



Spotlight
Initiative

Stories from Samoa

2020 - 2023



In Samoa, domestic violence and intimate partner violence (DV/IPV) is a cause for serious concern. The Spotlight Initiative, a global partnership between the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN), leverages the latest evidence on violence against women and girls and works to apply it within the context of country-specific insight and analysis.

UNESCO in the frame of the Spotlight Initiative has partnered with more than 15 organizations in Samoa and established the groundwork and supportive programs to effectively address the issue of DV/IPV in 2020-2023.

The focus of the Country Program Strategy was on prevention of DV/IPV as this was identified as the sole area where innovative approaches could be trialed and scaled to reach a large number of people and have long-lasting impact.



Strengthening the education system in addressing DV/IPV

The impact of DV/IPV on children's learning can be severe, causing difficulty concentrating, physical and emotional symptoms, and behavioral problems. The Spotlight Initiative has opened another window for educators in Samoa to investigate this problem.

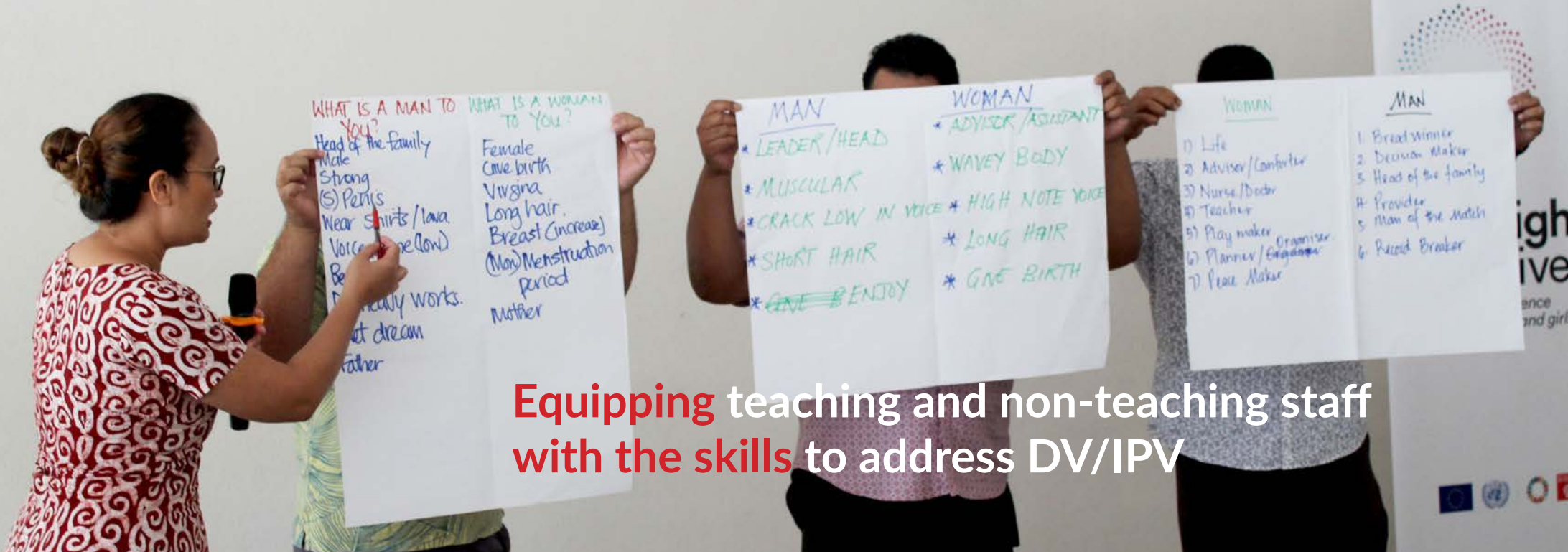
In 2021, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) conducted a study to produce a platform of knowledge for teachers and non-teaching staff on the impact of DV/IPV on the lives and education of children, as well as methods of working with children who experienced violence at home.

Following the report's findings, the Ministry reviewed and developed policies regarding the impact of DV/IPV experiences on learning and ways to address such cases.

Considering that at the moment there is no specific solution that addresses DV/IPV issues affecting school children, such knowledge is crucial in determining effective policy intervention by the government, development partners and stakeholders to create a safe learning and teaching environment for children, teachers and non-teaching staff.

A photograph of two school students, a boy and a girl, both wearing light blue uniforms. They are looking down at something together, possibly a book or a piece of paper. The boy is on the left, and the girl is on the right. They are both smiling slightly. The background is a light blue wall.

Understanding the impact **domestic violence** has on Samoa's school students



Equipping teaching and non-teaching staff with the skills to address DV/IPV

Training of trainers

Building on the recommendations from the study, a Training of Trainers curriculum was developed. The face-to-face workshops were conducted in Upolu and Savai'i and included participants selected from local schools including principals, teachers and non-teaching staff. The training focused on the three main objectives:

- Building the capacity of teachers and non-teaching staff on how to respond and support victims of DV/IPV;
- Improving their understanding of children's family context in terms of DV/IPV; and
- Guidance on how to engage with children and alert contact points in the social protection system.

Teachers had an opportunity to work with the experts from other organizations that support victims of DV/IPV and GBV, such as the Office of the Ombudsman, Samoa Victims Support Group, Police, and Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development.

Participants were provided with knowledge tools: information sheets, brochures and information guides, including the **Inter-agency Essential Services Guide for Responding to Cases of Gender-Based Violence and Child Protection**.

While the participants were not expected to become expert counselors in this area, they were able to achieve the goals of the training and become agents of change in their schools and support the collective effort to stop and prevent domestic violence in Samoa.

Spotlight Initiative Virtual Trivia

TV5, alongside its partners, organized the Spotlight Initiative Virtual Trivia Challenge as an informative and enjoyable way to raise awareness on the paramount issue of DV/IPV against women and children.

The trivia was comprised of 6 games broadcasted over a period of 3 weeks (October- November, 2023). The findings of the MEC 2021 study as well as the Training of Trainers materials developed by MEC, were integrated in trivia questions.

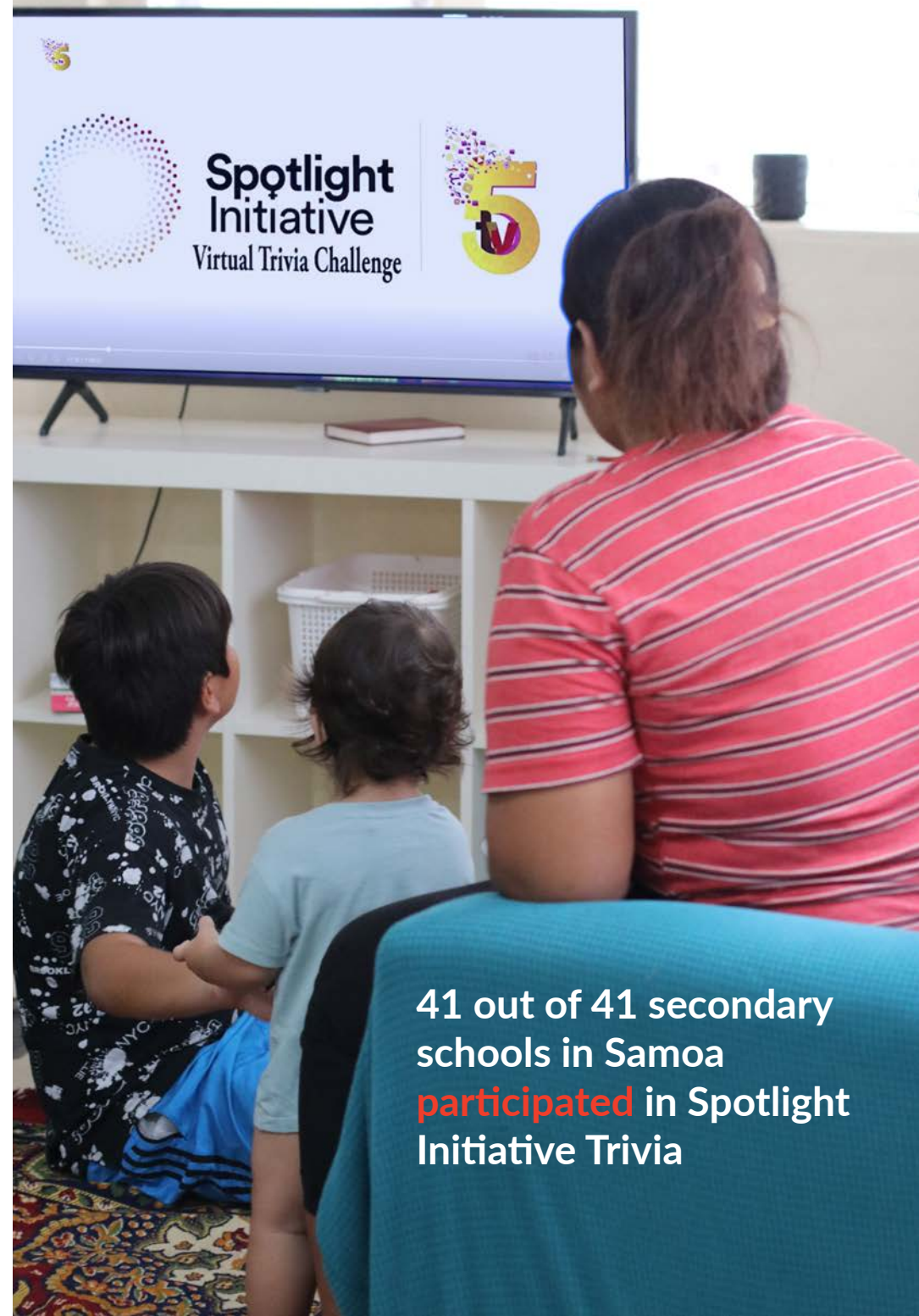
Current students, alumni, and staff of high schools in Samoa all joined together to compete from the comfort of their own homes to win prizes as individuals and for their schools.

65% of Spotlight Initiative Trivia players were below 30 years old and predominately female.

In addition, a photo competition was held at the end of each game: participants were encouraged to upload photos from their participation and share their thoughts on the topic.

The trivia attracted a great number of participants not only in Samoa but from other countries such as Australia and the United States of America, who all engaged with pride and purpose. This was evident from the results of each question answered and from the messages that were sent during the photo competition.

Overall, the trivia was a major success, attracting current and former student and staff members of 41 secondary schools. By participating actively, trivia players helped to bring DV/IPV awareness to the forefront.



41 out of 41 secondary schools in Samoa participated in Spotlight Initiative Trivia

Prevention of DV/IPV through the use of Performing Arts

Samoa is known as the cradle of Polynesia for its vibrant culture and traditions. Faa Samoa – the Samoan way of life – promotes respect to elders, patience and loyalty to family. As a downside of these values domestic violence is rarely discussed openly, and a significant number of people choose to remain silent about the issue.

Through the Spotlight Initiative in Samoa, UNESCO introduced the use of traditional cultural expressions and performing arts to raise awareness around DV/IPV by creating a safe space to heal affected communities in Samoa.

Performing arts play a key role in the daily life of Samoa, being woven into the fabric of village life, national events, religious celebrations and school activities. But the idea of using performing arts to talk about DV/IPV in Samoa is new.



Through performing arts, the message is heard, and **trauma can be healed**



My Village My Pride

Under the theme “My village My Pride” the Samoa Victims Support Group (SVSG) engaged communities from 13 villages, mobilized village leaders, youth artists and creative ambassadors to organize and implement performances for social messaging and debates on the issues of DV/IPV.

Through advocacy sessions, the village chiefs with their influence in Samoan society were well engaged, which is crucial for fostering behavior change.

Local village stories, dances, and skits created and performed by community members for their families, neighbors and friends proved to be very effective when addressing issues related to DV/IPV.

Using local cultural traditions that are relatable for Samoan people opened a dialogue and helped them to understand the issues of violence. It brought communities together, and provided a platform to heal trauma and drive reconciliation.

Name and Surname

31 years old, Solosolo village

Participant of My Village My Pride programme

“ We have undergone a lot of healing, there has been a lot of changes within our family, every time we are doing our tasks in peace and harmony, I also see changes in my husband as well as myself, and we are no longer experiencing any issues since our participation in the relief program.

There have been a lot of changes within me, a peaceful response does not cause anger.

I am very thankful for the program, because it has brought about a change in our people, especially in my family.





HUSH Musical

The hierarchical nature of the Samoan culture imposes a barrier for youth to voice themselves, or seek help. Young people have an opportunity to channel their messages through modern choreography and music. Performing arts serve as a tool to express their emotions and trauma: poetry writing, singing, dancing and acting provide safe environment to speak about DV/IPV and heal.

The Brown Girl Woke - a local nonprofit organization that aims to inspire, educate and empower young girls in Samoa, in partnership with UNESCO under the Spotlight Initiative made a strong statement

with their captivating musical play “HUSH” in 2023. The musical explored and challenged the harmful social and cultural standards contributing to domestic and intimate partner violence.

The musical embraced modern performing arts to highlight gender-based violence experienced within traditional communities in Samoa today.

In the workshop following the musical, participants explored issues surrounding DV/IPV in-depth and reflected on how performing arts can help healing.



Grace Pauga Greed

23 years old, dancer
Brown Girl Woke/SPACE

“ Usually in families there are certain things you can and cannot talk about, usually there’s a hierarchy status because its always the little kids have to listen to what the older ones have to say and the older ones are always deemed right in every aspect.

Through singing dancing and poetry writing they are able to express themselves in a way that no one else can feel and its just a whole different level of healing.

We hope that with this show, this project, this initiative, the youth can see that there are other ways to express themselves not just through cyberbullying, verbal and physical abuse but that there is a more positive way.



Use of new technologies

to improve data collection and provision of services

SVSG - the main service provider for victims and the only provider of shelter facilities for women and children in Samoa - was initially using a paper-based system to manage their new cases averaging 30 per month. This posed many issues in providing services to the DV/IPV victims on time. The collection of data and processing of the information were time-consuming tasks, which impacted the overall response time.

Lack of sufficient data made it difficult to produce meaningful reports. Report-writing relied heavily on what case officers could remember from their conversations with the callers.

SVSG realized the need to address these issues, and in 2022, under the Samoa Spotlight Initiative and in partnership with a New Zealand-based digital agency RIVER, a technology solution was developed. This solution takes the form of a progressive web-based case management app.

**Samoa helpline receives
over 30 **domestic violence** related
phone calls per day**

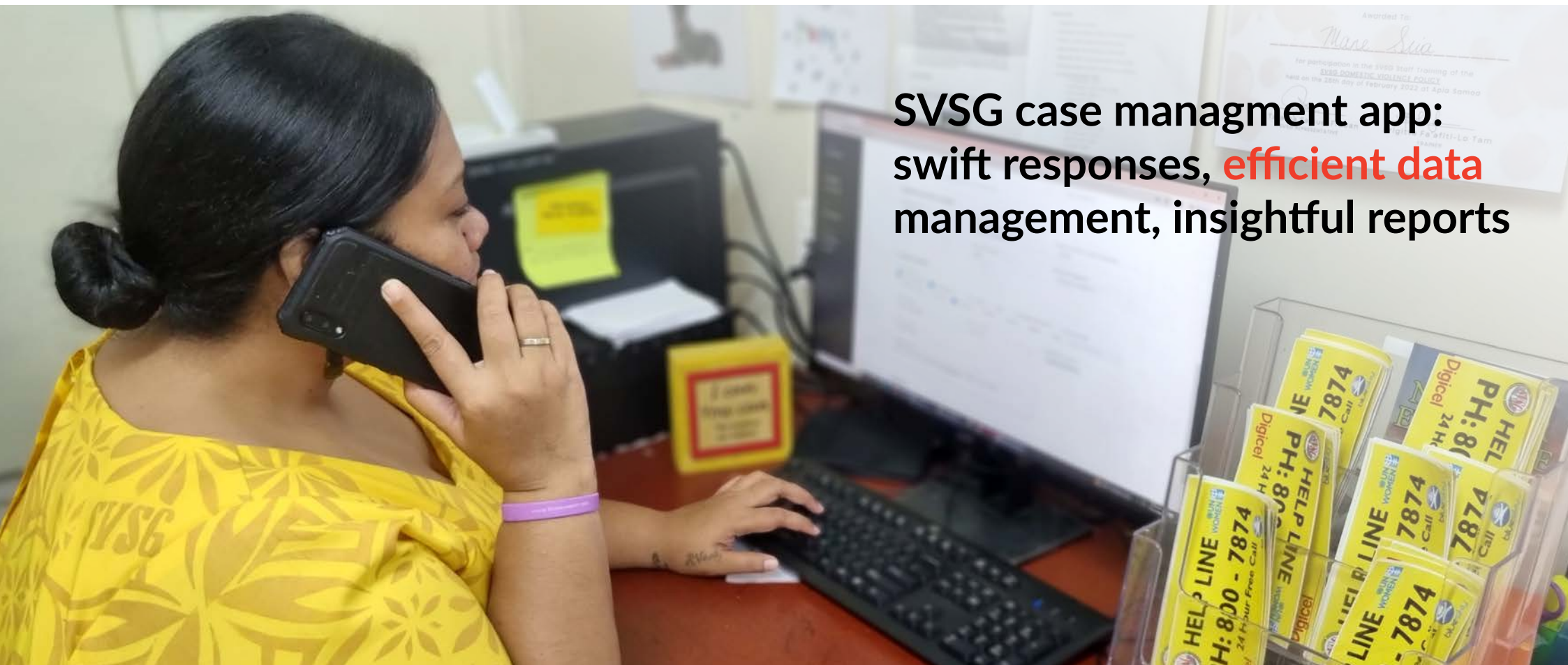
Case management app

The case management app has resulted in significant transformation at SVSG, facilitating efficiency, accessibility, and a more coordinated approach to victim support services, while at the same time collecting high quality data that will allow for evidence-based policy making.

The new system significantly improves case management by expediting responses from case managers and officers and inter-agency communication. This efficiency is highlighted by seamless data entry and swift lookup of essential information, facilitated by the application's

modern infrastructure and robust security protocols. The reporting process requires less time and effort from staff: the system is built to capture large volume of data for producing high quality reports.

This empowerment allows case managers and officers to gain valuable insights and increase the speed of processing the cases and providing help. It has also notably contributed to evidence-based program development to address DV/IPV.



**SVSG case management app:
swift responses, efficient data
management, insightful reports**



Sports and positive role model for prevention of DV/IPV

Sports serve as a powerful source of motivation and mobilization for the people of Samoa and have the status of being a social institution. Samoa has a thriving sports culture, from official sports federations to village clubs, with men dominating the arena. Athletes are looked at as role models and can advocate to promote positive attitudes for all genders and age groups.

In light of the uncertainty regarding the presence of policies, bylaws, or guidelines concerning the prevention and reporting of any forms of abuse and violence against players, in particular, women and girls, within sports organizations, the Samoa Association of Sports and National Olympic Committee (SASNOC) conducted an institutional review on the National Sports Federations (NSFs) in 2020.

Reporting mechanisms explored

The review identified that the NSFs lack the resources and skills to develop and implement GBV-related policies, with only 25% of the NSFs surveyed having any form of policies in place. This highlighted the need for sports in Samoa to develop and implement reporting mechanisms that encourage the safe reporting of incidents.

Several workshops were held to deliver key messages and important recommendations to NSFs. One of the workshops was aimed at empowering the advocate team, Voice of the Athletes (VOAs), with the knowledge and confidence to deliver the main points and concepts regarding the prevention and reporting of any form of violence.



The following workshops were focused on the gender-related and incident-reporting policies that define how to act and how to treat people equally within the sporting context. As a result, the VOAs presented information to 14 NSFs on how they can adopt sound policies to support prevention of gender-based violence within the context of

sport. The NSFs interacted and contributed favourably, acknowledging the need for change. By developing a Whistle Blower protective framework SASNOC and NSFs will safeguard everyone involved in and out of sports to feel that they can report incidents of violence.



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Tofilau Avi'i Faalupega

Internationally accredited female rugby referee

One of the goals of the partnership between the Spotlight Initiative and SASNOC was involving outstanding female athletes to be the voice of women in sports and share stories of their journeys to inspire and educate younger generations of female athletes.

The experience of Ms. Tofilau Avi'i Faalupega, Samoa's internationally accredited rugby referee and an inspired advocate against DV/IPV, provides a glimpse into the challenges faced by women in the sporting world, highlighting the need for systemic change.

“Your only way out is be courageous and move forward. Fortunately, it has never been a stumbling block but has been a stepping stone for me to continue to work hard towards my goals as a female referee. Being discriminated, being called by different names, and being abused both on and off the field is a driving force to get involved and to make a difference. It is not an easy journey, but it can be achieved.



Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls



It is with great pride that we recognize the accomplishments of our partners in Samoa and are looking forward to providing more opportunities to further combat domestic and intimate partner violence in Samoa.