

Researching Sorcery Accusation Related Violence in PNG



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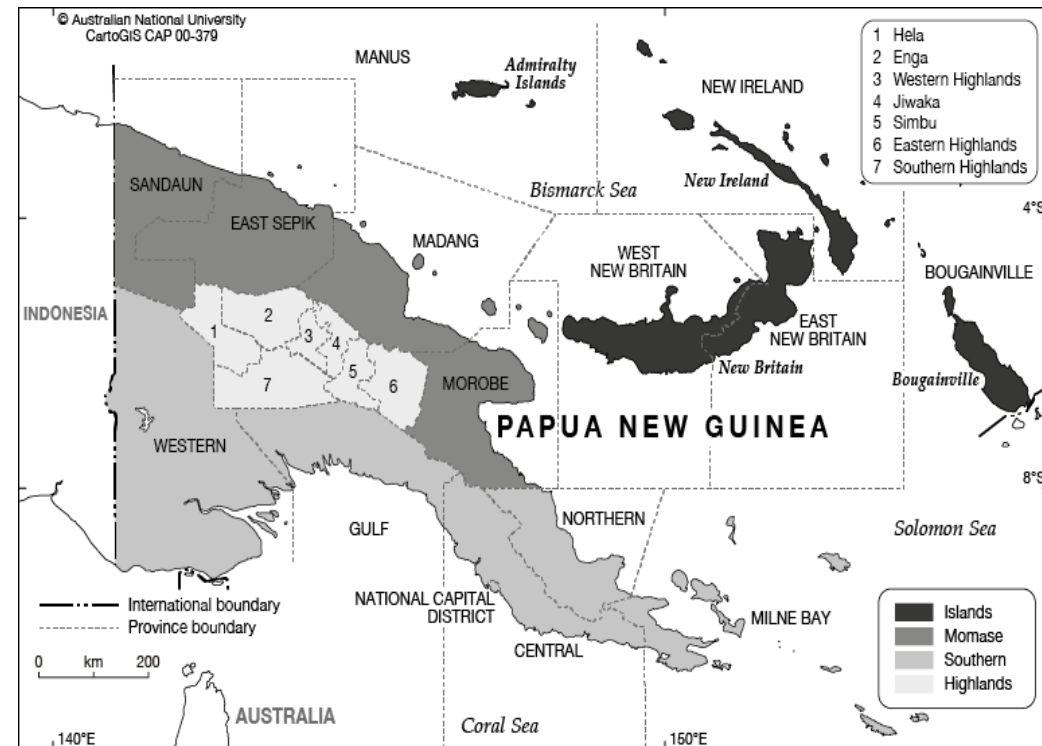


Sorcery accusation related violence is a global phenomena

- Particular problem in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, India and Nepal
- Increasing problem in countries in the global North
- UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (2009): “the number of so-called witches killed or otherwise persecuted is high in the aggregate.”
- First ever international conference on the issue to be held in Geneva this year at the UN Human Rights Council

Overview

- Background
- Research questions
- Methodology
- Preliminary findings
(3 out of 4 research questions)



The problem of sorcery accusation related violence

- Sorcery accusation cycle: someone suffers harm/ misfortune -> accusation against individual(s) -> violence against those accused
- Violence often sanctioned by community/ police
- Worldview in which the supernatural has causative impact in the physical world
- Range of impacts (torture, death, banishment etc) including ongoing insecurity - *“this thing is like a life time thing”* (survivor)



A number of people accused of witchcraft in the Highlands tied up awaiting torture, image uploaded onto Facebook (2016)

In a survivor's own words

“we were sleeping in the house with these children when they came and got me for a problem that might have happened up there.

Without knowing anything, I went out of the house and there they swung their bush knives several times at me. I had no clothes on, I got up from bed. Imagine how one would sleep in the house. They took me on this road to Takeanda. . . .

When we arrived there, I saw that wires and iron rods were on fire ready to be used. . . .

Even when I said I do not know, they tortured and burned me with the hot wire and iron rod, the other women were tortured too but I was completed tortured and burned. . .

When I was lying in the drain, the crowd laughed and they used the bush knives again to it me hard on the body that was already tortured and burned. . .

Nothing remained. Like a bend old cooking pot I laid there alone and nobody came to see me because I was declared eating humans. . . .

I remained there rolled up and even no one from my own family came to see me. . . .

The police saw me in such a condition that they too were afraid. . . .

Not even a doctor attended to me. . . .”

(“Cathy”, Enga province, 2016, interview with Fr Philip Gibbs)

Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP)

- Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP) passed by National Executive Council in 2015 (funding promised but not allocated as yet)
- SNAP based on adoption of a holistic response to the problem of sorcery accusation related violence
- Multi-sectoral and based on partnerships with NGOs, Churches, local activists etc
- Core national committee (led by FSVAC and DJAG) and plans for provincial committees
- Need for evidence base to support SNAP



Participants at workshop in Port Moresby in 2014 to draft Sorcery National Action Plan (SNAP)

Background to project

Project started September 2016, funded for four years by Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (DFAT)



Father Philip Gibbs (Divine Word University, PNG), Dr Judy Putt (ANU), Dr Miranda Forsyth (ANU), Ms Llane Munau, Dr Sinclair Dinnen (ANU), Dr Fiona Hukula (National Research Institute, PNG) (Also Dr Ibolya Losoncz (ANU) and Phyllis Philip, Brigitte and Thierry Bouhours)



Serena Sasingian, Department of Justice and Attorney General (PNG)



Isi Oru, Family Sexual Violence Action Committee (PNG)

The main research questions

1. Who is being accused of sorcery, where, why, how often, by whom, and how does this change over time? (and why?)
2. Why do accusations lead to violence at times and not at others?
3. What regulatory levers exist to overcome sorcery accusation related violence, and what is the context or conditions necessary for them to work effectively?
4. How is the PNG Sorcery National Action Plan (“SNAP”) working as a coalition for change network? What are its impacts, failures and challenges?

Mixed methods methodology

Quantitative

- **National scope** (1998 – 2016)
 - Newspaper analysis (mostly Post Courier and the National)
 - Reported National Court judgments
 - Census data
 - Available state data sets (prosecutions, village courts etc)
- **Provincial/District/Ward** (2016 ->)
 - Case study forms (violence and no violence)
 - Starting with Bougainville and Enga

Qualitative

- **National scope** (2016 ->)
 - SNAP Committee planning and national activities
- **Provincial/district/ward** (2016 ->)
 - Semi-structured interviews with broader range of stakeholders
 - Participant observation of training, workshops etc
 - Enga and Simbu done to date
 - Movie competition



Research Question 1

Mutilated limbs of a woman accused of sorcery,
photo by Vlad Sokhin 2013

**Who Is Being Accused Of Sorcery, Where,
Why, How Often, By Whom, And How Does
This Change Over Time? (And Why?)**

Current state of data

- Rich anthropological literature, but very locally oriented, mostly descriptive, not a policy focus (cf Melanesian Institute study 2005; Oxfam study in Gumine 2010; Constitutional Law Reform Commission 2013, Institute of Medical Research 2004)
- Common narratives:
 - Victims are: old, more women than men, weak and unprotected members of community
 - Perpetrators are: “drug bodies”, groups of young men
 - Trends: getting worse, changing as a result of outside influence, mobile beliefs
 - Impunity common

Current state of data cont . . .

- Hard data missing as often not recorded in hospitals, courts, police stations for a variety of reasons
- But some figures re-circulated continuously (eg):
 - “In Simbu Province alone, it is estimated that 150 cases of violence and killings occur each year as a result of witchcraft accusations, with impunity as the norm” (Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women)
 - 6 times more women than men accused (cited by Amnesty International and subsequent UN reports)

Dr Br Andrew told Lady Kidu about horrific injuries and deaths that they have had to deal with as a ‘result of sorcery accusations. The doctors said people are more than likely to be female rather than male in the ratio of 6:1. “Funds sought for sorcery research” The National 2003, 19 June

What have we found to date about the numbers of victims/ survivors?

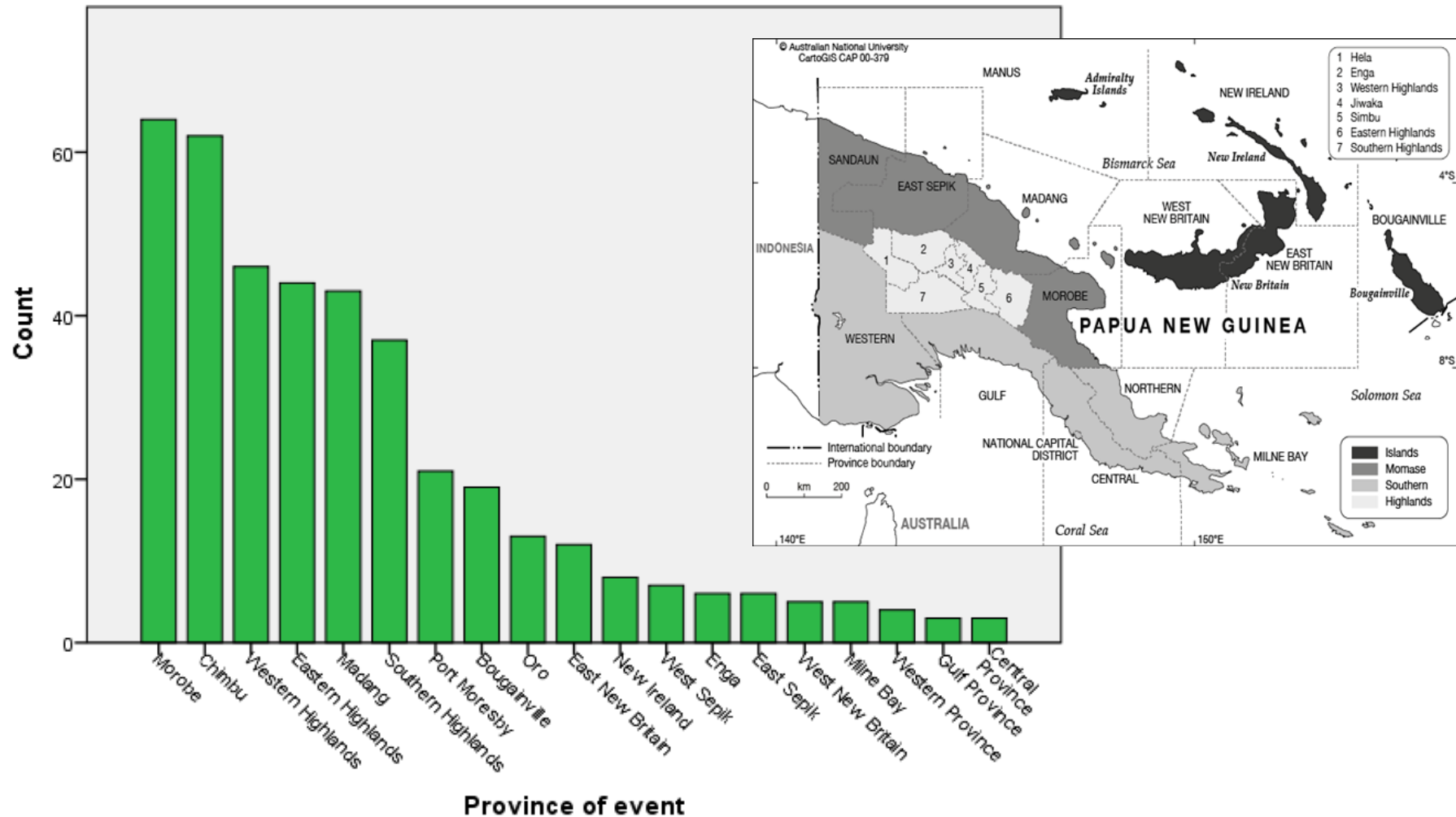
Newspaper analysis (The Post Courier and the National) (1998 – 2016):

- 410 cases of sorcery accusation related violence reported in the period
- 598 persons were killed (**avg. 33 per year**), and 324 were wounded
- In 26 cases an additional 296 were injured as “secondary victims”
- Additional 148 victims suffered no physical harm (just arson etc) or were rescued before harm
- Total: 1,366 people were victims of sorcery-related violence whether directly or indirectly (**avg. 76 cases per year**)
- Population 8 million
- Minimum figures: certainly not every case is reported to the media



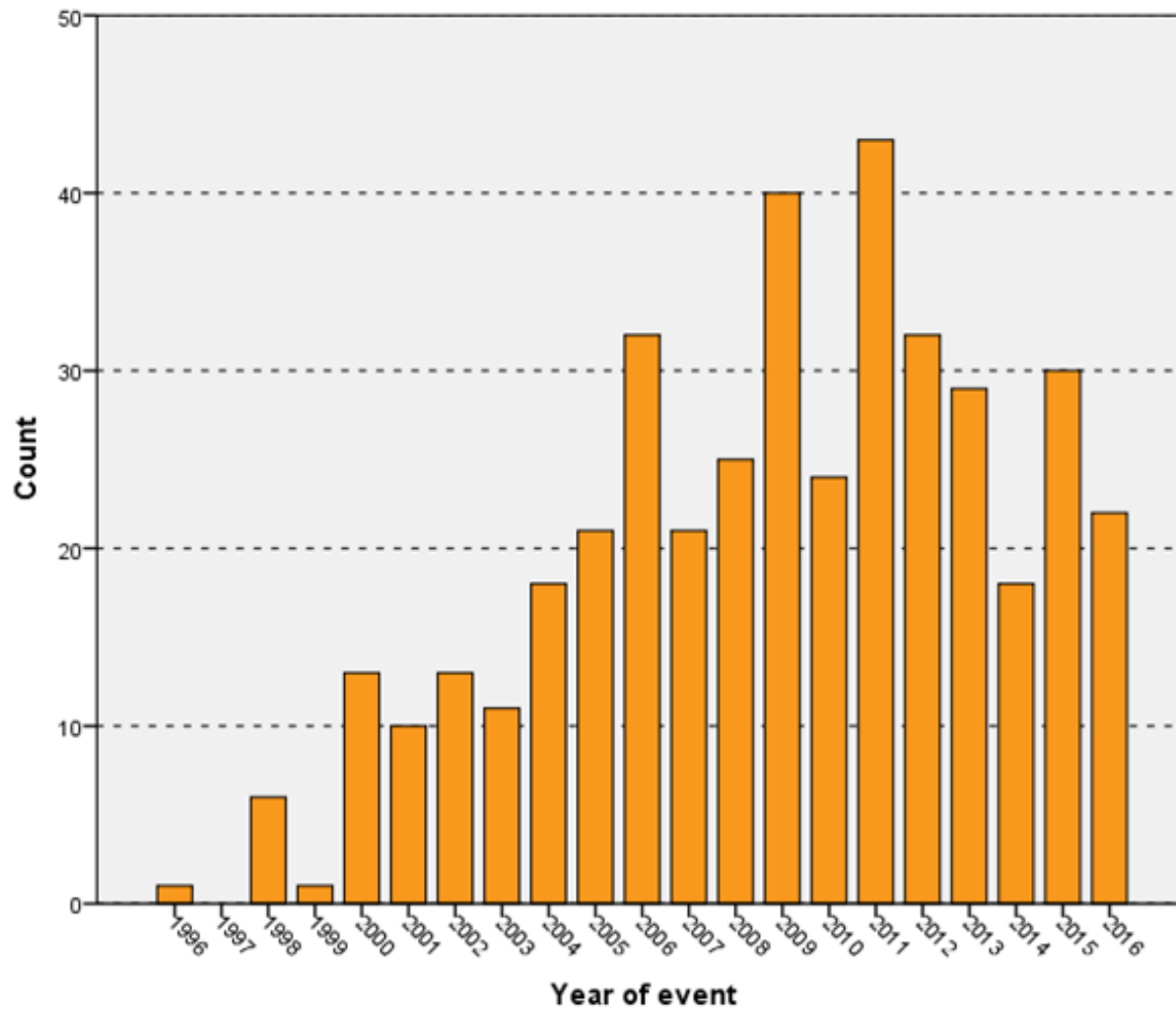
Margaret, survivor of sorcery related violence speaks in Enga workshop

Where? (Total number of cases)





When?



Characteristics of victims/survivors: gender

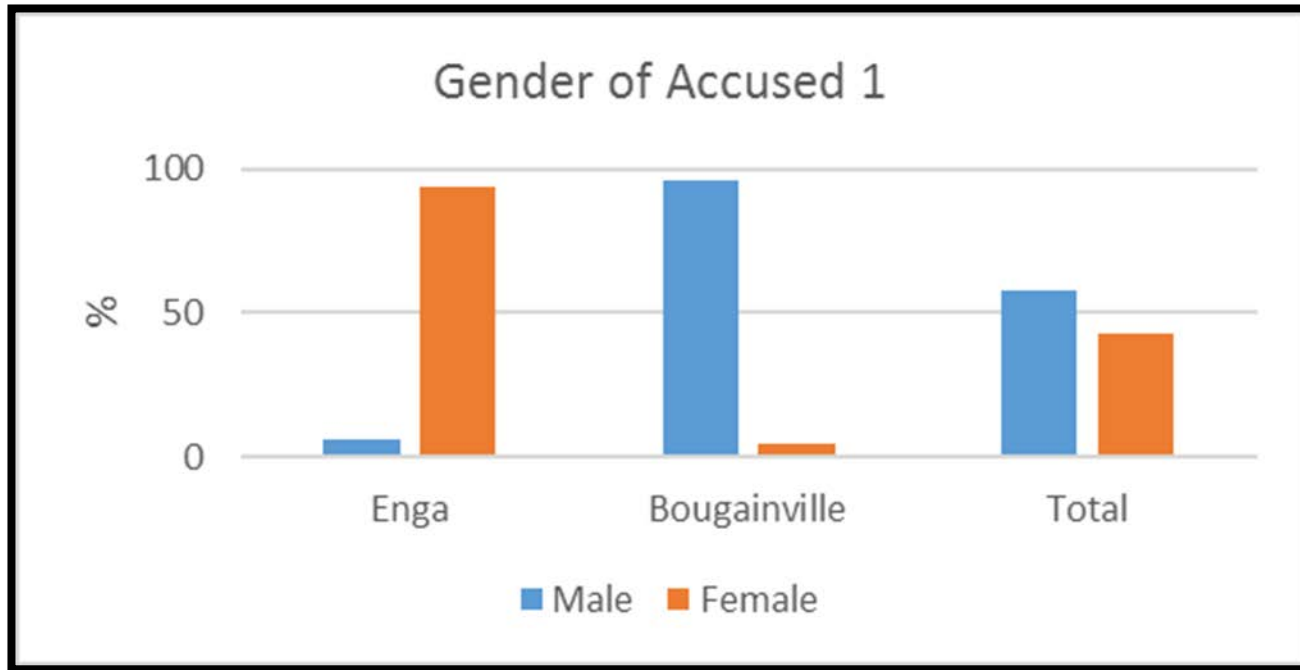
Red: gendered
division towards
women as
victims (2/3 or
more)

Yellow:
gendered
division towards
men as victims
(2/3 or more)

Green: roughly
equal gender
split (within 20%
difference)

Province	N female victims	N male victims	% female victims	% male victims
Eastern Highlands	87	118	42.4	57.6
Chimbu	106	75	58.6	41.4
Morobe	43	72	37.4	62.6
Western Highlands	60	45	57.1	42.9
Southern Highlands	39	57	40.6	59.4
Madang	15	69	17.9	82.1
Port Moresby	21	16	56.8	43.2
Bougainville	5	28	15.2	84.8
East New Britain	0	20	0.0	100.0
West Sepik	2	13	13.3	86.7
East Sepik	8	4	66.7	33.3
New Ireland	5	7	41.7	58.3
Oro	0	12	0.0	100.0
Milne Bay	8	3	72.7	27.3
Enga	7	1	87.5	12.5
Western Province	0	4	0.0	100.0
Central province	0	3	0.0	100.0
Gulf province	0	3	0.0	100.0
West New Britain	1	2	33.3	66.7
Total	407	552	42.4	57.6

Gender: other sources (case study form)



Other characteristics of victims: socio-economic status

Economic Status of Accused 1 (reported in %) (n=40)			
	Enga	Bougainville	Total
Same as others in the community	56.3	82.6	71.8
One of the poorest	37.5	13.0	23.1
One of the wealthiest	6.3	4.3	5.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

“Before it was the vulnerable ones, those who could not defend themselves, but the trend is changing now. . . Also targeting those who have a lot of money, who have the power to make decisions. So in a way it is just like paying back. So like anyone can be affected, anyone could be accused. Now they are also accusing the educated people, the leaders. . . You see teachers being killed, also some senior public servants, men and women.” (Monica Paulus, activist, 2017)

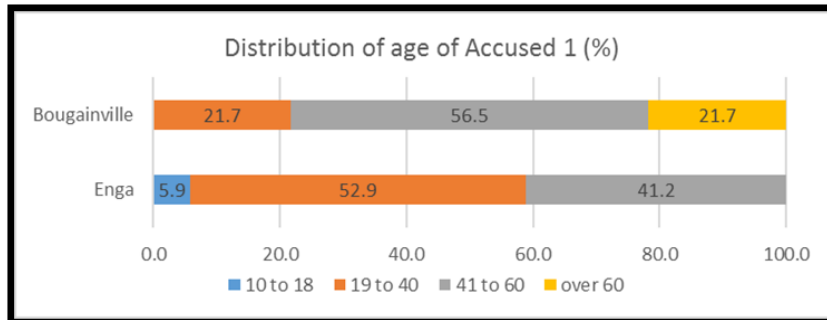


Survivor of sorcery accusation and torture, escaped using her own quick wits – and saved others as well.

Age of victims

Case study forms

	Enga	Bougainville	Total
10 to 18	5.9	0.0	2.5
19 to 40	52.9	21.7	35.0
41 to 60	41.2	56.5	50.0
over 60	0.0	21.7	12.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0



Newspaper analysis

- N (>60 y/o) = 111 (31.6%)
- N (41-60 y/o) = 93 (26.5%)
- N (19-40 y/o) = 114 (32.5%)
- N (10-18 y/o) = 27 (7.7%)
- N (<10) = 6 (1.7%)

Characteristics of perpetrators of violence: mob violence

Number of perpetrators (newspaper)

Between 1 and 5 perpetrators = 143 cases
Between 6 and 20 perpetrators = 180 cases
Between 21 and 50 perpetrators = 47 cases
More than 50 perpetrators = 40 cases

Number of perpetrators
(case study % of answers
given)

	Enga	Bougainville	Total
1 to 5	12.5	28.6	20.0
21-50	37.5	28.6	33.3
More than 50	50.0	42.9	46.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Relationship between main
accused and main leaders of
violence

	Enga	Bougainville	Total
Blood related family	50.0	42.9	46.7
Family through marriage	12.5	14.3	13.3
Same tribe	25.0	14.3	20.0
No special relationship	12.5	28.6	20.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Witchcraft allegations are
“the dark side of kinship”
Geschiere (1997, p.11)

Context of accusation 1: historical “bad blood”

Pre-existing conflict/tension (reported in %) (n=40)			
	Enga	Bougainville	Total
No	11.8	47.8	32.5
Yes	52.9	47.8	50.0
Don't know	35.3	4.3	17.5
Total	100.0	0.0	100.0

Goes to question of whether person accused because of catalytic misfortune; or misfortune used as an opportunity to accuse for some reason (pay back, jealousy etc or is it real fear?)

Hypothesis of study: often both in the one case; important for determining regulatory response and understanding why

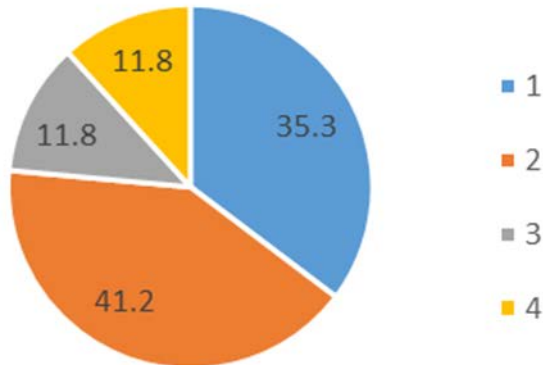
Context of accusation 2: immediate catalytic misfortune

There was an incident that sparked the accusation in 95% and 91% of cases in Enga and Bougainville

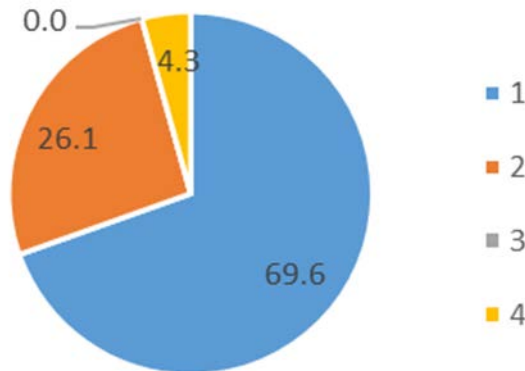
Type of incident sparking accusation (reported in %) (n=40)			
	Enga	Bougainville	Total
Death	50.0	76.2	64.9
Sickness	18.8	19.0	18.9
Economic misfortune	12.5	4.8	8.1
Other	18.8	0.0	8.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Context of accusation: chains of accusation AKA “witch panics”

No of people were accused of being a sorcerer (reported in %) - Enga



No of people were accused of being a sorcerer (reported in %) - Bougainville



Attempts to extract a
“confession”

	Enga	Bougainville	Total
Yes	87.5	85.7	86.7
No	12.5	14.3	13.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Preliminary findings about question 1

- Average of 33 people killed due to SARV per year, and 67 per year killed or harmed
- Big disparities in rates of violence across PNG, and variations over time
- In many places strong gendered divisions in victims; marginally more men overall than women in newspaper analysis
- More “middle aged” than old victims
- Victims mostly economically average, sometimes the poorest, rarely the wealthiest
- Frequently mobs of perpetrators
- But close relationships between main accusers and victims; often existing bad blood and catalysed by death or sickness



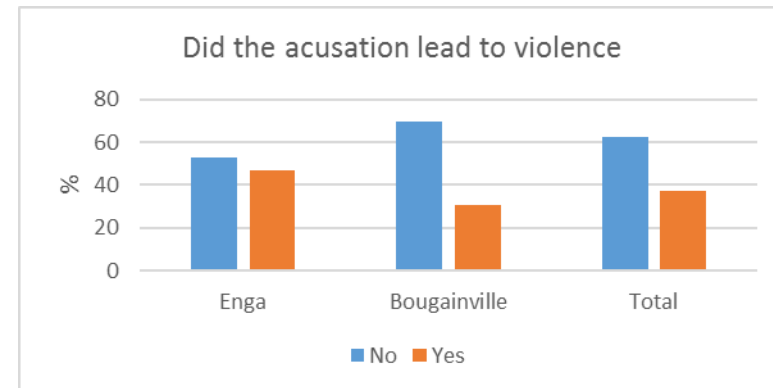
Question 2

Why Do Accusations Lead To Violence At Times And Not At Others?

How often do accusations lead to violence?

- In many provinces it is reported that although there are many accusations, they often don't lead to violence because counter-sorcery is done on spiritual level, or there are accepted customary ways
- In other places there are other types of interventions
- Case study data on when accusation leads to violence
- Big variation between provinces in preliminary findings

	Enga		Bougainville		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
No	9	52.9	16	69.6	25	62.5
Yes	8	47.1	7	30.4	15	37.5
Total	17	100.0	23	100.0	40	100.0



Interventions before violence erupts

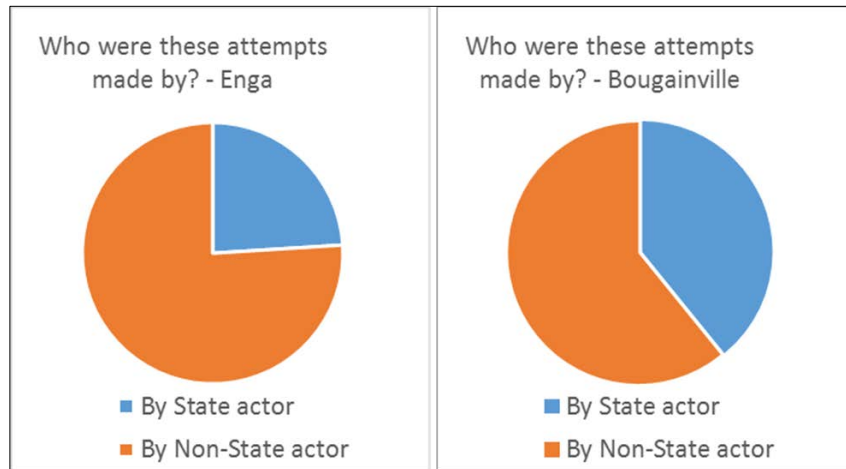
Attempts to deal with accusation
in non-violent ways

	Enga	Bougainville	Total
No	23.5	13.0	17.5
Yes	64.7	87.0	77.5
Don't know	11.8	0.0	5.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Examples of interventions from fieldwork:

- Anti-sorcery taskforce (Enga police)
- Village court strategies
- Catholic church 5 point plan
- Human rights defenders network

Who were attempts made by?



What strategies were used?

	Enga	Bougainville	Total
No proof of sorcery	7	12	19
Sorcery doesn't exist	6	4	10
Deal with existing conflict	5	5	10
Payment of compensation	5	6	11
Promise not to do it again	10	2	12
Violence against the law	7	1	8
Impact on relationships	6	0	6
Exorcism/ rel or cult ceremony	1	1	2
Other	1	2	3
Total	48	33	81

Preliminary findings about question 2

- Even in Enga which has a history of tribal fights and violence, many sorcery accusations are resolved before they get to violence
- Important place to focus resources, once violence erupts may be too late to save lives/repair relationships
- Non-state interventions really critical
- Need to document better what works and when



Question 3

What Regulatory Levers Exist To Overcome Sorcery Accusation Related Violence, And What Is The Context Or Conditions Necessary For Them To Work Effectively?

Range of different perspectives about what should be done to address the problem



- Strong push to end impunity; prosecute perpetrators; increase sentences [criminal justice response]
- Arguments that sorcery is just a symptom, focus on underlying causes
- Cultural beliefs are a key problem and need education to overcome these beliefs
- SNAP: cut link between accusation and violence, multi-sectoral response (justice, health, education etc), focusing on networks and partnerships between local initiatives and the State

Preliminary findings about police response to date

- Overall police response patchy, but higher than anecdotal narrative
- Highly dependent upon commitment of local police leaders (qual)
- The police came for 4 cases in case studies (1 Enga and 3 Bougainville)

Response	N	%
Police intervene	54	13.2
Police at least investigate	207	50.5
Post-mortem	48	11.7
Police arrest one or more suspects	101	24.6
Police charge one or more suspects	76	18.5
Trial	35	8.5
Convicted	28	6.8
Sentenced	27	6.6
No response due to lack of evidence	7	1.7
Police aware but did nothing	56	13.7

Results of newspaper analysis

Preliminary findings about prosecution

- Only 45 cases reported as getting to trial 1998 – 2017 cf 410 cases in media analysis (so roughly 10% of cases of often really serious violence reported in newspaper)
- Gender gap in victims (40 men:6 women): 13% women when newspaper analysis suggest approx. 50% are women
- Many cases judges found real belief in sorcery (cf using it as a pretext);
- Judges giving increased sentences, use an “evolutionary paradigm” about sorcery beliefs
- Judges continually stress importance of deterrent sentencing and increase sentences (25+ years), contradicted by criminological consensus
- Recognition that prosecution can endanger lives

“This end result also has its own sour grapes when it comes to Deslyn Atiksep. For all intents and purposes, when giving her evidence in this trial, she may have been thinking that justice will finally be done to her for all the suffering she went through in the hands of her torturers. But little did she know or even realise that this court case was not for or about her, and it was not going to redeem or vindicate her, she was only called to appear as a witness.” (State v Dippon 2014)

Preliminary findings about prosecution continued

- Many cases where group attacks but only one or two individuals prosecuted: arbitrary
- Long time gaps between getting to court (average 2-3 years): delayed justice limits effectiveness as deterrent

“In this case the prisoners are the only persons, out of about forty (40) people that took part in the brutal killings of the three (3) Wandap brothers, who have been arrested and charged for this heinous crime. It is said that the rest of the offenders are known to Police and are moving freely in the community but no attempts have been made to bring them before the Courts to be dealt with according to law. If this is the best the Police Force of this country can do, then it is a very disturbing and sad state of affairs.

State v Mathias (2007)

What actually does (seem to) work?

- Credible threats of state action
 - Eg/ holding a statement of complaint, preventative orders
- Involving individuals and communities in law making and law enforcement
 - Eg by-laws, transforming perpetrators
- Coalitions and partnerships of motivated citizens, police, religious leaders, community leaders
 - Eg Simbu rapid response team
 - Eg catholic papas group (Enga)
- Creative officials
 - Eg Deputy Police Commissioner in Enga
- Multiple different advocacy strategies being used at once
- Historical literature: beliefs don't disappear but violence response can



Above: New leaders of SNAP provincial committee in Enga;
Left: survivor and her rescuer and leader of local Catholic papa's group



Conclusions

- Study at preliminary stages but methodology seems to be working: important for PNG and internationally
- Findings so far challenge some of the narratives about sorcery in PNG and provide an evidence base for others (esp numbers and gender of victims)
- The really gendered part of this problem is in the operation of the criminal justice system which seems to value male victims over female
- Illustrate importance of paying attention at provincial level (actually will go down to ward level); natural experiments
- Calls into question value of punitive model of justice both in this context and maybe even more broadly;
- Creative solutions are being developed at local level, need to be supported by state authorities; some may be able to be scaled, others need to happen almost at an individual level



Broader theoretical contributions of the study

- Why do people obey the law/regulation? Particularly in a situation of normative pluralism? What is the relationship between law and morality?
- How to respond to and manage fear without violence, exclusion and scapegoating?
- How to collect data on hidden crimes like sorcery?
- How are Human Rights used by those “on the ground” and how are they enforced and resisted?
- What does SARV and the response to it say about state formation in PNG?
- What can we learn from SNAP about the challenges, possibilities and limitations of networks of state and non-state actors working together to address particular societal issues?

“Perhaps no other form of crime in history has been a better index to social disruption and change, for outbreaks of witchcraft mania have generally taken place in societies which are experiencing a shift of religious focus—societies, we would say, confronting a relocation of boundaries”

Erikson, *Wayward Puritans* 1966

Prolonged witch hunting is as good a barometer as any for measuring weakness in a state. (Soman 1989, p. 17)