Towards a world without rape and violence

THURSDAYS IN BLACK

World Council of Churches
Rolling Out the Fine Mat of Scripture:

Strengthening Church Responses to Violence Against Women in Samoa

Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, Dr Ramona Boodoosingh, Dr Melanie A. Beres and Prof. David Tombs
Dr. Mercy Ah-Siu Maliko, a theologian based at Piula Theological College. Photo: Vaitogi Asuisui Matafeo from *Samoa Observer* (23 September 2019).
Acknowledgements

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- Interview participants
- Partners
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  - Pacific Theological College (Fiji)
  - University of Otago and University of Auckland
- Model for contextual bible study developed by Ujamaa Community, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Research team: Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko; Dr Ramona Boodoosingh; Dr Melanie Beres; Dr Carolyn Blyth; Prof David Tombs.
Background

- Studies estimate that 60% (or more) of women experience violence in Samoa.
- Christianity central to life is Samoa, 99% of population identify as Christian.
- Recent calls for churches to be sites of prevention.
- Governing principle: Violence prevention requires understanding communities.
The Church must not “sleep” while church families struggle with family violence. It must rise up to directly confront and battle against the problem of family violence. Otherwise, family violence will continue to destroy families for generations to come. As the body of Christ, Samoan churches, pastors and members, must stand up for victims of family violence.

Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko
Methods

- Background briefing paper
- Interviews with church leaders about their perceptions of the churches role in addressing violence against women. 12 Interviews
  - 8 women and 4 men
  - 6 church leaders representing 4 denominations
  - 6 gov’t officials
- Contextual bible studies
  - Tatale le Tau’ui a le Tatua | Rolling Out the Fine Mat of Scripture
Briefing paper


Interview Results

Four themes

- Emphasis on spiritual concerns and the importance of spiritual guidance
- Some support for mental and physical needs in addition to spiritual concerns
- Leadership by example
- Church as site for change
Spiritual Guidance

‘I think there are many aspects of the role of the church because of its own diverseness that reach people. Both in the spiritual especially in the spiritual mission of the church. I see that as the core essence of the ministry of the church is to save people. The support of parishioners and people...so this is like the thing I focus on...the spiritual part of the person is the centre. Leave other things.’
Mental and Physical Needs

‘It is the Christianising of people, not only spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, but also include the wellbeing and common good of people in each parish. The church also looks at those situations... such as reaching out to situations like education, restoring relationships, like those affected by law and those troubled by illness... There are no barriers in roles for good things in the church.’
Leadership by example

‘The issue of VAW is not new. And the church played a part as being in it as well. The church is also a perpetrator. I mean the church is also the perpetrator. I mean all those working for the church. The ministers, the ordained priest, the nuns...I myself have experienced that sort of violence within the church.’
'There is a huge impact on the spirit due to the severity of the violence of those who are presumed to have the power within families, the circle of the church, the village and the society. My observation is that the church has a huge role in preventing violence. The person has experienced something he should not be experiencing. The person wants to have the power and control on something he shouldn’t. One person want to control another person. There is one creator and he is the authority, but the person want to have power.'
Faith-Based Resources

Ministry for Women, Community, and Social Development.
19 March 2017. Photo credit Samoa Observer
Contextual Bible Study

http://hdl.handle.net/10523/9604
■ Introduction: Reading the Bible in Context

■ Bible Study 1. ATAMU MA EVA I LE FAʻATOAGA I ETENA
  Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

■ Bible Study 2. O LE TALA IA AKARA
  The Story of Hagar

■ Bible Study 3. O LE TOSOGA FAʻAMALOSI O TAMARA
  The Rape of Tamar

■ Bible Study 4. LIUA IA FAʻAPEI O KERISO
  Transformation in the Likeness of Christ
Barbara Dreaver, ‘Study recommends churches play a role in solving Samoa's domestic violence issue’, TVNZ 1News, 1 July 2019, c. 2 mins.
The beautiful Polynesian island is home to a fiercely traditional society rife with domestic violence.
Eleanor Ainge Roy, 'The silence is suffocating': family abuse 'epidemic' uncovered in Samoa’ Guardian (3 September 2019).
Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden
Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, *Tatala le Ta’ui a le Atua | Rolling Out the Fine Mat of Scripture*
reprinted in *Samoa Observer* (24 September 2019).
Good Practice Case Study

Conclusions

 Churches vary in how they see their role, yet all see themselves as spiritual guides.
 Churches are both sites of perpetration of VAW and sites for prevention.
 Biblical studies offer extraordinary promise to intervene in VAW in Samoa.
 More work needs to be done for church leadership to take ownership.
Project web pages

Resources


Ah Siu-Maliko, Mercy. *Tatala le Ta’ui a le Atua | Rolling Out the Fine Mat of Scripture*. Dunedin: Centre for Theology and Public Issues, University of Otago, 2019. [http://hdl.handle.net/10523/9604](http://hdl.handle.net/10523/9604)


Key events

5-7 September 2017. Dunedin.
‘Church Responses to Violence Against Women in Samoa: Identifying the Issues and Developing a Transformative Response’ Initial workshop.

15-19 March 2018. Piula and Apia (Samoa)
‘Transforming Church Responses to Gender Based Violence against Women in Samoa’

12-13 April 2018. Suva.

7-11 June Auckland
‘Church Responses to Gender Violence in Samoa’. https://tatalaletaui.wordpress.com/

Media coverage


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