as well but then you know, they should've called and talked to me. So I think the reason why my son is like that is because it is what he experienced at home when he was young. I think he got it from me, because when I got abused, I couldn't tell anyone, even my parents and my family. I would take everything in and be quiet and move on like nothing happened. I think he picked that up, and he thinks that is how you're supposed to handle things. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

Taboos surrounding sex and sexuality were one of the factors identified by the Government of Tonga (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018) as providing discouragement against reporting and addressing sexual violence against children, and the study findings were fully in alignment. Responses to the stakeholder survey were unanimous in the opinion that taboos around sex and sexuality, as well as the stigma surrounding extramarital sex for women, increased the risk of child sex abuse. In extrapolating further, KII and FGD participants explained that the strength of the taboo is such that sexual abuse cannot even be discussed *within* the family, even where the perpetrators are also family members.

Survey results show that stigma surrounding extramarital sex for men and women was associated with an increase in other forms of violence against children, which may warrant further exploration.

Protective Norms

In contrast to the above norms, an overwhelming theme emerging from participant responses was the protective nature of children being in communities where they know or are related to most or all of the community members – who, as a community, then share a sense of responsibility for the protection of the community's children. Children in all groups associated this type of environment with increased safety, including through lower rates of violent crime such as robbery, more sources of assistance, and a sense of collective responsibility for wellbeing.

Many of the children's suggestions for child protection strengthening related to reinforcing or strengthening this community framework – for example, through activities by which youth can get to know each other or get to know more people in the community, and town village meetings where collective decisions can be made about improving child safety. Adults in FGDs and KIIs tended to agree, with one linking it to one of Tonga's "4 pillars" – "*helping one another (dependency)*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Male), and a different caregiver noting that close relationships between adults within a community (parents, neighbours and religious leaders) also provided better protection for the community's children.

A different caregiver lamented that this type of environment was becoming rarer as migration and other factors result in children growing up away from extended family, which may have implications for the long-term viability of relying on community networks for child protection.

b) *Socio-economic status and its gendered implications*

Whereas official figures observed a decline in multidimensional poverty in Tonga between 2015 and 2021-2 to 24%, with child poverty experiencing the most significant decrease compared to other population groups, child poverty rates remain relatively high at 28% (having come down from 33% in 2015) (Tonga Statistics Department, 2023). Progress was interrupted by COVID, with World Bank figures showing that Tonga's economy only recovered to its pre-COVID size in 2023 (World Bank, 2023b, 2023c). The current situation would require 2.5% yearly economic growth in order for Tonga to meet the 2030 SDG target, but the most recent figures in GDP growth were negative, at -2.7% in 2020-21 (Tonga Statistics Department, 2023). In Tonga, approximately one-fifth of the population reports food insecurity (World Bank, 2023a).

Poverty in Tonga is associated with violence against children - the lowest wealth quintile is associated with higher rates of violent discipline against children (90.1% use of any type of violent discipline within the preceding month, compared to 78% in the highest quintile, as well as 85.5% compared to 69.7% in terms of use of physical punishment specifically). It is also associated with higher rates of spousal violence, and one of the contributors to the gendering of poverty is the inability of Tongan women to legally own land in their own right (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020) (UN Women, 2022). This inequality in rights increases Tongan women's economic vulnerability compared to that of men, as well as their economic dependency on the men in their lives, and therefore their (and their children's) vulnerability to violence. For instance, in cases of family violence, women with no income or assets (and their children) may accordingly be forced to stay in households with violent family members or risk homelessness and destitution. Households led by single mothers are, therefore, exposed to a range of additional economic difficulties (UN Women, 2022).

In line with the above, a few study participants associated poverty with child neglect and increased risk of violence both at home and at school (although the topic was not discussed at length). Caregivers also noted the intersection between poverty and family breakdown or separation, identifying children living with extended family while their parents had migrated for work, as well as children in households with widows (in line with the literature above) as particularly at-risk for material deprivation.

Also in support of the literature, the strained circumstances of these children were explicitly linked to a lack of educational opportunities and school drop-out:

> *If parents passed away/divorced/travelled and stayed away from their children, that is another factor. Children will stay with their grannies or aunties/uncles or relatives; these children will come late to school or be absent due to no bus fare or transportation; some did not do their homework because they do not have enough resources. This is another factor of why children drop out of school at a young age. (FGD, Caregivers, Female)*

Adult caregivers associated children's work with the loss of parents/caregivers, and associated household poverty – as mentioned above, there was a strong association between wealth and child labour in the MICS

survey, with 35% of children aged 5-17 years in the poorest wealth quintile engaged in child labour, compared to 18% in the two wealthiest quintiles (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020). Stakeholder accounts of recent trends in child labour were extremely mixed, which is unsurprising given the general lack of regulatory and research oversight. No child participants discussed labour in relation to their current circumstances or as a material risk to themselves: boys aged 12-16 expressed general concerns regarding the possibility of having to work in the future due to changing family circumstances (e.g. not being able to afford essential items like food and school fees), whereas other children in both age groups only expressed general knowledge of the existence of children who were required to work *"like kids that sell things on the street" (FGD, Children Aged 8-11, Gender Unknown)*.

c) Migration and displacement

Globally, migration has been described as a driver of violence against children (Maternowska et al., 2020). Across the Pacific Islands, internal migration of parents and/or children occurs to facilitate the pursual of economic and/or educational opportunities in urban centres, tourist centres or other places of economic activity. This was supported by responses received from child protection stakeholders in interviews, who described the trend of families in Tonga migrating from the outer small islands to the main Island of Tongutapu, or from Tonga to Australia and New Zealand under temporary work schemes, with negative impacts for their children.

Consistent with literature on the disruption that migration poses to children's protective environment, child protection survey respondents with expertise in child sexual abuse were unanimous in the opinion that migration of children or parents within or between countries had an increasing effect on the prevalence of child sexual abuse, and the majority of them also thought that it had the same effect on other forms of violence against children. Approximately half of adolescent respondents (10 of 19 who answered the question) and two thirds of caregivers (16 of 24) shared the belief that child or parent migration had a negative impact on children's safety, and similar numbers of both groups held the same opinion about the impact of moving away from community.

Participants in KIIs provided additional detail about the impacts of migration and the interconnectedness of factors like poverty. According to one stakeholder, following family migration to Tongutapu, "*living conditions worsens … whereby the family are struggling financially and often parents have to make certain choices to ensure the well being of their children in future"* (KII, National Stakeholder, Female), leading to child neglect and increased vulnerability to child marriage and child abuse. Many discussed the impacts of parents migrating and leaving their children in the care of extended family, without access to adequate resources (as discussed in relation to poverty, above), also leading to increased risk of neglect and other forms of violence. Another participant also highlighted the risk posed by migration to parents' personal safety, adding that where that risk eventuates in injury or death, any dependent children left behind in Tonga are again exposed to myriad risks of poverty and separation from parental care as a result.

d) Climate change

The vulnerability of Pacific Island countries to rapid, slow-onset and conflict-driven climate change events and resulting short or long-term displacement is clear. In a recent report, the World Bank (2021, p. 2) stated that for Tonga, "[p]otential threats to human well-being and natural ecosystems include increased prevalence of heat wave, intensified cyclones, saline intrusion, wave-driven flooding, and permanent inundation" also noting that the flooding and permanent inundation could, in turn, result in "significant displacement of communities." This is likely to bring significant disruption to communities, including temporary displacement.

In line with the literature, most child protection stakeholders and caregivers surveyed for the study believed that living in evacuation centres or camps in the aftermath of natural disasters, such as cyclones or floods, tended to increase the prevalence of child sexual abuse and other forms of violence against children.

FGD participants also associated the aftermath of climate disasters with a general deterioration in children's living conditions and risk of poverty, exacerbating pathways identified above. One boarding school teacher (male) noted that "*children face worse treatment or care as a result of damaged infrastructure and loss of homes, clothes and other personal belongings due to natural weather hazards. Both school boarding and homes are affected by the changes in the weather*". Another FGD respondent (male) noted the increased vulnerability of particular families to violence and general danger in times of natural disasters, such as "families with grandchildren and elderlies", further noting that "children are often neglected at times where grandparents cannot take care of themselves".

In terms of survey results, while the majority of child protection stakeholders agreed that the closure of schools had a negative impact on children's safety from violence, adolescents and caregivers tended to think the opposite – with many citing that children were kept away from peers who were bullying them. However, it is worth noting that the survey did not specify which types of violence against children should be considered, and so adolescent and caregiver opinions with respect to the risk of other types of violence are uncertain and may warrant further exploration.

While there is a lack of data on the actual abuse of children in Tonga in connection with natural disasters, a 2023 report by UN Women on internet searches for resources on violence against women, which may reflect a need for increased service delivery. The report found that:

> *Tonga saw a steady increase in VAW-related Google searches from December 2020 to July 2021 … when the country experienced a series of overlapping crises, including cyclones Zazu and Yasa, heavy rainfalls and higher-than-usual wet periods attributed to the prolonged La Niña. The following year, a short dip in search volume occurred from December to February 2022, in line with an overall decrease in Internet usage due to power shortages following the volcanic eruption, tsunami, ash storms and related events, which disrupted communications for several days. Shortly after, an upward trend in overall searches as well as VAW searches, took place between February and April 2022, after Internet connections were restored. It is possible that VAW victims abused during the eruption only got a chance to look for help or raise VAW-related search queries. (UN Women, 2023)*

e) COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic affected children's risk of violence in their homes, communities and online due to disruptions to schooling and the exacerbation of existing socio-economic inequalities (Bhatia et al., 2021; Cappa & Jijon, 2021; Todd Herrenkohl, 2020). Child protection stakeholders tended to agree, noting specifically that in Tonga, there were reported child sexual abuse cases commonly involving male perpetrators from among the victim-survivors close family and friends who were co-located in households during the lockdown. Restrictions on the movement of these children, as well as a simultaneous increase in perpetrator's free time, resulted in increased access and opportunity for abuse to take place.

However, a large number of caregivers in the FGDs thought that the pandemic made an overall positive contribution to children's safety, precisely due to increased time spent with family, which they associated with better parenting and more family discussions. They also noted the protective impact of increased law enforcement presence during lockdown periods, which protected against violence from strangers. One child from Fangaloto, Tongatapu, noted in the FGDs that *"I felt so much safer because I know that there is barely anyone roaming around since we had lockdown and a lot of town officers to keep watch"* (FGD, adolescents,

female). However, it is worth noting that the survey did not specify which types of violence against children should be considered, and this may warrant further exploration.

f) *Digitisation*

There has been a significant improvement in internet accessibility in the Pacific in recent years with the completion of undersea cables, with use of the internet amongst adults increasing by 100% in Tonga since 2015 (World Bank, 2023a) (although it should be noted that some of the FGD participants lived in areas were internet coverage and stability was still unreliable, with one boarding school teacher stating that "there is not good coverage of internet and only a few students can afford using the internet or have the means of accessing the internet"). Research reported increasing internet use amongst young people (Third et. al., 2020; UNFPA & IPPF, 2021).

Some study participants identified some protective effects of digitisation. Children in the FGDs noted that having mobile phones increased their feelings of safety due to the ability to contact family or emergency services whenever the need arises. Caregivers also noted variously that social media has been used by children and parents to discuss or raise community awareness about their experiences of violence and that social media can be used by children to connect with family and friends who care about them more generally. However, participants from all groups also spoke extensively about the child protection risks associated with children's increasing use of the internet and social media.

The findings of this study largely aligned with recent research conducted in PNG and Solomon Islands in terms of the broad awareness of internet usage risks among children and their caregivers (Third et. al., 2020). As in that study, the biggest concern raised by child protection stakeholders, caregivers and children was exposure to "inappropriate content". This was described as including sexualised/pornographic, violent or otherwise undesirable material (such as gambling or horror), with some respondents being worried that exposure might encourage children to mimic negative behaviours – in particular, violent or sexual ones. For instance, child protection stakeholders thought that children's exposure to sexual content increased the prevalence of child sexual abuse by increasing awareness among children, which would create the risk of children engaging in "copycat" behaviours. It was also suggested that children's exposure to sexual behaviours that they did not have the emotional capacity to make sense of may lead to children normalising abusive behaviours and "become less likely to understand that when predators come after them that it is not OK". This is a particular concern in the absence of comprehensive sexuality education.

Another concern expressed by chiefly adult participants related to contact risks, such as online bullying and online predation (such as scams, theft and misuse of data, blackmail) by strangers. Data presented above in Section 8.1.1 suggest that contact risks are the most frequent risks encountered by children, although children may not share their caregivers' opinions about the content they access, may not consider accessing age-inappropriate content as necessarily "negative" (as the survey question was framed) and may be further disincentivised to report content risks due to potential impacts on their continued internet access. The survey results do suggest that contact risks present a more pressing concern for child protection programming. The risks of both this and the dangers arising from online contact with others can both be managed through more comprehensive education on internet use. As in the other Pacific countries, limited community awareness in Tonga of online exploitation and its related criminal offences may be directly contributing to children's vulnerability in this area, as was suggested by the respondents to a 2019 survey of Pacific frontline child welfare workers (ECPAT International, 2019).

Adult participants also expressed concern about the potential indirect impacts for children of their own or their caregivers' online content consumption. A number of caregivers were concerned about the potential for exposure to foreign content to engender in their children different social attitudes and norms than those set by Tongan culture. Other caregivers were concerned about the potential of addiction to digital activity,

and the consequent negative impacts on other areas of the child's life (e.g. sleep patterns and potentially their studies). And behaviours such as running away from school in order to play online games puts children at risk of the myriad external risks stemming from lack of adult supervision, as well as potential impacts on studies. Some caregivers also pointed to adult patterns of internet use as negatively impacting children. One child protection stakeholder linked digitisation with child neglect, explaining that where parents become overly occupied with online pursuits, the consequence is a decrease in the amount of time they spend with their children and engage in parenting. All five caregivers in one of the FGDs agreed with this sentiment, further clarifying that as a result of parents spending less time talking to and building relationships with children, children would "not open up to their parents" – including to report on experiences of violence or other issues of concern.

Most caregivers reported conducting some level of monitoring over their children's usage of the internet (per figure below), with just over half doing so "sometimes" and approximately a quarter doing so "all the time". Even so, this still leaves a considerable amount of unsupervised internet usage. Questions also remain in regards to the effectiveness of caregiver monitoring, especially given that many caregivers in the FGDs described ways in which their children's superior digital literacy ("they are…sometimes too advanced for us parents") allowed them to circumvent parental oversight over or restrictions on their use of the internet and electronic devices. One such caregiver stated:

> My sister informed me to check my daughter's Facebook that she is fighting with other girls on Facebook. I wasn't aware of that, and when I went to my daughter's fb page, I am not on her friend list. I wasn't aware of that, and of course, I should be more careful and monitor my children when they are on fb (FGD, Caregiver, Female).

All but one of the caregiver survey respondents reported speaking to their children about their online experiences and online safety with a frequency of "sometimes", "often" or "all the time" (with results fairly evenly distributed across the three). While the majority of caregivers also stated that they were "very concerned" about children's online safety, most also reported being very confident in their ability to respond if their child encountered a negative online experience.

Both adolescents and caregivers expressed an interest in comprehensive education – including:

- For adolescents: learning more about how to support a friend who is in trouble (which is extremely relevant, given the propensity of children to seek help from their peers, further discussed below), and many are also interested in learning how to have photos or comments of themselves removed from social media platforms, learning how to report negative online experiences and accessing information about counselling services for teenagers.

- For caregivers: accessing additional resources on how to talk to children about staying safe online, how to talk to children about responding to negative online experiences, how to support a child who is in trouble and other measures to keep children safe online.

8.1.3 How are the risks and protective factors associated with such violence, including but not limited to gender, disability and age changing? (RQ1.2)

Given the scarcity of existing research on risk and protective factors associated with violence against children in Tonga, it was difficult to gauge how they might be changing in operation in recent years. While the observations offered by study participants themselves in this regard were also limited, they were however able to offer valuable clarification of the current dimensions of various risk/protective factors – and particularly how they varied with respect to different types of violence against children – beyond those outlined in the existing literature. Participants were able to offer insights into the influence of age, gender and sexual diversity, education status, experience of family violence, drugs and alcohol, family breakdown,

living arrangements (i.e. separation from parents or other types of co-location with extended family) and location (i.e. urban or rural) on violence against children. For gender, disability and poverty, participant responses largely affirmed the existing literature.

Age

The existing Tongan literature identifies a slightly greater risk of violent physical discipline for younger children (aged 3-4 years) compared with children aged 10-14 years, noting that the severity of violence increases slightly with age (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020; Tonga Statistics Department & United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). Regional literature identifies a greater risk of child sexual exploitation and peer violence for older children, who may also actively engage in their own sexual exploitation (ECPAT International, 2019).

Study participants also identified variations in risk with respect to different types of violence according to age. While it was noted that children aged 5-15 were generally at risk of home or community violence, adults noted the changes in risk attaching to the abilities of differently-aged children to react and process their experiences. Younger children, for instance, those aged between 6 and 11 (who have relatively limited autonomy and emotional processing capacity compared to older children), were identified as particularly sensitive to changes in their environment. It was noted that the pre-teen years brought particular risk of violence due to children being "*still [too] young to understand what is occurring around them, but [old enough to] react to it nonetheless*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). The same respondent noted that these children "*run away from home due to not being given proper attention or care*" or due to their caregivers abusing them, leaving unspoken the understanding that these children are, of course, not yet old enough to be self-reliant after having done so. Children who are LGBTQI+ (or at risk of being labelled so by their communities) were reported to be most vulnerable between ages 8 and 11, where they were old enough to be aware of sexuality and difference but not able to "really think twice" and furthermore remained sensitive to social rejection within schools, families and communities (KII, National Stakeholder, Male). Being a younger child within a school community was also identified as a risk factor for being the target of bullying from older students (per the discussion about school violence above).

As children age, their seniority within school settings, as well as increased autonomy and capacity to understand experiences of violence, may act as a protective factor against many of these forms of violence or at least improve children's capacity to protect themselves. On the other hand, the very same increase in autonomy and the corresponding decrease in the abilities of their caregivers to monitor and control them, was associated with increased exposure to different risks. Being an older child was associated with an increased risk of peer violence and being presented with choices (which can potentially have grave impacts, including various forms of violence) that are not available to younger children – for example, alcohol, sexual and other activities and associations with various groups of people. Secondary school children were also identified as particularly at risk of accessing content they should not be accessing while unsupervised (such as pornography) while also lacking the capacity to process and avoid being unduly influenced by what they have seen.

Gender and Sexual Diversity

According to the literature, female children across the Pacific are more vulnerable to child sexual abuse and exploitation than male children (ECPAT International, 2019; Naughton-Watt et al., 2023), with female children in Tonga identified as more likely to be abused more generally (Langridge et al., 2021). On the other hand, male children in Tonga may be more vulnerable to particular types of physical violence – such as violent discipline – according to the results of the MICS (88.7% boys compared with 84.4% girls) (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020), and male children globally are at higher risk of suffering serious injury – and mortality – when experiencing interpersonal and other types of physical violence (Kennedy et al., 2020; WHO, 2011-2017).

The research findings tended to affirm the trends arising from the literature. Study participants agreed that being female posed a risk or significant risk to the safety of children, with respect to both child sexual abuse and some other forms of violence against children. As discussed above, one child protection informant linked sexual harassment of girls to cultural drivers, which they also thought needed to change in the interests of child protection. Also discussed above, male children were very clearly identified by both children themselves and adults as more at risk for peer violence, both in and out of school, in part due to cultural drivers about masculinity. One participant also noted that adults responded differently to reports of violence against girls, compared to violence against boys, but did not elaborate further.

According to the literature, gay (particularly male), bisexual and transgender children are more vulnerable to child sexual exploitation and violence across the Pacific (ECPAT International, 2019; Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). Survey responses from child protection stakeholders were in strong agreement, associating gender and sexual diversity with an increased or significantly increased risk of both child sexual abuse and other forms of violence. Caregivers tended to agree, with 6 of 28 associating gender and sexual diversity a decrease in child safety and a further 12 associating it with a significant decrease in child safety. (Responses from adolescents themselves were much more mixed, with a much higher proportion of respondents who reported being unsure.)

Participants in FGDs and KIIs noted that gender and sexual diversity, or even the appearance or suspicion of it, could place children at increased risk of violence in homes, schools and the wider community due to lack of social acceptance ("because of our conservative culture"). In the home, one caregiver noted that LGBTIQ+ children fear violence in the home, and another admitted that:

> I would always yell at him [(her son)] sometimes asking if he is a "fakaleiti[21]" and I would smack him sometimes and you know that's just me not wanting him to be fakaleiti because he's my only hope (FGD, Caregiver, Female).

Similarly, one key informant (male) from an LGBTIQ+ organisation described LGBTIQ+ children being beaten and rejected by families, as well as thrown out of the family home and left to support themselves. To some extent, there seemed to be a political dimension to risk as well, where advocating for social change or pushing back against the cultural status quo increased children's risk of violence. As the same key informant explained: "some [LGBTIQ+ youth] fight for their rights, which contribute to the level of abuse they faced".

Among peers and in schools, LGBTQI children (both boys and girls) were described as an at-risk group for both physical and online violence. Multiple stakeholders reported that LGBTIQ+ children were often subjected to bullying from peers, prefects and teachers (who treated them differently or "labelled" them derogatively). Again, even the accusation of being homosexual could result in extensive bullying – in one case to the extent that one of the target children stopped attending school. One key informant identified online bullying on social media as a major challenge for LGBTIQ+ children but noted that LGBTIQ+ children themselves were also, at times, the perpetrators.

A common theme throughout the KIIs and FGDs was the co-location and inter-relation of LGBTIQ+ status with other risk factors. For instance, where LGBTIQ+ children are not accepted by their families or communities and are forced to leave home by parents or due to experiences of abuse (mental, sexual, physical, emotional and verbal), they often end up living with what friends or extended family will take them in, leaving them vulnerable to the various forms of abuse associated with their new living arrangements (further discussed below), dependency on others and financial vulnerability. This, and experiences of bullying from teachers or peers can push children to drop out of school, exposing them to the risks associated with education status (further discussed below).

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[21] A Tongan individual assigned male at birth who has a feminine gender expression.

It is worth noting that in the discussions that, despite acknowledging the conservative nature of Tongan culture, many caregivers in FGDs nevertheless expressed support for the rights of LGBTIQ+ children, and specifically their rights to be free from violence and discrimination – indicating some level of social change. One teacher stated that "*it Is important to treat them fairly in school and the community and not to degrade them and treat them unfairly*" and that the school should be "fair to everyone" (FGD, Caregiver, Male). One parent reported that she had once asked her son for his opinion on LGBTIQ+ people, and that "*he thinks that they are funny and nice and said that he would rather hang out with them than the normal kids because sometimes they would bully a lot*". The parent reflected that "*I like it that way because it tells me that they do not hate them and they respect them, but in our church's beliefs we do not support it but that does not mean I would teach my kids to hate them*" (FGD, Caregiver, Female). Along similar lines, a different caregiver expressed some tolerance or acceptance for a niece who did not conform with traditional expectations of gender while exploring her own identity, and stated that:

> *When we grew up I have never heard my parents mention anything about gay and lesbian and things like that to me…I believe that it is important that the parents would talk first with their children at home because that is the first place we need to feel accepted for who we truly are it's your home and family (FGD, Caregiver, Female).*

Disability

Across the Pacific and in Tonga specifically, the literature identifies children with disabilities as more vulnerable to physical and psychological abuse, neglect and sexual violence, with the general limitations on their social participation considered a contributor to their vulnerability. Most study participants only discussed children with disabilities very briefly and in very general terms. All survey respondent groups agreed that disability increased the risk of children being abused, with child protection stakeholders noting a similarly increased risk of child sexual abuse. In KIIs, one informant with experience in education also identified children with disability as being most at risk or affected by violence. Further research is required to develop a better understanding of the impact of disability on experiences of violence against children and the ways in which these changes for children living with different disabilities.

Experience of Family Violence

Literature from across the Pacific notes the substantial overlap between violence against children and violence against women, including their shared drivers, co-occurrence and similarity in perpetrator justifications (Feinstein et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2021; Save the Children, 2021; World Vision, 2022). In line with this, child protection stakeholders responded with the belief that experiences of family violence significantly increased the risk of children experiencing child sexual abuse, and there was strong consensus across all groups surveyed that experiences of family violence had a negative impact on children's general safety.

However, in addition to this, KII discussions highlighted the potential for experiences of family violence to create risk with respect to experiences of peer violence. As discussed in relation to drivers of violence, the reputational damage and the shame or stigma that can attach to experiences of family violence (or perhaps to being *known* to be experiencing family violence) mean that where family violence becomes more widely known, children can become the target of bullying and mockery from other children because of it.

Drugs and Alcohol

Literature from across the Pacific also indicates that parental use of drugs and alcohol may contribute to children's exposure to family violence (Fulu et al., 2013; Homan et al., 2019; Jewkes et al., 2013; McKelvie et al., 2022), which saw very strong agreement among child protection stakeholders in the survey results with respect to both child sexual abuse and other forms of violence against children, and robust agreement from adolescent and caregiver respondents as well. One key informant observed that the "majority of the

perpetrators of violence in Tonga are people who are currently addicted to the use of illicit drugs", including perpetrators of violence against their own children (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). The same informant noted that parents who use drugs are sometimes also drug-dealers, which would also exposure children to different types of violence relating to engagement *It won't be fun nor safe, like I want to be with my parents, but if they do bad things like alcohol and drugs that's not good it will be scary* in illicit activities and exposure to drug-related transactions.

Interestingly, while children in the FGDs did not make clear connections between drug and alcohol use and personal (or observed) experiences of violence, there emerged a strong theme in both their own responses, and in caregiver discussions of their own children, of children's apprehension towards any drug or alcohol use witnessed – by either their parents or others in the community. For children aged 8-11, use of alcohol and drugs such as *faikava* created the sole exception to the otherwise strong association between being with parents and feeling safe. One child respondent stated that "" (FGD, Children Aged 8-11, Gender Unknown). Caregivers described their children's fear of "being around drunken violent people" (FGD, Caregiver, Female), with one noting that her child had witnessed alcohol-fuelled violence in the past. Another noted that the presence of marijuana dealers in the neighbourhood, who had previously been raided by the police, made her children feel generally unsafe in and around their home, and more than one child expressed a desire to have an increased presence of town officers to manage drugs or drunken people in their communities.

Participant responses also touched on the complexity in relationships between drug and alcohol use, violence, and other interconnected/intersecting factors. One caregiver described the intersection of drug and alcohol use with family poverty and neglect, stating that "children who are living with parents who are alcohol abusers face a lot of financial problems and are usually neglected due to financial problems at home and display signs of financial neglect and poor hygiene" (FGD, Caregiver, Male). In KIIs, one informant noted that drug and alcohol use by children, while exposing them to new forms of violence, is often also itself driven by past experiences of violence, and that use of drug and alcohol forms a coping strategy for victim-survivors. This suggests a possibility of intergenerational or other cycles of violence, where past violence and related trauma drives alcohol and drug use, creating vulnerability towards violence, but also driving the use of violence against others (including children).

Family Breakdown/Single Parents

Most child protection stakeholders considered family breakdown a risk factor, with both stakeholders and caregivers responding that it also increased the risk of other forms of violence against children. Interestingly, the majority of adolescents thought that it was a factor with no impact, with others responding that it made children both more and less safe. This s difference may be due to the impact of violent parents leaving the family home.

As discussed above, family breakdown and single parenthood was closely associated with poverty, which itself can drive violence against children, but participants in KIIs and FGDs raised additional risk factors, with different key informants observing that children whose parents are separated are commonly involved in peer violence in schools, as both victims and perpetrators of bullying. One caregiver also noted the emotional abuse that can affect children where separated parents use them as a tool in fighting each other, for example by refusing to allow their partner access to the child (or threatening to do so).

Living Arrangements (separation from parents and/or living with extended family)

Studies across the Pacific have found that children living away from their parents are more vulnerable to forms of violence like forced labour and sexual exploitation (Davy & Tppou, 2022; Fatiaki, 2019; Save the Children, 2021), and survey respondents in this study tended to agree that separation from parents presented a general elevated risk of both child sexual abuse and other forms of violence against children, with stakeholders and caregivers tending to see it as doing so to a significant degree. On the other hand, while child protection stakeholders also identified living with extended family (where parents might still be

present) as a risk factor, caregiver responses were extremely mixed (with seven citing no impact, eight considering the factor risk, and seven reporting that it was protective) and adolescents tended to think that it was protective or had no impact (six thought it made them safer, four thought it made them much safer, and six thought it had no impact).

KII and FGD participants discussed some of the specific ways in which this risk was presented. An increased risk of neglect was identified where children were cared for by extended family instead of parents – including via intersection with poverty and the consequential impacts on children's access to education (although the specific direction of causality was not clarified). One caregiver observed that adopted children were sometimes "treated differently by siblings or other children in the village", resulting in a lesser level of child protection and care (FGD, Caregiver, Male). Respondents also identified a risk of neglect where parents left children alone without any adult supervision, and one key informant noted that sometimes children whose parents migrate for work end up living in huts together with other children – exposing them to different types of peer violence and conflict.

In line with the survey results, close proximity to extended family while parents were still present was commonly associated with greater safety and protection by both children and caregivers in the FGDs, although perhaps it should be noted that question scripts and participant responses did not always distinguish between living in the same house as extended family, or living in more general proximity. Children frequently noted that living in villages where they were related to most people, or having their relatives around them made them feel safer, and caregivers also commonly referenced the protective nature of community and family, although a small few did suggest that there should be clearer separation between male and female relatives to guard against incest and sexual abuse. That said, these responses, and their implications for child protection, may need to be considered in conjunction with the above discussion on the ways in which taboos surrounding sexuality and the need to keep family matters "private" discourage open discussion of violence (including child sexual abuse) perpetrated by extended family members.

Perhaps reflecting this tension, informant responses were more mixed. One noted that while living in traditional settings with extended family or "*nofo-a-kainga*" did sometimes protect against child abuse, citing that a protective network is created where the community is "one family" and "everyone looks out for each other". However, the same informant also noted that sometimes this precise arrangement "is also the root cause of abuse" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). Another informant noted that a particular risk of violence – including sexual violence – arose for children where entire families relocated from the outer islands to stay with relatives or friends in Tongatapu and search for better economic opportunities. This risk was also heavily associated with circumstances of poverty and consequently suboptimal living conditions.

Education Status

According to household survey data, higher educational attainment among girls in Tonga is associated with lower rates of child marriage, although as above, the direction of causality is unclear (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020). MICS results also associate higher parental education with lower risk of violent punishment for children (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020). While data on child labour and trafficking in Tonga is limited, data from elsewhere in the Pacific suggests that a lack of education can also increase children's vulnerability to trafficking for forced labour, including sexual exploitation (Davy & Tppou, 2022).

In alignment with the literature, child protection stakeholders associated not being in school with a higher risk of child sexual abuse and other forms of violence against children, with agreement from caregivers and adolescents on the latter point (although with an overall less emphatic response compared with stakeholders). Sentiments were similar across the KIIs, with informants also associating higher parental education with lower rates of violent parenting, noting that these parents had "*the mindset to understand the problems faced by their children*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Male) and respond accordingly.

On the other hand, another key informant noted that for children in the outer islands, access to higher levels of education required relocation to the capital, requiring them to stay with relatives and therefore putting them at increased risk of the types of violence associated with living separately from parents and communities of origin. Additionally, one other key informant noted that being away from school somewhat predictably provided protection for children who experienced various types of violence in school settings, such as bullying, violent discipline by teachers and inter-school fighting.

Poverty

While poverty has already been discussed above as a driver of violence against children, it is worth explicitly noting here that it often plays a role in the operation of many of the above-listed drivers and risk factors, including (but not limited to) migration, climate change, gender and sexual diversity, experience of family violence, drugs and alcohol, family breakdown, separation from parents, and rural living. While survey responses regarding the impacts of food insecurity and water scarcity and child safety were mixed, a caregiver in the FGDs noted that children whose parents "*are unable to adequately provide for them … wander to the neighbours and other places to look for things to meet their essential need like food and water*" (FGD, Caregiver, Male). This may expose them to associated risks of violence and exploitation.

Location (Urban or Rural)

According to the literature, children in urban and rural settings may be at risk of different types of violence. For instance, children in rural areas may be at greater risk of physical discipline in the home, child marriage and child labour (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020), although it should also be noted that it is unclear whether the differences in rates of violence are due to unique aspects of rural settings, or if causality has been founded by generally lower rates of caregiver educational attainment and wealth status in rural settings; statistical analysis of the full data set would be required to explore these interactions further (Tonga Statistics Department, 2020; Tonga Statistics Department & United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). Even so, children living in non-urban areas (peri-urban, rural, remote) often have reduced access to child welfare and other services that might protect and support them against violence, whereas children living in urban areas may experience greater exposure to risks attaching to crowded and populated places, night clubs and easier access to drugs and alcohol. Perhaps reflective of these differences, results from survey respondents regarding whether rural locations broadly presented a risk or protective factor were considerably mixed.

As discussed above, large numbers participants in the FGDs identified provincial or rural living as a protective factor against child abuse where most people in the community were known or related to each other, both implicitly and explicitly through statements such as: "[l]iving in a village in the rural areas help with the raising of kids in the community" (FGD, Caregiver, Male). Beyond direct assistance with child-rearing for caregivers, other benefits included children being easily able to identify strangers and thus protect themselves against potential stranger violence, and children being able to request and expect assistance from almost anyone in the community.

By contrast, urban areas were commonly associated with dangers associated with strangers or non-family members, such as children's exposure to urban violence in the neighbourhood, sale and use of illicit drugs and "other urban problems" (FGD, Caregiver, Male). However, there is insufficient data to gauge whether or not there is a difference here between perceived harms and prevalence.

8.2 What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues studied in this research? (RQ2)

8.2.1 Strengths and Gaps in the Child Protection System (RQ2.1)

a) Governance

The following government bodies and ministries are responsible for the governance of the child protection system in Tonga:

- Family Protection Advisory Council: which was established under the Family Protection Act 2013, to advise and make recommendations to the Minister of Internal Affairs regarding the safety of victims of domestic violence (including children). As specified in the Act, membership includes representatives from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Division of Women's Affairs; Attorney-General's Office; Tonga Police; Ministry of Education and Training; the Forum of Church Leaders and other relevant groups as the Minister of Internal Affairs thinks fit (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016; Polynesia Regional Office, 2021);

- Tonga National Child Protection Policy Committee led by the Ministry of Justice;

- Ministry of Internal Affairs: which holds general responsibility for child rights and administers the Family Protection Act (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021; UNICEF, 2017b));

- Ministry of Trade and Economic Development: which has oversight over legislation and law enforcement relating to child labour (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021);

- Ministry of Education and Training: which appears to have ultimate oversight of no-tolerance policies regarding corporal punishment and bullying in schools. Study participants referenced reporting structures for the escalation of complaints from schools.

Major gaps remain, however, in inter-agency co-ordination, which one key informant in the study identified as the most pressing issue in strengthening Tonga's child protection system. There remains a lack of overarching strategy and management for child protection specifically, and the sector as a whole. This includes:

- No national co-ordinating body responsible for strategic planning and inter-agency coordination for child protection, although a new body was formed to drive policy reform described below (UNICEF, 2017b);

- No co-ordinating body, other mechanism, policy or program to address child labour (although in practice, there is some collaboration between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, and the Immigration Department where foreign nationals are involved) (Coram International, 2021; U.S. Department of Labor, 2021); and

- No inter-agency body or referral mechanism that is specific to child protection (UNICEF, 2017b).

While there is no specific coordination body in relation to child protection, there exist various initiatives for coordination on various matters *related* to child protection. The National Service Delivery Protocol was launched in 2021 to co-ordinate multi-sectoral responses to gender-based violence (Tongan Prime Minister's Office, 2021), and would cover some instances of violence against children.

Informal mechanisms related to child protection have also emerged: one stakeholder confirmed that some of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' child protection outreach resulted in the submission of child protection reports from town officers and church ministers in recent times. Another stakeholder reported that collaboration during emergency periods was improving, with less duplication of services as a result. The US

Department of State noted that the Tongan government had procedures to refer victims of crime, including potential trafficking victims, to an NGO (U.S Department of State, 2022).

b) *Legislation and policy*

Legislation related to child protection is shown in Table 20 to Table 21. As noted in Table 20, the major gaps with respect to the legislative framework include the lack of:

- Provision of care and protection orders for children (which are currently only available under the Family Protection Act), including in relation to corporal punishment;

- Criminalisation of corporal punishment in the home and community;

- Criminalisation of sexual violence amongst boys (and men) and online grooming; and

- Establishment of 18 years as the minimum age for marriage without exception.

A major gap in child protection governance in Tonga is the lack of a national child protection policy (UNICEF, 2017b). This has been addressed by through the development of the Tonga National Child Protection Policy and Strategic Plan, which is pending approval by Cabinet.

Table 20: Overview of Tongan legislation relating to child protection in the home and community

LEGISLATION	STRENGTHS/GAPS
Family Protection Act 2013 Covers family violence, including against child victims. Administered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.	Strengths: • Empowers court to issue emergency protection orders, temporary protection orders and final protection orders that prohibit contact of perpetrator with victim (UNICEF, 2017b). • Criminalises domestic violence and states that committing an act of violence against a child, or in the presence of a child, is an aggravating circumstance (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016). • Funding for Family Violence Response Services was established under the Family Protection Trust Fund, including to support shelters and safe houses for victims of domestic violence and dependent children, community awareness and education programs, counselling and healthcare services, transportation services, etc. s 38 of Act (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016). Implemented in 2018 (Polynesia Regional Office, 2021). Gaps: • Permits physical violence consistent with "reasonable expectations and acceptances of family and domestic life" (art. 4) • Lack of enforcement, evidenced by the literature, which indicates continuing high levels of physical and emotional abuse, as well as neglect and mistreatment, and significant underreporting (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2019). • Weak implementation due to lack of resourcing, including funding, staffing, and training, according to study participants.
Criminal Offences Act 1988	Crimes against children include: • Violence against children, including assault and bodily harm • Cruelty to children • Enticing or taking away a child under 14 • Abduction of girls

	• Rape
	• "Carnal knowledge" of a child under 12, and the same for a child under 15 (with a significantly lower penalty)
	• Indecent assault
	• Incest
	• Child pornography
	(Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2020)
	
	Gaps:
	• Corporal punishment of children is still legal in the home, in non-educational care settings, and as a sentence for crime. (End Violence & End Corporal Punishment, 2022)
	• Gendered provisions which fail to recognise certain crimes against children:
	  o There is no age of consent to sexual activity for boys (UN Women, 2022);
	  o Rape can only be committed by a man against a woman or a girl;
	  o There is no corresponding provision for boys to "abduction of girls";
	  o Commercial sexual exploitation of women is recognised against "procuring the defilement of females", but there is no provision to criminalise the procurement of boys for the same.
	• There are no provisions to address online grooming, and potentially the online exploitation of children.
	(Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2020; U.S Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor, 2022a) (UNICEF, 2017b)

Counter Terrorism and Transnational Organised Crime Act 2013	Strength: Prohibits the international trafficking of children. Gap: Transnationality is a requirement of the offence, which means that the legislation does not specifically prohibit the domestic trafficking of children (U.S Department of State, 2022; UNICEF, 2017b) – see draft Employment Relations Bill below for more.
Communications Act 2015	Strength: Requires internet service providers to filter content that relates to child pornography, and report details to the police (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018)
Electronic Communication Abuse Offences Act 2020	Strength: Prohibits cyberbullying
Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1926 Provides for marriage, including the minimum age thereof.	Gap: While the legal age of consent to marriage is 18, marriage is possible from the age of 15 with parental consent. This leaves children open to the risk of child marriage. (UNICEF, 2017b).
Guardianship Act 2004 Provides for custody and maintenance of children, including for children to be made guardians of the Court.	Gap: No legislation for the formal adoption of children under circumstances other than those covered under the *Maintenance of Illegitimate Children Act* (below). A 2018 review recommended that new law be adopted to address this. (Coram International, 2021; Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018)
Maintenance of Illegitimate Children Act 1926 Provides for the maintenance and adoption of illegitimate children	Gap: No legislation to outline the government's obligation to support childrearing responsibilities (UNICEF, 2017b)

| Pending: _Draft Employment Relations Bill_ | Strength: this Bill aims to provide for the protection of children in employment, prohibit the sale and trafficking of children, and also prescribe a minimum age of 15 for non-hazardous work (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021)

Gaps:

- Enactment of this legislation was reportedly delayed due to COVID (Global Payroll Association, 2020; U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).
- There is still "[n]o comprehensive or explicit criminalisation of forced labour or slavery." (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021)

"As of 2021, there was no labour inspectorate and no legal authority to conduct labour inspections in Tonga" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021) |

Table 21: Overview of Tongan legislation relating to child protection in schools

LEGISLATION	STRENGTHS/GAPS
Education Act 2013	Strengths: - Prohibits corporal punishment in schools and pre-schools (article 37) (Coram International, 2021; End Violence & End Corporal Punishment, 2022) - Contains a non-discrimination provision to prevent discrimination against children with disabilities (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018). Gaps: - Corporal punishment in schools persists in practice, according to both the literature and reports from all groups of study participants. (Coram International, 2021; End Violence & End Corporal Punishment, 2022)
Education (Schools and General Provisions) Regulations 2002 Prohibits corporal punishment against students, also requires schools to develop codes of conduct to govern parent-student interactions	_Public Service Instructions and the Code of Ethics for civil servants may also apply to regulate the way that teachers dress and interact with students (according to KIIs)_

c) Reporting Mechanisms

The Family Protection Act 2013 places an obligation on all health professionals to file a report with the police on behalf of any child victim where the professional has been notified or become aware that the child has experienced or is at risk of future domestic violence (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016). Especially in cases of domestic violence where there may be disincentives for caregivers to report violence against children themselves, this is an important system strength. In 2018, the Government also reported that counselling services offered by the Women and Children's Crisis Centre and the Tonga National Centre for Women and Children have put into place procedures relating to confidentiality and protection of victim identity, which are aimed at making it easier for children to lodge complaints against perpetrators (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018).

However, all of these forms of reporting still require children to access a particular service and service providers, and thus a gap remains in child-friendly mechanisms for child victim-survivors to report violence

directly and, from there, to be directed to available forms of support. This is particularly true where access to reporting services requires parental consent or intervention – such as in the case of the Tonga Leitis Association, which requires parental consent before they can "*conduct any case*" – which could not be obtained by children where their parents choose not to pursue formal action, or where they are the perpetrators of violence themselves. As the key informant did not discuss this point any further, it may warrant further exploration.

While the study participants did describe many instances of parents taking steps to formally report violence against their children and to consequently secure justice or other forms of redress and support, reports of caregiver inaction were common enough to highlight the real need for mechanisms to support children's agency in deciding whether or not to report. Overall, the child protection stakeholders surveyed provided a very low estimation of the likelihood that adults would report violence against children, collectively estimating that more than half of child sexual abuses (63.4%) and cases involving other forms of violence against children (52.5%) go unreported. In terms of specific authorities, only 40% of child sex abuse cases were estimated to be reported by adults to social welfare, with even lower proportions reported to health workers (31.8%), the police (21.2%) and to community leaders for traditional forms of justice (15.2%). Common reasons for parental or caregiver reluctance to report included:

- Failure to take children's concerns seriously, due to either being too busy or "*tough love*" (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown);

- Protecting family reputation or pride, including that of the child (with one participant stating that "*the fathers are the head of the family and they usually are not welcoming of children reporting or telling others about the abuse they experience*" and that "*also there are instances where the mothers would not let the child report the abuse, especially sexual abuse because it will bring shame to the family or a stigma that they do not want*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)); and

- Protecting family members who are involved (potentially as the perpetrator).

Again, this highlights the pressing need to provide children with mechanisms by which they can directly report violence and access support.

Beyond the availability of reporting mechanisms, however, effectiveness and actual access by children still depend on the many social and other factors that shape children's reporting behaviours more broadly. Along this vein, Tongan child protection authorities and stakeholders are already aware of a number of barriers to reporting. The first is the cultural sensitivity of child sex abuse, which continues to impede reporting and thus makes it difficult for authorities to establish the exact incidence and prevalence of child sexual abuse and incest. The Government of Tonga observed that:

> *Because sexual abuse is considered "taboo", cases of sexual abuse in the family will often not be reported for fear of bringing "shame" to the family. The MOP reports that sexual crimes are underreported and that NGOs tend to report a higher number of offences than Police records (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018), p. 62.*

Key informants affirmed this account, citing shame, fear of being a figure of discussion and disapproval in the wider community among children as driving a reluctance to report experiences of violence. One key informant noted that:

> *Kids would often express their concern about their needs for support and keeping things away from their relatives. Again, dealing with criticisms from their relatives and the community was a major concern for them (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).*

Fear of abusers was also identified as a common barrier to reporting, with multiple study participants noting that the result is children either refusing to disclose the names of their abusers or refusing to report at all.

The Government of Tonga similarly noted that some of the reported sexual abuse cases were "retrospective as victims only find the courage to speak out as they grow older and have less fear for the perpetrator" (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018), p. 62.

Due to either the above, or other undisclosed reasons, key informants recognised that a general level of courage was required in the child coming forward, with one noting that "*those who are brave enough to tell the whole truth have the whole ordeal dealt with quickly but it is a long process calling students in and getting them to talk about the problem*" (KII, Subregional Stakeholder, Female). Another key informant stated that "*people require a lot of courage to come into the centre to report now compared to years back when lot of people would stop by our office to report*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female), implying that social difficulties surrounding reporting are increasing, which may warrant further exploration.

Beyond specific barriers, responses from the children and adolescents involved in the study suggested that children's willingness to report experiences of violence to the people around them broadly decreased with age, decreasing trust in the adults around them to provide assistance. Reasons for this were unclear but could include changes in the types of violence children of different ages expect to face, changes in parental expectations of children (e.g., whether older children would be expected to resolve bullying issues themselves or whether it is more acceptable for teachers to physically discipline older children), or past (and negative) experiences among older children of the consequences of reporting violence to their parents. Further research is required to better understand these trends.

Children aged 8-11 were firm in their willingness to report violence to their parents, teachers or the police, with statements like:

- "*I would tell my mom and dad or call the police*" (FGD, Child Aged 8-11, Gender Unknown)

- "*I would go to my teacher because she always helps me*" (FGD, Child Aged 8-11, Gender Unknown)

- "*I would tell my friends, and they would tell their parents to help us*" (FGD, Child Aged 8-11, Gender Unknown)

- "*If I ever get bullied at school, I would tell my teachers about it*" (FGD, Child Aged 8-11, Gender Unknown)

As already evident in some of the above statements, when speaking of "violence", the children chiefly envisaged either corporal punishment or peer violence. Perhaps due to the uncontroversial nature of these types of experiences, children were confident that the adults around them would take straightforward action to address their grievances, stating that:

- "*[w]hen my parents knows that I was physically violated they would usually be stressed because they are upset and angry*" (FGD, Child Aged 8-11, Gender Unknown),

- "*[m]y mom and dad would call the police*" (FGD, Child Aged 8-11, Gender Unknown)

The only envisaged situation where an adult failed to take action involved school principals who did not "*deal with the situation in the way that you want*", but in those cases, the child explained that, "*then you can ask the police for their help instead*" (FGD, Child Aged 8-11, Gender Unknown).

Whereas some of the children in the FGDs for 12 to 16 year olds remained firm in their conviction that they would tell their parents, teachers or the police, who would assist them, other trends began to emerge among the others. Some children reported that they would tell their peers (such as friends, siblings or cousins) first, and then only afterwards report to adults – or expect their peers to act as intermediaries in reporting to adults. This behaviour was also observed by one of the key informants, who reported that children sometimes raise experiences of violence with teachers or friends, who will then report on their behalf. More significantly, children began to display a reluctance to disclose their experiences, and/or an awareness that there were certain circumstances under which they would not be willing to report:

- "*I'll tell my family if I feel like I can't tell my parents*" (FGD, Child Aged 12-16, Female)

- "*Sometimes I would tell them and sometimes I would not tell them because I am scared that I might get in trouble and be kidnapped*" (FGD, Child Aged 12-16, Male)

- "*I don't feel like I would tell anyone because I am not comfortable enough to tell someone, also I feel like if I tell anyone, I might get in trouble myself*" (FGD, Child Aged 12-16, Female)

- "*I wouldn't go anywhere for help*" (FGD, Child Aged 12-16, Male)

- "*It depends, if it feels too personal, I wouldn't tell anyone, but maybe I would tell anyone if I feel like I need help but for now, I feel like I wouldn't tell anyone, and it would depend if it is serious enough to report*" (FGD, Child Aged 12-16, Male).

Similarly, while children still expressed confidence that their parents or the other adults around them could and would assist them, accounts of common adult reactions to reports of child violence began to include becoming angry, "*overreacting*" or circumstances under which parents would not care or would otherwise refuse to act.

Adolescents were even less likely to report violence and other problems to adults. Survey responses showed strong agreement that children were not very likely to seek help from anyone in the event of a problem (and caregiver responses tended to agree). Survey respondents selected the following reasons for doing so with very strong group consensus:

- No one will believe them
- They are embarrassed, ashamed, humiliated
- They feel responsible
- Fear of ruining their reputation
- Fear of getting into trouble
- Fear of making the violence worse

With reduced, although still strong group consensus, respondents also indicated the following possible reasons for their likely inaction:

- It wouldn't change anything
- They don't want adults to report it to authorities (village leaders, school or police)

These results raise similar issues to adolescent responses relating to seeking help for negative online experiences (discussed above) – i.e. possible weakness of child protection frameworks and community buy-in, a lack of trust and safety in the relationships between children and the adults around them, and a wider socio-cultural environment that normalises or otherwise discourages action on violence against children.

The strongest consensus (across all groups) related to the strong likelihood of children sharing experiences of violence with their friends, a theme that was also identified in the responses from both children and adults in the KIIs and FGDs. From among discussions surrounding explanations for this and other patterns of reporting across the KIIs and FGDs, the following themes emerged:

- A belief that children would share experiences of violence with people they had close relationships with and trusted, whether that was one or both of their parents, other family members or friends.
- That building and maintaining this kind of parent-child relationship was important for child protection, and required deliberate action from parents. It was commonly noted that where parents did not habitually make time for their children or if the parent-child relationship was categorised by fear, children would not be likely to tell them about any problems. Some caregivers also explicitly described the role that violent discipline played in creating fear and damaging trust between children and parents.

One key informant further observed that this type of parent-child relationship was rare in Tonga, stating:

> *Let's say about 10% will tell somebody, especially if the house is a good house. The only ones that would tell is about 10 or 20% because of the good family structure that they have, they can actually go to their mom and dad and go 'mom and dad I got a problem with this kid'…but majority of the houses in Tonga, you don't see that man some of the families, it's not even a family at home. Kids gonna look at their parents and go, 'I ain't gonna tell my mom and dad my mum either gonna whoop me or my dad gonna be like 'go away. (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown)*

Perhaps relatedly, there was also broad consensus across survey responses from both adolescents and caregivers that children were not likely to report to church leaders, social welfare officers, or village/community leaders. KII participants further elaborated that children would be further disincentivised to report to leaders of the opposite sex (which might create a particular issue for girls if the majority of leaders are male), and that LGBTQI children were particularly unlikely to consult religious leaders for predictable reasons, although they were likely to consult older LGBTQI people if they were acquainted with any.

KII and FGD participants also raised a number of other variables that might influence children's reporting behaviours. These included the type of violence in question (e.g. with certain problems being reported to friends first, school-related problems more likely being reported to teachers, and crimes being reported to police). Others noted that many children would first attempt to resolve (or simply endure) the violence themselves, only reporting if the violence worsens, i.e. "*when it is over their capacity to handle the abuse*" (*which was noted to often be "too late"*) (KII, National Stakeholder, Male).

For circumstances under which they *were* willing to report experiences of violence, adolescents were presented with four possible reasons for children to tell people about experiences of violence. Survey responses ranked the reasons as follows:

Table 22: Reasons why children would report experiences of violence to people, according to adolescents

Suggested Reason	Yes, this is a reason	No, this is not a reason	Blank
Because they would listen and comfort them	15	1	5
Because they would not punish them	13	3	5
Because they wouldn't tell anyone else	11	3	7
Because they would make it stop	10	5	6

Even given the limitations of the survey, it is interesting that the most important issue to adolescents in disclosing experiences was to be listened to and comforted and that the lowest priority was for their confidant to make the violence stop. Child protection stakeholders appeared to be already aware of this, stating that "*children wanted to share with others that are willing to listen and understand their problems*".

It is worth noting that across all questions on this topic, caregivers consistently believed that children were more likely to report than adolescents or child protection stakeholders thought they were. FGD responses displayed similar (although less marked) trends – i.e. a tendency to believe that children would report experiences of violence, or more specifically, that their own children would report experiences of violence to them (or other adults). For example, most participants in the FGD for caregivers of boys aged between 12 and 16 in Atele thought that children would report violence to a very wide range of people – almost all of the figures suggested by the FGD questions (although one notable participant believed that children would be likely to report violence to friends if anyone at all, and teachers only on rare occasions). By contrast,

responses from boys in the 12 to 16 age group (noting that these were not the same boys that the caregivers were responsible for and that the FGDs were conducted in different locations) reported willingness to share with a much more restricted group of people, limited to friends, parents/certain family members and the police.

By contrast, child protection stakeholders speaking from their professional experience tended to agree with the adolescent response, i.e. that there was a high likelihood of children sharing experiences of violence with their peers (except for sexual abuse), and a low likelihood of them disclosing any form of violence to adults.

When children did share an experience of violence with an adult, the majority of caregivers responding to the online survey (11/20 or 55%), thought that caregivers would encourage reporting to at least someone with common responses being police (50%), health workers (50%), social welfare organisations (45%) or church or community leaders (40%). In line with the norms discussed under Section 8.1.2(a), reasons caregivers would not report to anyone included wanting to keep the matter private (especially if the perpetrator is within the family), family pride and the shame and embarrassment associated with reporting. Poor knowledge of the importance of reporting and reporting pathways was also listed as a factor.

d) Child protection response services

Despite the community's need, there is no clear authority for any government agency to proactively intervene and protect a child who is at risk of, or has experienced harm (UNICEF, 2017b). There is also no government agency/unit with the mandate or capacity to co-ordinate or deliver child and family welfare services – responsibility was responsibility previously assigned to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (UNICEF, 2017b), with the Ministry of Justice taking responsibility for developing the forthcoming child protection policy. An overview of the various actors involved in the sector is provided in Table 23.

Both the literature and the key informants identified a lack of technical expertise (including specifically in relation to gender-based violence and violence against children, as well as child protection in general) and training across the sectors. One key informant added that children should be involved in the design of any initiatives to address this gap, to ensure the child-centredness of future approaches (Polynesia Regional Office, 2021).

Despite the health sector's role as a key point of entry for children into child protection, the literature indicates a lack of focus on child protection in both health sector policies and health service delivery across the Pacific (Sheehan, 2021; UNICEF, 2017c). While one key informant described the existence of child protection policies in some women and children's service organisations (for example to require that discussions with children at risk are kept confidential and to require staff to advocate for children who require their assistance), there is a lack of information on how common this might be, consistency in standards across organisations, and implementation.

The literature also identified limitations in general service provision to the outer islands, noting that the majority of providers are located in Tongatapu, and that there are extremely limited resources available to develop decentralised services in more remote areas (Coram International, 2021; Polynesia Regional Office, 2021; UNICEF, 2017b). Survey responses from stakeholders suggested that the proportion of children in Tonga who were affected by lack of access was high. Where stakeholders were asked to rate the availability of various types of services out of 100 (representing availability to all children in Tonga), the highest scores were given to economic protection services (57.50) and medical services (56.60) responding to child sex abuse, which nevertheless still only indicates access by a little over half the population. The average availability rating across all services sat between 45 and 46 out of 100. By contrast, the lowest availability scores were given to prevention programs for perpetrators of child sexual abuse (30) and other forms of

violence against children (37.75), as well as services to meet the basic needs of child sexual abuse victims (35.75).

Both the literature and study participants also raised funding as an issue across the sector. KIIs noted that children's affairs were allocated a relatively small proportion of the national budget as compared to other areas. According to the literature, this would likely have been further reduced by COVID-19, which resulted in budget reductions for social services across the Pacific (Coram International, 2021). KII participants also reported insufficient funding allocations for individual organisations in terms of both staffing and operations, and one of these informants also pointed out that the lack of government support for CSOs, FBOs and NGOs is nevertheless coupled with government *overreliance* on these bodies to provide key services (KII, Tonga) (Coram International, 2021).

There is no formal program for out-of-home care (including foster care, adoption, residential care and children's crisis housing) (UNICEF, 2017b)

Table 23: Overview of health and welfare services for child protection in Tonga

SYSTEM ACTORS/BODIES AND ROLES	STRENGTHS/GAPS
Panel of Registered Counsellors: counsellors on this panel provide family counselling services, and in the case of family violence to facilitate arrangement of support services for victims and other people at risk (including accommodation and medical examination). Appointed under the Family Protection Act 2013 from a pool of qualified counsellors and experienced community workers. *Practice guide: **Tonga Family Protection Counselling Framework*** (UNICEF, 2017c; United Nations Country Team in the Pacific, n.d.)	Strength: In carrying out certain child protection responsibilities under the authority of the Family Protection Act, registered counsellors help to fill some of the gap left by the absence of an official child protection agency. This includes carrying out child protection investigations and assessments at the request of the court in domestic violence cases. (UNICEF, 2017c) Strength: Able to provide more holistic support to victims through connection to the referral pathway set up under the Family Protection Act, which connects health professionals and social services. (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016) Gaps: • Primary focus is on family violence, and not necessarily other forms of violence against children. • Access, availability and quality of counselling services: child protection stakeholders commonly reported a shortfall in counselling expertise, both in terms of availability (rated at 54.40/100 for child sexual abuse and 35.25 for other types of violence against children by survey respondents) and quality of service (rated at 50/100 for child sex abuse and 35.75 for other types of violence by survey respondents). KII and FGD participants identified church ministers (particularly the Patele priests) as particularly well-trained and qualified, but noted that lack of counsellors affected healthcare services as well as NGOs. This is a particular concern because children who have

experienced violence were described as responding best to counselling (KII, Tonga).

Health Practitioners and Social Service Providers: are required to report domestic violence to the police on the victim's behalf once they become aware of it. Health professionals are also required to conduct medical examinations and refer victims to counselling, medical treatment, shelter and support services as appropriate. (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016)	Strength: Able to provide more holistic support to victims through connection to the referral pathway set up under the Family Protection Act, which connects health professionals and social services. (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016)

CSO/FBO/NGOs:
- **Tonga Women and Children's Crisis Centre:** provides domestic violence response services, such as counselling (including via a helpline for those living in the outer islands) and temporary safe shelter to victims, including children. (UNICEF, 2017b)
- **Tonga National Centre for Women and Children:** provides domestic violence response services, such as counselling and temporary safe shelter to victims, including children. (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018)
- **Tonga Leitis Association:** provides support services for LGBTIQ+ youth, including family counselling and liaison services to resolve conflict, temporary safe shelter, and referrals to other services (e.g. Legal Aid) (KII, Tonga).
- **Tonga National Youth Centre:** conducts child-centred programming and advocacy (KII, Tonga)
- **Other bodies (such as international NGOs) and programs:** including those working in domestic violence and child protection. (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018)

Strengths: many of these organisations are well-known across the sector, and interface with government systems. For example, many organisations:
- Partner with police and other government agencies (such as the TWCCC, which works with the domestic violence unit of the police)
- Are connected to other services via the Family Protection Act or other pathways (TWCCC, TNCWC, TLA,
- May receive other case referrals from the Ministry of Health
(Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018)

Gaps:
- Services:
  - Because the primary providers of crisis housing are women's services, there are limited shelter facilities available to male children over the age of 12 (KII, Department of State, 2022). Having been designed for women, these services are furthermore not always appropriate for children's needs, for example those of LGBTIQ+ children (KII, Tonga).
  - Limited rehabilitation services and programs for children in conflict with the law (Sheehan, 2021)(KII, Tonga)
- Referral implementation: The US Department of state noted that in regards to child trafficking in 2021-22, the government procedures for referring victims to NGOs for support were not used (although this could also be due to upstream failures in detection) (U.S Department of State, 2022)

Barrier
- KII stakeholders noted that international partners (including NGOs) working in child protection often imposed onerous reporting requirements on local partners. The rigidity of these presented barriers to child protection by

creating extra resource burdens for organisations that needed to then adhere to donor data collection and other reporting processes, and implementation of activities was often delayed while local organisations waited for donor administrative processes and approvals.

e) Police

There is no dedicated children's unit within Tonga's police force, with cases involving children being distributed across other specialist units and the general police force. For example, the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) takes children's cases only in connection with domestic violence, whereas the Transnational Crimes Unit would assume responsibility for any cases of child trafficking (UNICEF, 2017b). The DVU's strengths include a legal obligation to investigate domestic violence cases and a no-drop policy to protect against the possibility of victims being pressured into withdrawing complaints, and section 151 of the Tonga Police Act 2010 states that a relative, friend or law practitioner chosen by the child must be present during the process of questioning, and further provides for privacy of the conversation (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018). However, beyond this, the literature identifies an overall lack of formal processes and procedures for handling cases involving children, and the literature and study participants both described a widespread lack of training in gender-based violence and child protection (UNICEF, 2017b) (Polynesia Regional Office, 2021) (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016, 2018). One KII informant described this creating a barrier to access to justice for child victims, stating that "*some children are afraid when the police are involved so they closed off when they experience violence*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

On the other hand, participants did express confidence in the ability of the police to address at least some non-sexual risks to children. For instance, both children and caregivers in FGDs identified the police as a higher level of escalation for issues of school-related violence (largely corporal punishment by teachers) that were not dealt with satisfactorily by school authorities and associated higher levels of police presence with safety from drug-related violence.

Regarding staffing numbers, many caregivers and children called for increased patrolling from police and town officers in towns. It was unclear whether this indicated issues with police numbers, distribution, engagement in patrolling, or other issues.

f) Justice sector

Overall, child protection stakeholders seemed to have a positive opinion of the justice system's effectiveness in addressing sexual abuse cases, assigning it a collective rating of 78/100). Access to justice services was rated similarly well, at 63.50. However, sentiments relating to justice services for other forms of violence against children were much lower, at 54.67 for availability and 35.50 for quality.

An overview of the key actors involved in the sector is provided in the table below.

Table 24: Justice sector actors in Tonga

SYSTEM ACTORS/BODIES AND ROLES	STRENGTHS/GAPS
Magistrates Court (and Supreme Court on appeal): Hears and makes legal findings in cases of domestic violence and crimes against children. (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016; United Nations Children's Fund, 2017a	Strengths: • In domestic violence cases, the Magistrates Court has authority to issue protection orders to prohibit or restrict perpetrators from having contact with child victims, and granting custody to the other

parent (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016; UNICEF, 2017b)

- There are some child-friendly provisions for proceedings that apply to offences against children:
    - Certain cases can be heard in-camera (but these notably do not include charges of sodomy/indecent assault on males, so there is no such protection for a male child who is victim of rape/indecent assault). (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018).
    - Section 19 of the *Magistrate's Court (Amendment) Act 2012* states that criminal cases against children under age of 16 may be listed to be heard separately if the Court considers it appropriate (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018).
    - Some non-custodial sentencing options are available for children in conflict with the law, including compensation of the victim, community service, fines, suspended sentences and conditional discharge (UNICEF, 2017b).
    - In practice, it appears to be rare for custodial sentences to be used for children (UNICEF, 2017b).

Gaps:
- Courts lack the authority to make formal custody orders in relation to out-of-home care (UNICEF, 2017b)(KII, Tonga)
- Aside from the above, there is a general lack of child-friendly procedures to assist children in giving effective evidence and also to protect against secondary victimisation.
    - e.g. there are no specialised courts, limited training for court officials on handling cases with children. (UNICEF, 2017b)
    - It is also possible for the death penalty to be imposed on children aged 15-17 and whipping is a formal sentencing option for boys. That said, neither of these seem to be implemented in practice (UNICEF, 2017b)
- General lack of training in child protection issues for officials in the sector, including judges, prosecutors, other court officers, etc. (KII, Tonga)

Police Safety Orders: can be issued by police for domestic violence cases.	Strength: This fills a gap in the outer islands where there are few resident magistrates and therefore limited access to court orders (Polynesia Regional Office, 2021)
Community Legal Aid Centre/Tonga Family Protection Legal Aid Centre	Strength: Provides free legal aid to survivors of domestic violence.

Gaps:

- Assistance may be limited for children in conflict with the law and other cases not related to domestic violence. While a *Legal Aid Bill 2013* was proposed that might have addressed this, as of 2018 it had been deferred for further consultation. (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018)
- Services may be reduced during emergency period, as they were reduced during COVID (from approximately five staff to two) (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2018; Family Protection Legal Aid Centre Tonga, 2022)

As noted above, Tonga has a very limited formal protection framework for protecting children engaged in work. The US Department of Labour notes that child labour is not included in standard business licence inspections, and that site visitations by the Chief Labour Inspector only take place following the receipt of a complaint. There are furthermore no investigators specifically trained to identify and address child labour, as well as a broad absence of general labour inspectors as at 2021 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

There are also limited or no formal diversion programs or community-based programs for children in conflict with the law, partially due to the lack of laws for child justice. Offences involving children in conflict with the law and child victims are still largely resolved informally through community mechanisms (UNICEF, 2017b).

g) Education System

An overview of the key features of the child protection framework of the sector is provided in the table below.

Table 25: Overview of the relevant child protection features of the Education system in Tonga

SYSTEM FEATURES AND DESCRIPTIONS	STRENGTHS/GAPS
Sector-wide Policies: • **"Zero-tolerance" Bullying Policy** • **"Zero-tolerance" Corporal Punishment Policy** ○ **Related: Code of Ethics and Conduct for Civil Servants** (KII, Tonga)	Strengths: • One key stakeholder described implementation of these policies (through disciplinary measures against offending teachers, prefects and students) resulting in decreases in both bullying and use of corporal punishment in schools. However, as discussed above, both practices persist to a high degree (Coram International, 2021; UNICEF, 2017b) (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2018) (KIIs, Tonga) (FGDs, Tonga) Gaps: • Lack of sector-wide child protection reporting protocols and procedures (UNICEF, 2017b) • Lack of sector-wide integration of child protection issues into school curricula, which would empower children to protect themselves (UNICEF, 2017b)

	• Lack of data collection to inform implementation of policies and related child-protection programs. (KII, Tonga) • The anecdotal descriptions of schools providing unsatisfactory action, or teachers failing to take action on bullying suggest imperfect and inconsistent implementation • There is no training provided to teachers on alternative strategies for disciplining students (UNICEF, 2017b) • There is no training provided to teachers or other personnel in the education sector on identifying child abuse and other child protection issues (KII, Tonga) (UNICEF, 2017b)
School Child Protection Initiatives: Study participants described some schools implementing various initiatives to protect children from stranger violence near school grounds (e.g. at break times and home time), as well as violence on the way to and from school.	Strengths: • Participant responses seemed to suggest that there was a level of contextualisation in school policies and child safety initiatives, i.e. that they were adapted to the specific needs of schools and their communities. For example, one male teacher noted that all-boys' boarding schools had different policies to co-education and non-boarding schools to respond to differing needs. It is, however, unclear whether there are best-practice materials available to schools, or any sector-wide minimum standards.
Individual School Procedures for Reporting	Strengths: • In the absence of sector-wide protocols, study participants nevertheless provided good evidence of the existence of some reporting procedures in place at schools, and that were known to both caregivers and children. Many participants in KIIs and FGDs described similar pathways (i.e. reporting or speaking with teachers, escalating issues to principals and then where the school fails to act satisfactorily, escalating to the police). Moreover some KIIs described schools appointing child protection "counsellors" or officers from among the staff, who also had responsibility for proactively monitoring children who had been identified as "problem" children or otherwise at-risk. These staff members would also speak to children about suspected abuse, and eventually file complaints on their behalf where appropriate. • There was furthermore some evidence of serious cases being escalated through schools to the Ministry of Education and Training, and related reporting to the police by Ministry officials. • Some participants also described schools providing some level of child protection or pastoral programming to students, e.g. teaching children how to identify and respond to abuse, and implementing counselling sessions regarding how to avoid and

address child sexual abuse in the absence of official sex education classes.

Gaps:
- The anecdotal descriptions of schools providing unsatisfactory action, teachers failing to take action on bullying, and the lack of officially recorded child trafficking convictions despite anecdotal evidence of both occurrence and reporting suggest imperfect and inconsistent implementation.

h) Child protection information systems

Some of the study participants and many sources across the existing literature have also identified outstanding gaps in data-collection on violence against children, child protection needs and related issues, including:

- a complete lack of data collection in areas such as child trafficking;

- a lack of systematic data sharing between different agencies and child protection actors; and

- a lack of analysis of the data that is collected for use in informing child protection activities, including enforcement of crimes, advocacy and programming (Coram International, 2021; Polynesia Regional Office, 2021; Szamier & Attenborough, 2017; UNICEF, 2017b; (UNODC, 2023a)).

i) Community

As described in Section 8.2.1(c), the community – including caregivers and traditional and church leaders, plays a significant role of caregivers and other community members in supporting children to report and was also identified as the main medium of social reintegration for child victims is the family/extended family and by extension the community by the Family Protection Act (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016). The majority of out-of-home care for children is informal kinship care.

While the extended family in Tonga has traditionally ensured that children who have experienced violence are not deprived of a family, social change has weakened traditional safety net structures through migration and the creation of urban suburbs where neighbours are not connected by family or other ties (Government of the Kingdom of Tonga, 2016). In addition, dependency on community support structures creates risk of supports being subject to community and cultural norms, attitudes and traditions. In some cases, these enable child protection, but in others, they act as barriers and bottlenecks – for example for LGBTQI children and other groups who already face social exclusion (Coram International, 2021)

8.2.2 Are there past, existing or emerging, approaches, including kastom, traditional or religious approaches, to learn from? (RQ2.2)

A recent review of the development of child protection systems across the Pacific concluded that community child protection projects across the Pacific Islands are "…highly variable and inconsistent in terms of funding, staffing, commitment and ideas about desirable outcomes" (Sheehan, 2021). Such systems have limited reach into most communities in the Pacific. Like other Pacific countries, there is limited data on Tonga-specific programming, but the literature review analysed some recent evaluations and studies relating to community-level child protection programs in other PICs[26], including programs relating to the transformation of norms relating to gender and violence, suggests the emergence of a few broad themes in terms of potentially beneficial approaches and areas of focus for future community-level programming. These relate to: long-

term involvement and relationship-building, contextualisation and adaptability in programming, adopting or incorporating indigenous approaches and frameworks, pursuing linkages with other community development programs, pursuing linkages with formal child protection networks and specific target groups. A number of these aligned with participant responses, as discussed below.

Long-term Involvement and Relationship-building

The importance of long-term involvement and relationship-building in community interventions and child protection programming is already well-known. One caregiver in the FGDs stated that any child protection programs *"should be ongoing on the relevant issue and keeping up with times and let them do it every year because we can't just sit and wait until something happens in order to act"* (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*.*

Contextualisation and Adaptability of Programming

Multiple sources stressed the diversity of Pacific communities, and the importance of contextualisation to local needs (including cultural needs and interests in protecting traditions and cultural values). Many of the study participants' recommendations for future programming echoed these findings. Key informants suggested that international partners should support local child protection teams in their current work, to "better provide the support services that the kids at risk or provide experts to deal with these issues at school" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female), and one caregiver similar suggested that local youth offices should be established with local people as staff, because they would understand the local context and act accordingly. In providing an example of international partners failing to contextualise programming, one key informant described a program under which a partner provided iPads to children without providing appropriate support surrounding safe use of electronic devices and the internet, with the result that "*students misused [them]*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Male).

Adopting or Incorporating Indigenous Approaches and Frameworks

Beyond the community involvement discussed above, some sources further advocate for the adoption of Pacific Indigenous *approaches* in child protection (and indeed wider social) programming, which would enable the incorporation of cultural relevancy and sensitivity, anti-racism, anti-oppression and decolonisation into the core of intervention design and implementation. One opportunity to do this in Tonga may relate to the use of group discussions or "*talanoa*"/"*talatalanoa*", which were frequently suggested by both adult and child participants as ways to collectively develop child protection solutions within communities, and which one participant described as "how Tongans best learn" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). Suggestions included holding village meetings to discuss shared responsibilities for child safety, discussions about child safety in schools, and ongoing discussions between parents and children about identifying and responding to violence, as well as strengthening parenting practices in general.

8.3 Recommendations

Key findings

The situation analysis found a strong rationale for SC's newly established child protection program in the Pacific. Like all other countries considered in this situational analysis, the situational analysis showed that children, their caregivers and stakeholders were most concerned about emotional and physical violence against children in the home and at school, which they recognised, consistent with recent household survey data, as commonplace. Bullying – both at school and online - was also a concern amongst children and caregivers. Stakeholders, caregivers and children are also concerned about sexual violence, with the majority of stakeholders perceiving an increase in prevalence. Related to this, stakeholders, caregivers and adolescents also expressed growing concern about children being contacting by strangers online and online grooming. Stakeholders were sure about trends with respect to child labour, child marriage, CSEC and

trafficking, yet data show they are impacting children's lives to varying degrees, with one in ten girls in Tonga married before 18 years of age.

Socio-cultural and religious norms regarding gender and violence were the dominant drivers of violence against children in Tonga. Other drivers included poverty and socio-economic factors, often associated with children living away from one or both parents due to separation or parent migration, as well as migration, climate change and digitisation. Risk factors identified by stakeholders, caregivers and children include gender and sexuality diversity, disability, experiencing family violence, living away from one or both parents, caregiver drug and alcohol use, and education and poverty.

Although Tonga has the highest income per capita out of the countries considered in this analysis child protection system is in its initial phases, with the first Child Protection policy pending approval by Cabinet. Next steps with respect to strengthening the system include the establishment of a child protection legislative framework as contextually appropriate for Tonga, with associated institutional development to support service response. The experience of other countries suggests that the development of such institutional capacity (including interagency guidelines guiding practice, as well as financial and human resources) is a long process. Other legislative priorities include prohibiting the use of violent discipline, protecting boys from sexual violence, and eliminating exceptions for child marriage.

There is a need to design community-based programs for prevention and response, drawing on lessons from programs seeking to address gender-based violence in Tonga, and experience from other Pacific Island countries, that help build trust and openness between children and their caregivers, as well as other community leaders.

Recommendations for this situational analysis

- Discuss in depth the findings of this situational analysis with SC staff and close partners in Tonga as a way to strengthen SC's partnerships. Discuss priorities and plans for how SC can best contribute to efforts to support the emerging child protection system.

Recommendations for Save the Children Programming

- SC's child protection programming should seek to establish flexible, long-term partnerships with existing actors in child protection and gender-based violence, both government and other CSOs.

- Engage with children on child rights and violence against children at the community level and in schools. Children were specifically interested in forming and strengthening peer relationships so that child clubs may provide an appropriate model. Children and key stakeholders suggested that these programs should be child-led or otherwise involve children in their development to ensure that children's concerns and perspectives are centred.

- Respondents also called for engagement with caregivers on positive parenting approaches and strengthening relationships with their children, as well as effectively responding to violence. Respondents described *"talanoa"*/*"talatalanoa"* in communities and schools to discuss child protection issues as the best means for discussing such issues, and they should be framed in this way. Holding sessions may provide a basis to inform program design in a deeper manner.

- Both children and caregivers called for online safety, and digital literacy may provide a basis for initiating community-based programs on culturally taboo issues such as sex, sexuality and child sexual abuse. For parents, this should link to positive parenting knowledge and skills with respect to how caregivers can effectively negotiate screen time.

- Participants also called for awareness-raising and education programs and campaigns (including via TV and radio) about:
  o Available services for children,

- o Strategies for children to protect themselves and support their friends (which SC could assist in developing and training teachers how to deliver)
- o Child protection strategies for parents and communities,
- o The importance and impact of reporting child abuse to the authorities (for both children and adults),
- o Online harms and how to address them (for both children and parents).

Recommendations for Save the Children partnership with national and subnational government institutions

- Strengthen child protection policy and legislation, including implementation and enforcement, by passing the Child Protection Policy and developing a legislative framework for the care and protection of children. The development of the legislation should take place through the deep participation of children and caregivers.

- Together with CSOs and relevant government agencies, develop and communicate guidelines for formal reporting processes and explain how confidentiality is maintained broadly across the community. This should link to consistency in reporting cases and data-collection/datamanagement (a national stakeholder requested SC's assistance with this).

- In considering the development of services to ensure the care and protection of children, participants recommended the establishment of a youth office in each community, staffed by qualified child protection officers who are also people who live in the community ("*locals would understand*" (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown)).

- Work with the Ministry of Education and Training to support cultural (institutional) change within the education sector to create a "positive and supporting environment where [school] staff feel safe, valued and empowered to report incidents" (Survey, Caregiver, Female).

- Engage in dialogue with the Ministry of Education and Training on integrating violence against children, online safety, digital literacy, and reporting violence into school curricula. Work to remove social taboos and shame surrounding child sex abuse to enable open discussion.

- Consider the introduction of community policing in communities to support a feeling of safety, particularly in relation to stranger violence (requested by children and caregivers in FGDs).

- Development of a Tongan definition of the word "gender", a better definition of Leitis/LGBTQI group (the key informant asked for SC support in progressing this).

9. Vanuatu

9.1 What is the nature and extent of violence that children are at risk of or affected by in their home, school, community, and online? (RQ1)

9.1.1 Prevalence of violence

While much of the publicly available data on violence against children in Vanuatu is outdated, recent Ministry of Justice and Community Services figures, cited in news-media reports, indicate that numbers of reported cases of violence against children (including neglect, as well as physical, emotional and sexual abuse) tripled between 2021 and 2022. Although this increase was largely attributed to increased reporting rather than an increase in actual prevalence (as a consequence of growing awareness of child protection issues and formal child protection systems among communities), a national stakeholder advised that many cases of child abuse continue to remain unreported, and therefore that actual figures may be higher than the 360 cases recorded by the Ministry in 2022 (Tabi, 2023).

While awareness-raising programs and campaigns have had some success in creating change (Tabi, 2023), key stakeholders still generally agreed that there had been increases in the incidence of violence against children over the past five years, and that prevalence would not have materially changed since the 2013 Demographic and Health Survey (discussed further below under "Violent discipline in the home"):

> *Without talking about specific numbers, we know that the rates are high, and we know that it takes years for change to happen in terms of knowledge, attitude, and practice. So we can assume that it's still at a very high rate (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *We can assume that it's very much at the same level but also increasing because of the different issues that have come up that are impacting children and families (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

According to both children (aged 12-17) and adult child protection stakeholders who participated in recent research commissioned by Save the Children, this violence against children in Vanuatu takes place in a range of different contexts, including: the home, school, community and public spaces, as well as increasingly online (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). Of these, violence in the home was reported to be the most common, with rates of school bullying also significant and sexual violence was the most prominent and worrying form of violence, especially for girls (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). Participants also reported multiple and often overlapping forms of violence occurring in a single location, as well as "spill-over" in the impacts of violence to other contexts (e.g., violence in the hope affecting children's behaviour at school). In support of key stakeholder estimations of the high prevalence of violence, children from all backgrounds in that study reported being exposed to some form of violence on an almost daily basis (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023).

a) Violent discipline in the home

In the home, both girls and boys are subject to emotional and physical violence as a form of discipline from their male and female caregivers and, in some contexts, older siblings. The 2013 Demographic and Health Survey found that 83% of boys and 84% of girls between the ages of 2 and 14 were experiencing some form of violent discipline, with 77% of children experiencing emotional violence, 72% experiencing physical violence, and 36% experiencing severe physical violence (Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014).

The findings of the current study seem to indicate that the situation remains largely unchanged, with stakeholders identifying physical discipline in the home as a common and continuing child protection concern. One key informant described violence against children as including "*shaking or throwing, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or choking, pushing or kicking, inappropriate restraint or false imprisonment, misusing medication, fabricating or including an illness or ill health*" (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female). Others noted:

In Vanuatu, the majority of families use physical force to discipline their kids at home. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)

Violent discipline is seen as something that has immediate rewards in terms of a change of behaviour. And so, you know, that's very much practised in the home. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

The father angrily hit him [four-year-old son] and threw him to the seashore and brutally removed all his teeth, and burned him. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)

[the victim's] aunt sends some boys in their community to punch him, and I ask [his] aunt why she did it, and she said that he was doing wrong things. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

The disaggregated data on child and caregiver characteristics show slight variations amongst population groups. The highest levels of severe physical violence were associated with poverty, with experiences of severe physical punishment being reported among 43% of children from families in the lowest wealth quintile (Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014). With respect to age, data suggest that caregiver use of violent discipline is slightly greater amongst younger children (aged 2-9 years), compared with children aged 10-14 years. With respect to location, data also show caregiver use of violent discipline is slightly greater amongst children in rural areas (72%) compared to urban areas (70%). Children aged 5-9 in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to severe physical punishment. It is possible that this difference reflects a confounding by caregiver educational attainment – that is, caregivers in rural areas may be less likely to have higher educational attainment, which is also associated with decreased use of violent discipline and therefore underlies the slightly greater use of violent discipline in rural areas. Statistical analysis of the full data set would be required to explore these interactions further.

b) Other forms of violence in the home and community

Neglect

Neglect was raised by participants in KIIs and FGDs in connection with a myriad of factors. Multiple participants described neglect in connection with a lack of adult supervision in the home (sometimes due to parents working) as well as poverty. Participants also identified children with disabilities, adopted children, those with single parents, and those with drug-using parents as particularly at risk of neglect, although they noted that neglect might take different forms in these cases. For instance, neglect of children with disability was described as meaning that the parents "*locking them inside, not giving them food or bathing them and not caring if they are out in the street begging*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). On the other hand, in connection to single parenthood and drug use, neglect was described as "*when a single mother takes the child to her own parents, single mothers in town they go and drink kava, lock the child in the house and go out to drink kava*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). In connection with poverty, neglect was described as including failure to pay a child's school fees and failure to provide children with adequate clothing, and adopted children were described as particularly at risk of emotional neglect.

Street/Community Violence

As an extension of the association between parental supervision and child safety, multiple participants in FGDs expressed particular fears regarding the risks (presumably of stranger violence, although this was often left unarticulated) posed to their children while those children were in spaces without caregiver oversight – such as on the way to/from school, at community events or when out in the community in general with peers.

One key informant also described the risks attached to children who participate in "juvenile groups" which "create problems and are subjected to violence" – potentially from peers, although again, the details were not further clarified (KII, National Stakeholder, Male). Participation in these groups was described as being driven by poverty, a lack of education and consequent unemployment.

Sexual Violence

Whereas the use of violent discipline and neglect in Vanuatu appears to impact both boys and girls, with relatively small differences observed, the prevalence of other forms of violence is more gendered and uni-directional, with girls and women rarely perpetrators (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). Available data suggest that girls are more concerned about sexual violence, and boys are more concerned about psychological and physical violence (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023).

Sexual violence was the most commonly-raised child protection concern – particularly for girls - in the caregiver FGDs (who were mostly based in rural and remote locations), and was also commonly discussed by KII participants. Key informants tended to think that prevalence was high and increasing due to the high (and potentially also increasing) vulnerability of girls. Conversely, reporting was said to be both low and decreasing, which had been identified by the Ministry of Justice and Community Services as an issue requiring action. While there is a lack of recent data for both boys and girls, prior studies have round that 30% of women have experienced sexual abuse before 15 years of age (Vanuatu Women's Centre, 2016).

Recent research notes that justice sector stakeholders are particularly concerned about sexual violence perpetrated by older boys against younger girls, including incest (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). Participants in FGDs and KIIS focused on adult perpetrators of sexual violence against girls, both known and unknown to the victims. In terms of incest, key informants named fathers, stepfathers and uncles as common perpetrators. Other potential perpetrators commonly discussed in KIIs and FGDs included neighbours or other known adults, as well as strangers committing violence against children in scenarios where the child's parents were not present to supervise (e.g.: where parents had left their children in the care of other adults while migrating for work, or when children were on the way to school or otherwise out in the community without their parents).

Child Marriage

Child marriage was also commonly identified as a risk in KIIs and FGDs, particularly for girls, where marriages are decided by the fathers of the bride and groom, and/or the village chief, and girl brides, in particular,, have no choice. Some stakeholders noted that grooms were often much older than brides.

> *Early-age marriage happens because the parents want to exchange culture because of or for the family's land or financial security, so the girl becomes the victim. Maybe the boy or the man they want to marry her off to is the land owner, or maybe he is the chief's son, so the parents of the girl will try to marry her off to the land owner or to the chief's son for their land or property security. It is like the trading of goods. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *They [couldn't] even talk; they were not able to speak their minds. They were 15 years old and were terrified. The parents told them, 'I gave birth to you; you do what I say.' So they did. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

KII participants described child marriage in Vanuatu as a decreasing but persisting practice. This is consistent with data from the caregiver survey, which found that 44% of caregivers (16/36) thought that children worried about being forced to marry. Qualitative research has reported an increased autonomy of young people in the selection of partners (Servy, 2020). The 2013 Demographic Health Survey found that 21% of girls in Vanuatu married before 18 years, compared to 4.6% of boys (Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014) and updated survey data are needed to ascertain to what extent child marriage has declined.

> *Regarding child marriage, I can say that it is decreasing a lot because of awareness, religions and an increase in education…these practices were very effective in the past when people were not yet educated, but now that education and awareness have reached the majority of the remote areas, people realize that it is [not] worth it at all and it's against the law (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

The system of arranged marriage has changed over the years due to education, awareness and social media (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown)

Beyond these accounts of child marriage being increasingly restricted to certain remote villages or islands, the presence of cultural change surrounding child marriage demonstrated the unanimous disapproval of child marriage among stakeholders, as well as at least some caregivers. However, cultural acceptance still remained to the extent of reporting behaviours, with the majority of caregiver survey participants reporting that they would not report known instances of child marriage to the formal authorities (e.g. the police or social welfare officers), preferring instead to speak to village or church leaders – which presents a child protection risk where these leaders are themselves involved in or otherwise supportive of the practice.

Child Labour

The 2013 Demographic Health Survey found that 21% of children aged between 5 and 11 years in Vanuatu were engaged in child labour activities (at least one hour of economic activity or 28 hours of domestic work per week), comprising mostly involvement in economic activities – possibly in connection with family enterprises. Among children between 12 and 14, only 0.7% met the child labour threshold (at least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week), although the survey report notes that children who were involved in hazardous labour activities for durations lower than the respective thresholds would not have been captured under those statistics (Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014).

In terms of demographic differences, the report notes that more young girls were involved in child labour activities than their male counterparts (21.6% compared to 19.7%), a trend that was reversed in the 12-14 age bracket (0.1% compared to 1.3%). Moreover, children from households in the lowest wealth quintile were more likely to be involved in child labour activities (26% compared to 16% for children from households in the highest wealth quintile), as were children from rural areas (Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014).

Child labour was briefly identified as a child protection concern by participants but not discussed in much detail. The majority of caregiver survey respondents (64% or 23/2or 23/36) thought that children worried about being forced to work to some extent. In line with the 2013 statistics, one key informant identified poverty as a driver for children selling their labour very cheaply. This also suggests that prevalence may have grown in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and successive natural disasters.

The US Department of Labor has noted the weak structural protections in place to guard against child labour. One major system gap is the limited coordination between the relevant agencies, which spans communication processes and collaboration mechanisms, as well as issues caused by disparate priorities and resource commitments. There is also a grave lack of data collection that makes understanding the prevalence and features of child labour in Vanuatu very difficult (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), including trafficking

CSEC, including trafficking, has been identified as a risk faced by both girls and boys in the Pacific, with a potentially greater risk for girls – noting that a recent survey of child protection stakeholders across the Pacific reported that 68% of trafficking victims were girls (ECPAT International, 2019b). While there is limited information on the prevalence of CSEC or trafficking or case numbers in Vanuatu, the US Department of State stated in its 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report (U.S Department of State, 2023) that:

Reports show taxi drivers may facilitate the exploitation of children in commercial sex. Forced labour and child sex trafficking occur on fishing vessels in Vanuatu. Foreign tourists aboard boats reportedly approach remote ni-Vanuatu communities and offer money in exchange for marriage with underage girls as a ploy for short-term sexual exploitation. Locals onshore, acting as recruiters, also reportedly take underage girls aboard vessels and subject them to commercial sexual exploitation by foreign

workers, often for weeks at a time. The local recruiters, and in some instances, the families, receive payment for recruiting and transporting the girls to the boats. (U.S Department of State, 2023)

The report added that the vulnerability of girls to trafficking was further increased by their limited ability to seek justice against traffickers.

There is also evidence in the literature about CSEC that is not connected with trafficking. In its State Party Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016), the Government of Vanuatu noted that a peer education activity involving 90 female sex workers in Port Vila reported that 9% of the sex workers in attendance were between the ages of 14 and 19. It also noted that evidence of young people engaging in commercial or transactional sex work (i.e. in exchange for goods, clothes, food and transport) had been found in Port Vila, Malakula and Tanna. Further, while not focused on children, a recent study of sex work in Vanuatu (Burry, 2019) noted a "lack of parental support" as a reason for younger women entering sex work, as well as the practice of men aged between 18 and 25 soliciting their younger female peers to engage in commercial sex – which indicates at least a strong possibility of the commercial exploitation of underaged girls.

The two KII stakeholders who discussed CSEC in Vanuatu also focused on the exploitation of girls, which they associated very strongly with poverty as a driver. One stakeholder noted that many girls from broken homes or those who were experiencing COVID-driven poverty were selling their bodies "very cheap[ly] for money" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). Another added that cases of girls being pushed by poverty into engaging in transactional sex or other forms of forced sex were contributing to an overall increase in sexual violence.

One additional item of potential note for future research, programming, and perhaps work in detection is the overlap between CSEC and child marriage, which can be seen in both the use of marriage as a ploy for short-term sexual exploitation (bolded and referenced in the above quote), as well the explicit connection made between child marriage and economic benefits by many study participants – i.e. parents (predominantly fathers) agreeing to give their daughters in child marriage in exchange for financial benefits such as land and other material benefits.

c) *Violence in Schools*

Study participants discussed a number of types of violence connected with schools. Caregivers in FGDs discussed the risk of violence to children on the way to and from school extensively and – interestingly – exclusively. Key informants also discussed physical discipline by teachers, while peer violence (including school bullying) received the least discussion.

Violence Associated with Journey To/From School

Children's exposure to violence on the journey to and from school was one of the major concerns among caregiver participants in both surveys and FGDs. Survey participants assigned the journey to/from school the second-lowest safety rating of all spaces behind the online setting, and FGD participants discussed the risk extensively, as did key stakeholders. There are limited prevalence data on actual violence experienced by children in this setting – the Child Protection Baseline Study in Vanuatu found that 15% of 16-17-year-olds had been inappropriately touched by an adult or peer in the last month - this figure was said to include some cases that took place on the way to and from school, there is no disaggregation (Thuso Limited, 2022).

The risk of sexual violence (a form of violence which in itself also received a lot of participant attention, per above) received a lot of emphasis from stakeholders and caregivers, with one informant stating that:

Walking home exposes [children] to abuses, such as they can be picked up by strangers. There are history of children, especially girls jumping off running vehicles because of attempted rape or sexual molestation on these public vehicles. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

The same stakeholder shared the following illustrative anecdote:

> *There is that case from Epi Island where the adult man tricked a 9 year old by offering her a lolly pop when she was on her way to school. As soon as she reached out to take the lolly, he pulled her into the bushes and raped her. There are similar cases, so this is serious, and we need to deal with these issues fast. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Caregivers in FGDs also described other types of violence, such as severe physical violence stemming from:

- Community-level conflicts: *"Children also worried about their safety in the village due to land dispute with their neighbour village that they might get kill and also their safety to school."* (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown),

- Verbal abuse: *"As a kid, I wouldn't feel safe at all due to the fact that I was called some nasty name or language against me on my way to school"* (FGD, Caregiver, Female); and

- Sexual and other types of harassment from others in the community (with gender identified as making girls particularly vulnerable): *"Especially in the village, children are mainly worried about their road to school because they have to walk a long distance before they reach the school so on their way there are boys consuming marijuana who threaten them on their way by asking for money, food and especially they like to threaten girls on their way to school"* (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown).

It was observed that the company of peers provided some protection against some of these forms of violence (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown).

Caregiver concerns regarding the journey to school tied in strongly with the general attitudes of apprehension towards uncontrolled spaces and the lack of parental supervision discussed above in connection with violence in the community. Caregivers themselves made the explicit link between danger and lack of supervision, stating that:

> *When we talk about school, school is a safe environment, but in between the area of school and home, there is an area that we parent overlooked it, and in that area this is where our kids have got involved in different activities that we parents are not aware of. The area that I am referring to is the streets; streets this is where we parents don't know what our children are getting themselves into, so in this middle area between school and home is the area where our children have learned or experienced new teaching that it wasn't being taught by us parents but by outsiders. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

> *For the safety of our children, I recommend that each school should have its own school buses because, with that, we will know that our children are going straight to school and coming straight back home, and with that, we will know that our children are a safe, but right now what we are going through as parents we don't know if our kids are going to school or they are running around the streets involving in different kinds of activities that we parents are not aware of. So the area between school is the area where most of our children got in a lot, like instead of coming straight home they are still somewhere doing something that me as a parent not even being aware of what my kids are doing, so that's why I recommend that each school should have school buses for the safety of our children to avoid problems like sexual abuses etc. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

Key stakeholders tended to agree that the solution was increased parent supervision, expressing censure towards parents who failed to pick their children up from school or otherwise monitor their movements in the community.

Teacher violence

There is limited data relating to violence from teachers, with no comprehensive prevalence surveys found in the literature review. In Vanuatu, research conducted by Save the Children's Seif Schools program reported that while the use of physical punishment was banned in 2001, it continues in some schools, with teacher

attitudes reflecting the normalisation of violence as a form of violence as discussed below under Section 9.1.2. Of caregivers who responded to a survey, 83% (59/71) identified physical and humiliating punishments as threats to children's safety within the school as a concern (Thuso Limited, 2022).

Responses from stakeholders supported the literature findings, noting that the use of violent discipline (both in terms of physical violence and abusive language) in schools continues to be common, with little concern for or enforcement of the relevant legislation and policy banning the practice (although one stakeholder noted that the Ministry of Education in Training has been involved in initiatives to address this). In this context, it is notable that none of the caregivers in FGDs discussed violent discipline by teachers as a concern at all, which one key informant attributed to widespread social acceptance (also discussed further below under Section 9.1.2):

> *Violent discipline is seen as something that has immediate rewards in terms of a change of behaviour. And so, you know, that's very much practised at the home. But also, you know, parents expect that teachers will do it because a child is naughty. So that's how you discipline them, you know. Hit them on the hand with a ruler, or you know you do something else, but it's almost an expectation. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

The stakeholder did describe some signs of social change, adding that *"I hear more and more cases where parents are going into the school environment to, you know. Talk to a teacher that's done something to their child in that sense."* On the other hand, the same stakeholder noted that in certain areas, the social status and authority afforded to teachers acted to prevent challenges to the continued practice of violent discipline:

> *In a lot of cases, and in rural communities in Panama, so teachers are almost like equal to nurses and doctors in terms of the respect that you would give them. And so you don't question that authority. It's a given, and teachers know what's good for your child. So you respect that. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

By extension, the respect accorded to teachers may be acting as a potential barrier to the enforcement of laws and policies surrounding violent discipline in schools.

A different stakeholder also added that sexual abuse by teachers was an additional risk to children, with known cases of sexual relationships between teachers and students:

> *At schools, there are some interactions of intimate relationships between teachers and students who have intimate sexual relationships between each other or students having intimate relationships between each other. In most cases, they are expelled from school, which leads to emotional violence. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

It is unclear whether the reference to expulsion from school relates only to the exposure of sexual relationships between students or equally to student-teacher relationships. Both are concerning for their implications regarding the punishment of victims of sexual abuse and the potential for thus deterring reporting – especially if the same stakeholder is correct in observing that instances of sexual abuse in schools are increasing.

Peer-to-peer violence

The 2016 Global School-based Student Health Survey estimated that 50.4% of students in Vanuatu had experienced school bullying, with a slightly higher prevalence among boys (57.4%) than girls (46.2%). Prevalence also appeared to decrease slightly with age (52.6% for students aged 13-15 compared to 47.5% for those aged 16-17) (WHO, 2011-2017). There is also anecdotal evidence from Vanuatu of a gendered dimension to bullying, with male perpetrators more commonly bullying girls, including through physical and emotional violence, both in and outside the classroom (Thuso Limited, 2022).

Given the relatively high prevalence of bullying indicated by the statistics, there was limited data from the KIIs and FGDs. Apart from risks attaching to specific groups (i.e. children with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ children), only one stakeholder expressed concern about bullying in schools, and peer bullying was not mentioned by any of the caregivers in FGDs.

As discussed above, under teacher violence, the discovery of peer sexual abuse by school authorities may result in the expulsion of the students involved.

d) Online violence

Being a relatively new area of focus, there is limited data related to violence experienced by children online. A 2013 study involving one Port Vila school found widespread internet use among children and corresponding reports of online bullying (with children involved both as perpetrators and victims), cybercrime and being contacted by strangers (Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services, 2016). Responses from all groups of caregivers supported the literature's finding of widespread and increasing access to digital devices and the internet among children, and the survey respondents tended to agree that children were worried about being abused or bullied online to some degree. Caregivers who responded to the survey reported that they were most concerned about children's safety online compared to other settings. However, most of the concerns voiced by adult participants in KIIs and FGDs centred on risks relating to accessing inappropriate content rather than any risks involving contact with other people online. Only one stakeholder raised cyberbullying as a concern, and no stakeholders discussed more extreme forms of online violence, perhaps reflecting the emerging nature of child protection awareness in this space.

e) Impacts

The literature describes a range of short- and long-term or lifelong impacts resulting from childhood experiences of violence, affecting children's physical health, as well as their social, emotional, neurological and developmental wellbeing – noting that these facets are mutually-influencing and that negative impacts to one can influence the others. In terms of severe forms of violence, child protection stakeholders have reported instances where neglect and abuse have resulted in long-term or permanent disability (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023).

In terms of mental health, child protection stakeholders in an earlier study identified violence as a contributing factor in the increase of youth mental illness and suicide – a link that stakeholders and one caregiver in this study also made (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023).

One stakeholder reported that:

> There have been cases where some children could not take emotional abuse, so they committed suicide. They live with emotional abuse, and many of them don't act or try to find help, so they live with this until such time when they cannot cope so they will commit suicide (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

One caregiver related their own experiences of neglect as an adopted child and described the way it contributed to social disengagement and suicidal thoughts:

> Being a child that got adopted, I can say it's not easy, and I have faced a lot where there is favouritism in the family, meaning if you were adopted, they don't care if you have a present for Christmas or not, they think poorly of you. And with that, when I reached teenage age, all I could think about was creating or making problems, and with that when I reached the age of being a teenager I didn't care because due to the fact that there was favouritism in the family and with me being adopted, they didn't care about my safety and protection, which sometimes made me feel like committing suicide (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

9.1.2 How are recent factors, including climate change, digitisation and COVID-19, changing the dynamics and behaviours that drive such violence occurring in the home, school, community and online? (RQ1.1)

a) Socio-cultural norms and practices relating to gender and violence

Socio-cultural and religious norms and practices set different standards of behaviour or roles for men and women, including in relation to the use of violence, and are referred to as gender norms. These gender norms and practices include standards of behaviour and roles for men and women, with men holding power, authority and/or responsibility for enforcing these gendered standards for women and children, including through violence against women and children, which is accepted and normalised (Feinstein et al., 2022; Homan et al., 2019; Naughton-Watt et al., 2023; Pacific Community, 2009).

Adherence to gendered norms of behaviour was evident throughout FGD caregiver responses, indicated by comments regarding the place of men in the household: *"Fathers have to play their role in the community in terms of our custom and culture, and fathers be respected when talking to their children"* (FGD, Caregiver, Female), as well as comments attributing chief responsibility for preventing sexual assault to women, through adherence to codes of modesty:

> *In our village or community, we must highly consider that chiefs must think strongly of girls and mothers in the village to dress up properly to stop rape, sexual abuse in our community (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

> *Women inside our community should dress up properly around their homes and during community activities (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

Both the literature and the study's findings explicitly linked these norms to continuing violence against children in Vanuatu. Vanuatu's previous Child Protection Policy notes that culturally-embedded gender inequality drives the normalisation of and inter-generational nature of violence against women and children (Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services, 2016). Stakeholders agreed, with caregiver survey respondents fairly emphatically agreeing that the low social, economic and political status of women made children less safe – with 22 out of 35 (63%) stating that it made children less safe to some degree.

Research from across the Pacific also notes that men's violence against women and children is further supported by the priority given to community or social relations over individual rights (Hermkens, 2013; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016). This can be seen through both child marriage practices and through cultural practices, which are used to respond to cases of violence when they come to the attention of the community (discussed below).

Child Marriage

Stakeholders' explanations of the main reasons for child marriage provide further illustration of the gender norms discussed in the above section, specifically the authority of men in decision-making and the prioritisation of collective or men's interests above those of women and children. Stakeholders reported that relationship-building between families, communities and other cultural reasons drove child marriage:

- *"Because the parents want to exchange culture"* (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

- *"To strengthen the relationship between two families … and following the chief's advice"* (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)

- *"To stop the war happening all the time between the two clans"* (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Participants in the current study chiefly discussed child marriage primarily in connection with culture (*"This is a common form of abuse in Vanuatu which is more like a traditional way of marriage, and it's a tradition that is passed down from one generation to another."* (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)), which itself is of

course not entirely without financial considerations, as discussed further below (Burn & Evenhuis, 2014). However, the link with culture is notable insofar that participants attributed the decreasing prevalence of the practice to increasing awareness and education surrounding the illegality of child marriage rather than poverty alleviation or general improvement in socio-economic conditions:

> *In Vanuatu, our customs and traditions are very strong, especially in rural areas as I mention earlier several years or decades ago, there were quite a number of child marriages because they didn't know about the laws that when we got married, we sign a paper and all that …This is still happening in some remote areas or custom villages but is also decreasing because of access of education and awareness. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

Norms regarding violence against children

In addition to the influence of community resolution practices, discussed below under Section 9.2.1(i), many caregivers and stakeholders also discussed the role of taboo, shame and other social pressures in discouraging children from disclosing their experiences to adults. Some discussed the role of social authority structures and respect for authority, stating that "*most kids are afraid to talk to their parents or relatives about being abused, maybe because growing up we were trained not to disrespect our elders*" (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown). Another agreed, stating that children would not report violence to their parents "*because they are in a certain age where they fear their parents most and also our culture for respecting parents unless it is different being in a home that everyone opens up. And sometimes, being a child, it is very difficult to express it because people will label you as very disrespectful*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). One caregiver suggested that this association between reporting and disrespect of elders could be addressed in awareness-raising and educational programming.

Many participants also described the negative social consequences that often attached to children whose experiences of violence became known, including stigma, community censure, and even falling out with family, observing that the fear of this was a strong disincentive for children to disclose their experiences to adults. One stakeholder noted that this social risk is decreasing rates of reporting for sexual violence against children, according to preliminary findings of research involving Vanuatu's CSOs and the Ministry of Justice and Community Services.

Some examples of participant responses are listed here:

- *"Sometimes, she can accidentally get pregnant, and **people will know**. So normally sometimes children don't want to report it because they are intimidated, which makes them scared."* (KII, National Stakeholder, Male – emphasis mine)

- *"In the case of a boy who got raped … he is scared to tell someone about what happened … it will only bring [him] a lot of problems."* (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

- *"When children don't disclose their experience of sexual abuse to others, it's because they are afraid, ashamed to tell, **feel so guilty that people will know that they are involved in such kind of abuse** and they don't know what response they will get from their parents."* (KII, National Stakeholder, Male – emphasis mine)

- *"A lot of the cases [of sexual abuse] obviously are happening within families, within the immediate family, also within the extended family. And often, you know, this is an issue of shame, and it's taboo. And people don't talk about it because of the shame that it could bring to your family, but also because it's a small, close-knitted community."* (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Participants also noted that, as a result, exposure could easily lead to conflict within the extended family, and one caregiver described the impact of this on her own likely reporting behaviours, stating that if she had a daughter who was raped while she herself and her husband had migrated for work:

The decision that I will make is for her not to tell anyone about that issue until her father comes back so we can go to the police to address the issue or file a case. The reason why I said that is because if my daughter tells any of our family members, they are going to judge her, and on top of that, they might beat her up and say all nasty things about her. And another thing is that she will only feel comfortable around the right people in her life. And with that issue of her telling our family members, it can cause a big family argument and can cause family separation. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

By contrast, one stakeholder observed that perpetrators (particularly of sexual crimes, which are furthermore associated with social taboo) often remain unpunished and that only the victims were subject to backlash and additional emotional violence from the community.

Normalisation of violence and lack of community awareness

As described above, violence against children can be seen as part of the intersection of gender norms relating to men's and women's behaviour and roles and to the normalisation of men's violence against women and children in the household. Evidence presented in the literature review suggests that women's violence against children is part of this gendered violence. In line with the literature, stakeholders in KIIs overwhelmingly pointed to the normalisation of violence in the community as a persisting driver of violence against children in Vanuatu in relation to children witnessing violence (and particularly violence against women) at home, acceptance of the use of violent discipline against children in the home, as well as children's relative status and the impacts of that on reporting.

In regards to children witnessing violence in their environments, stakeholders stated that:

Community or family itself can be another driver. When a child is raised in a violence community or home, when he grows up, he'll be violent too because he thinks that it is a tradition in the family or community. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)

Children are growing up, and they are seeing this around them, and they're not just witnesses, but they're also impacted and affected by it within their homes. And so they're very much surrounded by this culture of violence, and that it's acceptable. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

There is a high rate of violence at home that is not reported because it is a norm. This is affecting our children a lot! (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Most caregiver survey respondents agreed that acceptance of violence in the community (including as a way to resolve conflict) made children less safe.

KII stakeholders also discussed the widespread community acceptance of violent discipline as a driver for violence against children.

In Vanuatu, the majority of the families use physical force to discipline their kids at home, and they don't even see anything wrong with it because it's a practice that they themselves did go through with their parents when they were kids. If a child is raised in a house where discipline is used as a physical force, then that child will grow up using the same teachings. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)

And it's part of how you deal with issues within your home, in your private sphere as well as in the public sphere. And in a way, violent discipline can be seen by community members, as highlighted in the discussions with CSOs, as having, you know, clear and immediate effects for us. Non-violent discipline can be seen as being less effective or maybe entirely ineffective. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

One stakeholder discussed an additional consequence of children's low reporting is that when children do report experiences of violence, they are often not believed by adults – including their parents – "*because*

they are kids and most people don't take kids seriously when they are being abused and try to confront adults", adding that adults often believe that "*kids can say unnecessary things*" (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female).

Earlier research commissioned by Save the Children in Vanuatu found the existence of a chronic lack of awareness and social sensitisation regarding the rights of women, children and people with disabilities (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). The findings of this study also strongly supported this, with stakeholders observing that the lack of awareness among children about what constitutes abuse or otherwise unacceptable behaviour towards them and how to respond to such incidents is increasing vulnerability and thus enabling violence against children to continue:

> *Children themselves are not informed or educated about these forms of abuse, which makes it difficult for them to define that it is an abuse, so the lack of information and confidence to speak up against an abuse makes it easy for them to be abused. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *Lack of education can also be one of the main drivers of sexual violence. If there is proper education and awareness, victims of sexual violence would know exactly where they can find help. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

However, some participants observed that educational programming had been effective in changing this – particularly in relation to child marriage (discussed above), but also other forms of violence against children:

> *In the past, we could not inform or educate our children about sex education, and sex is a big taboo to talk about, so it leaves children more exposed to sexual abuse. In the present time now, more people are educated, parents are more educated, and there are many programs that are coming into the country, so it advances [children's understandings of] violence. The children educate themselves; they hear about it in school, and they learn it from the media there they learn. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

> *Awareness inside communities helps those age groups have more understanding of the abuses; thus, they will know where to go if they become the victim. (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown)*

b) *Socio-economic status and its gendered implications*

The use of physical violence against children is also associated with the extent of poverty in communities in Vanuatu, with parental use of physical violence in the past month ranging between the poorest and richest quintiles from 74-66% (Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014).

Limited data emerged from the situational analysis on the pathways between poverty and violence against children in Vanuatu. In line with the literature, the majority of survey respondents thought that poverty made children less safe, and the qualitative data suggested four pathways.

First, caregivers in FGDs connected poverty with failure to meet children's basic needs and, therefore, neglect. Recent research in Vanuatu has pointed to the connections between neglect of children and parental detachment as contributing to violence against children in the home – this may be due to both a lack of time due to poverty and low awareness of the importance of emotional support in children's development linked to education discussed below (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023).

Second, poverty creates household stress, impacting family relationships and leading to household conflict. Emerging findings from a study in Vanuatu reported that children "*identified financial stress or disagreement within the family about the use of resources*" as contributing to physical violence (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023, p. 9).

Third, poverty and limited resources were associated with child marriage, with girls being forced to marry so that their families could gain *"land security purposes"* (Survey, National Stakeholder, Female).

Finally, poverty is associated with a lack of educational opportunities for both children and parents, which may put children at risk of child marriage and/or child labour. Household survey data show that tertiary education of caregivers is associated with reduced use of physical violence against children in the home (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023; Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014). Similarly, completing high school was protective against experiencing IPV during pregnancy in Vanuatu (McKelvie et al., 2022).

c) Migration and displacement

Globally, migration has been described as a driver of violence against children (Maternowska et al., 2020). Migration for economic or, as discussed below, climate-related reasons can resulting abrupt changes in children's living arrangements, which caregivers and stakeholders in the current study both associated with increased risk of violence against children and neglect (Maternowska et al., 2020). Survey participants strongly associated both child and parent migration, as well as moving away from the community, as creating risk for children. Stakeholders in KIIs connected economic migration (primarily from rural areas, and often to Australia and New Zealand) with violence stemming from children being brought under the care of extended family:

> Village kids face different violence at home. Many parents who are in the RSE Scheme are leaving their children under the care of aunties, uncles, grandmothers etc. There are a lot of abuses happening to these children every day (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

> Also, now we have so many people going for SWP in Australia and New Zealand, which creates so many broken homes and children become victims. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)

> RSE works that have increased in Vanuatu has caused a lot of broken homes, and with that, kids being wondered around made them fall down in these types of areas where they suffer alone and make them question their parents to concern towards them due to this issues a kid wouldn't feel safe a lot, and due to that, a kid can lose his/her protection in broken homes. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

Caregivers also strongly associate the migration of parents for work with loss of oversight over children and, consequently, a general decrease in child safety.

d) Climate change

Two pathways were discussed in relation to climate change and violence against children in Vanuatu: temporary displacement and longer-term changes to household poverty and food insecurity.

Study findings aligned with the research, particularly in relation to the risks posed to child safety by temporary displacement and the failure of services and infrastructure, including education. Caregiver survey respondents demonstrated strong consensus that living in evacuation centres and the general isolation of the community due to natural disasters negatively impacted children's safety. One stakeholder also described the risks posed to whole families living in foreign contexts following this displacement, where their unfamiliarity with local customs and cultures exposes them to conflict and, therefore, violence:

> As a kid, you lost your house, you are homeless, you must relocate, and you relocate to another island, but you don't know their custom and culture. You make mistakes that can lead you to many cases of abuse. Just like the Amae people, about 14,000 people were evicted to Maevo, and they faced a lot of abuses while on the island. Their children were vulnerable to violence, and their protection was at stake. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

In discussing the increased risk of violence to children caused by disruption of services during emergency periods, one child protection stakeholder observed that the general resilience of Vanuatu's service systems

was being strongly challenged by the frequency of intense, successive and sometimes overlapping disruptions, both in terms of natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic. Existing system gaps (including in terms of the geographical reach of services) have been exacerbated by the effects of natural disasters through the constant need to spend resources on rebuilding, which also impedes work on further systems strengthening.

Other stakeholders highlighted the disruptions to education in particular, noting the uneven impacts between urban centres and rural areas. For example, whereas schools in major centres are able to harness online methods for continued educational delivery, national reliance on this as an alternative particularly advantages children in rural areas who "don't have a laptop or mobile phone", and who are perhaps more susceptible to complete loss of network access once the infrastructure is damaged (KII, National Stakeholder, Male). It was also noted that emergency resources are not always shared equally between schools.

Weather-related disasters also have an economic impact, which affects violence against children. Economic analysis suggested that 4,000 people had slipped below the poverty line following Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu (2015) (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021). Given women's more limited access to financial and other capital, the impact was likely disproportionately high for women.

Second, household food insecurity and poverty may increase, exacerbating existing drivers of violence. Research indicates that families affected by natural disasters, especially those in lower socio-economic conditions, face greater social and economic pressures and that families which are more vulnerable to loss of food and shelter commit violence against children more frequently (Biswas A., 2010; Sriskandarajah V., 2015). While study participants did not discuss this topic at length, overall, their responses provided support to the literature findings. Caregivers in the survey agreed that food security and water scarcity both posed some degree of risk to child safety, and caregivers in FGDs noted that children's food security at home and at school had already been disrupted by the effects of climate change on crop yield, as well as the disruptions of cyclones and COVID-19.

e) COVID-19

Study participants did not discuss COVID-19 at length, and then only in relation to economic impacts and the closure of schools in terms of disruption to education (as discussed above under "climate change"). This could be due to Vanuatu's particular experience of COVID-19, especially in contrast with experiences of cyclones, with the same stakeholder observing that:

> *COVID-19 for Vanuatu was slightly different. We got Covid quite late, and so we only got COVID-19 last year, when the rest of the world had COVID-19 for a couple of years, and the border was closed for much of that time. We were really in an ideal world where we were in a bubble and very much protected.*

> *I feel like it had a lesser impact on the lives of children in Vanuatu in terms of child protection compared to, you know, for instance, the cyclones that we've had at the compounding impact of that on children, and on child protection. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

f) Digitisation

There has been a significant improvement in internet accessibility in the Pacific in recent years with the completion of undersea cables, with use of the internet amongst adults increasing by over 200% in Vanuatu since 2015 (World Bank, 2023a). Research reported increasing use of the internet amongst young people (Third et al., 2020; UNFPA & IPPF, 2021), including apps like Youtube, Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook and Instagram in Vanuatu (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023).

With respect to internet usage, participants in the primary data collection reported widespread access to the internet and digital devices by children of all ages, with predictably greater access in urban areas and more limited access in some rural and remote locations, noting that levels of connectivity vary even in remote locations. In terms of frequency of use, a majority of caregiver survey participants reported that their children had regular access to an internet device (16 compared to 8 who did not), and there was quite a wide range in average weekly use, spanning 1 or less ("only when she needs it to do her research" (Survey, Caregiver, Female)) to 28 hours. Reports were fairly evenly divided between children using the internet for 1-5 hours a week and 9-28 hours a week, as well as whether children used the internet by themselves or with family - although it should be noted that there was no information collected on the ages of these children.

With respect to perceived risks, the findings of the current study were very much in line with prior research in other Pacific countries, with children and their parents/carers, with both groups citing exposure to "inappropriate content" (primarily via social media) as their key concern (Third et al., 2020). In KIIs and FGDs, all but one stakeholder exclusively discussed the content risks of internet use. Participants expressed concern about sexualised, violent and otherwise inappropriate content influencing children's behaviours, with some specifically linking exposure to increased youth crime, drug-use and sexual activity (including sexual abuse), as well as changing moral and cultural values. Participants were also concerned about the potential for children to become addicted to internet use, as well as increased use among adults and children, leaving less time for meaningful parent-child engagement and parenting in the home.

With respect to contact risks, of all the participants, only two[22] stakeholders discussed contact risks of internet use (that is, risks relating to engaging with other people in online spaces) – with one naming cyberbullying as an issue that children had reported in small-scale studies, and the other noting in-survey that the internet is being used as a tool to facilitate child marriage, in terms of locating potential partners. Similarly, no participants discussed more extreme contact risks, such as offline violence or rape, grooming, trafficking and other forms of exploitation. This could be due to limited awareness (noting that children in a recent Vanuatu study similarly did not discuss online violence (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023)), but merits further validation with stakeholders.

In the face of these risks, there is a lack of comprehensive education in online risk-management strategies for both children and parents. Stakeholders in the current study were similarly concerned about the ability of parents to control the internet use of their children and called for more awareness-raising and educational programs in both schools and the community. As noted by one stakeholder about their own organisation, it is possible that programming focus on this area has been disrupted and delayed by the need for government and child protection organisations to respond to recent and successive natural disasters and COVID-19.

9.1.3 How are the risks and protective factors associated with such violence, including but not limited to gender, disability and age changing? (RQ1.2)

Given the scarcity of existing research on risk and protective factors associated with violence against children in Vanuatu, it was difficult to gauge how they might be changing in operation in recent years. While the observations offered by study participants themselves in this regard were also limited, they were able to provide a fuller picture of the ways in which different risk and protective factors interact with each other to impact children. Participants were able to offer insights into the influence of disability, disclosure of violence, drug and alcohol use, gender and sexual diversity, location (i.e. urban/rural) and living arrangements (i.e. separation from parents or other types of co-location with extended family) on violence against children. For age, education, experiences of family violence, gender and single-parent families or family breakdown, the

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[22] One KII participant stated that Facebook increased risks of sexual abuse, but did not clearly attribute that to either content or contact risks.

responses largely affirmed the existing literature. Education of children and caregivers was the dominant protective factor.

Disability

Disability was very strongly identified by all groups of participants as a risk factor for children, with one key informant working in the disability space attributing this vulnerability to their limited autonomy and increased dependence on others:

> *Since we are working for children with disability, I can say that they are the most vulnerable. For example, one that is being locked inside the room and already doesn't have the ability to work or talk and if they don't feed or bathe him, he can't even speak for himself. So that is why I would say that children with disability are the most vulnerable. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

In line with the literature, other stakeholders observed the heightened risk of bullying from peers, as well as neglect from caregivers – particularly in connection with poverty (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). The stakeholder above observed that there has been a tendency to overly focus on violence against children at the expense of considering neglect, resulting in a failure to capture many forms of child abuse against children with disabilities:

> *From my experience working with different partners, I see that they're more interested in searching for violence. When we talk about neglect, it means we lock them inside, not giving them food or bath them and don't care if they are out in the street begging. So, people can say that abuse is the bigger picture here, but if you work more closely with these kids with disability, you will realize that neglect is the issue that we have to consider most. I can say that when we have more educated field staff out in the field, we receive the more increasing result of this violence, and that is because, in Vanuatu, we don't have a special provider that aims to work with only kids with disability. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

The same stakeholder also noted the strong connection between neglect and poverty in cases involving children with disabilities:

> *Hardship is one of the main drivers when we deal with children with disability. Their livelihood is very challenging when their family doesn't fully support them, maybe because they don't have enough income or access to a piece of land on which they could plant. These are the contributing factors that cause them to feel burdened in taking care of them, and most times, when we ask their parents or families why they are doing this, they never respond with a specific answer. A mother even told us that if we see that she's not taking good care of her child we can have her child and take care of him properly. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Other issues raised included the structural contributors to the vulnerability of children with disabilities. In addition to the lack of specialised service providers above, participants also discussed the lack of access to education (in part due to lack of qualified educators), as well as the dependency on others for subsistence and care acting as a barrier to the reporting of violence, i.e., "*even his family encourage him not to go to the police because his aunt will be her future supporter when his parents are gone.*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Disclosure of Violence

It was notable that many participants in KIIs and FGDs described the disclosure of violence by children to adults as exposing child victims to further experiences of violence. This included physical violence, with caregivers in FGDs reporting that some parents or relatives would respond to reports of violence by beating the child victims involved. It also included emotional violence and social exclusion, which many participants agreed that children would face should their experiences of violence become known.

Drug and Alcohol Use

Children in a previous study reported substance abuse as a dominant trigger for multiple forms of violence, such as family violence, fighting in the community and sexual violence (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). Caregiver survey responses tended to align with this, very strongly identifying drug and alcohol use by parents as a risk factor for children (with 22 stating that it made children "much less safe", 3 who thought it made children "less safe", 3 who thought it had no impact, and no participants who thought it was protective).

Interestingly, only one participant in KIIs and FGDS associated drug use with caregiver violence (in this case, particularly extreme forms of violence, stating that "*a young father who was under the influence of marijuana burned his innocent son who was 4 years old….the father angrily hit him and threw him to the sea shore and brutally removed all his teeth and burned him*". (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)) Most participants were more concerned about the normalisation of drug abuse in the home and the potential for children to grow up to be drug users (particularly where they have been involved in running errands to purchase cigarettes or kava), drug use in the community making children unsafe in public spaces, or drug use being connected with poverty and neglect.

Gender and sexual diversity

Study findings affirmed the suggestion raised by the existing literature that gender and sexually diverse children in Vanuatu are at high risk of abuse, with caregiver survey respondents responding with strong consensus that it posed a risk to child safety (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). KII participants agreed, explaining that the drivers were a lack of social acceptance stemming from cultural and religious beliefs and that sometimes even the appearance of being LGBTIQ+ put children at risk. In connection with this, one participant also noted the intersection of this with age, stating that the risk of violence to gender and sexually diverse children increases with age as their status becomes more obvious to the child and the community.

Beyond physical violence, one stakeholder described other forms of social exclusion that affect LGBTQI+ children and their life prospects:

> *People will criticize them because of their gender in so many ways that can sometimes cost them their life. From what I know, most of them find it very hard to get jobs in town; parents send them out of the house, families deny them in public, and people will see them as nothing or useless. But now they have formed an organization called VPRIDE, which secures their rights as humans too in society. (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)*

Location (Urban/Rural)

Caregiver survey respondents demonstrated a strong consensus that living in rural areas presented a greater risk to child safety. KII responses tended to support this, associating rural areas with poverty, lack of economic opportunity (and therefore labour migration and the risks stemming from separation from parents), more limited access to education, and reduced access to child protection services.

In addition to this, the stronger adherence to tradition and custom in rural areas was associated with a higher risk of child marriage for girls, as well as a higher risk of violent discipline by teachers passing unquestioned, with one stakeholder noting that "*in rural communities … teachers are almost like equal to nurses and doctors in terms of the respect that you would give them. And so you don't question that authority. It's a given [that] teachers know what's good for your child. So you respect that*" (KII National Stakeholder, Female).

Separation from parents/living with extended family

Recent survey data found one in six children in Santo living away from both parents due to parental migration to Australia and New Zealand as part of labour migration schemes and family separation (Brandl et al., 2023). This is consistent with drivers identified by respondents in this situational analysis, which they noted in turn, is associated with rural poverty.

In alignment with child protection stakeholders in the literature, participants in the current study associated children's separation from parents with decreased child safety (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). More specifically, separation from parents was associated with substandard care or neglect by alternative caregivers, children engaging in antisocial behaviours due to lack of adequate supervision and guidance, as well as the risk of sexual and other forms of violence by alternative caregivers.

> *When you leave kids with their neighbours, of course, the children will have injury. The neighbours also have their own chores, so when you ask them to do your chores, they will not do their best to look after your children. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

It is noteworthy, however, that by contrast, the simple presence of biological parents in the home was not identified as a protective factor. Participants specified that parents needed to pay their children adequate attention and spend adequate time building relationships of trust in order to foster an environment where children would be willing to share and seek help from their parents about experiences of violence.

While caregivers in the survey identified living with extended family as a risk factor, the issue was not further discussed among KIIs or FGDs.

Age

Existing data suggests that caregiver use of violent discipline is slightly greater amongst younger children (aged 2-9 years), compared with children aged 10-14 years, which may align with the lower status of young children and beliefs about the use of violent discipline in correcting children's behaviour discussed above (Vanuatu National Statistics Office & Pacific Community, 2014).

While survey caregivers displayed strong consensus that being closer to 16 years of age created an increased risk to children – this may be in part because caregivers placed more weight on violence outside of the home.

Education

Caregiver survey respondents generally saw being in education as a protective factor for children, and KII participants further associated being out of school with increased vulnerability to child marriage, as well as unemployment or limited employment opportunities, which themselves exposed children to street violence and future poverty.

> *Child marriage, I can say, is decreasing because many girls have access to education. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)*

Experiences of Family Violence

Aligning with the discussion under drivers regarding inter-generational violence (above), caregivers in the survey very emphatically identified experiences of family violence as a risk factor for violence against children. One stakeholder noted, however, that the link between violence against women and violence against children has received relatively little attention in terms of programming and service integration and that further work is needed.

Gender

The literature notes that boys and girls are more at risk of different types of violent experiences. Boys are at higher risk of physical violence from peers and serious injury (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023; WHO, 2011-2017). On the other hand, girls have been identified as more at risk of sexual violence and harassment, which was very strongly supported by participants in the current study, who both explicitly identified girls as more at risk of child marriage, sexual violence, and CSEC, and also overwhelmingly provided examples of girls when discussing these forms of violence (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023).

Single Parent/Family Breakdown

Caregiver survey respondents very strongly linked single-parent families and family breakdown with increased risk to children, with no respondent identifying the factor as protective. In line with the literature, key informants in KIIs strongly associated single parenthood with teenage pregnancy, poverty and neglect – bother in terms of material deprivation and lack of parental supervision or control over children.

9.2 What are the strengths and gaps in the current child protection formal and informal system to prevent and respond to key protection issues studied in this research? (RQ2)

9.2.1 Strengths and Gaps in the Child Protection System (RQ2.1)

a) Governance

The Child Desk Office of the Ministry of Justice and Community Services holds broad responsibility for child rights monitoring and coordination. If the *Child Protection Bill* (discussed further below) passes, the Ministry of Justice and Community Services will also have legal responsibilities for child protection. Other responsibilities include receiving reports of all child safeguarding breaches that involve a criminal element under the Ministry of Education and Training's *Child Safeguarding Policy 2017* (Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training, 2017). As discussed below, while the Ministry's stewardship and leadership is considered a strength by stakeholders, they have expressed concern regarding their limited financial and human resources.

The National Child Protection Working Group is a coordinating group working directly on child protection issues and concerns, with membership from government, NGOs and CSOs (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016; Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services, 2016). Responsibilities include overseeing and coordinating the implementation fo the National Child Protection Policy, child protection during emergencies, ensuring that child protection systems and activities are equitable and inclusive, and advocating for the mainstream of child protection in all sectors (UNICEF, 2017c). Stakeholders noted that the strengths include regular, quarterly meetings which enable good oversight of progress across the working group's various areas of operation (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

In addition, the National Children's Committee is a regulatory body that directly coordinates the implementation of the UN CRC. Membership includes representatives from various ministries and departments, NGOs, CSOs, etc. (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016).

Further research is required in order to determine how the pathway has addressed the lack of referral and collaboration identified by the US Department of Labour in regard to identifying and policing child labour cases (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021).

More broadly, coordination gaps that remain include the lack of integration between services for violence against women and those against violence against children (KII, National Stakeholder, Female), as well as in relation to the centralisation of data collection and management on most child protection issues, as well as its analysis and use (UNICEF, 2017c)(KIIs and Surveys, Stakeholders) – although one stakeholder did note that the Ministry of Justice and Community Services and the Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics were also engaging in work in this space.

b) Legislation and policy

Described as a system strength in one of the KIIs, the key policy document for child protection in Vanuatu is the National Child Protection Policy (Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services, 2016), which sets child protection goals and identifies strategic areas for action – including coordination between formal and non-formal bodies to ensure a holistic approach and continuum of care, as well as inclusion of child

protection in emergency preparedness and response initiatives (Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services, 2016).

The Ministry of Justice and Community Services has acknowledged some of the substantive gaps left by this document, including:

- the lack of legislation to outline state responsibility for child protection;
- the absence of a framework for prevention, early intervention and response; and
- the lack of legislation to regulate alternative care.

These legislative gaps are further described in Table 26 to Table 27. The Ministry of Justice and Community has responded to these identified gaps through the drafting of the *Child Protection Bill* and the *Adoption Bill*, which are intended to address them (UNICEF, 2017c) (Vanuatu Daily Post, 2022) (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). Stakeholders, however, identified the lack of progress on the Child Protection Bill in particular as a persisting system gap, with the inability on the part of the authorities to prosecute child abuse, leaving children vulnerable to violence. Another stakeholder expressed hope that the Bill would be presented to parliament in early 2024.

As noted in Table 26 to Table 27, there remain a number of gaps in the legislative framework. These include:

- Violent discipline in the home and other settings is legally permitted;
- Child marriage is legally permitted for girls from 16 years of age; and
- Child labour is permitted for children aged 14 years of age (whereas the international standard for employment is 15 years).

The Vanuatu Child Protection Policy 2016-2026 sets out the government's commitment to developing a child protection system and aims to "create an environment where children are protected from all forms of abuse, exploitation and neglect and violence and have equitable access to services" (Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services, 2016). It sets out eight strategic areas but does not set out specific budget allocation for implementation.

Table 26: Overview of legislation relating to child protection in Vanuatu

LEGISLATION	STRENGTHS/GAPS
Child Protection Bill (**pending enactment**)	Strengths: • Establishes a framework to articulate the roles of service providers in prevention, early intervention and response; however, there is no confirmed timeline for the presentation of the Bill to Parliament (UNICEF, 2017c).
Family Protection Act 2008	Strengths: • Provides for offence of domestic violence (includes physical assault, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, stalking, indecent behaviour, damage to property or threats of the preceding to a family member (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2008); • Family member defined as spouse, child, parent, sibling, "any other person who is treated by the person as a family member") (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2008); • Provides courts with powers to make protection orders (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016);

	• Provides for a register of Registered Counsellors (in DV) and another register for Authorised Persons (who can make temporary protection orders); • Provides for "compensation of child victims/survivors and takes into account the moral, physical, actual damages and other reasonable expenses that which has caused the victims/survivors. Further, the Act also provides for counselling" (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016). Gaps: • Insufficient information-sharing capacity is enabled between relevant child protection actors by the Act. • Corporal punishment is legal at home, alternative care and daycare.
Maintenance of Children Act 1966	Strengths: • Delineates provisions for the maintenance of child support (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2006; UNICEF, 2017c). Gaps: • Very outdated and needs review to reflect a higher cost of living
Matrimonial Causes Act	Strengths: • Outlines processes for custody and maintenance of children following divorce (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2006; UNICEF, 2017c).
Adoption Act 1959 UK	Gaps: • Not adopted to present national context, nor amended to reflect best international practices (UNICEF, 2017c).
Control of Marriage Act 1966	Gaps: • Legal age for marriage for girls is 16 (18 for boys); in rural areas and outer islands, some children married at younger ages (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016).
Penal Code 1981	Strengths: • Criminalises sexual offences against all children, child prostitution, using children for pornographic purposes. Gaps: • No provision is made to penalise the production, sale, and distribution of child pornography (other than in the context of general provisions relating to obscene material) (UNICEF, 2017c); Corporal punishment is legal as a sentence for crime, including for juvenile offenders (End Violence & End Corporal Punishment, 2020).
Cybercrime Act No. 22 of 2021	Strengths: Creates offences that include child pornography, cyberstalking, solicitation of children (Coram International, 2021; Council of Europe, 2021; Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2021).
Employment Act 1983	Strengths: • Sets minimum age for employment at 14 (UNICEF, 2017c); • Sets minimum age for hazardous work at 15 (UNICEF, 2017c) Gaps:

Sets minimum age of employment at 14 years (international standard is 15 years)

Table 27: Overview of legislation relating to child protection in schools in Vanuatu

LEGISLATION	STRENGTHS/GAPS
Education Act 2014	Strengths: • Prohibits corporal punishment (Coram International, 2021; End Violence & End Corporal Punishment, 2020). Gaps: • Practice of corporal punishment continues within education settings indicating a lack of enforcement mechanisms.
Teaching Service Act 2013	Strengths: • Physical punishment of student is misconduct (Coram International, 2021; End Violence & End Corporal Punishment, 2020). Gaps: • Practice of corporal punishment continues within education settings indicating a lack of enforcement mechanisms.

c) Reporting Mechanisms

In the years following UNICEF's 2017 Situation Analysis, Vanuatu has made good progress in establishing formal mechanisms for reporting and response to children who need protection (the absence of which was identified as a gap in that report) (UNICEF, 2017c). The aforementioned National Child Protection Working Group holds chief responsibility for interagency cooperation in the child protection space. The key mechanism for interagency cooperation in child protection is the National Child Protection Referral Pathway, which "*outlines the roles of different stakeholders and service providers for support provided to children, such as, psychosocial support, access to healthcare, access to safety and justice*" (Vanuatu Daily Post, 2022). While Pathway was established relatively recently, stakeholders have identified it as an emerging strength. The Ministry of Justice and Community Services (with assistance from international partners including Save the Children) is currently making progress in raising awareness about the Pathway and training child protection system actors in their responsibilities and its use – including in remote areas (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). As a consequence, stakeholders shared anecdotal evidence of increases in reporting:

> *In talking with the child protection officers in the ministry who you know, who are basically the case managers, it's seeing an increase in the number of cases that they are receiving. And you know, I think that's an indication that people are becoming a lot more aware that there is a system in place, and they are reporting. But of course, we know there would be a lot more cases out there. But … they are talking about seeing an increase the reporting of cases that are cutting through after the teams have now to do awareness and create a lot more kind of engagement around the pathway (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).*

Also in development, but not yet operationalised, is a 24/7, tollfree telephone helpline, staffed by trained child protection officers, which allows anyone – including children themselves, to report concerns about the safety or wellbeing of a child (Vanuatu Daily Post, 2022).

In practice, however, many barriers to reporting remain. Study findings, to this end, include the social norms discussed above in relation to drivers of violence against children. The literature has also identified a general lack of human and financial resources that impedes the proper implementation of reporting processes, as well as a lack of training amongst the police about to receive and respond to a report from children that

creates fear and, therefore a reluctance to report among children (UNICEF, 2017c). In addition, the literature noted that of the small number of child abuse cases that were reported to the police or formal systems, the vast majority were diverted back to the community (UNICEF, 2017c).

Although there are some reports that these issues have also undergone some change in recent years and that rates of reporting are accordingly beginning to rise, the study findings suggest that, despite the improvements in formal reporting structures, the proportion of cases of violence against children that are reported remain low (Tabi, 2023).

Both the majority of caregivers in the survey, as well as KII participants, thought that children were generally unlikely to seek help in cases of violence. Where children did seek help, caregiver survey respondents thought that they were most likely to tell their friends or a "sister/aunt." Responses were mixed on whether children would report violence to a "brother/uncle", nurse or police officer. By contrast, they thought that children were unlikely to tell most adult authority figures about their lives, including parents, village/community leaders, church leaders, teachers, or social welfare officers.

While one stakeholder noted that outcomes may be different in families where parent-child communication was strong, overall, KII participants agreed that children were unlikely to disclose experiences of violence to their caregivers. Some added that where children did disclose experiences of violence to their adult caregivers, those caregivers were likely to respond negatively, stating that:

> Maybe their parents will get very angry and hit them, which happens many times, instead of feeling sorry for her and supporting her morally, so it is very difficult for children to disclose their experience directly to their parents. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)

> When children experience violence, sometimes it's hard for them to report it to their parents or relatives because that person might be a very close relative or sometimes their parents won't believe them (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female)

> Some parents don't care. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

Responses among the predominantly rural caregivers in FGDs were more mixed but tended to be more optimistic about the inclination of children to report experiences of violence. Some were confident that children would tell their parents or other relatives, and a slightly smaller number thought that children would tell *someone,* albeit not always a parent. In terms of caregiver responses, roughly equal numbers of caregivers expressed confidence that adults would believe children and help resolve their problems or conversely acknowledged that negative caregiver responses were a possibility. Many of the latter described a likelihood that parents would resolve by hitting their child, but they all also discussed the possibility of more positive outcomes, either in terms of what they themselves would do or the action parents would take after physically disciplining their child.

The differences between the groups of respondents could have a number of explanations – it is difficult to reconcile them without more data, most critically from children themselves, which highlights the need for further research in this area.

d) Child Protection Response Services

Stakeholders noted that while Vanuatu's forthcoming body of child protection legislation constituted a strength, the lack of implementation and enforcement of these laws constituted a general gap (UNICEF, 2017c).

> We have very good laws in Vanuatu but the thing is that we cannot enforce these laws, especially in the remote areas... (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)

As noted above, the Child Desk Office has primary responsibility for child protection. It is currently staffed by two supervisors, as well as a few child protection officers (one in Port Vila, two officers in each of the six provinces) (UNICEF, 2017c; KII, National Stakeholder, Female). Stakeholders noted that the government has demonstrated commitment to child protection through the assumption of responsibility (from UNICEF) for financing all major child protection posts, engagement in partnerships with international partners and NGOs, as well as stewardship and leadership in terms of the Ministry's role in leading various programs developed with international partners (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). However, they also noted the following limitations with respect to resourcing:

- Lack of financial resources (both for staffing and operational budgets – with a tension between allocating funds between the two) (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)
- Lack of human resources (in terms of both numbers and training – the majority of child protection workers are not qualified social workers) (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)
- Lack of formal qualifications in child protection (some training in child protection, but not qualified social workers) (UNICEF, 2017c)
- Limitations in the geographical reach of services: "*child protection officers sit at the provincial headquarters. There are many challenges to being able to reach children and families in the communities because, you know, even though Vanuatu's quite small in terms of population. You've got people living in remote rural communities where it's often very challenging for the child protection officer as well as, you know, police in the provincial headquarters to be able to get out to respond to cases*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

As noted above, the government has assumed responsibility for financing all child protection posts, with an increase in the budget for the Child Desk Office, as shown in Figure 33. Yet while the budget for the Child Desk Office has increased in dollar terms, as well as a share of the total government budget, the share of the government budget receives by the Children's Desk remains just over 0.05%.

Figure 33: Government budget for the Child Desk Office (Source: Government of the Republic of Vanuatu (2021, 2022))
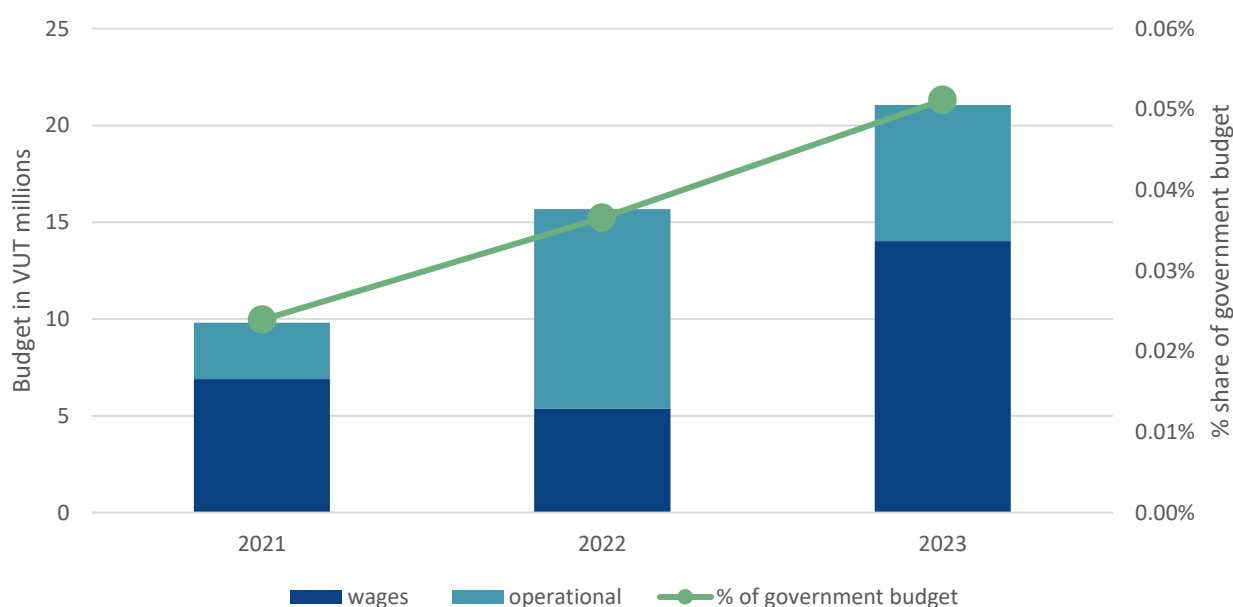
Beyond the Child Desk Office, many of the response and welfare services are not child-centred (KII, National Stakeholder, Female). With respect to health services, there is a lack of formal/standardised qualifications in child protection. Whilst there has been some level of engagement by medical staff and Village Health Workers in identifying and addressing children at risk and victims of abuse may be taking place, it has not

been institutionalized in health care provision, nor is child protection mainstreaming reflected in institutional documents, training or guidelines (UNICEF, 2017c). The Ministry of Health is currently developing its child safeguarding and child protection policy, with the aim to strengthen the capacity of doctors and nurses to identify signs of abuse in children and take responsibility for reporting through the child protection referral pathway.

Beyond these networks, there are limited formal counselling or other support services (UNICEF, 2017c). For example, stakeholder survey respondents reported a lack of sector awareness regarding the importance of creating/fostering child-friendly environments where children "can have or will want to seek counselling from professionals". The Vanuatu Women's Centre provides counselling, but there are no formal programs for alternative care, mostly informal kinship care (UNICEF, 2017c).

One stakeholder noted that if the Child Protection Bill passes, "*it's going to become increasingly more important to really look at building capacity specifically. I mean the different roles that service providers have. So yeah, definitely. Still, an area that needs a lot of support and attention, and funding and resources.*" (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

e) Police

The Police have established a Family Protection Unit (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016), which manages cases of domestic violence, including those involving children. However, the police have no existing trained psychiatrists or psychologists to assist child victims (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016). More serious sexual offences against children continue to be handled by the Criminal Investigation Division, which is not child-centred (UNICEF, 2017c)**.** One stakeholder suggested the establishment of "*a dedicated agency for investigating and prosecuting cases of abuse and neglect*."

Most cases are managed by general police offices. This should be done in accordance with the (Vanuatu Police Force) Policy for Young Victims and Witnesses, which considers a child-sensitive environment, the necessary steps for interviewing victims and witnesses, identifying appropriate referral to follow-up services, protecting the child's safety and privacy (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016). This policy has a number of strengths:

- It provides guidelines and a checklist for investigations, which include the interview process whereby the child is given ample time to consider the questions during the interview and to respond, thus respecting the views of a child. (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016)
- In cases of family violence, it provides for the protection of a child with regard to police inquiries relating to complaints of family/domestic violence. It provides that '*if the officer reasonably believes that a child or children have been involved in the domestic violence to the extent that physical, emotional or sexual abuse has or is reasonably suspected to have occurred; or the officer reasonably believes the child/children is/are at risk, the officer, must immediately notify their shift supervisor and Family Protection Unit personnel so that decision can be made as to the appropriate action which will be taken to protect the children*' (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016)

Yet a number of gaps have also been identified with respect to the generalised police approach:

- Limited police and/or limited reach (KII, National Stakeholder, Female), with children and their families, facing financial barriers in accessing the police; (UNICEF, 2017c);
- Despite a 'no-drop' policy, police continue to refer reported crimes against children back to the community for informal resolution (UNICEF, 2017c);
- Police are slow to follow up on reports, and cases involving children are not prioritised; (UNICEF, 2017c); and

- Children also continue to experience physical and verbal abuse at the hands of police (KII, National Stakeholder, Female) (UNICEF, 2017c).

Prior research also notes that police have limited resources, including lack of space to interview children in private, lack of basic office resources in stations, limited transport, low staffing levels which make it difficult to accompany children to the hospital, and few agencies, other than WCC to which they can refer children for follow up services (UNICEF, 2017c).

f) Justice

Justice sector actors in Vanuatu, and their strengths and weaknesses, are described in Table 28.

Table 28: Justice sector actors in Vanuatu

SYSTEM ACTORS/BODIES AND ROLES	STRENGTHS/GAPS
COURTS: **Magistrates' Court** **Island Courts** (outside capital/on remote islands) **Juvenile Court in Port Vila** (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2008; UNICEF, 2017c)	
Child-centred processes (limited): In practice, there is some specialised handling of children as victims, witnesses and offenders.	Strengths: - Supreme Court dispenses with wigs and clears the courtroom, and in the Magistrates Court a more informal 'round table configuration' is used (UNICEF, 2017c) - *In development:* Practice Direction for Juveniles in Contact with Court Process (UNICEF, 2017c) Gaps: - There are no specific court rules yet relating to procedures dealing with children and young people. The Criminal Procedures Code [Cap 136] is silent with regard to procedures in respect of child's view during criminal cases. Criminal Procedure code has no special measures to facilitate children's evidence (and courts are not using any, e.g. screens, video-taped testimony or video link) (UNICEF, 2017c) (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2016) - Availability of legal aid uncertain: Public Solicitor's office provides aid for "needy persons", but there is no further information about family violence/child protection capacity (Public Solicitor's Office Vanuatu, 2023)
Available Court Remedies - Maintenance Orders under Maintenance of Children Act 1966 (for child support where parents unmarried) (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2006)	Gap: no mechanism for removal of child from custody except under Penal Code where girl under age of 18 can be removed from male incest perpetrator OR under Family Protection Act 2008 for temporary protection orders/protection orders that remove children from domestic violence perpetrators (UNICEF, 2017c)

- Protection Orders for family violence under Family Protection Act (Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, 2008)

Note: Child Protection Bill is intended to address this

g) Education

While corporal punishment is permitted in the home, it is prohibited by the *Education Act 2014.* In addition, the Ministry of Education has established a Child Safeguarding Policy 2017, which also includes the government's commitment to protecting children from all forms of violence within educational spaces and creating a safe and inclusive school environment (UNICEF, 2017c), as well as outlining reporting protocols and procedures, and also includes a Code of Conduct for teachers and school staff.

There are a number of strengths with respect to the policy environment in the education sector:

- Every school is required to develop and implement a "Safe School Policy" addressing child protection, school safety, non-discrimination and emergency preparedness (includes prevention and response to violence by students and teachers, bullying and sexual harassment) (UNICEF, 2017c).

- Child safeguarding focal points, which are appointed in Ministry schools, school zones and provincial education offices, as well as the school head, are assigned child protection responsibilities (to be the first point of contact for any reports of alleged or suspected child abuse or other serious breaches of the child safeguarding policy and its code of conduct (Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training, 2017))

- Teachers, volunteers and other school staff are subject to mandatory reporting of child protection incidents under the Child Safeguarding Policy and are furthermore required to take the child to the nearest health centre for medical examination and/or the nearest police station for safety where required. (Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training, 2017)

- Safeguarding and reporting training is required to be provided to staff under the Child Safeguarding Policy (Vanuatu Ministry of Education and Training, 2017).

However, stakeholders noted a general lack of sector awareness about the importance of creating or fostering child-friendly environments to encourage or enable reporting in the education sector (Survey, Stakeholder). Previous studies have also identified substantial discrepancies in children's access to confidential counselling (Thuso Limited, 2022).

h) Information systems

There was limited data from participants regarding information systems in Vanuatu. The Ministry of Justice has established an administrative dataset in relation to violence against children, which has been discussed in media reports. As part of preparation for the implementation of the forthcoming *Child Protection Bill*, consideration should be given to how to build on and strengthen existing administrative information systems for both case management, and broader monitoring, evaluation and learning regarding system assessment.

i) Community

According to the literature, village authority in Vanuatu rests with the chief and people of all ages respect his ultimate authority. Chiefs provide counselling and mediate disputes, with community peace and harmony placed at the root of all decision-making. Through some practices of reconciliation, male relatives of girls or women who have experienced physical or sexual violence may seek compensation in the form of payment of money or gifts from the family of the perpetrator to redress the harm (stigma) caused to the family. While

this approach may help to ensure a level of cohesion and cooperation and integrate children into the fabric of the community, it can also act to complicate conflict resolution and may sometimes even act to silence the needs and interests of victims (Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services, 2016).

KII stakeholder responses supported the literature, describing cases where customary conflict resolution processes worked to the detriment of children's interests. One stakeholder stated that when incidences of violence against children occur, "*the families will use customary laws to solve the issue, which doesn't help at all because the victim is still hurt and that person might abuse her again if they didn't lock him up. So it's best to go directly to the police*" (KII, Provincial Stakeholder, Female).

Another stakeholder highlighted the potential for chiefs to exercise their customary village authority in circumventing formal processes for personal gain, sharing an example where the chief's son had raped a "15-16" year old girl. In that case, despite the Vanuatu police and Vanuatu Mobile Force being present and taking statements, the chief persuaded the father of the victim to withdraw their statements and *"settle the matter via custom ceremony so the case can be forgotten"*. The stakeholder commented that, as a result, the case would *"no longer reach the courts. This means that the boy is a free man and what he did was okay"* – highlighting both the recognised risks of traditional reconciliation processes, and the need to strengthen formal processes to address similar situations, for example through no-drop policies – meaning that police are under an obligation to take forward a case involving violence against children (KII, National Stakeholder, Female).

Nevertheless, many caregivers expressed support for village authority structures, identifying them as structures that contributed to child protection and often the most appropriate structures for resolving certain types of violence against children (discussed further below). Participants thought that enforcement of cultural rules and traditional practices by community leaders encouraged social cohesion, protected children against antisocial behaviours such as "*consuming drugs in the village*" (FGD, Caregiver, Male) and thus made children feel safe. Conversely, the weakening of these structures due to challenges by "Western" values and ideas (such as individualism) was seen as putting children at risk by promoting deviation from positive (traditional) behaviours. For example, one participant in an FGD for village chiefs associated increasing Westernisation with parental neglect, stating that parents "*follow their own pleasure because there's no teaching in custom, and forgot their kids at home due to Western life*". While it is important to acknowledge the weaknesses of traditional dispute resolution practices in addressing violence against children, the continued strength of the community's belief in these structures highlights the importance of finding ways to engage and leverage cultural values and customary processes in future child protection programming.

As an extension of the community buy-in to cultural structures discussed above, the study findings suggested that norms regarding traditional decision-making processes and their appropriateness as fora for certain types of violence can have the effect of creating partial or complete disincentives for caregivers to report violence against children to the formal authorities. In this way, traditional processes have the capacity to divert or delay cases of violence against children from reaching child protection authorities and the police.

For example, some caregivers expressed opinions that certain types of cases were most appropriately reported to village chiefs, at least under certain circumstances:

> *In my point of view, the person that you should go to when this situation happens is our chief, but if the case is very serious, go to the police to file a case. Another thing is that in our community if we have a certain type of issue that involves a young girl and a young boy our community, the best way to address this issue is to call our chiefs to solve this issue in our way of custom and culture. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)*

> *If the rape had taken, let's say 2-3 months ago, go straight to the chief to address this issue ,but if you, as a concerned parent, think you have to go to the police, then you have to. When a girl has been*

raped, this issue has to be helped with by the police because rape is a crime and with that, the person who committed the rape will get punished because it is against the law. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

If a problem between a girl and a boy in a community, let the parents and the chiefs handle that problem. When two kids from two different islands in Vanuatu created a problem, for example, the girl is from Tanna island and the boy is from Tongoa, it is a must to include a chief to fix this due to the fact that it is the role of the chief to solve this matter, from chief to chief to fix this issue. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

Other caregiver described the influence on reporting behaviours of the setting under which violence takes place:

If an issue arises in a home, the first person to address it is his/her parents. However, if an issue arises in a school boundary, the first person to address this issue to is his/her teacher, or he/she can go straight to the principal. But if the issue was formed outside of these two areas, which is the home and the school, somewhere along the streets or in another village or community, I can say that we have to involve our community chief and with their parents being presented in that meeting, but having a police there at the meeting if it's a must then let it be. Chiefs are the right people to go to, to solve problems in our community. (FGD, Caregiver, Female)

If the problem occurs at the village, they will report it to their parents, and after that, their parents will report to the chief, and then the chief will solve the problem, but if it occurs inside the school compound, the victim will report straight to the teacher then the teacher will forward the report to the police to deal with. If it is too serious in the school compound, it can go straight to the hospital and then to the police (FGD, Caregiver, Male)

While further research is required for a comprehensive understanding of the way that these norms operate to influence reporting behaviours, a preliminary reading suggests that the types of cases that are likely to never reach the formal child protection system include cases of sexual contact between children (perhaps including teenage pregnancy and sexual violence, although what constitutes a "very serious" cases is unclear), cases where the perpetrator is a community leader, cases of violence that include perpetrators and victims from different communities, and cases of violence that take place in the home and certain community spaces. On the other hand, the police were often viewed very much as an afterthought, or an option only in extreme cases.

Moreover, the quotes taken together (all but one from female caregivers in the same local area) indicate a high level of complexity in the way that competing norms influence reporting behaviours, which must be taken into account in any initiative to strengthen the child protection system.

On the other hand, there is also evidence of competing views. A number of other stakeholders and caregivers noted that traditional decision-making processes did not always resolve cases of violence against children satisfactorily, commenting that:

If we let the chief or leaders in the community handle this issue, they will be no strong punishment for that person and that abuse can be rehappen again. (KII, National Stakeholder, Male)

When this ceremony happens, [the perpetrators] get away with it. The ceremony they perform prevents these culprits from going to prison. (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)

I think it's best to report to the police because customs or traditional laws will not consider it very serious. (FGD, Caregiver, Gender Unknown)

The Ministry of Justice and Community Services has also acknowledged that many victims, both women and children, do not seek help for experiences of violence due to fear of retribution or negative social consequences of reporting that create disincentives to report – both of these were supported by the findings

of the study (Vanuatu Ministry of Justice and Community Services, 2016). Stakeholders described children being intimidated by threats from perpetrators or even the status of the perpetrator in relation to them (for example, if the person is a close relative), and noted that the reluctance to report creates vulnerability to continued abuse.

9.2.2 Are there past, existing or emerging approaches, including kastom, traditional or religious approaches, to learn from? (RQ2.2)

The literature review identified one program, World Vision's 2016-2018 "Vanuatu Counselling Approach" (one of the initiatives under the Channels of Hope for Gender program), aiming to address violence against children at the community level. Its evaluation found the program to have achieved success in fostering knowledge, behavioural and attitude changes in its key target group, but the evaluation noted that insufficient time had passed to evaluate the initiative's success in achieving some of its wider aims (e.g. similar changes among the wider community population). That said, notable achievements included 83% of evaluation participants reporting that the program had made them aware that their methods of child-discipline were violent and a further 74% reporting that they had stopped hitting their partners and children in favour of more positive forms of conflict-resolution or discipline as a result. The evaluation also reported that 75% of faith and community leaders interviewed indicated that they had or would refer people in their communities to the various main family violence service providers (Williams & Meyer, 2018).

While achieving overall success, the impact of World Vision's 2014-2022 "Channels of Hope for Gender" program varied considerably between projects, with some reporting significant contributions towards the achievement of their aims and others only achieving minor gains (World Vision, 2022).

Three themes of the program are relevant to future work in Vanuatu:

Long-term Involvement and Relationship-building

The importance of long-term involvement and relationship-building in community interventions and child protection programming is already well-known (Feinstein et al., 2022; Thompson & Wadley, 2019). Especially for initiatives aimed at fostering attitudinal and behavioural change, World Vision's "Channels of Hope for Gender" evaluation recommended longer project timeframes, noting that incremental and sustaining behavioural change can take up to 10 years to achieve and that repeated programming engagement may be helpful in reinforcing and sustaining changes – particularly for children (World Vision, 2022).

One stakeholder in the KIIs emphasised the importance of long-term involvement – if not through direct involvement by partners, then by establishing program sustainability through local capacity-building:

> *You come to our country, you must have counterparts. When you leave, your counterparts can take over the job. You do not come and run the show and then leave without building local capacities! Many times the international partners give us money to implement it in a very short period of time. They give us money, but they do not give us enough time! (KII, National Stakeholder, Female)*

Contextualisation and Adaptability of Programming

Multiple sources stressed the diversity of Pacific communities, and the importance of contextualisation to local needs (including cultural needs and interests in protecting traditions and cultural values) - or at least having enough flexibility within a program so that it can be adapted to better serve local needs during the course of delivery if so required. World Vision's program noted the importance of monitoring faith-leader progress, following project experiences of faith leaders hoarding knowledge, selectively disseminating messaging according to their own views and interests, or personally persisting in violent practices (Williams & Meyer, 2018; World Vision, 2022).

In terms of content, World Vision's Channels of Hope for Gender programs were able to find broad success in shifting behaviours and norms by specifically incorporating the analysis of faith texts commonly used to support violence against women and children into their gender-based violence (Williams & Meyer, 2018; World Vision, 2022). As a result, participating faith and community leaders stated during the Vanuatu Counselling Approach evaluation that the course had allowed them to realise that the verbal and physical discipline they had previously used in childrearing (and had previously believed to be in line with the Bible's teachings and in the best interests of their children), was in fact abuse. 70% of evaluation participants further stated that they did not believe there was any justification for violence. As a consequence, some faith leaders have begun to challenge and change beliefs surrounding the physical discipline of children held by those in their wider communities (Williams & Meyer, 2018).

One stakeholder in the current study noted the importance of wider community buy-in for educational and other programming, recommending that chiefs and other needs be included in the auditing of program content for contextualisation and appropriateness.

Linkages with Formal Child Protection Networks

While not all programs attempted to identify or build linkages between the informal child protection networks established in the course of their activities and the formal child protection systems in their respective countries of operation, the relative success of these efforts was in large part dependent on the ability of formal networks to respond to and service community child protection needs.

Regular contact through cross-training in family-violence-related programming allowed communities and service providers in Vanuatu to build both interpersonal linkages in responding to family violence and shared understandings of the conceptual space (Williams & Meyer, 2018). Staff from the justice system were invited to participate in World Vision's Vanuatu Counselling Approach programming, while some community leaders participating in the World Vision program undertook the government's "Authorised Persons" program for the authorisation of community members to issue temporary protection orders for family violence (Australian Federal Police & Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Williams & Meyer, 2018). In addition to fostering cooperation and relationships between members of formal and informal networks, the initiative improved community leaders' understanding of the family violence legal framework, and also prompted the Corrections Department to develop an Anger Management Module for their inmate Rehabilitation Program, which incorporated some of the World Vision course material. The program evaluation noted that this initiative was particularly successful in rural Santo, and less successful in Port Vila but did not provide an explanation as to the cause (Williams & Meyer, 2018).

9.3 Recommendations

Key findings

Consistent with recent research in Vanuatu, this situational analysis has found that violence is present in all domains of children's lives (Naughton-Watt et al., 2023). In particular, the use of violent discipline in the home and school remains a key concern, as well as children's, particularly girls' vulnerability to sexual violence. There is growing concern about children's safety online, and CSEC also emerged as a concern in this report. On the other hand, there is a sense that child marriage before 18 years has declined amongst girls as access to education has improved, but given the limited sample size, this finding should be treated with caution until data from the upcoming MICS is available.

Importantly, gendered social and cultural norms remain the dominant driver of violence and the responses to it, while poverty, migration, climate change and digitisation also contribute.

The situational analysis showed that there has been significant progress in strengthening the child protection system in Vanuatu over the past 10 years. However, while formal legislative and policy frameworks have

improved, the first child protection legislation is close to being finalised, and the child protection workforce has grown, there remains a significant gap between children's lived experience of violence and the formal and community-based systems to both prevent and respond to that violence.

While the situational analysis highlighted several factors leading to a greater risk of violence, which should be taken into account in programming, the generalised experience of violence and the stage of evolution of the system, suggests the emphasis should remain on universal primary prevention programming.

Recommendations for this situational analysis

- Discuss in depth the findings of the recent study on children's experience of violence in Vanuatu and this study with SC staff and close partners (including UNICEF) in Vanuatu.

- Together with the recent study on children's experience of violence in Vanuatu, socialise the findings of the situational analysis with children, government and other partners.

Recommendations for Save the Children Programming

- Addressing the challenges presented in this report will only be possible through deep partnerships with children, communities, government and other child protection actors in all aspects of strengthening the child protection system, from primary prevention to response. The data gathered through this situational analysis suggests that SC in Vanuatu has a strong basis through which these partnerships can be deepened, and comprehensive strategies can be collectively designed, implemented and learned from.

- Strengthen long-term child-led programming to help children build their knowledge of and responses to violence in their homes, communities, schools, and online. Such programs should seek to learn from and collaborate with community-based programs aiming to prevent and respond to gender-based violence from an early intervention perspective.

- Strengthen long-term community-based programming with caregivers to build their knowledge of and responses to violence in their homes, communities, schools, and online, as well as their skills with respect to positive parenting practices. Such programs should seek to learn from and collaborate with community-based programs aiming to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

- Consider ways in which intersectionality can be reflected in generalised prevention programming, including linking to secondary prevention programs (i.e...: additional support to) families with children with disability and grandparents who are primary carers.

- There was a very strong belief among caregivers in the protective properties of building strong networks and relationships to connect children with their communities (including engaging children in traditional or other community activities) and giving them a sense of "belonging". This could be reflected in and potentially harnessed in programming, particularly to encourage community buy-in.

Recommendations for Save the Children partnership with national and subnational government institutions

- Support the government in the final stages of passing the Child Protection Bill, and in collaboration with other child protection actors, support the development of a national implementation or action plan to support the government to fulfil its responsibilities in relation to prevention and response, including establishing a governance mechanism for the sector.

- With respect to SC's work in schools, look to supporting the development of teacher capacity to respond without violence, and to respond appropriately to peer-to-peer violence. In addition, consideration should be given to strengthening the safety of the whole school environment, including children's transit to and from school.

- Consider with UNICEF and other child protection partners who are best placed to support additional training on identifying and responding to violence against children within the health workforce.

- Community members called for SC to support the enforcement of laws in rural Vanuatu. This could be supported through police training and connected to the community-based programming noted above: "*Lack of enforcement of laws. We have very good laws in Vanuatu, but the thing is that we cannot enforce these laws, especially in the remote areas, police can't access those populations to make awareness, and that's where the NGOs come in and make more awareness, so that we can cut down these drivers of violence.*"

- Mainstreaming of child protection policy into all government sector activities, as well as NGO, SCO, FBO, etc.

Recommendations for Save the Children partnership with other actors

- Need for UNICEF and SC to build their mutual understanding of their respective areas of comparative advantage and the importance of their collaborative support to the government and develop a comprehensive plan to move ahead accordingly – noting that Save the Children has a strong capacity at the subnational level and community programming.

- These partnerships are essential for programming that moves beyond small-scale initiatives and adopts a strategic national approach to primary prevention, noting that such efforts will require the engagement of all partners, as well as programming that addresses complex issues such as community-based resolution of violence against children.

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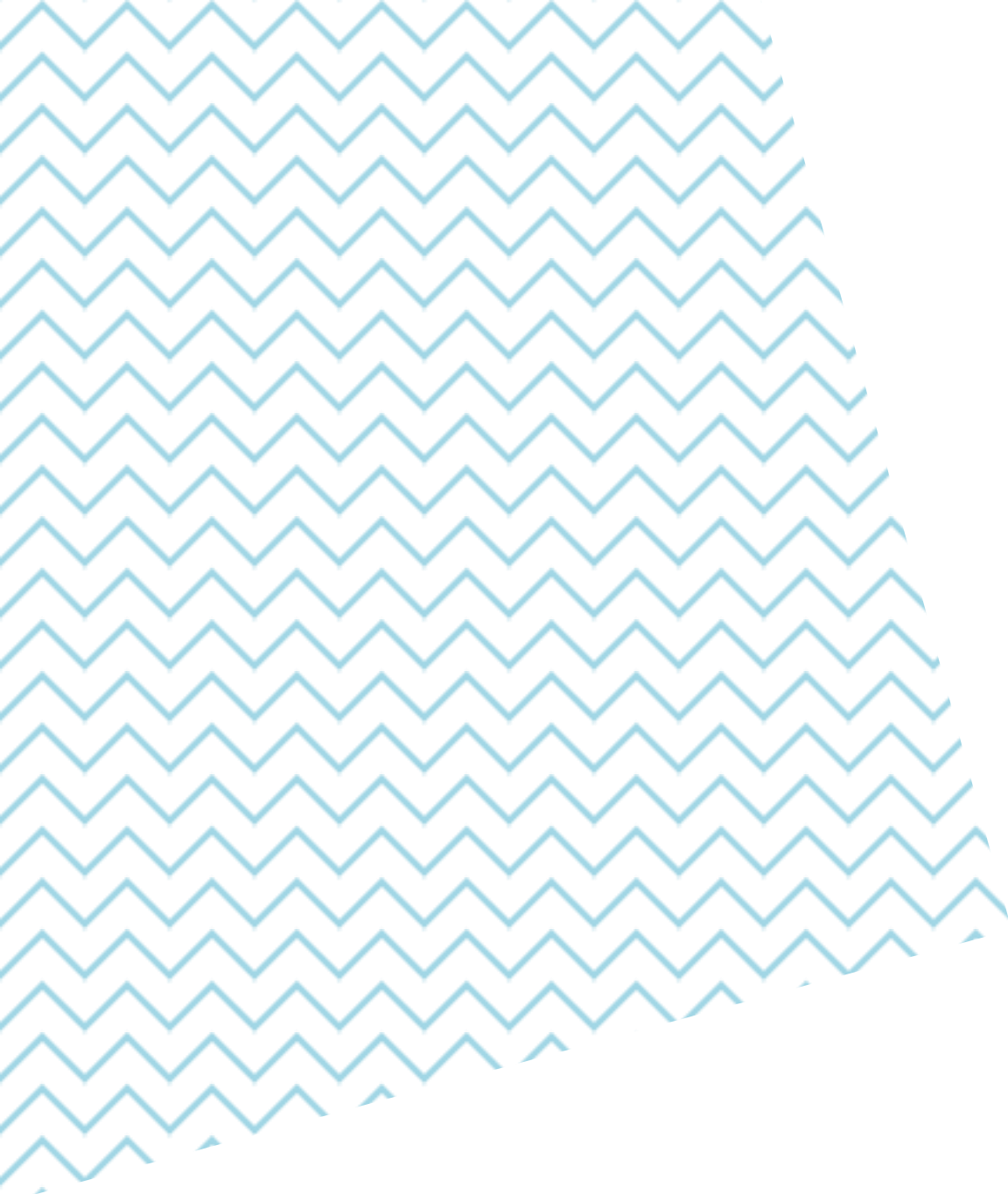Fiji Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Fiji Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2021, Survey Findings Report*.

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