

## **Real Men Don't Hit Women**

### **The virtue of respect as a strategy for reducing gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea**

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#### **Abstract**

Gender-based violence (violence against women and girls) is a world-wide problem that is also a big concern in Papua New Guinea (PNG). This paper argues that gender-based violence in PNG is a product of socialization that erroneously tends to associate masculinity with an overt expression of violence towards women. One way to tackle it will be for the society and more especially the men to cultivate and internalize the virtue of respect that recognizes that women are persons with absolute dignity who are entitled to respect simply because they are persons. This paper argues that the lack of this type of respect is the foundation for all the social evils of gender-based violence meted out to women in PNG.

**Key words:** gender-based violence, socialization, virtue, respect, rape, assault, physical and sexual abuse, HIV/AIDS, mental health

#### **Introduction**

According to the United Nations General Assembly,

Violence against women means 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 deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.<sup>1</sup>

In PNG, the two national daily newspapers, *The National* and the *Post Courier*, almost on a daily basis, deliver harrowing stories of gender-based violence which form part of the evidence base for the existence of the phenomenon. For example, according to the *Post Courier*:

A man is alleged to have shoved three sugar cane pieces – all measuring up to 50 centimetres – into his wife's private part last month, all because he suspected her of infidelity. ... He is alleged to have hit his wife with an axe and tortured her with hot wire. He then tied his wife's hands and

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly, 1993. *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*. Proceedings of the 85th Plenary Meeting, Geneva, Dec. 20, United Nations: Geneva

shoved the three normal size sugar cane pieces into her private part, then abandoned her and ran away when he realised she was unconscious<sup>2</sup>.

In the same vein, *The National* reported that:

Police have detained a man who allegedly pushed a beer bottle into his wife's private parts after accusing her of adultery. The man, also allegedly forced his wife to eat her excreta and drink her urine for two weeks... the couple's children could not put up with the situation and reported to the police<sup>3</sup>.

In a *Post Courier* item:

The woman ... was tortured to death based on rumours she was seeing someone else in her husband's village. She had been stripped naked, her hands and feet tied unto the wall and tied around her stomach with barbed wire and then had her first Achilles tendon cut – the other was cut on the second day. Then the accused allegedly got two hot stones from a burning fire and put each of them under her armpits, pulled her arms down over the stones and tied them down against her body. After that, he allegedly used the flat side of a hot bush knife heated in the fire to 'brand' various parts of her bare body – including her private parts – before allegedly locking her for six days without food and water while he stood watch outside the house. She died ... and we had to deliver the body to her husband's people to bury. They took the body and removed her tongue and eyes before burying her, claiming her spirit may harm the accused if left intact<sup>4</sup>.

These stories which are by no means isolated incidents reveal something that goes beyond violence and which is the interest of this paper. All the men involved in the above case scenarios all were seen to be men of 'good standing' in the society with 'normal behaviour' using violence to express their anger in an open way – perhaps the only way known to them – to 'teach' a lesson against perceived transgressions and to show their authority. Acting out one's anger is one thing, but meting out such extreme and systematic acts of torture openly and publicly points to a socialized negative attitude towards women that accepts the use of violence as a norm rather than the exception and as a mechanism for social control. On the surface level, it will be very easy to blame such men and to demand justice, but unless we go behind the actions to understand and attack the social conditions and structures that breed such attitudes and actions, even the implementation of the death penalty in the country will not stop such acts. One sustainable solution can be found in changing the mindset of the society, and by extension, the men involved through positive socialization – emphasizing and internalizing the virtue of respect for the dignity of the other.

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<sup>2</sup> *Post Courier*, 12 February 2004, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *The National*, 9 December 2005, 'Hubby detained for sexual abuse', p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Nikints Tiptip, 2006, 'Husband who tortured wife to death is a prison escapee', *Post Courier*, 3 November, p. 3

It is also important to realize that violence against women is not necessarily isolated from the general violence that exists in any society. When scores are settled and resolved through acceptable violence, then violence against women simply becomes another strand of this general violence. To curb such acts, socialization must begin early enough to teach young boys (and girls) not only the importance of respect and recognition of the value of the other, but also how to settle ordinary scores in a non-violent way.

So, in this paper, the starting point for us will be a short overview of gender-based violence before we attempt to look at the sociology of gender-based violence. This will then lead us to examining the virtue of respect which we believe is the key to reducing gender-based violence in PNG.

### **Short overview of gender-based violence in PNG**

Violence against women in all its forms is a recognised social problem in PNG. Highlighting the prevalence of violence in PNG, Fiona Hukula writes that violence against women 'occurs both within the home setting and in public places'<sup>5</sup>, a view shared by Rod Mitchell who noted that 'violence against women has become almost second nature in Papua New Guinean society'<sup>6</sup> as well as Christine Bradley who argues that 'family and sexual violence are common and widespread in PNG'<sup>7</sup>.

Nancy Kalimda, in noting the escalating nature of the problem in PNG, quoted a 2000 WHO report on domestic violence which unfortunately states that after Uganda, Papua New Guinean men are considered the second most violent in the world in terms of assault on women and noted that the phenomenon is 'endemic with over 56.1% of married women being physically assaulted'<sup>8</sup>.

In another report, World Vision observes that 'violence and the fear of violence is an important concern for many people and one that receives a growing amount of attention and that violent attacks against women in public places are frequently reported in the press and it is a prevalent phenomenon in the larger urban centres'<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Fiona Hukula, 2008, 'Gender violence and inequality retards development', in *Papua New Guinea Year Book 2008*, Brian Gomez(ed.), The National and Cassowary Books, Port Moresby, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Rod Mitchell, 2008, 'Every company needs a workplace policy on HIV/AIDS in PNG', in *Papua New Guinea Year Book 2008*, Brian Gomez(ed.), The National and Cassowary Books, Port Moresby, p.33.

<sup>7</sup> Christine Bradley, 2001, *Family and Sexual Violence in PNG: An Integrated Long-Term Strategy*, Institute of National Affairs, Port Moresby, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Kalimda, 2005, 'PNG men violent', *Post Courier*, 13 April, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> World Vision Australia, 2006, *Gutpela Tingting na Sindaun-Papua New Guinean Perspectives on a good life* Advocacy and Public Influence Unit, Vic, Australia, p. 26.

For Amnesty International, 'all available evidence and Amnesty International's own research indicate that violence against women in the home and the community is pervasive, and in some regions affect most women's lives'<sup>10</sup>.

In a study by Margit Ganster-Breidler, where she interviewed a sample population of 200 women within the age range of 17 to 60 years, she discovered that:

65% reported being survivors of physical and sexual violence; 75% of women reporting a past occurrence of physical abuse by their partners also reported associated injuries; 86% of the women who had been pregnant reported that they had been beaten in their last pregnancy. Significant associations between physical, sexual violence and mental health problems were found<sup>11</sup>

Her study found a very serious correlation between gender-based violence and the low health status and general wellbeing of PNG women.

A very strong link has also been made between violence against women and the spread of HIV/AIDS in PNG. For example, Amnesty International, Papua New Guinea, observed that:

Gender inequities and the prevalence and social acceptability of violence against women, which manifest in high levels of sexual violence within the home and community, have been identified amongst the major factors contributing to the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS<sup>12</sup>.

With regard to sexual violence, specifically rape, Donatus Onyeke, noted that 'rape in Papua New Guinea is an existential problem'<sup>13</sup> that 'has become pervasive, prevalent and systemic'<sup>14</sup>.

A 1996 study on the situation of women and children by the Government of PNG and UNICEF concluded that 'the pervasiveness of gang rape as a form of criminal activity has become a major threat to social stability and the security of women and families throughout PNG'<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International Papua New Guinea, 2006, *Violence Against Women: Not Inevitable, Never Acceptable*, p. 1

<sup>11</sup> Margit Ganster-Breidler, 2009, *Gender-based violence and the impact on women's health and wellbeing in Papua New Guinea*, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> UNICEF PNG, 2005, 'Children and HIV/AIDS in Papua New Guinea', in Amnesty International, Papua New Guinea; *Violence Against Women: Not Inevitable, Never Acceptable* p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Donatus Onyeke, 2009, 'The Problem of Rape in Papua New Guinea: An exploration of conflicting understandings', *Contemporary PNG Studies: DWU Research Journal*, Volume 11, p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF Papua New Guinea, 1996, *Children, Women and Families in Papua New Guinea: A Situation Analysis*. Port Moresby: Government of PNG, p. 144.

Another research study done by The Office of National Planning reported an incidence of 110 rapes and other sexual offences against women for every 100,000 females aged 15 and over in the population in 1997<sup>16</sup>.

A report by the Government of Papua New Guinea on the prevalence of rape warned that:

Young women all over the country are at high risk of rape, gang rape and other forms of violent sexual assault and the attendant fear accompanies them in many aspects of their daily life in urban and rural settings<sup>17</sup>.

According to Matthias Sapuri<sup>18</sup> the Port Moresby General Hospital 'is now treating an average of two rape victims every day', unlike 20 years ago when the average was 'only one rape victim treated every six months'<sup>19</sup>. Records also show that in the first six months of 2006, at the same hospital, up to 400 women complained to doctors about sexual assault and rape.<sup>20</sup>

In its opinion column, *The National*, adding its voice to the concern of sexual violence in the country, writes that:

The incidence of rape throughout Papua New Guinea is reaching new heights. That is a savage indictment of our society, of the way in which our men view our women. Rape is fast reaching the point where it is becoming a tolerated, if not accepted social norm in some parts of the country. In other areas where the crime has been virtually unknown, rape now occurs at an increasingly frequent rate.<sup>21</sup>

This short overview reinforces the claim that violence against women – both physical and sexual is alive and true in PNG. According to Vero Gene,

Violence against women is accepted as a norm in many parts of the country. For the past 30 years, women have sought ways and means to fight violence. Regrettably, they have been fighting a losing battle because they are the victims and not the cause.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Office of National Planning, 1998, *Papua New Guinea Human Development Report*. Port Moresby, Government of Papua New Guinea, p. 138.

<sup>17</sup> *Committee on the Rights of the Child*, 2003, 'Considerations of Reports submitted by State Parties under Article 44 of the Convention – Papua New Guinea', UN Doc. CRC/C/28/Add. 20, 21 July, para. 172.

<sup>18</sup> Matthias Sapuri is the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Papua New Guinea.

<sup>19</sup> Winis Map, 2005, 'Two Raped everyday', *The National*, 13 October, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Noel Pascoe, 2006, 'Are Rape victims ignored?' *Post Courier*, 7 July, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *The National*, 17 October 2005, 'Worse than murder', p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Vero Gene, 2005, 'Women have the right to be free' *The National*, Dec 13, p.18.

### **The sociology of violence against women in PNG: The problem of socialization**

The questions that come to mind are these: How and why is it that violence against women in PNG is so socially acceptable and therefore common? Why does the society not regard it as an abnormal behaviour that merits societal sanctions? Why is it that men and even women are so quick to point to custom and tradition as reasons for violence against women?

The explanation can only be found in socialization as 'violence against women cannot be understood in isolation from the gender norms, social structures and roles that influence women's vulnerability to violence.'<sup>23</sup> In other words, violence against women is a product of the prevailing social norms and processes of a given society that tend to portray women in a way that makes the use of violence against them inevitable. In this regard, Anastasia Sai<sup>24</sup>, in examining the notions of patriarchy and masculinity and how they are lived out by men in contemporary PNG, listed wife beating and sexual violence as two cultural expressions of masculinity in PNG today.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, wife beating which is the commonest form of gender violence in PNG is a socially accepted demonstration of being 'masculine'.

Ennio Mantovani, in examining male-female relationships in PNG, writes about the attitude of male avoidance of females in PNG. He argues that there is a social mechanism of avoidance of female 'power' expressed chiefly through physical avoidance. He asserts that 'the rules of avoidance vary from culture to culture, but in one form or another, they are present everywhere'<sup>26</sup>.

On the same issue, Jeline Giris and Teresia Rynkiewich lament that the traditional attitude of men towards women have been one of avoidance – nurtured by fear and suspicion and that is why ...

in many initiations, boys are led to vomit out food that women have given them, to get rid of any menstrual blood that they might have ingested from food and other items prepared by women, and sometimes, to ingest or absorb male semen so that their growth would be proper.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sarah Bott, Andrew Morrison, and Mary Ellsberg, 2005, *Preventing and responding to gender-based violence in middle and low income countries: a global review and analysis*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3618.

<sup>24</sup> Anastasia Sai teaches gender issues in Divine Word University. Her doctoral thesis examined the two notions of patriarchy and masculinity in PNG.

<sup>25</sup> Anastasia Sai, 2007, *Tamot: Masculinities in Transition in Papua New Guinea*, PhD thesis, Victoria University, Melbourne Australia. Pp. 54 – 56.

<sup>26</sup> Ennio Mantovani, 1993, *Male-female relationships in Melanesia – A pastoral reflection, with particular reference to domestic violence - Occasional Papers of the Melanesian Institute*, No. 8, Goroka: The Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-economic Service Inc., p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Jeline Giris and Teresia Rynkiewich, 2005, *Emerging Issues for Women and Children in Papua New Guinea – Occasional Paper of Melanesian Institute*, No. 12, Goroka: The Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-economic Service Inc. p.12.

Using the Highlands as a case study, they observed that culturally men held a very low regard for women, a view also shared by Conrad Kottak who wrote that

Men fear all female contacts, including sex. They think that sexual contact with women will weaken them. Indeed, men see everything female as dangerous and polluting. They segregate themselves in men's houses and hide their precious ritual objects from women. They delay marriage and some never marry<sup>28</sup>.

Therefore, to be 'manly' means to 'avoid' women, as everything associated with them pollutes and destroys masculinity. The implication is that any overt act towards women that integrates and cherishes, is frowned upon as abnormal behaviour as it does not conform to society's shared expectations regarding appropriate behaviour towards women. As human behaviour is learned, prejudices like other human attitudes blossom in any environment that support and promote it. Therefore, the societal mechanism of female avoidance is maintained and sustained culturally through socialization. So, if everything female was to be avoided, how did men cope existentially? Ennio Mantovanni observed that

One common way of coping with the power of the women and their ensuing superiority is denigration. The power and its symbols are called dirty, polluting and shameful. This ideology is taught even to the women so that they feel inferior because of the polluting nature of their power. By discrediting the female power, men feel less inferior.<sup>29</sup>

One conclusion from the foregoing is that prejudice against women is therefore not only entrenched in the mindset but also promoted and propagated. It is thus a normative behaviour, a 'we' feeling, that everybody is supposed to abide by, and even the women themselves, as cultural conditioning and socialization have put it into the women that they are inferior to men. This societal prejudice then finds expression in all manner of violence from the men – physical, sexual, verbal, attitudinal – and a self-destructive, gendered inferiority complex from the women that implicitly accepts and condones violence towards women. This attitude incidentally not only prevents the women from demanding and expecting respect, but also restricts their full participation in all other aspects of life as a matter of course.

### **The virtue of respect as a strategy for reducing gender-based violence**

So, how can the virtue of respect help in reducing gender-based violence in PNG? How can it right the wrong of socialized prejudice that leads to violence? As we have seen that violence is a socialized behaviour, the virtue of respect can also be cultivated and internalized as a social attitude that will

<sup>28</sup> Conrad Phillip Kottak, 2000, *Cultural Anthropology, Eighth Edition*, Boston: McGraw Hill, p. 285.

<sup>29</sup> See, Ennio Mantovanni, *ibid*, p. 9

positively change the mindset of the society towards women. So, here, we look at the meaning of 'virtues' and 'respect' and we shall show how internalizing the virtue of respect can help in reducing gender based violence.

### **What do we mean by virtues?**

Different philosophers have tried to make sense of the term 'virtue'. The common agreement is that virtues have to do with good character. A virtue is commonly defined as 'a good quality or excellence of character ... a disposition of acknowledging or responding ... in an excellent (or good enough) way'<sup>30</sup>; 'attitudes, dispositions or character traits that enable us to be and act in ways that develop this potential'<sup>31</sup>. Thus, 'the concept of a virtue is the concept of something that makes its possessor good: a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent or admirable person who acts and feels well, rightly, as they should'<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, a virtuous person is a morally good person who acts with the right intentions and whose actions are exemplary and consistent with societal moral principles.

A virtue such as respect is not just the tendency to be respectful towards people, for example, but rather, an attitude, a habit, a character trait, a well entrenched tendency and disposition in the person that combines with other character traits and dispositions to produce a well-rounded, ethical individual – a good person. It is thus a cocktail of other good qualities. In other words, 'it is concerned with many other actions as well, with emotions and emotional reactions, choices, values, desires, perceptions, attitudes, interests, expectations and sensibilities'<sup>33</sup>.

Virtues being character traits are not developed in isolation of a person's social environment and also require habitual practice. Such character traits like respect, generosity, integrity, compassion, prudence, honesty, courage, fairness are all regarded as virtues.

### **The virtue of respect: What is respect?**

The idea of respect as something to which all persons are entitled without any qualifications simply because they are persons has gained enormous recognition amongst philosophers. However, we owe a lot to the 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who was the first Western philosopher to articulate and enunciate the idea of respect for persons as an ontological value, an essential element of their being human. He was the one who 'insisted that

<sup>30</sup> Christine Swanton, 2001, 'A Virtue Ethical Account of Right Action', *Ethics*, Vol. 112, No. 1. (Oct., 2001), p. 38, in <http://www.jstor.org> (Accessed: Thu Jul 26 03:10:40 2007)

<sup>31</sup> Markkula Centre of Applied Ethics, 'Virtues', [www.scu.edu/ethics](http://www.scu.edu/ethics), Accessed May 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 'Virtue Ethics', <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue>, Accessed May 2010.

<sup>33</sup> See, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Ibid.



persons are ends in themselves with an absolute dignity who must always be respected<sup>34</sup>.

Magill-Cuerden asserts that 'respect serves as an essential element of any interaction among human beings. It is concerned with the way individuals behave and convey their social attitude'<sup>35</sup>. The virtue of respect therefore 'involves deference, in the most basic sense of yielding: self-absorption and egocentric concerns give way to consideration of the object, one's motives or feelings submit to the object's reality, one is disposed to act in obedience to the object's demands.'<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the virtue of respect for persons is a positive attitude towards, a good feeling about, a deliberate act, a reflective and considered judgement about a person. It means to show courtesy, to consider or treat in a deferential way, to show honour, to esteem highly, to deem somebody important. It implies the absence of everything negative towards another, to avoid insulting, hurting or molesting the other. With regard to women, it means therefore teaching our men to esteem our women, to be polite towards women, to care for them because they are important, to defer to them in the most honourable way, to engage rather than avoid, to have a sense of admiration and considerateness that is organic, genuine and holistic, not to mask feelings under any pretext.

It therefore means not abusing or hurting the woman, not because you will go to jail, but because you realize the essential dignity and value of the woman as a human being. When we admonish people to be truthful always, it is not necessarily for them to avoid going to jail, but simply because lying is bad. So, in the case of respect, it means realizing that it is incumbent on us to show respect to women in all circumstances. This attitude of holistic respect then becomes a 'we' feeling that is teachable, knowable and learnable. It becomes a socialized behaviour that replaces the old attitude that sees women as inferior, dirty, and an object to be avoided and abused.

I would like to point out that the present over-emphasis of some people on a legal solution as the only means to reducing gender based violence stops short of really addressing the issue because somebody can finish his jail term, be released and still keep on abusing women. For example, according to *The National*,

One week after a convicted rapist was freed on bail; he raped the victim again and then slit her throat... One day after killing the mother of two, the rapist committed suicide by cutting off his private parts<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> See, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/respect> , Accessed May 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Magill-Cuerden, Julia, 2007, *British Journal of Midwifery*, March 2007, Vol. 15 Issue 3, p. 126.

<sup>36</sup> See, Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Bonny Bonsela, 2005, 'Rape and killed by same man – one week after his release', *The National*, 10 August, p.1.

### **The virtue of respect for women versus political gender equality**

There is also general agreement that women in PNG are marginalised in political and leadership positions because of their gender. As we shall see below, a short review of some literature on women issues in PNG reveals a common thread running through all of them. They all tend to focus on the issue of gender equality – the roles of women in politics, decision making, leadership and business rather than on the subject of respect for women as women. For instance, Orovu Sepoe on gender relations in PNG writes that

as is common elsewhere in PNG, women experience gross inequalities in relation to their men folk in all spheres of contemporary life...In the sphere of public decision making, again, one finds women are under represented<sup>38</sup>.

The fact that the current Parliament has only one female MP is cited as a fact of that gross inequality.

The interest of Dianne Korare was on equality, power relationship and participation in politics. She argues that cultural factors are to blame for the lack of participation of women in politics. As she states:

the most common explanation given for why women in Papua New Guinea are not recognised as equals in the society is ‘cultural factors’, or the term more commonly used in the Pacific, ‘custom’ or ‘pasin bilong mipela’<sup>39</sup>.

For World Vision,

the under-representation of women in politics is common internationally, but especially so in Melanesian countries including Papua New Guinea. There is only one female national level MP, Minister for Community Development, Dame Carol Kidu.<sup>40</sup>, and so ‘without the full participation of women, PNG will not emerge as a prosperous and truly unified nation’.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, for the paper, the country’s underdevelopment is a function of the non-inclusion and participation of women in political life.

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<sup>38</sup> Orovu V. Sepoe, 2000, *Changing Gender Relations in Papua New Guinea – The role of Women’s Organisations*, New Delhi: UBS Publishers Distributors Ltd, p.13.

<sup>39</sup> Dianne Korare, 2002, ‘Gender and perceptions of political power in Papua New Guinea’, *Development Bulletin*, No. 59, 47-50.

<sup>40</sup> See, World Vision, Australia, 2006, *Gutpela Tingting na Sindaun – Papua New Guinean perspective of a good life*, p.11.

<sup>41</sup> See World Vision, Australia 2006, p.13.

Gisele Maisonneuve, writing about women's movement as a platform to participate in development, pointed out that 'mainstream socio-economic indicators and a review of the macro forces at play reveal the disadvantaged position of women and exposes the remarkable barriers to participation they are facing'<sup>42</sup>.

The short excursus above shows that for some people, women in PNG are marginalized politically and economically because of their gender and the fact that there is only one female Member of Parliament at the moment affirms their convictions. However, this paper argues, as we have discussed so far, that this systemic marginalisation is a consequence of a much bigger problem – a socialized attitude that refuses to accept and respect the essential dignity of women, an attitude which sees the woman as a social outcast to be 'avoided'. So, unless the society changes its perspective on women, their participation in politics and leadership will continue to be a mirage.

If a woman is regarded as a 'polluting' agent to be avoided, how can she be accepted as a leader? If the woman herself has been brought up to see herself as having an inherent problem, how can she have the courage to weather the rough seas of politics and leadership?

Politics and leadership are about engagement not avoidance. Thus, the emphasis on using politics and leadership roles for women as a yardstick for measuring the value and dignity of women creates another problem in PNG. Both are very transient and dependent on a range of other factors, more especially education and connection.

Why can't the woman be accepted as a woman? Why should her identity and dignity be tied to achievement and roles – political or economic leadership?

Whether the daily lives of the majority of PNG women who live in the villages will change positively simply because there are more women in Parliament and others involved in other leadership positions is debatable. Besides, whether the society will continue to be more considerate and thoughtful and less violent towards all women due to the fact that we have more women in leadership positions also remains to be seen.

In a symposium on "*Culture and Violence: The Melanesian Philosophy of Human Dignity*" held at Divine Word University in 2009, a female police officer, who is also in-charge of the sexual and family violence desk at the provincial police station narrated her ordeal and showed disturbing pictures of herself full of injuries at the hands of her violent husband. Being a female police officer in-charge of domestic violence was not even enough deterrent for her husband who continued to inflict life threatening injuries on her for so long until the woman decided to end the marriage. This goes to reinforce the claim

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<sup>42</sup> Gisele Maisonneuve, 2006 'The women's movement in PNG as a vehicle to enhance women's participation in development', *Contemporary PNG Studies: DWU Research Journal*, Volume 4, p.10.

of this paper that emphasizing political or leadership role for women is not a sure solution against gender based violence.

However, without discounting the impact of policy change that will be brought by that and by extension, a more positive outlook on women issues, it suffices to say that in the context of the scenario we have – socialized violence – one can have women MPs who will still face the same problems. Examples from countries and societies racked by racism and caste systems confirm this. Racism, caste systems and gender-based violence have the same root – socialized prejudice. Here, those who have the power to decide, name and to socially construct reality – men (gender-based violence), majority or more powerful race (racism) and the higher caste (caste system) – simply choose not to include, see, hear, or notice you (the object of prejudice), irrespective of your social achievement. You could be an MP, but still an untouchable, a ‘polluting’ woman to be avoided, or any other identity they choose, who is not worthy of respect, a social refuse dump, an ‘object’ to be tolerated rather than engaged as a human being with equal dignity.

So, the idea of using political or leadership gender equality to measure the value and dignity of PNG women is far too simplistic and overly optimistic as it fails to take into account the process it takes to come to that level. Not all the women will go into politics and not all of them will attain leadership positions, but every woman right from birth, should be and deserves to be respected as a person. Respecting someone because of her role and achievement (recognition respect) is completely different from the virtue of respect for the dignity of a person.

### **The way forward – the need for a value re-orientation**

So, how do we educate our boys – husbands of tomorrow – to show respect to our women? How do we bring them up to know and accept that ‘real’ men don’t hit women – in other words, that violence against women is not a show of manliness or masculinity? How do we train them to know that there is no ‘we’ feeling in hurting women – that is, the fact that one or some people do it does not mean it is right and that others should do the same? How do we socialize them to know and accept that treating a woman with courtesy and deferring to her is not a sign of weakness or being effeminate, but rather a sign of maturity and of how things should be? How do we sensitize them to know that a woman does not ‘pollute’ the society simply because she is a woman and so should not be ‘avoided’?

Again, how do we educate our women from childhood – not only to know their inherent value and dignity but also to demand and expect respect from the men and not necessarily in an antagonistic way? How do we train our women to know how it is to be respected and to appreciate the feeling of being respected; to appreciate the fact that they are complete in themselves in their own right, that there is no physical evil of deprivation or lack in themselves that needs to be filled by ‘doing’ something extra – achievement; that their identity, value and dignity do not depend on another person’s assumptions? How do we train

our women to hold their ground in the face of meaningless threats and abuse from the men? The present self-destructive feeling and attitude of utter resignation and helplessness by women in the face of unwarranted abuse is even more serious than the abuse itself.

Besides, how do we change the mindset of our women to know that being treated deferentially in a respectful way is not demeaning and not suggestive of the woman being inferior? It is important to note that nowadays, certain streams of thought, more especially those emphasizing equality, sometimes look at the expressions of respect in a negative way – as patronizing, sexist, and demeaning. This worldview in PNG is at best, in the context of what we are discussing, very counter-productive as respect is a virtue and not a vice.

The implication of this social metamorphosis for the fight against gender based violence in PNG cannot be overemphasized. If a young boy does not know how to show respect to women generally, how can he suddenly begin it after marriage? Besides, if our women do not even know what it means to be respected, how can the men show it and how can they accept and appreciate it when given? To achieve this goal, all hands must be on deck to educate both genders on the virtue of respect – respect that is given and demanded, appreciated and commended, whose violations can carry societal sanctions.

### **The model of ‘motherhood’ as a basis of respect for women**

Furthermore, on what do we base this ethical education and re-orientation? The use of ‘motherhood’ as a model and basis for the respect of women is one that everybody can understand and relate to. At an early age, boys should be groomed to look upon all women as mother irrespective of status, age, or degree of relationship, who must be respected and deemed important. Motherhood in this regard is not circumscribed to the biological act of giving birth, but rather to the more important social act of caring and nurturing, the act of bringing order into the chaos of the society.

Women are like mother-nature, for besides bearing life, women also nurse, give warmth, cherish and care since invariably every human life passed through a woman’s body. Thus, she is the mother of life and therefore to abuse, harm or kill a woman is to kill or harm life and therefore humanity generally. In other words, ‘humanity could not have existed without women’<sup>43</sup>.

In this model, there is no difference between one’s mother, wife, grandmother and a one-day old baby girl, for the baby girl of today is the wife, mother and grandmother of tomorrow. The tendency for some abusive men (and in fact the whole society) to use the payment of bride price, alcohol, anger or jealousy as excuses for hitting their wives therefore disappears in the context of this model of motherhood simply because it is hard to find a man who under any pretext

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<sup>43</sup> Vern L. Bullough, Brenda Shelton and Sarah Slavin, 1988, *The Subordinated Sex – A History of Attitudes Toward Women (Revised Edition)*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, p. 1.

whatever will violently abuse his mother or grandmother. One man's wife is another's mother and grandmother and so, if hitting one's mother and grandmother is frowned upon by the society and not regarded as a sign of masculinity, the same attitude should also apply to one's wife and daughter or to any other woman irrespective of the degree of relationship.

This attitude therefore, in principle, precludes any form of violence towards women. In principle, because in practice, violence can still occur, but in this case it is known and denounced as an anomaly, a crime, a taboo, something to be avoided rather than an indication of masculinity. Therefore, a man who wilfully abuses a woman is not only regarded as breaking the law, but also somebody to be avoided – who pollutes the whole society and sets a bad example. Thus, men should be taught that the inherent value and dignity of the woman is based on her 'being', and physically begins at birth.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has established that gender based violence, like in other places, is also an existential reality in PNG; that it is a consequence of the misunderstood notions and expressions of masculinity; and that it is strengthened by cultural misunderstandings of the true nature of women. The results of these misunderstandings have been disastrous for the women and the society. To change such an entrenched attitude and its attendant consequences, it is important that we begin to internalize the virtue of respect – a bottom-up approach – that will serve as the yeast that will eventually work through the whole society, changing it from the inside, creating holistic individuals devoid of any gender-based prejudice. This is especially important in the face of the rapid social changes brought about by globalisation and the unprecedented mineral resource exploration taking place in PNG today that will inevitably bring PNG in contact with other cultures.

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