



# FIJI WOMEN'S CRISIS CENTRE

## NEWSLETTER

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### Brutality raises

**MITHLESHNI GURDAYAL**  
REPORTS of alleged police brutality on women continues to increase in Fiji. The Women's Crisis Centre has recorded three cases of verbal and physical abuse by police officers within the past seven days. Centre coordinator Shamima Ali yesterday

In two other incidents, a three-month pregnant woman who was taken in for questioning had a miscarriage after she was punched, slapped and verbally abused by police officers at the Nabua Police Station while another woman who was also taken to Samabula Police Station was allegedly verbally and emotionally tortured by the of-

police officers that the police had been und during the crisis doesn't mean it an unprofessional minister said. "The rep cases are seri istry will sur a member of

### Woman blames police ordeal for loss of fetus

**POLICE** are investigating complaints by a woman that officers allegedly assaulted her causing her to lose her three-month-old fetus.

complained of stomach aches and was taken hospital," SSP Nand said.

He refuted allegation that she lost her fetus because

The incident happened at

### Chilli used on naked suspect

THE woman on the right at the centre of alleged brutal treatment at ch

# Police brutality on the rise

Police brutality seems to be on the increase with at least three women being assaulted in March.

A 36-year-old woman suffered severe haemorrhaging after allegedly being assaulted by police officers who had taken her in for questioning.

Another woman was dragged from her car, kicked and punched for a traffic infringement while a third woman in custody was beaten and threatened with having chilli rubbed on her private parts.

These shocking cases have been brought to the FWCC's attention with what seems to be a wave of increasing police brutality.

"These assaults are horrific examples of human rights viola-

tions being committed by the very people who are supposed to protect us," said Shamima Ali, FWCC Coordinator.

Two of these cases were brought to the attention of FWCC through it's 24 hour service line, which is effectively being used by members of the public. The counsellors on

duty are able to attend to women in these difficult situations and are also able to call on the support of other organisations like the Human Rights Commission.

Other cases of bru-

tality have also been reported in the media. In Labasa, investigating officers allegedly brutalised two men and a women arrested in connection with a murder. The officers had allegedly stripped the women naked and rubbed chillies on her body. The two men were said to be severely beaten.

"The police are supposed to be the protectors of the law and it is

totally unacceptable that they are indulging in such illegal acts", said Ali.

The FWCC is calling for a full investigation into these allegations and has insisted that severe action should be taken against the officers concerned.



### FWCC questions racist stance

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre supports affirmative action for all disadvantaged groups, but not at the expense of violating the rights of others, says coordinator, Shamima Ali.

Ali was responding to the caretaker government's criticism of her statement that it was racist.

She said the path of affirmative action taken by caretaker Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase's "illegal regime" meant continued violation of other people's rights.

She said the FWCC stood by its earlier statement that the interim administration (and now the caretaker administration), led by Mr Qarase is illegal and continues to work on the racist platform demanded by George Speight and his thugs.

"The interim administration has been totally ineffective in containing the breakdown of law and order in this country; has been unable to effect reconciliation and has failed to bring to justice all those involved in the illegal takeover of a democratically elected government", said Ali.

It is obvious that Mr Qarase has tasted power, and having announced his intentions to stand in the next general election, is now engaging in politics of expediency and vote buying.

As for questions about the standing of the FWCC and her, Ms Ali said: "The record of the FWCC in highlighting human rights abuses regardless of race, religion or gender is well-known, and our clients and those whose lives our work has touched, will attest to this."

## Rural women want more information

The need for information on violence against women and children and women's legal rights in rural areas is evident.

This follows a recent community education visit to Bua by the FWCC's Salote Malo and Yishu Lal. The two traveled to various parts of Bua to conduct awareness raising workshops for women and community groups. Some workshops had more than 60 people.

People were also educated on police procedures. "There seemed to be a lack of faith in the police because of the delays in taking action after cases were reported,"

said Lal. "We had to spend time explaining what the procedures were and how cases could be followed up."

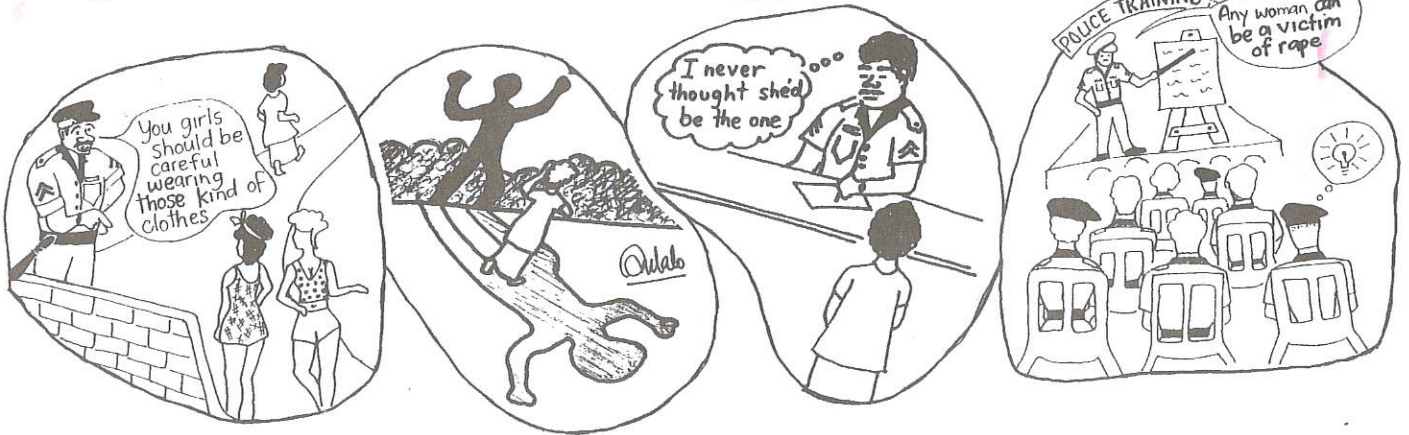
Other issues of concern included young children not wanting to go to school and their being sexually active from a young age, extra-marital affairs and parenting



Yishu Lal explaining legal issues to the Bua women

skills. "These issues are very real in the rural areas and people want to know how to deal with them, and what their legal rights and obligations are," said Malo.

# Any woman is in danger of being raped



**Myth**  
Only certain types of women get raped

**Fact**  
All women are in danger of being raped. Women of all races, classes, religions, occupations, education or physical appearance can be raped. It does not matter how a woman is dressed or how she acts. Women in their 90s and babies of 12 months have been raped.

**Vakasama Lasu**  
E so ga na mataqali yalewa era dau kucuvi  
**Ka Dina**  
Na yalewa kecega era rawa ni kucuvi.  
E sega ni wasea se yalewa rairai vina-ka, duidui ni matalotu/ mata-tamata, kila ka vakavuli/ vakacakacaka. E so madaga na gone vula 12 ki na mara-ma yabaki 90 era kucuvi.

**ऐसा समझा जाता है**  
केवल कुछ तरह की महिलाओं के साथ बलात्कार होता है।  
**वास्तविकता यह है**  
सभी तरह की महिलाओं को बलात्कार का खतरा होता है। सभी जातियों, वर्गों, धर्मों, पेशों की महिलाओं के साथ बलात्कार होता है चाहे उनकी शिक्षा और शारीरिक रूप रंग जैसा भी हो। कोई महिला कैसे कपड़े पहने है या उसका बर्ताव कैसा है, उससे कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ता। 90 वर्ष की महिलाओं से लेकर 12 महीने के बच्चों तक के साथ बलात्कार होने के मामले सामने आये हैं।

## The Violence Continues

Feb 6 - A taxi driver charged with raping his passenger, offers to marry her during his court case.  
Feb 6 - Two boys take a 13-year-old girl to a motel where they defiled her. She was later taken to one of the boy's homes where she was kept for a week.  
Feb 7 - A man who raped a 60 year-old woman, was acquitted because she suffered from memory loss.  
Feb 8 - A man was jailed for two years for defiling a three-year-old girl in her home.  
Feb 8 - Two youths charged with defiling a 13-year-old student, were released on bail.  
Feb 8 - Three Fijian soldiers with the British Army are in prison for rape, robbery and car theft.  
Feb 9 - A man charged with attempted rape, is released on bail.

Feb 9 - The hearing of the attempted rape of a deaf and dumb girl is adjourned.  
Feb 11 - An 18-year-old woman is hospitalised after she was stabbed repeatedly during an attempted rape.  
Feb 11 - A 28-year-old Tavua labourer is charged with rape. He is alleged to have raped a teenage relative after enticing her to a secluded location.  
Feb 11 - A villager with two previous rape convictions is in police custody for allegedly raping a young girl.  
Feb 13 - A police special constable appears in court charged with

rape.  
Feb 15 - A Lautoka maintenance worker was given a 12-month suspended jail term for indecently assaulting his female tenant in 1999.  
Feb 22 - A man is sentenced to five years in jail for raping a 19-year-old woman.  
Feb 23 - Police look for a lay preacher who allegedly raped a woman in her home twice.  
Feb 23 - Police look for a man who tried to rape a Form Six student who was walking home from school.  
Feb 23 - A 37-year-old man

appears in court for sodomising an eight year-old boy.  
Feb 27 - A 22-year-old man is arrested by police for raping a Class Five student.  
Mar 1 - Police search for a man who accosted and raped a 16-year-old girl.  
Mar 2 - A businessman is charged for abducting and defiling a 14-year-old girl.  
Mar 3 - A 20-year-old man is sentenced to three years imprisonment after pleading guilty to rape.  
Mar 6 - A 12-year-old girl who was raped twice last year, is placed in the care of Social Welfare.  
Mar 6 - A nightclub

bouncer is sentenced for four years and four months for impersonating a police officer and raping a 17-year-old girl.  
Mar 7 - A villager is jailed for five years for breaking into a home and attempting to rape the woman in the house.  
Mar 10 - A man charged with raping his 18 year-old tenant, is released on bail.  
Mar 11 - A man who tried to rape a woman and later the same day assaulted another woman leaving her with a suspected fractured skull is in police custody.  
Mar 13 - A man charged with defiling a 15-year-old girl is allowed to walk free because he had begun to look after the baby of the young girl whom he had made pregnant.  
Mar 17 - A 28-year-old man is given a three-year suspended sentence after he pleaded guilty to attempted rape.  
Mar 20 - A man who tried to have sex with two young bottle collectors is jailed for four years.  
Mar 21 - A 45-year-old man is sentenced to four years in prison for raping a 24-year-old woman.

### Farmer arrested for raping Class five student

By NATASHA MORELL

POLICE have arrested a 22-two-year-old farmer for alleged raping a Class five student. The incident took place in Drasa, Lomolomo Settlement in Lautoka, at about 9.30pm on Friday. Police said the young girl and her mother were attending a service at the house of the accused who

### Lay preacher v

By SUSAN MANI FS 23-2-01

POLICE are looking for a lay preacher who allegedly raped a Viseisei villager at her home twice last month. Divisional Police Commander Western Eroni Antonio said the suspect

was 25 to 30 years old. The alleged rape was on January 8 and 9 at the victim's home back road. The victim was 84-year-old grand

### Constable appears for rape

TABUA  
A constable appeared in court for the rape of a 12-year-old girl.

yesterday acknowledging the charge that he had sexual intercourse with the victim last week without her consent. Police prosecutor Inspector M. Kanaitaki said the accused was to be remanded in custody of the offender's interest.

## The real meaning of Mother's Day

Mother's Day will be celebrated on Sunday May 13 this year and as usual we will be bombarded with the media hype of what to buy and how to best commemorate the day.

But what is the real meaning of Mother's Day and when and how did it start?

The Mother's Day that we know today first began as an initiative of Julia Ward Howe, a crusader for women's suffrage, civil rights and peace.

She recognised the cruelties of war during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. That year she wrote a Mother's Day Proclamation that recognised the power and importance of motherhood to oppose war and violence.

The proclamation was translated into French, Spanish, Italian, German and Swedish. This marked the beginning of a peace crusade and of her personal and public endeavours to oppose war. She called for a world congress of women united against war.

When Julia was not successful in this effort, she initiated the concept of Mother's Day - a festival devoted to advocating for peace. The first Mother's Day festival was held in Boston on June 2, 1873 and these continued until 1912, when she died.

In 1918 the United States Congress officially declared Mother's Day as a day to celebrate motherhood, but without the strong emphasis on peace. Churches and schools also began to observe Mother's Day.

After 1918, Mother's Day was celebrated on the 2nd Sunday in May and was generally observed as a day to honour motherhood and patriotism rather than world peace.

The original concept, however is clearly attributable Julia Ward Howe, with the intent of promoting world peace and the role of women in developing a peaceful world order.

Given the current political situation in Fiji and the conflict and violence in other parts of the world, it is time we reclaimed the true meaning of Mother's Day.



## Women's situation 'worse'

The situation of women in the country has worsened since International Women's Day last year, says FWCC coordinator Shamima Ali.

Ali was speaking at a vigil at Suva's Sacred Heart Cathedral on March 8 to commemorate International Women's Day.

Instead of the annual Reclaim the Night March, the FWCC organised the vigil and a panel discussion on the issue of sexual assaults. The occasion was also used to reflect on how the events of the past year have affected the situation of women throughout Fiji.

"On this day last year we heard many promises made by our government representatives. We thought then that International Women's Day 2001 would be a day when we could celebrate the progress and achievements of the past year," said Ali.

"Sadly, the situation of women has worsened now - we have a lot of work ahead of us."

Police spokeswoman ASP Sarah Bernard spoke about the different roles that police play in addressing the issue of sexual assault. She stressed that no one deserved to ever have personal safety threatened.

"Women have the right to go where they like, to wear what they like and to behave as they like, free from the fear of harassment and assault," she said.

The group Panelists at the discussion in Suva

also heard speakers talk about the inadequacies of Fiji's rape laws, in particular the very constricted definition of rape.

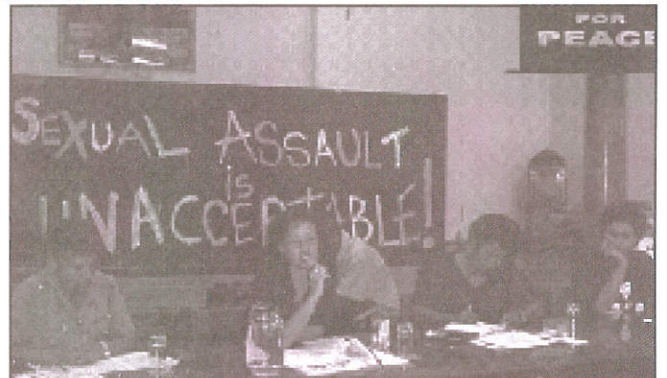
"Currently, only penile-vaginal penetration qualifies as rape. The law doesn't recognise any of the other ways that a person can be raped, eg with objects or hands, said Gina Houg Lee of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM).

The FWRM submitted proposed new laws that included a much wider definition of rape and addressed many other flaws in current laws.

Sexual assault within marriage was also discussed. The FWCC's Edwina Kotoisua spoke about the issue of marital rape, which she said was common.

"A trend that we are seeing at the Crisis Centre is the use of violent sexual acts on women by their husbands or partners including the use of objects or forced anal sex. A woman should have the right to say no - just because she is married she is not duty-bound to be available for her husband's sexual gratification," she said.

Those present at the vigil held a moment of silence for all the women who are victims/ survivors of sexual assault.



## Rape is not about uncontrollable desires

Men can stop themselves from raping women if they want to, says FWCC counsellor Salote Malo.

Malo made the comments to over 50 Lautoka women who gathered on International Women's Day to discuss the issues of rape and child abuse.

"Imagine if a young couple are just about to have sex when they hear the girl's father approaching. The boy won't keep going and say 'Sorry, I just couldn't stop myself.' He's going to stop immediately and pretend that there was nothing going on."

Malo was commenting on the myth that men are unable to control themselves once they reach a certain point of arousal.

Some of the women at the workshop believed that this was true, but changed their minds after hearing Malo's explanation.



Women attending a recent FWCC workshop

The women were also told about police procedures to follow after a rape, especially early reporting.

"It is very important that a woman reports to police as soon as possible after she has been

raped. She should try to keep the clothes that she was wearing at the time and not have a shower, because this will destroy important medical evidence," said Corporal Marica Koroi from the Sexual Offences Unit in Lautoka.

As part of the workshop, the participants worked in groups discussing whether some common beliefs about rape and child abuse were true or not.

One of the participants asked about the relevance of traditional reconciliation practices, such as bulubulu, in a rape case.

Malo said that bulubulu should never be taken into account during a rape case.

"Unfortunately some magistrates still see it as a mitigating circumstance and reduce sentencing if it has been done. This kind of leniency fails to deter other men from committing rape," she said.

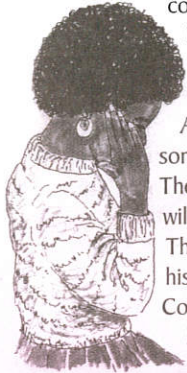
# FEAR

The children are silent,

And mother has sat in the corner,  
Filled with fear,  
The man of the house is violent,  
And mother has shed some tears.  
The children imagine what will happen next,  
The man of the house has his food.  
Covered in smear,  
Mother lives under a tyrant,

No peace is found here.  
The man of the house is,  
No more.  
The children are no longer,  
Living in fear.  
The mother has found,  
Freedom from her husband;  
The tyrant,  
Peace has settled in here.

By: Avikash Atish Ram, Suva



# Meet our counsellors

## Shobna Devi

Shobna first joined the FWCC as a volunteer after finishing her studie at FIT in 1998. She became a part-time counsellor in 1999.

"I wanted to join the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre to broaden my knowledge on issues regarding women and children. Thinking about the women, I want to provide counselling and moral support to them so that they can become independent and overcome their problems. I enjoy my work because it is challenging and personally I have gained a lot."



## Alumita Tuikenatabua

Alumita started work at the FWCC in 1994 after applying for a position as counsellor. Alumita is fluent in Fijian, Hindi and English.

"As a counsellor, it is challenging to see clients through to the stage where they are independent and able to cope effectively with their own situation. I get a lot of satisfaction out of being available for women during their time of need. Being on call and being used at different times can be challenging as well as satisfactory."



## Counselling is back on the road

English, Fijian and Hindi-speaking counsellors will be available at these places over the next few months for free and confidential counselling, support and information.



<b>April</b>	
17-20	Levuka Health Centre
23-27	Taveuni Hospital
<b>May</b>	
15-22	Lomaloma Hospital
30	Nausori Health Centre
31	Wainibokasi Hospital

## Listen to us on radio every week

You can listen to FWCC staff on the radio talking about the work of the Crisis Centre and the issues that we deal with. These radio programs are available in English, Fijian and Hindi on the Bula Network.

- Fijian:** 3.15 pm on Bula 102 FM  
Every second Sunday, starting 28th January
- English:** 9.30am on Bula 100.4 FM  
Every Tuesday, starting 30th January
- Hindi:** 10.00am on Radio Fiji 2  
Every Thursday starting 1st February

## Child abuse hurts children



Injuries can range from mild bruising to a severe handicap for life. Although the scars might heal on the body, the emotional scars can last for life.

## Visit the new fijiwomen.com

Our website, [www.fijiwomen.com](http://www.fijiwomen.com) now has some new features. There is a daily news update featuring the main news story involving women. News from around the region will also be available.



So click on [www.fijiwomen.com](http://www.fijiwomen.com). Get informed and get involved!

## We'd love to hear from you

**Letter to the Editor**  
Thank you for keeping the general public informed about the harsh cruelty suffered by our fellow women. The FWCC gives young girls like us encouragement and support. In the Fiji Times (12-2-01), there was an article about a man who forced his wife to have sex with him when he was drunk. This is a crime - marriage doesn't give anyone the right to have sex against their partner's will. This is rape. No matter who the victim is - it is still rape.  
**Shikha Chand, Nausori**

We want to hear from you! If you have any comments regarding current cases of violence against women or wish to air your views on women's rights or on the work of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre - write to us via fax, email or post. Please include your name and contact details. We will select the best comments for publication in the newsletter and you could win an FWCC T-shirt.

