

# **World Vision Vanuatu Precursory Impact Study**

## **Men's Behaviour Change Program August 2019**



**Author:** Miranda Forsyth, Associate Professor, School of Regulation and Global Governance (RegNet), College of Asia & the Pacific, The Australian National University.

This study has been funded by the Australian Government through the Gender Action Platform (GAP). The views expressed in this publication are the author’s alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

## Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Background and Design of the MBC .....	5
Study Methodology.....	7
Case Studies of Impact.....	9
Addressing the Study Questions .....	12
Changes for Participants .....	12
Sustainability.....	14
Restorative Justice .....	15
Recommendations .....	18

## Glossary

ANCP	Australian NGO Cooperation Program
ANU	Australian National University
BIP	Batterer Intervention Program
CoHG	Channels of Hope for Gender
DFAT	(Australian) Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DV	Domestic Violence
GAP	Gender Action Platform
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
MBC	Men’s Behaviour Change
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PSG	Peer Support Group
REACH	Relationship Education About Choices and Healing
RJ	Restorative Justice
SDA	Seventh Day Adventist
STOP	Safe Time Out Please / Sef Taem aOt Plis
VAW	Violence Against Women
WVV	World Vision Vanuatu

## Executive Summary

The following is a report of a precursory impact study to determine the initial impact of a Men's Behaviour Change (MBC) program run by World Vision Vanuatu (WVV). MBC is a 10-session small group therapy program for perpetrators of violence (either self-identified or selected by community leaders to attend). This report also addresses the issue of whether or not integration of a Restorative Justice (RJ) approach into MBC would potentially increase program impact. Specifically, the purpose of this precursory study was to:

1. Determine if MBC attendees identify personal and lifestyle changes as a direct result of the program;
2. Examine perceptions as to why the program led to the identified personal and lifestyle changes;
3. Examine the perceived sustainability of the identified changes;
4. Gather feedback to improve program delivery and impact, in particular examining whether a Restorative Justice element would be beneficial; and,
5. Identify recommendations for further areas of evaluation and/or study.

The report below first sets out the background of the MBC and the methodology used in the study. It then presents four case studies of participants in the program, drawing upon interviews with the participants, their wives and their adult children. These case studies are written to focus primarily upon questions of perceived impact and reasons for that impact. The last part of the report addresses each of the questions 1-5 in turn.

Overall, the study found that the program was highly valued by participants and their families, with all identifying it as having been transformative in the participants' changed attitudes and behaviour towards their spouse. Other key findings are:

- **All participants and their spouses and other family members identified significant changes in the participant's behaviour.** These included greater engagement in housework and family life, less anger, more emotional connection with wife and family, and changed understandings about the relationship between men and women.
- The impact of the program was identified by interviewees and facilitators as relating to:
  1. **its Christian framing** (which provided authority and a familiar means through which to transmit messages);
  2. **its resonance with the real issues** men face today and the **practical steps** suggested to address them in a staged manner;
  3. **the emotional engagement** with the concepts it engendered in the participants; and,
  4. **the opportunity** it offered men to both realise and acknowledge their past behaviour and to forge new paths for themselves.
- **There is potential for sustainability of changes**, and the one participant interviewed who had done the program a year ago had sustained the changes.

- **All the participants apologised to their spouses and this was meaningful** to them and their spouses, but the apology and the reconciliation could be better incorporated into the program in a restorative manner that would also make room also for the victims' voices.

The recommendation is to **continue the program**, with consideration given to adding the following components:

- a) **Incorporate a restorative justice element** into the program to better address apology and reconciliation through making space for victims' voices.
- b) **Link the MBC into the work of probation officers** to facilitate family and community reconciliations before parole is granted.
- c) **Spouses should be brought into the final stages of the program** to ensure they understand the process their husband has been through and what can be done to help support the changes. As one participant said, the women are the ones who "receive back" the participants, so they need to be prepared. This is also an opportunity for the spouses to learn about tools and concepts they can utilise themselves.
- d) Respond to the desire of participants and facilitators to share what they have learnt by **preparing a number of specific components of the program** that can be shared safely by them with their family/community.

It is also recommended that the next phase of the MBC has a thorough evaluation, with interviews/surveys of participants and their family, both before as well as after the program.

Note that the parts of the report in italics are the research team's English translation of the interviewee's Bislama comments, rather than exact quotes.

## Background and Design of the MBC

World Vision Vanuatu (WVV) is a Christian humanitarian and development organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. In 2016-2017, WVV designed a Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention program called Relationship Education about Choices and Healing (REACH), which is supported by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The REACH program aims to reduce GBV in Vanuatu by addressing cultural, attitudinal and religious norms and behaviours that normalise or justify family violence at the community level. In order to achieve this, REACH uses both a primary and a secondary violence prevention approach targeting four key areas: families, youth, children, and faith and community leaders.

The REACH program builds upon a modified World Vision International “Channels of Hope for Gender” (CoHG) approach, which was implemented in Vanuatu between 2014-2018. CoHG is a faith-based approach to engage church leaders and church members in discussions about gender equality and GBV, supporting participants to analyse religious texts commonly used across denominations to support women’s subordination and condone a husband’s violence against his wife. CoHG was identified as an appropriate approach for Vanuatu, where approximately 83% of ni-Vanuatu identify as Christian.

The primary prevention focus of CoHG was supplemented with the development of a Counselling Skills program. It sought to strengthen secondary prevention by working with religious leaders, chiefs and their spouses to increase their understanding of GBV and child abuse, and increase their ability to help violence survivors through better analysis of the dynamics, developing safety plans and linking survivors to services through counselling skills training. This training has a strong focus of working with men and perpetrators of violence to accept responsibility for their action, see violence as a choice, and provide practical tools and strategies to change their behaviour. A co-designer of the program, Kara Duncan-Hewitt, observed:

A key and foundational part of this is to promote empathy, using experiential exercises to support those in power to have a heart-felt understanding of the victim’s experience and reality, in order to help shift and disqualify cultural and religious justification for the violence. Key to this exploration and uptake is education in the concept of spiritual abuse. To support this work, positive values of theology and culture are utilised to confront and challenge oppression and misuse of power, and further utilised to advocate for healthy and safe families and communities.

Another co-designer of the program, Pastor Fiama, observed that the program aims to incorporate both Christianity and Vanuatu culture, as it exists within a nation whose three pillars are “Faith in God, Christian Principles and Melanesian Values.”

In 2018, as part of REACH’s secondary prevention work, with support from the Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) Gender Action Platform (GAP), WVV developed and piloted an innovative Men’s Behaviour Change (MBC) program. MBC is a 10-session small group therapy program for perpetrators of violence (either self-identified or selected by community leaders to attend). The purpose of the program is to assist men to reduce and cease family and domestic violence. The program addresses attitudes and behaviours around abuse whilst creating

opportunities for men to understand the impact of their violence on their partners and families. It also supports men to recognise they can change and have caring, healthy and equal relationships.

The MBC program content themes include: participants understanding violence and the cycle of violence; strategies for stopping violence; protecting children; healthy and good relationships; sexual respect; respectful relationships; and, support systems and safety planning.

The program was based on the REACH Counselling Skills program,<sup>1</sup> which was modified through an in-country consultation and training of facilitator process. World Vision selected a group of respected male and female leaders who went through the program, practiced delivering sessions within their small group and then delivered the program to a group of pilot participants. Each session, both practice facilitation and session delivery were followed by a debrief and feedback session which evaluated the content of every exercise and teaching, and reworded or deleted parts that were excess to requirements, and allocated appropriate timeframes for each exercise covered within the program. Much discussion and prayer amongst the leaders went into the sexual respect session, as it was culturally and religiously difficult for some leaders to imagine delivering. The female facilitators made a strong and clear stand that this topic and session was of great importance and ultimately the facilitators unanimously agreed to both keep this session and to deliver it.

The facilitators are faith leaders in a range of different denominations, and include three women.<sup>2</sup>

The facilitators are also part of an ongoing Peer Support Group (PSG) that meets every 6 weeks to provide support to trained faith leaders and help them grow in their knowledge and understanding of the messages from the counselling workshops and support them to pass on the messages to their communities. There are currently over 30 Faith Leaders attending the PSG.

To date, one facilitator training and four pilots with men's groups have been run. A summary of each pilot group is included in the table below:

---

<sup>1</sup> Developed by Kara Duncan-Hewitt of Liberty Training NZ ([www.libertytrainingnz.com](http://www.libertytrainingnz.com)). This program drew from models such as the Duluth Power and Control Wheel, the Cycle of Violence, concepts from both Narrative Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Family Therapy techniques and the Kübler-Ross Grief Process.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Amanda Tavoia (Anglican), Mrs. Evelyn Tamasui (Presbyterian), and Pastor Pollyanna (a woman Pastor from the Apostolic Church). The Male facilitators are: Pastor Sandy Shem (Nazarene Church), Pastor Zechariah (New Covenant Church), Pastor Collin Kelep (Presbyterian Church), Elder Collin (Chaplain of the Police Force, a member of the Presbyterian Church), and Father Ephraim Mathias (Anglican Church).

Dates	Group	Beneficiary numbers	Location	Participant Description
<b>30th April – 22nd June 2018</b>	Faith Leaders Training of Facilitators	5 Women 7 Men	Cultural Centre	Faith leaders who were identified as REACH champions from REACH programming
<b>5th May – 22nd June 2018</b>	Community-based men	8 Men	World Vision Vanuatu Office	Men chosen by Faith leaders from their communities (faith leaders who had completed the MBC facilitator training)
<b>30th Oct – 30th Nov 2018</b>	Male World Vision Vanuatu Staff	15 Men	Owen Hall	All local male staff from the Shefa Area Program/Country Program Office
<b>7th March – 9th April 2019</b>	Low Risk Inmates	12 Men	Low Risk Prison Facility	A cohort of low risk inmates identified by the corrections staff and management
<b>14th March – 06 June 2019</b>	Correctional Staff	12 Men	Department of Corrections Office	Male correctional staff who work within the prison system

## Study Methodology

Associate Professor Miranda Forsyth, assisted by WVV officers Johnnah Nahwo and Shanna Ligo, conducted the study. Miranda is a legal academic with over fifteen years' experience working in issues of crime and justice in the Pacific Islands, particularly Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, although her primary focus to date has not been GBV. Miranda is fluent in Bislama (the language in which the interviews and focus groups were conducted) and does not identify as a Christian. Johnnah is the Program Quality Officer for the REACH program and participated in the Male World Vision Staff MBC sessions in November 2018. Shanna had observed 11 sessions in total (3 for inmates and 8 from correctional staff) and coordinated a safety check on spouses of participants in the corrections staff group. Shanna also provided helpful insights based on her previous ten years' experience working in the Vanuatu Women's Centre as a Counsellor for women facing violence. The team developed the questions together; Miranda and Shanna interviewed the female participants, and Miranda and Johnnah interviewed the male participants. Each interview ran for between 1-1.5 hours. Miranda ran the focus group with MBC facilitators that ran for approximately 2 hours, and Johnnah and Shanna took notes. At the end of the field-work (16-19 July 2019), the team did a brainstorm of major findings and Miranda wrote this report that incorporates the reflections of all members of the research team. There were no disagreements between the team members over the major findings. The names used in this report are pseudonyms.

The methodology used in the study was:

1. Desk-based review of existing documentation, including activity reports, end-of-workshop reports (where available) and the MBC curriculum.
2. Semi-structured one to one-and-a-half hour interviews with four participants from different cohorts, and their spouses, and an additional important person in their lives (adult-aged child or brother). The participants were randomly chosen by putting their names into a box and drawing them out and contacting them. Attempts were made to get participants from all the cohorts excluding the one with WVV staff (as they may not be representative of the general participants targeted). One participant initially agreed to take part but later withdrew. All participants were assured of anonymity and advised they were free to answer or not answer as they felt comfortable. All interviewees were interviewed separately.
3. A two-hour focus group with MBC facilitators on their training process, delivery of the program, and any changes they may attribute to the program. An in-depth interview was also conducted with WVV staff member, Pastor Fiama, a lead designer of the MBC, and a key facilitator.
4. Email communication with Kara Duncan-Hewitt about the design process of the program.

The study has three noted limitations. First, only four participants were interviewed out of a possible 32; however, they did come from the three different “general” cohorts (i.e. not WVV staff or facilitators). All their spouses were also interviewed, along with an additional family member for further triangulation; this occurred in all but one case. Second, three of the four participants had completed their training only a few months previously (in April/May) and so the sustainability of the changes could not be fully assessed at this stage. Third, due to the sensitivity of the subject-matter, and the lack of opportunity to build up a relationship with the spouses, no direct questions were asked about the use of violence. Rather, interviewees were asked to comment on what changes they observed in their spouses, to what they attributed those changes, and what impact these changes were having on their relationship and home life. Similarly, the participants were not asked questions about their use of violence, but were encouraged to reflect on any changes in attitude or behaviour, its impact on their family and reasons for the impact.

As the questioning raised the possibilities of disclosures of violence, WVV had ensured there was the possibility to provide follow-up support if necessary, either directly or through referral. Although the interviewees were tearful at times, none needed further support.

<b>Interviewee type</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>Participant</b>	4	0
<b>Participant's spouse</b>	0	4
<b>Participant other family</b>	2	1
<b>MBC Facilitators</b>	4	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	10	7

## Case Studies of Impact

### **Fred (MBC participant in Pilot 1, 5<sup>th</sup> May – 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018)**

Fred did the MBC program a year ago when his brother, a pastor, nominated him as he was worried about Fred's lifestyle and his treatment of his wife and children. Both Fred and his wife were adamant the course had made a huge difference to their relationship and their home life. Fred said:

*Our house has come back to "normal", it is clean, there is food on the table, and there is laughing too. Before I did not cook, I just expected my wife to do that, but after I came to the course I realised it was my responsibility too. Now my family "lick their plates" when I cook and the kids say "daddy, yu mekem naes" [daddy, your food is good]. I found out that the duty is also on the man to work in the home. I also help to clean the house.*

He spoke about how he still regularly uses the STOP sign tool (Safe Time Out Please) that he had learnt during the course, in order to reflect before doing something he would later regret.

Fred's brother reported that whereas Fred used to come and hang around at his place instead of spending time with his family, nowadays he brings his family to visit as well. He said: *I see that he has become a good husband and father. Now he has also stopped drinking kava and he spends time with his family.*

Fred's wife reported:

*His anger before was bad, he would swear at me and said words that hurt my feelings. He also used harsh words on the children but that has now changed. He helps me to cook and he now makes time to talk to the children. He also comes home early from work and spends less time with his friends. We discuss and make decisions together.*

She says these changes have been sustained over the year ("*jenis istap kasem naoia*") and that one thing helping him to stay on the right track is his personal study of the Bible.

In reflecting on why the course was so impactful, Fred remarked that it was really just common-sense. He realised that if he followed what was being suggested, then his life would be happier. He tried it and found it did make a difference. He also said the Bible verses help him to understand the messages being communicated in the course. Fred's brother said that he thought it had worked so well because it helped Fred to see that he is a man with potential and that he needed to be a leader in his home, to take responsibility.

### **James (MBC Participant Correctional Staff, 14<sup>th</sup> March – 16<sup>th</sup> May 2019)**

James volunteered to do the course when it was offered to the correctional officers as he had heard that WVV does good training programs. He identified the course as having a major impact on his understanding about his role and responsibilities as a father and a husband and his use of violence.

*Before I did not think that violence was wrong. In our kastom, when you pay for a woman you are the boss of her, if she does not do what you want, then you hit her. But when I came to the training, I realised that is “rabis fasin” [bad behaviour].*

He had pasted the STOP sign handout from the course on their front door and when anyone in their house starts to get worked up, they point to it and go for a walk or do something else to cool down. He goes through the handouts he received on his days off, and has started to counsel the prisoners he manages, particularly those who have committed sexual violence. He says that, like him, they had not been really aware that what they had done was wrong. We asked: Really? He said: “Yes”, although he acknowledged that the new learnings were in line with what was taught at church.

James’s wife was very grateful for the course. She said there is much less anger and tension in their house these days, and that James helps out much more than he used to and does not shout or get angry like before. Previously when she wanted to go out with friends, James would make excuses to stop her going. But now he says “sure”. Last time she went out on James’s day off and when she came home, he had dinner prepared, had bathed the kids and they were calmly watching cartoons. This had never happened before! He also disciplines the kids through speaking seriously to them, rather than shouting and threatening with a stick. She noted: *I thought he might go back to his old self but he has not. I see that he has adjusted himself to the new learnings.*

In reflecting on why the course had brought about these changes in his behaviour, James said:

*When I went through the training, it touched my heart because I realised I had done that behaviour that was talked about. I realised I had done rubbish violence. I felt sorry and I felt guilty and I also felt glad to learn something to help me.*

### **Bill (MBC Participant Low Risk Inmate, 7th March – 9th April 2019)**

Bill had volunteered to do the course whilst serving his sentence. He reported the course caused an enormous change in his beliefs and attitudes towards women and his role as a husband and father. He learnt that he needed to listen to his wife and children. He also spoke about the STOP sign:

*Before we make decisions we have to stop and look. I also learnt that in life if there is a good agreement in the family, there is peace. We need to sit together to make decisions – let children and mama express themselves before making a decision. I also learnt the scale between men and women must be balanced. If I take advantage of my wife all the time, there will not be peace.*

As he has been in prison, Bill has been limited in what he has been able to practice, but he has called his wife far more frequently than before and established a new and loving relationship with her.

One significant struggle Bill had faced that the course assisted him with was forgiving his wife for having reported him to the police for violent behaviour. He said that previously forgiveness had been very hard for him, and he resented her being in “his” house while he was in prison. He also found it hard to accept that now his daughters had to stop going to school because his wife could not pay the school fees with him being in prison. But after the course, he realised that he was there because he had been wrong: *She put me in jail because she loves me.*

Bill found the course powerful because they used the Bible as proof. He reflected:

*I found it was easy because the learnings were supported with the words of papa God. Some parts of the course “cut me”. One is the one where the man wants to be “on top” and “the boss” and that his wife is “down” and just needs to listen to the man. During this time “my heart broke,” because I realised how I had acted before.*

Bill’s wife cried when she spoke about the changes:

*I did not believe that he could do it, that he could change like that. Sometimes when he talks with me, I cry. I see how different he is now, I wish he could be outside with me. She confirmed that he calls her often now, whereas before he did not used to. She said: We sometimes go and visit him inside. The first time we went was before the course and the second time was afterwards. There was a big change after the course. The first time he did not kiss us or share the words of the Bible like he did the second time. It was a really big difference.*

Bill’s daughter (aged 23) also reported significant changes in her father since the course. He has stopped doing lots of things that he did before, like getting cross and talking “until we were tired of him”. But now he does not get cross quickly – he takes things “lightly” and he does not go on so much. She also said that whereas before *he would call home and not be happy with mummy because she had put him in prison, after the course he calls and he tells her [mummy] he loves her and that he wants to speak with us too.*

### **Joe (MBC Participant Low Risk Inmate, 7th March – 9th April 2019)**

Joe volunteered to do the course whilst he was in prison. It had a very significant impact on his attitudes towards women and violence. He reported he felt the program was specifically designed with him in mind, because he identified with all aspects of the problematic behaviour addressed in it! The close way the course resonated with him personally “*broke his heart*” and managed to get the messages about gender equity being communicated through to him. He said:

*I was brought up in a community with kastom and culture, but during the course I learnt that women can sometimes say things that are right. I realised that women can correct me, and if I had listened to my wife, then maybe I would not be in prison.*

He reported he now has learnt tools for managing his anger that he tries to use, and he and his wife have started to use terms of endearment when speaking with each other. Whereas he only used to call her occasionally, he now calls her every day and speaks gently to her, even if he is not happy about something. Since learning about economic violence, Joe has realised that he was mistaken previously when he only gave a small amount of his earnings to his wife, and now he gives her all of the money he makes doing small jobs in the prison.

Joe’s wife was very grateful he had gone through the course. She said: “*Mi luk janj blong hem big wan we ibig wan*” [*I have seen a huge change in him*]. She observed that the change in him: *makes me grow towards him, I am so glad. It has made me love him.* She told us:

*He told me to come to the prison and sit down and he started to share about the course. He said that he learnt about married couples. He said that it really touched him because he felt that the course was directed towards him personally. He said sorry to me, please forgive me, I will not make the same mistakes. I need to help you to do all the work in the house. Now I can see all the mistakes I made. Before he really thought his work was just to come home and eat and throw his plate down. Now he has realised his mistake. He hugged me when he told me*

*all this. I felt glad that he has realised what he thought was good was not good. All these things that he has done to us I feel like it was gone, I have forgotten it.*

Joe's 19-year-old son confirmed significant changes in his father since the course. He said:

*I can feel that his tone, words have changed. Before when he speaks to us through phone, he speaks very short, he says good night and passes on the messages right away. Now he is checking on us, are we okay? He is encouraging me a lot, especially me and my mum, he says: "I am his son and I must look after my mum and my girlfriend well, take good care of them and encourages me to share money to my mum and my girlfriend".*

He also stated that a reconciliation would be very important to reunite his family once again so they can receive him when he comes out of prison.

## Addressing the Study Questions

### Changes for Participants

#### **1. If MBC attendees identify personal and lifestyle changes as a direct result of the program.**

After successful completion of the Men's Behaviour Change program, participants are expected to:

- Have stopped using physical and sexual violence in their home
- Be able to identify at least four different types of violence
- Begin to take ownership of their past violent attitudes and actions
- Show improved gender equitable attitudes, such as an increase in sharing of household chores
- Understand the impact of negative gender norms
- Understand and acknowledge the impact of their own violence on others
- Understand and accept that violence is a personal choice
- Identify two tools that they use in their relationships to change their own violent behaviour or to positively strengthen their relationships.

As discussed above, no questions were directly asked about whether the participants have stopped using physical and sexual violence in their home, as there was neither the time nor an ethics approval to evaluate this query in a robust manner.

The major changes self-identified by participants, spouses and children/brother were:

- Responsibilities and labour within the house were now shared more equitably, with two participants reportedly actually doing more cooking, washing and child-rearing; and two incarcerated inmates reflecting on changed awareness around the need to do this.
- A sense of freedom in spouses and children in regard to participation in decision-making and expression of needs and desires (this is emerging evidence of a shift in exercise of domination by the husband).
- Men using gentler language to communicate with their families and express their needs and feelings, even when expressing disappointment/unhappiness, rather than resorting to loud, cross and violent expressions.

- Men and their spouses developing a more intimate connection, involving far more in-depth communication, physical affection and in some cases, terms of endearment. This was reflected in increased calls by the inmates to their wives, and in the non-incarcerated participants reflecting on how they now discuss “their day” with their wives in a way that never happened before.
- Men indicating for the first time they recognised the value of listening to their wives’ opinions.
- Two participants discussed the fact that they became aware that the use of violence was a conscious choice.
- Regular use of the STOP sign to avoid escalation of tension.
- Changed understandings of gender roles – participants explained they had understood their role as a man to be the “Boss” but realised through the training that their role should be one of a supporter and protector of their family. A number referred to the re-interpretation of the Biblical passage about the man being the “head” of the household, to being the man as a support for his family as particularly enlightening in this regard.
- Development of a closer connection with God, and this enabling them to participate in their spouse’s spiritual life; for many, this was the first time they regularly prayed together, and this was highly valued by both spouses.
- Several participants reflected on changed understandings about sex and love: one participant said, *I have realised that love is not about sex, which I used to think about before (90%) but it is about living peacefully in a peaceful environment.*
- A recognition that their previous behaviour and attitudes had caused harm to their spouses and children, regret over this, and a desire to change their ways. This was manifest in all of the participants having apologised to their spouses in various manners, in ways that were reported by the spouses as meaningful and sincere.
- Participants reported regularly apologising for bad behaviour now, and that this was a major shift for them. A participant observed: *Talem sori [apologising] is key in our house now, when you say sorry you see a smile on the person’s face, you see their face change and you feel better.*

## **2. Examine perceptions as to why the program led to the identified personal and lifestyle changes.**

The answers from the participants and their families concerning the reasons for the impact of the MBC fell into three broad categories.

First, the faith-based approach and use of the scriptures both provided authority for the new concepts, and also assisted in their comprehension through providing a familiar medium for the participants who all identified as Christians. One participant said: *The Bible texts help us to understand these topics more and relate them to our societies.*

Secondly, the participants seem to have genuinely not realised that their behaviour was wrong, and when they did realise this, it had a big emotional impact upon them that has propelled and sustained behavioural change. Whilst the participants are likely to have been exposed previously to messages about gender violence and gender equality, physical violence is normalised and perceived as a legitimate and even demanded form of punishment in Vanuatu. This is especially the case in the southern islands. As a co-designer of the program observed,

*There are elements in Vanuatu culture that promotes a “big man system” that can be oppressive. Also, there are practices and attitudes that men use to support violence against women and children. For example, bride price has given a man the idea that they can do what they like with the wife because she was paid for.*

Concepts such as rape within marriage and economic and emotional abuse are still very new for both men and women in Vanuatu. When pressed on the question of why the course had had an impact on him, one of the participants said:

*Because we realised that we had done those things and we realised that it was wrong. Before I did not think that it was wrong. In our kastom, when you pay for a woman, you are the boss of her, if she does not do what you want then you hit her. But when I came to the training, I realised that is “rabis fasin”.*

Thirdly, the program was targeted at issues the participants felt were “real” and with which they could immediately personally identify. They expressed views such as realising that the approaches identified were “common-sense”. They also reported trying out the new approaches/tools and finding that they worked and resulted in less tension in their homes and increased self-satisfaction. In this regard, the measured pace of the course, stretched over six to ten weeks depending on the cohort, seems to have been advantageous.

Although the participants did not directly express this point, it seems that the fact the MBC was able to provide them with an awareness that their previous behaviour was wrong, together with a confidence that they can “course-correct” and follow a new and better path going forward, was very important. There was an overarching sense of positivity and excitement in both the participants and their families about their future as a result of the program.

## Sustainability

### **3. Examine the perceived sustainability of the identified changes.**

A limitation of the study was that only one of the participants had completed his training a year ago; the rest had only finished in the two months prior to the study. However, the participant who had completed a year ago was maintaining the changes successfully. This was confirmed by his spouse and older brother.

There are factors suggesting grounds for optimism about the sustainability of the changes. First, the course encourages practising changed behaviour on a daily basis, making sustainability more likely. Secondly, the discussions between the participants and their spouses and family about their changes, and the participants’ adopted role as advocate of the learnings in the MBC to their broader community, also make sustainability more likely. In regard to this last point, as will be discussed further below, all of the participants expressed great enthusiasm for speaking with others (friends, broader family, other inmates, etc.) about what they had learnt in an effort to “share” their insights and spread the word.

One of the participants noted the important role the handouts played in allowing him to refresh his mind about what he had learnt, and to post certain key handouts on the wall of his house for easy reminding.

One participant and the spouse of one participant requested a refresher course after a year to help with the sustainability of the changes.

## Restorative Justice

### **4. Gather feedback to improve program delivery and impact, in particular examining whether a Restorative Justice element would be beneficial.**

Restorative justice seeks an opportunity for all stakeholders affected by an injustice to discuss how they have been hurt by it, to heal those hurts, repair relationships, take responsibility for reform, prevent recurrence and enhance the capabilities for human flourishing of those affected. It is based on:

- Dialogue
- Active responsibility
- Healing
- Building relationships
- Building human capabilities
- Prevention of future injustice.

Restorative justice processes can take different forms. Some involve direct contact between the victim and perpetrator (such as victim-offender mediation and group conferencing), while others involve just the victims in processes that aim to be restorative, for example by giving them a forum in which to be heard (these are referred to as truth-telling models).

In the past five years, as limitations of the crime-centred approach to domestic violence become increasingly apparent, there has been growing interest in using restorative justice in family violence cases. Australia, New Zealand, the European Union, Canada, and the United States have all legislated and/or used restorative justice in cases of family and domestic violence. Some jurisdictions have been experimenting with a combined MBC and restorative justice approach, and preliminary findings are positive. For example, a recent US study titled *In-depth Examination of Batterer Intervention and Alternative Treatment Approaches for Domestic Violence Offenders* found:

The results indicate that RJ (combined with BIP [Batterer Intervention Program]) is a viable alternative treatment option for DV [domestic violence] crimes in cases of IPV [intimate partner violence]; the findings also challenge assumptions about RJ and more specifically, that victim participation in treatment with their offender should be forbidden. It is noteworthy that in relevant jurisdictions, a hybrid approach to treatment that includes both BIP and RJ might be useful in addressing the shortcomings of a BIP-only approach.<sup>3</sup>

While restorative justice has not been used formally to deal with cases of family violence in the Pacific Islands region or indeed in much of the global South, informal customary and religious approaches that are highly restorative in nature are often used in this context.

---

<sup>3</sup> Mills, B. and Barocas, B. (2018) *An In-depth Examination of Batterer Intervention and Alternative Treatment Approaches for Domestic Violence Offenders*, available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252265.pdf>

The question for this study was whether more consciously including restorative justice elements into the MBC would be advantageous. It should be noted that the MBC already resonates with all of the restorative justice values/principles set out above, although the “restorative justice” label has not been used as yet.

The two major contributions that conscious inclusion of restorative justice could make are: (1) to provide a space for the voices of victims of violence to be heard; and (2) to facilitate apology and reconciliation within the family, and where appropriate, the broader community.

In interviews, we asked participants and their families about apologies and reconciliation, and the role of victims in these. The following observations can be made, based on their responses:

- All the participants voluntarily apologised to their spouses and some to other family members for their past behaviour as a result of realisations they had come to during the course.
- In no cases did these apologies involve any discussion with victims about the impact of the violence on them.
- All the victims reported that they had been extremely pleased when the apology was made and saw it as meaningful and sincere.
- All the victims reported accepting the apology, a number making comments such as “it was nothing” or “it’s in the past now”.
- None of the victims had been prepared or forewarned in any way for the apology, it came out of the blue.
- The dominant emotions felt by course participants as observed and identified by the MBC facilitators throughout the course were shame and guilt, and one way the participants were able to process these emotions was through apology to their spouses and family members.
- None of the victims expressed a desire to talk about the impact of the behaviour on them with their spouse in the context of the apology, and seemed confused by the suggestion. Their dominant emotion seemed to be relief that their husband recognised what he had done was wrong and hope that it could be forgotten, and they could move forward. The mood was one of “forgive and forget”.
- Some of the participants and family members expressed the desire to make a public apology and reconciliation with broader family members and with their community at large; this was particularly strong amongst the inmates who sought an opportunity to be seen by the community in a fresh light. For example, one inmate’s son said:

*It is an important thing to do reconciliation with my father, my mother and the families. Because it will make us happy, my father will say sorry to my mum, myself and the family and we will reunite again. And we see our father as a new man. We are ready to receive him for the reconciliation. I suggest the reconciliation be done in our community so chiefs, pastors and families will know and reconcile.*

- Most interviewees expressed the view that there should be a public reconciliation if the violence had been witnessed by or impacted upon those outside the perpetrator’s home.

Whilst the participants and their spouses and families seemed to consider hearing the voices of victims as unimportant to the apology process, those who designed the program and some of the facilitators saw it as a critical missing component. They explained that culturally the details of an incident are not talked about as part of a reconciliation or apology, as the focus is on restoring community harmony

and relationships. In many *kastom* ceremonies, the victim is often represented by the male head of her family or chief. However, this may enable customary apologies to be used to cover up violence rather than to deal with it. Whilst they allow the perpetrator to have “cleaned his face”, they often fail to provide an avenue for the victim to be satisfied that the wrongs done to her have been acknowledged and articulated.

Making space for survivors to have their voices heard and their suffering acknowledged and validated is an important way to address their hurt. The New Zealand Ministry of Justice Practice Standards for Family Violence Cases has stated: “For the victim, the experience of justice and healing occurs primarily through the provision of a safe and supported environment to talk about the harm caused, receive genuine apology and negotiate actions or behaviours that they would find restorative”.<sup>4</sup>

Making this space can also be an important way to affirm to survivors that what they went through was not acceptable. This is important in communities where family violence is normalised, as it is in many ni-Vanuatu communities. Research elsewhere has demonstrated that a crucial step in addressing family violence is to ensure that everyone participates in the community’s naming and conceptualisation of it, and one way to do this is through restorative justice processes.<sup>5</sup>

It is therefore recommended that a pilot inclusion of restorative justice integrated into the current MBC program be developed and carefully tested. This could be done as follows:

- a) Including more time in the course for a discussion of apology and of the benefits of hearing victims’ stories about the impact of violence on them, thereby supporting the participants in their voluntary apologies to their spouses and families.
- b) Creating an opportunity for a facilitated apology involving an MBC facilitator, which makes room for participants to hear their spouses’ and family’s account of the impact of the violence on them, if all participants wanted to do so. Including others impacted by the harm and those in support roles with the user of violence can assist in working out how to avoid violence in future, such as through devising strategies to avert violence or keep people safe if it arises. It gives a chance for others (chiefs, pastors, etc.) to offer support and make change more sustainable over the long term.
- c) Working with the correctional services/probation officers to link the MBC into the mechanisms by which parole officers arrange for inmates to conduct reconciliation ceremonies before being released. We heard from one of the MBC Correctional Officer participants that this can occur at any time before release, but must be done before parole is granted. Linking the MBC into the reconciliation process would help to ensure a more genuine apology/reconciliation (i.e. not just for the purpose of being released) and would attest to the inmates’ emotional readiness as a result of going through the course. For example, one inmate

---

<sup>4</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Justice, Restorative Justice: Practice Standards for Family Violence Cases (2018), <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Publications/rj-specialist-standards-in-family-violence-cases-2018.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Cheers, B., Binell, M., Coleman, H., Gentle, I., Miller, G., Taylor, J., & Weetra, C. (2006). Family violence: An Australian Indigenous community tells its story. *International Social Work*, 49(1), 51-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872806059401>

participant said: *A challenge was I have not been with my wife to really confess and reconcile straight after the training, if she could see me in flesh, it will be better.* This participant had already done a public apology/reconciliation before going to prison, but after doing the course he felt it had not been sufficient. He explained:

*I want to do a reconciliation in front of my family before I come out of prison. I want to organise this and then have a kakai (meal) afterwards. I would like MBC to witness and also the paramount chief of my area and the Presbyterian and SDA (Seventh Day Adventist) pastors too. I want to do it with them because the home should be my priority, I should show my family that I prioritise them in saying sorry I want to do it before I return to them to ensure that there is trust and so my family knows I still love them. My home should be good before I go back.*

- d) Ideally, the MBC facilitator, participant, community probation officer, relevant chief and relevant pastor could together design a reconciliation that provides a space for the victim's story to be told in a way the victim is comfortable with, noting this may occur before a public ceremony.

A trauma-informed approach would need to be adopted to extending the program in this manner. It should draw from the established work done in Europe, Australia and New Zealand on restorative justice and domestic violence (including that the process must be consensual by all parties, victim safety is at the core, there is adequate preparation, etc.), and also from the ni-Vanuatu cultural context and Christian principles. This planning stage should also identify the risks associated with restorative justice and whether or not these can be satisfactorily mitigated in the context of Vanuatu. Then a pilot should be developed based on these principles and carefully evaluated. The objectives against which the pilot should be evaluated and the timeframe for this evaluation must be considered with care.

## Recommendations

### 5. Recommendations for further areas of evaluation and/or study

In addition to the **restorative justice recommendations** above, there are four further major recommendations.

**Recommendation #1:** First, enable participation by the spouses in the final parts of the program. The rationale for this is twofold. This would permit a spouse to become familiar with the language and concepts their husband has learnt, and the journey he has been on from his "old story" to "new story". As one participant said, the women are the ones who "receive back" the participants, so they need to be prepared. Several facilitators and one family member noted that given the range of messaging about GBV, it would avoid potential friction if the participants and their spouses were getting the same messages and understandings about these concepts. One said:

*Women have been getting lots of awareness about VAW (Violence Against Women) from everywhere – it is a 100% focus. So it is important that while we are putting husbands into their roles, mothers and wives are also made part of the process as helpers, and so they can appreciate and acknowledge the process taking place in the father's life.*

It is also an opportunity for the spouses to learn about tools and concepts they can utilise themselves to manage anger and communicate better.

All the participants responded favourably to the suggestion that spouses be involved in the program, although for a range of different reasons. Some saw the women as benefiting from the skills taught, and others saw it as useful for them to understand what their husband had learnt. Almost all interviewees expressed the view that they had been taught about the importance of gender equality and therefore they wanted to see this in action with a program that brings in both men and women. There were different views as to whether the men and women should be in the same sessions; some women noted they would be intimidated if they were mixed together. It may be advisable to have separate sessions initially and then a joint session at the end. Joint sessions may also be part of the restorative justice element identified above.

**Recommendation #2:** Secondly, WVV is encouraged to respond to the desire of participants and facilitators to share what they have learnt in the program. Whilst there are legitimate concerns about participants rolling out their own versions of the program given its highly sensitive nature, the desire to share was palpable amongst participants and facilitators and forms an important part of their journey to their “new” self. One of the spouses said: *“We cannot hide what we have learnt, we will go and share it”*.

One way to do this safely is to prepare a number of specific components of the program that can be shared easily and with minimal risk of distortion by participants with their family/community. Possible components are the STOP sign tool, the analysis of Biblical texts about the man being the head of the household, the fact that violence can be sexual, emotional and economic as well as physical, and information about rape in marriage as an offence.

**Recommendation #3:** Thirdly, WVV is encouraged to run a session with chiefs as participants, based on the idea that chiefs are role models and mouth-pieces for their communities.

**Recommendation #4:** Fourth, WVV is encouraged to undertake a more thorough evaluation of the MBC, ideally 12 months after a number of cohorts have completed it in order to be able to track change sustained over time. Going forward, it would be good to develop a survey instrument to gauge attitudes regarding gender equality, relationships and use of violence before the participants undertake the program in order to provide some baseline data to evaluate change against. This evaluation could proceed concurrently with the evaluation of the RJ component.