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Entering Unknown Territory:
Exploring the Impact on Indigenous
Field Researchers when Conducting Gender Based
Violence and Child Abuse Research in the
Solomon Islands

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy in Social Work

Massey University
New Zealand

Sharyn Titchener
2010
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Noel and Val Titchener, who provided me with the most wonderful childhood and raised me with a great sense of self-belief.

“You’re braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think”

(Christopher Robin to Pooh, from Pooh’s Grand Adventure by A.A Milne)

Approval for this research was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee
MUHECN 08/062
ABSTRACT

This study explores the reflective experiences of indigenous field researchers who were involved in conducting the first population representative research study on gender-based violence and child abuse in the Solomon Islands. The purpose of this thesis study was to gain an understanding and insight into the field researchers’ perceptions of the positive and negative impacts such involvement may have had on their lives. The term ‘impact’ was applied holistically and focus was given to whether negative impacts were mitigated by the positive benefits that may be present from being involved in such research.

The research study design was exploratory and qualitative in nature, underpinned by a phenomenological approach. The participants were 29 Solomon Island women who had been employed in the role of ‘field researcher’ for the Solomon Island Family Health and Safety Study. Data collection methods included the use of both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Eleven interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach. Three focus group discussions were facilitated, with the assistance of an open-ended questionnaire guideline.

The findings identified a number of themes that emerged from the data collected. The themes highlighted primary impacts that included an emotional, physical and life-changing dimension. There was a pattern where different themes were more prevalent, dependent on what phase of the ‘research journey’ that the researchers’ were reflecting on. A significant finding was that although field researchers’ primarily reported negative impacts, they all unanimously stated that they would be interested in being involved in conducting research on violence against women and children in the future. These findings not only suggest that the positive benefits from being involved in such research mitigated the many negative impacts as reported by the field researchers, but also suggest that through being involved with such research, they developed an increased commitment within their own communities to assist in reducing violence against women and children.

Conducting research on violence against women and children in a developing post-conflict country brings with it many physical and emotional challenges for indigenous field researchers. It is essential that field researchers are provided with considerable support during all phases of the research study. The application of ethical and safety standards needs to reflect the unique characteristics of the country where the study is being conducted, taking into account the situational and ambient dangers that field researchers may be confronted with during their time in the field.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I doubt I would have survived the early days of planning this thesis without the knowledge and support from Lesley Hoatson, who just happened to be living in the Solomon Islands at the right time! Lesley, your knowledge and understanding about social research, and your willingness to be a ‘sounding board’ in the absence of being able to have face-to-face supervision with Mike, provided me with the confidence to complete this study. Thank you so much.

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Last but definitely not least, my deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks to the Solomon Island women who so willingly offered to be participants for this study, and without whose involvement, this research would not have been possible. The stories you shared, left me in awe of your courage, tenacity and commitment in working toward improving the lives of the women and children of the Solomon Islands. You are ordinary women who truly did something extraordinary! For those field researchers who I never got to interview due to circumstances such as you returning home to your villages, I have no doubt your stories would have been as amazing and inspiring as were the ones that I heard from your colleagues, therefore the findings from this thesis study are also yours to share. Tanggio tumas!
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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>The Australian Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>GBVCA</td>
<td>Gender Based Violence and Child Abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender based violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPV</td>
<td>Intimate partner violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWYC</td>
<td>Ministry of Women, Youth and Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATH</td>
<td>World Health Organisation and Program for Appropriate Technology in Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPC</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Pacific Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAMSI</td>
<td>Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIFHSS</td>
<td>Solomon Island Family Health and Safety Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAW</td>
<td>Violence against women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
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