



Input to the Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls in Sports.

Overview

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), established in 1986, is a multi-ethnic and multicultural non-governmental organization committed to removing all forms of discrimination against women through institutional reform and attitudinal change.

For 38 years, FWRM has lobbied for and raised awareness on the various intersecting and interlinking barriers that women face in the country whether it is accessing justice; healthcare; education; employment opportunities; political participation; harassment-free streets and workplace; and/or elimination of violence against women and children in Fiji.

FWRM uses feminist analysis in the work we do including as a basis for this submission to address gender inequality with particular regard to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which Fiji ratified in 1995, the role of the State on the Fiji National Gender Policy as well as other human rights commitments, including Fiji's 2013 Constitution. The endorsement of these international and national commitments imply that women are equal partners in decision-making and implementation rather than just beneficiaries. FWRM also recognises the rights of people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression including men and women and the different ways they are affected by existing policies and laws.

FWRM recognises the significant work of the special rapporteur in monitoring violence against women; and providing comprehensive recommendations on national, regional and international measures to help the fight to eliminate all forms of violence against women. We welcome the efforts of the special rapporteur in providing an avenue where all stakeholders, Civil Society organisations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) can provide meaningful inputs to strengthen the work of the special rapporteur because FWRM believes that the fight to eliminate all forms of violence against women and children concerns all of us.

FWRM has supported young women in sports through the Intergenerational Women's Leadership Programme. Specifically, the program has used sports as a tool for empowerment with adolescent girls and the program has also supported the local women's sports team through sponsorship.

FWRM is also developing a Young Women in Sports information session where young women are capacitated on gender equality, feminism and human rights, so that young women are able to build agency and empower young women in sports to fight on issues of violence that exists for them in sports.

Women in Fiji continue to face many challenges in sports. They struggle to secure consistent playing schedules, fields, referees, medical support and other facilities/services, and even to meet the most basic needs for jerseys, shoes, appropriate diet or bus fares to reach training grounds. Many female players run or walk for miles to training grounds almost every day. Young women are neither contracted nor medically insured. In other words, young women play sports literally at their own risk and expense.

With this being said, FWRM's submission will respond to the questions on violence against young women in sports, with key recommendations for the special rapporteur to consider.

Question 1: What are the different forms of violence that women and girls in sports may experience (e.g. physical, psychological, economic, online violence, coercive control, as well as extreme form of discrimination that amounts to violence)?

FWRM response: For young Fijian women in sports, the common form of violence that they experience is online bullying. Young women in sports are bullied for the way they play, the way they fit into their sportswear, and they are even body shamed. People make fun of young women (even on the field while playing) not only for being lesbians for looking masculine but also screaming from the crowd saying that women don't belong on the field but in the kitchen and at home.

Our 16 days of activism women in sports panel in 2023 highlighted two important issues that add to the discrimination that women in sports face, which is around unpaid care work and high cost of living. Due to financial constraints that women face because of unpaid care work and the high cost of living, women in sports are expected to fundraise and look for sponsorships while the men's team are catered for. The extreme form of discrimination that women in sports face here in Fiji are the distribution of resources for sports, and unequal treatment between boys and girls.

Question 2: What human rights of women and girls in sports are violated as a result of the exposure of women and girls in sports to violence or the risk of violence?

FWRM response: One major right that's violated is their freedom of expression. Young women in sports, especially women rugby players in Fiji are severely stigmatized, with the association between being mannish and lesbianism. On top of being bullied for the way they look, play and present themselves in the media, they face all types of discrimination. Young Fijian women in sports do not have access to resources like good gyms, sporting facilities, even on tournaments, women will be accommodated at cheap and run down hotels.

Another right that's violated is the right to health. Due to the physical and psychological violence that exists for women, injuries resulting from violence or abuse can jeopardize their physical well-being and hinder their ability to continue participating in sports. Psychological violence can lead to long term mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder – affecting overall well-being.

Question 3: Which groups of women and girls in sports are more exposed to violence and on what grounds?

FWRM response: When it comes to online harassment and verbal harassment, the targeted groups of women and girls are the masculine looking women. They are made fun of and are condemned for being masculine and/or lesbian.

Question 4: What measures do State and non-State actors have in place to ensure that incidents of violence against women and girls in sports can be effectively reported, and that they are thoroughly investigated and sanctioned?

FWRM response: The Fiji National Action Plan on the Prevention of Violence against Women and Girls identifies sports as a priority setting to prevent VAWG as with other social settings, such as schools and workplaces, because people learn and reproduce attitudes, behaviors and social norms in sports settings. Additionally, Fiji has a National Gender Policy where it helps to promote the development of women's human rights in accordance with Fiji's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and

its General Recommendations, and all other conventions and international laws relevant to women.

The Crimes Act has provisions relating to offences against the person ranging from verbal to physical assaults and the Online Safety Act mandates OSC to investigate complaints for harassment perpetrated online (complaints based).

Various sporting organisations are formally registered, eg Suva Rugby Union which governs the conduct of its regular sporting events. Fiji Rugby Union governs all union rugby events in the country including putting in place policies to minimize or eradicate violence against women and girls in rugby. Similarly, Fiji Football Association functions the same way.

Even with all these policies that Fiji government and sporting organizations are to implement, there are still more to be done to encourage more participation of women in sports, without any forms of discrimination.

FWRM's key recommendations

Question 5: Please provide recommendations as to how violence against women and girls in sport can be prevented and what needs to be done to better respond to the needs of survivors of such violence?

1. To have Child protection and safeguarding policies in all sports and they work with stakeholders like the UN Women and the government for an action plan on prevention against all forms of violence against women and girls.
2. With regards to the online violence that women in sports face, the Online Safety Commission needs to improve on its functions of creating a safer internet for Fiji. Social media users should also help by reporting the online harassment that are targeted towards women in sports.
3. The Ministry of Sports needs to distribute funding and equipment's equally to both men and women sports clubs and see that national gyms and spaces are available for both men and women sports groups to use.
4. Include sporting bodies and avenues in efforts to address gender inequality and prevent VAWG.
5. Greater female representation in sports participation and sports leadership

