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.

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%).

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%).

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.
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