Zaire Cancels AIDS Study

Recent riots and turmoil in Zaire have put a hold on the world's largest field research programme on AIDS. The political crisis and violence stopped Zaire's Project SIDA (Project AIDS) just as researchers were to start a major trial on an AIDS vaccine. The trial was set up to study over 4,000 subjects mostly sex workers in the Zairean capital of Kinshasa. Subjects were to be injected with GP-160, a new vaccine that does not reverse the side effects of AIDS but reportedly slows the disease and was expected to allow the victims to live longer.

The $5 million project was halted when the violence and looting in Kinshasa closed stores, stopped public transport and led fewer prostitutes to volunteer for the study. Project SIDA officials report that the number of applicants for the injection dropped from 80 prostitutes a day to under 10 in just two months. While Kinshasa's AIDS rate has remained steady at about 5 per cent to 7 per cent over the past few years, more than two thirds of the 1,500 prostitutes who work in the city are thought to be infected. There are no reported plans to restart the project. ■

Farewell Sue and thank you for a job well done!

FWRM would like to farewell colleague and member Susan O'neill who has returned to Australia following a term as Project Officer for the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Suva. Bon voyage Sue and hope to see you back in Fiji in the not too distant future.

AIDS Voice Pacific

At a recent Collective meeting at FWRM, member Dr Mridula Sainath requested those present to observe the 14th International Candlelight and Mobilisation Ceremony to be held in Suva. The Fiji Times reported that churches in Fiji have also been asked to pray for victims of AIDS. The article said that the ceremony was described as the world's largest annual grassroots AIDS event held in over 50 countries in 1994. Candles are lit in memory of those who have died of AIDS. This year UNAIDS - the United Nations joint programme on AIDS which set up office in Suva, in January has agreed to co-sponsor this annual event. On Sunday, May 4, members of the general public (including members of FWRM) congregated at a candlelight church service at Suva's Presbyterian Church in rememberence of AIDS vicitim who have passed on.This year's theme was *Illuminate the Truth: Honor Every Death, Value Every Life - Global Solidarity for Access to Health, Dignity and Life.*

PPSEAWA HOLDS SEXUALITY WORKSHOP

The Pan Pacific South East Asia Women's Association (PASEWA) organised a three workshops in the month of April with the theme Teenagers and Sexuality. The workshops funded by AusAID and Nestle (Fiji) Ltd and organised by the Fiji National Council of Women was attended by teenage students from schools in the Suva, Nadi and Lautoka areas. Ms Titilia Naitini, FNCW's Coordinator said the workshops were successful in that there was a lot of interest generated amongst the youth.

"They discussed a whole range of issues such as AIDS, how to cope with the changing personal physical and emotional health and their evaluations indicated that most of them wanted the workshops to include parents and teachers," she said. Ms Naitini added that the workshop was open and candid and students were able to openly discuss issues that were directly affecting them such as understanding myths about sexuality. "It was very basic and they came up with personal questions like, can one lose her virginity through use of tampons? These are some things they can't really discuss with parents and teachers," Ms Naitini said.

Resource people at the workshop included Steven Vete, Coordinator AIDS from the UNAIDS office and presentations were made by Dr Tebano Taururu from the OXFAM Clinic, Dr Salanieta Sakete from the Reproductive Health Clinic in Suva, Dr Raghwa Narayan, Dr James Fong and Dietitian, Maca Rokomalani, all of the Lautoka Hospital.

Lautoka workshop coordinator, FNCW's Asinate Malani said that the workshop was a learning experience both for participants and facilitators. "From the workshop in Lautoka which was attended by both male and female teenagers, it was obvious that there was a dire need for more workshops of this kind to be conducted. The students were particularly concerned about students and youth in the rural

PPSEAWA Workshop *(Continued)*

areas of whom they felt were less exposed to this type of informal education. Some of the questions raised were quite interesting and it showed that sexuality was still an area of mystery amongst our youth and until the adults such as parents and teachers lend a helping hand by being open about the questions that the young may have, sexual problems will still prevail," Ms Malani said.

Dr James Fong who made a presentation on Sexually Transmitted Diseases told Balance that although PPSEAWA had taken a good initiative to conduct the workshop, there was a need for a more integrated approach to make it more effective. "Schools accepting the invitations to attend normally send their most academically outstanding students who have influence over their peers in other areas other than sexuality. In this type of workshops, the students that really should be attending are the more socially and sexually aware who will have more influence over their peers on subjects of sexuality. And it is inadequate to educate students about something that is a lifetime dilemma in just 20 minutes. Sex education is a subject that needs to be integrated into the curriculum system for it to be the most effective. However, overall the workshop was good and it's a start," Dr Fong said.

FWRM ABHORS POLL FINDINGS

A recent poll conducted in Fiji and publicised in the Fiji Times of April, 1997 highlighted how the general public viewed male rape as a bigger problem than female rape. "The majority of respondents (71 per cent) also believed that the sentence for male rape should be heavier than that for female rape. Of the men interviewed, 72 per cent believed the penalty for raping a man should be heavier. Three per cent of men interviewed thought male rape sentences should be lighter than those for raping a woman while 23 per cent felt sentences should be the same," the survey report stated.

Imrana Patricia Jalal photographed with organisers of the National Federation Party's Womens Movement Convention recently held in which she challenges male dorminance in Fiji's society. Photo by Fiji Times.

The FWRM through its newly appointed Legal Rights Training Officer, EmaTagicakibau and WEER Project Officer/Acting Coordinator Praveen Sharma reacted strongly against the poll findings expressing their views in the Letter to the Editor column of the same newspaper on Saturday April 5, 1997. The letter stated how FWRM was disappointed with the respondents to the survey who believed that male rape was a bigger problem thus perpetrators should be given harsher penalties. The FWRM asked if this was an indication of the general societal attitude towards sexual crimes against women.

"Police statistics show that there was an alarming increase of 84 per cent in the number of reported rape cases over the past ten years. Have we become so indifferent to sexual crimes against women that we have started to believe that females do not suffer as much as males in cases of sexual assault," FWRM asked.

The letter further informed readers that under Fiji's current legislation "Rape" is restricted to forced penile - vaginal penetration only thus legally, men cannot get raped. "Anal penetration comes under the lesser crime of indecent assault which carries a maximum sentence of five years imprisonment. Yes, we agree harsher penalties are needed in order to make the law an effective deterrent However, we believe that harsher penalties are needed for all who commit rape/sexual assault against females, males and children," the letter read.FWRM has been working with other women's and human rights' organisations to reform the current legislation because of the inadequacy of the laws in the treatment of all victims of sexual

(Continued to page 14)

Activities Update

Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development

Labour & Migration Taskforce Meeting - Sri Lanka

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement was represented by member Vinlana Seeto to an Asia Pacific Women Law & Development (APWLD) sponsored Labour & Migration Taskforce Committee meeting in Colombo, Sri Lanka in April. The Taskforce, one of four set up at the Regional Forum meeting in Thailand in July last year was established to strengthen the initiatives of women's movements in addressing gender issues. FWRM is the only Pacific non-government organisation nominated by APWLD to sit on the committee of two taskforces, *Labour & Migration* and *Women in the Political/ Democratic Processes.*

Asian women migrant workers are subjected to inhumane working conditions and vulnerable to human rights abuse in "receiving countries".

Ms Seeto said that much of the discussions which took place during the meeting centered on issues relating to the import/ export of women labour from "sending" countries of South / South-East Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Bangladesh to more affluent "receiving" countries in the ASEAN region and beyond such as Singapore , Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Fiji, Saudi Arabia, Europe and the West Indies.

"The export of labour from within the South/South-East have been and continues to be a lucrative industry. The Philippines government annually earns US$6 billion from its migrant workers abroad of which 75 per cent are women. Most if not all of the "sending" countries in South and South-East Asia have long standing bilateral agreements with their "receiving" countries. The Philippines alone has close to 6 million of its population serving as semi to unskilled labour in other parts of Asia, Fiji, Saudi Arabia, parts of Europe and the West Indies. In 1994, 340,000 Filipino women migrated overseas as semiskilled workers," she said.

Ms Seeto added that the migration of women workers in search of paid employment has historically been attached to characteristic problems such as exploitation of migrant workers by unscrupulous recruiting agents, severe work conditions, low wages and physical abuse by the employer to name a few. "It was also established from discussions that the prospect of women who gain employment overseas were severely limited. Forced by economic hardships at home and the lack of employment opportunities, women from developing countries are usually relegated to such jobs as domestic labour," she said.

Discussions at the meeting revealed that women entered the migrant labour force with little protection from abuse and exploitation of the existing migratory system and it has been the experience of most if not all documented cases of abuse of migrant workers that the process of recruitment itself has many hidden costs. "In countries like Philippines where the system of charging agency service is extremely confusing and inconsistent, migrants especially women often find themselves indebted to the recruitment system. It is also at this level of obtaining human resources for the international migrant market that clandestine activities of criminal agents involve the trafficking of women for other purposes," said Ms Seeto.

The meeting heard that it has been the experience of "sending" countries in South-East Asia that upon arrival in the "receiving" countries, employment contracts of migrants negotiated and signed prior to departure are substituted by contracts which promote nothing more than enslaved conditions of employment. Since the implementation of the tax free scheme in Fiji in 1988, 12 large sized enterprises from the ASEAN region opened garment

guys would rather dump you than use a condom.

3. Other factors.

Expense and availability of safer sex supplies is a big factor for many women. Teenage women often find themselves in a bind. In Fiji, condoms have been distributed in nightclubs by the AIDS Task force team and other AIDS project organisations such as the South Pacific Commission. So we are up against a lot when it comes to protecting ourselves from HIV.

Farewell & Thank You Praveen!!

WEER Project Officer and Acting Coordinator Praveen Sharma has resigned from her position with FWRM to join the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) with effect from June 30, 1997. We would like take this opportunity in thanking Praveen for her hard work, loyalty and dedication to FWRM and we wish her well in her future undertakings. Praveen will however remain an active collective member.

Quote:

Political, traditional and religious leaders (mostly men) must use their powers of persuasion on other men to modify their behaviour so as to give women a fair deal in life, at all levels and in all areas. Let there not be any double standards. - Dr Wadan Narsey

"Yes, men get beaten and they also get raped in prisons but the level and frequency of violence that happens to women, because they are women in no way can be compared to men. There is a big difference between a slap and a punch in the stomach or a kick in the head" - Imrana P Jalal

Immunity to AIDS: Do Monkeys Hold the Key?

In their effort to arrive at a better understanding of HIV and its effects, scientists have searched for an animal model for AIDS among non-human primates (monkeys and chimpanzees) in captivity and in the wild. An early stage of this search began when American researchers noticed that captive rhesus monkey became ill with an AIDS like condition. They took blood samples from the sick animals and found a virus which turned out to be similar to the AIDS virus. They called the monkey virus STLV-3 (simian T-lymphrotophic virus). Next the researchers looked for an animal reservoir or a similar virus inthe populations of green monkeys which live in close

Monkeys may hold the answer to combating HIV/AIDS in humans. Do primates after all hold the key to curing each other's afflictions?

proximity to humans in parts of central and east Africa. Because other viruses have been known to make the leap from animals to humans, including the yellow fever virus. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the AIDS epidemic could have started when HIV was transferred from wild monkeys to human hosts. In samples of blood from wild green monkeys, these researchers found a virus similar to STLV-3 which infected the captive monkeys. Blood tests on a variety of African primates found that 50 per cent of African green monkeys were carriers of STLV-3. But unlike their captive counterparts, the wild monkeys infected with STLV-3 did not become ill. Did the wild monkeys then possess some form of natural immunity to STLV-3? In precisely what way have the virus mutated to become more virulent in its human hosts? Pursuing answers to these questions, scientists have continued to study captive monkeys and have found that whereas rhesus macaques infected with STLV-3 develop an AIDS-like condition, another type of African monkey, the sooty mangabey does not. It is not known why the mangabeys seem not to develop AIDS like symptoms. Neither is it known why chimpanzees when infected with the AIDS virus, remain free from full-blown disease. If mangabey and chimpanzees do possess some form of immunity to AIDS, then an understanding of how this immunity has evolved could provide clues to means of immunising humans against HIV. So the study of primates, both captive and wild has become part of the larger effort of AIDS research. ■

AIDS VOICE - GLOBAL

Protecting Ourselves from HIV

HIV can live in the blood for at least ten years without creating symptoms. If we have unprotected sex with someone today, we expose ourselves to everyone s/he has exchanged bodily fluids with in the past decade. Even if we are in a monogamous long-term relationships, our lovers may be bisexual and not telling us. Or they may have been infected by something they did long before they met us. The only answer is to act as though one or both partners is HIV positive and to use protection. There are barriers that are known to stop HIV transmission. Yet many of us are not protecting ourselves, or we do it sometimes and not others.

How do we as women protect ourselves from HIV/ AIDS? Finding the answer to this dilemma is a challenge facing many women around the globe but it all boils down to individual responsibility.

Why are we not building safer sex into our lives? Here are few reasons that women have mentioned.

1. Our own attitudes.

Who me??? I'm not a gay man or a junkie, so I'm safe.... I have good taste in men... or women.... I can tell who's infected.....If he had HIV he'd have oily hair and broken skin....I love him so much, he'd never do anything to hurt me...If I bring a condom, he'll think I'm a sleaze...I want sex to be romantic.....I'm afraid he'll refuse... or get mad.

With thoughts like these, who is going to pull a condom or a roll of plastic wrap out of their bag?

As one woman said, *"that condom seems to pour cold water on the romance by saying, "OK, to be brutally honest, we've both slept with other people." The condom seems like a statement of distrust: You could give me disease, you could kill me."*

Or you may want to have a baby, which means you don't want to use a condom or any birth control method.

2. Our partners attitudes.

Some men complain that condoms ruins sex. Some are afraid they won't keep an erection while putting on a condom. Or they think it's not really sex without penetration and they insist on intercourse even if there is no protection. If they are used to be in charge sexually, they may resent a woman initiating safer sex. They may feel accused of sleeping around. A lesbian lover may believe there is no HIV risk for lesbians. A sex worker's clients may refuse to pay for protected sex. Or there are cultural reasons.

A women'sgroup from Chicago once wrote:

"If you're poor and Latina, sexuality is one area which men still feel they have some control in their lives. If the women bring home the safer sex message, we may become lightening rods for the frustration and anger the men feel as a result of racism, unemployment and poverty. The educational strategy has to be developed by the community itself."

Whatever the reason, our suggesting safer sex can provoke a response we didn't look for.

Ann's partner poked a pencil through the six condoms she brought home from the clinic, snarling, *"I'll show you what I think of this shit!"* The choice may seem to be unsafe sex or no sex. A lot of these

Rotary Promotes Stress Management

Editorial/Communication Officer, Rosemary Naivalurua attended a one-day Conflict Resolution in Suva organised by the Rotary Club of Suva East. The sessions was divided into two parts - Stress Management and Conflict to Consensus. Course Coordinator Elizabeth Paine, also a member of FWRM spoke to participants on the importance of recognising and combating stress with positive thinking and simple exercises. Ms Pain, a trainer/counsellor and member of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors kept the class entertained and absorbed with presentations of case studies and demonstrations ranging from testing negotiation skills to simple exercises which some found to be uncompromising such as the "knee sitting," all taken with good humour and interest.

Editorial Officer, Rosemary Naivalurua (extreme left) with participants of the Conflict Resolution Workshop in Suva. Photo courtesy of Suva East Rotary.

Coordinator of Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Shamima Ali spoke to participants about equality in the home and workplace stating that stress is often gender related. " Gender and sex are two different issues which people sometimes get confused about. Sex is your biological makeover which makes one either male or female. Gender on the other hand is artificially created and is often made up of a society's perception of how a female or male should bewhether it be for religious or cultural influences," Ms Ali said. Ms Ali said that what created stress in most people is not being able to handle situations they feel are getting out of their control. Stress is often accompanied by a feeling of helplessness, participants were told. Ms Ali also spoke to participants on the changing face of gender in Fiji particulalry in the family and workfront. Half of the total number of those attending the seminar were men. Participants were awarded certificates at the end of the seminar. ■

---

manufacturing operations in Fiji. The 13 year "tax-holiday", cheap labour, unrestricted repatriation of profits plus preferential treatments under SPARTECA were the contributing factors to the influx of Asian investors to our shores.

Within the context of International Migrant Labour Force, Fiji is considered a "receiving" country with at least 4,000-5,000 women migrant workers employed in garment factories around Fiji. This is close to 50 per cent of the total population of women garment workers in the country. Yet despite the investor friendly conditions and preferential access as outlined earlier, women migrant workers in Fiji are no exception to the exploitation and abuse characteristic of the treatment of migrant women workers worldwide.

Ms Seeto said that it was a fact that the feminisation of labour provided cheap and quick means of expanding the available workforce at lower wages. Women in the manufacturing sector are paid less for the work of the same qualifications as men in many developing countries including Fiji. Condition of employment in the manufacturing sector remain severe such as random body checks by security guards on women workers upon entering and leaving work. Health and safety precautions remain minimal with lightning, seating and rest periods remaining a much needed area of redress. The isolation from the local working population due to differences in language and culture help to maintain the divided work environment that effectively deters concerted collective action of workers to improve the situation.

Resolutions passed at the Labour & Migration Taskforce Committee meeting in Sri Lanka included a proposal that a research on the plight of Asian women migrant workers in the manufacturing industry in

(Continued on page 13)

Provisional Results of Fiji 1996 Census

A total of 772,655 residents were counted in Fiji on the night of the 1996 Census of August 25, 1996 and the total excludes visitors in Fiji and citizens and residents who were out of the country during the count. There are 358,131 people in the urban areas and 414, 524 in the rural areas and it is predicted that the urban population will overwhelm that of rural population in five years. Of the total population, 394, 999 were Fijians, 336, 579 were Indians and 41, 077 of other races.

The main features of the 1996 Census results were:

- declining growth rates overall and the lowest growth rate between censuses since the 1901 census;
- smallest increment in population size in recent decades;
- dramatic change in ethnic composition of total population;
- decrease in the overall number of the Indian people due largely to a fall in the rural population;
- intensified urbanization most especially by Fijians. Urban dwellers now comprise 46.4 per cent of the total population;
- decrease in the proportion as well as the size of the overall rural population due to heavy Indian losses and the small Fijian increase;

The numbers indicate that international migration was the most significant determinant of the population size. The net population loss of Indians through emigration between the 1986 and 1996 censuses were estimated at 58, 300 people. ■

Adapted from Statistical News No. 8, 1997, Fiji Government Bureau of Statics.

Comments from participants at RRRT Legal Literacy Training Workshop, Suva, April 7-25, 1997

"I love this, this is great. An opportunity not to be missed because it affects your whole life." - Jocelyn Mete, Administrative Assistant, Vanuatu

"It is a great opportunity. I thoroughly enjoyed it besides gaining a wealth of information to take back home and pass on to other women especially those seeking legal assistance in separation, maintenance and divorce. Also those women who can't get out of intolerable situations because of the pressure of culture, custom and tradition, and although they are discriminated against, they cannot find a way out and still have to cope with the situation. I now feel more empowered to deal with the Police and the media personnel with confidence and also to be more aware of how the justice system works from the Courts and the individual human rights cases that the Judges deal with. - Annie Homelo, General Secretary, YWCA, Solomon Islands

This is a very new area for me but within this short period of 3 weeks training I have benefited personally from what I have learned about the law and legal rights and what is in it for us. With this acquired knowledge, I will be able to go back home and help women's groups to have a wider perspective of our society. I have heard how my other Pacific sisters have coped in their different countries within the constraints of custom, tradition and religion, the Constitution and the law itself and it has really encouraged me to do something for women in Tonga" - Betty Blake, LRTO, Catholic Women's League, Tonga

"I have acquired a wide range of knowledge on law and gender because these issues are important to our empowerment in obtaining access to law and how it affects our daily lives within our community, culture, way of living, whereby women can maintain an equal capacity beside their menfolk" - Pamela Shriven, Nauru

"I have been the Legal Rights Training Officer in my organization for 11 months now but this training has given me the first introduction to

Family Court Labelled Sexist

By Arthur McCutchan-Fiji Times

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre has objected to suggestions by a Magistrate that some women were having children just to get maintenance payments. Resident Magistrate at the Family Court in Suva, Eroni Sauvakacolo said last week that he had seen some mothers all dressed up with five children to collect $200 and $300 a week. " Are they having children just to collect the money," he had asked.

Crisis Centre coordinator Shamima Ali said these comments were a gross insult to women who were having problems with acquiring F$7.50 a week from maintenance payments.

"The Domestic Court totally ignores women's reproductive rights and their rights to have the number of children they want. It ignores male control over women's sexuality since a lot of women are forced to have babies because they feel it is one way to keep the relationship together. The Court really has no idea about women in the country. It is traditional, ill-informed and sexist," she said.

Ms Ali challenged the Court to show her one ordinary woman who collected that much money on a regular basis. "The maintenance women get is very little and so many men are in arrears with hundreds if not thousands of dollars," she said.

Mr Sauvakacolo had said some women were getting $200 and $300 a week because of ruling made in the Court. He said: " it boils down to what I said before: Can parents help these young girls at home, or can the general public and other social organisations help them, by disciplining them? Can we make them refrain from these actions and have a proper marriage and proper household?"

Ms Ali said the court's method of reconciliation to solve family problems totally ignored the violence women were subjected to, " from our experience a lot of the women leave their marriages because of violence," she said.

Mr Sauvakacolo said last week, that reconciliation was the Court's priority. If that didn't work then the court will have to make a decision. "That's what the Family Court is about, where families can sit down and discuss problems. Families should be given that right," he said. He defended the use of reconciliation: "we have had cases where the family sits down in court for hours and in the end they solve their problems."

But Ms Ali said that reconciliation could work only if the court arranged counselling for the violent partner and in-depth and ongoing counselling for both, provided they were willing to undergo reconciliation. "By forcing reconciliation, the Court is taking way the right of the woman to leave a situation that has become intolerable," Ms Ali said.

She said women who didn't understand the court system would feel that reconciliation was the only way to solve problems. "They have so much respect for people in power that they don't question what they are told. But with this sexist views, how can women respect justice in the courts?"

Members of the USP Women's Student Association -fighting for women's rights. Photo courtesy of the USP Information Office.

Double standards at Work for Him & Her

He's not at his desk: He must be at a meeting. She is not at her desk: She must be out shopping if not in the powder room. He's having lunch with the boss: He's on his way up. She's having lunch with the boss: She must be having an affair with him. He's getting married: He'll get more settled. She's getting married: She'll get pregnant and leave. He's having a baby: He'll need a raise. She's having a baby: She'll cost the company money in maternity benefits.

HOW INNOCENT IS HE REALLY? *By Stan Ritova, Daily Post, March 7, 1997*

Frank Albert Thomas, 80, of Helston, Cornwell, England who came to Fiji 15 years ago to retire in "his tropical paradise" with his son and family, is now separated from them because he was convicted in the Suva Magistrate Court on Friday for molesting his two grand-daughters.

Magistrate Salesi Temo sentenced him to 12 months imprisonment on each of the four charges and ordered they be served concurrently but suspended him for three years saying he would have sent Thomas to jail but for his age. He was acquitted on a fifth charge because of insuffiecient evidence. Thomas had pleaded not guilty to all five charges. Thomas who served "at home" in Britain in the Second World War and a former British Civil Servant for 20 years before he retired, told me yesterday he was innocent and "will do everything in my power to clear my name."

Thomas, who is married to Suman, a 30 year-old Fiji Indian woman for ten years, was charged with allegedly molesting his grand-daughters, Melodie, now 21 and Harmony, 19 in the family swimming pool and in the bedrooms of their Pacific Harbour home 50 kms from Suva on the Queen's Highway between 1984 and 1988.

The girls are the daughters of his prawn farmer son Howard and his Singaporean-Indian wife Peggy, who had lived in Pacific Harbour, an upmarket residential area for about 15 years. Peggy and Howard were critical of the Court's ruling setting Thomas free saying that he should have been sent to prison for what he has done. Peggy told a local newspaper after the case on Friday that the suspended sentence imposed by Mr Temo meant that Thomas was a free man.

"Does this judgment mean that if one is 80 years of age, he or she can actually molest children and get a mere suspended sentence?"

"They were lovely children when they were younger but now they have become vicious and calculating young women blaming an old man for something that isn't true."

she asked. "I've waited five years for this case to come to an end and now this has happened. I didn't attend Court on Friday because delivery of the judgement has been adjourned seven times and I could not bear any more strain waiting for justice to be done," she said.

Peggy revealed the case almost broke up her 26 year-old marriage and subjected the family to ridicule. Husband Howard Thomas who also owns a real estate company, told the newspaper he was happy with the conviction but viewed the suspension as an academic decision. "The fact is he is free," he added.

Thomas senior told the Australian Associated Press (AAP) yesterday that his lawyer was planning to appeal against the verdict of the case "because I am absolutely innocent of these charges." He has 28 days to lodge an appeal. "I came to Fiji for peace and quiet in my twilight years with my son and his family and I was enjoying my life in this tropical paradise when this happened. My son and I were the best of friends but we have not been on speaking terms since 1991 when my grand-daughters made these accusations against me. They were lovely children when they were younger but now they have become vicious and calculating young women accusing an old man of something that isn't true."

Mr Thomas said he had met his wife Suman when she was 20 at Deuba near Pacific Harbour and married her in 1987. He said he had been divorced from his wife (who has remarried) for 20 years when he married the second time. "I was of an age when I couldn't live on my own and needed someone to look after me and keep me company, and when Suman came along and I proposed to her and she said yes, we tied the knot," he said.

But Suman, a diabetic, has not been well since the case began in April last year. "She has been continuously worried about the case and me, especially because it involved my grand-daughters and this has made her more ill. She has had to go and see our doctor several times," Thomas said. He had a married daughter in Helston, Cornwell who has a son "but my grandson has been alienated from me because of this dreadful business which has brought disgrace to my family," he said.

"We have just moved into our

(Continued on page 11)

Workshop Comments Continued

legal literacy and provided the groundwork so I am in a better position to start my Legal Literacy Awareness Training when I go back home - Lynnsay Francis, Punanga Tauturu Inc., Cook Islands

The training has broadened my perspective about what the law can do . It has helped me to see how the law is discriminating against women e.g. in the legislation to do with assaults. This is also the first time I have come in touch with my country's legislation and what it is and how women can use it to their advantage especially custom marriage in relation to bride price, on issues of custody of children etc. I have also become aware of other countries' legislation - similarities regarding common law legislation and the issues faced by women in other countries - Christina Ramosaea, Family Support Centre, Honiara. ■

NOTICE

Tired of searching for blank locally made cards? We have the answer. FWRM has blank cards available at the office at F$7.50 for a pack of 10.

Novels are available in the FWRM Library/Resource Centre for those of you who wish to borrow them.

Video Tapes are also available for viewing. Members are to contact the office if interested on 313156.

(from page 11) *APWLD Labour & Migration Taskforce Report continued*

Fiji be conducted to meet the lack of documentation of such data. FWRM envisages conducting a feasibility study to take into account the nature of Asian women migrant workers' living and working conditions in Fiji.

Acting Coordinator of FWRM Praveen Sharma said that migrant workers should be accorded the same labour/ working rights as local workers. "At the moment it is more lucrative for employers to hire migrant workers because of reduced labour costs and they are required to work longer hours at minimum wages. Existing labour laws should be enforced and when this happens, it will no longer be financially viable to hire them because there will be added costs such as their transportation to receiving countries."

Ms Sharma added that the lack of enforcement of current migrant workers legislation is attracting unscrupulous investors who exploit migrant workers and encourage human rights violations.

"The recent relaxing of migrant workers laws is an area of redress because Fiji has a current unemployment problem which will be exacerbated by the importation of labour. Migrant workers should only be brought in to fill in positions that cannot be performed by locals," Ms Sharma said. ■

USP Psychology Class Study on Violence

"It is alright for a man to batter a woman if she's having an affair...if she doesn't listen to him. It is alright for a woman to batter a man is she has had enough.... if he is seen with another man....men who batter are psychologically ill....alcohol is the main cause of domestic violence." **The following are some comments from a small scale study conducted by PS101: Introduction to Psychology students during semester one of 1997. Many respondents to a survey conducted by students believe that it is culturally acceptable for a man to batter a woman perpetuating the myth that women who have affairs provoke and contribute to violence within the home. Although many agreed with the prevailing attitudes that domestic violence is condoned, they also agreed that the current laws do not offer enough protection for women who are victims of domestic violence.The two ethnic groups investigated were Samoans and the Solomon Islanders. Many studies in the area of domestic violence indicate that jealousy is a cause of domestic violence. The findings of the report indicate that overall (60%) 30% for both males and females believe that men kill their partners out of jealousy whilst documented cases reveal that women kill their partners out of frustration usually after years of enduring constant physical and emotional abuse. 55% of respondents agree that women kill their partners out of frustration and 55% agree that assault occurs because of power and control which was encouraging because males are realizing that their abusive behavior is about power and control.Overall results of the study reveal that attitudes towards domestic violence still follow the traditional line of thought but some positive aspects were to be found such as the indication that gender awareness programs are getting through. Ten years ago, the results would have been negatively skewed.** *By Gaylene Osborne, Tutor in Psychology at the University of the South Pacific, Collective Member of FWRM*

(FWRM Abhors Poll Findings Continued from page 9)

assault offenses regardless of sex. FWRM has asked for a minimum sentence of five years imprisonment for those who sexually assault men and women. When there is added violence and where children are the victims, FWRM are lobbying for a minimum of seven years imprisonment.

"The result of the opinion poll are indeed shocking as it portrays male rape as a bigger problem than female rape because of the moral and religious implication involved. The fact that people are becoming more aware of the extent of sexual assault reinforces the need for legal reform and harsher penalties. If we are to eradicate sexual crimes from our society, the law needs to be an effective deterrent besides playing an educative role. A message needs to be sent out to all members of society that the rape/sexual assault of any human being will not be tolerated under any circumstances." FWRM commented. ■

(How Innocent Is He Really?Continued from page 4)

new but yet unfinished home in Deuba and I wonder how we are going to complete its construction because the case has cost us a lot of money and will cost more yet if the appeal goes ahead," said Thomas who lives on his British pension. Daughter-in-law Peggy has appealed to the Fiji Government to deport Thomas who is on a three-year residential permit but no action has yet been taken. "This happened in 1993 but I took the Immigration to Court and won and I am still here but it may happen again, who knows," he added. ■

RRRT Conducts Workshop

FWRM's Legal Rights Training Officer, Ema Tagicakibau attended a three week workshop on Legal Literacy Training Program from April 7th to 25th. The workshop held in Suva was conducted by the British Aid's Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) Director Kim Stanford-Smith and Resource Trainer Imrana Jalal. Fourteen women participants from all over the region attended the workshop held at the RRRT office in Suva and the training included the following topics:

Week 1:
What is legal literacy, What is the Law - sources & types, 3 arms of Government, Gender, Feminist Theory contribution to Law, Sexual Offenses, Criminal Assault Against Women in the Home
Week 2:
Marriage & Separation, Divorce, Custody & Access of Children
Week 3:
Maintenance for Married Women & Legitimate Children, Matrimonial Property, De Facto Relationships, Affiliation & Natural Children, Strategies for Change, NGOs, Good Governance, International Conventions

Ms Tagicakibau said that apart from lectures, participants had to analyse case studies in groups which contributed to a better understanding of the topics especially those under Family Law. Individual assessments included short tests, group presentations on Legal Literacy Campaign and two individual 20-minute presentations, one of which was video taped to enable participants to view themselves and pick up on areas for improvement. A number of tests conducted involved making assessments on the award of custody, maintenance or matrimonial property.

Each participants had to design a 35-hour (one week) training program for submission on the final day of the training. An evaluation of the training was also done on the final day for teacher's benefit. Ms Tagicakibau said she found the workshop very informative and educative in the sense that she benefited a lot from the activities where she actually had to learn to design campaigns and legal literacy training programs, analysing case studies, judging and justifying as to which parent deserved custody and access to matrimonial property including children. ■

Victim speaks out about child sexual assault and how it can happen

Marama, 36, can still vividly remember that night of 1965 when she was a mere four-year old - that tender age when a child is just beginning to recollect memories and the transition from babyhood into childhood. She says the experience has left a deep scar affecting her relationships with family members and men. "In retrospect, I realize that what happened that night was the beginning of a vicious cycle that I am trying to break away from. I still feel dirty and unworthy and I have to keep reminding myself that it wasn't my fault." She agreed to an interview with Balance on the condition of anonymity.

She candidly relates the events of that fateful night and how it has affected her whole life.

This is her story

My mother and I went to this village function which was quite a distance from home. There was an atmosphere of merriment and *taralala* going on but I just couldn't keep awake and kept dozing off. I recall that I became very irritable and started howling to go home. I remember this young man of about twenty years who worked with my mother offering to take me home since he was leaving anyway and would be passing by my home. I was flattered to be going home with this man because I thought he was big and handsome and I trusted him because he was always so nice to me when I visited my mother at work. As I piggyrode on his back that night on the way home, he entertained me with myths about dwarfs that lived along the coastline we were walking along on the way home.

After a while, he said he was tired and put me down saying he needed to rest because his shoulders were aching due to my weight. Years later, I realized it was just a ploy to make me feel guilty and obligated to him. He sat down and asked me rub his back and then he reached down and unzipped his pants. He asked me to hold his penis. I was petrified and when I refused to comply, he threatened to leave me there for the dwarfs to come for me.

With tears streaming down my face, I complied and he told me to stroke it for him - that it was sore there too. I could actually feel it growing rigid against my hand. As much as I was aghast knowing the act was wrong, I have to admit that I was also curious and fascinated to feel this thing growing in my hand and my first thought was that it was an animal. I felt strange and confused because he seemed to be in pain yet he urged me to continue.That was my first experience of sexual activity and I think that right there and then, whilst

"Growing up, I never forgave my mother and secretly despised her for what happened that night".

holding his penis, my innocence was lost. He told me to stop when he realised that I was very quite and compliant saying that if I told anyone, not only will the *veli* come for me but nobody would believe my story. They will know what a bad and dirty little girl I was.

I never told anyone about what happened that night but my parents soon noticed that I began to grow sullen and moody. My father used to say I was matured for my age, attributing the absence of childlike cheer in me to the process of growing up. I remember feeling sad and dirty and years later, when I was fifteen years old, during a heated argument with my mother, I blurted it out to her, blaming her for my state of confusion - for letting something like that happen to me as a child. Growing up, I never forgave my mother and secretly despised her for what happened. By fourteen, I had lost my virginity, by sixteen I had "known" four men and I have never been able to commit myself to nor trust another men since. I know that I have to come to terms with what happened and I am hoping that through this story, I will be able to make mothers see, the seemingly harmless guises in which something as traumatic as child sexual assault can present itself. It still is an every day battle, the bitterness and anger for what may have been and I hope that telling my story will help.

Correction

Praveen Sharma is the Acting Coordinator for FWRM and not the Assistant Coordinator. RRRT is the Regional Rights Resource Team and not Resourcer Team as indicated in the last issue of Balance. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

also includes showing the child the adult's genitals and making sexual comments to the child.

In all the cases, the offender has more power than the child and misuses that power to take advantage of the child. The victims of child sexual abuse can be boys as

"You cannot pick them out in a crowd and they normally present themselves as normal or "especially fond of children."

well as girls and the offenders can be women as well as men, although most victims are girls (over 90%) and most offenders are men (over 90%). Child sexual assault is a major problem over the world and research in America found that 30% of all women have been sexually assaulted by an adult male before they were aged 18. Other statistics in Britain show that 1 child in 10 is sexually assaulted by someone they know and trust. It is a problem in Fiji too. Very few victims of child sexual assault ever report the abuse.

Many victims never speak out when the abuse is happening, but do so once they become adults themselves and learn they are not the only ones who have been victims of child sexual assault.They may report it to agencies but very few take the matter to the police. Strangers are not the main offenders as myths may say. In about 85% of cases, the offender is a member of the child's immediate family or someone the child knows and trusts. Offenders are not mentally ill and do not appear to the world as insane child molesters. You cannot pick them out in a crowd and they normally present themselves as normal or "especially fond of children." The unfortunate thing is that for most people, the idea that someone so close to the child could commit such as act is difficult to believe. CSA exists in every societies - rich or poor, large or small, educated or not.

Ms Ali said that screens have been donated to the Courts as a means of safeguarding victims during a trial but legislation in Fiji does not make it a mandatory exercise. "Victims of CSA must be heard-on-camera and sentencing must be more severe with offenders receiving specialized counselling." Praveen Sharma, FWRM's acting coordinator agrees with Ms Ali. She says that the law has two purposes. "The laws in place should be seen as an educating and deterrent tool for the general public and would be offenders respectively. The message has to go out to the community that such as offence will not be tolerated and yes, offenders should be given specialized counselling because we can't throw them into gaol and throw away the keys. That would be an abuse of human rights. Besides without counselling, there is more chances that the offender will repeat the offence once released into society."

According to the Fiji Police Force, since the predorminant races are the indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians, more reports are received from them. "However, indigenous Fijians are more easy to talk with when investigating such cases.They are more open and willing to disclose their stories compared to other ethnic grous in Fiji. In the defilement of girls under 13 years, 18 cases were reported in 1995 and 15 in 1996. Out of these, both years saw more Indo-Fijian offenders. There were more rape committed by Indigenous Fijians in the same years. Eight cases of incest were reported in both years 3 of whom were Indigenous Fijians, 4 Indo-Fijians and 1 others.

Most offenders were within the age range of 17 to 24 years and it was recorded that more than 90 per cent of the offenders were either known or related to the victims. All offenders were males.

In the publicising of cases, the Police said that certain factor were taken into consideration such as how young the victim was, the seriousness of the injuries sustained in the assault, how the offence was committed and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.

Reference: The Fiji Women's Crisis Center

The Unit

The Sexual Offences Unit was established in 1995. Following the setting up of the Unit, the Force recognised that there was a need to train officers in the area of sexual assault. A three week training course held at the Police Academy and funded by AIDAB was conducted by the Australian Federal Police and the Director of Public Prosecution's Office. The course focused on improving police officers' ability of handling and dealing with sexual offences assault victims and investigating techniques. The course emphasised on the Sexual Assault Legislation in Fiji, Court proceedings and Culture and Gender Sensitivity. According to Police, there has been four additional local courses conducted so far to raise Police awareness and understanding with information being disseminated through other senior and junior courses besides the scheduled sexual offence course. The idea is to educate all police officers on how to approach and handle such cases. Victims classified under defilement of girls between 13 and 16 years are given a 12 month period in which to file for the case.

Historial Background of Fiji:

1643 - Tasman sighted the Fiji group, 1774 - Captain Cook visited Vatoa, 1797 - Captain Wilson discovered Northern Lau, 1835 - Methodist Missioners Ariived, 1844 - French Priest Arrived, 1854 - King Cakobau renounced his ancient Gods, 1855 - Battle of Kaba, 1857 - British Consul was appointed at Levuka, 1874 - Fiji was proclaimed a British Colony, 1879 - Indentured Indian Labourers were introduced, 1970 - Fiji became independent, 1987 - Fiji became Republic

USP WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION HOLDS RALLY AGAINST VIOLENCE ON WOMEN

On Thursday, May15, the University of the South Pacific Women's Association comprising of both students and staff held an open rally on campus to campaign for the eilimination of violence against women. Speakers were invited from other women's organisation including FWRM. Acting Coordinator, Praveen Sharma and Editorial Officer, Rosemary Naivalurua attended the rally at which Ms Sharma spoke to students about the culture of violence on campus. She made observations on the lack of proper lighting on campus which increased the risk of female students and staff being assaulted on campus. Ms Sharma congratulated the USP Women's Association for its revival. The group had been dormant for a number of years and others who gave speeches joined Ms Sharma in praising the group for taking the initiative to address women's issues on campus. Other speakers included Shamima Ali from the Women's Crisis Centre and Teresia Teaiwa, a lecturer at USP. Feminist poems, essays and presentations were dished out to spectators from all over the region who were students at USP. Feminists attending the rally came replinished in black to commemorate *Thurdays in Black* in protest of violence against women in times of war. ■

Students and staff take to feminism at USP campus! Invited speakers, students and staff at the rally to campaign for the elimination of violence against women.

New Additions!!!

Congratulations to Collective members Gina Houng Lee and Sofaia Raiwalui who each gave birth to baby sons recently. Scott Munroe Pickering was borne to Gina on Tuesday, May 27 at 9.30 am. Coincidently (or by design??), baby Scott was born the same day as his mother so mother and son share the same birthdate. Apimeleki Niumatailwalu was borne to Sophie at 2.00 pm Wednesday, April 30. Both babies and mothers are reportedly doing well and we look forward to seeing all mothers and (hopefully) sons at a Collective meeting at the office soon. FWRM welcomes two addition of male feminists. Way to go Mums!! ■

Gina's Scott Pickering

Sofaia's Apimeleki Junior

From the Editorial Desk!!

In the next issue, we will be bringing to you a paper written by Dr Wadan Narsey, an Economist at the University of the South Pacific. Dr Narsey looked at the culture of silence in Fiji and how there was a need for people to be more vocal and to challenge leadership roles. Dr Narsey is a locally renowned columnist and speaker in the Fiji Times and at national forums and he has been vocal on women's issues. We will also be updating you with activities here at the FWRM office. We urge you to please write in about your views on Balance and the articles covered so far.

Membership:

To become a member, it is necessary for you to pay a subscription fee of FS5 for within Fiji, FS10 for Pacific islands, FS15 for Australia and New Zealand, FS20 for USA and $25 for Europe. Men are also welcome to join up as Friends of the Movement. Please forward cheque or money order to the address below. Do not forget to include a forwarding address:

Fiji Women's Rights Movement,
P O Box 14194, Suva,
Fiji Islands
Telephone: (679) 313156
Fax: (679) 313466

Editorial Team:

FWRM Communication/Editorial Officer - Rosemary Naivalurua
Editors - Viniana Seeto, Gaylene Osborne (Collective Members)

SUPPORT THE FIJI WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND JOIN UP NOW!!!

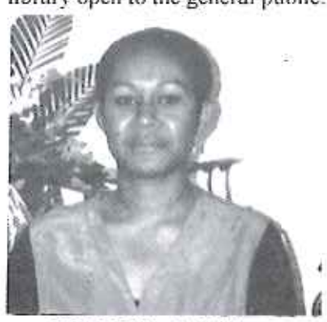
New Staff Join FWRM

Ema Tagicakibau, Legal Rights Training Officer for FWRM

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement introduces to members its newly appointed staff. They are Legal Rights Training Officer, Ema Tagicakibau and Editorial/ Communications Officer, Rosemary Naivalurua.

Ema was a former high school teacher having graduated with a Diploma in Education and Bachelor of Arts in English/ History/Politics at the University of the South Pacific. She was awarded an AIDAB scholarship to do a Masters Degree programme in Women's Studies at the Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. At the completion of her programme in 1995, she returned to Fiji and was appointed to the position of New Centres' Establishment Officer for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. Ema comes to FWRM with a wealth of knowledge on women's issues and will be responsible for enhancing the understanding of Fiji's women in the area of legal and human rights.

Communications/Editorial Officer Rosemary Naivalurua was a former journalist for the local newspapers, the Daily Post and Fiji Times and was formerly employed as the Sustainable Development Project/Information Officer for the environmental organisation, South Pacific Action Committee for Human Ecology & Environment (SPACHEE). She will be responsible for the compilation of the bi-monthly newsletter Balance as well as taking care of general information dissemination concerning the Movement. She also maintains FWRM's resource library open to the general public.



FWRM Editorial Officer, Rosemary Naivalurua

Another staff, clerical officer, Mereani Kamanalagi who is currently under probation has joined FWRM and we will introduce her to you in the next issue.

Name/Organisaion.....
Address: .....
.....
.....
.....
.....

FWRM

Balance

The Fiji Women's Rights Movement

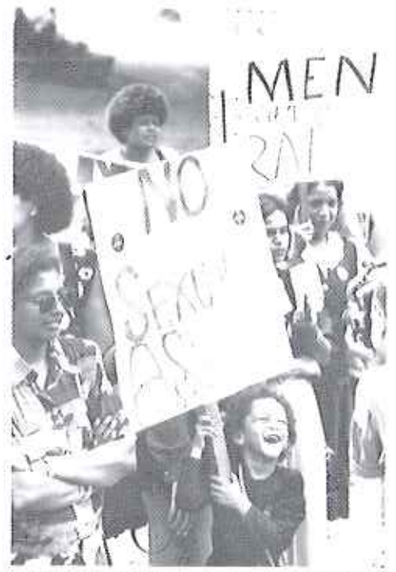
Balancing the Scales — *May - June Issue 1997*

Child Sexual Assault Escalates in Fiji

In a recent interview, a spokeswoman of the Sexual Offence Unit in the Fiji Police Force stated that the rate of child sexual assault occurring in Fiji reported to the newly set up Sexual Assault Unit has increased steadily in the last five years.

However, the Fiji Police Force has no specific records or statistics on CSA because the Statistics Unit categorises the age of victims collectively.

According to Police, the increase may be due to an increase in offences committed, an increase in reporting due to awareness programs and the improved judicial system in the sentencing of offenders.



Sexual abuse is not only a major concern for women in Fiji but for children too. Photo by Fiji Times.

What is Child Sexual Assault

Child sexual assault is a criminal offence and can be described as any act of a sexual nature which involves anyone under the age of 15 years.

Coordinator of Fiji Women's Crisis Ms Shamima Ali said that there is more awareness of CSA now than ten years ago, "but the disclosure and acceptance that it does happen is still very low. There is a lot more reporting but this we believe, is only the tip of the iceberg." According to FWCC, 20 cases were reported to the Centre between 1984 to 1991. Out of this 20, the offender in 5 of the cases was the child's father, in 3 it was a stranger and in the remaining 12, it was a person known by the victim.

The fact that very few cases are reported can be attributed to the lack of expertise in the handling of such cases by the police and judiciary departments in Fiji. "The police are not sensitized to deal with abused children and child victims are scared of the Police. Victims do not report out of fear and lack of trust in adults generally and they are often scared of losing the family member who is abusing them. It is the adults who should make the report to the Police once it is detected but they don't." said Ms Ali. However, she said that the recent setting up of a Sexual Offences Unit in the Police Department manned by specially trained officers shows a commitment by the Police in dealing with this issue and she hopes that the Unit will be maintained. The abuser may use tricks, bribes, threats and sometimes physical force to make the child take part in sexual activity. Child sexual assault refers not only to sexual intercourse, although sexual intercourse is often involved. It includes touching genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a finger, penis or any other object. It

Inside this issue:

- child sexual assault in Fiji - a victim speaks out in a bid to prevent CSA - convicted child sex abuser maintains innocence - family court and attitude to women - AIDS here and abroad - FWRM activities update - and more!!!