

THE CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF SOLOMON ISLANDS' RESPONSE TO ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

*Francis Kiri **

I. BACKGROUND TO THE CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Solomon Islands is a developing South Pacific country consisting of 992 islands with a population of 700,000. The country's Correctional Service of Solomon Islands (CSSI), previously known as the Solomon Islands Prison Service, was established in 1892. The first prison in Solomon Islands was built in 1894 at Tulagi by Mr. Woodford who arrived in Solomon Islands as the first representative of the then British Empire from Fiji. Today Tulagi has no correctional facility, and CSSI is Headquartered in Honiara on the neighbouring Island of Guadalcanal.

In 2007, Solomon Islands Prison Service formally became what is still known today as the CSSI, through Parliament's enactment of the Correctional Service of Solomon Islands (CSSI) Acts 2007 and CSSI Regulations 2008. In 2009, as part of the agreed transition and capacity-building activities that had occurred under the RAMSI¹ development programme and a de-escalation of ethnic tensions in the community, the Solomon Islands Government decided to localize the position of the Commissioner of Prisons. With the first Commissioner Francis Haisoma appointed in 2010, he was followed by the appointment of the current Commissioner Gabriel Manelusi in 2019.

II. REGIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION TO SOLOMON ISLANDS (RAMSI) AND VAWC

The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) began operating in Solomon Islands in 2003 until its withdrawal in 2017. It was a partnership between the people and government of Solomon Islands and fifteen contributing countries of the Pacific region. Its mission was to bring peace and monitor the peace after the ethnic conflict in Solomon Islands. RAMSI is important in that it has played a large role in putting gender and the issue of violence against women and children as a priority of Solomon Islands Government and provided the specialist advisors to develop the Solomon Islands Family Protection Bill introduced in 2016. RAMSI also in its time supported the introduction of men's behavioural change programmes within the Correctional Services centres.

III. CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Solomon Islands has one of the highest rates of family and sexual violence (FSV) in the world with 64% of women aged 15–49 having reported physical and/or sexual abuse by a partner. Gender inequality remains a major issue in the Solomon Islands as documented in the World Health Organization report in 2011. Furthermore, the country has one of the highest rates of family and sexual violence (FSV) in the world, with 64% of women aged 15–49 reporting physical or sexual abuse.² A 2009 study revealing high rates of FSV in the Solomon Islands concluded that a multi-factorial approach to tackling attitudes toward gender-based violence was necessary, involving politics, public health, communities, and healthcare policies.³ Nevertheless, in 2011, the World Health Organization reported that 73% of men and women still believed gender-based violence was acceptable.

* Inspector, Inspectorate, Correctional Services of Solomon Islands.

¹ RAMSI – Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands <https://www.ramsi.org>

² WHO – Gender Based Violence in the Solomon Islands: Translating Research Into Action on the Social Determinants of Health. 2011. [Last accessed on 2015 Dec 01]. Available from: http://www.who.int/sdhconference/resources/draft_background_paper4_solomon_islands.pdf.

³ Solomon Islands Family Health Safety Study. 2009. [Last accessed on 2015 Dec 01]. Available at: http://www.spc.int/hdp/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=39&dir=ASC&order=name&Itemid=44&limit=5&limitstart=5

IV. RAMSI SPONSORED SOLOMON ISLANDS GOVERNMENT FAMILY PROTECTION ACT

In 2016, Solomon Islands launched its first ever Family Protection Act. For the first time, domestic violence is explicitly outlawed. Previously, the only option for women who experienced physical or sexual violence was to charge their partners with assault. Even then, police were hesitant to get involved with what is viewed as a private family matter. If the violence was not physical, it was impossible to prosecute.

Before the Act was passed, psychological and economic abuse were not even acknowledged, despite being invisible but dangerous ways women are controlled and trapped in abusive relationships. With no formal legislation in place defining and criminalizing domestic violence, women's rights to justice were not taken seriously. The Act finally changes this, making physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse illegal. It gives women and girls an opportunity to seek protection from the state. It also finally sends a clear message that violence against women will not be tolerated. A new law in Solomon Islands will introduce harsher penalties for sexual offences, particularly those committed against children. The amendment to the penal code updates penalties and the definitions of a range of serious offences. The new laws also introduce a range of new sexual offences, including sexual intercourse with a person with a disability, sexual intercourse by a person in a position of trust, commercial child sexual exploitation, child exploitation material and internal people.

V. THE CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF SOLOMON ISLANDS' TREATMENT OF VAWC OFFENDERS

Regarding identifying offenders' risks and needs, in 2007 the Solomon Island Prison Service began work on its Rehabilitation Framework to provide a foundation and guide for implementing rehabilitation at its 6 correctional facilities. At the centre of this framework was the development of a risk/needs assessment tool that could be predictive of recidivism for prisoners and guide the service in providing programmes that could mitigate and reduce the risk of recidivism to support this offender-needs analysis. From the data gathered in the RNI it was apparent that CSSI was seeing a large increase in the number of prisoners sentenced for crimes of a sexual nature: rape, defilement, indecent assault, and incest were on the increase. The perpetrators ranged across the whole community from village elders to young juveniles; many of these offenders were illiterate.

As a response, CSSI, through its programmes and industry team, began working to develop treatment programmes for offenders focused on VAWC and were able in 2012 to introduce their first programmes that directly addressed these behaviours. It must be noted that the concept and practice of assisting sexual offenders was new to most CSSI Officers, and conversations included male identity in Solomon Islands culture, the rights of women and children, and the silence surrounding sexual offences. Making the concepts of the sex offending programme culturally relevant are all new concepts; another challenge is the taboo nature of sex in Solomon Islands traditional culture.

VI. FAITH-BASED BASIC SEX OFFENDER PROGRAMME

The first of these has been a faith-based basic sex offender programme developed in consultation with church leaders with its foundation built on Christian faith and Solomon Islands culture. The course is structured around the principals of narrative therapy:

Narrative therapy, or storying as it is called in Solomon Pidgin, is as an empowering and collaborative form of therapy, recognizing that people have natural skills and experiences that can guide change in their lives. People are seen separately from their problems, and simple therapy can help externalize sensitive issues. When done in a structured manner, it can overcome their resistance and defences and allows them to address their behaviour in a more productive manner.

Narrative therapy also helps prisoners to view their past behaviour within the context of social, political, and cultural storylines that influence the way we view ourselves and our personal stories. This storying ultimately makes a sex offender confront his crime; for many they believe forgetting will help them cope. However, for the prisoner to change this confrontation is an important step. The Cognitive Behavioural

Therapy component of the programme is based on the idea that sex offenders have had many cognitive distortions (e.g. “thinking errors”) that “give permission” to the offender to commit sexual offences. For the CBT to be effective, the prisoner develops for themselves the ability to recognize and overcome cognitive distortions. Since beginning the programme in 2012, more than 200 prisoners have completed it.

VII. THE THINKING-FEELING-DOING PROGRAM (TFD)

The TFD Project was also introduced with support from RAMSI in 2012 and conducted at the Rove Central Correction Centre. Prisoners undergo 12 x 2 hour sessions on theories behind their sexual offending and are then provided with course materials and exercises to aim at addressing their risks and needs to support the changing of their behaviours and end reoffending.

The learning is supposed to be interactive with moments of in-depth disclosure and a healthy humour. The TFD Project format is based around the building of a quality internal home with a strong foundation, skilful construction and assisting clients to share the keys to their lives. The primary aim of the training is to assist a client to relate well to others and think about building a ‘good life’.

After successfully introducing the TFD programme in 2012, it has been also delivered in four of CSSI’s smaller centres away from Honiara; to date more than 400 prisoners have completed the TFD programme, and many have completed the programme as well as the Faith-Based Sexual Offending programme.

Thinking-Feeling-Doing Program – The chart below shows the number of prisoners completing the programme by year and centre. It also shows the difficulty in delivering and sustaining delivery in Provincial Centres, after training local providers to deliver the programme; they then stop.⁴

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<i>Rove Honiara</i>	24	38	46	48	62	63	58
<i>Auki</i>					14	12	
<i>Makira</i>			9				
<i>Lata</i>						8	8
<i>Gizo</i>			11				

VIII. CSSI AND UN WOMEN

In 2013, CSSI began working in partnership with the United Nations Women Pacific Facility Fund (UN Women PFF) in Honiara. The project funded by UN Women was to deliver an ending violence against women programme to all sentenced prisoners within the Correction Centres in the Solomon Islands. UN Women recognized the attempts that CSSI had made to make prisoner rehabilitation its priority, and it is seeking new ways to deliver programmes that would change the behaviour of prisoners, most of whom are serving sentences for violence-related offences.⁵ Under the programme, more than 400 prisoners in all the six correctional facilities at Rove, Honiara, Tetere, Guadalcanal, Auki, Malaita, Kira Kira, Makira, Gizo, Western Province, and Lata in Santa Cruz were targeted.

In addition to primarily targeting prisoners, the awareness programme on Domestic Violence was also delivered to the more than 350 Correctional Service staff and families. The programme used for this was the Naf Nao programme from the NGO Live and Learn. One prisoner in Auki Correction Centre spoke on the closing encouraging the recipients of Male Advocators against Violence against Women and Girls, “You have completed this five days’ training workshop, and I believe that you have acquired a brand new way of thinking; let’s take that with us when we leave here, back to our communities so we can be better fathers and men”, CSSI UN Women Project Coordinator Staff Sergeant Glins K Clay in speaking said that the CSSI

⁴ Thinking-Feeling-Doing Program Manual – Island Printing Honiara 2012

⁵ United Nations General Assembly. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly 61/143. Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. 30 January 2007. Retrieved from http://www.uneca.org/daweca/conventions_and_resolutions/Res.%20intensification%20of%20efforts.pdf.

Programs & Industry Unit and UN Women, CSSI and UN Women team in Honiara is working very closely through programmes such as this to move prisoners and communities towards zero tolerance to violence against women and children.

IX. CONCLUSION

As a correctional service coming late to modern correctional practices, CSSI has come a long way since first developing its prisoner Rehabilitation Framework and the first Risk Need Responsivity/Assessment tool—all only in 2008. A lot of its progress has been made possible through the assistance of RAMSI, especially in the area of Gender and Ending Violence against Women. The Correctional Service, having started from very few programmes of any type and no programmes that addressed prisoners, offending behaviour against women and children in 2008 has come a long way up to now. It is an achievement that it now has three programmes aimed at behavioural change. These home-grown treatment programmes, although considered low level in their intensity, are seen as a beginning, and as the Correctional Service develops along with the country and more resources are made available, then the CSSI response to treating prisoners can be intensified.

The Challenge for CSSI in going forward is to continue to develop its staff in rehabilitation practices, particularly in the area of ERAW programmes. Such development in Solomon Islands is very challenging as the CSSI does not have access to the needed educational programmes and expertise that are required; this makes opportunities such as those offered by organizations like the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (UNAFEI) essential for the continued development of the organization.