

# Te Ata O Te Ngakau

## Shadows of the Heart



## The Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study

Violence against women (VAW) is one of the most concerning human rights violations and public health issues in the world today. United Nations defines VAW as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” (UN Resolution A/RES/48/104, 1993).

The Cook Islands Family Health and Safety Study (FHSS) aimed to obtain reliable data on the prevalence and different types of VAW in the Cook Islands. Among other objectives, the study also sought to document the associations between partner violence with health issues and other outcomes, and identify risk and protective factors for partner violence. The following are key facts regarding violence against women in the Cook Islands.

### PHYSICAL PARTNER VIOLENCE

- **30%** of women in the Cook Islands **experienced physical partner violence** in their lifetime.
- By region, the prevalence of physical partner violence in lifetime was **higher among women in the Southern Islands** (40%) than in Rarotonga (28%) and the Northern Islands (20%).
- The **most common acts of physical partner violence** were being 'slapped or having something thrown at her' (27%) and being 'pushed or shoved' (22%).
- **Nearly 8% ever-pregnant women experienced physical violence during pregnancy** at some point in her lifetime. In most cases, the perpetrator was the father of the child.

### SEXUAL PARTNER VIOLENCE

- **13%** of women in the Cook Islands **experienced sexual partner violence** in their lifetime.
- By region, the prevalence of sexual partner violence in lifetime was **higher among women in the Southern Islands** (22%) than in Rarotonga (11%) and the Northern Islands (7%).
- The **most common acts of sexual partner violence** were being forced to have sexual intercourse (10%) and having sex because she is afraid of what partner might do if she refuses sex (9%).
- Prevalence of lifetime sexual partner violence was **higher among women with primary (13%) and secondary level education (14%)** than among women with tertiary level education (7%).

### EMOTIONAL PARTNER VIOLENCE

- **27%** of women in the Cook Islands **experienced emotional partner abuse** in their lifetime.
- By region, the prevalence of emotional partner violence in lifetime was **higher among women in the Southern Islands** (31%) than in Rarotonga (26%) and the Northern Islands (16%).
- The **most common acts of emotional abuse** were being insulted (21%) and being threatened to be hurt (17%).

### ECONOMIC PARTNER VIOLENCE

- **6%** of women in the Cook Islands **experienced at least one act of economic abuse** by a partner in their lifetime.
- By education, economic abuse by partners was **higher among women with primary (9.1%) and secondary level education (7.1%)** than among women with tertiary level education (1%).
- **Common acts of economic abuse** were partner refusing to give money for household expenses (5%) and taking away what she earned (2%).

For this study, partner violence against women is defined as the violence experienced by a woman, perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner, whether cohabiting or not, that includes acts of physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse. Non-partner violence against women is defined as the violence experienced by a woman that is perpetrated by anyone other than a partner that includes acts of physical and sexual abuse.

### IMPACT OF PARTNER VIOLENCE ON HEALTH

- **47% of ever-abused women were injured** as a result of partner abuse.
- By region, this figure was **higher among women in the Southern Islands** (57%) than among women in Rarotonga (44%) and the Northern Islands (15%).
- The **most common injuries** were scratches/abrasions/bruises, cuts/punctures/bites, and broken eardrums/eye injuries.
- **41%** of women who experienced partner violence said violence affected their health and 13% said partner violence had a large effect on their health.
- Women who ever experienced partner violence were more likely to **think of or attempt suicide** than women who never experienced partner violence.
- Women who experienced partner violence were **more likely to report abortions** (4.7%) than women who never experienced partner violence (2.4%).

### VIOLENCE BY NON-PARTNERS

- Nearly **39%** of women have ever experienced **physical violence by non-partners** since age of 15.
- Slightly over 7% of women experienced **sexual abuse by a non-partner since age 15**.
- Roughly **8%** of women experienced **sexual abuse before the age of 15**.
- The **most common perpetrators** for non-partner sexual abuse before and after age 15 were **male relatives and male friends/acquaintances**.

### RISK FACTORS FOR PARTNER VIOLENCE

Most risk factors associated with lifetime and current partner violence were related to the **characteristics of the woman and her partner**:

- **Current partnership status.** Women who were with a partner at the time of the interview were two and a half times more likely to experience partner violence in their lifetime and almost eight times more likely to experience current violence.
- **Nature of first sexual intercourse.** Women whose first sexual intercourse was forced were nearly seven times more likely to experience lifetime violence and five times more likely to experience current violence.
- **Partner's parallel relationships with other women.** Women whose partners were engaged in parallel relationships with other women were two times more likely to experience current partner violence and three and a half times more likely to experience lifetime partner violence.
- **Education level of the partner.** Women whose partners had higher education were 77% less likely to experience lifetime partner violence and 93% less likely to experience current partner violence.
- **Location.** Women in the Southern Islands were more likely to experience lifetime and current partner violence than women in Rarotonga.

### OTHER IMPORTANT FACTS

- **28% of women had not told anyone** about the violence. Those who did tell someone mostly confided in friends (39.8%) and parents (23.8%).
- **59%** of women who experienced partner violence **never left home** despite the violence.
- **64%** of women who experienced partner violence **did not seek help from formal services or authorities**.
- The **most common reasons for not seeking help** were: believing that partner violence is normal (29%) and being ashamed or afraid of not being believed (16%).

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