



FIJI WOMEN'S CRISIS CENTRE

NEWSLETTER

Volume 9, Issue 3

September 2005

Cream buns vs wife assault

Stealing cream buns and some \$200 cash is perceived to be a bigger crime than assaulting one's wife.

In a recent case, a man received a suspended sentence for assaulting his wife while a cream bun thief who also took \$200 cash, got three years in jail (Fiji Sun 27/7/05).

"The justice system continues to be inconsistent when passing judgments on crimes of violence against women compared to other minor crimes," says Edwina Kotoisuva, FWCC Deputy Coordinator.

"We are so quick to reconcile a couple when the woman has been assaulted, even if she has been assaulted repeatedly and hurt physically in the process.

A current trend that we're witnessing is that offenders are given a suspended sentence and told not to re-offend.

Yet, when people steal some cream buns and a bit of money, they are given a three-

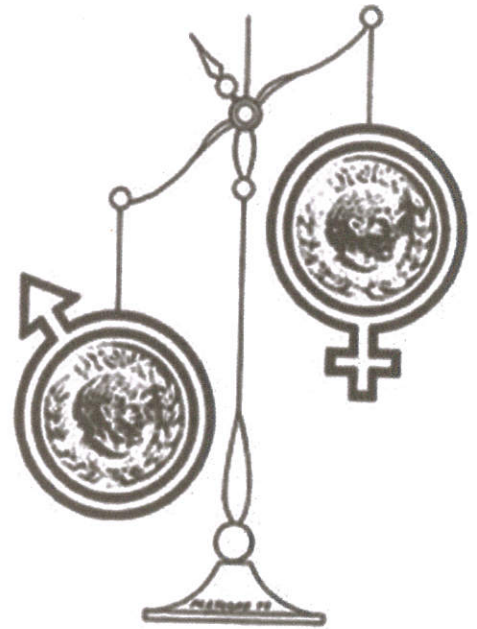
year sentence - what kind of value do we place on the lives of women?" questioned Kotoisuva.

The emotional and physical trauma women and children suffer as a result of domestic violence is often overlooked when cases reach the court and in the very same court rooms, people get sent to jail for stealing small items.

"We need to look at what is fair and just in terms of the lives of women and children, and we need to ensure that they do receive adequate justice", said Kotoisuva.

The FWCC went onto say that it does not agree with reconciliation if it is not genuine and if there is not adequate provisions to ensure a change in behaviour on the part of the perpetrator.

"We hope that the new Domestic Violence Legislation that is being prepared by the Fiji Law Reform Commission will address this", said Kotoisuva.



Source: International Women's Tribune Centre (Feminist Logos)

Kadavu initiative commended

Recent community responses to an alleged rape case on the island of Kadavu is an indication of greater awareness in the community and growing support for victim/ survivors of sexual offences. In this particular case, the victim's mother reported the alleged rape to the turaga-ni-koro and nurse who then referred the case to Police.

"Their prompt action not only avoids stereotyping the rape victim, but it sends out a clear message that the leaders in that community do not condone such behaviour," says Shamima Ali, FWCC Coordinator.

The Police are also happy with the speedy way in which the community worked with their team on the island.

"When the matter was reported to Police, our first concern was the possible problems that could arise within the village where the survivor and perpetrators are from", said Sylvia Low, Fiji Police Spokesperson.

"The investigating officer on the island took the time to talk to the turaga-ni-koro and the village elders about the need to maintain calm and to let Police do their work. We received an assurance that there would be no problems and there wasn't and we are grateful for that", said Low.

Ms. Low said that the villagers assisted the police in finding the alleged perpetrators. The FWCC says that these quick responses and the support from the turaga ni koro have demonstrated a shift in attitude.

"Too often we allow traditional

forgiveness practices such as 'bulubulu' not only to disregard rape as less of a crime but also indirectly communicate that perpetrators can get away with crimes of violence against women. We are happy to see these positive responses" said Ali.

The Police also felt it was important to provide relevant support and counseling to the victim. "Our Central Police Station, Station Officer, SP Ram Chetty was in Kadavu and realized the impact on the girl and when he heard she was coming to Suva, referred her to FWCC for counseling - this is another mark of valuable partnerships between Police and stakeholders", said Low.



Community Education at Burewai, Tallevu helping to create greater awareness

Since support services are scarce and difficult to access in the rural and outer islands, it is vital to educate the community on how to take immediate proper action in following the right channel of referrals when reporting such crime. The community support shown in this Kadavu case can be seen as a good example to Fiji as a whole.

Toy guns: Just say NO

The recent discovery of replica toy guns (which surprisingly passed detection under the watchful eyes of customs authorities) has sparked concern among many citizens. Toy guns imported for sale is not new to the retail business in Fiji. Toys are only toys if they bring joy and laughter to those that play with them (in this case we hope they are children) but it defeats the purpose when it's brought in and sold under suspicious circumstances.

The number of and manner in which these toy guns were sold has people thinking: who and what were these guns for and why are children allowed to play with toys that promote violence.

Guns are representations of objects designed to kill or injure people. They perpetuate the idea that violence is something that is perfectly alright. Fiji has a high level of violence against women and children.

Research around the world has shown that guns and violence are a lethal combination; guns can injure and kill women and children in particular in domestic violence situations. When guns are used in a violent assault, the risk of death increases dramatically. Guns are a part of the larger cycle of violence. Children who play with guns learn that pointing a firearm and pulling the trigger has no consequence. They are not only a threat to women and children's safety but to society as a whole.

If recent media images of these toy guns are anything to go by, everyone should be concerned. Not everyone including members of the security forces would be able to differentiate between real and toy firearms.

This in itself can create some dangerous situations.

Children are bombarded with violent images through the media on almost a daily basis and they imitate games such as "cops and robbers" using replicas that were probably given to them as presents. They demonstrate violent behaviours such as shooting and killing which they imitate from the media and while it may be easy to dismiss this as child play, it should really be a trigger for concern.



Incidents in the United States have prompted some concerned citizens and lobby groups to call for the ban of all toy guns.

In one incident, a child who was "armed" with a toy gun was shot by a police officer after the police officer believed that the child was armed with a real gun.¹

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre joins the call by other concerned groups in Fiji calling for the ban of toy guns. Agni Deo Singh, the Fiji Teachers Union general secretary, has called for the ban of such toys. "It's about time people come to their senses and take the necessary actions to prevent this culture of violence," said Mr Singh. (*Fiji Times*, 15/8/05)

Himmat Lodhia, the President of the Fiji Retailers Association, stated that although there would be a drop in sales and revenue for some toy retailers, "the ban of replica guns would be a good thing because most of the times, guns created fear in most people". "We will support a ban for any such replicas of dangerous arms," said Mr Lodhia. (*Fiji Times*, 15/8/05)

While the Fiji Police are of the opinion that the availability of a product does not necessarily govern behaviour, it agrees that replica guns are a cause for concern.

"We are fortunate in Fiji that we don't have a gun culture. The readily available and cheap firearms in shops is troubling from a security perspective. These are not meant for use by children" said Sylvia Low, Police Spokesperson.

"In the past, guns have been seen as a weapon of choice for robbers during major robberies. Whether, these were real or toy ones could only be determined after they have been taken into custody and examined.

As toy manufacturers compete to create the most realistic looking gun, we would like to see greater control on the importation of these items as matter of public safety concern and the Customs Department are attempting to amend the Import Regulations to prohibit these replica firearms from coming into Fiji", said Low.

If we do not ban such toys or even to continue to buy them as gifts for our children, then we are teaching children to accept violence as a way of life. Guns; whether real or toy, and its contribution to violence is certainly no laughing matter!

¹ www.infor.net.org

REGIONAL MOVEMENT

Work in the Pacific region continues with training in other Pacific Island countries upon the request of other agencies:

In the Solomon Islands, Shamima Ali was joined by Marilyn Tahi, the Coordinator of the Vanuatu Women's Centre to conduct training for:

- 22-26 August: Christian Care Center (CCC) Gender Violence and Women's Rights Issues & Basic Counselling Skills Training

- 29-31 August: Royal Solomon Islands Police - Training on sexual offences

In Vanuatu, Shamima will be joined by Joanne Lee,

FWCC's Regional Administrator for the:

- SANTO Male Advocacy Training: 5-9 September



WE ARE MOVING!

OUR office will be closed from 12 September-1 October 2005 due to our temporary relocation from 88 Gordon Street to 19 Berry Road.

We will resume all services on Monday 3 October 2005 at 19 Berry Road, Suva.

For emergencies and/or enquiries, please call our 24-hour line (3313 300). Any inconvenience caused is regretted.



Child abuse wrong: Chief

Despite their isolation the people of Kaba village have taken a direct approach and have organised workshops on the issue of child abuse and violence against women.

"Children need to know that this type of behavior is wrong and it will not be tolerated," says Rewa Chief and Kaba Fijian School headteacher, Ratu Aca Mataitini.

Villagers have raised concern over the lack of community support in the villages. Kaba Fijian School is only accessible by boat. The nearest police post and health centre is on the mainland in Nausori.

In the Maro community in Sigatoka however, the story is different. There is a



Children of Kaba Fijian school listen intently

police post in the area but the Maro women find police are not taking domestic violence complaints seriously. This was the key message raised during a workshop for the Maro community in Sigatoka.

According to community members, police would not take domestic violence complaints seriously unless they saw bruises on the woman. If she did complain and it was the first time she was hit, she would be told by police that this was a one-off situation.

Another cause of concern is the emerging trend of violence within the community. Maro women admitted there was a lot of abuse by in-laws. This trend however is not new. According to FWCC research on the incidence

and prevalence of domestic violence and sexual assault, in-laws accounted for 30% of the perpetrator profile.

Kaba Village and Maro were two of the communities visited in August by FWCC

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

JULY

- Wainivula Methodist Church Youth Group: Women's Rights and Role of FWCC
- Citizens Constitutional Forum: Violence against women as a Human Rights issue
- Soqosoqo Vakamarama tikina Verata: Role of the FWCC, Women's Human Rights, Women's issues and the law
- Ba Special School: Child Abuse and Rights of Children
- Bethel Primary School, Labasa: Child Abuse
- Citizens Constitutional Forum, Human Rights Workshop, Labasa: Violence Against Women and Children.
- Naseakula District School, Labasa: Child Abuse, Domestic Violence and the Role of FWCC
- Guru Nanak Primary School, Labasa: Child Abuse and the Role of FWCC
- Sukanaivalu Military Barracks, Labasa: Role of FWCC and Child Abuse

AUGUST

- Pacific Theological College Women of Maro participate in group discussion

attachment: Gender Issues

- Kaba Village: Child Sexual Abuse and domestic violence
- Kaba District School: 8 Rules of Safety and Child Sexual Abuse
- Burewai Village: Domestic Violence, Child Sexual Abuse, Rape and Police Procedures.
- Nawailoba Public School: Role of the FWCC and Child Abuse
- Nadi Muslim Women's League: Role of the

FWCC and Violence Against Women and Children

- Nawailoba Women's Club: Role of the FWCC, Domestic Violence and Child Abuse
- Matawai Village: Domestic Violence, Law on Divorce and divorce procedures
- Bulileka Kindergarten, Labasa: Child abuse
- Naduna Arya Kindergarten, Labasa: Child Abuse
- Labasa Jaycees Playcentre: Child Abuse
- Namoli Kindergarten: Roles of the FWCC and Child Abuse
- Vanuavou Workshop, Labasa: Violence Against Women and Children and Women's Rights.
- Vatudradra Police Post, Sigatoka: Domestic Violence and Child Abuse and the laws relating to Domestic Violence
- Maro Women's Group: Violence Against Women and Children
- Public Service Commission: Training on Violence Against Women and Gender mainstreaming
- St John Ambulance youth Volunteers: Violence Against Women
- Social Welfare and Court Counselor Training: Role of FWCC



Staff profile

NAME: Joanne Lee
Kunatuba
POSITION: Regional Administrator
REFLECTION:

Working at the Crisis Centre has made me more aware of the violence women face and the magnitude of the impact it has on the family. It makes me sad and angry, and if I channel these emotions wisely, I'm hoping to achieve something positive for the women of Fiji and the Pacific.



NAME: Reshmi Singh
POSITION: Counsellor (Nadi Branch)

REFLECTIONS: Working for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre for nearly two years has been both challenging and rewarding. It has contributed towards my personal development as well as making me aware of the issues a woman faces in her everyday life. It has made me aware of how vast discrimination against women and children in Fiji is. Therefore I am privileged to be able to support the women and children in Nadi.



Looking for Counselling & Support Services?

Ba Women's Crisis Centre: Nukudrala Rd, Ba. 8.30am-4.00pm; Ph: 6670 466

Labasa Women's Crisis Centre: Bayly House, Siberia Rd. 8.30am-4.00pm; Ph: 8814 609

Nadi Women's Crisis Centre: 84 Sagayam Rd, Nadi Town. 8.30am-4.00pm; Ph: 6707 558

