



Peer-led Study on the Rights and Social Experiences of Trans and Gender Diverse People in:

Fiji 

COUNTRY REPORT





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Map attributions Vemaps. Every effort has been made to ensure the information and facts mentioned in this publication is accurate and correct at the time of publishing.

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 **Foreword** / Haus of Khameleon (HOK) is a Transgender Feminist movement of the economic south that is a social justice organisation movement, devoted to ending multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, oppression and violence targeted at transgender and gender non-conforming people through education and advocacy on national, regional and global issues of importance to transgender and gender non-conforming people.

HOK's praxis and work is also about promoting Gender Justice, Feminism, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law. HOK facilitates a strong and lucid voice for transgender equality in Fiji and the Pacific, and impact and influence Trans Human Rights advocates to effectively advance the rights of trans and the overall LGBTIQ+ Rights. HOK also stands in solidarity and co-responsibility for Transgender Human Rights defenders and advocates to advance the protection for defenders.

HOK works in the Area of Law and Policy reform for Queer Rights across Fiji which began in 2012 and this work continues today. Our reform work focuses on the systematic and structural discriminatory oppressive aspects within Fiji's Legislative system, Constitution, legislation, common law, legal practices and policies, and the wider access to justice for Transgender and Gender Non-conforming people, from a Human Rights and Gender Justice aspect. This partnership between the HOK and the Asia

Pacific Transgender Network (APTAN) research titled the *Social Experiences Study (SES) for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming people in Fiji* looks into the critical issue of Gender-Based Violence and discrimination targeted against Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming people in Fiji. It was very clear that these issues are still under-reported. Transgender women who do not conform to societal expectations of sexuality and gender presentations are at the heightened risk of violence based on their sexuality or gender identity. Reliable statistics on violence against Transgender and Gender Non-conforming people are scarce, as large numbers of victims do not report the crimes to law enforcement because of well-founded fear, and distrust. HOK believes that in order to improve the existing structure and response in Fiji, it is critical to examine gender based violence from an intersectional analysis that addresses the specific vulnerabilities of transgender and gender non-conforming people based on their sexuality and gender identity.

HOK hopes that the findings and the recommendations of this research report will compel various actors to lobby across sectors and work with policy makers in improving Transgender and Gender Non-conforming peoples' access to the formal justice service and system through gender and sensitized legislations and institutions that actively remove barriers and discrimination Transgender and Gender Non-conforming people face when dealing with the intersecting issues related to Gender Based Violence.

On behalf of the HOK Team and the Research Assistants from the respected organisations Fiji (Rainbow Pride Foundation, Strumpet Alliance Network, Survival Advocacy Network and the House of Colours), and for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Recognition and Rights.



Lady Miki Charlamagne,
Former Executive Director, HOK

Acknowledgements / This study was coordinated by the Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APT¹N) and led in the country by Haus of Khameleon.² This study has been adapted from Transgender Europe (TGEU)'s *Transrespect versus Transphobia (TvT): The social experiences of trans and gender-diverse people in 8 countries: Colombia, India, the Philippines, Serbia, Thailand, Tonga, Turkey and Venezuela*.

¹ The Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APT¹N) advocates for the protection of the legal, social, and human rights of transgender (trans) people as well as the enhancement of their social wellbeing and quality of life in the Asia Pacific region.

² Haus of Khameleon is a social justice organization devoted to ending discrimination and violence against trans people through education and advocacy on national, regional, and global issues of importance to trans people. By empowering trans people and allies to educate and influence policymakers and others, Haus of Khameleon facilitates a strong and clear voice for trans equality in Fiji and the Pacific.

Data was gathered by trained trans and gender diverse people (from Haus of Khameleon, Rainbow Pride Foundation, Survival Advocacy Network Fiji, Strumphet Alliance, and House of Colours) under the coordination of Haus of Khameleon. Initial descriptive data analysis was done by Duangta Pawa. The introduction of the report was produced by Patrick Thomsen, interpretation and analyses of the data were supported by Kylie Fisk, and editing of the report was supported by Sangita Singh.

Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL).

Our deepest gratitude, however, goes to all the trans and gender diverse people in Fiji who shared their open, honest and valuable experiences and the peer and technical reviewers who provided feedback on this report. It is with your reflections, experiences, and dedications that APTN can continue to contribute to the advocacy efforts for greater human rights in our fight for equality.

This report has been reviewed internally by the APTN secretariat. Feedback on the report has been received from Isikeli Vulavou (PSGDN), Kavita Naidu, and Leli Darling. The study was funded with support from the Global Equality Fund (GEF) through the US Department of State's Bureau of



Acronyms

APT^N / Asia Pacific Transgender Network
DIVA/ Diverse Voices and Action for Equality
CBO / Community Based Organizations
FtM / Female to Male
GBV / Gender-based Violence
HIV / Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HOK / Haus of Khameleon
LBTI / Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
LGBT / Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
LGBTI / Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
LGBTQI / Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
LGBTQIA+ / Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and other sexually or gender diverse people
MGC / My Girls Club
MSM / Men who have Sex with Men
MtF / Male to Female
NGO / Non-government Organizations
PEP / Post Exposure Prophylaxis
PIFS / Pacific Island Forum Secretariat
PrEP / Pre-exposure Prophylaxis
PNG / Papua New Guinea
SPC / Secretariat for the Pacific Community
SPSS / Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SRS / Sexual Reassignment Surgery
SRH / Sexual and Reproductive Health
STI / Sexually Transmitted Infection
TGEU / Transgender Europe
TvT / Transrespect versus Transphobia
UNAIDS / Joint United Nations Programme on HIV

Glossary of Terms*

Transgender & Trans

The umbrella term trans covers a diversity of gender identities and forms of gender expressions. The following non-exhaustive list explains some common terms used to describe trans identities and how they are used in this report. The definitions and their applications vary significantly across the region, within specific countries or cultures, and amongst individual trans people. Every person has the right to use the term or terms that best describes their gender identity.

In this region, “transgender” (or “trans”) is used frequently as an umbrella term to describe people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth. APTN has included the following definition of the terms based on discussions held at a regional consultation in Manila in 2012:

Persons who identify themselves in a different gender than that assigned to them at birth. They may express their identity differently to that expected of the gender role assigned to them at birth. Trans/transgender persons often identify themselves in ways that are locally, socially, culturally, religiously, or spiritually defined.

This report uses the word “trans” as an umbrella term to convey this diversity of gender identity or expression. When it is appropriate, the report uses the following additional terms:

Trans Woman

A trans person who identifies as female (that is, someone whose sex was assigned male at birth but who identifies as female). The acronym MtF (male to female) is also used to describe a trans woman.

Trans Man

A trans person who identifies as male (that is, someone whose sex was assigned female at birth but who identifies as male). The acronym FtM (female to male) is also used to describe a trans man.

Cisgender

Someone who is not transgender, that is, someone whose gender identity corresponds with their sex assigned at birth.

Gender-affirming Health Services

The biomedical, surgical, or health interventions a trans person may undertake to physically transition. This includes, for example, access to counselling, hormone therapy, hair removal, and a range of surgeries. The term “gender-affirming surgeries” is preferred in this document, rather than the older term, “sex reassignment surgery (SRS)”.

Gender Expression

A person’s ways of communicating culturally-defined traits of masculinity or femininity (or both or neither) externally through physical appearance (including clothing, accessories, hairstyles, and cosmetics), mannerisms, ways of speaking, and behavioural patterns in interactions with others.

Gender Dysphoria

Discomfort or distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person's gender identity and that person's sex assigned at birth (and the associated gender role and/or primary and secondary sex characteristics).

Gender Identity

A person's internal sense of being a man, a woman, or some alternative gender or combination of genders. A person's gender identity may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth.

Gender-nonconforming or Gender Variant

Someone whose gender identity or gender expression is different from societal expectations or stereotypes. Not all trans people are gender-nonconforming. Some trans people are comfortable conforming to societal expectations of what it means to be a woman or a man. Conversely, some people who are not trans may identify as gender-nonconforming, based on their gender expression rather than their gender identity.

Intersex

Someone whose innate physical sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, gonads, and genitals) are considered to be either male or female at the same time, only partially male or partially female, or neither male nor female.

Transition

A process many but not all trans people undergo to live authentically in their gender identity. This may involve changes to a person's gender expression, such as their outward appearance, clothing, mannerisms, or the name they use in everyday interactions. Transitioning may also involve biomedical and surgical steps that help align a person's anatomy with their gender identity.

Transphobia

Prejudice directed at trans people because of their actual or perceived gender identity or expression. It can also have an impact on non-trans people who do not fit societal expectations for males or females. Transphobia can be *structural* (reflected in policies and laws that discriminate against trans people), *societal* (when trans people are rejected or mistreated by members of the society), or *internalized* (when trans people accept such prejudicial attitudes about themselves or other trans people).

Sexual Orientation

A person's capacity for profound emotional, affectional, and sexual attraction to and intimate and sexual relations with individuals of a different gender (heterosexual), the same gender (homosexual), or more than one gender (bisexual or pansexual) (International Commission of Jurists, 2007).

* Adapted with minor changes from Health Policy Project, Asia Pacific Transgender Network, and the United Nations Development Programme, *Blueprint for the Provision of Comprehensive Care for Trans People and Trans Communities*, Washington DC: Futures Group, Health Policy Project, 2015.



Introduction / Fiji is a South Pacific island nation that consists of more than 330 islands, around 100 of which are inhabited.³ Gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1970, Fiji is one of the most developed economies in the Pacific.



Fiji's population is around 885,000,⁴ comprised largely of an Indigenous Fijian majority and a significant Indian minority, with racial tensions between the two communities being not uncommon.⁵ Due to a lack of data disaggregation, the exact number of Fiji's transgender (trans) and gender diverse population is unknown. However, UNAIDS estimates that there are approximately 16,000 MSM and trans people living in Fiji at present.⁶

"AKASALEWALEWA IS OFTEN USED TO DENOTE TRANS WOMEN AND BARACA OR BRASTO TRANS MEN. FIJI'S TRANS, VAKASALEWALEWA, AND BARACA POPULATIONS FACE MANY OBSTACLES TO REALIZING THEIR LEGAL RIGHTS AND ACHIEVING SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE."

Much like other Pacific nations, Fiji has its own Indigenous terms for trans populations that reflect its unique cultural heritage. Vakasalewalewa is often used to denote

trans women and baraca or brasto trans men.⁷ Fiji's trans, vakasalewalewa, and baraca populations face many obstacles to realizing their legal rights and achieving social acceptance. They also face high levels of violence, have limited access to trans-specific healthcare services, and must contend with politics that are openly hostile toward sexual and gender diverse populations.⁸

Although early colonial records on Fiji make no mention of trans or non-heteronormative gender identities, it is commonly acknowledged that trans Fijians played a recognized role in pre-modern Fijian society.⁹ Vakasalewalewa, which translates to "like a woman," is the identity grouping most closely associated with trans women as understood in a Western context. Vakasalewalewa are seen as a distinct gender category, much like the fa'afafine in Samoa and the fakaleiti in Tonga. However, they are not as prominent in Fijian society as some of their counterparts across the Pacific.¹⁰

³ "Fiji," One World Nations Online, accessed April 23, 2022, <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/fiji.htm>.

⁴ Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, *Unjust, unequal, unstoppable: Fiji lesbians, bisexual women, transmen and gender non conforming people tipping the scales toward justice* (Suva, Fiji: DIVA for Equality and Australia Aid, 2019), https://drive.google.com/file/d/1D2YiPOQb_erOxBK2rdRt45Z8mEB1no0z/view?fbclid=IwAR3QDFf02wmV9IEoRvu-TFuqSo9Dn3qcj0Yk8bVlnmPCVZTPPYHc0vGzWLC.

⁵ Romitesh Kant and Smita Singh, *Race Relations in Fiji: Charting a New Course?* (Suva, Fiji: Citizens' Constitutional Forum 2015), <https://news.ccf.org.fj/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Race-Relations-in-Fiji-report-2.pdf>.

⁶ UNAIDS Fiji, *MSM Country Snapshots: Country Specific Information on HIV, Men Who have Sex with Men (MSM) and Transgender People – Fiji*, 2010, UNAIDS. https://www.aidsdatahub.org/sites/default/files/documents/MSM_Country_Snapshots_-_Fiji_online.pdf.

⁷ World Health Organization (WHO) and APTN, *Regional Assessment of HIV, STI and other Health Needs of Transgender People in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: WHO and APTN, 2013), https://www.weareaptn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Regional_assessment_of_HIV_STI_and_other_health_needs_of_TG_people_in_Asia_and_the_Pacific.pdf.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Geir-Henning Presterudstuen, “Men trapped in women’s clothing: homosexuality, cross-dressing, and masculinity in Fiji,” in *Gender on the Edge: Transgender, Gay, and Other Pacific Islanders*, eds. Niko Besnier and Kalissa Alexeyeff (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2014), 162–183.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Fiji: Treatment of homosexuals by society and government authorities; recourse and protection available to homosexuals who have been subject to ill treatment* (2005 - March 2007), April 2, 2007, FJI102479.E, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/469cd69b44.html>.

¹² Government of Fiji, *Constitution of the Republic of Fiji* (2013), 26, 3a, 19, [https://www.laws.gov.fj/ResourceFile/Get/?fileName=2013%20Constitution%20of%20Fiji%20\(English\).pdf](https://www.laws.gov.fj/ResourceFile/Get/?fileName=2013%20Constitution%20of%20Fiji%20(English).pdf).

¹³ “Interim Government of the Republic of the Fiji Islands, *Employment Relations Promulgation 2007* (Promulgation No. 36 of 2007), October 2, 2007, http://www.paclii.org/fj/promu/promu_dec/erp2007381/.

¹⁴ DIVA, *Unjust, unequal, unstoppable*.



In 1997, Fiji became the second country in the world to introduce protection against discrimination based on sexuality in its Constitution.¹¹ While this Constitution was abolished in 2009 due to a military coup, the new Constitution adopted in 2013 also outlawed discrimination based on sexuality, gender identity, and expression.¹² Legislation has also been enacted under the Employment Act to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, and HIV status.¹³ However, constitutional rights come with caveats and exclusions from several institutions and rights including marriage, adoption, and inheritance. Furthermore, as of yet, legal gender recognition to enable trans and gender diverse people to change their national identity documents to reflect their gender identity is not allowed.¹⁴ This highlights the

fact that despite the progress in legislation, discrimination persists and Fiji’s trans and gender diverse population often do not have equal and universal access to rights as the other citizens of Fiji.

Fiji is a country deeply affected by religious conservatism, which influences the debate around same-sex marriage, a subject that is typically met with aggressive opposition. There have been repeated statements by politicians and public figures that reiterate that Fiji has no intention of legalizing same-sex marriage or civil unions.¹⁵ In 2002, the law expressly banned same-sex marriage by amending the Marriage Act to define marriage as the “union of one woman and one man to the exclusion of all others,” thus excluding all gender diverse Fijians.¹⁶ Same-sex unions that take place overseas are not recognized in Fiji either.¹⁷ The

Go-Fiji website that promotes Fiji as a tourist destination strongly recommends that gay and lesbian travellers to Fiji do not display their affection toward each other in public.¹⁸ This is despite Fiji decriminalizing homosexuality in 2010.¹⁹

Members of the highest offices in the country often target trans and sexually and gender diverse Fijians with violent and prejudicial political statements that legitimize discrimination. In 2016, when speaking about the possibility of same-sex marriage or marriage equality, Frank Bainimarama, Fiji's Prime Minister, stated that all LGBTQ Fijians should move to Iceland and get married there if that was their desire.²⁰ In 2018, Jone Kata, a member of the opposition, the Social Democratic Liberal Party, posted a statement that suggested all members of the LGBTQ community in Fiji should be sent to four isolated and uninhabited islands, in hopes of making them extinct.²¹

"FIJI IS A COUNTRY DEEPLY AFFECTED BY RELIGIOUS CONSERVATISM, WHICH INFLUENCES THE DEBATE AROUND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, A SUBJECT THAT IS TYPICALLY MET WITH AGGRESSIVE OPPOSITION."

These threats of violence

are not just limited to discriminatory statements by politicians. Such comments within an overtly heterosexist environment reinforce the rigid gender and social barriers, perpetuating a climate of fear and leading to discriminatory treatment in public and private spaces.

"RELIABLE STATISTICS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE ARE SCARCE, AS LARGE NUMBERS OF VICTIMS DO NOT REPORT THE CRIMES TO LAW ENFORCEMENT BECAUSE OF WELL-FOUNDED FEAR AND DISTRUST OF FIGURES AND INSTITUTIONS OF AUTHORITY."

Trans and gender diverse people, who do not conform to societal expectations of sexuality and gender presentation, are at a heightened risk of violence. Reliable statistics on violence against trans and gender diverse people are scarce, as large numbers of victims do not report the crimes to law enforcement because of well-founded fear and distrust of figures and institutions of authority.²² For example, a 2011 community-based study highlighted that trans women experience low levels of safety and high levels of abuse, including verbal and physical abuse, with 40% of trans

¹⁵ International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) and Angus Carroll, *State Sponsored Homophobia 2016: A world survey of sexual orientation laws: criminalisation, protection and recognition* (Geneva: ILGA, 2016), 186–187, https://ilga.org/downloads/02_ILGA_State_Sponsored_Homophobia_2016_ENG_WEB_150516.pdf.

¹⁶ Government of Fiji, Marriage Act [Cap 50], Part IV Provision 15, http://www.paclii.org/fj/legis/consol_act_OK/ma85/.

¹⁷ With the exception of foreign diplomats, as per Section 6 of the Diplomatic and Privileges Immunities Act, which permits same-sex foreign couples to reside together in Fiji as "members of the household." See <https://www.laws.gov.fj/Acts/DisplayAct/940#>.

¹⁸ "Getting Married in Fiji," Go-Fiji.com, accessed April 23, 2022, <https://www.go-fiji.com/marriage.html>.

¹⁹ Shalveen Chand, "Same sex law decriminalised," *The Fiji Times Online*, February 26, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110822063355/http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=140812>.

²⁰ Chris D'Angelo, "Fiji Prime Minister Tells Gay Couples To Move To Iceland," *Huffpost*, January 6, 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/fijis-prime-minister-calls-same-sex-marriage-rubbish_n_568d6b34e4b0a2b6fb6e6155.

²¹ Apenisa Waqairadovu, "Kata's statement about LGBTQ community is discriminatory and he should be held accountable for it – Wali," *Fijivillage*, November 20, 2018, <https://fijivillage.com/news/Katas-statement-about-LGBTQ-community-is-discriminatory-and-he-should-be-held-accountable-for-it--Wali-5rsk92>.

²² United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Responding to Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence against Women and Girls*, https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/VAWClinicalGuideline_02122015.pdf.

²³ Ben Bavinton, *Secret Lives, Other Voices: A Community-Based Study Exploring Male-to-Male Sex, Gender Identity and HIV Transmission Risk in Fiji* (Suva, Fiji: AIDS Task Force of Fiji, 2011).

²⁴ UNFPA, *Responding to Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence against Women and Girls*. https://pacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/VAWClinicalGuideline_02122015.pdf

²⁵ Ministry of Health and UNAIDS, *Global AIDS Progress Report 2013: Fiji Islands*, https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/FJI_narrative_report_2014.pdf.

²⁶ "Diva for Equality," Pacific Community, <https://www.spc.int/diva-equality>.

²⁷ House of Colours, "About," Facebook, accessed 23 April, 2022, https://www.facebook.com/pg/House-of-Colours-Labasa-1054706194599269/about/?ref=page_internal.

women surveyed stating they had been forced to have sex against their will in the past.²³

Access to services that help prevent or deal with gender-based violence continue to be limited due to the lack of trans competency and knowledge among service providers.

However, moves to address this, while slow, are positive, with the inclusion of trans people in the consultation for the country's National Action Plan to prevent violence against women and girls and in the clinical management guidelines to tackle violence against women adopted by the Ministry of Health in 2015.²⁴

"THE FIJI HIV/AIDS PROGRESS REPORT 2013 FURTHER HIGHLIGHTED THE LOW LEVELS OF TESTING IN TRANS POPULATIONS AND HIGH LEVELS OF EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE, BOTH VERBAL AND PHYSICAL."

With a lack of education and employment opportunities, trans and gender diverse people are often driven to seek work in informal sectors, like the sex work sector, for instance, which are often unregulated and risky. In 2018, the HIV prevalence rate for trans sex workers in Fiji was 1.8% (up from 1.3% in 2013) compared to the 0.5% for men who have sex with men and 0.7% for women sex workers. Given that the national prevalence rate is approximately 0.2%,²⁵ trans

people are disproportionately affected. The Fiji HIV/AIDS Progress Report 2013 further highlighted the low levels of testing in trans populations and high levels of experiences of violence, both verbal and physical.

Several trans-affirming NGOs in Fiji are advocating for the need for greater investment in trans health, education, and employment opportunities as well as the need for more data on the experiences of trans and gender diverse people in the country. One such organization is DIVA for Equality, a radical feminist collective. Founded in 2011, it is currently the only one of its kind in the region, formally constituted by lesbians, gender non-conforming women, and transmasculine people. DIVA has conducted the first LBTI human rights and social justice research to be developed, conducted, and analysed by the LBTI community for the LBTI community in Fiji.²⁶ Similarly, House of Colours is an LGBTQI organization based in Labasa in Northern Fiji that works with stakeholders and communities raising awareness on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.²⁷ The Rainbow Pride Foundation is a not-for-profit organization that advocates for the human rights of LGBTI people so that they can live free from discrimination, persecution, and violence. The organization works with policymakers in providing advice on more

LGBTI-inclusive policies. It also provides legal advocacy services, mental health services, HIV prevention awareness, and training sessions and workshops for employers, service providers, and community organizations to develop more inclusive and safer spaces for LGBTI people.²⁸ It aims to empower the LGBT sex worker community in Fiji so they can work and live in a safe environment and work toward the elimination of stigma and discrimination targeted at them.²⁹ Led by former sex workers, Strumphet Alliance Network is a trans-inclusive organization that opposes the criminalization and other legal oppression of sex work and advocates for universal access to health services, including primary health care and HIV and sexual and reproductive health services.³⁰ Other trans-affirming organizations working in Fiji include (but are not limited to) Youth Champs 4 Mental Health,³¹ the Red Cross, and Femlink.³²

"THIS STUDY AND THE SUBSEQUENT REPORT CONDUCTED BY APTN ON THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE FIJIANS AIM TO BEGIN TO FILL PART OF THE DATA GAPS THAT EXIST FOR THIS COMMUNITY."

Despite the number of trans-inclusive NGOs that

currently operate in Fiji, data that disaggregates Fiji's trans and MSM populations is much needed. For Fijian policymakers and legislators to design interventions to enable prosperous lives for trans and gender diverse Fijians, there is an immediate need for research that better documents the social and lived experiences of trans and gender diverse communities in Fiji. This study and the subsequent report conducted by APTN on the social experiences of trans and gender diverse Fijians aim to begin to fill part of the data gaps that exist for this community. This study provides more nuanced data on trans and gender diverse Fijians' negative and positive experiences in areas such as education, employment, family relations, health services, religion, and legal and justice systems. As such, it aims to be a resource for all who are working toward the meaningful improvement of the lives of Fiji's trans and gender diverse communities by helping to identify key areas that require the most urgent political attention.

²⁸ "What We Do," Rainbow Pride Foundation (Fiji), accessed 23 April, 2022, <https://rainbowpridefoundation.org/initiatives/>.

²⁹ Fiji Women's Fund, *Survival Advocacy Network*, <https://fijiwomensfund.org/project/survival-advocacy-network-san/>.

³⁰ "Strumphet Alliance Network," Global Network of Sex Work Projects, <https://www.nswp.org/members/strumphet-alliance-network>.

³¹ "About Us," Youth Champs 4 Mental Health, accessed 23 April, 2022, <https://youthchampsfiji.wixsite.com/yc4mh/about-us>.

³² "Our Mission, Vision and Values," femLINK Pacific – Fiji, <https://www.femlinkpacific.org.fj/index.php/en/about-us/mission-vision>.



Methodology / This research was conceptualized as a peer-led study and has been adapted from the TvT social experiences study conducted by TGEU in 8 countries, namely, Colombia, India, the Philippines, Serbia, Thailand, Tonga, Turkey, and Venezuela. The country research teams and APTN retained the original form of the questionnaire for sections 1 to 9 but changed some sentence structures and removed or combined specific questions. Additionally, section 10 was jointly developed to include questions on humanitarian aid services, SRHR services, traditional healers, and traditions.

Training sessions on research methodologies and data collection were conducted in Fiji in September 2018. The country team identified a focal person and 10 research team members (all of whom were trans or gender diverse people). The existing TvT survey tool was reviewed and adapted to the specific country context, with the inclusion of culturally appropriate terminology, together with the research team.

The questionnaire is divided into ten sections (see Annex 1):

1. General Information
2. Family, Friends, and Partners
3. Formal Education
4. Labor Market, Job, Earning one's Living
5. Health Care
6. Legal and Criminal Justice Systems
7. Religion
8. Society
9. Culture
10. Local Section (Humanitarian Aid Services, SRHR Services, Traditional Healers, Traditions)

The questionnaire was finalized by the end of November 2018. There was a consensus to keep the questionnaire in English and agreement across all three countries that, if required, questions would be verbally translated into the local language to enable a greater understanding of terms and concepts. In total, there were 175 questions, including sub-questions that required explanatory responses. Enumerators were required to guide interviewees through the questionnaire and write down the responses. The paper-based questionnaire worked as a guided interview where the researchers ask the questions and write down the response of the respondent.

The data gathering process commenced in December 2018 and continued until January 2019. The objective was to collect at least 50 interviews to ensure diversity among respondents in terms of gender identities. There was also an



effort to make sure at least 20% of the respondents were trans men or transmasculine. Each interview started with the respondent being provided with the information sheet (Annex 2) about the research. If respondents met the 5 inclusion eligibility criteria, informed consent (Annex 1) was sought and assurance of confidentiality provided before progressing. Lastly, an 18-character interview code was determined for each respondent to ensure their anonymity. After each interview, respondents were asked if they were willing to be contacted for a follow-up discussion. If yes, another informed consent

was signed to get the respondent's mobile number and/or e-mail address. Each respondent was provided with a transportation allowance to support their participation in the study. Each interviewer was provided with compensation per accomplished form.

In Fiji, 51 people were interviewed for the study. Most of the respondents came from Fiji's capital city, Suva (Central Eastern Division), some from Nadi (Western Division), and some from Labasa and Savusavu (Northern Division).

DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS /

The survey questionnaire was structured in ten sections, grouped thematically by modules. This structure has largely been followed in the presentation of the analysis, though items have been merged or placed in different sections to ease reading flow. Data has been imported from Excel and analyzed using IBM SPSS v.24. Quantitative and qualitative data have been merged to enable direct comparisons. Data has been coded and labelled according to the survey tool.³³ The selection of findings presented included findings that aligned with key themes, findings that were of interest or unexpected, or responses where quantitative and qualitative data were complementary or particularly insightful. With a sample of 51 individuals and a diverse range of gender identities, disaggregation by gender wasn't possible, though we point towards patterns where they exist by gender.

³³ Validity checks were performed but removing cases was avoided to preserve data quantity; instead, results that were inconsistent or unrelated to the question have been noted in the footnotes. Likewise, qualitative answers unrelated to the question have not been presented here but have not been removed either. They are available through APTN if required.

LIMITATIONS /

Some of the limitations that may have affected the data stemmed largely from the limited oversight and quality assurance of data collection due to time and budget constraints. While training was provided to all interviewers and enumerators, some inconsistencies were found in the data collection. This could be due to a misinterpretation of a question or term. In addition, some terms and concepts regarding gender identity may not have been easily translated into the local language. Given the large number of questions and this being the first time many of the community interviewers and enumerators were engaging in such an activity, there were also issues of missing data in sections. In Fiji, inconsistencies in data collection meant 6 interviews were repeated. Finally, given the hard-to-reach population, many interviewees were associated with the coordinating organizations and other LGBTI organizations in each country, leading to a potential sample bias. Statistical validity checks were performed to ensure the rigour of the data presented in this report.





³⁴ Carla LaGata/Carsten Balzer and Jan Simone Hutta, eds, *Transrespect versus Transphobia: The social experiences of trans and gender-diverse people in Colombia, India, the Philippines, Serbia, Thailand, Tonga, Turkey and Venezuela*, TvT Publication Series 9 (Berlin, Germany: Transgender Europe, 2015), <https://transrespect.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/TvT-PS-Vol9-2015.pdf>.

Findings / This section presents the results of the APTN peer-led study on the social experiences of trans and gender diverse people in Fiji, as one section of an overall comparative research methodology and narrative. This section aims to highlight key results, based on key experiences reported in response to the longer questionnaire, and by triangulating quantitative and qualitative data. It also draws on the *TvT Survey on the Social Experiences of Trans and Gender Diverse People* and aligns with its aim to “identify which aspects in the wide range of domains examined are especially positive or problematic and in need of political attention.”³⁴

BASIC DEMOGRAPHICS /

The age of the respondents ranged between 19 and 54 (with the mean age being 33.36). Most respondents lived in Suva (29), with other respondents being from Lautoka (6), Labasa (5), Nadi (5), Nausori (4), Nasinu (1), and Navua (1). Of the 51 respondents, 45 people (84.6%) identified as Christian, 2 as Hindus, 2 as Muslims, and 2 as “other.” The majority (63.5% or 33 respondents) did paid work, while 7 were supported by family and 3 by friends. A large number of respondents (50% or 26) lived with their family, 7 lived alone, 6 lived with their partner/

kids, and 8 with roommates. A high number of respondents (71.2% or 37) had completed high school/upper secondary/college, 8 had completed primary schooling, and 5 had not attended school. Of the 37 who had finished at least high school, 11 had gone to college/university. There were a number of other marginalized identities recognised within the sample, including people who use drugs (3.8% or 2 respondents), people who sell sex/sex workers (11.5% or 6 respondents), and youth/young people (30.8% or 16 respondents). 30.8% did not identify with any of these categorisations.

TABLE 1. WHICH CITY/TOWNSHIP OF THIS COUNTRY DO YOU LIVE IN?"

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT (%)
Valid		
Labasa	5	9.8
Lautoka	6	11.8
Nadi	5	9.8
Nasinu	1	2.0
Nausori	4	7.8
Navua	1	2.0
Suva	29	56.9
Total	51	100.0

GENDER IDENTITY /

The Fiji sample revealed a broad range of gender identities, with the majority identity represented being trans women/transfeminine (12) or brastos (11). 53.8% (28 respondents) were assigned male at birth and 44.2% (23) female; 11.8% (6) had an intersex variation.

TABLE 2. HOW DO YOU CURRENTLY IDENTIFY IN TERMS OF YOUR GENDER? (PLEASE MARK THE IDENTITY YOU IDENTIFY WITH THE MOST)"

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT (%)
Valid		
Transsexual woman	5	9.8
Transgender woman/trans feminine	12	23.5
Vakasalewalewa	7	13.7
Transsexual man	1	2.0
Transgender man/trans masculine	8	15.7
Brastos	11	21.6
Third sex/third gender	1	2.0
Gender non-conforming	2	3.9
Genderqueer	2	3.9
Total	49	96.1
Missing		
System	2	3.9
Total	51	100.0

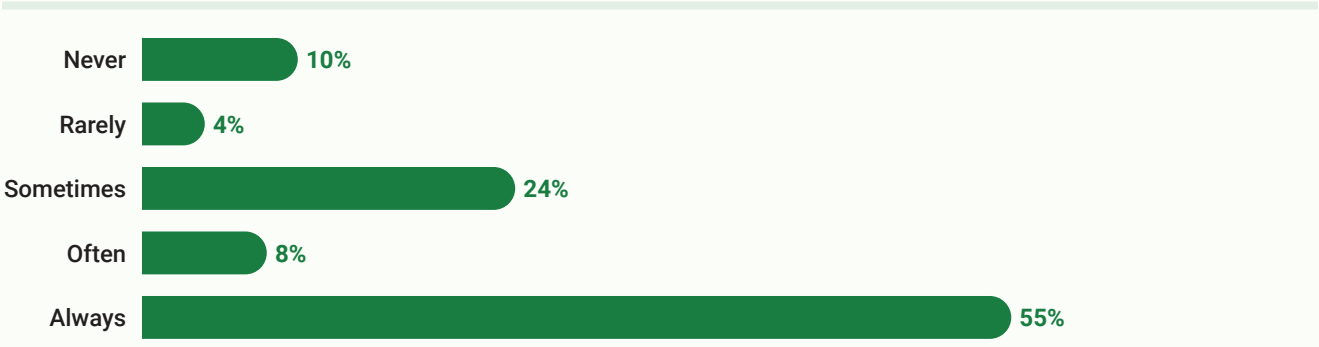
There was an overlap between how the respondents described appearance and mannerisms; in terms of appearance/style/dress, 42.3% (22 respondents) present as somewhat or mostly feminine and 26.9% (14) as somewhat or mostly masculine.

A large number of respondents (28.8% or 15) present as equally masculine and feminine.

Most respondents (55%) said they always lived in their preferred identity; however, 23% reported they do so only “sometimes,” implying they hide their gender identity depending on the circumstance. A relatively large number of respondents (10% or 5) said they never live in their preferred identity. Two of these respondents cited family as the reason, one cited “people’s perception of [them]” in general, while one stated that their “expression is non-conforming and [they] don’t believe in labels.”

35 A set of questions in the “Legal and criminal” module ask about experiences with trying to change gender details on legal documents. However, the validity of the data collected is questionable, with 3 respondents answering that they had tried to change their gender despite there being no legal gender recognition provisions in the Constitution, and 7 respondents answering the follow-up question about the ease of the experience.

FIGURE 1. “I LIVE IN MY PREFERRED GENDER IDENTITY AND/OR EXPRESSION.”














The large majority of the respondents (88.5% or 46) did not have legal documentation reflecting their preferred gender identity. Of the 5 who did have documentation, 3 had birth certificates in their preferred identity despite the fact that legal gender recognition is unavailable under the

Constitution and legislative frameworks in Fiji. For the rest of the sample, including those who said they always lived in their preferred identity, a large gap exists between their identity and the legal recognition of that identity.³⁵

The majority of the respondents

(61.5% or 32) were active in community-based organizations. A full list of organizations that respondents were involved with has been provided below (where people indicated multiple organizations, each has been tallied separately).

TABLE 3. LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT PARTICIPANTS’ WERE ASSOCIATED WITH.

											
Frequency	13	2	9	1	2	4	3	3	1	9	3
Valid	DIVA for Equality	FemLink	Haus of Khameleon	HIV/AIDS Community Group	House of Colours	Rainbow Pride	Red Cross	Strumphet Alliance Network	LGBT Support Group	Survival Advocacy Network	Youth Champs 4 Mental Health

FAMILY AND FRIENDS /

A large number of the respondents (44.2% or 23) were raised in the gender they now identify as. Nonetheless, many reported disrespect and abuse from family members. 51.9% (27 respondents) reported being bullied, attacked, or abused by their family because of their gender identity at least once, while 28.8% (15 respondents) reported this happened often. On the other hand, 48.1% (25 respondents) reported often receiving support or acknowledgement from their family in relation to gender identity (15.4% said they had received support once or a few times). Examples of abuse and support are presented in the table below.³⁶ Notable are a few examples in which respect is linked to economic advancement: “It was always an issue until I got a job,” “they’re proud of me for my involvement in the entertainment industry.”

³⁶ Basic spelling and grammar from original responses have been corrected where the intended meaning was obvious. Responses not corresponding to the question (for instance, examples of abuse given where examples of support were requested) have been removed. Irrelevant, nonsensical, or duplicate responses have been removed.

TABLE 4. QUALITATIVE EXAMPLES GIVEN BY PARTICIPANTS OF FAMILY SUPPORT AND ABUSE.

EXAMPLES OF BULLYING/ABUSE/ ATTACKS BY FAMILY MEMBERS	EXAMPLES OF SUPPORT/ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY FAMILY MEMBERS
<p>“Family conflicts, that is, language spoken to.”</p> <p>“I get usually attacked by my brother because of the way I’m dressed sometimes.”</p> <p>“I have been attacked and abused physical[ly] and verbally by members of my family as in beaten and punched.”</p> <p>“I was bullied by step mum.”</p> <p>“I would be told I was born a boy and I should act like one.”</p> <p>“It was always an issue until I got a job.”</p> <p>“Kicked out from home.”</p> <p>“My father always had an issue with me being trans.”</p> <p>“Persuading me to have sexual intercourse with them/Making me doing things I did not like.”</p>	<p>“They’re proud of me for my involvement with the entertainment industry.”</p> <p>“EQUAL TREATMENT”</p> <p>“My aunties defending me during an argument.”</p> <p>“My aunty from the USA sent a dress and silent support from family.”</p> <p>“My family always ask me to assist them with men’s work and household chores.”</p> <p>“My family have and always supported me regardless of who I was because they know that I am also human.”</p> <p>“My family acknowledge my gender identity.”</p> <p>“My father told all to treat me as a girl.”</p> <p>“My father told everyone to respect me for who I am.”</p> <p>“My mom and siblings are beginning to call me by my preferred gender.”</p>

53.8% (28 respondents) reported always being able to present as their preferred identity around friends not belonging to their gender identity, 26.9% (14) said they could only do so with some of their friends not belonging to the same gender identity, and 17.2% (9) said they never presented as their preferred gender identity to friends who did not belong to their gender identity. 73% (38 respondents) said they sometimes, often, or always felt their gender identity was appreciated by friends, although 28.8% (15) said they felt disrespected. Examples of each are presented below. The distinction in treatment in public and private settings is mentioned more than once, indicating that often trans and gender

diverse people are treated differently by their peers who did not belong to their gender identity group and/or partners in public and private settings. The most common example of respectful treatment is the use of correct pronouns and compliments on their gender presentation.

TABLE 5. QUALITATIVE EXAMPLES GIVEN BY PARTICIPANTS OF FRIENDS' SUPPORT AND DISRESPECT.

EXAMPLES OF DISRESPECT FROM FRIENDS		EXAMPLES OF SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS
"Language spoken/facial reactions"		"Calling me in my preferred name."
"Calling me out in public and insulting me but not very often."		"Having friends calling me on my pronoun."
"During drinking sessions."		"I always share confidential stuff with them regarding my gender and sexuality being a transgender."
"I have lost some friends because of the fact that their cultural and religious beliefs may be in conflict with my dissemination of info and understanding."		"I have cis-men friends who support the work that I do."
"Only on social media from other friends who are homophobic."		"People who understand about sexuality does not discriminate."
"Passing sarcastic remarks."		"So my friend not belonging to my gender identity appreciate me so much."
"There would be family and friends who thought I was not enough to be friends."		"Straight boys hang with me in parties & functions."
"They would hardly talk to me or let me participate in any women's function or gathering when in nightclubs."		"Thanking me of some advocacy work I shared."
		They address me with my preferred name/ able to socialize."

"When in public places"

"When in public places they try to mock me always."

"When it comes to religion"

"When it comes to competing amongst themselves."

"They have always used the proper and preferred pronouns."

"They have come to understand my lifestyle."

"They join us for a talanoa/dialogue."

"They say I look good in dress and make-up."

"They say I look nice in make-up."

Overall, we find a pattern of people reporting more disrespect and abuse from family members than friends as well as more positive experiences with friends than with family, providing insight into the importance of peers in modelling supportive adult relationships for trans and gender diverse people in Fiji.

EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATION /

When asked specifically about having received respect and acknowledgement from teachers, 29.4% (15 respondents) cited at least one instance, with one participant mentioning a mufti (no uniform) day, when they "wore a dress and teacher loved it." Positively, fewer respondents reported disrespectful treatment from teachers due to gender identity, though a high enough number (15.7% or 8) reported at least one instance, citing examples such as being called "tomboy" and being "humiliated in front of the [other] students." One respondent said, "a male teacher once hit me" (one of several examples of the gender of teachers being specifically mentioned when talking about the perpetrators of abuse). Of the 47 respondents who answered the question, 3 reported experiencing physical violence by teachers at least once, citing examples of being "punched and beaten," and "belted." One respondent said, "my feminine ways was [offending] them that caused physical [violence]," while another described a "male teacher in school who used to be violent."

37.3% (19 respondents) reported being excluded, bullied, or insulted at least once by other students (15.7% or 8 respondents said they had been bullied or insulted "often"), with examples ranging from "teasing" and "taunts" to "assault," "blackmail," and "beatings." 19.6% (10 respondents) reported at least one instance of physical violence, and 25.5% (13) reported at least one instance of sexual harassment or attack, citing examples mostly of verbal harassment. One respondent said they were "forced to do sexual things."



"OVERALL, WE FIND A PATTERN OF PEOPLE REPORTING MORE DISRESPECT AND ABUSE FROM FAMILY MEMBERS THAN FRIENDS AS WELL AS MORE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH FRIENDS THAN WITH FAMILY."



37 A high number of the respondents had finished school and had paid employment, potentially due to the nature of the sample. There did not appear to be an association between having completed school-level education and being in paid employment.

38 A follow-up question was asked about legally challenging the refusal of employment, but more people responded to this question than had indicated they were ever refused employment, so the results of that question have not been reported.

Positive examples of engagement with other students were cited by 37.3% of the sample, with 15.7% saying they “often” received respect and acknowledgement from them, examples including being addressed by preferred pronouns and instances of reciprocity and solidarity: “addressing me using preferred pronouns,” “always because I did the same for them,” “we look after each other,” “I was... hospitable and caring, they respected me.”

Negative experiences in education included finding it hard to move schools or classes (21.6% or 11 respondents reported this happening at least once). Qualitative responses giving examples of negative experiences included being “different,” “moving from village life to city life,” “moving from girls school to mixed school,” and “no gender-neutral washrooms,” as reasons for the difficulty. Of the 45 respondents who answered the question, 88.2% (32) said they’d never had achievements overlooked because of their gender, though 25.5% (5) said it had happened “once or a few times,” and 15.7% (8) said it had happened “often.” Two interesting qualitative examples mentioned achievement levels that bestowed respect despite gender identity, such as being a star athlete or being voted the prefect, examples perhaps of the necessity of extraordinary

achievement for gaining respect as a trans or gender diverse pupil. In this question, as in others in the education module, respondents mentioned the gender of teachers as an important variable: “If they are male, then they would treat us differently.”

When asked about respect and acknowledgement of gender identity and/or expression in education settings, 39.2% of the sample (20 respondents) reported at least one positive experience, like “[taking] part in a trans pageant show,” or being celebrated in normatively gendered activities such as “cheerleading” or “hairdressing” (for transfeminine people).

EXPERIENCES WITH LABOUR /

Of the 49 respondents who answered the question, 3 had been refused employment because of their gender identity or expression and 2 had not tried to express their gender identity when seeking employment, though 84.6% (44) said they had not been refused employment.³⁷ Those who had been refused employment cited examples of being forced to conform to a particular gender expression: “they said if only I cut my hair then I will get the job,” “they would tell me to wear sulu.” One sex worker cited their gender identity/expression as a reason clients give for refusing their services.³⁸ Of those who had expressed their gender identity at work, 9.6% (5) had lost a job due to their gender

identity/expression. Interestingly, even the respondents that worked as performers, sex workers, hairdressers, or human rights advocates (25), that is, in sectors where trans and gender diverse people found work relatively more regularly, only 10 reported having received employment support due to their gender identity. Other than NGO/CBO work, employment associated with gender identity was limited to either private enterprise or business and/or the informal economy, including hairdressing, entertainment, sex work, hotel service, and sewing. Only 9 respondents had workplaces with specific facilities for people of their gender identity/expression, with the most common example of such a facility being gender-neutral toilets.

Overall, 11.5% (6 respondents) said their gender identity had affected how they were treated at work, with one respondent saying, “trans people are often second choice.”

EXPERIENCES WITH HEALTH SERVICES /

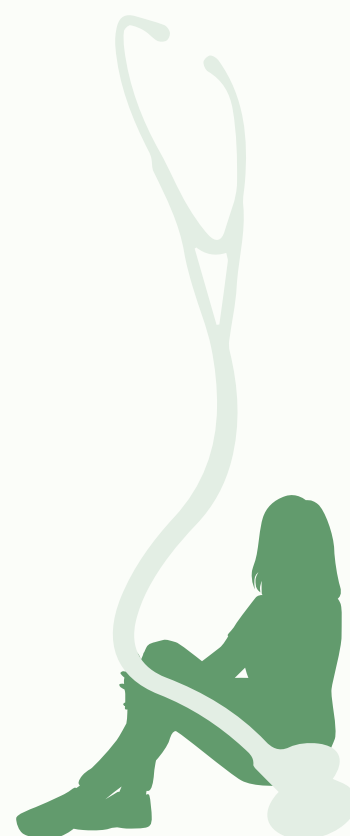
Across Fiji, health care is largely delivered through primary healthcare (PHC) services, which include a network of 98 nursing stations (approximately 20 per administrative division), 84 health centres, and 19 subdivisional hospitals.³⁹ government health services are provided to the citizens of Fiji free of charge. Of the respondents who answered, 11.8% (6) reported their health care experiences as somewhat to very bad (32 declined to answer), 17.6% (9) reported that their gender identity affected how they were treated while trying to access public health services, with 2 reporting being refused treatment.

25.5% of the sample (13 respondents) had sought transition-related treatment at least once. In the quantitative responses, of those who had not received transition-related services, 14 respondents (29.2%) cited not needing or wanting these services, 4 cited being unable to afford such services, and 2 cited the lack of availability of such services, as their reason, with 1 respondent saying they preferred community-led services. Qualitative responses reflecting on seeking or not seeking transition-related health care revealed the importance of the reputation of a doctor and finding a trustworthy practitioner: “We are the community that [is] very particular when you come to health checkup, thinking which doctor would see us,” “We have a good relationship with one doctor who understand and is very accepting and assists us with medical issues or concerns,” “There was no services provider during my day it just a word by mouth,” “It was safe and friendly seeing my own community providing that service.”⁴⁰

Most respondents (39) either had no experience with or skipped

³⁹ Augustine D Asante et al., “Financing for universal health coverage in small island states: evidence from the Fiji Islands,” *BMJ Global Health* 2, no.2 (2017), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5435255/>.

⁴⁰ There were other questions asking about HRT, but there was a significant amount of missing data in the section, and many of the qualitative follow up questions did not correspond to the quantitative responses. The data can be accessed on request but not published here.



the questions about mental health treatment, though those who responded provided a variety of responses, such as barriers relating to the profession (“as a sex worker sometimes it can be good but sometimes it can be very scary”) and inherent bias in assuming mental health professionals may pathologise them (“some health professional think we are suffering from mental illness without understanding who we are”).

LEGAL AND CRIMINAL EXPERIENCES /

Nearly one-third of the sample had experienced harassment by police because of their gender identity or expression at least once, with 13.7% (7 respondents) saying they experienced

it often. When asked to give examples, the respondents cited a wide range of serious offences committed by the police: “assaulted... in the station,” “hitting us with their weapon/ chasing and swearing at us in public,” “arrested because of the way that I dress.” One respondent reported being told that being with their partner at the time was “illegal.” Three responses highlighted the additional burden of being a sex worker including: “we were not allowed to be seen on a sex worker environment and their hatred,” “when I was a sex worker was taken to the cell but no abuse.” The most common offence cited by the police for arrests or detainment was “nuisance/public disturbance.”

FIGURE 2. “HAVE YOU EVER BEEN HARASSED BY THE POLICE BECAUSE OF YOUR GENDER IDENTITY AND/OR EXPRESSION?”



"ONE RESPONDENT SAID THEY WERE ATTACKED BY OTHER INMATES, WHILE ANOTHER SAID THEY WERE SUBJECTED TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN PRISON. THE MOST COMMONLY REPORTED OFFENCE WAS DISRESPECTFUL TREATMENT, BOTH BY GUARDS AND OTHER INMATES."

21.2% of the sample (11 respondents) had previously been in prison, jail, or in detention once or a few times. Of these respondents, 27.5% (8) said they would have preferred a separate unit for people of their gender identity. While 2 respondents said they were actually placed in a unit for people of their gender identity, 2 others said they were placed in cells that were not assigned for people of their gender identity, and 3 said they were placed in solitary confinement. Treatment by prison staff ranged from very or sometimes respectful (3), neutral (2), very or sometimes disrespectful (3), to physically abusive, with 2 respondents reporting being attacked by guards while in prison: “I was punched by the officer to wake up.” One respondent said they were attacked by other inmates, while another said they were subjected to sexual violence in prison. The most commonly reported offence was disrespectful treatment, both by guards (“I

was laughed at because of my identity,” “very rude just because of the way was dressed”) and other inmates (“male inmates calling from their cells and telling us to come over their cell and also question us if were lesbians,” “me and my girlfriend were detained in a men’s cell and never slept because the other male inmates were calling us,” “swearing and asking why I am like this,” “continuous transphobic treatment”). Respectful treatment in prison was linked more than once to pre-existing relationships:

“friends living in the same community,” “they knew my brother in the hood.”

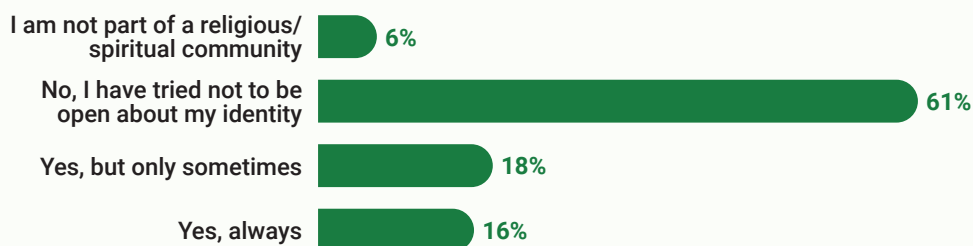
EXPERIENCES WITH RELIGION /

The church was identified as a place where preferred gender identity and expression were less welcome. In an earlier section, 55% of the sample had said they “always” live in their preferred identity. However, it seems that church is one of the main spaces where identity is concealed occasionally or always for at least some of these respondents, with

94.1% (31) of those who are part of a religious or spiritual community not having tried to be open about their identity therein. 15.4% or 8 respondents said they were always open about their gender identity in their religious community, 17.3% (9) said they were open only sometimes, while 3 respondents said they were not a part of any religious group.

For some, the church was a space of acceptance: “accepted as I am,” “just being myself,” “trans people are treated with

FIGURE 3. “CAN YOU BE OPEN ABOUT YOUR GENDER IDENTITY AND/OR EXPRESSION WITHIN YOUR CHURCH, TEMPLE, OR OTHER RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY?”



respect.” Other respondents were not as positive: “The views of people in the faith-based community are not all the same so my expression are neutral.” One respondent linked acceptance to generational differences in the church: “Youths are understanding while the older ones are pointing fingers.” Overall, 13.5% of the sample said that their gender identity/expression was valued in their religious or spiritual community, 19.2% (10) said it was not, and 65.4% (34) did not answer the question.

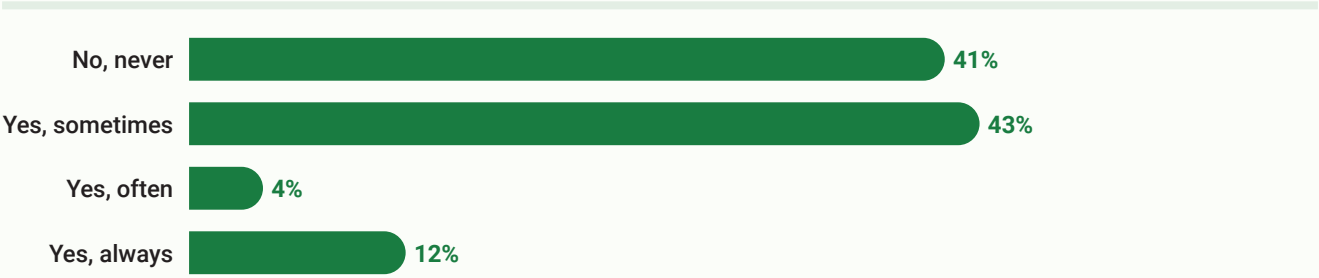
SOCIETY AND CULTURE /

Some positive results emerged when the respondents were asked to reflect on their role in Fijian society. Most respondents said people like them were especially appreciated in society because of their gender identity/expression, with 58.8% (30) saying this is the case at least sometimes.

The reasons given for this appreciation are encouraging and focus on the collective positive impact that trans and gender diverse

“MANY OF THE QUALITATIVE RESPONSES POINTED TO THE EXTERNAL REGRESSIVE ATTITUDES OF SOCIETY RATHER THAN INTERNALISED REASONS FOR DISCRIMINATION.”

FIGURE 4. "DO YOU THINK PEOPLE LIKE YOU ARE ESPECIALLY APPRECIATED IN SOCIETY BECAUSE OF YOUR GENDER IDENTITY AND/OR EXPRESSION?"



people may have in modelling courage for a community:

- "Because sometimes what we do to help or how we express ourselves can help or motivate other people to be who they want to be."
- "I believe that when we live our lives are filled with love kindness and we approach people."
- "Maybe because of how we manoeuver ourselves around society."

Many other responses point to the reciprocity of acceptance when contributing meaningfully and instrumentally to a

community:

- "It goes back to how a person contributes to society then the acceptance rolls in."
- "Contribution to the village work/community group discussion."
- "Participation has always been with our family legacy."
- "Yes, to contribute to the society."
- "Invite to do decoration."

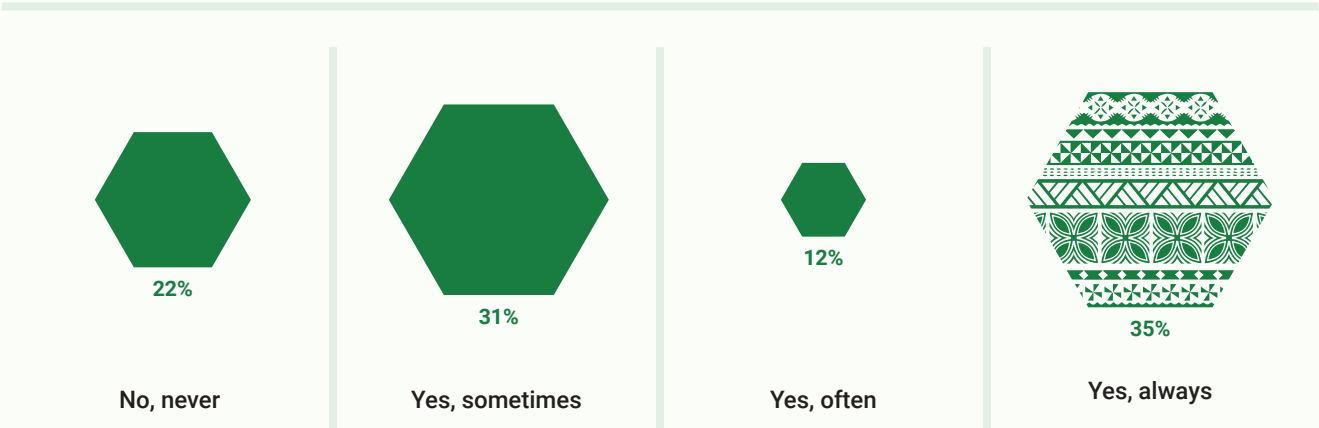
The emphasis on reciprocity in these responses points to the positive impact on overall acceptance when trans and

gender diverse people can live openly and contribute meaningfully to society.

Of course, there were also instances of discrimination, with 35.3% (18 respondents) saying that people like them suffer discrimination due to their gender identity/ expression "always" (21.6% or 11 said "never"). The table below presents the gender split of those who said they felt their gender was especially discriminated against in society.

When asked to expand upon their answer, many of the qualitative responses pointed to the external regressive

TABLE 6. "DO YOU THINK PEOPLE LIKE YOU ARE ESPECIALLY DISCRIMINATED IN SOCIETY BECAUSE OF YOUR GENDER IDENTITY AND/OR EXPRESSION?"



attitudes of society rather than internalised reasons for discrimination:

“Because most of the people who discriminate us don’t have the ability to do work that we doing in regards to doing both male and female work.”

“Because of people’s ignorance and because of their cultural and religious beliefs it does affect.”

“I think it’s because we swing away from the traditional and cultural norms.”

“Their mindset is not well sensitized or some of them are just cruel.”

The respondents were split on Fijian society’s changing relationship with trans and gender diverse people over time. Given that there is very little documented historical evidence available on trans people in Fiji, respondents’ views were largely based on anecdotal evidence. 25.5% (13 respondents) said people of their gender identity/expression were traditionally accepted in the past, 37.3% (19) said they weren’t accepted, and 37.3% (19) said they didn’t know if they were. Those who did know about diverse identities said they had learnt about it from their elders (“Grandparents told me that they do exist,” “It was shared by traditional women leaders in a women’s

meeting in my village”), or pointed to specific roles or cultures in the acceptance (“Chiefs in Kadavu has us in their house as helpers,” “With the French Polynesian culture there is no restrictions of self-expressions”).

“HERE IN THE PACIFIC THERE IS RECORDED DOCUMENTATION TO STATE THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE THIRD GENDER AND THEIR ROLES INCLUDED SOCIAL AND SEXUAL NORMS AND PRACTICES INCLUSIVE OF THE ARTS AND TRADITIONAL MEDICINE.”

Very similar results were observed when asked about gender identity/expression having contributed to the country’s culture in the past, with respondents citing a wide array of ways in which it did: “community work,” “domestic workers,” “donating, contributing,” “fishing/weaving,” “helpers of the chiefly family,” “humans rights network,” “known as entertainer,” “traditional counsellors,” “We were the help to give blessings and care for the newborn and elderly.” One respondent pointed to historical records: “Here in the Pacific there is recorded documentation to state the acknowledgement of the third gender and their roles included social and sexual

norms and practices inclusive of the arts and traditional medicine.”

For both questions, the percentage of trans women/

transfeminine and vakasalewalewa respondents who said they were accepted and contributed to the culture in the past was much higher than the percentage of trans men/transmasculine respondents and brastos who said the same.

With respect to the present



times, 43.1% (22 respondents) said their gender identity/ expression contributed to traditions, with many pointing to the role of trans people, particularly trans women and transfeminine people, in traditional ceremonies.

NATURAL DISASTERS /

When designing the survey, community groups were able to add a module to include experiences that may be specific to the local Fijian context. This included natural disasters, with 78.4% of the sample having been affected by a disaster at some point (cyclones and flooding being the most common).

"IT IS ALWAYS THE PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH WHO BLAMES US FOR THE CAUSE OF CLIMATE CHANGE," "THEY SAY THAT BEING WHO I AM IS A CURSE OF DISASTER."

An interesting finding both here and elsewhere in the qualitative responses was the intersection of transphobia with the age of climate change: "blamed for bad weather," "it is always the people in the church who blames us for the cause of climate change," "they say that being who I am is a curse of disaster." 7.8% of the sample (4 respondents) said they have been excluded, abused, attacked, harassed, or violated during and after a natural disaster.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS /

Of the 51 respondents who answered the question, 62.7% (32) had accessed SRH services, the most common being HIV services (52.9% or 27 respondents), STI-related services (19.6% or 10 respondents), and IEC services (27.5% or 14 respondents). A relatively small number of respondents (23.5% or 12) sought SRH services for condoms and an even smaller number for psychosocial services (17.6% or 9). None of the respondents had accessed SRHR services for PrEP or PEP, a gap to highlight for trans and gender diverse advocacy efforts in the region.

Health care centres run by CBOs/NGOs were the most common kind of health services sought by respondents (39.2% or 20), followed by public health care centres (33.3% or 17), health care provided by peers (27.5% or 14), and private health care centres (25.5% or 13). Only 2 respondents in the sample had seen a traditional or spiritual healer.

"NONE OF THE RESPONDENTS HAD ACCESSED SRHR SERVICES FOR PREP OR PEP, A GAP TO HIGHLIGHT FOR TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE ADVOCACY EFFORTS IN THE REGION."



Conclusion / This research fills a huge gap in the understanding of trans and gender diverse experiences in Fiji. The results point to a complex relationship between trans and gender diverse people and the institutions and structures of Fijian society and culture—a relationship sometimes fraught with discrimination and violence; at other times characterized by acceptance and freedom.

One of the first results drawn from the answers in the questionnaire illustrated the astonishing diversity of gender identity in a sample of only fifty-two people. Participants self-nominated 9 different gender identities overall. Some encouraging results included the finding that more than half of the respondents in the sample said they always live in their preferred identity, though the overall picture painted by the results is that the main barriers to the expression of gender identity are family and church. Yet, the results also highlighted avenues for overcoming these barriers, specifically the crucial role of peers and adult friendships in forging a community of

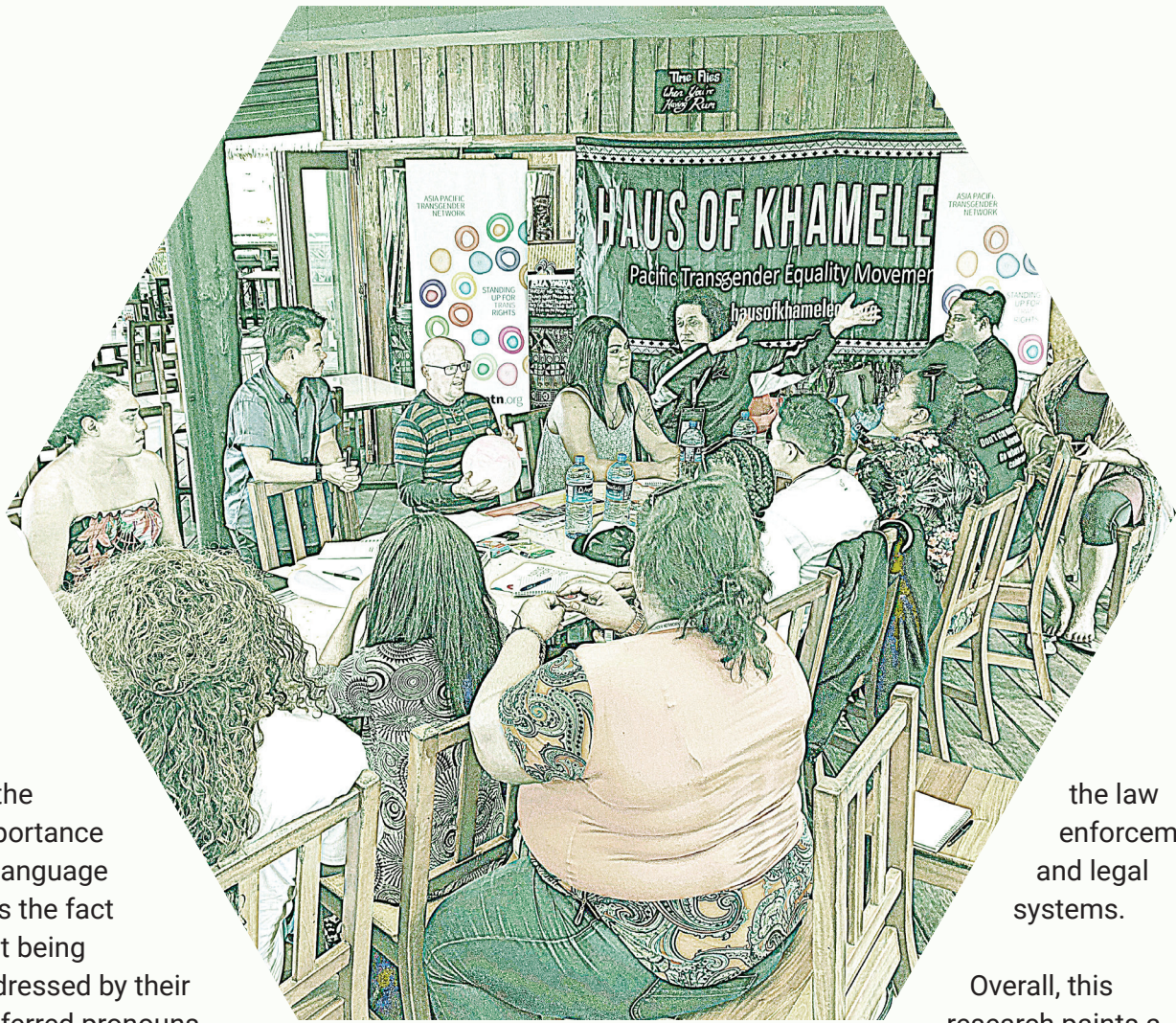
acceptance and belonging, and underlined the importance of being able to live openly as trans or gender diverse to contribute equally as a valued member of the community through hard work, community engagement, and the demonstration of the shared values of respect and kindness.

As revealed in previous research on trans and gender diverse communities, the importance of the role of community-based organizations in the lives of trans and gender diverse people cannot be overstated. From providing employment opportunities, advocating for infrastructure such as gender-neutral toilets in the workplace,

trans-specific healthcare, and psychosocial support through peer relationships to normalising diverse gender identities, such organizations provided support in every aspect of the lives of trans and gender diverse people.

Across the different interviews, when respondents referred to examples of respect and disrespect, be it in the school playground, the church, or prison, what emerged was the importance and impact of language, with respondents often remembering direct phrases spoken to them when they were a child or a particularly cruel phrase uttered by a bully they encountered in adulthood. Another evidence





of the importance of language was the fact that being addressed by their preferred pronouns was frequently cited as an example of respect. We also see the importance of tangible gestures (such as buying a transfeminine person a dress, complimenting her makeup, or including her in normatively feminine activities) in the internalisation of acceptance by trans and gender diverse people.

Of course, too many respondents cited instances of physical violence and verbal abuse in educational settings, religious groups, the legal system, and even during or as a result of natural disasters. This remains a major barrier for

trans and gender diverse people in terms of physical health and mental wellbeing.

"COLONIALISM AND THE RISE OF THE CHURCH PLACED BARRIERS TO THEIR ACCEPTANCE."

Although there were too few responses to analyse quantitatively, the results suggest intersecting oppression of trans and gender diverse sex workers, with many trans sex workers pointing to additional barriers across the domains of the survey, including employment, health care, and

the law enforcement and legal systems.

Overall, this research paints a complex picture of

Fijian society coming to terms with the trans and gender diverse communities. Trans and gender diverse people have been a predominant part of traditional Fijian society; however, colonialism and the rise of the church placed barriers to their acceptance and ability to participate in society. Nonetheless, we see a population of people who, for the most part, do not blame themselves for the discrimination they face and who, above all, wish to be accepted members of society, contributing to social and cultural life on their own terms.

Recommendations / These recommendations have been developed as the next steps following an advocacy meeting in April 2019 (Annex 3) with key stakeholders from the trans and gender diverse community in Fiji, facilitated by APTN and Haus of Khameleon.

1.0

Dissemination of findings.

1.1

Conduct a joint community consultation with trans organizations and those who participated in the study to share research report findings and develop a programme and advocacy roadmap on the way forward.

1.2

Organise the dissemination and socialization of research results with key government and national stakeholders, such as the National Human Rights Commission, the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), parliamentarians, and the Ministries of Women, Sports, Education, Health, and Justice and Corrections.

1.3

Develop media kits to disseminate and publish research findings/results through various media channels.

2.0

Promote an enabling legal and legislative environment.

2.1

Strengthen all laws, policies, and practices in accordance with SOGIE protections in the Constitution to eliminate discrimination on political, economic, social, and ethnic grounds to achieve equality among all citizens.

2.2

Allow legal gender recognition and the ability to self-identify in all official and administrative documents such as passports, birth certificates, education, and employment records.

2.3

Repeal laws and policies on public decency, morality, begging, loitering, indecent conduct, and sex work that aggravate police abuse, extortion, and harassment against trans and gender diverse people.

2.4 Engage in continued advocacy to ensure the inclusion of trans and gender diverse people in the National Action Plans concerning women and girls, including the Fiji National Gender Policy, the Women's Plan of Action 2010–2019, and the National Protocol on Ending Violence Against Women 2020–21.

2.5 Strengthen the capacity for trans-led organizations to monitor human rights violations, such as discrimination and violence, including mechanisms to report through international human rights avenues such as the Universal Periodic Review.

3.0 **Increase the knowledge and understanding of healthcare gaps and needs competency to improve health outcomes.**

3.1 Increase the knowledge of health workers by rolling out training on the Trans Blueprint to support comprehensive health care for trans and gender diverse people, especially in services accessed by trans and gender diverse people, to improve service delivery, including quality, availability, access, and trans-competent standards.

3.2 Adequately resource the provision of affordable, quality, and accessible care, particularly mental health care, for trans and gender diverse people to support trauma, transition, and wellbeing.

4.0 **Reduce discrimination through sensitisation training for key sectors.**

4.1 Develop and roll out sensitisation training sessions with healthcare services (government, NGO, private sector). Training should be provided not only to healthcare providers but also to the auxiliary staff, including administrative staff, intake staff, receptionists, security guards, and cleaners to ensure that trans and gender people feel safe and are treated with dignity throughout the service delivery cycle.

4.2 Increase the sensitization of teachers and people in education settings to better respond to the needs of trans and gender diverse children and young people in schools.

4.3 Given the role of the church in Fiji, support dialogue and sensitisation programmes with church leaders to promote social acceptance and reduce discrimination.

5.0

Expand and deepen the research into trans and gender diverse people in Fiji to better understand needs and response.

5.1

Given the socio-cultural diversity of Fiji and its trans and gender diverse populations, expand the study to rural and remote areas to increase understanding of the social experiences of trans and gender diverse people outside of urban centres.

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ANNEX 1: Research Questionnaire (with informed consent)

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PqcAPIBAZbea4xMBXCx4JVc_wkUmH9Gb/view?usp=sharing

ANNEX 2: Information Sheet

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L4mahpM9zgp2lwiDXWJj_LUkcC30S8Sp/view?usp=sharing

ANNEX 3: Minutes from Advocacy Planning Meeting

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WN9hYA_qQvD7zxwCm1vXVR8Z3E5HPbxo/view?usp=sharing

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