



# Gender-Based Violence in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** Some of the most alarming gender-based violence (GBV) statistics are found in the Highlands region of Papua New Guinea (PNG). A literature review of GBV in the Highlands provinces (Enga, Chimbu, Hela, Jiwaka, the Southern, Western and Eastern Highlands provinces) is lacking. This paper will provide a comprehensive review of existing literature related to GBV in the Highlands region of PNG focusing on gender roles and norms, intimate partner violence, polygyny, bride price, tribal conflict, the introduction of Christianity, mining and existing local and international policy. The literature is analyzed using Merry's "Concept of Culture and Human Rights" (2003) and correlations are drawn to the three gender dichotomies discussed in Yanagisako and Collier's (1987) work: "Nature and Culture" (Ortner 1974), "Domestic and Public" (Rosaldo 1974) and "Reproduction and Production" (Harris and Young 1981). Our findings indicate there are several gaps in existing literature. A dynamic understanding of culture is best suited to understand factors contributing to GBV in the Highlands of PNG, contemporary cultural change has exacerbated GBV and existent gender dichotomies are often used as justification for control and violence. Such findings should be taken into account when addressing GBV in the Highlands of PNG.

**Keywords:** Gender based violence (GBV), Highlands of Papua New Guinea, Anthropology, Literature Review, Cultural change, Gender Dichotomies, Papua New Guinea Policy

## 1. Introduction

According to the World Bank's 2014 report, gender-based violence (GBV) is the most common form of crime experienced by women in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Statistics highlight alarming data: most of the women knew the perpetrator; women are five times more likely to be victimized at home than on the street and alcohol is often cited by respondents as a factor in violent crimes. While GBV affects women of different socioeconomic statuses, the situation is much worse in specific areas, including Southern and Western Highlands. For example, in the Western Highlands Province rape and serious sexual assault accounted for the majority of violent crimes in 2010, as 117 cases of rape and sexual offences were reported out of 316 reported crimes in total (Lakhani, Sadaf and Willman 2014b).

United Nations Women underlines that in 2016 there were no official national statistics concerning lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the last 12 months and lifetime non-partner sexual violence. Therefore, the lack of available data certainly is an issue that will be addressed in this literature review. However, international organizations and research centres provide insight into GBV occurring at epidemic proportions in PNG. For example, the Overseas Development Institute, an independent and global think tank based in London, through its 2015 report, indicates that 41% of men in PNG admit to having raped someone and over two-thirds of women are estimated to have suffered GBV in their lifetime. Furthermore, this study also shows that only 73% of GBV survivors seek official assistance and that 88% seek this assistance through informal support structures, as village courts and community leaders (Darko, Smith and Walker 2015). Moreover, the International Women's Development Agency's (IWDA) report identifies financial disagreements and disharmony in marriage as very common causes of GBV and warned that violence would increase during the COVID-19 pandemic, given the increased stress put on households and the forced cohabitation with abusive partners during lockdowns (International Women's Development Agency 2020). Even if official data on the GBV situation during this pandemic is lacking, many stories gathered by IWDA (2020) unfortunately confirm this forecast.

For example, Femili PNG's Case Management Centres of Lae, which is dedicated to assist survivors of family and sexual violence in the Highlands region with access to services, declares that new client intake was at 29 individuals in April and 31 in May 2020, compared to 42 individuals and 46 respectively in April and May 2019 and that this reduction of number should be attributed to the difficulty of seeking assistance during the lockdown (IWDA 2020). Highlands provinces are often cited as the ones with the most alarming data concerning violence against women and where tribal cultures, isolation and lack of infrastructure play a central role in the growth of this social issue (Lakhani, Sadaf and Willman 2014b). For this reason, this literature review focuses on GBV in the Highlands Region of PNG and will draw information from Enga, Chimbu, Hela, Jiwaka, the Southern, Western and Eastern Highlands provinces. This review will integrate analysis drawing on Merry's (2003) work on culture and human rights in anthropology and gender dichotomies discussed in Yanagisako and Collier's (1987) work: "Nature and Culture" (Ortner 1974), "Domestic and Public" (Rosaldo 1974) and "Reproduction and Production" (Harris and Young 1981).

## 2. Definition of Gender-Based Violence

At this point, a clear and official definition of GBV must be provided to correctly understand the content of the current literature review. GBV refers to violent and harmful acts directed towards an individual on the basis of their gender in a society or culture (UNHCR 2021; PNG National Strategy to Prevent and

Respond to GBV 2016-2025). Examples of these violent acts include sexual-based harassment, physical violence, online violence, forced marriage, coercion and manipulation without the survivor's consent (European Commission 2021; PNG National Strategy 2016-2025). These actions may inflict sexual, physical, emotional, economic harm and suffering (European Commission 2021). GBV predominantly targets women and is therefore often understood in the context of violence against women. This is reflected in the many international documents such as the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) which denotes GBV against women as a violation of international law (OHCHR 2021). GBV is rooted in gender inequality and power relations - it violates the human rights and security of individuals across the globe (UNHRC 2021). International perceptions of GBV against women also recognize the phenomenon is not an accident or a reflection of a woman's vulnerability, rather that it is embedded in structural systems, norms and long-standing discrimination found in states across the world (OHCHR 2021).

### 3. Methodology

This literature review survey was conducted in order to understand the main factors contributing to GBV in the Highlands and identify gaps in existing research. Sorcery accusation related violence (SARV) was excluded from the literature survey as this form of violence is composed of complex ideologies and unique causes which would better be studied individually. In order to develop focal points and themes to guide the review of literature, authors conducted a preliminary search using online databases such as Google search engine, Google Scholar and university affiliated libraries. This information was used to define key themes to investigate, which were "gender norms and roles", "tribal conflict", "bride price", "policy". Authors and United Nations Online Volunteers from the Morobe Development Foundation Inc. conducted research focusing on each key theme, ensuring the Highlands provinces (Enga, Chimbu, Hela, Jiwaka, the Southern, Western and Eastern Highlands provinces) and the key term "gender-based violence (GBV)" were mentioned in sources collected. Policy and legal sources may have focused on PNG as a nation. Sources collected during the literature survey primarily consisted of news articles, peer reviewed papers, conference papers, discussion articles, dissertations, websites, international and non-governmental organization (NGO) reports, newspaper articles, documentaries, books, policy documents and reports. The theoretical framework was determined based on preliminary research found in these groups. Once sources were exhausted in these categories secondary themes which arose during the literature survey, such as "economy", "mining", "alcohol and drug use" and "statistics" all pertaining to GBV in the Highlands of PNG were researched. The authors then reviewed the information and selected points of interest in order to develop the literature review.

### 4. Analytical Framework

#### 4.1 Merry (2003) - Culture and Human Rights

Merry's (2003) work discusses culture, the demonization of culture and development of human rights. Merry (2003) cites the difference between the "old" concept of culture - being understood as static, bounded, traditional, with the "new" concept of culture - which may be understood as dynamic, contested, changing and hybridized (Merry 2003, pp. 58, 67). Merry's work highlights the idea of a cultural relativism without boundaries - a tolerance without limits (Merry 2003, p. 56). Though if one perceives culture as a static and unchanging entity, this will mean defending every culture practice and tradition unwaveringly (Merry 2003, p. 58). This is not a realistic assumption, as cultures have been affected by processes such as globalization, colonization, capitalism, reform movements and militarization and have therefore been subject to change (Merry 2003, pp. 57- 58). These definitions of

culture and cultural relativism are intertwined with the legalistic domain of human rights which aims for a degree of universalism in defining standards of wellbeing and rights for humanity without considering local differences (Merry 2003, p. 59, 60, 68). Though as emphasized in Merry's (2003) work, human rights documents are often vague in their definition of culture and equate culture as being synonymous with tradition and view culture as an obstacle to achieving human rights, especially women's rights (Merry 2003, p. 60). Though it is important to note the subordination of women has been exasperated by global conflicts, poverty and political systems (Merry 2003, p. 62, 64). These principles will be used as points of analysis when examining cultural practices and norms and their relation to GBV in various Highland regions of PNG.

#### *4.2 Yanagisako & Collier (1987)- Gender Dichotomies*

This article critically reviews three gender dichotomies which have been prominent in literature related to kinship and gender in anthropology. The authors note that these dichotomies are assumptions, and that gender everywhere is not rooted in the same type of difference (Yanagisako and Collier 1987, p. 15). Our literature review will highlight where these dichotomies are apparent in ideologies and practices contributing to GBV in the Highlands of PNG.

The "Nature and Culture" dichotomy theorized by Ortner (1974) associates females with the natural sphere while males are believed to be associated with the transcendent and more dominant "culture" sphere (as cited in Yanagisako and Collier 1987, pp. 17, 18). The "Domestic and Public" dichotomy proposed by Rosaldo (1974) is premised on the nature and culture dichotomy and argues that women due to childbearing and mothering activities spend more time in the domestic sphere, while men are believed to create culture and partake in societal activities outside of the home (as cited in Yanagisako and Collier 1987, p. 19). Finally, the "Reproduction and Production" dichotomy mainly theorized by Harris and Young (1981) is inspired by Marxist theory. This dichotomy proposes that women are associated with reproductive activities involving the reproduction of human beings, child rearing, and domestic activities while men are associated with production activities due to involvement in societal occupations and culture (as cited in Yanagisako and Collier 1987, p. 20). In essence, the underlying presumption in these dichotomies is that a woman's biology and motherhood define her role, and that this role is devalued in comparison to male "cultural" activities (as cited in Yanagisako and Collier 1987, p. 19, 24).

## **5. Definitions of Gender in the Highlands of PNG**

### *5.1. Gender Roles and Norms*

Scholarship largely focuses on gender norms in the Eastern Highlands, one of PNG's most populated areas, which is reported to be a "hot spot for abuse" (Solomon 2018). A World Health Organization survey showed that almost 80% of women in the province have been physically abused by their husbands (Solomon 2018). Literature has linked high rates of Violence Against Women (VAW) in the Eastern Highlands to local marital relationships, characterized by perceived male superiority and dominance and reinforced through violence. In the Unggai-Bena District, asymmetrical power relations pervade marriages, with one participant stating: "Women aren't allowed to butcher pigs, they aren't allowed to divide up money or anything else. Only the husband must make the decisions and the wife must follow those decisions" (Eves 2020, p. 8). The interviewee asserted that male dominance in the household represented "the power of [their] customary ways", explaining that if a woman was disobedient, custom dictated that her husband should beat her into submission (Eves 2020, p. 8). From this example, the

dichotomy of male and female domains is apparent – men believe that they hold authority over decision-making processes, and, by extension, over women.

In Hela province, cultural understandings of domestic violence are informed by local gender norms. Research showed that men “associated domestic violence with female disobedience, disrespect and idleness”, and considered domestic violence a corrective measure to ensure that female kin remain “good women” (Kopi et al. 2011, p. 10). Behaviors deemed socially inappropriate for “good women”, thereby warranting violence from male kin, include frequenting nightclubs or cinemas and having relationships with men (Kopi et al. 2011, p. 10). Moreover, in Hela province, unmarried women engaging in consensual sex is included in cultural definitions of rape, as, in the absence of bride price, the woman’s sexuality is understood to have been stolen from her family or tribe (Kopi et al. 2011, p. 11). Rationalization for GBV appears to be linked to the fairly widespread assumption of women as the ‘property’ of male kin.

Furthermore, motherhood has been found to offer significant advantages to women. Research found that women of the Huli clans in the Southern Highlands can gain power and status through “bearing and raising children”, enabling them to make certain demands of their spouse (Wardlow 2007, p. 1011). This would align somewhat with Harris and Young’s (1981) “reproduction/production” dichotomy, namely that society assumes women’s main role to be ‘reproducers’, a domain in which they appear to exercise some agency, as Wardlow’s research suggests. Scholarship on humors and bodily substances has proved insightful about gender ideologies and GBV, with Dickerson-Putman (1994) stressing that women’s value increases with age in the Eastern Highlands province. During their reproductive years, gender ideologies of “menstrual taboos” and female pollution constrain women to sustenance production and childbearing (Dickerson-Putman 1994, p. 25). As they reach menopause, women are accorded greater significance, gaining some access to household income and participating in “extra-domestic” activities. Such an activity includes coffee production, which is accorded significant cultural weight (Dickerson-Putman 1994, p. 25). This suggests that age and maturity enable women to transcend the “nature/culture” divide, proposed by Ortner (1974, cited in Collier & Yanagisako 1987, pp. 15-17). No longer rigidly constrained by ideologies attached to their bodily substances, women can perhaps gain some access to male-dominated spaces.

Similarly, Clark (1997, cited in Stewart & Strathern 2000, p. 4) highlights that the Huli of the Southern Highlands believe women’s vaginas to be “hot” and therefore “potentially dangerous” to men. Traditional Huli cultural ideologies warned against excessive contact between spouses, believed to “[worsen] fortunes among men and premature ageing” amongst both sexes (Wardlow 2007, p. 1007). The notion of women representing a threat to men is often cited as justification for male authority and VAW. However, recent social changes are prompting the deconstruction of gender hierarchies based on bodily substance beliefs. For example, Wardlow (2007) argues that the influence of Christianity has reshaped social relations amongst Huli tribes, with most married couples now inhabiting the same house. Likewise, developments in schooling and religious influences in the Sambia tribes of the Eastern Highlands have broken down taboos surrounding bodily fluids amongst younger generations. Herdt (2019) argues that this has generated less hostility between men and women in the Sambia tribes (p. 36). The previous examples support Merry’s (2003) notion of culture as dynamic and constantly fluctuating in response to changes in environments, often in ways that can prove enabling for the pursuit of human rights.

Furthermore, the pre-colonial practices of the Huli clans of the Southern Highlands are described as involving gender avoidance practices (Wardlow 2007). This has encouraged a popular depiction of the Highlands as characterized by rigid gender dichotomies. However, certain anthropologists have

challenged this interpretation, arguing that new findings demonstrate that “elements of complementarity” existed between men and women (Eves et al. 2018, pp. 7-8).

Scholarship on the Southern Highlands, reports that Mendi women exercise greater agency than women elsewhere in the Highlands. Lederman (1989) argues that Mendi women are not restricted to the domestic sphere by gender ideologies, but rather actively engage in exchange networks, with both men and women (p. 232-33). Merlan (1988) states that they are “fully acknowledged as transactors in their own right in *twem*[network] exchange” (p. 423). Therefore, Mendi women cannot necessarily be described as socially inferior to men. However, despite active participation in exchange networks, women are excluded from cultural activities. Formal Mendi meetings, for example, remain exclusively male (Lederman 1989, p. 482). This aligns with the notion of a “nature/culture” or “public/private” divide between the sexes, though the boundaries are certainly blurred given women’s participation in exchange networks. While gender dichotomies do not appear to be as rigid in Mendi as in neighboring areas, patriarchal power relations nonetheless dictate society. The majority of literature on gender norms in Mendi, however, was produced in the 1980s, and therefore offers considerably dated accounts.

Additionally, Wardlow (2004) discovered that some Huli women, known as ‘passenger women’, are rebelling against gender boundaries through sex work. Despite local stigmatization of their work, these women “embrace [the identity] because it symbolizes rebellion and autonomy” (Wardlow 2004, p. 1019). They are often previous victims of gender violence, and thus *choose* to become ‘passenger women’ in resistance to social norms and male authority, rather than out of economic necessity, much of their anger stemming from bride price, which they perceive as the sole concern of their male kin (Wardlow 2004, pp. 1018-35).

While practices involving strict separation of the sexes have lessened considerably, the division of labor continues to be dictated by local gender norms. Eves et al. (2018) stress the significance of studying gender asymmetries in the Highlands, stating that the extent to which women are able to “negotiate a more equitable sharing of housework with their partners” is dependent on cultural understandings of gender (p. 55-6). In the Eastern Highlands, women are generally expected to engage in sustenance farming, as well as unpaid domestic housework, childbearing and care-taking responsibilities. While the increasing number of female workers in coffee production has transformed gender roles, it remains a “man’s crop”, with female workers continuously disregarded and assigned heavier, more labor-intensive tasks (Eves and Titus 2020, p. ix). Recent developments in commercial cultivation of broccoli and pineapple in the Eastern Highlands, however, have increased opportunities for women and changed gender roles (Inu 2015, p. iv). Their short crop life symbolizes “temporary ownership”, in contrast to the permanent ownership of coffee crops, and thus can be associated with impermanent female power (Inu 2015, p. v).

Research on gendered divisions of labor in Jiwaka province found that while heavy labor was previously a man’s responsibility, women are now burdened with agricultural labor, including the tedious work that men previously undertook, as well as housework and childcare, similar to the Eastern Highlands (Eves et al. 2018). Eves et al. (2018) assert that adherence to traditional gender roles in Jiwaka is strongly encouraged, even enforced, through physical violence (p. 12). Women’s increased participation in previously male spheres of labor does not equate to gender equality. Women are tasked with heavier workloads and many are forced to hand over income to their husband (Eves et al. 2018, pp. 28-30). Fear of violence sparked by conflicts over finances often deters women from entering waged labor (Eves et al. 2018, p. 32).

Eves et al. (2018) report that Chimbu society is characterized by conservative gender norms (p. 37-49). Similar to Jiwaka province, Chimbu women are now overburdened with agricultural, household and childcare work, and express frustration at their husbands' unwillingness to share the burden of housework (Eves et al. 2018, p. 37-39). It is commonly accepted that the man dictates the household and that a "good wife" is submissive to his charge (Eves et al. 2018, p. 38). In comparison to Jiwaka, women in Chimbu must walk longer distances to reach markets to sell produce and are thus more vulnerable to assault by armed criminals (Eves et al. 2018, p. 36).

The previous examples suggest that women in certain provinces cannot be described as solely confined to childbearing and caretaking duties. The reality is considerably more complex, with women occupying both the 'productive' and 'reproductive' spheres. Merry (2003) challenges the prominent belief that modernity is universally emancipatory for women, whilst culture subordinates them (p. 62). Recognizing culture as "dynamic" and "fluid", rather than antithetical to progress and 'modernity', enables a more nuanced understanding of the sources of women's oppression. Applied to the context of the Highlands, 'modern' capitalist structures, in conjunction with local gender norms, appear perhaps to have largely contributed to, even worsened, gender inequality.

There are a number of areas where research on gender norms and roles is particularly lacking. Information on the Western Highlands and Enga provinces, in particular, is relatively scarce. Future research might concentrate on these areas to identify local understandings of gender norms, as well as if and how 'outside' influences, such as those cited by Eves (2006), have transformed contemporary gender dynamics (p. 38).

### *5.2. Hegemonic Masculinities in PNG Highlands*

Recent scholarship on hegemonic masculinities in the Highlands offers insight into the gendered nature of violence. Eves (2012) stresses that "gender inequality is intimately tied to masculine discourses and culture, men's practices and identities, and their participation in complex gender relations" (pp. 2-3). The dominant form of masculinity in the PNG Highlands, Eves (2006) argues, is characterized by "assertiveness and strength" (p. 44). Men are encouraged to become 'big men', embodying both assertion and aggression, the latter of which is seen as a legitimate response to "insult or challenge" (Eves 2006, p. 44).

In the Goroka district of the Eastern Highlands, the archetypal 'big man' (often referred to as a 'leader man' today) has one or multiple wives, is active in kinship and network exchanges, and owns land for coffee production (Barnett-Naghshineh 2019, p. 221). 'Masculine' characteristics are instilled in boys from a young age, often through violent methods, including thrashings, genital mutilation, and food deprivation (Eves 2010, p. 53; Jolly 2012, p. 8). Such characteristics are perhaps in accordance with Ortner's (1971) "nature and culture" dichotomy, with men expected to occupy a much more public, active, and 'cultural' role in society.

In a study of the Eastern Highlands, Kelly et al. (2010) found that young men frequently make sexual jokes in assertion of their masculinity, serving to "further entrench the desirability of frequent sex and focus on male pleasure" (p. 227). Similarly, a study of masculinity in the Unggai-Bena District of the Eastern Highlands revealed that sexual violence against women is largely considered "disciplinary method essential to building good character and even a necessary constituent of becoming a man" (Kelly-Hanku et al. 2016, p. 2). Hegemonic forms of masculinity evidently contribute considerably to the normalization of GBV and notions of male superiority.

### 5.3. *'Troubled Masculinities'*

Literature is comparatively thinner on the topic of transitional gender roles and norms. Increased agency for women has contributed to the emergence of what Zimmer-Tamakoshi (2012) terms “troubled masculinities” – namely men’s inability to acquire “the resources they need to achieve both local and global ideals of masculine social and individual power”, resulting in insecurity over their status (p. 82). Eves et al. (2018) argue that advancements in women’s rights often results in a violent backlash from men (p. 7). Spark (2011) interviewed a woman from the Western Highlands whose husband physically abused her out of “‘jealousy’ about her professional attainments” (p. 172). Educated women are often accused of ‘sins’, including speaking English, having a higher wage/status or better education than their husband, and returning home late (Spark 2011, p. 167). Such jealousy often results in a desire to reassert authority, namely through violence.

Malbrancke (2018) identifies a similar trend, as the Baruya tribe of the Eastern Highlands embrace elements of both traditional forms of masculinity and its more modern interpretations. Malbrancke (2018) argues, however, that men appropriate both the “means to be modern” and the “discourse of modernity itself” (p. 76). They consider women’s access to greater opportunities to be an “encroachment”, viewing themselves as “suffering subjects” (Malbrancke 2018, p. 76). Men’s anxieties over women’s advancement have translated into reinterpretations of what they consider to be a “good wife/good woman” and invoked past notions of “female propriety” (Malbrancke 2018, p. 78).

### 5.4. *Sexual and Gender Minorities*

There is very limited scholarship on LGBTQ+ individuals in the Highlands. The majority of available literature, though equally scarce, focuses on coastal areas. A study on the Sambia tribe of the Eastern Highlands suggests an embracing of homosexuality – the tribe were known for acts of “ritualized homosexuality”, which they deemed crucial to the process of male development (Herdt 2019, pp. 36-40). However, the introduction of evangelical Christianity (namely the Seventh Day Adventist Church) in the 1970s, while proving positive for female agency, has since fostered negative attitudes towards homosexuality (Herdt 2019, p. 64).

Research on the Western Highlands identified a correlation between the HIV epidemic and poor legal infrastructure, linked to a widespread, “hypermasculine culture” of “violence, denial, homophobia and gender inequality” (Kelly-Hanku et al. 2015, pp. 990-92). A study focusing on transgender individuals highlighted that “conformity to gender norms is perhaps more rigorously policed” in the Highlands, where cultures of “toxic and violent forms of masculinity” dominate (Kelly-Hanku et al. 2020, p. 829). Sexual and gender diverse Highlanders thus tend to relocate elsewhere on the island, where societies are perhaps more accepting (Kelly-Hanku et al. 2020, p. 829).

However, Kelly-Hanku et al. (2020) note that grassroot changes in the Highlands are contributing to wider acceptance and safer communities, namely in instances where local culture is “deployed to redress serious inequalities in what is often a hostile environment”, highlighting the “enabling” role of culture in work for justice (p. 829). Such initiatives would benefit from greater scholarship on sexually and gender diverse individuals in the Highlands.

## 6. Intimate Partner Violence and GBV in the Highlands of PNG

### 6.1. *Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)*

Definitions of IPV are debated. Using a single, narrow definition of IPV may be inaccurate as it is understood differently across cultures, it may reduce the credibility of findings, or result in the normalisation of alternative violence that it excludes (Ellsberg and Heise 2005, cited in Eves and Titus 2020, p. 85). This report will adopt Butchart and Mikton's (2014) definition, which acknowledges the breadth of the issue: namely, an intimate (or ex-) partner's behavior that "causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors" (p. 74). Forms of violence can vary in nature. For example, physical aggression in the Highlands can range from husbands inflicting injuries on their spouses to prohibiting their wives from washing to discourage other men from taking an interest in them (Eves et al. 2018, p. 27).

The true extent of the problem of IPV in the Highlands is considerably difficult to gauge, given the scarcity of data on the issue across provinces. The most frequently cited data are from a survey conducted by the Law Reform Commission in 1982-1986 (Amnesty International 2006, p. 5). This survey showed that the extent of IPV varied considerably across provinces, with the highest rates occurring in the Western Highlands and Chimbu provinces, where almost 100% of women report being hit by their spouse (Amnesty International 2006, p. 5). The city of Tari, in the Hela province, has also been recorded as a hotspot for violence within the household (Chandler 2014, pp. 6-7).

The limited data on the issue can be largely attributed to local understandings of what constitutes violence. The rate of sexual violence within the household is estimated to be greater than current statistics suggest. Eves (2020) argues that cultural understandings of violence account for this gap in statistics, as forced sexual intercourse within a marriage is not commonly viewed as 'rape' in the Eastern Highlands province (p. 3).

There is limited scholarship, in particular, on the psychological impact of IPV on women in PNG. A report by Médecins Sans Frontières (2011) stresses that victims of IPV and sexual violence risk "serious long-term physical and emotional harm", with many survivors suffering from "depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts, anxiety, phobias and post-traumatic stress disorder", as well as risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (p. 2). Little research has been conducted into the impact that IPV is having on women's mental or physical health in PNG or strategies for addressing this problem.

### 6.2. *Triggers of Intimate Partner Violence*

There are various triggers for outbursts of IPV. Kopi et al. (2011) note that triggers of violence against women by partners can differ across age and marital status (p. 6). However, research that focuses on such variations is scarce. The main triggers, therefore, will be outlined below without distinction across age or marital status.

One of the most frequently cited triggers is the refusal of sex. Research conducted across various sites in PNG, including Mount Hagen in the Western Highlands, found that refusing sex was the predominant trigger of violence – 71% of women, whose marriage was characterized by violence, felt that they could not refuse sex (Eves and Titus 2020, p. 91). Forced sex within marriages is largely linked to the practice of bride price. In the Eastern Highlands in particular, marriage is understood as a 'purchase' and women a commodity, over which men have ownership (Eves and Titus 2020, p. 107). As Kelly-Hanku et al. (2016) highlight, sexual violence is an urgent health emergency, given the increasing risk of HIV (p. 1).

IPV is inextricably linked to gender roles and ideologies in the Highlands, often triggered by women engaging in what are deemed socially unacceptable behaviors. An Amnesty International report (2006) states that IPV is considered an “inevitable dimension of domestic relationships” in the Highlands, used as a *corrective* measure against wives deemed to be “lazy, insubordinate or argumentative” (p. 12). Malbrancke (2016) highlights that conjugal violence continues to be validated amongst the Baruya tribes of the Eastern Highlands, with no exception granted to pregnant women – women are warned against failing to feed their husbands or engaging in extramarital relations, for example (pp. 82-84). Furthermore, Kelly-Hanku et al. (2016) highlight that, in the Highlands, sexual violence is used to “punish, control, assert masculinity and for personal sexual pleasure” (p. 2). This points to a culture of male dominance, enforced through violence, which is crucial to understanding the broader epidemic of GBV.

A further trigger of IPV is conflicts over money, common in Jikawa. Conflicts are mainly triggered by men failing to contribute financially to the household – often stopping completely when their wives engage in paid labor – and men demanding that their wives give them their income (Eves et al. 2018, p. 28). If challenged, men will often respond with violence (Eves et al. 2018, pp. 29-31). This highlights the often harmful impact of ‘modern’ influences, such as capitalist structures, which overburden women with dual responsibilities (household and waged labor). In order to understand the issue of IPV, women’s role in society cannot necessarily be strictly confined to the framework of the gender dichotomy “reproduction/production”, as proposed by Harris and Young (Harris and Young 1987, cited in Collier and Yanagisako 1987). The problem of IPV is arguably intensified by recent external influences, which have sparked a greater number of women participating in the labor force.

The harmful impact of ‘modern’ influences is perhaps most evident in societies where IPV is triggered by increased opportunities for women’s agency. Krug et al. (2002) argue that IPV will be most severe in areas where “the status of women is in a state of transition” (Spark 2011, p. 172). This suggests that IPV is sparked by resistance to changing gender roles and the dismantling of patriarchal structures. Merry’s (2003) work on human rights and culture offers an interesting framework through which to consider this issue. Women’s increased economic empowerment, Eves et al. (2018) argue, can result in a backlash from men (pp. 1-2). Zimmer-Tamakoshi (2012) links this backlash to the influence of globalization on local ideas about masculine power in society, exemplified through ‘troubled masculinities’ (p. 82). Merry (2003) argues that there is a common culturalization of problems relating to women’s oppression, which tends to place the blame on local culture rather than the contemporary neoliberal globalization (p. 64). However, the problem of IPV, though certainly linked to harmful gender roles and ideologies, is exacerbated by global, ‘modern’ influences.

Another trigger of IPV is alcohol/marijuana misuse and gambling habits. Kelly-Hanku et al. (2016) argue that alcohol or marijuana intoxication commonly results in violence perpetrated against female partners (pp. 6-7). Furthermore, men spending money on alcohol or gambling habits can result in domestic disputes over household finances, often concluding in violence against women (Care 2015, p. 3).

### 6.3. Women’s Coping Strategies for Intimate Partner Violence

Eves et al. (2018) highlights the difficulty of women leaving relationships characterized by IPV as the threat of losing children, assets and family pressure to remain in the relationship leave them feeling confined. Therefore, some women have developed coping strategies for reducing the rate of IPV within their household. Eves et al. (2018) argue that women in Chimbu province often engage in peacekeeping strategies, ultimately burdening women, rather than the perpetrator of violence, with the extra responsibility of “maintaining peace in the household” (p. 42). Furthermore, in order to reduce conflict,

women in Jikawa province consciously refrain from engaging in behaviors that might anger their partners (Eves et al. 2018, p. 32). This often includes hiding wages or avoiding waged labor completely, in order to deter conflicts over financial resources (Eves et al. 2018, pp. 29-32). Research into the mental exhaustion of conscious efforts to avoid violent interactions is particularly lacking.

#### 6.4. Polygyny and Intimate Partner Violence

Literature has linked polygyny to the problem of IPV. In the Hela province, polygyny is cited as the most common trigger of domestic violence, with 13% of cases occurring between co-wives (Kopi et al. 2011, p. 9). Statistics from the Highlands indicate that 32% of women are in a polygynous marriage and twice as likely to have more than one co-wife compared to the rest of PNG (Care 2015, p. 4).

Polygyny was traditionally restricted to older men in the Highlands, namely those in leadership positions, used to enhance their social and political status (Mek et al. 2018, pp. 121-22). However, recent economic growth, a growing cash economy, and resource extraction has made polygyny more accessible to younger men and therefore more widespread (Shih et al., 2018, p. 1028). Polygyny can have significant, negative consequences for women. In Jikawa province, precolonial polygyny practices have changed. Men now have a preference for underage girls, fail to consult their current wife before bringing another woman into the marriage, and often force their first wife (and children from their first marriage) to leave the household through violence (Eves et al. 2018, pp. 20-22). Furthermore, polygyny often leads to violence between co-wives, resulting from jealousy, resentment, and loss of financial support (Eves et al. 2018, pp. 20-22; Kirkham 2013, p. 71). Similarly, Dinnen and Thompson argue that polygyny is the main trigger of both violence against women and violence *between* women in Hela province (Dinnen and Thompson 2004, cited in Kirkham 2013, p. 47). Women are frequently subjected to violence for refusing to accept the polygynous relationship (Kirkham 2013, p. 45). Polygyny thus results in an increase in IPV, but also violence between co-wives in polygynous unions.

However, Mek et al. (2018) indicate a recent “gendered shift” in practices of polygyny in the Highlands (p. 133). Research conducted in the Eastern and Western Highlands found that while there is a new style of polygyny emerging amongst younger men with access to the cash economy, women are also engaging in polygyny in order to access financial resources and social status (Mek et al. 2018, p. 130). These women, Mek et al. (2018) argue, are “yielding choice, decision-making power and action” in order to gain some “control over their own life circumstances” (p. 133). Although they remain confined within patriarchal structures, women choosing to enter polygynous relationships are able to gain some agency and privileges usually restricted to men (Mek et al. 2018, p. 135).

Significantly, in reference to polygyny, Shih et al. (2017) warns against the oversimplification of culture, categorized as either “good or bad” (p. 1033). To do so would neglect the “current and historical nuances of social and economic change”, which are crucial to the evolution of culture, which is understood to be fluctuating and dynamic, rather than static (Shih et al. 2017, p. 1033). This aligns with Merry’s (2003) notion of culture and human rights. A more nuanced and flexible interpretation of cultural practices in PNG is needed. Polygyny in the Highlands has become more widely practiced today than in the pre-colonial societies, thus exacerbating the problem of IPV. However, this phenomenon has been driven largely by economic, rather than cultural, influences. Therefore, in accordance with Merry’s (2003) argument, polygyny is perhaps best understood as part of a culture which is contested, dynamic, and constantly changing, subject to external influence. In order to address the issue of IPV, it is necessary to treat the economic, structural drivers of this phenomenon, as well as the underlying gender roles and ideologies, rather than targeting culture as a barrier to human rights.

## 7. Bride Price and GBV in the Highlands of PNG

### 7.1. Bride Price

Research on bride price practices and its connections to GBV in the Highlands of PNG is quite dated and limited. Bride price (also known as bride wealth) is defined as a transaction in which the groom and his family provide the bride and her family with a form of compensation for the loss of a family member in their household (Neuendorf 2020; Human Rights Watch 2015; Alfred 2016). This practice solidifies kin relations and varies regionally, though it has often included the exchange of pigs, oils, shells and other gifts (Wardlow 2006; Henry and Vávrová 2020, p. 7; Bre 2006, p. 9). Clans such as the Tomba-Enga traditionally engage in in *Tee* (also called *Bekim* in the Western Highlands) – a practice which requires the bride’s family to repay the bride price gift to the groom’s family (Feil 1981, p. 64; Henry and Vávrová 2020, p. 10). Though such traditional bride price practices have often been replaced with a “simplified” version premised on an inflated monetary exchange and competitiveness in wealth between families (Eves 2019, p. 1373; Pickles 2016; Eves et al., 2018, p. 23).

### 7.2. Bride Price and the Commodification of Women in the Highlands of PNG

The transformation in bride price practices has been associated with a man “buying” his wife, similar to that of buying a property (Eves 2019, p. 1374). According to Henry and Vávrová (2020), bride price practices in Hagen, Western Highlands often run counter to the traditional theme of reciprocal exchange and are rooted in women being exchanged as commodities in a market economy (p. 7). Eves (2018) found that marriage and bride price in Jikawa is increasingly becoming a competition between men to see who can pay the highest price for a wife. This ideology has led men to use the phrase “Full price, fully body”, signifying that they have full control over their wives if the entire bride price has been paid (Eves 2019, p. 1374). Nihill’s (1996) research in Anganen, Southern Highlands illustrates how the bride price transaction may politicize the female body as the groom’s exchange of wealth for a wife may be premised on her productive and reproductive capacity in the domestic sphere. As Bre (2006) explains in regard to examining bride price in the Western Highlands, “Daughters are now something that we can sell and buy, just to satisfy our greed” (p. 12).

This has led women to be treated as property. According to Human Rights Watch (2015), bride price severs the relationship between a woman and her kin. In Eves’ (2018) article, a woman from Chimbu explains that men believe they become the boss once bride price has been paid (p. 27). Wardlow’s (2007) study in Hela province and Eves’ (2018) study in Jiwaka indicate men often use bride price to explain why wives must obey their husband’s commands which include performing agricultural labour, complying with requests for sexual relations from her husband, and asking permission to leave their home (Wardlow 2007, p. 1010; Eves et al., 2018, p. 22-23). These examples correlate with the three gender dichotomies discussed by Collier & Yanagisako (1987). Women’s work in childcare (reproduction/nature), agriculture/ gardening (nature) and housework (domestic) is gendered by men and thought of as subordinate as they use their power to request that these tasks be completed. The payment of bride price in these examples is being used as a justification/ reasoning for the continued separation of “spheres”.

### 7.3. Bride Price - Control and Intimate Partner Violence in the Highlands of PNG

This ownership and complete control of female bodies commonly associated with bride price payments has been used to justify male superiority and violence as a corrective measure to control women. Current

bride price practices have been associated with an increase in domestic and intimate partner violence in the Highlands of PNG. Bride price exchange is widely thought to provide men with the right to beat their wives (Eves et al. 2018, p. 7; Eves 2019, p. 1374). In interviews with respondents in Chimbu and Jiwaka province in April 2016 (Eves 2019, p. 1372) men used the phrase “mi baim em pinis” (I have paid for her) to justify the use of force and violence against their wife if supposed marital obligations previously mentioned had not been observed (Eves et al. 2018, p. 24). Eves’ (2020) study in the Eastern Highlands found that 82.8% of marriages in which wives were subjected to forced sex and 82% of marriages where women were forced into sex due to fear also involved a bride price exchange (p. 9). During a bride price ceremony in Mt Hagen in the Western Highlands in December 2012, bigman Philip Maipson stated “Most of the people interpret it wrongly. They think that buying a woman gives us the right to beat her” (Henry and Vávrová 2020, p. 7). At this ceremony, the bride’s sister, Bernadine also said when her sisters from the village got married and they came back because their husbands were beating them, they were told to return because bride price was paid (Henry and Vávrová 2020, p. 11).

This indebtedness associated with bride price often limits autonomy of women in marriages and their ability to leave abusive relationships (Henry and Vávrová 2020, p. 11). Women in marriages that included a bride price exchange believe the abuse they experience is justified (Eves 2019, p. 1369; Human Rights Watch 2015; Eves et al. 2018, pp. 34-35). As a result of inflation in monetary bride price, the wife’s family may not be able to afford to pay back bride price as tradition dictates if the marriage ends or dissolves (Garbe and Struck-Garbe 2018, p. 22). A wife may also feel guilty if her family must repay an expensive bride price which has been financially supporting them. Therefore this may leave the bride in a marriage characterized by indebtedness, vulnerability and some form of imprisonment (Eves et al. 2018, p. 25-26).

#### *7.4. Bride Price as a Positive Cultural Practice*

There are some ethnographic examples of bride price practices in the Highlands of PNG that are not characterized by violence and female subordination. Henry and Vávrová’s (2020) acknowledge bride price is associated with a harmful impact on women but argue that it does not cause violence. Family members at this bride price ceremony in Mount Hagen stress the cultural and traditional significance of bride price. Henry and Vávrová (2020) suggest that the return gift payment helps to eliminate the notion of bride price being similar to a “commodity” exchange and reduces the risk of GBV (p. 11). The authors even counter the claim that inflation in bride price may cause GBV and suggest it could mean an increased value in the work of women (p. 16). In addition, some men believe the exchange of bride price makes men more responsible for their marriage (Gerawa 2015). A journalist from Tari in the Southern Highlands acknowledges that he was happy to pay bride price for his wife because he believes the exchange makes men more responsible in their marriages and ensures men will not just “get the girl and go” (Gerawa 2015). It is important to note that in some areas of the Highlands, GBV may not correlate with bride price payments. For example, Malbrancke’s (2013) research in Wonenara valley in the Eastern Highlands of PNG indicates although bride price is part of Baruya marriage practices, it accounted for only twenty percent of 489 marriages recorded (Malbrancke 2013, as cited in Henry and Vávrová 2020, p. 75).

#### *7.5. Bride Price - Demonization of Culture and Women’s Rights*

Human Rights Watch and CEDAW Committee on the Rights of the child also consider bride price to be a “harmful and discriminatory practice” (Human Rights Watch 2015; OHCHR 2021). Patrick Lombaia, the Executive Director of the PNG Mining Watch Group explains that the ceremonial exchange of bride price should be discouraged because if bride price is not paid, the bride and her family fight with the husband,

but even if bride price is paid, the husband will control and beat his wife (Kep 2017). Though it is important to note in light of Merry's (2003) work, bride price is not a one dimensional and static practice in the Highlands of PNG – it has been affected by globalization and the introduction of a market and cash-based economy (Merry 2003, p. 55). This in association with male superiority according to ethnographic evidence, has made the current cultural practice harmful. Understanding bride price as a dynamic, hybridized, contested and changing cultural practice makes it difficult to employ the notion of cultural relativism without bounds or conditions. It would be unsuitable to demonize the complete practice of bride price as it fosters reciprocal exchange and solidifies kin relations, but reasonable criticize elements of it – such as commodification, ownership and male superiority which contribute to its harm and endangerment of women in many marriages. Though this perspective may be contrary to common anthropological standpoints premised on cultural relativism and defending culture it is important to consider the longevity, and importance the cultural practice of bride price holds in relation to the existence of diverse clans and tribes in the Highlands of PNG. Elements such as these may be considered when evaluating the impact, role and harm associated with the practice of bride price in the Highlands of PNG. Bride price literature in the Highlands would benefit from an increase in ethnographic and statistical data related to bride price and its connection to GBV and perceptions of women.

## **8. Tribal Dynamics and GBV in the Highlands of PNG**

### *8.1. Cultural Change and Tribal Conflict*

The dynamics of tribal fighting have been radically transformed by the effects of globalization in the region. The introduction of firearms, the availability of drugs and alcohol and the exploitation of resources have created profound inequality and conflict, and as a result, has led to an increase in violence in warfare. The social, economic and political environments vary across provinces, and thus, approaching the subject with generalizations would be incredibly inaccurate. Existing research on the impact of tribal warfare on GBV in the PNG Highlands is not extensive. In order to understand the relationship between contemporary tribal warfare and violence against women, it is crucial to evaluate the nature of fighting itself and the factors that have contributed to its change in nature.

Tribal dynamics in the PNG Highlands have undergone a cultural transformation. Early tribal conflict as described by anthropologists was characterized by tribes fighting with bows and arrows over land, women and pigs. Major battles would occur between two tribes and were often pre-arranged and restricted to the geography of the tribes involved (Hallak 2019; Ziazaris 2020). In this traditional method of warfare, elder male leaders played a key role in dispute resolution. These leaders were equipped with the oratory skills needed for conflict negotiation, an ability that has been lost to the younger generation (Lakhani and Willman 2014a). Thus, one can infer that these leaders derived most of their power and status from the recognition and respect of their communities as well as their ability to successfully manage conflict through negotiation and leadership.

Contemporary tribal conflict is more complex, as young male groups often under the influence of drugs and alcohol launch surprise attacks with modern weaponry due to a variety of socio-political factors (Macdonald and Kirami 2015). The new generation of fighters are not familiarized with traditional warfare and resort to specializing in firearms and guerrilla warfare techniques. Traditionally, it was unacceptable to target women and children in tribal conflict, but this prohibition seems to be disappearing, leaving women and girls as frequent victims (Capie 2011; Thompson and Dinnen 2004).

### *8.2. Youth, Weaponry, Masculinity and GBV in Contemporary Tribal Conflict*

Lewis' (2007) research in the Southern Highlands demonstrates that youth alienated from traditional mechanisms for addressing grievances and traditional male leaders are more likely to resort to spontaneous violence or criminality. Rambos are an example of this disenfranchised youth. In Porgera Valley in Enga province, Rambos are exclusively young men who specialize in killing with firearms and engage in sustained tribal conflicts as a result of socioeconomic inequalities (Jacka 2019). This relates to the contemporary concept of culture as stated by Merry (2003). The youth's present-day behaviour is reflective of the active making of culture, as it is a result of Western influence. Young men in the Enga Province state that they have seen how others fight around the world in Hollywood movies, and thereby, they turn to guns as the weapon of choice in conflict (The Guardian 2019).

The introduction of new weaponry and poor decision-making from a few members of a tribe has led to conflict and targeted killings can take place against random members of either side almost anywhere (Hallak 2019). This heightened violence disproportionately affects women in the Highlands. It is common for women to be viewed as commodified objects in conflict. They are vulnerable to rape, used in 'payback killings', forced to be mediators or to partake directly in conflict, and are overall seen as collateral damage to warfare (Kelly-Hanku et al. 2016; Jolly 2012; Amnesty International 2006.)

Among the many incidents, in 2002, a church worker recalls a woman being dragged out of her house and then gang-raped by gun-wielding men (Alpers 2005). Many of the rape by gun-point scenarios aren't limited to the choice taken by an individual man. In fact, rape in the Highlands, reveals the wider nature of the conflict itself. The sexual violation of women and girls acts as a means to challenge, weaken and undermine the men from the opposing ethnic group (Kelly-Hanku et al. 2016). In Chimbu Province, a gang raped a seven-year-old girl from the enemy tribe as she walked with her father, as a way to offend the enemy tribe as well as punish them for their belonging (Garap 2004). Sexual assault as a part of warfare is not restricted to rape. Men who need to travel long distances to fight are often given access to women. In Enga, clanswomen are pressured and forced to sleep with fighters from other clans to encourage them to stay (Wiessner 2006).

Additionally, modern weaponry has further contributed to the commodification of women. In order to obtain guns, men tend to rely on money and pigs. Yet, when these are unavailable, women are used as currency for the exchange of weaponry, or the services provided by gunmen (Amnesty International 2006). Women are also used as instruments to maintain peace. Participants of a study held in the Jiwaka Province explained how women are often forced to take part in arranged marriages or bride exchanges with members of other tribes as a way to foster relationships (Gibbs, Mckenna, Yakam, 2020).

Gender dichotomies dominate the way in which women are perceived and treated during warfare. Although the conflict largely takes place among men, women suffer the consequences. This is a reflection of the "Domestic" and "Public" spheres presented by Rosaldo (1974) as cited in Yanagiasako and Collier (1987). Most women in the Highlands are confined to home-making activities, and thus, when conflict occurs, they are the biggest victims of displacement. In the Western Highlands, women's dependency puts them at an increased risk of violence and exploitation when they are forced to flee their communities and join different groups (Amnesty International 2006). Notions of gender do not always dictate the role that women in the Highlands take during tribal fighting. Contrary to the idea that women are limited to domestic aspects of warfare, many of them actually play key parts as negotiators or are actively involved in the conflict. Through an analysis of the Aiya warfare, Southern Highlands, one can note the active participation that women have in contemporary warfare. As violent actors, women are armed with bush knives or partake in diversionary tactics on the battleground - commonly, entering the fighting area

naked to distract the enemy (MacDonald and Kirami 2015). Similarly among the Simbu, physically powerful women took on men's roles in fighting and daughters of prominent village leaders or war heroes were occasionally allowed to live in the men's house and take part in activities normally reserved to men (Gibbs 2012).

Contemporary expressions of masculinity are therefore at the center of Highlands tribal dynamics. The economic boom from natural resource extractions and the country's liquid natural gas project has led to an influx of money in the Highlands and with no flourishing economy for people to invest in, men buy weapons as a way to increase their power and status (Bhandari 2017). Violence perpetrated with firearms exacerbates unequal power relationships between the sexes as masculinity is used as a justification for the abuse towards women (Alpers 2005). Likewise, masculinity has been tightly linked to the consumption of alcohol and drug abuse. Beer, for example, is associated with the exercise of male power and use of force—both legitimate and illegitimate (Capie 2011). In the context of tribal fighting, guns and substance abuse as being part of what constitutes a 'man' have significantly aggravated violence, specifically towards women (Macdonald and Kirami 2015; Denbach and Marshall 2001). As the account of Tony highlights, a 16-year-old boy in the Highlands, men often get drunk and destroy the opposing ethnic community's block as well as rape their women and destroy their houses, thus prompting to a wider tribal conflict (Kelly-Hanku et al. 2016).

### *8.3. Culture of Retribution and its Effect on Women*

The nature of tribal fighting in the PNG Highlands is based on the expression of grievances through violent means. Cultural beliefs and norms encourage revenge-seeking through retributive fighting or 'payback', particularly for the deaths incurred and an attack on an individual is considered an attack on the group as a whole (Lakhani and Willman 2014a). Payback killings or retaliation has strong connotations of honour and respect, and it has long formed part of the Highlands history. In Engan culture, for example, fighting is born out of sorrow, they cannot let go of the people they have lost and therefore, they must retaliate (The Guardian 2019).

The culture of retribution has been traditionally present as a method of settling scores among tribes in the PNG Highlands. There exists moral and social obligations tied to payback killings, and in order to understand these, retribution must be viewed through the concepts of group loyalty, reciprocity, and kinship (Larcom 2015). Aside from those, 'payback' killings are also linked to ideas of masculinity. For men, the practice of retributive violence is seen as a mechanism to establish one's "manliness" and increase one's prestige within the tribe (Larcom 2015). In a legal context, the legitimacy of retaliatory violence is complex. Payback was considered legal in pre-colonial PNG under customary law, but now, payback killings are a criminal offence under the Criminal Code Act (2013) (Larcom 2015). However, such unlawfulness does not prevent payback killings from occurring. Tribal groups do not see court systems or law enforcement mechanisms as a viable choice to address grievances, and so are forced to take justice upon their own hands (ICRC 2017).

Women in the Highlands are particularly affected by the tendency of retributive violence. The DFAT Country Information Report published by the Australian government states that women are at a more vulnerable position than their male counterparts since those who are victims of violence are unlikely to come forward for state support or protection. For instance, one of the biggest massacres that resulted out of retaliation against an enemy tribe happened to have an evident female victim majority. The police minister in Hela Province declared that this horrific killing involved a total of 23 women, two of which were pregnant, as well as nine children (Henriques-Gomes, 2019). Sexual violence against women is also

used as a retaliatory method to destroy a tribe's "property". The rape of women and girls from enemy tribes and villages is viewed as an appropriate part of ethnic conflict and a culturally accepted tactic of retributive violence (Hanku et al. 2016).

Although the research of tribal violence in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea is extensive, its direct correlation to gender-based violence is not often studied. Future research should focus on the gendered aspects of tribal warfare, in order to evaluate the effect that conceptions of gender and masculinity have on women. Further, the role of women in intertribal struggles must be evaluated in a contemporary context as a way to highlight how globalization has reshaped their involvement in direct conflict.

## **9. Religion and GBV in the Highlands of PNG**

### *9.1. Religious Transformation in PNG*

The introduction of Christianity has impacted many facets of local culture in PNG, such as gender dynamics and relations. As previously noted, gender norms and roles in the Highlands of PNG are quite complex but often characterized by sexual antagonism and gender dichotomies. Pre-European arrival in the Highlands region, Indigenous ritual cults were prevalent, with separate male and female cults often recognizing male and female spiritual entities (Stewart and Strathern, 2000a, p. 29). Male ritual cults especially shaped the warrior and dominant male masculinity ideology (Jolly 1994, as cited in Jolly, Stewart and Brewer 2012, p. 15). Once Christian missions, mainly Catholic and Lutheran churches arrived in the Highlands region by 1930, local cult practices were suppressed and Christianity became widely accepted (Stewart and Strathern, 2000, p. 29). As previously mentioned in section 4.1 this has led to less strict gender dichotomies and roles among some groups. Nearly the entire population of PNG practices Christianity and this has been recognized in the preamble to their Constitution (Anderson 2015).

### *9.2. Christianity's Influence on Gender Roles and GBV*

There was a gendered approach to church organization and roles of religious civilians taught by some of the first missionaries (Eves 2012, p. 3). Men were given leadership positions in the church setting and could take on roles as pastors, bishops and priests. A Christian man was also expected to be the leader and head of his household and family. Contrastingly, women were excluded from prominent leadership roles in Christian institutions and expected to be a "good" domesticated housewife and mother (Eves 2012, p. 3). These ideologies still exist today and also collide with pre-existing stringent gender dynamics in various tribes in the Highlands along with a dominant patriarchal structure across the nation (Chandler 2014). This phenomenon reflects Merry's (2003) definition of culture as being hybridized and dynamic. The influence of Christian ideals on a man and woman's roles is also reflective of the "Domestic/Public" dichotomy proposed by Rosaldo (1974). This introduction of Christianity has contributed to dominant masculinity and has consequently contributed to female subordination and violence against women. Domestic violence in a Christian community is believed to be restrained to the domestic and family sphere while being condemned in public spheres, which is also reminiscent of Rosaldo's gender dichotomy (Eves 2012). Responsibility for this violence is also believed to be equal between partners and could be solved by increased mutual understanding and communication (Eves 2012). Christian women often turn to God or the Virgin Mary and rely on prayer as a solution to the problem of domestic violence and the rage of their husbands in their household (Hermkens 2012). Though scholarship on Christianity in PNG is generally quite abundant, research is lacking in relation to GBV and its connection to Christian denominations in the Highlands of PNG. Future research could focus

on collecting ethnographic and statistical data in all Highlands provinces, examining how Christian institutions and the community perceive genders and GBV.

## **10. Mining and GBV in the Highlands of PNG**

### *10.1. Porgera Valley Gold Mine, Enga Province*

The presence of mining operations in communities across PNG has been linked to GBV. This is especially true at Porgera Gold Mine, which was opened in Porgera Valley, Enga Province, PNG in 1990. The mine is 95% owned by Canadian mining company Barrick Gold and a Chinese mining company Zijin Mining, while 5% is held by Enga's local government and landowners (MiningWatch 2020; Manning 2016, p. 6). The mine has been operating for some residents' entire lifetime, and has led to infrastructure development such as roads, schools and hospitals and has created economic opportunities (Armstrong 2014). Though the mine has currently closed, mining operations in Porgera demonstrate how mining activities exacerbate GBV in the Highlands and literature on this topic is abundant.

### *10.2. Power, Inequality, Conflict and Masculinity*

Socioeconomic development as a consequence of mining activities in Porgera has led to economic inequality and an increase in resource conflicts (Jacka 2019). Mining activities are also predominantly male and the economic benefits gained by elites and landowners are often male dominated, meaning women are often excluded from this acquired wealth (Bonnell 2012, as cited in Manning 2016). Environmental degradation especially impacts women, such as Ipili women, as land for household food production and subsistence farming activities has been polluted (Amnesty International 2010). The contrasting impact of mining activities on men and women and the higher importance and benefits given to males in mining activities is reminiscent of the "nature/ culture", "domestic/public" and "reproductive and productive" dichotomies discussed by Yanagiasako and Collier (1987).

'Rambos' - young and aggressive men in the area of Porgera mine engage in tribal fighting. As Jacka (2019) notes, "With no promises for development from the failed projects initiated by PDA, many young men felt they had no choice but to fight (p. 46). Porgera men also spend their money earned from mining on buying guns and more wives and often do not share this wealth with their families (Jacka 2019, p. 50).

### *10.3. Human Rights Abuses and GBV in Porgera*

Despite local development, Porgera has become home to issues such as environmental destruction, increased alcohol and drug use and increased levels of domestic and sexual violence towards women (Armstrong 2014). Tribal conflicts in the vicinity of the mine have displaced women and resulted in women being targeted for revenge murders (Jacka 2019, p. 46). The negative implications of tribal conflict and polygyny on GBV is only increased by this extractive industry.

Over 200 women and girls have experienced rape and sexual assault by guards and security personnel employed by the Porgera gold mine and international corporate stakeholders (MiningWatch 2020). There are reports of women being asked to pay a fine or submit to gang rape by officials after being arrested for illegal mining on water dumps (Manning 2016, p. 15). Many women in the area have also been arrested, beaten, raped and then imprisoned for "illegal mining" while panning for gold (EarthRights International, 2018). It is important to recognize the severe impact of these atrocities on women in Porgera. One woman who was aged 14 at the time of being raped at Porgera mine in 2010 stated it

drastically changed her life trajectory and ruined chances of marriage, as in Enga culture rape tints one's reputation (is viewed as shameful) and a women's eligibility for marriage (McViegh 2016).

In 2011 Human Rights Watch released a report outlining Barrick Gold's systemic failures have contributed to its failure to recognize risk of sexual abuse and appropriately deal with allegations (Human Rights Watch 2011). Though Barrick took meaningful steps to address structural inadequacies according to this report, issues still exist. Ipili women have come forward deeming Barrick's compensation was inadequate and not culturally sensitive (Mining Watch 2017; McVeigh 2016). In March 2020 the PNG government refused renewal of Porgera mine's lease as Barrick continues to ignore historical human rights abuses of Porgeran people (Mining Watch 2020).

It is clear structural violence perpetrated by entities in the global north has harmed the lives and trajectories of women in Enga province, Papua New Guinea. A dynamic, changing and hybridized definition of culture as proposed by Merry (2003) is well suited to understand the impact of globalization and foreign intervention on gender-based violence and women's rights in Porgera. The situation in Porgera also illustrates that "modernity" and globalization does not guarantee women of their rights and safety. Rather, it can actually be a barrier. In order to continue to examine the effects of extractive industries on GBV in the Highlands, future research should focus on gathering ethnographic accounts of PNG men and women's experiences living and working in the vicinity of these industries.

## **11. GBV Policy in PNG**

### *11.1. PNG's Legal Commitments*

PNG has signed several legal commitments at the international, regional and national level. The international obligations must be translated into national laws and political tools to fight GBV. A brief overview of this topic is necessary to understand the state's obligations in terms of Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals and how they influence the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV. The National Strategy is in compliance with many of the most important legal international tools concerning women's rights, like the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified by PNG in 1995 with the purpose of adopting appropriate measures to support women; the Beijing Platform for Action, which has been adopted by the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women to urge states to take appropriate measures to combat GBV; the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women of 1993, where violence against women has been finally recognized as a form of GBV which occur in public and private life and can lead to psychological, sexual and physical harms.

In addition to the international commitments specifically concerning women's rights, PNG National Strategy is in compliance with international human rights conventions, like the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by PNG in 1993, and the 2008 United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which dedicates a specific article to women with disabilities. Furthermore, there are two other international legal tools concerning women whose importance should be stressed. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 underlines the essential role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and also addresses the impact of war on them. Therefore, this Resolution, which is cited in the National Strategy, becomes extremely important considering the numerous conflicts that affect the Highlands Region. The second legal tool of importance is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is a call for action from all countries concerning 17 specific

Sustainable Development Goals. PNG recognizes the extreme importance of this SDG 5, which specifically focuses on gender equality.

PNG also claims to be in compliance with regional commitments set out by the Governments of Pacific States to combat and prevent GBV and to increase gender equality. The most important regional tools are the 2005-2015 Revised Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality, which has been adopted in 2004 by Pacific Ministers, and the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration, according to which Pacific leaders committed to developing gender policies in their own countries by implementing protection, health, counselling and legal services.

Concerning national commitments which will be analyzed below, the main political tool to implement women's rights is the PNG National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV, which is based on different key government documents and national laws, all listed in the content of the Strategy (Independent State of Papua New Guinea 2016). However, there are few national laws that deserve to be mentioned as they are very important to this specific analysis. First of all, dealing with intimate partner violence, the 2013 Family Protection Act criminalizes domestic violence and so allows victims to receive proper legal protection through an Interim Protection Order. This Order is strictly linked to the second important national law, which is the Village Courts Act (Independent State of Papua New Guinea 2016). In fact, this Act addresses the harms suffered by a person or its property and, therefore, it also includes sexual violence. According to this law, village courts are entitled to issue Interim Protection Order and, therefore, they become extremely important to combat GBV in remote regions, like the Highlands, where they represent the only access to justice for victims.

As this brief overview shows, PNG has ratified many international treaties and claims to be in compliance with as many conventions. However, masculine culture, lack of laws' enforcement and poor infrastructures in remote locations undermine the commitments' implementation at the community level. The causes of the gap between legal commitments and implementation are the main issue that will be addressed in the current analysis.

### 11.2 *The Existing Policy*

Considering the above, the Government has adopted the 2016- 2025 *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV*, which has four main objectives: creating a GBV governance and institutional structure; institutionalizing data collection and in-depth research to facilitate the strategy's implementation; ensuring continuous services to survivors; decentralising the response to reach all sectors of the society (Independent State of Papua New Guinea 2016). These goals should be implemented by 2025 when a new step of the strategy will begin to reach the PNG Vision by 2050. Detailed targets and indicators have been created to monitor the strategy's implementation and important legal reforms have been made in the last years. However, women's rights continue to be violated.

### 11.3 *Policy System Failures*

Despite National Strategy's implementation, women are more affected than men by the failures of the system and their access to justice is quite complicated. *Pacific Women* is an organization committed to defending women's rights among Pacific countries and country plans are the main tool that is used to reach this goal, by providing detailed descriptions of how funding decisions are made. According to its 2020 *Country Plan*, the remoteness of most of the population and extremely poor infrastructures of many

regions of PNG, like the Highlands, are part of the main challenges that women must face (Australian Government and Australian Aid, 2020).

Unfortunately, this emergency has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, when, as the International Women's Development Agency highlights in its *Submission to the UN special rapporteur on violence against women*, lockdown and lack of transportations have forced women to stay home with violent partners, whose abuse of alcohol has increased lately (IWDA 2021). Moreover, as many remote areas of PNG have limited access to technology and phone lines, seeking help has become even more difficult during the lockdown, when connections between remote villages and support services have been reduced. Concerning this point, the above-mentioned 2014 World Bank report highlights divergence in rural and urban populations relating to GBV (Lakhani, Sadaf, and Willman 2014b).

In fact, preventing this phenomenon is easier in urban areas, where NGOs have delivered training courses concerning women's rights and recourse. Once again, the situation becomes more complicated in rural areas, where lack of education and mistrust in the system persist and people prefer traditional methods of conflict resolution. This mechanism is extremely dangerous in a country where masculine culture pervades society and the violations of women's rights are commonplace.

#### *11.4 PNG's Judicial System: Justice and Village Courts*

One peculiarity of PNG's judicial system deserves to be addressed at this stage. It is important to know that the country is characterized by a hybrid judicial system, where district courts and village courts coexist. The original purpose of this hybrid system was to avoid customary dispute-settling procedures, however, this decision turned out to be a double-edged sword in term of avoiding violence against women. This system has been subjected to many discussions among experts who tried to understand whether women's rights are guaranteed by village courts or not; however, the answer still remains quite controversial and divergent opinions concerning the issue exist.

Relating to the advantages of this hybrid system, Michael Goddard offers his interesting point of view in his research report on this topic. In fact, Goddard defines the existing literature as condemnatory, highlighting its total lack of cultural relativism, and, on the base of the research findings gathered in remote villages, he states that women are reasonably successful disputants in front of village courts (Goddard 2005). However, Goddard mentions the disadvantages of village courts as well, which have been highlighted by many other experts. For example, as Schwoerer mentions in his study of 2018 on unofficial village courts in the Eastern Highlands, decisions are often based on local leaders' perception of justice and highly influenced by masculine perspective (Schwoerer 2018). In conclusion, no unanimous opinion exists, but it seems clear that masculinity pervades the culture of PNG and its judicial system as well.

Regarding this point, a 2012 interesting publication of the Australian National University should be mentioned. According to this analysis, judges are often unsympathetic with rape's victims and many of them still think that women are somehow responsible for suffering from GBV. As a result, they find ways to impose sentences that do not reflect victims' pain, so women's rights are downgraded and their trust in justice obviously decreases (Brewer 2012).

As some of the above-mentioned experts underline, village courts have raised doubts regarding the ability of village courts of granting women's rights as disputants and magistrates as well and this system has often been accused of gender bias. However, given the extremely complex cultural, geographic, and

demographic context of PNG's Highlands Region, it is extremely important to consider a certain grade of cultural relativism while addressing this specific issue as discussed by Merry (2003). Women's rights are human rights and, therefore, village courts should not be influenced by a male-dominated culture. However, imposing a policy that does not consider specific cultural and tribal dynamics might not be the most effective way to achieve gender equality.

### *11.5 Economic Autonomy and Political Participation*

In front of the difficult scenario that women have to face in PNG, education to gender equality certainly is necessary to prevent women from future violence and increasing women's representation in politics would be the right strategy to pursue this objective.

However, as IFES underlines in its 2019 report, violence against women in elections is a serious problem among PNG and the worst cases of this phenomenon have been registered in the Highlands, where female candidates, polling officials, scrutineers, electoral administrators and voters suffer from severe violations of human rights. In fact, according to IFES, female voters face obstacles in expressing their preference, as male members of families control their vote. Moreover, women have to face many changes as a candidate as well, as supported by the fact that, in the 2017 elections, just 5% of all the candidates were female (Dyer, Alison, Bardall and Rogers 2019). The first barrier for female candidates is the lack of economic support for their campaigns because of their socio-economic status and also because families and political parties are reluctant to support women. In conclusion, economic barriers and women's lack of autonomy are huge obstacles for women in freely exercising their civil and political rights.

For this reason, several projects have been implemented to increase women's economic autonomy and so the freedom to choose what is best for them as persons, voters and candidates. A successful example that should be mentioned is the IFC's *Gender-smart business solution*, which found an effective strategy to combine companies' benefits with GBV prevention. To be specific, staff time lost to GBV has been monetized, as well as costs of dealing with GBV, and indirect costs, such as staff turnover, and these studies have been presented to companies. Once employers have understood that GBV is a cost for them, the solution has been based on the following give-and-take mechanism: companies undertake to create safe workplaces for women through specific measures in exchange for the benefit of GBV reduction (IFC 2017).

Therefore, demonstrating that gender-equitable workplaces drive productivity is probably one of the fastest strategies to pursue women empowerment and economic autonomy, while a structural changing of masculine culture certainly is a longer and more complex process.

## **12. Discussion**

Through a careful examination of the literature it is evident GBV in the Highlands of PNG is a complex issue. A review of gender norms and roles, intimate partner violence, polygyny, bride price, tribal conflict, the imposition of religion, across the Highlands provinces and existing local and international policy frameworks provide insight into the causes and ideologies contributing to this phenomenon. Applying concepts from Merry's (2003) work to literature indicates a dynamic understanding of culture is best suited to understand how cultural change affects traditional practices and existing gender inequalities in the Highlands region. Initiatives to combat GBV must also take into account the dynamic, hybridized and fluctuating nature of cultural practices. The introduction of modernity to communities in the Highlands, including the introduction of a cash economy, Christianity and media have not brought

guaranteed improvements to GBV, but rather exacerbated existing gender inequality and increased male dominance. In addition, applying cultural relativism to traditional practices and cultural norms in the Highlands of PNG must be done with caution - as defending culture must take into account cultural change and not defend harm against individuals involved. Through this literature review, gender dichotomies provided insight into how males and females occupy and are identified with separate spheres in the Highlands. It is evident female roles in spheres associated with dichotomies in the Highlands are often given less importance and are used as justification for control and violence against women. Such findings may be used to develop programs and solutions which focus on addressing perceptions, norms and women's roles in such spheres

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#### **Authorship Contribution Statement:**

**Gabriella Richardson:** Conceptualization, Writing - original draft, review & editing, Methodology, Data curation, Formal Analysis. **Chiara Zardoni:** Writing - review & editing, Data curation, Formal Analysis.

**Mhairi-Louise Martin:** Writing - review & editing, Data curation, Formal Analysis. **Sofia Treminio:** Writing - review & editing, Data curation, Formal Analysis.

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