



Building safe and resilient workplaces during COVID-19

Bank South Pacific Case Study

December 2020

AN INITIATIVE OF THE PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP



Creating Markets, Creating Opportunities



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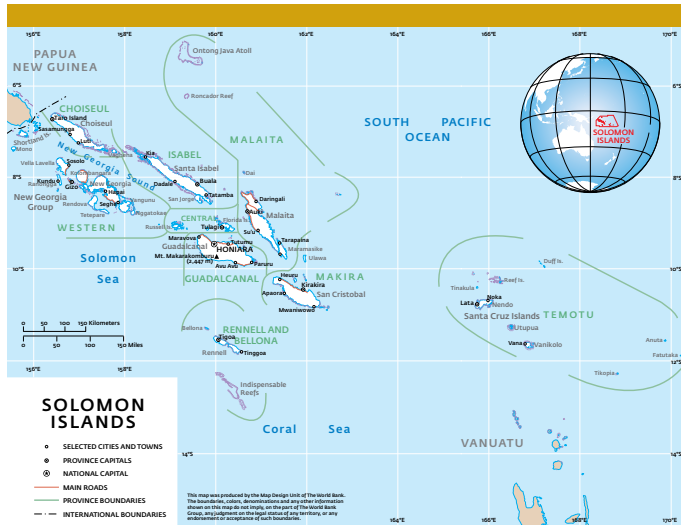
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NEW ZEALAND
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Ending the silence about violence and the workplace



Solomon Islands*

Economy Name:
Solomon Islands

Capital City:
Honiara

Region:
East Asia and Pacific

Income Level:
Lower middle income

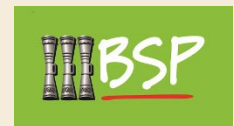
Male Population (2019):
340,538

Female Population (2019):
329,240

* Estimates using the World Bank's total population and age/sex distributions of the United Nations Population Division's World Population Prospects: 2019 Revision. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.MA.IN?locations=SB>

Overview

Bank South Pacific (BSP) Solomon Islands participated in IFC-led peer learning platform Waka Mere which means ‘She Works’ in Solomon Islands Pijin to address factors that underlie gender inequality and the low participation of women in the workplace, including gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH)¹. The Waka Mere Commitment to Action (2017-2019) was an initiative to improve business outcomes in Solomon Islands through advancing workplace gender equality. The initiative was led by IFC and the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce. Fifteen of the largest companies in Solomon Islands participated in Waka Mere. Under the initiative BSP Solomon Islands developed a policy and measures to foster a respectful and supportive workplace for all genders. This case study outlines the results of these activities. Previously the bank took disciplinary action as a first response to behaviors such as absenteeism and lateness. Now it considers violence as a possible cause and works with employees to provide a range of measures to respond to the impacts of violence. Emerging evidence suggests this new approach is resulting in a more productive workforce.



In November 2020:
248 employees,
148 (60%) of which
are women

¹ Gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) is an umbrella term covering a range of behaviours, including sexual, physical, psychological and economic abuse. The behaviours are directed at people because of their sex or gender, or disproportionately affect people of a particular sex or gender. IFC (2020) Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: Emerging Good Practice for the Private Sector, https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/f645167-7eff-439b-922b-7656c75320ab/GPN_AddressingGBVH_July2020.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=nddoki5

Impact of violence at the workplace

International research² links forms of violence such as domestic and sexual violence³, bullying, and sexual harassment with employees' compromised ability to remain safely and productively employed. Whether violence occurs at work or elsewhere, it typically results in adverse company outcomes such as absenteeism, presenteeism (working while not in a fully functioning state) and staff turnover.

“ Domestic violence affects all physically, mentally and spiritually...Therefore measures have to be in place to address these issues. This affects and has big impacts in workplaces which results in poor work performance.”

Male employee, September 2018
Bank South Pacific

For BSP Solomon Islands, these outcomes were revealed through the results of a survey⁴ undertaken in August and September 2018, which found that 11 days were lost on average for each employee in 2018 because of domestic and sexual violence. These lost days were attributed to employees feeling tired, distracted, or unwell from the effects of domestic and sexual violence (4.5 days). Most lost days (6.2) related to employees piecing together makeshift⁵ responses to the effects of domestic and sexual violence. Domestic and sexual violence were also linked to staff absence (0.2 days) and lateness (0.3 days). These findings are consistent with the survey results from other companies that participated in Waka Mere.

“I believe that domestic violence is affecting the ability of some employees to come to work and/or perform their best at this company”⁶

FEMALE EMPLOYEES

Endline	84%	13%	3%
Baseline	88%	10%	2%

MALE EMPLOYEES

Endline	84%	12%	4%
Baseline	82%	11%	7%

ALL EMPLOYEES

Endline	84%	13%	4%
Baseline	86%	11%	4%

- Strongly agree + agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Strongly disagree + disagree

“ The effects of violence result in a cost to the bank because staff are not working to their maximum capacity, so assisting the staff to resolve this issue will resolve their private life and hopefully the staff will be a more productive member and of more use to the organization.”

Solomon Islands Country Head
Bank South Pacific

² Research to establish this link has been carried out in countries in Asia, Europe and North America. For regional examples see IFC (2019) The Business Case for Workplace Responses to Domestic and Sexual Violence in Fiji, https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/region_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/east+asia+and+the+pacific/resources/fiji-domestic-and-sexual-violence-report and Darko, E., Smith, W., & Walker, D. (2015) Gender violence in Papua New Guinea: The Cost to Business. Overseas Development Institute.

³ Domestic violence is any violence between family members and/or current/former intimate partners. Sexual violence is the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions and all sexual activity with children: IFC (2020) Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: Emerging Good Practice for the Private Sector

⁴ Survey about how problems at home affect your work (Aug/Sept 2018) administered by IFC with employees of companies involved in Waka Mere.

⁵ Makeshift, or informal, workplace responses to domestic and sexual violence often involve employees trying to access support for themselves or colleagues whereby they may have inadequate information about how to respond to violence and to attend to self-care.

⁶ At the time of Waka Mere, 150 women and 106 men were employed by BSP. Of female employees, 32% answered the survey in November 2017 (baseline), 61% in August 2019 (endline). Of male employees, 26% in answered the survey in November 2017 (baseline), 41% in August 2019 (endline).

Impact of COVID-19 on the workplace

Solomon Islands is mostly COVID-19-free (4 cases were confirmed in October 2020)⁷, however its economy is in recession⁸. More than half of the businesses surveyed by the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry indicated they had or intended to lay off workers. As of July 2020, BSP Solomon Islands had not had to reduce its workforce, but some staff roles have been shifted from back office to teller positions to meet the sudden, changed needs of its customers. This change in customer demand was brought about by the State of Emergency (SOE) declared by the Government of Solomon Islands on 25 March 2020 (since extended until November 2020).

Under the SOE schools and universities were closed, and many people moved from the capital, Honiara, to villages across the country. For the bank this movement of people resulted in a higher demand on its eight Solomon Islands branches with tellers occasionally facing customers' stress. According to the bank's Human Resources Manager some customers behaved aggressively in wanting to be quickly served in order to return to their home provinces during the repatriation process.

The bank is also focused on confirming availability of adequate protective equipment for staff, with concern about the possibility of COVID-19's spread to Solomon Islands.



⁷ World Health Organisation (2020, September) COVID-19 Situation in WHO Western Pacific Region, <https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/345dfdc82b5c4f6a815fd54a05d18ec>

⁸ Solomon Times (2020, August) 'Infrastructure is Our Lifeline: SICCI', <https://www.solomontimes.com/news/infrastructure-is-our-lifeline-sicci/10133>

Addressing violence and its workplace impact

BSP Group Family and Sexual Violence Policy

The Solomon Islands Government passed the Family Protection Act in 2014 making domestic violence illegal. To assist the company in developing a workplace response to domestic and sexual violence the bank's human resources department established a committee comprised of female and male representatives of the bank's six business units. The bank's Human Resources Manager⁹ said that the Waka Mere trainings were an "eye opener" for the committee members in helping them to understand how a domestic and sexual violence workplace policy could spell out employees' rights and how they could get help.

Following the training, the committee led the development of a Family and Sexual Violence Policy to cover the bank's operations in the Solomon Islands. This policy work assisted the development of a company-wide policy that has since been implemented and adapted by all 93 BSP branches in 7 countries across the region.

“ The topic of violence was a silent topic that was never raised... staff who are having punctuality issues, absenteeism or continuous absence, we see it as a trend [but] without realising they'd been affected back at home... and then it affected their performance at work so after we attended the training, then that's when we thought, 'hang, on'... they are victims themselves..., it affected them to come to work during a work day.”

Solomon Islands Human Resources Manager
Bank South Pacific

First points of contact

In addition to having led the development and implementation of the Family and Sexual Violence Policy, the committee serves as the bank's team of trained first points of contact for staff who are affected by violence. These first points of contact support affected colleagues by referring them to services and by assisting them to access reasonable workplace adjustments, such as provision of special paid leave to deal with issues arising from violence.

Induction program

BSP Solomon Islands realized that the staff induction process is an important phase in which to introduce new employees to the Family and Sexual Violence Policy and the first points of contact for employees affected by violence. The bank therefore redesigned its induction program so that the issue of violence and its impact on work, as well as responses to it, are made explicit to new employees at the start of their tenure with the bank.

Community messaging

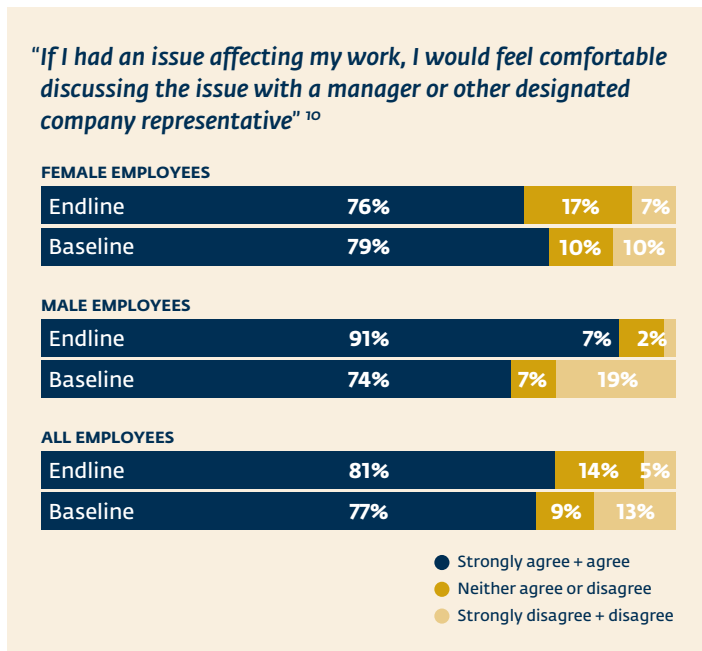
The bank is using its presence in Honiara, Malaita and Western Province to demonstrate its public position against all forms of violence. To symbolize this stance, staff wear black uniforms every Thursday in a campaign called #BlackThursdays. Branches display posters with similar messaging directed at customers who come into the branches.

⁹ Quotes for this case study are from interviews with BSP Solomon Islands Human Resources Manager September 2019 and July 2020; The Island Sun (2018, October) 'Shock survey prompts violence policy', <https://theislandsun.com.sb/bsp-banks-to-roll-out-domestic-violence-policy-after-shock-survey-results-in-si/> and (IFC) Survey about how problems at home affect your work (Solomon Islands).

Signs of change

The bank is beginning to see the benefits of its formal responses to violence and the workplace, with the Human Resource Manager estimating that the turnover of staff in a few positions has reduced since the bank participated in Waka Mere. This result, in turn, has helped the bank to keep recruitment costs down. The human resources department estimates that the bank is also saving on the costs of makeshift responses to violence such as the ad-hoc provision of medical treatment and relocation by instead using the first point of contacts to refer employees to appropriate services.

Surveys with BSP Solomon Islands employees undertaken throughout the Waka Mere initiative shows staff have an increased level of comfort in discussing issues that affect their work with their manager or representative such as a contact team member. This increase was particularly apparent for male employees.



¹⁰ See footnote 4

Lessons learned and next steps

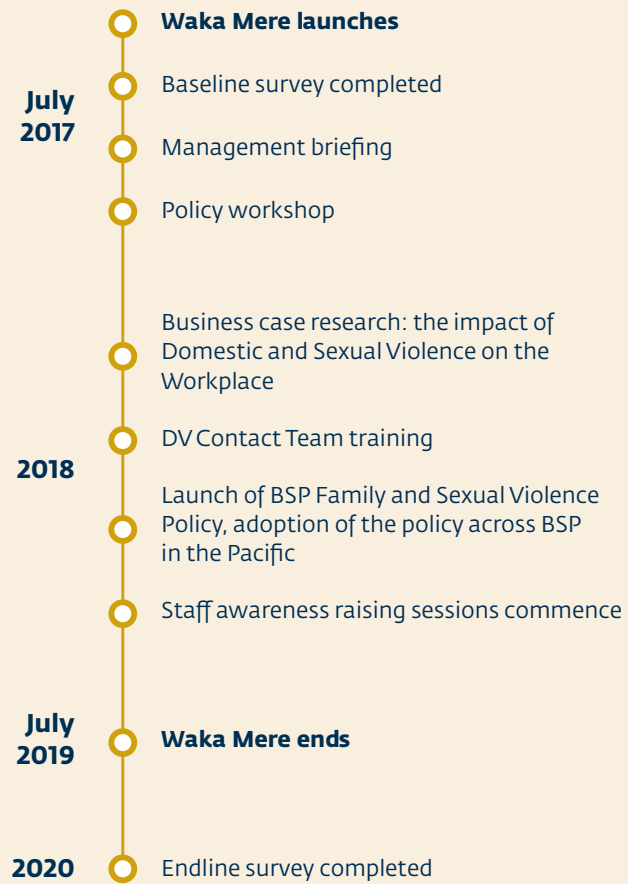
Through participating in Waka Mere, BSP Solomon Islands has learnt about the significance of domestic and sexual violence and bullying and harassment as factors that underlie employee absenteeism, presenteeism and turnover. By implementing a comprehensive Family and Sexual Violence policy and associated measures such as a team of trained responders and an induction program, the bank has begun to cut costs related to staff turnover and makeshift, uncoordinated supports for staff affected by violence.

BSP Solomon Islands is working to consolidate the measures it has implemented to understand and respond to the impacts of violence and the workplace. BSP Solomon Islands' Human Resources Manager recommends all companies in the country consider and respond to violence as an issue that underlies staff performance problems.

“ I suggest instead of going straight to disciplining an employee, find out first what could be the root cause of why that person is not performing up to the expected standard of the organisation... they might be a victim or a perpetrator who has been going through such a situation so that's why it affected them psychologically and they don't perform at work. Once they have that help, organisations or companies seek that help for their staff, or refer them to the right service providers, I believe that they should perform better but if it continues that's where it's a different story”.

Solomon Islands
Human Resources Manager
Bank South Pacific

Bank South Pacific's activities to promote a respectful and supportive workplace through the Waka Mere Commitment to Action



Visit www.ifc.org/gender/EAP to find more

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