

Do No Harm

Understanding the Relationship between Women's Economic Empowerment and Violence against Women in Melanesia

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Research Summary Report | May 2018

This report covers the research undertaken as part of the project, Do No Harm: Understanding the Relationship between Women's Economic Empowerment and Violence against Women in Melanesia. The research was a collaboration between the Australian National University's Department of Pacific Affairs (formerly State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program) and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program.

It has often been assumed that improving women's access to income-generating activities would lead automatically to more general empowerment, the theory being that an increased income would improve women's 'bargaining power' within the household. Some researchers believed that this increase in bargaining power would reduce the risk of intimate partner violence, while others believed it would have the opposite effect. Those trying to promote gender equality through economic empowerment initiatives face the vexing issue that their efforts may have unintended consequences, improving one dimension of women's lives but undermining others.

The Do No Harm (DNH) research addresses the question of how to improve women's economic agency and the security of their livelihoods without compromising their safety. In an effort to understand the realities women face as they attempt to overcome economic disadvantage, the DNH research gathered detailed accounts from women of their experiences as well as from men and community leaders. Field research was undertaken in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea with 485 interviews completed, including 238 with women and 135 in-depth key informant interviews (see Table 1).

Table 1: DNH Interviews by Research Site

	Women	Men	Key Informant
Solomon Islands	85	36	53
Makira–Ulawa Province	23	5	12
Malaita Province	40	18	23
Honiara	22	13	18
Bougainville	43	20	29
Kieta District	10	1	10
Panguna District	11	6	7
Tinputz District	22	13	12
Papua New Guinea	110	56	53
Jiwaka Province	36	14	22
Chimbu Province	55	31	31
Urban: Buka, Goroka, Port Moresby	19	11	0
Total	238	112	135

The research in Solomon Islands was undertaken in July and August 2014 in Makira–Ulawa and Malaita Province and in the capital Honiara (Eves and Lusby 2018). The research in Papua New Guinea took place in October 2015 in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (Kieta, Panguna, and Tinputz Districts) and in April 2016 in Jiwaka (Anglimp–South Wahgi District) and Chimbu (Kundiawa–Gembogl District) Provinces (Eves 2018a and 2018b). Respondents were recruited through local research brokers and/or local organisations and NGOs. In Solomon Islands, we worked with IWDA partner organisations, Live and Learn and the West 'Are'Are Rotokaniken Association (WARA). In Jiwaka Province in Papua New Guinea, we worked with IWDA's partner organisation, Voice for Change, and with Oxfam's partner organisations in Chimbu Province – KGWAN and the Individual Reform and Restoration Movement. In Bougainville, we worked with Beverley Tamis, Stella Tunim and Ursula Rakova of the local NGO Tulele Peisa.

The DNH research used in-depth qualitative interviews to explore marital relationships, how the domestic economy is managed within the family and what gives rise to marital conflicts and violence. Rather than seeking to produce generalised results for the whole country, the DNH research aimed to capture the individual experiences of women by encouraging them to tell stories of their lives from when they were children through to their married life. This allowed for rich case studies to be developed and women's voices to be heard, voices that are often obscured or unheard in larger country-wide and less detailed studies. The interviews generated a large body of rich qualitative data on women's lives and the difficulties they confront as they seek to earn income in order to improve their lives and those of their children.

The income sources of women interviewed ranged from formal employment to informal marketing and business enterprises. A large majority of women interviewed were involved in the informal economy of marketing garden produce, cooked food or purchased goods.

Overall, it is clear the women who participated in this study valued the opportunity to earn an income and spoke positively about its benefits. But income generation also has negative impacts, including the burden of extra work, difficulties finding childcare, problems accessing markets and increased demands for money from husbands, relatives and affiliates. Across the field sites, the DNH research found that there is rarely agreement on the expenditure of household income and that women's income generation does contribute to marital conflict and violence.

Unequal Work Burdens

Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea women interviewed reported heavy workloads (Eves 2017a; Eves 2018a:38–39; Eves 2018b:11–12; Eves and Lusby 2018:28–29). To make a better future for themselves, they work exceedingly hard, often in difficult conditions. Women of Chimbu and Honiara reported the heaviest workloads, citing no time for other duties let alone for rest or relaxation. At all of the research sites, women were found to bear primary responsibility for agricultural labour, often with little or no help from their spouses. Furthermore, the majority of women also reported an inability to renegotiate their work burdens. Regardless of the amount of time spent on income-generating

activities, they continue to bear almost total responsibility for the domestic and care responsibilities in the household.

Research in developed countries demonstrates that women in paid employment frequently endure what is often referred to as a double burden, due to their continued responsibility for domestic labour. In developing countries, such as PNG and Solomon Islands, it is perhaps more apt to refer to this as a triple burden, as many rural women not only work to earn income and carry out domestic labour, but also carry out agricultural labour for subsistence. Urban women not only undertake paid employment and domestic labour, but also expend labour in other activities to earn extra income, such as baking cakes and marketing of garden crops (Eves 2017a; Eves and Lusby 2018:27). For the most part, women in this study had little success renegotiating their work burdens.

The DNH research found that although women themselves often subscribe to gender norms that stipulate their responsibility for unpaid house and care work, husbands can and do place considerable pressure on them to conform. At the same time, the serious imbalance of power present within many relationships enables many men to retreat from the duties gender norms assign to them.

Withdrawal of Contributions to the Household

Several scholars writing on women's economic empowerment in other regions have observed that women's increased access to income can simply mean that their husbands opt out of contributing or reduce their contributions to the household expenses, so that women are forced to meet these shortfalls (Haile et al. 2012:257, 258). According to Linda Mayoux: 'There is considerable evidence that women's increased control over income may be accompanied by a withdrawal of male contributions for their own luxury expenditure, limiting the total increase in income going into household well-being' (Mayoux 1999: 972; Haile et al. 2012:257, 259; Vyas et al. 2015:48).

The DNH findings are consistent with this earlier research (Eves 2018a:32; Eves 2018b:27–28; Eves and Lusby 2018:23). Specifically, the DNH research found that women's increased financial resources often enable men to reduce their own contributions to the household, or to contribute nothing at all. Women

across the field sites often bear full responsibility for the financial support of the household, even when their spouse has an income. Instead of increasing the overall pool of resources available to the household, women's economic gains were often found to move men's financial resources from contributions to the household to discretionary expenditure.

Some husbands do not contribute financially to the household because they do not earn any income, relying instead on their spouse's income. The DNH research showed that men who are not working are unlikely to take on additional domestic responsibilities when their wives are participating in income-generating activity. Although women may have advanced economically in that they have access to an income, this comes at the cost of increased workload (Kabeer 2001; Haile et al. 2012:258).

While some men seem quite comfortable about not contributing to the household, this is not always the case. Compared to the other field sites, men's failure to contribute to the household was viewed more negatively in the urban context of Honiara, where households are more dependent on two incomes because of the high cost of living in the city. When men there fail to earn an income and thus do not live up to the ideal of the male breadwinner, their masculine identity is called into question, sometimes resulting in violent backlash against their partners who are earning an income.

Men's Resource-Depleting Behaviour

Men usually fail to contribute financially to the household because they choose to direct their income to their own discretionary spending, for example on cigarettes, betel-nut, alcohol (and sometimes marijuana), gambling or other women (Eves 2018a:32–33; Eves 2018b:31; Eves and Lusby 2018:35). This is largely because many men view the money they earn solely as their own. In some cases when men do contribute to the household they divide their income in half, keeping half for their own discretionary spending, while their spouse contributes all her income to the household.

The impact of men's resource-depleting behaviour on women's workload and household well-being is a source of discontent and often results in domestic conflict. Such conflict often occurs when women exercise agency by refusing requests for money or by questioning their husbands' expenditure. Women's requests for their husbands to contribute to the household were

more likely to result in violence in Jiwaka and Chimbu than in Bougainville and Solomon Islands.

Alcohol is a key trigger for physical violence against women (Eves and Lusby 2018: 36–37; Eves 2018a:31; Eves 2018b:33; Eves 2016). Women interviewed reported their partners' alcohol consumption — particularly in the form of binge drinking — to be central to marital discord. Women consistently reported that refusing requests for money for alcohol or questioning expenditure on alcohol was a trigger for violence. Being reproached by their wives for wasting money on themselves and depriving family was also reported as a cause of men's violence towards their partners.

Conflict over the use of money for alcohol is often exacerbated by alcohol consumption itself. Some men interviewed sought to control their spending on alcohol by giving money to their wives to look after before drinking sessions. However, this strategy is not always effective with men; women at each field site reported examples of men who adopt this strategy subsequently demanding the money back when drunk and becoming violent if it were not forthcoming.

Conflicts over Women's Income Generation

Much of the violence reported was related — in one way or another — to women's income generation, although it was attributed to a range of factors including a husband's jealousy and distrust of his wife's fidelity or his opinion that his wife had not done her work satisfactorily, disagreements over the discipline of children, or other reasons including refusing sex or talking too much.¹ At each field site, violence was reported to be used as a means of enforcing compliance with gender norms and cultural expectations of how a woman should behave. Men were often reported to resort to violence where they perceived their partner's behaviour to be at odds with their expectations of their behaviour.

Conflicts over women's income generation arise for several reasons, which include men demanding or seizing money from their spouses, wives considered to be not earning enough or incurring a loss at market, wives' income generation interfering with domestic responsibilities or men forbidding wives' income generation. Much of the conflict and violence associated with money concerns men's demands for money from their wives. Some conflicts occur because the husband expects full control of all the income that his spouse

generates, even when he has not contributed to earning it. Other conflicts about money occur over spending priorities for pooled income. Some husbands demand that their wives seek permission for any expenditure of pooled income, but do not seek agreement for their own expenditure. If a wife challenges this expectation, conflict is likely to follow.

Some husbands restrict their wives' freedom so far as to prevent them from earning income, thus reinforcing the women's dependency on them. Preventing women from earning an income is one way used by men to curtail women's agency. Restricting their movement is another way. A small number of women in each field site indicated that their spouses engaged in controlling behaviour, which curtailed income generation. Controlling behaviour was particularly acute in the PNG Highlands, where it extended to men preventing their wives from going to sell produce at markets.

While some men try to prevent their partners from earning income, others welcome it because it reduces pressure on them to contribute to the household (Kim et al. 2007; Vyas and Watts 2009:598). A small number of men in Solomon Islands acknowledged the benefit women's earning presented for themselves and their households, largely because it reduced pressure on their income. In contrast this view did not emerge in the field sites in PNG.

Conflicts over income from cash crops, such as coffee, cocoa and copra, are particularly common and occur because some men seize control of the sales, passing very little of the income on to their wives. This is particularly acute in places with patrilineal land tenure systems, for when crops are planted on a man's land, he will consider the income as rightfully his (Eves and Titus 2017a and 2017b). Several key informants in Jiwaka reported that despite women doing all of the labour required for the production of coffee, men seize the coffee when it is ready for sale so that they can, as one remarked, 'see the money first' (Eves 2018b:28; Voice for Change 2013:39). Even when they have appropriated the larger share of the coffee income, men often also demand money from their spouses when their own coffee money is spent.

The research revealed a small number of cases of conflict and violence occurring at all field sites because women were deemed not to be working hard enough at domestic labour. Several Chimbu women indicated

that their income-generating activities, especially their trips to market, are a source of conflict and violence and we found examples of husbands beating their wives if they feel they are not working hard enough at income generation or have not made enough money at market (Eves 2018b:52–53). We found no similar cases at the other field sites. If earning an income interferes with women's domestic and childcare responsibilities, some husbands react violently. For example, women who go to the markets to sell produce face the risk of violence from husbands who may regard them as being away from the home too much or neglecting their domestic duties. Several women indicated that being late home from market and not being able to fulfil their domestic and childcare responsibilities led to violence from their spouses.

Life is quite precarious for many women who rely on selling produce or other items at market, since markets are often saturated by the same products, so profits are small. If a woman gives some of this income to her husband, she may not have funds to re-invest in generating further income or to meet the needs of the household. While some women contest their spouses' demands, others accede to such requests out of fear of violence if they refuse.

Women's Agency

Women interviewed as a part of this study reported employing a range of strategies to minimise marital discord and violence (Eves 2018a:39–40; Eves 2018b:58–60; Eves and Lusby 2018:38–39). Many women also sought to challenge inequitable relations in the marriage and inequitable contribution of funds to the household, for example by questioning their husbands' misuse of money. While such examples demonstrate an overt exercise of agency, other times women exercise a 'defensive form of agency' (Kabeer 1997:291), which does not challenge gender norms. Examples of defensive agency include being silent or running away if their husband comes home drunk, returning only when he is sober again. Some interviewees reported that they had given up trying to hold their husbands to account and let their husbands control the money. They had resolved not to ask their husband for money in order to avoid conflict and violence. Submission was a common theme enunciated by many women of Chimbu, several saying that a good wife should submit to her husband (Eves 2018b:38). Others reported some suc-

cess in reducing violence by informing their husband what they were doing, how they were earning money and the purpose of their earning. A small number of women in PNG advocated sharing their money with the husband as a strategy for reducing marital discord.

In the PNG Highlands, one woman reported telling her husband why she was saving money in the bank so that he understood and suggested that it is when there is no understanding between couples about the purpose of income generation that violence occurs. Another woman, whose husband was violent and controlling (he had broken her nose and hand), advised that the way to resolve family problems was to keep the husband informed about how the wife earned money. She also advised that wives should not ask their husbands for money. Another woman (whose husband was non-violent) offered similar advice, that is wives should explain to their husbands what they are marketing and how the money will be used. She also believed that wives should share the money they earn to avoid problems.

To avoid conflict, many women silently endure the pain and suffering they experience in their marriages, adopting a strategy of simply avoiding talking. As a woman from Malaita remarked, 'I'm sick of fighting, so I just don't say anything now'. Similarly, a woman from Makira said that she believed her husband would be better if she did not talk too much. So, while some women may query their spouses' personal expenditure to the exclusion of the household, many women may not, preferring to let it pass for the sake of peace. In the highlands of PNG, many women subscribe to conservative gender norms requiring women to submit to their husbands. For example, one woman said that if her husband gets angry with her (though not physically violent) if she has not washed his clothes, to appease him she washes them and then he is happy.

Even women whose relationships appear relatively good on the surface, with no apparent violence or conflict, circumscribe their behaviour and defuse their spouses' anger by being careful to explain how much money they made and how much they spent. Other women are careful to share incomes and to make financial decisions together with their spouse, to alleviate the potential for conflict. Others consider that spending money wisely and only on family needs is necessary to avert conflict. Some women engage in other strategies to keep possession of their money, such as hiding money or depositing it in the accounts of others.

Thus, it is important to recognise that the absence of conflict in the household does not necessarily signify the absence of unequal power relations in a household (Kabeer 1997:267). Inequality exists in many domestic relationships but simply remains unchallenged. The absence of conflict simply means that some women see the risks of questioning the status quo as too great and prefer to remain silent.

One of the assumptions of women's economic empowerment programming is that if women become financially independent they will be able to leave dysfunctional, conflictual and violent marriages (Eves 2017b).² Some of the women interviewed had left violent husbands and a small number indicated that they wanted to leave but had not done so yet. However, it is important to note that this is not always an option for women even if they do have their own income, particularly in contexts where land is passed through the male line, since the productive asset for income generation — land — is considered the property of men.

The strategy of divorce also poses other difficulties for women, because not only do they lose all the assets they have accumulated when married, they can lose their children, as their father may insist they remain with him. Moreover, if they return to their natal village there is no certainty that they will have access to resources such as land, vital for subsistence and income generation. Whether they are granted access to land really depends on the woman's father if he is still alive or her brother or brothers if the father is deceased. This was the situation that confronted one woman in the PNG Highlands, who divorced her violent husband. When she returned to her natal village, her brother, encouraged by his wife, only allowed her access to one block of land and refused to give her a coffee block, which would have made income generation easier.

Throughout the research sites, few women had recourse to the law and justice system. Some women remarked that they were too afraid of their partners to pursue this option, fearing even more violence. The fact that few women resort to the law and justice system reflects not only of the inadequate reach of the state, but also that intimate partner violence continues to be cloaked in shame and silence which means women are reluctant to report their experiences.

What Does the Research Tell Us?

Ensuring that women's access to and control over economic resources leads to increased control over other areas of their lives is critical for women's economic empowerment. To this end, these research findings suggest some key lessons to inform economic empowerment initiatives:

- » Working with men to challenge gender inequitable behaviour and norms is imperative.
- » Community-based gender transformative programs should occur in conjunction with economic empowerment initiatives.
- » Women's economic empowerment programming should adopt — and be constantly aware of — a Do No Harm approach.

Key Lesson — Working with Men to Challenge Gender Inequitable Behaviour and Norms is Imperative

One lesson to be drawn from the DNH research is **the importance of working with men before the commencement of economic empowerment interventions**. Given the poor development outcomes for women and the high levels of violence they experience, there is a clear need for programs that work to improve the position of women. However, there are dangers if strategies are not in place to mitigate and manage male 'backlash'. Such 'backlash' includes the perception of being excluded from the benefits that accrue to women from women's economic empowerment programming, as well as more generally.

Initiatives working with men generally focus on violence against women or reproductive and sexual health. Although these are valuable, **there is a need for initiatives specifically relevant to women's economic empowerment that highlight different issues. Programs should include financial management and decision-making in the household, domestic labour and other caring responsibilities, workloads and more cooperative gender relations.**

Key Lesson — Community-based gender transformative programs should occur in conjunction with economic empowerment initiatives.

Economic empowerment requires not only building women's capacities and skills but also the removal of constraints that impinge on their empowerment. Unless these constraints are removed, it is unlikely that women's increased access to resources and assets can be transformed into broader empowerment in other areas of their lives. Given that such constraints are beyond the level of the individual, **there is a need for community-wide approaches. After all, it is in communities that gender inequality is normalised and tolerated.**

Women's economic empowerment programming needs to embrace a **gender transformative approach** more fully. As a recent Guidance Note from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) says, gender transformative approaches should focus explicitly on tackling social norms regarding gender, power and violence, as well as broader ideas, attitudes and values related to what it means to be a 'real man' or a 'real woman' (Alexander-Scott et al. 2016:10). Despite the long-term recognition of the role played by norms in justifying gender inequality and violence against women, it is only in the last few years that practitioners have focused on interventions that seek to transform these norms (Heise and Manji 2016:1).

This new emphasis is due to the realisation that focusing on norms is much more effective than interventions simply targeting attitude and behaviour change (Alexander-Scott et al. 2016:17, 10). **'Changing community norms is a process, not a single event'** (Michau 2005:4). Engaging with community members on a regular basis and with mutually reinforcing messages from a variety of sources over a sustained period of time contributes to changing the climate in the community and building momentum for change (Michau 2005:4).

To shift social norms, interventions must create new beliefs among community leaders, so that the collective expectations of the people important to the community encourage new behaviours to emerge (Heise and Manji 2016:2).

Key Lesson — Women’s economic empowerment programming should adopt, and be constantly aware of, a Do No Harm approach.

Women’s economic advancement and empowerment sometimes has negative consequences for women, including violence and widely felt inequitable workloads. Add the consequence of male ‘backlash’ and withdrawal of male contributions to the household and clearly **it is essential for women’s economic empowerment programming to adopt a Do No Harm approach** and to be constantly alert for indications that harm is occurring.

The importance of addressing violence in the context of women’s economic empowerment interventions has been especially highlighted in recent international literature. Indeed, another DFID Guidance Note argues that programs to improve women’s business performance or increase women’s income are threatened or diluted by the impact of violence. To defuse the risk and to optimise benefits of economic development, the authors suggest that it is essential for programs focussing on women’s business performance or increasing women’s income to address violence against women (Taylor 2015:5). The authors have found that approaches to empower women economically that are combined with social interventions have consistently stronger and more positive outcomes than interventions that focus on economic factors alone (Taylor 2015:8). The Guidance Note concludes that efforts to tackle violence against women that address social and gender norms will have a much better impact on women’s economic empowerment, and vice versa. The Note suggests that ‘women’s lack of agency, assets and economic opportunities and their unpaid reproductive, household and caring responsibilities can

compound discriminatory social norms and vastly increase their vulnerability to violence in many countries’ (Taylor 2015:5).

To ensure the women’s economic empowerment programming mitigates risks of harm to women, holistic approaches are advocated. Economic advancement needs to be:

implemented alongside, and integrated into, an approach that can increase women’s power and agency with respect to income and assets. This usually means an approach that will work to change social norms around women and girls working, earning an income and having decision-making power.

(Taylor 2015:19)

For this approach to be effective, specific action is needed to address social norms and behaviour concerning violence, gender roles and gender relations and to ensure prevention, protection and response (Taylor 2015:19–20).

The DNH research provides insights into the gendered power dynamics at play in marital relationships, the specific factors that hamper women’s income-generating activities and economic advancement, and the risk factors for violence in Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. Given the importance placed on women’s economic empowerment by donors, NGOs and governments, there is a critical need for more research on the challenges that arise in supporting women’s economic empowerment and a broader evidence base from which development programming can proceed.

Author Notes

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Endnotes

- 1 As one insightful respondent said, some women are forced into sex with their husbands under economic duress. If they agree to sex, their husbands, who are in control of the money, will give some money to their wife. So, women who do not have a truly independent source of income are being coerced into unwanted sex with their husbands.
- 2 Where financial independence did allow women to exit dysfunctional marriages more easily, this occurred in the urban context when women earned a salary.

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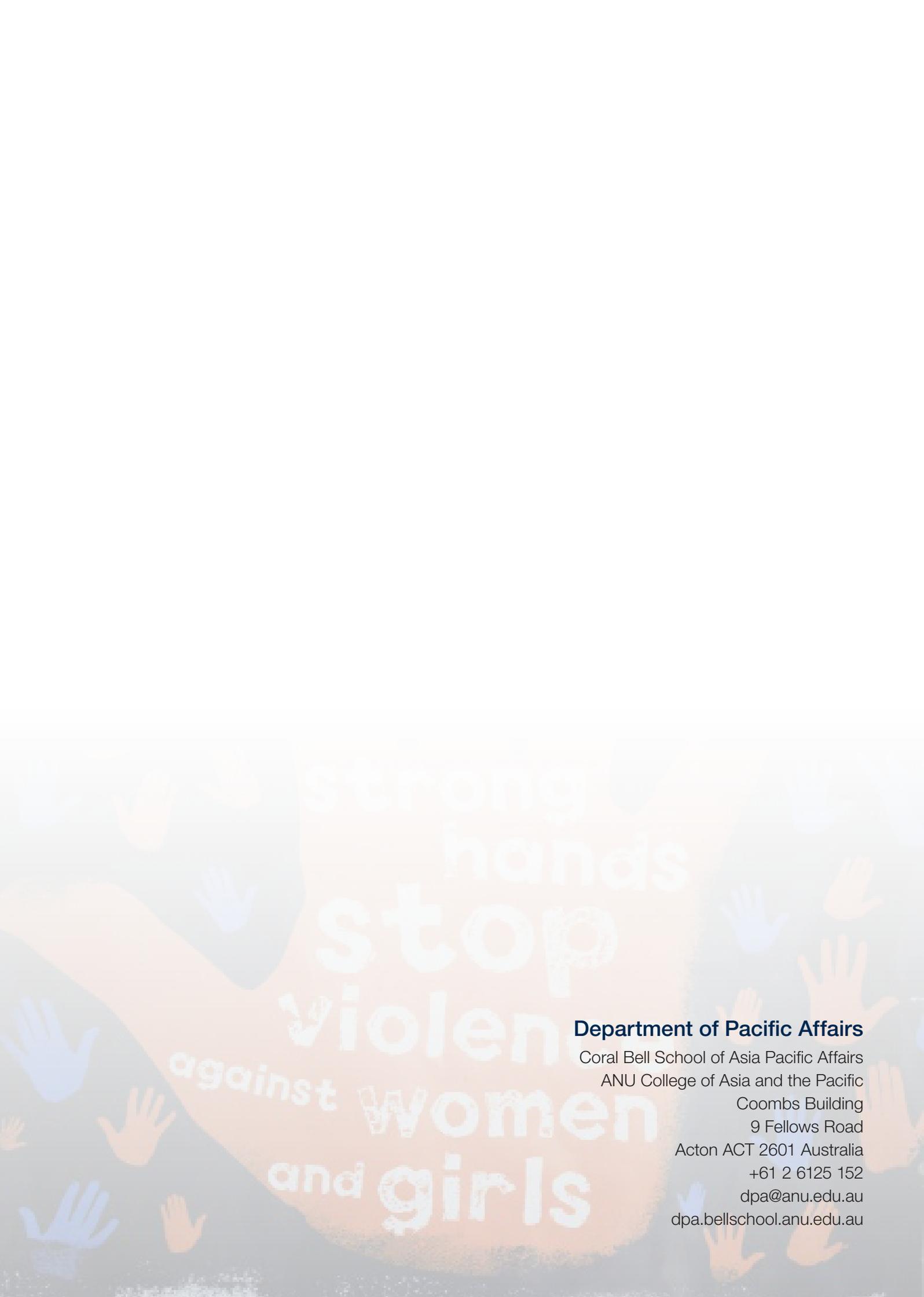
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This research and publication has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's *Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development*. The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.



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