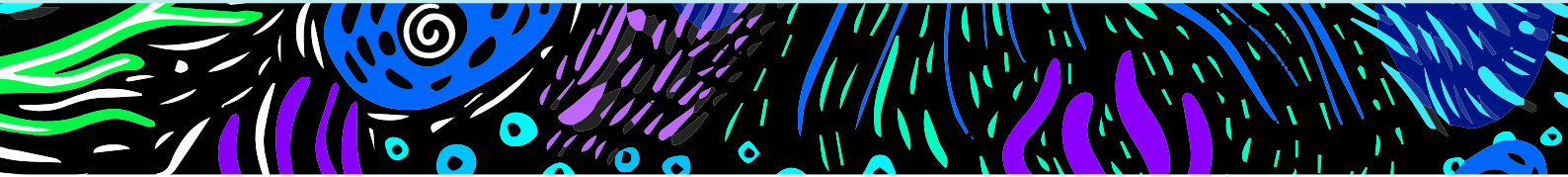




CEVAW

ARC Centre of Excellence for the
Elimination of Violence Against Women

Frontline Practice Responses to Violence Against Women in Samoa: Preliminary Qualitative Findings (Phase 1)



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1. Executive Summary

This report presents preliminary findings from the Samoa component of the Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW) project on frontline responses to violence against women. It draws on 34 qualitative interviews with survivors, religious leaders, academics and frontline service providers to examine how violence is understood, how survivors seek help, and how responses are shaped by fa'a-Samoa, Christianity, informal networks and state institutions.

1.1 Study background and aims

The study is grounded in the recognition that violence against women remains a serious concern in Samoa, with high levels of underreporting and limited specialist service capacity. The project focuses on frontline practice because non-specialist organisations and informal networks—especially churches, families and village structures—play central roles in how survivors first encounter support or accountability. It investigates how traditional Samoan knowledge, religious and spiritual life, and SOGIE/LGBTQ+ experiences shape responses to violence, and where gaps and barriers exist in current support systems.

1.2 Methods and data

The report is based on a cohort-based qualitative design. To date, 33 interviews have been completed: 8 with academics, 12 with survivors, 8 with religious leaders, and 5 with frontline service providers. Survivor interviews were conducted in hired venues to protect confidentiality and safety. Data collection has been affected by institutional delays (particularly with the Ministry of Health) and national political developments, including a snap election that redirected key institutional contacts and disrupted continuity of access. Analysis has proceeded iteratively using a developing codebook and framework matrix. The findings presented here are preliminary, as not all interviews have yet been fully transcribed or incorporated into the analysis.

1.3 Preliminary findings

The cross-cohort analysis reveals five main findings:

1.3.1 Violence is interpreted through moral and relational frameworks, not only legal or rights-based categories.

Across cohorts, participants described violence using the language of family obligation, respect (fa'aaloalo), shame, discipline, obedience and religious duty. Survivors and frontline actors alike framed disclosures and decisions in relation to these values rather than primarily through formal legal categories or human rights discourse. This means that responses are often shaped by concerns about family reputation, church standing and community judgement as much as by considerations of safety or justice.

1.3.2. Survivors navigate hybrid governance systems, not linear service pathways.

The data show that survivors do not move through a single, formal service system. Instead, they encounter overlapping and often inconsistent responses from family members, church leaders, village authorities, service organisations and state agencies. In some cases, survivors receive practical help and compassionate support; in others, they face pressure to reconcile, disbelief, delay, or outright dismissal. The experience of response is therefore highly variable and depends on which actors become involved, in what order, and with what institutional backing.

1.3.3. Churches and non-specialist actors occupy central but under-supported frontline roles.

Religious leaders, faith-based organisations and other non-specialist actors frequently function as first points of disclosure or the only available source of help, especially in rural or socially dense settings. However,

most operate without formal training in trauma-informed care, risk assessment or survivor-centred practice. They rely instead on pastoral intuition, scriptural interpretation or customary authority. While some participants described church or village responses as helpful and protective, others reported being told to pray, forgive, submit or stay silent—responses that prioritised family unity, congregational harmony or male authority over survivor safety.

1.3.4. Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) is central to survivors' experiences but marginal in institutional responses.

Fa'afafine, fa'atama and other sexuality- and gender-diverse participants described violence, exclusion and stigma that were deeply entangled with religious condemnation, family shame and community gossip. Yet institutional responses—whether from churches, villages or formal services—tended to render SOGIESC invisible, treat it as a sensitive issue requiring discretion, or frame it as individual sin rather than a structural dimension of inequality and harm. This asymmetry means that SOGIESC-diverse survivors often encounter silence, selective inclusion or judgment even when they do seek help.

1.3.5. A significant gap exists between policy aspiration and frontline implementation.

Samoa has developed formal policies, including the Family Safety Act, police family violence procedures, and inter-agency guidelines. Yet participants across cohorts reported that these policies are inconsistently understood, unevenly enforced and poorly coordinated in practice. Survivors described being bounced between institutions, given contradictory advice, or finding that expected protections did not materialise. Service providers and institutional actors noted fragmentation, lack of clear referral pathways, and the absence of ongoing training or accountability mechanisms.

1.4 Implications

These findings have several implications for policy, programming and future research. First, because fa'a-Samoa and Christianity are widely understood as inseparable, strategies to prevent and respond to violence must work with, not around, culture and faith, while also confronting their harmful uses. This requires deliberate theological and cultural work to reclaim core Samoan-Christian values—alofa, fa'aaloalo, tautua, amiotonu and soalaupule—as normative grounds for rejecting all forms of violence.

Second, the cross-cohort data indicate that system-level change will depend on strengthening hybrid governance and closing implementation gaps. This includes embedding clear domestic violence policies and referral protocols within churches and village structures; investing in training for clergy, matai and non-specialist organisations; and systematically evaluating community and faith-based initiatives to build an evidence base on "what works" in Samoan settings.

Third, the asymmetry between the centrality of SOGIESC in survivors' experiences and its marginal status in institutional responses points to an urgent need for SOGIESC-inclusive approaches in both church and state systems. Future phases should focus on co-developing practical tools that help churches, village councils and service providers move from aspirational visions of safety and inclusion to consistent, accountable practice for all survivors, including fa'afafine and fa'atama.

1.5 Next steps

The project will complete remaining data collection for Phase 1 by July, including interviews with additional survivors, frontline workers, courts, police, ER staff and the Salvation Army. Further refinement of the codebook, cross-case analysis and integration of transcribed interviews will follow. The findings will inform a full phase report, academic publications, and the co-design of practical tools and training resources with churches, villages and service providers to strengthen culturally grounded, survivor-centred and institutionally accountable responses to violence in Samoa.

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2. Background and Aims

2.1 Background

Violence against women and domestic violence remain serious concerns in Samoa, with significant social, health and economic consequences for women, children, families and communities. The ethics application frames the project as a response to the continuing scale of violence and to the need for stronger, more contextually grounded frontline responses in Samoa.

The project is grounded in the recognition that domestic and family violence in Samoa is shaped by both high prevalence and persistent underreporting. The ethics application notes the high rates of physical, emotional and intimate partner violence experienced by Samoan women, together with barriers to reporting that include stigma, shame, fear, tolerance of violence and uneven access to services. These conditions mean that many survivors do not first encounter specialist services, and some may rely primarily on informal or non-specialist pathways of support.

For this reason, frontline practice is a central focus of the study. The ethics application identifies a key problem as the limited capacity of specialist frontline services to meet the extensive needs of victim-survivors and to respond effectively to those using violence and abuse. It therefore argues that nonspecialist organisations and informal networks are critical actors in the response landscape, especially in contexts where they may be the first or only point of contact for survivors.

The study gives particular attention to faith-based organisations, drug- and alcohol-related organisations, and other informal or community-based response sites because these actors often operate close to everyday family and village life. Their significance lies not only in service provision, but in their influence over disclosure, help-seeking, referral, moral judgement and the practical management of violence.

2.2 Why religion, fa'a-Samoa and SOGIE/LGBTQ+ matter

The ethics application identifies the cultural and religious landscape of Samoa as a defining context for understanding violence and response. It notes that fa'a-Samoa profoundly shapes family dynamics and social expectations, while churches play a central role in community life and strongly influence attitudes toward violence against women and family relationships. These forces therefore cannot be treated as background context only; they are central to how violence is named, interpreted, justified, silenced or challenged.

The study focuses on religion and fa'a-Samoa because both can function as sources of care, belonging and ethical obligation, while also being mobilised in ways that reinforce hierarchy, protect reputation, or prioritise family unity over survivor safety. The ethics application explicitly recognises that these cultural and religious factors often intersect with, and sometimes complicate, efforts to address domestic violence effectively.

Traditional Samoan knowledge and practices are also central to the study's rationale. The project proposes that traditional ways of knowing should be explored in relation to their relevance to domestic violence response, especially in the context of contemporary social and cultural change. This includes attention to how cultural practices may serve as resources for care and reconciliation in some instances, while also functioning as barriers to disclosure, protection or justice in others.

Although the original ethics framing centres violence against women and women survivors, the present study also attends to SOGIE/LGBTQ+ experiences because frontline response systems are shaped by broader norms about gender, sexuality and social legitimacy. In practice, fa'afafine, fa'atama and other sexuality- and gender-diverse people may encounter specific forms of violence, exclusion, stigma or institutional invisibility within family, church and service settings. Including these experiences strengthens the study's analysis of

barriers and enablers in frontline practice and clarifies how religion, culture and institutional norms shape differential experiences of safety, recognition and response.

2.3 Study rationale

The study is designed to contribute to the evidence base while also strengthening responses to women and children experiencing domestic violence in Samoa. Its rationale is both analytical and practical: to better understand how existing response systems operate, and to generate findings that can inform policy, service development and culturally grounded practice.

A central rationale for the project is the gap between formal policy frameworks and everyday frontline realities. Although Samoa has established legislative and policy mechanisms to address domestic and family violence, including the Family Safety Act and later procedural reforms, implementation remains uneven across sectors and settings. In practice, non-specialist organisations, churches and informal networks often carry significant frontline responsibility without consistent training, referral pathways, coordination mechanisms or formal recognition within the wider response system. The study therefore examines not only whether policies or services exist, but how response is actually experienced, interpreted and enacted in everyday institutional and community life—and where the distance between policy aspiration and lived reality is widest.

A second rationale is the need to address a persistent knowledge gap concerning the role and needs of non-specialist organisations. Faith-based organisations, drug- and alcohol-related organisations, and other informal networks are identified in the ethics application as important but under-examined response actors. Yet little is known about how these frontline actors currently operate, what barriers and enablers shape their practice, or what kinds of support, training or coordination might strengthen their capacity to respond safely and effectively. By focusing on these sectors, the study seeks to make visible a substantial but largely undocumented part of the response system.

A further rationale is methodological and epistemological. The project adopts a survivor-centred approach rooted in the Samoan dialogic method of *tofa saili ma le tofa sasa'a*. This aligns the study with Pacific-centred approaches that seek to generate culturally meaningful evidence rather than relying solely on externally derived models of violence, service response and recovery. In this way, the study positions *fa'a Samoa* and Samoan ways of knowing not as background context, but as foundational to understanding both the problem and the pathways to change.

2.4 Study aims

The overall aim of the project is to contribute to the evidence base on frontline responses to violence against women in Samoa while simultaneously strengthening the response to women and children experiencing domestic violence. The ethics application states that the project will investigate the effectiveness of crisis and recovery responses, focusing particularly on non-specialist organisations and informal networks, including faith-based and drug- and alcohol-related organisations.

A second aim is to explore traditional Samoan knowledge and practices related to domestic violence and to examine the role of religious and spiritual life in addressing these challenges. This includes attention to how cultural and religious frameworks shape survivors' experiences, organisational responses and broader community understandings of violence.

A third aim is to identify gaps and needs in current support systems and to generate evidence that can improve frontline responses in culturally appropriate and trauma-informed ways. The project also aims to map the frontline workforce involved in responding to violence against women, in order to better understand its composition, capacities and support needs.

2.5 Objectives

The ethics application sets out five core objectives for the study:

1. To explore traditional Samoan knowledge and practices related to domestic violence and the increasing complexities these face in the context of contemporary social and cultural change.
2. To understand the role of religious and spiritual life in addressing domestic violence.
3. To assess the effectiveness of crisis and recovery responses for women and children, particularly those provided by non-specialist frontline organisations.
4. To identify gaps and needs in current support systems.
5. To map and analyse the violence-against-women response workforce.

These objectives continue to guide the present phase of the project. In the current analysis, they are being pursued through particular attention to frontline practice, hybrid governance, survivor pathways and the interaction between formal systems and informal social authority.

2.6 Research questions

The study is guided by the following research questions set out in the ethics application:

How do traditional Samoan knowledge and practices influence the understanding and response to domestic violence?

What role does religious and spiritual life play in the experiences of women survivors of domestic violence and in the responses of support organisations?

How effective are the current crisis and recovery responses from frontline services, particularly nonspecialist organisations, in addressing the needs of women and children experiencing domestic and family violence or other types of violence against women?

What are the gaps and needs in the existing support systems for domestic violence survivors in Samoa, and how can these be addressed?

What is the nature of the workforce responding to women living with violence, and how can it be better supported and planned for?

These questions frame the present report's analysis of how traditional knowledge, churches, informal networks and service systems respond to violence, and how barriers and enablers operate across these intersecting domains.

2.7 Scope of the present phase

The wider project includes multiple components, including qualitative interviews, focus groups with relevant organisations, and a survey designed to map the frontline workforce. The current phase is primarily focused on the qualitative investigation of frontline practice and response through interview-based analysis.

In this report, particular emphasis is placed on the relational and institutional dimensions of response: how violence is understood by different actors, how survivors navigate available systems, how churches and other non-specialist organisations are involved in crisis and recovery responses, and how cultural, religious and SOGIE/LGBTQ+ dynamics shape barriers and enablers in practice. This keeps the analysis aligned with the original ethics application while extending it in light of the evidence now emerging from the field.

3. Methods and Data to Date

3.1 Research design

This phase of the project uses a qualitative research design to explore how violence is understood, experienced and responded to across family, church, village and state settings in Samoa. Qualitative interviewing was selected because it is well suited to examining sensitive issues, lived experience, institutional practice and the meanings participants attach to violence, safety, justice and care. The study is organised around a cohort-based design, allowing comparison across participant groups occupying different social and institutional positions within Samoa's hybrid governance environment.

Data collection has centred on semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This format has provided enough consistency to support cross-cohort analysis while also allowing participants to emphasise the issues most significant in their own experience or professional role. The design has been especially useful for tracing how violence is narrated and addressed across overlapping domains of authority, including family, church, village, service organisations and broader institutional systems.

3.2 Participant cohorts

To date, the project has completed a total of 34 interviews across four principal cohorts

Table 3.2 Participant cohorts

Type of Participant	Male	Female	Faafafine	Faatama	Total
academics	1	7	-	-	8
survivors	0	3	7	3	13
participants in the religious cohort	4	4	-	-	8
frontline service providers	2	3	-	-	5
Total	7	17	7	3	34

These cohorts were selected to generate a cross-sectional view of both lived experience and institutional response. The academic cohort provides informed perspectives on gender, theology, Samoan culture, law, governance and social change. The survivor cohort anchors the study in lived realities of violence, disclosure and help-seeking. The religious cohort captures perspectives from those occupying important positions of pastoral and moral authority. The frontline service provider cohort contributes the practical experience of those responding directly to violence, crisis and referral needs.

The broader study design also includes Samoa Fa'afafine Association and wider SOGIE/SOGIESC-related participants, along with additional institutional actors, although not all of these interviews are yet fully incorporated into the present analysis. Their inclusion remains important to the overall design because fa'afafine and fa'atama perspectives are central to understanding how violence, exclusion and institutional response are shaped by SOGIESC in Samoan contexts.

3.3 Sampling and recruitment

Sampling has been purposive and network-based. Participants were identified through professional, community and organisational networks relevant to the aims of the study, including churches, academic networks, trusted contacts, support services and advocacy organisations. Purposive recruitment is

appropriate for qualitative inquiry of this kind because the study seeks depth, diversity of perspective and ethically supported access rather than statistical representativeness.

Recruitment pathways differed across cohorts. Academic participants were recruited through university and professional networks on the basis of their expertise and engagement with relevant issues. Religious leaders were approached through church and institutional connections. Frontline service providers were identified through organisations involved in counselling, advocacy, shelter, crisis response, community outreach and referral work, including service environments such as those associated with Samoa Victim Support Group. Survivor recruitment proceeded through trusted and ethically supported pathways designed to minimise risk and ensure participant safety.

Participants were drawn from a range of age groups and locations, including urban and non-urban settings. The study design also intentionally includes fa'afafine and fa'atama participants and perspectives, recognising that SOGIESC is not a peripheral issue but a central dimension of how violence, stigma and service access are experienced and negotiated in Samoa.

3.4 Interview procedures

Interviews were semi-structured and in-depth. Across cohorts, they explored understandings of violence, pathways of disclosure, experiences of help-seeking, the role of family, church and village systems, institutional responses, and the relationship between Christianity, fa'a-Samoa and SOGIESC. This flexible format allowed the interviews to move between personal narrative, case reflection and institutional analysis, depending on the participant's role and experience.

Care was required in the survivor interviews. To protect participants' privacy and safety, survivor interviews were conducted in hired venues rather than in homes or other settings where participants might be overheard, interrupted or exposed to further risk. This was an essential ethical safeguard given the sensitivity of the topics discussed and the close social environments in which many participants live. The use of hired locations reduced the risk that participation itself might generate suspicion, conflict or additional harm.

Interviews were audio-recorded where consent was provided and otherwise documented through detailed notes. This approach ensured that participants retained control over the recording process while allowing the research team to maintain a careful and accurate record of the material shared.

3.5 Data status

At the time of writing, 34 interviews have been completed. The interviews included in the current analysis represent the portion of the dataset that has already been prepared and analysed. All interview data not yet captured in this analysis are currently being transcribed.

This means that the present findings should be understood as preliminary rather than final. The dataset is already substantial enough to support meaningful cross-cohort interpretation, but the ongoing transcription process means that additional themes, refinements and points of comparison may still emerge as the remaining interviews are incorporated.

3.6 Data analysis

Analysis has proceeded iteratively alongside data collection. This approach has allowed early themes to inform subsequent interviewing, recruitment and analytic refinement, which is consistent with good qualitative practice. The principal analytic tools used to date are a developing codebook and a framework matrix. Framework analysis is especially useful in applied qualitative research because it enables systematic comparison across cases and themes through a matrix structure while retaining attention to context and complexity.

The codebook has been developed both deductively and inductively. Some codes were derived from the study's guiding questions, including violence, disclosure, institutional response, safety, reconciliation, authority, church, village, stigma and SOGIESC. Other codes emerged through close reading of the interviews, including tensions between harmony and justice, institutional silence, selective inclusion and the differing uses of Samoan-Christian values across participant groups.

The framework matrix has supported comparison across academics, survivors, religious leaders and service providers. It has been used to trace how different cohorts define violence, assign responsibility, understand help-seeking, and interpret the roles of culture, faith and institutional authority. This comparative process has been central to identifying recurring patterns as well as important divergences between institutional narratives and survivors' lived experience.

3.7 Ethics and approvals

The study has proceeded under ethics approval from the National University of Samoa, together with relevant partner and institutional processes where required. Ethical practice has included attention to informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, secure handling of interview data and sensitivity to distress or disclosure during interviews. These protections are especially important in qualitative research on violence, where participation can carry physical, emotional and social risks if not carefully managed.

Alongside formal ethics approval, the project established supporting governance and implementation structures during its early phase, including a Research Advisory Committee and comprehensive training of the research team in qualitative interviewing, trauma-informed engagement, ethical protocols and culturally appropriate fieldwork practice. These preparatory steps were essential to ensuring that data collection proceeded with methodological consistency and appropriate safeguards for participants discussing highly sensitive experiences.

Additional institutional processes have also shaped the pace and sequencing of data collection. Engagement with the Ministry of Health proved more difficult than anticipated due to changes in management and the concurrent revamping of the Ministry's ethics and research approval framework. These procedural shifts slowed access to health-sector participants and affected the sequencing of parts of the fieldwork, reflecting the practical consequences of institutional transition even where such processes are designed to strengthen research governance.

The pace of data collection was further affected by Samoa's political context during this phase. A snap election resulted in the temporary redeployment of key institutional contacts within the Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration to manage election-related legal cases, while changes in police leadership—including the removal of the Police Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners—disrupted existing relationships and referral pathways. These shifts required the research team to re-establish contact with new personnel unfamiliar with the project, contributing to delays in securing interviews with justice-sector actors and in maintaining continuity of institutional engagement. For researchers also engaged in governance and due process advocacy, these developments required careful navigation of role boundaries and competing demands on time and attention.

3.8 Current position

At this stage, the project has moved beyond initial setup and early fieldwork into a more consolidated analytic phase. The data collected to date provide a substantial and analytically rich qualitative dataset that already supports meaningful cross-cohort comparison, even though some interviews are still being transcribed and additional data remain to be integrated. The completed material establishes a strong foundation both for the preliminary findings presented in this report and for the next phase of analysis, which will include further refinement of the codebook, deeper cross-case comparison and full integration of the remaining interviews.

Earlier project milestones—ethics approval, team establishment and training, and completion of initial academic and faith-based interviews—laid the groundwork for the broader cross-cohort analysis now underway. The present report therefore builds on that earlier interim phase while substantially extending the dataset, the analytic depth and the comparative reach of the findings. In this sense, the findings presented here are preliminary in status but not in substance: they reflect careful, systematic analysis of a dataset already sufficient to identify clear patterns, important divergences and critical gaps in how violence is understood and addressed across institutional and survivor perspectives.

4. Limitations

4.1 Preliminary status of analysis

The first limitation is that the present analysis is preliminary. Although 34 interviews have been completed across key cohorts, not all interview material has yet been transcribed or incorporated into the current analytical frame. As a result, the findings presented here should be treated as provisional and subject to further refinement as the remaining transcripts are coded and compared.

4.2 Qualitative scope

A second limitation arises from the qualitative and purposive nature of the study. The research does not aim to produce statistically representative findings about the prevalence of violence or the distribution of attitudes across Samoa. Instead, it seeks depth, nuance and comparative insight across cohorts. The findings therefore illuminate patterns, tensions and institutional dynamics, but they should not be interpreted as representative of all Samoan communities, churches, services or survivor experiences.

4.3 Recruitment and access

A third limitation concerns recruitment and access. Because the project deals with highly sensitive issues, participation has depended in part on trusted networks, referrals and institutional relationships. This was necessary from an ethical and practical perspective, but it may also have shaped who was able or willing to participate. Some groups are therefore likely to remain under-represented, including individuals who are highly isolated, fearful of disclosure, distrustful of institutions, or unable to participate safely because of family, village or church pressures. We have had two situations where a participant was already at the venue but then pulled out of the interviews.

4.4 Uneven sector coverage

A fourth limitation is uneven access across institutional sectors. In particular, engagement with the Ministry of Health has been slowed by changes in management and by the revamping of internal ethics and research approval processes. This has delayed recruitment of some health-sector participants and limited the extent to which ER and other clinical perspectives could be included in this phase of the analysis. Consequently, the present dataset is stronger in some sectors than others, especially when compared with the still-developing health sector component.

4.5 Safety-related constraints

A fifth limitation relates to the practical demands of ethical protection. Survivor interviews required hired venues in order to maintain privacy and reduce risk. This was an essential safeguard, but it also introduced logistical and financial constraints that affected scheduling and the pace of interviewing. More broadly, qualitative research on violence in socially dense settings necessarily involves constraints around

confidentiality, mobility, timing and emotional burden, all of which shape what can be asked, who can safely participate and how much detail participants feel able to share.

4.6 Situated narratives

A final limitation is interpretive. The project examines violence, faith, culture and SOGIESC in a context where these are morally and politically sensitive issues. Participants speak from different institutional, theological and social positions, and their accounts may reflect not only lived experience but also institutional loyalty, self-protection, strategic framing or concern for reputation. For this reason, the interviews are treated not simply as transparent accounts of reality but as situated narratives that are themselves part of the social field being analysed. This does not diminish their value; rather, it underscores the importance of careful interpretation and cross-cohort comparison.

5. Preliminary Findings

5.1 Academic perspectives on CEVAW domains

5.1.1 Introduction to the academic analysis

This section analyses how seven Samoan academics conceptualise frontline responses to domestic violence, with a focus on traditional knowledge, religion and spirituality, and the broader research and policy landscape that shapes these responses. The analysis draws on the CEVAW ethics application and interview guide to structure a deductive framework (TK1–TK5, REL1–REL6, FR1–FR7, RES1–RES7, ETH1, ENG1, SURV1) and then layers inductive themes around silence, reputation, clerical complicity, intergenerational norms, harmful frontline responses and gaps between framework and practice. To make this structure visible, **Table 5.1** summarises what the academic cohort shows for each of the core TK, REL, FR and RES variables. Together, these academic perspectives offer a theoretically rich but also deeply grounded account of how Samoan community structures both support and constrain women's safety. This section therefore serves as a system-level lens that identifies domains, tensions and evidence gaps which subsequent sections, drawing on frontline workers and survivors, will test and refine.

The section is organised into three parts. The first examines traditional knowledge as both a resource and a barrier for addressing violence. The second analyses the ambivalent role of religion and spiritual life, highlighting the interplay of doctrine, institutional practice and shame. The third explores frontline practice and research gaps, tracing how academics position community-based responses alongside thin evidence and uneven implementation.

For ethics purposes, all academic participants have been assigned pseudonyms.

Table 5.1: Summary of TK/REL/FR/RES variables in the academic cohort

Domains	Description
TK1 (positive practices)	Traditional knowledge is described as relational and layered, with aiga, village councils, ifoga and soalaupule providing locally legitimate tools for prevention, conflict resolution and communal accountability when mobilised carefully.
TK2 (barrier practices)	The same systems can enable harm when silence, hierarchy and rigid disciplinary norms protect male authority, normalise certain forms of violence and discourage disclosure.
TK3 (influence of TK on DV)	Faasamoa is understood to shape how conduct is named and interpreted—whether as discipline, conflict or domestic violence—and thus which responses are seen as appropriate.

TK4 (traditional support systems)	Academics highlight aiga, matai, village fono, ifoga and church-linked leaders as the key traditional mechanisms through which violence is addressed.
TK5 (TK effectiveness)	TK-based responses are viewed as potentially effective only when protective values such as respect, restraint and sacred boundaries are foregrounded and not used to excuse weak accountability.
REL1–REL6 (religion variables)	The cohort depicts religion as a double-edged domain: doctrines of male headship and female submission have normalised endurance and silence, even as values of alofa, justice and protection could be mobilised to challenge violence; church leaders are pivotal actors who may offer pastoral care but also practise surface-level engagement, protect clergy perpetrators and reinforce stigma and reputation concerns.
FR1–FR7 (frontline variables)	Academics talk about frontline practice at a structural level, locating promise in community-embedded, TK-informed and faith-engaged responses, but also documenting harmful or limited patterns such as minimisation, premature reconciliation and lack of trauma-informed practice.
RES1–RES7 (research and policy variables)	The interviews underscore thin evidence on TK and nonspecialist mechanisms, the need for culturally grounded evaluation, and the importance of Pacific methodologies, training, collaboration and survivor engagement to bridge the gap between robust-looking frameworks and uneven practice.

5.1.2 Framing and methods link

Traditional knowledge was built into the CEVAW design as a core analytical domain, reflected in the interview guide and in the TK1–TK5 matrix that captures positive practices, barriers, interpretive lenses, traditional support systems and assessments of TK effectiveness. In analysing the academic cohort, I began by coding their accounts against these deductive categories and then traced inductive patterns that cut across them, including the use of silence and reputation-protection to manage violence, the role of elders and matai as both guardians and gatekeepers, the privileging of harmony over accountability, the formalisation of village authority through hybrid governance arrangements such as the Village Fono Act, and the intergenerational transmission of norms about discipline, gender and authority.

5.1.2.1 Traditional knowledge as a protective resource

Across all seven academics, traditional knowledge is described as a powerful resource for structuring family life, resolving conflicts and potentially supporting women experiencing violence. Several participants emphasise that Samoan social organisation is fundamentally relational and layered, with individuals nested within the aiga (nuclear family), the aiga potopoto (extended family) and village structures that ideally provide care, protection and oversight. Lanuola, for instance, frames Samoan knowledge systems as operating "holistically – from an extended family lens, layered community lens where the individual is nested within a network of connections," while Vaatausili underscores the aiga as "the basic social unit" in which "your sense of belonging and identity is formulated from within this unit," led by a matai whose responsibility is to maintain unity and prevent conflict or disputes.

Traditional support systems such as village fono, matai councils, ifoga/reconciliation ritual and church-linked networks are repeatedly cited as mechanisms for managing conflict and sanctioning wrongdoing. Matagofie and Tulou refer to village fono and fines against perpetrators, and Tulou emphasises the role of matai, pulenu'u and church leaders in mediating disputes and performing ifoga in serious cases. Lagimalie and Aveaveolela highlight soalaupule/consensus and other forms of dialogue that, when grounded in what Lagimalie calls "the beautiful parts of FaaSamoa... that are meant to be functional," can enable communities to act as agents of change. Several academics also identify distinctive concepts such as restraint or "enough-ness" as traditional principles that could be central to interventions, arguing that an ethic of self-control and consideration of consequences could help prevent violent behaviour.

Taken together, these accounts portray traditional knowledge as offering locally legitimate and relationally embedded tools for prevention, conflict resolution and communal accountability—tools that any effective frontline response in Samoa must take seriously.

5.1.2.2 Traditional knowledge as a barrier to safety

At the same time, the academics are clear that the same traditional systems that promise protection can also entrench harm. Across the cohort, participants describe how long-standing norms of silence, hierarchy and reputation-protection limit women's ability to disclose violence and seek help. Tofamanino notes that "Samoan knowledge systems dictate that anything matters that bring dishonor to the family such as incest, violence against women and or children in the family, usually are swept under the mat," dealt with quietly within families or only surfacing through gossip among in-laws. She comments that "people will talk around it, but not bring it into the open where something formal can be done." Vaatausili similarly observes that, because "Samoans are communal people, and violence is seen as a disruption to harmony and brings shame to the family," "there is a tendency that the family may choose to remain silent on issues regarding domestic violence to protect the family's reputation. Hence why most of the domestic violence cases go unreported." These accounts exemplify the harmony-and-reputation logic outlined in Section 5.1 violence is treated as a threat to collective honour, and silence or quiet management within aiga and village structures is used to repair the social front rather than to secure survivor-centred accountability. Similar patterns appear in Aveaveolela's and Tulou's accounts, where communities prefer to manage violence locally to preserve harmony, discouraging open disclosure and outside intervention.

Hierarchical power relations are central to this dynamic. Several academics underscore that matai and senior men hold authority not only over decisions but over how conflict is defined and handled. While this leadership can be protective, it also means that elders act as gatekeepers who may prioritise unity and honour over women's safety, treating resistance as a challenge to their authority. In this context, traditional understandings of "discipline" and obedience can normalise certain forms of physical and emotional harm; Lagimalie and Aveaveolela point out that practices outsiders would label as domestic violence may be locally interpreted as acceptable discipline, particularly of children, and that similar logics can be applied to women. Thus, even as TK is invoked as a culturally appropriate resource, the academic accounts foreground how its barrier functions—silence, deference and the protection of male authority—undermine disclosure and accountability.

5.1.2.3 Harmony, intergenerational patterns and hybrid governance

A strong emphasis on harmony runs through the academics' descriptions of Samoan social life, with violence framed as a disruption to social order that must be resolved to restore peace. Lanuola explicitly describes violence as "disruptive to social harmony and continuity," while Vaatausili notes that "violence is seen as a disruption to harmony and brings shame to the family." Tulou and Tofamanino describe village fono as oriented to restoring communal harmony through dialogue, consensus and, in serious cases, ifoga, where the goal is visible reconciliation between families. Tofamanino points out that these processes often involve pastors or village matai "to perform the ifoga, or give a formal apology to the victim and or victims family," while Tulou notes that "the priority is that the village looks peaceful again," even when "the woman may still be living with the same dangers at home." However, this harmony-first logic can also shift attention away from sustained accountability for perpetrators, especially when pressure is placed on survivors to accept apologies or compensation to avoid further disharmony.

The academics also trace how norms around discipline, gender roles and deference to authority are transmitted across generations through both family and village life. Matagofie links colonial and missionary histories to contemporary understandings of women's place, suggesting that imported Victorian gender norms and biblical interpretations have been layered onto local practices in ways that devalue women. Others, such as Aveaveolela and Tulou, emphasise that traditional values of respect, service and sacred boundaries are learned in families and communities, shaping how violence is interpreted and what

responses are deemed appropriate. This intergenerational transmission of both protective and harmful norms means that frontline interventions must confront deeply embedded ways of thinking rather than isolated behaviours.

Finally, several academics discuss the formal recognition of traditional governance within the state system as a form of hybrid governance with significant implications for DV responses. Tofamanino and Tulou highlight the Village Fono Act and the courts' recognition of ifoga as examples of how fa'asamoa is integrated into formal law, giving village councils legal authority to manage many conflicts. Lanuola and Lagimalie also point to sectoral frameworks and NGO collaborations that link TK-based local practices with national policy. While these hybrid arrangements may increase the legitimacy and reach of responses, the academic accounts also suggest that they can institutionalise the same harmony-oriented, reputation-protecting practices that constrain women's access to independent justice mechanisms.

5.1.2.4 Synthesis – TK's double edge

Overall, the academic cohort depicts traditional knowledge as a deeply ambivalent domain in the context of domestic violence. On one side, TK provides relationally grounded norms and institutions—family networks, village councils, ifoga, restraint—that can support safety and communal accountability when mobilised with care. On the other, the same systems reproduce silence, hierarchical masculinities and a preference for harmony over justice, often leaving women to endure violence in order to preserve family and village honour. Any frontline practice strategy that takes TK seriously must therefore work within this tension, amplifying protective elements while confronting entrenched patterns of secrecy and unequal power.

Although there is broad agreement on TK's double edge, the cohort is not monolithic. Some academics speak primarily in terms of transforming and mobilising the "beautiful parts" of FaaSamoa, while others are more sceptical about how far fixed beliefs and hierarchies can be reworked, especially where discipline and obedience are treated as non-negotiable. These differences matter for CEVAW because they signal that even sympathetic insiders disagree about the limits of cultural adaptation in practice.

5.1.3. Religion and spirituality

5.1.3.1 Framing

Religion and spiritual life were incorporated into the CEVAW framework as a second core analytical domain, reflected in the REL1–REL6 variables that capture how faith shapes understandings of violence, tensions between doctrine and safety, coping, the role of religious leaders, helpful supports and experiences of stigma or pressure. In analysing the academic cohort, we coded their accounts against these categories and then identified inductive patterns that cut across them, including clerical complicity, "surface-level" engagement with domestic violence, the intergenerational transmission of religiously inflected gender norms, and religiously shaped forms of silence and reputation-protection.

5.1.3.2 Religious teachings and gendered understandings of violence

The academics position religion as central to the contemporary moral landscape in which domestic violence occurs. Several argue that religious teachings have helped cultivate a belief in male headship and female submission that shapes how violence is understood and responded to. Lanuola notes that religion has "helped cultivate a belief that males are the authority figures in households and communities," and that "many Samoans continue to believe and justify this belief by referring to biblical quotes." Matagofie situates this within the history of Victorian missionary culture, arguing that Christian teachings and imported gender ideology have significantly influenced Samoan attitudes to domestic violence and women's place. She observes that "we inherited a very Victorian reading of the Bible, where women were expected to be quiet, obedient and long suffering." Lagimalie and Aveaveolela similarly observe that church teachings on gender roles, obedience and sacrifice inform community expectations of what women should endure for the sake of family and faith.

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These dynamics are understood as intergenerational. Academics describe how religiously framed norms about male leadership and female submission are repeated across generations through sermons, Sunday schools and family practices, contributing to a moral environment in which some forms of control or punishment are normalised. At the same time, they acknowledge that religious traditions also contain counter-narratives centred on love, protection and justice, which could be mobilised to challenge domestic violence if given greater prominence.

5.1.3.3 Clerical complicity and surface engagement

A major concern in the academic interviews is the role of religious leaders and institutions in responding to domestic violence. Several participants describe forms of clerical complicity, where religious actors perpetrate, excuse or protect abuse. Lanuola notes that "some pastors are perpetrators of violence," while Matagofie observes that churches often support perpetrators through reconciliation processes that do not involve meaningful accountability. Tofamanino comments that "the church does not condone domestic violence, but, there have been incidents where some faith based organizations tend to remain silent when the perpetrators is a member of the clergy," and that this amounts to the church "obstruct[ing] justice or *teu luma fale* when violence is happening among their members." Lagimalie and Aveaveolela add that churches can contribute to family stress and conflict through financial expectations and doctrinal emphases that ignore or downplay violence, with Lagimalie noting that when families commit so much of their time and resources to the church "this can cause a strain on the family planting seeds of domestic violence."

Beyond overt complicity, the academics characterise much church engagement with domestic violence as superficial. Matagofie describes these efforts as "surface only," consisting of services, prayers and occasional involvement in programmes without sustained work to change structures or hold perpetrators accountable. Lanuola and Aveaveolela argue that churches need to move beyond rhetoric by committing finances, facilities and personnel to survivor support and by taking stronger stances on accountability. Tofamanino similarly suggests that faith institutions should be at the forefront of awareness and prevention, indicating that their current contributions fall short of their potential.

5.1.3.4 Silence, shame and the limits of religious support

Silence and shame are cross-cutting themes linking religion to wider patterns of reputation-protection described in the TK section. Academics emphasise that domestic violence is often treated as a private matter that should not be brought into church forums, particularly when disclosure would damage the reputation of families or clergy. Lagimalie notes that fear of community judgement and congregational gossip discourages survivors from speaking about abuse in religious settings, emphasising that "family and domestic issues are private issues that shouldn't involve the church" and that some religious beliefs "does not help resolve the domestic conflicts but rather sweep it under the mat." ² Tofamanino highlights cases where the presence of clergy perpetrators leads to institutional silence, as exposing such behaviour threatens both individual leaders and the church itself. She explains that "if the *faifeau* is involved, there is a tendency to protect the office, even if it means sacrificing the woman." ³ In other words, religious actors participate in exactly the same governance of silence described earlier: the priority is to preserve the spiritual

¹ Matagofie, Academic Focus Group, Sept. 2025.

² Lagimalie, Academic Focus Group, Sept. 2025.

³ Tofamanino, Academic Focus Group, Sept. 2025.

and institutional face of the church, even when this means absorbing women's suffering into private counselling or symbolic reconciliation. Aveaveolela observes that families sometimes choose not to disclose abuse because they worry about shaming the congregation or harming the church's image.

Tulou extends this analysis by showing how religious leaders participate in village-level reconciliation processes, including ifoga, where the emphasis on restoring harmony can intensify pressure on survivors to forgive and to accept resolutions that leave underlying power relations intact. In such cases, the symbolic and moral authority of religious actors, combined with communal expectations of unity, can limit the extent to which churches act as safe spaces for disclosure or as advocates for justice.

5.1.3.5 Churches as potential allies

Despite these critiques, the academics do not dismiss churches as irredeemably harmful. Rather, they outline a series of changes they regard as necessary for religious institutions to become effective allies in addressing domestic violence. Lanuola argues that churches should "commit some of their finances to support schemes that help survivors and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice." Matagofie and Lagimalie call for stronger public condemnations of domestic violence and for churches to use their influence, infrastructure and safe spaces to support those affected. Vaatausili suggests that support should be framed around alofa (love), faaaloalo (respect) and tautua (service), "emphasizing that protecting survivors upholds, not undermines, family and spiritual integrity." Tofamanino proposes that theological education incorporate substantive teaching on violence, gender and power so that pastors are better equipped to respond, while Aveaveolela and Tulou emphasise the importance of integrating church leaders into multi layered governance and prevention frameworks, provided that their involvement goes beyond symbolic participation to include concrete, survivor centred actions.

5.1.3.6 Synthesis – religious ambivalence

Taken together, the academic accounts present religion and spiritual life as deeply ambivalent in relation to domestic violence. On one hand, religious doctrines and institutional practices have reinforced patriarchal authority, contributed to silence and shame, and in some cases directly protected perpetrators. On the other, churches possess significant moral authority, organisational capacity and reach, which makes them indispensable partners in any attempt to shift norms, strengthen support for survivors and hold perpetrators to account. For CEVAW, the task is not to position religion as either wholly harmful or wholly beneficial, but to attend closely to how specific interpretations and practices can be reshaped so that churches move from complicity and superficial engagement towards sustained, accountable and survivor-centred involvement in prevention and response.

5.1.4. Frontline practice and research gaps (academics)

5.1.4.1 Framing

In the academic cohort, participants speak primarily about systems and organisations rather than their own help-seeking, so the "frontline" domain is largely discussed at a structural level. The analysis here draws on the RES1–RES7 variables (research gaps, policy links, TK in frontline practice, training needs, collaboration, survivor feedback, non-specialist capacity), alongside ETH1, ENG1 and SURV1, and inductive codes that capture harmful frontline responses, community-based potential and gaps between frameworks and lived practice.

5.1.4.2 Community-based potential in frontline responses

Across the interviews, academics consistently locate the most promising frontline responses within community-embedded structures—aiga, villages, churches and local organisations—rather than in purely external services. Lanuola emphasises extended family and layered community networks as the context within which safety and support are negotiated, arguing that traditional knowledge "can shed light on the

important role of local community networks in ensuring the safety of those who are affected by violence" and asking "what networks exist [and] how can they be part of the delivery of interventions?" Matagofie and Tofamanino point to projects such as EVE and the formal recognition of village authority through the Village Fono Act as examples of interventions that "work through traditional beliefs and values of the faa Samoa," providing chiefs with legal power to address conflict in ways that can "enable communities to resolve minor conflicts and family disputes locally which can maintain harmony."

Lagimalie and Aveaveolela argue that frontline practice is most effective when it foregrounds the "beautiful parts" of fa'asamoa and is co-designed with communities, so that "Samoans are involved developing these interventions and in turn become agents of change themselves." Tulou similarly stresses the importance of empowering local leaders and councils, suggesting that "empowerment of local leadership, in a way that village matais and leaders can help strengthen local accountability structures and mobilize community support for prevention of violence in communities," is crucial for durable prevention and response. These accounts converge on the view that frontline practice in Samoa must be culturally grounded and relational, working through the very networks that structure everyday life; at the same time, academics recognise that those networks are deeply entangled with the norms and hierarchies that sustain violence, making the frontline simultaneously a site of potential and of risk.

5.1.4.3 Harmful or limited frontline responses

Alongside this emphasis on potential, the academics provide multiple examples of frontline responses that are harmful, limited or ambivalent in their effects. Many of these are the practical expressions of TK and religious dynamics discussed earlier. Vaatausili and Tofamanino describe how families and village councils may respond to domestic violence in ways that prioritise reputation and harmony, using quiet management, fines or ifoga to close cases without fully addressing women's safety or holding perpetrators accountable; as Tofamanino notes, "traditional knowledge can be used as a foundation" to restore harmony, but when "Samoan knowledge systems dictate that anything matters that bring dishonor to the family... usually [it is] swept under the mat," the risk is that local mediation "promote[s] harmony and reconciliation" while "prioritizing family unity over victim safety." Tulou similarly reflects that the council of chiefs "emphasizes dialogue, respect and consensus, aiming to restore peace rather than focus solely on punishment," and that ceremonial apologies may resolve public tension without changing underlying power relations. As with TK and religious domains, frontline responses here are structured by the harmony–reputation logic identified in Section 5.1 where councils seek visible peace and restored relations, often at the cost of sustained accountability and safety for women.

At the institutional level, academics highlight the limitations of non-specialist and faith-based organisations that engage with domestic violence only at the level of rhetoric, occasional events or spiritual practices. Matagofie characterises much church involvement as "surface only," while Lagimalie and Aveaveolela show how some churches neglect practical family support and can even worsen financial pressures that "cause a strain on the family planting seeds of domestic violence." Others note that non-specialist organisations often lack training in trauma-informed care and risk assessment; as one academic puts it, staff "may not have knowledge of trauma-informed care, risk assessment, or legal obligations, which can lead to unintentional harm," including minimising abuse, blaming survivors or pushing premature reconciliation. These patterns suggest that frontline responses are not simply under-resourced; they also reflect cultural and organisational logics—silence, deference, protection of leaders—that can deepen harm even when actors believe they are helping.

5.1.4.4 Gaps between frameworks and practice

A striking feature of the academic interviews is not simply that participants mention evidence gaps, but how often they do so in blunt, minimal terms. When asked about the effectiveness of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms or nonspecialist frontline responses for domestic violence, several academics answer "NA", "not that I know of" or refer only in general terms to programmes such as Spotlight, Samoa Victim Support

Group (SVSG) and Evidence for Violence prevention in the Extreme (EVE) Project without pointing to outcome data. This reveals a mismatch between the visibility of frameworks and the weakness of the evidence base beneath them: Samoa has a dense policy and programme landscape, but much less systematic knowledge about which village, church or hybrid interventions actually improve safety, accountability and long-term recovery.

At the same time, academics describe how research could and should feed into policy and practice. Lanuola references an "existing sectoral and nation-wide integrated framework at the national level" and the advisory role of MWSCD in working with communities, arguing that academic work should "provide evidence-based locally relevant policy recommendations" and "amplify voices [and] stories of victims and their survival strategies." Tofamanino and Tulou point to the legal recognition of village authority and collaborative projects such as EVE as evidence of an evolving hybrid system that research needs to understand more deeply. Lagimalie and Aveaveolela call for Pacific methodologies (fa'afaletui, talanoa) and practically oriented outputs—toolkits, workshops, trainings and "bite-size video reels of key research findings"—to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and frontline needs. Ethical and engagement concerns are also foregrounded: academics stress confidentiality, safety, anonymity and privacy for participants in a "small connected country," as well as the importance of consultations and relationship-building, Samoan-led research and including survivors in advisory groups for intervention design. From their perspective, CEVAW's empirical work with frontline workers and survivors is needed precisely because current frameworks move faster than the evidence base can support. These absences are therefore not a minor limitation; they mark the precise space where CEVAW's subsequent empirical phases are needed to test how TK-based, faith-linked and nonspecialist responses operate in practice.

5.1.4.5 Synthesis – academic perspectives on frontline practice and knowledge gaps

In summary, the academics view frontline practice in Samoa as both promising and precarious. They see community-embedded, TK-informed and faith-engaged responses as indispensable, yet they also show how those same structures can protect perpetrators, silence survivors and deliver only symbolic or partial support. They identify multiple programmes and hybrid governance arrangements but highlight a striking lack of rigorous evaluation of traditional and non-specialist mechanisms and call for research that is both culturally grounded and oriented towards practical tools and ethical engagement. These academic perspectives set the scene for subsequent sections that focus on frontline workers and survivors themselves, and for CEVAW's contribution to building an evidence base that can speak to both TK and formal policy.

5.1.5 Cross-cutting themes

5.1.5.1 Silence, shame and reputation management

Across the academic cohort, harmony, silence and reputation-management appear not as separate themes but as a single social logic for containing domestic violence. Violence is repeatedly framed as a disruption to family, village and church order, and this framing helps explain why disclosure is contained, redirected or deferred: families avoid public shame, village actors prioritise visible reconciliation, and religious institutions protect moral authority and office. In this sense, silence is not merely the absence of speech, but an active governance practice produced through kinship obligation, deference to elders and clergy, and the desire to keep the social front tidy. The result is that apparently protective structures—aiga, matai councils, congregations and hybrid village–state processes—can simultaneously offer care and obstruct accountability, restoring outward peace while leaving underlying power relations intact.

These dynamics are not merely attitudinal but structurally embedded. Silence is produced by the same relational networks that offer care: extended families, matai councils and congregations that provide support also function as gatekeepers, filtering what can be said and to whom. Shame operates as a regulatory force; the fear that violence "brings shame to the family" or church encourages under-reporting and discourage survivors from seeking external help, especially where disclosure would expose respected men or challenge public narratives of harmony. In practice, reputation management often displaces survivor-centred

accountability, as families and religious leaders work to preserve a "peaceful" façade rather than confronting the depth of the abuse.

5.1.5.2 Intergenerational transmission of norms and harm

The interviews also show how harmful and protective norms alike are transmitted across generations through intertwined cultural and religious practices. Academics describe TK-based understandings of discipline, obedience and authority as learned in aiga and village life, with physical punishment of children and controlling behaviour towards women framed as acceptable "discipline" rather than violence. Over time, these practices become normalised as part of what it means to uphold family order, especially where elders' decisions are not to be questioned and where matai status is linked to unquestioned authority.

Religion intensifies and reshapes these patterns. Several participants argue that missionary legacies and "Victorian" readings of scripture have layered new gender hierarchies onto Samoan norms, reinforcing male headship and female submission as spiritual duties that are taught through sermons, Sunday schools and church-based family life. In this context, expectations that women be "quiet, obedient and long suffering," combined with ideals of forgiveness and marital endurance, are passed down as virtues, making it harder for younger generations to name certain behaviours as abusive or to imagine alternative responses. At the same time, academics note that values such as alofa, faaaloalo and tautua, and Christian teachings on love and justice, also circulate intergenerationally and could be mobilised to disrupt violence, if they are intentionally foregrounded over more punitive or submissive interpretations.

5.1.5.3 Contradictions between frameworks and lived practice

Finally, the academic accounts highlight sharp contradictions between robust-looking frameworks and uneven, sometimes harmful, lived practice. On paper, Samoa has an "existing sectoral and nation-wide integrated framework" and a growing array of programmes—Spotlight, SVSG, EVE, Village Fono Act reforms—that signal strong commitments to address domestic violence and integrate TK and religious resources into responses. Yet when asked about evidence, many academics respond "NA" or "not that I know of" regarding research on the effectiveness of traditional conflict-resolution methods or non-specialist frontline responses, suggesting that policy and programming have outpaced evaluation.

The same tension appears at community level. Academics endorse community-based, culturally grounded approaches but also describe "surface only" church engagement, village processes that prioritise harmony over safety, and non-specialist organisations whose lack of training leads to minimisation of abuse or pressure for premature reconciliation. In theory, TK and religious institutions are framed as resources for prevention and accountability; in practice, they can simultaneously enable and obstruct justice, depending on how authority is exercised and whose interests are protected. This gap between frameworks and lived experience underscores the need for empirical work that tests assumptions about "what works" in TK-based and faith-linked responses, rather than treating cultural and religious mechanisms as inherently protective.

5.1.6 Closing analytic reflection

Taken together, the academic perspectives suggest that CEVAW's empirical work needs to focus on three interlocking fronts: evaluating TK mechanisms, scrutinising non-specialist and faith-based frontline actors, and mapping how integrated frameworks actually play out in women's lives. Academics see substantial potential in village councils, aiga networks and churches, but they also document the ways these structures sweep violence "under the mat," protect reputations and deliver "surface only" engagement. For CEVAW, this means designing research that can distinguish when TK- and religion-based interventions genuinely enhance safety and accountability and when they merely repackage existing hierarchies under the language of harmony and reconciliation. It also points to the importance of examining non-specialist organisations not just as "additional capacity" but as sites where untrained responses can do real harm, even when motivated by care.

These interviews also challenge and extend the project's original assumptions in important ways. They confirm the centrality of TK and religion to domestic violence responses in Samoa, but they resist any romanticisation of these domains, insisting that cultural legitimacy and moral authority are double-edged and must be analytically scrutinised rather than celebrated by default. They highlight how dense policy and programme landscapes may mask significant evidence gaps, pushing CEVAW to prioritise impact-focused research, Pacific methodologies and accessible outputs (toolkits, trainings, bite-size communication materials) that can travel back into frontline settings. Finally, their insistence on Samoan-led, ethically grounded research that centres survivor voices presses CEVAW to attend not only to what interventions do, but to how knowledge about violence is produced, by whom, and for whose benefit. The repeated "NA" and "not that I know of" responses about evaluation are, in this sense, one of the section's most important empirical findings- they show that the project must move from describing frameworks to testing what those frameworks actually do in women's lives.

5.2 Survivor perspectives on CEVAW domains

5.2.1 Introduction and analytical frame

This section presents a preliminary thematic analysis of ten survivor interviews from the CEVAW study, focusing on fa'afafine and fa'atama experiences of violence, survival and support in Samoa. The cohort currently includes Ferila Gregory Kim, Aute Su'a, Moso'oi Tautua Filiga, Moana, Suni AuSuni, Oketi Heather, Ausasala Taufua, Liliolevanu Asovale Lutu, Lagi and Teuila, spanning ages from late twenties to late forties and contexts ranging from urban employment and higher education to homelessness and village-based life. These narratives encompass assaults in public nightlife spaces, childhood and intra-family abuse, workplace violence, family rejection based on sexuality, and chronic structural exclusion.

Interviews with survivors are ongoing, and the present analysis should be read as an early mapping of patterns and tensions emerging from the first ten cases rather than a definitive account. The analysis draws on a matrix-based thematic framework that combines deductive codes (traditional knowledge, frontline systems, identity) with inductive themes developed directly from the transcripts. Following a reflexive thematic approach, the section identifies cross-cutting patterns that recur across the cohort while attending to the specificities of each case. Whereas the academic cohort section mapped CEVAW domains at a structural level, this survivor cohort uses the same lenses – traditional knowledge, frontline responses and identity – to trace how those systems are experienced in practice by fa'afafine and fa'atama survivors.

5.2.2 Traditional knowledge, family and village systems

5.2.2.1 Family as refuge and risk

Across the ten survivors, family appears simultaneously as refuge and as a primary site of harm. In several cases, nuclear family or grandparental care offers deep emotional and practical protection: Ferila describes a close, accepting family that allowed an effeminate boy to have long hair and express fa'afafine identity, while Suni portrays his aiga and village as a place of belonging so long as he performs tautua and stays connected. In Oketi's story, her grandmother becomes the decisive protective figure who brings her home from an abusive situation in American Samoa and anchors her recovery through talanoaga and everyday care. Liliolevanu similarly identifies his grandmother as his key refuge and as the elder who inducts him into village life and women's cultural spaces.

At the same time, extended aiga are repeatedly represented as dangerous and betraying. Moso'oi's maternal uncle uses his position in the family and village to inflict extreme physical violence over many years, eventually driving Moso'oi into homelessness. Aute's deepest wound is the loss of fa'asinomaga when his extended family rejects him once his long-term male relationship becomes visible, despite years of service. Oketi notes that her own parents and other relatives chose to manage sexual abuse "fa'a-aiga" to protect economic ties and kinship relations, even when this left her exposed to ongoing harm. These narratives echo

wider Pacific concerns about how extended families can be both a buffer and a vector for violence, depending on who holds authority and how they exercise it.

Grandmothers and older women appear as a distinct protective sub-theme. Where they are present, they often represent the most reliable moral anchor and advocate for survivors, especially fa'atama. For Oketi and Liliolevanu, grandmothers provide shelter, affection and a moral vocabulary of judgment ("God will deal with them") that allows survivors to condemn violence without directly confronting abusers in formal systems. In contrast, for others such as Aute and Moana, there is less emphasis on older women as protectors, and the maternal line does not always provide a counterweight to male violence or communal silence. Gender, generation and intra-family politics therefore shape whether extended family functions as a second layer of safety or a mechanism of control.

Identity and treatment are tightly intertwined with these family dynamics. Fa'afafine and fa'atama identities are sometimes accepted within the family so long as survivors remain useful, discreet and unmarried to same-sex partners, but visibility of intimate relationships can quickly convert acceptance into violence or exclusion. Aute's experience illustrates this threshold starkly: years of dutiful service and affective closeness did not protect him once his sexuality became publicly legible through a stable male partner. Suni's account suggests a different conditionality, where fa'atama identity can be accommodated as long as tautua obligations are fulfilled and overt challenges to heteronormative family order are avoided. Overall, family emerges as the central social institution in which refuge and risk are constantly negotiated and renegotiated.

5.2.2.2 Silence, shame and non-reporting

Silence, shame and non-reporting constitute a second major pattern running through the survivor cohort. Very few of the ten survivors pursue sustained legal action, even in cases of severe sexual and physical violence, and those who do engage with police report negative or non-existent follow-up. Ferila's case is the clearest example of a survivor who does report: he goes to the police after being beaten in public and hospitalised, but encounters indifference, homophobia and a lack of accountability. His experience reinforces a perception that the formal system does not consider violence against fa'afafine a serious matter, normalising institutional silence.

For other survivors, the decision not to report is framed not as passivity but as an ethical and relational calculation within fa'a-Samoa. Aute explicitly knows he could file complaints over threats and online abuse but refuses to take action against his own kin; Moso'oi repeatedly states that he cannot go to police or SVSG because "it is my family," despite life-threatening violence. Oketi's family, facing economic dependence on the abuser's household, chooses talanoaga and forgiveness rather than law, keeping rape and assault out of the police system. Liliolevanu describes leaving the family home to preserve peace and avoid direct confrontation rather than escalating conflict through legal processes. These narratives mirror broader regional observations that survivors in tight-knit kinship systems frequently hesitate to report abuse due to stigma, fear of not being believed and economic dependency on perpetrators.

Shame, particularly around sexual content, is a strong inhibitor of disclosure. Moana's account of a group assault in a nightlife context shows how shame about the sexual nature of the incident leads him to withhold critical details from police and conceal the event from family, resulting in no case being opened. Survivors anticipate moral judgment not only for being victims but also for being fa'afafine or fa'atama in sexual situations. This intersects with theological and cultural discourses that link sexuality and sin, making it difficult to separate condemnation of violence from condemnation of identity. Silence, then, is structured by cultural expectations around family loyalty and sexual respectability, and by anticipated institutional bias; it is a survival strategy in a context where "breaking the silence" can generate new forms of harm.

5.2.2.3 Gendered access to village space and future-facing lenses

Finally, the cohort illuminates how fa'afafine and fa'atama navigate gendered village spaces and think about future generations. Ferila's childhood in a village with a supportive pulenu'u shows that local leadership can

create permissive spaces for gender nonconforming children, even within conservative norms. In contrast, Aute experiences village and family structures as fundamentally excluding of fa'afafine needs, particularly when sexuality becomes visible. Suni's account of moving comfortably between men's and women's groups suggests that fa'atama can sometimes inhabit a more fluid positionality in village life, while Oketi and Liliolevanu highlight the limits of this flexibility when it comes to leadership, titles and moral authority. Liliolevanu's entry into the aualuma rather than the aumaga is especially significant, shaping both his sense of belonging and points of conflict.

Future facing concerns emerge most clearly around children. Aute reflects on how family conflict and rejection affect his adopted daughter and her loyalties, while Suni frames his grandchildren as a key motivation for moral reflection and ongoing care. Oketi centres her daughters and younger relatives in her narrative, describing how her own abuse history informs her vigilance around their safety and her willingness to confront potential violators, including within the Samoa Fa'afafine Association (SFA). Liliolevanu, although not a parent in the conventional sense, is acutely aware of generational transitions in gafa and titles and what his own contested position means for younger kin. These perspectives position survivors not only as victims but as agents actively shaping safer futures within and against existing structures.

5.2.3 Frontline systems and survival strategies

5.2.3.1 Alternative support: Samoa Fa'afafine Association (SFA), friends and street communities

In the absence of consistent, safe responses from family, church and state systems, survivors mobilise alternative support networks. The SFA is particularly significant as a queer community infrastructure and informal first responder. For Aute, SFA is both a safe space and an employer, giving him not only community but economic independence after family rejection. For Oketi, joining SFA opens a space where she can share her experiences with others who understand, even as she remains cautious about exposure of her children to any environment that might reproduce abuse. Liliolevanu and Lagi describe SFA as a key advocacy and support organisation for their community, including its emerging role in addressing drugs and HIV alongside violence.

Friendship networks and street communities also function as critical safety nets. After his assault, Ferila is sheltered by nearby friends and later pulled into a scholarship pathway that removes him physically and symbolically from the site of trauma. Moso'oi, living homeless in Apia, forms a community with other fa'afafine on the streets who share food, stories and spiritual encouragement, even as they all remain wary of formal NGOs. These networks are flexible, relational and based on mutual recognition rather than formal mandates, which makes them more responsive but also more precarious.

By contrast, some survivors, particularly Suni, locate their primary support within family and church rather than queer organisations or NGOs. This diversity of support pathways suggests that while SFA and informal communities fill important gaps, they do not replace the need for broader institutional reform. Instead, they highlight how community-driven organisations can act as bridging structures between survivors and more formal systems when trust and access are otherwise low.

5.2.3.2 Mobility, work and usefulness as survival strategies

Mobility and usefulness emerge as central survival strategies in the cohort. Several survivors emphasise leaving as a way to protect themselves: Ferila frames his JICA scholarship to Japan as a "saving grace" that allowed him to recover from trauma and escape a context of ongoing risk and stigma. Aute moves away from his family and embeds himself in urban and organisational spaces where he can live more safely as fa'afafine. Moso'oi runs away from his village and violent uncle, choosing homelessness in Apia over continued abuse. Liliolevanu leaves the village and family setting to maintain peace and continue his work without daily conflict.

Work and service (tautua) are equally important. Survivors' professional or communal roles shape both how they are treated and how they understand their own value. Ferila and Ausasala note that their status as health workers influenced the quality of care they received in hospital, underscoring how professional identity can partially counteract stigma. Suni's narrative is the clearest example of usefulness as legitimacy: his capacity to perform both "men's" and "women's" work, help at church and serve the family secures acceptance of his fa'atama identity, even if it does not eliminate structural prejudice. Oketi's story charts a shift from abused dependent to protective parent and SFA member who uses her experiences to support others and monitor risks around her daughters. Liliolevanu mobilises cultural skills and genealogical knowledge to assert his place in women's village spaces and in family title discussions, even as he faces resistance.

These patterns resonate with wider research on Samoan youth and fa'a-Samoa, where family, culture and structural factors can serve as both risk and protection depending on how obligations and expectations are negotiated. For fa'afafine and fa'atama survivors, being seen as "useful" — whether through professional expertise, cultural skills, or everyday tautua — can open spaces of relative safety and respect within otherwise hostile environments.

5.2.3.3 Law, fa'a-Samoa and mental health

The relationship between state law, fa'a-Samoa and mental health is fraught and ambivalent in these preliminary findings. Survivors recognise the importance of legal frameworks and, in some cases, strong penalties for offenders, but they also experience law as inaccessible, unreliable or misaligned with the realities of kinship. Moso'oi explicitly notes that the law is strong and penalties "good," yet he cannot bring himself to report his uncle because doing so would be "against my family." Oketi, who never reported her abuse to police, subsequently argues that rape should be dealt with by law and that ifoga and family settlements are insufficient for serious violent crime, signalling a clear normative distinction between acceptable fa'a-Samoa resolution and offences that demand state intervention.

At the same time, survivors report that traditional structures can both protect and condone violence. Ferila observes that saofaiga matai seem to tolerate violence against fa'afafine, while acknowledging the potential of village councils and female matai to support victims better. Moso'oi believes village structures like the pulenu'u and aualuma could protect him but fears being punished by the village himself if conflict continues. Liliolevanu values respectful cultural pathways for resolving disputes but recognises bias among leaders and police, especially when fa'atama and LGBTQ identities are involved. The result is a complex law–culture tension in which neither system is currently experienced as fully safe or sufficient.

Mental health consequences run through all these narratives. Survivors describe trauma, flashbacks, fear, depression, suicidality and ongoing triggers long after the original events. Ferila talks about humour as a way to mask pain and manage flashbacks; Aute references his mental-health literacy and coping skills; Suni and Oketi recount suicide attempts and enduring emotional impacts; Liliolevanu and Moso'oi speak of internalised hurt, exclusion and efforts to "keep peace" at personal cost. Formal counselling and psychological services are almost entirely absent from these accounts, reflecting regional concerns that while phone counselling and other initiatives are expanding, many at-risk people still do not receive sustained mental-health support. Survivors instead rely on faith, humour, work and community to manage psychological fallout, which can be sustaining but also leaves deep wounds unaddressed. At least five survivors explicitly reference suicide attempts, suicidality or severe ongoing trauma, yet none report sustained, formal counselling; mental-health care appears either episodic or entirely absent, reinforcing the picture of a system that leaves psychological injuries largely unaddressed.

5.2.3.4 Frontline systems – police, health, church and NGOs

The introduction to this study highlighted police, health services, churches and NGOs as key frontline systems in responding to violence. The preliminary survivor data suggest that, at present, these systems operate unevenly and often fail fa'afafine and fa'atama survivors at critical moments. Police responses range

from homophobic indifference (Ferila's experience of being treated as unimportant after a serious assault) to procedural disengagement, where cases are opened in name but not followed through, as in the case pursued by Lagi on behalf of another fa'afafine survivor. Survivors who consider reporting frequently decide against it because they anticipate these outcomes or fear that police will side with perpetrators.

Health services are more positively portrayed in some cases, especially where survivors have insider status as health workers. Ferila and the survivor described by Lagi both note that their or their friend's professional position within the Ministry of Health contributed to better treatment in hospital. However, across the cohort there is almost no evidence of systematic counselling or trauma informed care; mental health support is conspicuously absent, despite profound psychological impacts. This aligns with regional concerns that GBV counselling services in the Pacific are still developing and unevenly integrated into health systems.

Churches are present in nearly every narrative but are rarely experienced as proactive frontline responders to SOGIESC related violence. Some survivors draw strength from personal faith, while others describe pastors and pastor's wives as untrustworthy or complicit in silencing. Religious discourse around sin and sexuality fuels nonreporting and self blame in several stories. NGOs and statutory services such as SVSG appear in ambivalent ways: survivors recognise their protective mandates, but fear loss of freedom, forced legal action or institutional conditions they find unacceptable. In contrast, SFA and queer led spaces operate as de facto frontline systems for this cohort, offering immediate emotional support, advocacy and, in some cases, material assistance. These preliminary findings suggest that any effective response to SOGIESC violence must reckon with the gaps and biases in existing frontline institutions while recognising and resourcing the community-based work already being done.

5.2.4 Spatial patterns of violence

5.2.4.1 Impacts of violence in urban versus village settings (preliminary)

Across the cohort, the impacts of violence differ in texture between urban and village settings, even though the underlying drivers often overlap. Urban violence in these narratives is strongly associated with public space, nightlife economies and anonymity. Ferila's assault at Taufusi market after a night out, Moana's group attack near an urban bar, and other incidents around town illustrate how fa'afafine and fa'atama are exposed to spontaneous group violence, harassment and opportunistic sexual assault in city environments. These events produce immediate physical injury and visible trauma, but survivors also describe a lasting geographies of fear- driving past the scene of the assault, entering clubs or walking in certain areas can trigger flashbacks, panic and avoidance.

Village based violence, by contrast, is embedded in dense and long-term relational contexts. Moso'oi's years of brutal abuse at the hands of his maternal uncle take place inside the extended family household and are intertwined with village norms about obedience, respect and reputation. Oketi's sexual and physical abuse by a relative and the decision to resolve matters "fa'a aiga" rather than through police or courts are similarly rooted in a village and family world where everyone knows each other and economic ties are strong. In these contexts, the impact of violence includes not only physical harm and trauma but also exile from one's fa'asinomaga, as when Moso'oi finally runs away from Salelologa, or when others avoid returning home for fear of renewed conflict or shame.

Urban and village settings also differently shape survivors' access to support. Urban survivors may be closer to hospitals, SFA offices and NGOs, and some, like Ferila and Ausasala, can leverage professional networks within the health system. Yet they remain vulnerable to police indifference and homophobia, and their experiences can disappear into the anonymity of the city. In the village, survivors are often physically closer to pulenu'u, aualuma and church leaders, but the same leaders may be family members of abusers or more concerned with preserving harmony than protecting individuals, making disclosure risky. These preliminary findings suggest that space matters: urbanity offers both exposure to new risks and access to alternative supports, while village life intensifies the relational and reputational stakes of violence, exile and silence.

Substance use appears only in a minority of cases and does not map neatly onto fa'afafine versus fa'atama identities. One fa'atama survivor, Oketi, uses ICE and marijuana in the wake of severe intrafamily sexual and physical violence, while one fa'afafine survivor, Ausasala, uses alcohol to manage stress in an abusive workplace; Moana's social drinking is coded as situational rather than a sustained coping pattern. For most survivors, identity-based violence is managed through humour, silence, mobility, work and community rather than through substances, suggesting that while drugs and alcohol are present in some survival trajectories, they are not yet a dominant or identity-specific coping strategy in this small cohort.

5.2.5 Fa'afafine and fa'atama identities

The ten survivor narratives show that fa'afafine and fa'atama identities are not simply labels; they structure exposure to violence, forms of support and conditions of acceptance in distinct ways. For fa'afafine survivors like Ferila, Aute, Moso'oi and Moana, violence is often triggered or intensified by visible gender nonconformity and assumptions about sexual availability. Public assaults in nightlife settings, homophobic indifference from police, and long-standing family disciplinary violence against "effeminate boys" reflect a pervasive pattern identified in other research: young fa'afafine in Samoa are at heightened risk of both intra family and public violence that is rarely reported. Preliminary analysis of this cohort confirms that fa'afafine are subject to a combination of physical and epistemic violence, where their experiences are both enacted on their bodies and discounted or disbelieved within institutions.

Fa'atama survivors such as Suni, Oketi and Liliolevanu negotiate a different, though related, set of tensions. On one hand, the ability to perform both "men's" and "women's" work in family and village settings can grant fa'atama a degree of acceptance, particularly when they are seen as hard working, modest and church going. Suni's narrative epitomises this conditional acceptance: his fa'atama identity is tolerated because of his extensive tautua, but he remains aware of structural labour market stigma and the fragility of that acceptance. On the other hand, fa'atama embodiment and desire are often poorly understood and can provoke suspicion, sexualised curiosity or targeted abuse, as in Oketi's case where a female relative's sexual violence is followed by later conflicts around her relationships and parenting.

Identity also shapes how survivors relate to community organisations. SFA and broader queer networks are more explicitly central for fa'afafine and fa'atama survivors who are publicly involved in advocacy or leadership roles (Aute, Oketi, Liliolevanu, Lagi), while others remain more anchored in family and church support. Overall, the preliminary pattern is that fa'afafine in this cohort face more direct public and institutional hostility, particularly from police and some village leaders, whereas fa'atama face more ambivalent inclusion — accepted so long as they remain useful and do not challenge heteronormative expectations around children and women's safety. These findings align with emerging Pacific scholarship that critiques the tendency to homogenise "Samoa gender divergent communities" and calls for more nuanced attention to differences among fa'afafine, fa'atama and other gender diverse people.

5.2.6 Preliminary conclusions and implications

Taken together, these preliminary findings from ten survivors suggest that family, culture, law and community are deeply entangled in shaping SOGIESC-related violence and survival in Samoa. Family remains the primary site where refuge and risk are negotiated, with grandmothers and older women often anchoring safety while uncles and extended kin can perpetrate and conceal violence. Silence and non-reporting are not simply failures to use the law, but rational, if painful, strategies within a moral world that prioritises kinship bonds, economic survival and collective reputation. Alternative support systems — particularly SFA, friendship networks and street communities — emerge as crucial infrastructures of care, even as their capacity is limited and uneven.

Within this ten-person cohort, only one survivor pursued a police complaint to the point of lodging a formal report, and even that case did not result in sustained follow-up; several others explicitly describe deciding against reporting despite severe violence. Across all ten narratives, some form of alternative support is

present – a combination of family members, SFA, street communities or professional networks – with SFA named as a central support or employment base in at least five cases.

Mobility, work and usefulness provide important strategies for survival, signalling how movement and tautua can open relative safety without changing the underlying structures of inequality. Law and fa'a-Samoa, in their current forms, offer partial and sometimes conflicting responses to violence, leaving survivors with significant mental-health burdens and few formal avenues for psychological care. Gendered access to village spaces and concerns for children and future generations demonstrate that survivors are continuously working to reshape norms and protect others, not only themselves.

These patterns are preliminary and based on a small, purposive sample of survivors whose interviews were completed at the time of writing. As the cohort expands to include more fa'afafine, fa'atama and cis-women survivors, the themes mapped here will be revisited, tested and refined. Further analysis may reveal additional patterns or challenge the centrality of some themes identified at this stage. Nonetheless, this early thematic map provides a crucial foundation for subsequent sections on frontline responders and faith-based actors, and for policy discussions about how to build systems of care that take seriously the lived realities of SOGIESC survivors in Samoa

5.2.7 Comparison with existing literature on SOGIESC violence

The patterns emerging from this small cohort resonate strongly with existing work on SOGIESC-related violence in Samoa and the wider Pacific. Reports to the Universal Periodic Review and peer-led studies of fa'afafine and fa'atama document high levels of family violence, including severe punishment of gender-nonconforming children, cyber-bullying, and sexual and physical assaults that are seldom reported. The survivors in this study echo these findings: they recount childhood beatings for expressing femininity, family rejection when same-sex relationships become visible, and online and offline harassment that rarely translates into police complaints.

The broader literature on domestic and family violence in Samoa also emphasises the centrality of fa'a-Samoa in both enabling and addressing violence. National inquiries and policy documents describe how village councils, church leaders and fa'a-Samoa values can be mobilised either to excuse abuse or to promote "Samoaan solutions" such as family safety committees and zero-tolerance village bylaws. The preliminary survivor findings sit squarely in this tension: survivors recognise the potential of village structures and cultural values like alofa and va tapuia to protect, but they also report that these structures are used to silence them, protect perpetrators and prioritise communal reputation over individual safety, especially for fa'afafine and fa'atama.

At the same time, this cohort underscores aspects that are less visible in official documents, particularly the role of queer community organisations, street-based support networks and professional positionality in mediating violence. While much policy work rightly foregrounds women and children, fewer studies centre fa'afafine and fa'atama as primary subjects. These ten narratives therefore begin to fill a documented gap by providing grounded, survivor-led accounts of how SOGIESC violence intersects with law, culture and everyday survival strategies in Samoa.

Table 5.2 Survivors and key matrix codes (preliminary)

Participant (pseud.)	TK_V1 – TK as protection / safe spaces	TK_V2 – TK as barrier / condoning violence	FR_V1 – Police	FR_V3 – Other support	ID_V1 – Identity & treatment	IND_2 – Substance use & coping
Ferila	Accepting family, supportive pulenu'u, early village tolerance.	Saofaiga matai seen as condoning violence against fa'afafine.	Reported; indifferent, homophobic response; poor follow-up.	Friends and JICA scholarship as key supports; strong resilience.	Fa'afafine identity central to assault and poor institutional response.	Uses humour (not substances) as main coping strategy.
Aute	SFA community is main safe space; family not safe.	Aiga/gender norms reject him once male partner visible.	Knows he can report threats but refuses (family perpetrators).	SFA job and community are central supports.	Fa'afafine tolerated until steady male partner; relationship triggers rupture.	No strong substance-use theme.
Moso'oi	Village, pulenu'u, aualuma can protect if they act.	Uncle uses TK and honour to justify extreme violence; fear of village sala.	Trusts law in principle but will not report uncle; loyalty blocks complaint.	Street-friend community provides mutual support.	Fa'afafine explicitly targeted; uncle denies aiga "founded on fa'afafine".	No strong substance-use theme.
Oketi	Grandmother and family talanoaga as protection; TK ideals of alofa/va.	Kinship and economic dependence keep abuse "fa'a-aiga" and unreported.	Never reported; family resolved abuse internally; sceptical about weak sentences.	Grandmother, later SFA, and her role as parent are main supports.	Fa'atama identity and same-sex relationship linked to severe sexual and physical violence.	Uses ICE and marijuana to cope; marijuana allowed at home.
Ausasala	Culture both challenging and binding; values can elevate.	TK and fa'aaloalo make disclosure of sexuality/violence difficult.	Observes many DV/pregnancy police cases in work; no personal DV report.	Mother, SFA, friends and faith as supports.	Fa'afafine identity intensifies silence and workplace vulnerability.	Uses alcohol as stress relief in abusive work.
Suni	Family tautua and pulenu'u–matai cooperation seen as protective.	Less TK barrier in own family; aware of wider stigma to fa'atama.	Knows about protection orders via friends; no own case.	Family, church and aiga networks support recovery.	Fa'atama accepted when fulfilling tautua; aware of broader stigma.	No strong substance-use focus.
Liliolevanu	Partner, "second family", grandmother as protection.	Family leaders opposed to fa'atama identity yet rely on his genealogy work.	No formal police support; DV rooted inside aiga.	Partner, Elsa, grandmother and "second family" provide support.	Fa'atama identity linked to non-acceptance and DV inside aiga.	No strong substance-use focus.

Moana	Supportive home with mother; simple, routine life.	TK and family discipline punish "fia teine"; public violence tied to identity.	Goes to station after assault but withholds details; no case.	Helpful woman and bystanders support him after assault.	Fa'afafine identity drives childhood punishment and public assault risk.	Social drinking (pia, 'ava) before assault.
Lagi	Active in village work and taulelea as protective belonging.	Nu'uu punishment (fa'asala) experienced/feared; TK hierarchy can be harsh.	Follows up May's case; meets dismissive officer.	SFA as safe space and first respondent for community.	Fa'afafine identity negotiated in taulelea and women's roles.	Aware of drug use; supports SFA drug-focused sessions (no personal use theme).
Teuila	Takes over mother's women's roles; service in committees as protection.	Village sanctions and norms shape caution and self-restraint.	Relies more on nu'uu processes than own reporting to police.	Family and women's committee relationships provide everyday support.	Fa'afafine identity complicates belonging in male and female village spaces.	No strong substance-use focus.

5.3 Religious perspectives on CEVAW domains

5.3.1 Introduction and analytical frame

This section presents a preliminary thematic analysis of eight interviews with church leaders, theologians and religious workers from Catholic and Protestant contexts in Samoa. The cohort includes ordained clergy, a pastor's wife and women's leader, a religious sister, and scholar-pastors whose roles span preaching, pastoral care, theological teaching, parish leadership and ecumenical engagement. Together, these participants occupy positions that give them direct access to family life, moral discourse, community mediation and public debate, making them central actors in any serious account of violence prevention in Samoa.

The analysis draws on a matrix-based framework that combines deductive variables on religious identity, church responses, pastoral care, theology, institutional policy and ecumenical engagement with inductive themes on culture and faith as a double-edged formation, scripture and preaching, responsibility and blame, institutional fear, learning over time, and the imagined "good church/village." Whereas the academic cohort section mapped CEVAW domains at a structural level and the survivor cohort traced their lived effects, this section examines how religious actors themselves conceptualise violence, responsibility, pastoral response and institutional reform from within church settings.

5.3.2 Theology, scripture and the culture–faith double edge

5.3.2.1 Religious identity and moral authority

Across the cohort, religious identity is inseparable from pastoral and moral responsibility. The deacon, priest, ministers, sister and theologians all describe faith as a vocation of service to families, congregations and vulnerable people, and they repeatedly frame Christian life and fa'a-Samoa as mutually constitutive rather than separate domains. This matters analytically because it means church responses to violence are not peripheral or optional: they are understood by participants as part of the core work of ministry and public witness.

At the same time, moral authority is unevenly enacted. Some participants speak from explicitly critical and reformist positions, linking faith to justice, dignity and advocacy for survivors, while others frame their role more in terms of reconciliation, family unity and quiet counsel. The cohort therefore does not divide neatly into "progressive" and "conservative" camps; rather, it shows a spectrum of positions in which the same religious authority can be mobilised either to challenge violence directly or to soften, defer or privatise the response.

5.3.2.2 Violence as sin, and the limits of inherited theology

A major finding is that theological thinking is clearly moving toward naming domestic and gender-based violence as sin. Participants invoke alofa, fa'aaloalo, tautua, amiotonu, justice, human dignity and mutual service as grounds for condemning abuse, and several explicitly insist that culture, tradition and religion should never be used as an excuse for violence. In this sense, the cohort as a whole is building a recognisable "no excuse for abuse" theology, even if the language and depth of that commitment vary across denominations and roles.

Yet the matrix also shows why this theological shift remains incomplete. Headship language, submission texts, sacrificial models of endurance and pastoral emphases on reconciliation continue to shape how some leaders speak about marriage and family conflict. Even where participants reject overt victim-blaming, inherited theological habits still create ambiguity about whether women should prioritise safety, obedience, forgiveness or family unity when violence occurs.

5.3.2.3 Scripture and preaching

The cohort repeatedly identifies preaching and biblical interpretation as a decisive site of change. Some leaders describe active efforts to reinterpret difficult texts, foreground Jesus' solidarity with the vulnerable, and teach that abusive uses of authority violate both gospel ethics and Samoan Christian values. These accounts suggest that sermons and Bible studies are not secondary to intervention but one of the main places where moral permission either to disclose violence or to endure it is produced.

Even so, preaching remains uneven in practice. Some participants report that clergy still avoid public discussion of domestic violence, rely on generic teachings about peace and family life, or address abuse only indirectly through broad moral exhortation. The result is an implementation gap between theological aspiration and congregational formation: the churches may now possess the beginnings of a stronger anti-violence theology, but they have not yet embedded it consistently in ordinary preaching, teaching and pastoral culture.

5.3.3 Pastoral responses: support, silence and institutional fear

5.3.3.1 Religion as support and coping resource

Participants consistently describe faith communities as important sources of support for people living with violence. Prayer, sacraments, women's fellowships, parish visits, fasting groups, devotion to Mary, communal worship and spiritual accompaniment are all presented as practices that can sustain survivors emotionally, materially and psychologically. This is one reason churches remain indispensable in the Samoan response landscape: they are already embedded in the everyday moral and relational life of families, and they offer forms of care that many people trust and access before they approach statutory services.

The strength of this support, however, depends heavily on how it is interpreted and delivered. Faith can help survivors name their dignity, reject abuse and imagine a future beyond violence when it is framed through justice and compassion. But the same devotional and pastoral repertoire can become harmful if it asks women merely to pray more, forgive more, endure more or preserve the appearance of family peace without any corresponding plan for safety and accountability.

5.3.3.2 Church actors' responses to violence

The cohort describes a broad but shallow repertoire of church responses. These include home visits, private advice, prayer, couple counselling, pastoral mediation, women's seminars, youth workshops, ecumenical events, and in some cases referrals to SVSG, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSO) or police. Some leaders and institutions are involved in Spotlight-supported faith-based counselling or collaborative violence-prevention work, which shows that churches can participate constructively in structured intervention when resources and leadership align.

At the same time, the matrix makes clear that most church responses are still ad hoc. Leaders often rely on intuition, personality and pastoral instinct rather than on standard operating procedures, survivor-centred guidelines, trauma-informed practice or formal risk assessment. This means the quality of response is contingent: whether a survivor encounters meaningful support or harmful minimisation may depend less on denomination than on the individual minister, sister, deacon or lay worker involved.

5.3.3.3 Religion as barrier, and the signature argument on silence and reputation

Across the cohort, silence, reputation-management and deference to authority operate as a single social and theological logic rather than as separate issues. Participants acknowledge that churches often prioritise family unity, congregational respectability and institutional image, especially where abusers are male heads of household, matai, pastors or otherwise powerful men. In this setting, silence is not just the absence of

speech; it is an active method of governance through which churches preserve order, avoid scandal and keep violence in the private realm.

This signature dynamic helps explain why religion appears in the matrix as both support and barrier. The same church that offers prayer, food, accompaniment and moral language for survival may also shame women who leave, counsel endurance for the sake of vows, or protect clergy and influential families from public accountability. The result is a deeply ambivalent pastoral environment in which care and containment coexist, and in which institutional fear itself becomes a form of complicity.

5.3.3.4 Responsibility, blame and perpetrators

A notable strength of the cohort is that many participants explicitly reject simple victim-blaming. They identify misuse of power, patriarchal norms, alcohol, economic stress, trauma and distorted theology as key drivers of violence, and several insist that accountability must rest with perpetrators and with complicit institutions rather than with women's behaviour. This is an important shift because it moves the church conversation away from narratives of female disobedience or marital failure and toward structural and moral analysis.

Even here, however, the language is not fully settled. Some accounts still frame violence as a "shared marital problem" or stress men's headship in ways that leave room for ambiguity about who must change and how urgently. The cohort therefore shows movement toward more survivor-centred and justice-oriented accounts of blame, but it also shows how residual patriarchal assumptions remain embedded in ordinary pastoral speech.

5.3.4 Policy, training and the implementation gap

5.3.4.1 Institutional constraints and policy weakness

One of the clearest findings in the matrix is the weakness of institutional policy. Participants repeatedly note that dioceses, parishes, denominations and women's ministries often lack clear domestic-violence policies, binding protocols, reporting pathways, risk tools or mandatory training requirements. As a result, decision-making is frequently devolved to individual clergy or local leaders, which reinforces inconsistency and leaves survivors exposed to uneven standards of care.

These weaknesses are compounded by material and organisational constraints. Participants mention priest shortages, workload, pastoral overload, limited budgets, dependency on donor-funded programmes, fear of legal liability and denominational reluctance to invite controversy. This does not mean that churches are inactive; rather, it means their anti-violence work is too often fragile, under-resourced and vulnerable to institutional retreat.

5.3.4.2 Practical interventions and training needs

Despite the gaps, the cohort identifies a concrete reform agenda. Participants call for structured partnerships with SVSG, MWCSO and NGOs; regular preaching and Bible studies on violence; faith-based counselling with survivor-centred principles; mandatory clergy and lay training; risk assessment tools; theological education modules on DV; and clearer reporting obligations in severe cases. These recommendations matter because they are not abstract critiques from outside the church; they come from actors embedded within church systems who know both the opportunities and the limits of current practice.

What emerges, then, is not simply a call for "more church involvement" but for a different kind of involvement. The cohort is asking churches to move from pastoral improvisation to institutional competence; from goodwill to protocol; and from quiet, personality-based ministry to accountable, trained and systematised response.

5.3.4.3 Ecumenical learning and change over time

The interviews also show that change is already underway, though unevenly. Participants refer to National Inquiry processes, NCC initiatives, Pacific theological projects, Spotlight-funded programmes and inter-church workshops as catalysts that have made domestic violence more speakable within church settings. Several describe clear learning over time: issues once treated as private family matters are increasingly being named as public sin, structural injustice and pastoral responsibility.

Still, the pace and depth of change remain limited. Participants repeatedly suggest that rhetoric has moved faster than practice, and that policy, preaching, funding and institutional courage have not yet caught up with the stronger theological language now available. The implementation gap is therefore one of the section's central findings: the religious cohort does not lack moral vocabulary or reform ideas so much as the organisational conditions required to make them ordinary church practice.

5.3.5 SOGIESC: presence without policy

SOGIESC is the least developed area of church engagement in this cohort. Participants acknowledge that *fa'afafine* and *fa'atama* are present in congregations, ministries and parish life, but they describe church engagement as largely informal, personal and discretionary rather than public, policy-based or theologically developed. In other words, presence does not translate into institutional recognition.

The matrix shows a wide range of positions. Some participants call for pastoral spaces where *fa'afafine* and *fa'atama* can be heard, stress non-judgment, or argue that any serious theology of violence must confront SOGIESC stigma directly. Others remain hesitant, frame care in terms of welcoming individuals without affirming relationships, or admit uncertainty about how churches should address these issues beyond private accompaniment.

Analytically, this matters for two reasons. First, it shows that the churches' anti-violence agenda remains incomplete if it does not account for the forms of stigma, silence and harm experienced by gender-diverse congregants. Second, it suggests that SOGIESC may become a revealing test case for whether church reform remains narrowly focused on "family violence" in heteronormative terms or develops into a broader survivor-centred theology and practice of safety, dignity and justice.

5.3.6 Preliminary conclusions and implications

Taken together, these preliminary findings present churches in Samoa as both indispensable and under-performing actors in the violence-prevention system. Religious leaders possess the moral authority, social reach, interpretive influence and pastoral access to shape whether violence is named, hidden, minimised or confronted. Yet the cohort shows that church responses remain uneven, personality-driven and institutionally underdeveloped, especially where fear, reputation and patriarchal habits continue to shape pastoral judgement.

The strongest account emerging from the religious cohort is therefore not a simple contrast between "good churches" and "bad churches." It is a picture of churches caught between a growing anti-violence theology and older institutional reflexes that still prioritise reconciliation, privacy and respectability over survivor-centred accountability. That tension explains why faith appears throughout the matrix as both a source of hope and a mechanism of containment, and why the gap between aspiration and practice remains the defining issue for this cohort.

At the same time, the interviews articulate a relatively coherent vision of what a transformed response would look like. Participants imagine churches and villages in which violence is clearly named as sin and crime, scripture is taught in justice-oriented ways, clergy and lay leaders are trained and accountable, survivors can disclose safely, and congregations work in structured partnership with state and civil-society services. The next phase of CEVAW analysis can therefore build on this section by testing how far these religious self-understandings align with survivor experience and with frontline practice on the ground.

5.4 Cross cohort findings (academics, survivors, religious leaders)

Analysis of the three cohorts shows strong convergence on five cross cutting themes – culture and faith as double edged, silence and reputation, hybrid governance, uneven innovation, and the marginal yet central place of SOGIESC. Together, these themes depict a system in which fa'a Samoa and Christianity are indispensable to people's safety and belonging, but also deeply implicated in patterns of harm.

5.4.1 Culture and faith as both resource and risk

First, all three groups see culture and faith as both resource and risk. Academics emphasise the "beautiful parts" of fa'a Samoa—respect, service, sacred boundaries and communal care—as the normative basis for prevention and for community-anchored interventions. Survivors' narratives show these same values in practice: aiga, matai and village structures, and especially grandmothers and older women, can offer decisive protection, while male relatives and village sanctions can weaponise honour and discipline to conceal violence. Religious leaders echo this double edge, naming alofa/ love, fa'aaloalo/ respect, and tautua/ service to the family as theological grounds for rejecting violence, even as they acknowledge that cultural and biblical language is routinely used to pressure women and fa'afafine/fa'atama to endure abuse.

This ambivalence extends to churches as institutional actors. Churches function as primary community access points for disclosure, accompaniment and referral, approached by survivors and community members before formal institutions precisely because they are embedded in everyday social life and carry both moral legitimacy and relational accessibility. Yet this frontline role is typically undertaken without adequate training in trauma-informed care, risk assessment, coercive control or legal referral obligations. The result is a deeply uneven response landscape in which pastoral care may be genuinely supportive in some cases, while in others it is unsafe, insufficient, or actively harmful—pressing survivors to forgive, reconcile or stay silent in ways that prioritise family or congregational unity over individual safety.

5.4.2 Silence, shame and reputation protection

Second, there is broad agreement that silence and reputation protection are central mechanisms that sustain violence. Academics highlight "silence to protect reputation" across both cultural and religious domains, with village and church leaders acting as gatekeepers of what is named or reported. Survivors show how shame, loyalty, fear of fa'asalaga/ penalised, and concern for church image repeatedly prevent reporting to police, SVSG or pastors; cases involving kin or clergy are especially likely to stay inside family and village systems. Religious leaders themselves describe institutional reluctance to confront abuse publicly, citing fear of scandal, conflict with powerful families, donor relations and media scrutiny, and concede that women are sometimes encouraged to stay to preserve church unity. Across cohorts, "keeping the peace" frequently overrides accountability and safety.

5.4.3 Hybrid governance as reality and fragility

Third, the data confirm the reality of hybrid governance—where village fono, churches and state law intersect—but also expose its fragility. Academics describe the Village Fono Act, ifoga and court recognition of customary practices as concrete examples of formal–custom integration, while noting a significant evidence gap on how these mechanisms work for domestic violence in practice. Survivors' accounts of "law vs fa'a Samoa tension" show that kinship, shame and village expectations often keep cases out of court even when law is theoretically accessible, with one survivor explicitly arguing that rape demands state intervention because family settlement is insufficient. Religious leaders place themselves inside this hybrid order as village actors in reconciliation and dispute resolution, yet the religious matrix shows limited denominational guidance on when to prioritise formal justice over internal settlement. The hybrid system can deliver local peace, but not reliably survivor centred justice.

5.4.4 Uneven and under-resourced innovation

Fourth, across all three groups there is evidence of emergent innovation that remains uneven and under-resourced. Academics point to the EVE project, SVSG, Spotlight and village-based initiatives as signs that fa'a Samoa can be mobilised for prevention, while also highlighting a persistent "theory–practice gap" and thin evaluation of outcomes. Survivors' matrices reveal isolated but important instances of effective support—from particular police officers, health workers, bystanders, NGOs and especially SFA—amid otherwise fragmented help-seeking trajectories. Religious leaders describe parish workshops, women's seminars, faith-based counselling modules and ecumenical Bible study initiatives, but also emphasise the lack of denomination-wide policies, training and sustainable funding for anything beyond rhetoric.

These examples point to an "ecosystem of experiments" that has yet to be consolidated into a robust, coordinated system. Partnership models involving churches, SVSG, community campaigns and village-based safety initiatives demonstrate the potential for culturally grounded collaboration, but they remain localised, uneven and dependent on individual champions rather than institutional commitment. What is limited is not only scale, but also the infrastructure needed to sustain innovation: formal agreements that clarify roles and responsibilities, shared protocols that guide cross-sector referral and response, structured training that builds capacity across church and community actors, and reliable resourcing that allows promising initiatives to move beyond pilot status. Without these supports, even effective local experiments risk remaining fragile, unrepeatable and invisible to the wider system.

5.4.5 SOGIESC: lived centrality, institutional marginality

Finally, a critical cross cohort finding is that SOGIESC is central in survivors' experience but peripheral in institutional responses. Survivors' matrices show fa'afafine and fa'atama identities as constitutive of many violence experiences, shaping family conflict, village sanctions and institutional responses, with Sosaiete Faafafine Samoa (SFA) repeatedly identified as the one consistently safe and affirming space. Academics name SOGIESC discrimination explicitly and note the scarcity of SOGIESC specific services in mainstream programmes, including church responses. By contrast, religious leaders acknowledge the presence of fa'afafine/fa'atama in congregations but describe them as largely invisible in preaching and policy, with only a minority arguing that SOGIESC related stigma must be addressed as part of the churches' violence agenda. This asymmetry between lived centrality and institutional marginality is one of the strongest cross cohort signals emerging from the preliminary analysis.

5.4.6 Synthesis

Taken together, these themes show that the three cohorts share a surprisingly coherent vision—of culture and faith mobilised against violence, of accountable hybrid governance, of churches as safe and inclusive spaces—but also that implementation is held back by entrenched silence, patchy policy, and unresolved tensions around power and identity. The next stage of the study will deepen this cross reading, especially around where survivor expectations and institutional self descriptions diverge most sharply.

Table 5.4 Cross-cohort comparison of key themes in frontline responses to violence

Theme	Academics	Survivors	Religious leaders
Culture & faith as double-edged	Theorise "beautiful" fa'a-Samoa values as prevention assets while showing how rigid/colonial-Christian norms can legitimise discipline and constrain change.	Describe aiga, matai and village as both refuge and risk; grandmothers/older women often protect, male kin and titles often harm.	Affirm alofa, fa'aaloalo, tautua as theological grounds against violence, but admit culture and scripture are often used to keep victims in place.
Silence & reputation	Identify silence to protect family/church reputation	Show how shame, loyalty, fear of fa'asalaga	Acknowledge reluctance to confront DV publicly

	and gatekeeping by matai and clergy as systematic patterns in both TK and religion.	and church image block reporting to police/SVSG and keep abuse inside aiga and nu'u.	due to fear of scandal, conflict and donor/media concerns; some pressure women to stay for unity.
Hybrid governance (fono–church–state)	Map the Village Fono Act, ifoga and SVSG/village links as hybrid governance, but highlight limited evidence on DV outcomes.	Describe lived tension: formal law exists but kinship, shame and village practice often override; some insist violent crime requires courts.	See themselves as part of village governance and reconciliation, but note lack of clear rules for when to push cases into formal systems.
Innovation & system gaps	Document EVE, SVSG, Spotlight and village work; emphasise a theory–practice gap and weak evaluation of "what works."	Point to isolated positive supports (SFA, certain police, health workers, NGOs) amid fragmented and inconsistent service responses.	Describe parish workshops, counselling modules and ecumenical initiatives, but stress patchy policies, limited training and donor dependence.
SOGIESC	Frame SOGIESC discrimination as a clear thematic issue; note lack of inclusive, evaluated responses in mainstream systems.	Show fa'afafine/fa'atama identity as central to violence and exclusion; highlight SFA as primary safe space and first responder.	Acknowledge fa'afafine/fa'atama in congregations but mostly invisible in theology/policy; only some link SOGIESC stigma to violence agendas.

6. Some More Implications (preliminary)

These preliminary findings have several implications for policy, programming and future research. First, because fa'a-Samoa and Christianity are widely understood as inseparable, strategies to prevent and respond to violence must work with, not around, culture and faith, while also confronting their harmful uses. This requires deliberate theological and cultural work to reclaim core Samoan-Christian values—alofa, fa'aaloalo, tautua, amiotonu and soalaupule—as normative grounds for rejecting all forms of violence, and to challenge interpretations and practices that prioritise harmony, reputation and authority over safety and justice. Interventions that position church, village and family leaders as co-designers and duty-bearers, rather than external targets of critique alone, appear more likely to succeed and align with other Pacific research emphasising culture and Christianity as both contributors to, and key solutions for, domestic violence.

Second, the cross-cohort data indicate that system-level change will depend on strengthening hybrid governance and closing the implementation gaps that survivors experience daily. This includes: embedding clear domestic-violence policies and referral protocols within churches and village structures; investing in training for clergy, matai and non-specialist organisations on trauma, risk and survivor-centred practice; and systematically evaluating community and faith-based initiatives such as EVE, Spotlight and village fono responses to build an evidence base on "what works" in Samoan settings. At the same time, the asymmetry between the centrality of SOGIESC in survivors' experiences and its marginal status in institutional responses points to an urgent need for SOGIESC-inclusive approaches in both church and state systems, in line with emerging national and regional commitments on SOGIESC-related rights and violence. Future phases of this project should therefore focus on co-developing and testing practical tools that help churches, village councils and service providers move from aspirational visions of safety and inclusion to consistent, accountable practice for all survivors, including fa'afafine and fa'atama.

The findings also suggest that system improvement will require more than awareness raising alone. If churches, village actors and non-specialist organisations are to function as safe and effective responders, they need clearer role definition, structured coordination with formal services, and training that integrates trauma-informed practice with Samoan cultural and theological realities. The issue is not whether these actors matter—they clearly do—but whether the wider system is prepared to support them with the guidance, accountability and institutional linkages needed for survivor-centred practice.

The interim phase further suggests that some practical foundations for this work already exist. Partnership models, advisory structures, stakeholder relationships and early dissemination pathways are already in place and could be built on in the next phase. This means the next stage of the project is not starting from scratch; rather, it has the opportunity to consolidate existing collaborations, test practical tools, and translate emerging findings into more structured policy and service interventions.

7. Next Steps and Timeline

Next steps and timeline

This section outlines the planned remaining data collection, the next phases of analysis and writing, and the indicative timeline for completing this phase of the project by July. The next phase will extend both data collection and translational work. In addition to completing remaining interviews and deepening cross-case analysis, planned activities include further engagement with nonspecialist organisations, development of the workforce-mapping component, and continued exploration of training and coordination needs across church, community and service settings. The next phase will also involve targeted stakeholder engagement, including the preparation of briefings, policy-facing outputs and practical tools that can support uptake of the findings by government agencies, churches, NGOs and community actors. Remaining data collection

We will continue to prioritise depth and diversity in data collection to ensure that the analysis reflects the perspectives of survivors and key frontline institutions across the hybrid governance system. The remaining fieldwork for this phase includes:

- Additional in-depth interviews with survivors, with a focus on under-represented groups identified in the preliminary analysis (including younger survivors, rural participants and SOGIESC-diverse survivors where appropriate and safe).
- Interviews with frontline workers in key service sectors, including social workers, counsellors and NGO caseworkers who regularly respond to domestic, sexual and SOGIESC-related violence.
- Targeted interviews with justice-sector actors, particularly representatives of the courts and the police, to better understand how cases involving domestic and family violence, as well as SOGIESC-related harm, are identified, managed and resolved in practice.
- Interviews with emergency-room (ER) nurses and doctors, to capture the clinical and psychosocial dimensions of first response, documentation and referral within hospital settings.
- Interviews with police and narcotics specialists, with a view to exploring intersections between substance use, mental health, policing practices and violence in domestic and community settings.
- Interviews with faith-based service providers such as the Salvation Army, in order to build a richer picture of how religiously affiliated organisations navigate tensions between pastoral care, doctrinal commitments and professional standards in their responses to survivors.

In addition to interviews, we will continue to undertake focused document analysis of relevant policies, protocols, training materials and institutional statements from churches, village councils, state agencies and service providers. This will help us triangulate the narratives emerging from interviews and focus groups with the formal rules and guidelines that are meant to govern practice. If feasible within the remaining timeframe,

we will also convene one or two small, purposively sampled focus groups (for example, with frontline workers or youth leaders) to test emerging themes and identify gaps or misinterpretations in our preliminary analysis.

Engagement with the Ministry of Health has been slower than anticipated due to recent changes in management and a concurrent overhaul of the Ministry's ethics and research approval processes. This has delayed access to some ER staff and hospital-based documentation. We will continue to work with designated focal points within the Ministry to meet revised ethics requirements and to schedule interviews as soon as approvals are finalised. While this may limit the volume of health-sector data we are able to collect in this phase, any constraints will be transparently documented and will inform the design of subsequent phases.

Next phases of analysis and writing

In parallel with the remaining fieldwork, we will proceed through several iterative phases of analysis aimed at deepening and consolidating the findings. The key steps include:

Refinement of the codebook

Building on the preliminary coding and cross-cohort themes, the research team will revise and consolidate the analytical codebook. This will involve clarifying code definitions, merging overlapping codes, and adding new codes where gaps have been identified (for example, around specific institutional practices, SOGIESC-related dynamics, or emerging forms of resistance and innovation). The refined codebook will be tested on a subset of new transcripts and adjusted as needed to ensure consistency and analytic depth.

Cross-case and cross-institutional analysis

Once the full dataset for this phase is available, we will undertake systematic cross-case analysis to examine patterns and divergences across survivor cohorts, institutions (church, village, state, NGO, health, justice) and key axes such as gender, age, SOGIESC, location and institutional role. This will include matrix-based analysis to map how different actors understand and operationalise concepts such as safety, authority, forgiveness, justice and inclusion, and how these understandings shape concrete responses to violence.

Integration of documentary and interview data

Findings from policy and document analysis will be integrated with interview and focus-group data to trace implementation gaps, points of alignment and contradictions between formal rules and everyday practice. Particular attention will be paid to how domestic-violence and SOGIESC-related policies are interpreted at the frontline level, and to identifying promising practices that could inform future tools and interventions.

Drafting of the full report

Using the refined analysis, we will draft a comprehensive phase report that includes a detailed methodology, the cross-cohort and cross-institutional findings, and an expanded implications section for policy, programming and future research. The report will be written in a way that is accessible to both academic and practitioner audiences, with clear recommendations tailored to churches, village councils, state agencies, service providers and development partners.

Preparation of academic articles

In parallel with the report, the team will identify 2–3 thematic areas suitable for journal articles (for example, hybrid governance and domestic violence, SOGIESC and faith-based responses, or theological re-articulation of Samoan-Christian values in violence prevention). Initial outlines and literature mapping will be completed within this phase, with full drafting to follow once the report is finalised.

Where possible, we will also begin light-touch validation of findings through informal feedback sessions with selected participants and institutional partners. These will help ensure that our interpretations resonate with lived experience and institutional realities, and will lay the groundwork for co-designing practical tools in the next phase.

Timeline

Despite delays—particularly in securing approvals and access within the Ministry of Health—we remain committed to completing this phase of the project by the end of July. The indicative timeline is as follows (months can be adjusted to your internal calendar as needed).

Month	Tasks
Late April–May	<p>Complete remaining survivor and frontline worker interviews.</p> <p>Prioritise scheduling and conducting interviews with courts, police, ER staff, police and narcotics specialists, and the Salvation Army, subject to ethics approvals and institutional availability.</p> <p>Continue document collection and preliminary document analysis.</p> <p>Ongoing engagement with the Ministry of Health to navigate revised ethics processes and secure access to ER staff where possible.</p>
May–June	<p>Finalise the refined codebook and apply it consistently across all completed transcripts.</p> <p>Conduct cross-case and cross-institutional analysis, including matrix-based and thematic mapping.</p> <p>Integrate documentary analysis into the emerging analytical framework.</p> <p>Begin drafting core sections of the phase report (methods, context, cross-cohort findings, hybrid governance analysis, SOGIESC findings).</p>
June–early July	<p>Draft the remaining sections of the report (implications, recommendations, limitations, and next-phase design).</p> <p>Circulate a draft report within the research team and selected internal reviewers for feedback.</p> <p>Revise and finalise the codebook and analytic memos based on any additional data collected late in the process.</p> <p>Develop outlines and initial sections for 2–3 academic articles based on the consolidated findings.</p>
By end of July	<p>Finalise and submit the phase report to the project partners and relevant stakeholders.</p> <p>Share key findings and implications in targeted briefings or feedback sessions with participating institutions where appropriate and safe.</p> <p>Confirm the design, focus and resourcing needs of the next phase, including more extensive co-design and piloting of practical tools with churches, village councils and service providers.</p>

If further delays occur in gaining Ministry of Health approvals, we will document the scope of health-sector data achieved in this phase and explicitly flag this as a limitation. Any remaining gaps—particularly around ER and clinical perspectives—will be incorporated into the priority agenda for the next phase of data collection and partnership-building.

End of Report

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