

Table 2.9 Births to teenagers, as a percentage of all live births, 2002-2005

	2002	2003	2004	2005
Under 15 yrs	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1
15-19 yrs	2.8	4.6	7.3	7.5

Source: Ministry of Health, 2006

A high and rising teenage pregnancy rate is another consequence of restricted access for young people to reproductive and sexual health services and information. The rate is higher for Fijian than Indo-Fijian women. The Ministry of Health is trying to address this problem through awareness programmes and by expanding reproductive health services.

Condoms should be the most readily available prophylactic against STI infection or unintended pregnancy, but studies by WHO (2002) and UNFPA (2003) have confirmed that condoms are still hard to get in rural communities and young people can be embarrassed to seek them in pharmacies. Condom use is being encouraged by the Ministry of Health and various NGOs and agencies that are working to prevent HIV transmission. The number of condoms distributed has risen steadily but while it can be assumed that some are being used in situations of high-risk sex, this progress cannot be quantified.

Substance abuse is now a general problem in the Fiji population, and young people are in the forefront of the associated behavioural changes. The 2004 NNS found that one quarter of Fiji's adult population now smoked, more males than females (38% and 13% respectively) and more Fijians than Indo-Fijians (29% and 17% respectively) - although more Indo-Fijians smoked heavily. Five per cent of 12-17 year olds regularly smoked. Despite all public education programmes, there had been a small overall increase in the overall proportion of smokers – up 1.4% since 1993 – and in the proportion of young adolescents who smoked – up 3.7% for males and 4.3% for females since 1993.

Alcohol use has also become more widespread. The 2004 NNS found that 51% of the adult population reported drinking alcohol, again more males than females (58% and 32% respectively). Alcohol use was widespread among young adolescents, with 46% of 12-17 year-old males and 17% of females regularly drinking, and 50% of these young people reporting binge drinking. Drinking was more common among Fijians than Indo-Fijians. In 2004, however, fewer people reported drinking more than 5 days a week than in 1993, when the previous National Nutrition Survey was conducted. Risks associated with alcohol use include accidents, high risk sexual behaviour, domestic violence, crime, and depletion of family budgets. Marijuana use is widespread, including among school children, despite mandatory prison sentences for possession and use. Yaqona (kava) consumption is also greater and more widespread than in 1993. Again, more males than females and more Fijians than Indo-Fijians regularly drink yaqona. Sixty-nine percent of adults surveyed in the 2004 NNS drank kava 2-6 days per week, and 11% did so daily.

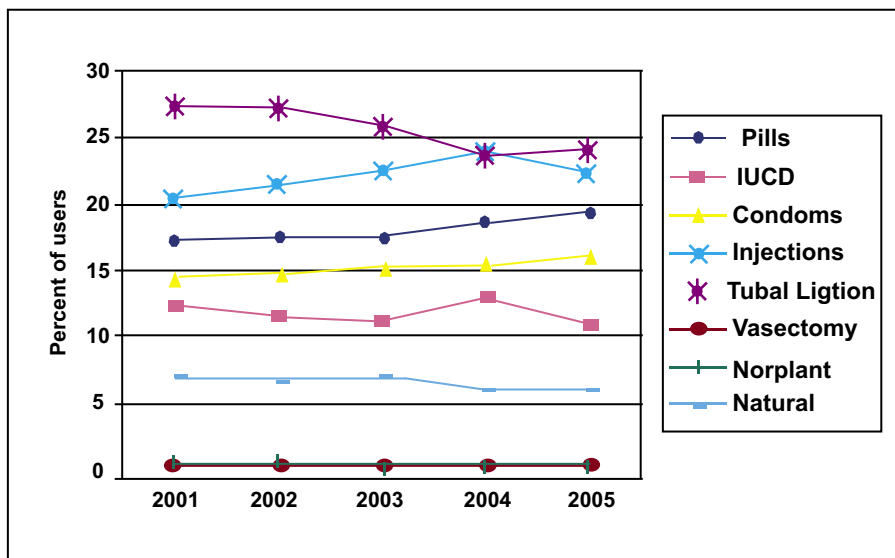
(c) Women

Maternal and child health services are available in government clinics and with private practitioners throughout Fiji. Since the early 1990s, a steady 97% of women have given birth in hospitals equipped with at least basic essential emergency obstetric care. The maternal mortality rate in Fiji's relatively small population fluctuates widely and this limits its usefulness as a general measurement of health.⁵⁶ In 2005, the maternal mortality rate was 50.49 per 100,000 live births, while the overall average for 2001-2005 was 31.85. Complementary indicators are the Crude Birth Rate (20.9/1000, 2005) and the Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (42.5%, 2005). Maternal mortality and morbidity is now less related to the

⁵⁶ With an annual average in Fiji of around 17,700 births, one maternal death would raise the maternal mortality rate by 5.6. Anything more than 18 deaths in a year would place Fiji among the countries with the worst conditions in the world for reproductive health.

conditions of delivery and more to long-term health risks such as rheumatic heart disease, obesity, diabetes and anaemia which exacerbate complications of pregnancy and child-bearing. The leading cause of maternal deaths in 2005 was ruptured ectopic pregnancy (28%).⁵⁷ Complications of pregnancy are still a major reason for women to be hospitalised. Reducing maternal deaths and pregnancy-related illness will again require sub-national differences in maternal health conditions to be better identified and addressed.

Figure 2.7 Main contraceptive methods, 2001-2005



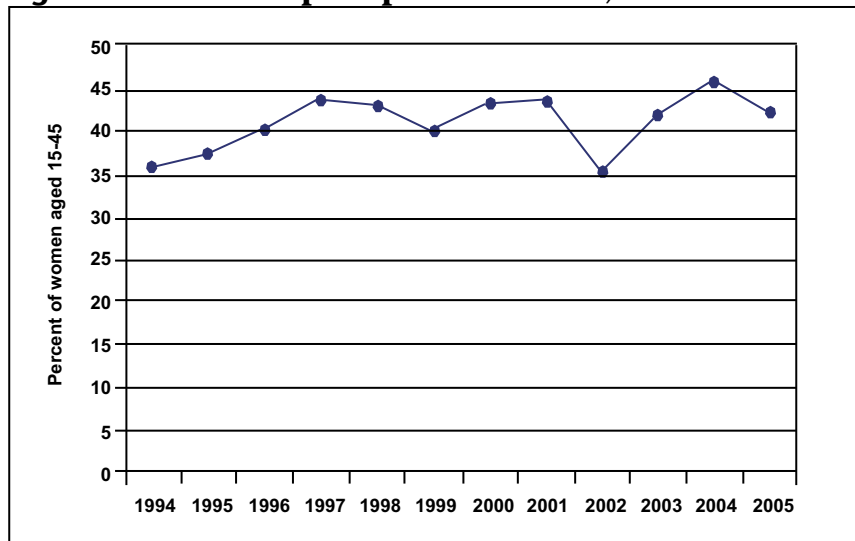
Source: Ministry of Health, 2005

Family planning services have been widely available in Fiji for the past 30 years, and are provided free in all Government medical stations throughout Fiji. From 1994 to 2005 the contraceptive prevalence rate has ranged between 35 and 45 per cent of women of child-bearing age, which is moderately high. The emphasis is on the health benefits of well-spaced births and, while a 'cafeteria' choice of methods has been championed, most promotion has been given to long-acting methods, such as pills, depo-provera and sterilisation. Vasectomy is still little used. Birth control is more widely practiced than the official contraceptive prevalence rate suggests, for this figure is compiled only from government health services and misses out the many people who use private health services, traditional methods (including rhythm and withdrawal, used particularly by Fijian couples), or poorly counted methods (condoms), used particularly by Indo-Fijian couples.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ministry of Health, 2006.

⁵⁸ Government of Fiji, 2004 MDG Report.

Figure 2.8 Contraceptive prevalence rate, 1994-2005



Source: Ministry of Health, 2005

The most common cancers in females are cervical, breast and uterine.⁵⁹ Cancers of the female reproductive organs make up almost 40% of cancers in both males and females, giving women a much higher incidence of cancer than men. The incidence of cancer is also much higher in Fijians than Indo-Fijians.⁶⁰ The particularly high incidence of cervical cancer in Fiji, which alone accounts for 37% of cancers in women,⁶¹ is related to the prevalence of STIs. The death rate from cancer is related to the minimal pap test screening available for women, although this test is now promoted by the Ministry of Health.

Obesity is more prevalent in women than men. The 2004 NNS found that 32.3% of women were overweight and 23.9% were obese. Although Fijian females had the highest rate of obesity (41.7%), the rate was increasing quickly for Indo-Fijian women also. Overweight and obesity are major risk factors for NCDs and linked to the high incidence rates of diabetes and heart diseases.

1.5 Addressing health needs

The 2004 NNS summarised the main nutrition related issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the general health of the Fiji population:

- Reduce the prevalence of anaemia, by increasing consumption of iron-rich foods, including fortification of commonly eaten processed food, and better monitoring of pregnant women children and adolescents
- Reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adults, by better education, school-based programmes, promoting of physical activity, lower consumption of sugar, fat and salty foods, and higher consumption of fruits and vegetables.
- Reduce the incidence rates of LBW babies by better maternal health programmes and promotion of early prenatal clinic and regular check-ups.

^{59,60} Ministry of Health, 2006.

⁶¹ UNGASS Report, 2005

- Improve growth and reduce underweight children by promoting better infant and child feeding practices, exclusive breastfeeding, expansion of the 'baby friendly hospital and work place initiatives', legislation on the Fiji Code for Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes, better infant growth monitoring programmes
- Reduce the prevalence of high birth weight (HBW) by monitoring weight gain in pregnant women, public education, and promotion of health living.
- Reduce the incidence of diarrhoea, skin infections, parasitic infestation and other infections by promoting hygiene and sanitation, expanded safe water supply, better immunisation coverage, and more promotion of the use of oral re-hydration for diarrhoea.
- Reduce prevalence rates of NCD risk factors by increasing taxes on alcohol and tobacco, health promotion activities especially for young people, better monitoring of anti-smoking laws; and promoting physical activities, healthy diets and regular health check-ups,
- Improve food consumption patterns by promoting healthy diets, local production of nutritious foods, and controls on the importation of foods to meet minimum nutritional standards.
- Improve family food production and household food security by encouraging family food production, enactment and monitoring of food standards legislation, better environmental management and poverty alleviation programmes.
- Formulate a policy and plan of action for nutrition to address improved household food security, promotion of better dietary patterns, food quality standards and control; poverty alleviation; and strengthened public health services.

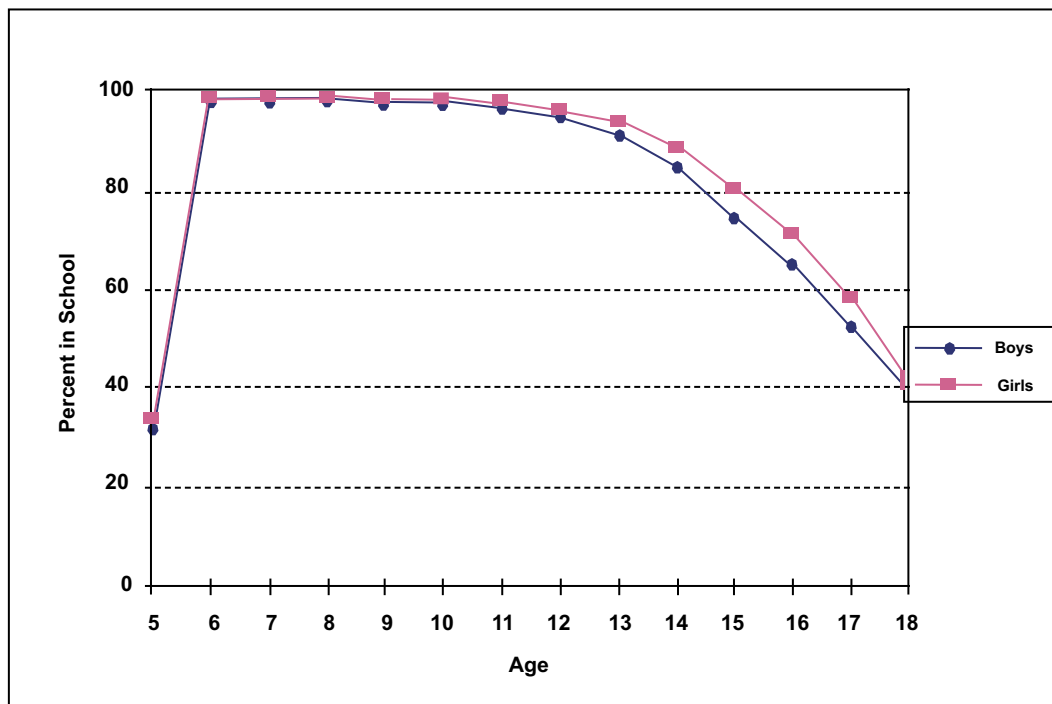


2. Education

2.1 Primary and Secondary Education

School enrolments in Fiji are high, with a Net Enrolment Ratio of around 100%. Entry to primary education is almost universal in Fiji, equally so for boys and girls (Figure 2.9). It is important to note, however, that these figures are based on the Ministry of Education's estimations of the total child population and in the absence of a recent census, it is impossible to confirm these figures. The most recent data on school enrolments by age comes from the 1996 census (Figure 2.9)

Figure 2.9 School enrolments by age, 1996



Bureau of Statistics: 1996 Census

This significant national achievement has come about through the joint efforts of the Ministry of Education and the many NGOs, local communities, churches and private organisations that operate schools or programmes to assist under-privileged children. Over the past decade, a strong push to widen access to school by the Ministry of Education and the many NGOs that operate schools or programmes to assist under-privileged families has considerably reduced the number of children who never attend school or do not complete basic education.⁶²

Community involvement in school management is encouraged by the Ministry of Education, which concentrates on providing material and technical support and supervision to schools and teachers. From 2001 to 2005, the Fiji Government has spent around 20% of its annual budget on education.⁶³

Since the early 1990s, the Ministry has worked towards making basic school education compulsory - although not fully free - for children aged 6 to 15 years by progressively extending fee-free education to cover all basic education years, increasing the amount of

⁶²Fiji Government, 2004.

⁶³Ministry of Education, 2006. Annual figures were: 2001: 19.3%; 2002: 20%; 2003: 19.8%; 2004: 21.5%; 2005: 21.3%.

tuition fee-free grants to schools,⁶⁴ increasing the number of civil servant teacher posts,⁶⁵ helping extend pre-school education, establishing more rural schools and providing transport assistance to children in remote areas, improving the quality of teaching staff and school management through pre-service and in-service training, and promoting community support for education.⁶⁶ (There has also been a considerable increase in education opportunities for children with disabilities throughout Fiji.) As Table 2.10 shows, there has been a net decrease in primary school enrolments and a fall in enrolments at schools close to urban areas (possibly because of increased inability to afford schooling) but a large increase in very remote school enrolments.⁶⁷

Table 2.10 Primary school enrolments, 1999 and 2003

	Number of children		Average annual change (%)
	1999	2003	
All schools	142,728	142,148	-0.1
Urban schools	74,398	76,313	0.6
Rural schools	68,330	65,835	-0.9
- close to urban areas	25,146	17,174	-9.1
- remote	27,393	27,751	0.3
- very remote	15,791	20,910	7.3

Source: Focus Economics, 2006

Table 2.11 Special Schools for Disabled Children, 2005

	Fijian	Indian	Others	Total
Ba School for Special Education	7	18	-	25
Fiji School for the Blind	14	13	4	31
Gospel School for the Deaf	29	6	9	44
Hilton Special School	59	28	6	93
Labasa School for the Disabled	64	43	-	107
Lautoka School for Special Education	27	21	64	112
Lautoka Sunshine School	75	41	4	120
Levuka School for Special Education	9	1	1	11
Nadi Centre for Special Education	56	14	-	70
Nausori Special Education School	9	-	25	34
Ra Society School for Disabled	49	4	-	53
Savusavu Handicapped School	32	5	4	41
Sigatoka School for Special Education	35	7	1	43
Suva Intellectually Handicapped School	44	71	10	125
The Early Intervention Centre	42	24	3	69
Veilomani Rehabilitation Workshop	23	12	-	35
Vocational Training Centre - Suva	26	48	8	82
TOTAL	600	356	139	1007

Source: Ministry of Education, 2006.

⁶⁴ Only 2 of the 719 primary schools and 12 of the 162 secondary schools are run by Government. (2005) Most are operated by community or church organisations.

⁶⁵ The reason that basic education is not fully free is that almost all schools are operated by non-government organisations, and government cannot control any other costs than tuition fees.

⁶⁶ Coordinating Committee on Children, 1995; Ministry of Education, all recent years.

⁶⁷ Focus Economics, 2006.

Many children in Fiji must travel a long distance to school, as shown in Table 2.12, including almost one third of urban students who travel more than 3 km to and from school daily, often passing other schools in order to attend one with a more desirable ethnic focus, religion, or quality.⁶⁸ In remote parts of Fiji, even very young children often board at school during the week for school would be too far away otherwise. In these often poor communities, feeding and maintaining children at boarding facilities can be difficult.

There is concern that there has been a significant decline in the quality of education and the standards achieved, both in basic numeracy and literacy. Students in remote and very remote schools are most disadvantaged in terms of their pass rates in national examinations (Table 2.12). The government's response has largely been to increase funding for schools, although there has been little research into the most effective targeting of these resources.⁶⁹ Narsey (2004) noted that differences in education quality mirrored significant differences in the capacities of schools to generate their own funds. For every dollar provided by government, urban schools spent an additional \$1.41, rural schools an additional 75 cents, remote schools 33 cents, and very remote schools 53 cents.⁷⁰ Poorer communities generally have less extra money to invest in the schools their children attend, and therefore lower-income students generally attend poorer quality schools. Improving the quality of schools is a pro-poor policy that has wide potential benefits for disadvantaged groups.

The Fiji Education Sector Programme provides infrastructure support to 300 of the most disadvantaged schools in the country. School selection was undertaken using baseline data from the Ministry of Education's database and merging it with a specially designed Schools Infrastructure Disadvantage Indices. The needs of these schools were confirmed through detailed questionnaires and site visits. The targeted schools are drawn from all fourteen provinces, all nine education districts, all four education divisions, and are spread across 44 islands. Over 80% of the schools are in remote or very remote locations.

Source: Ministry of Education, 2006

Table 2.12 Indicators of access to education, 1999

	Urban	Rural	Remote	Very Remote	Total
Books per pupil	3.5	5.3	5.3	5.5	4.5
Desk places per pupil	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
Percentage boarding	0.1	1.5	7.9	7.9	2.9
Percentage repeating	1.1	1.8	4.3	4.7	2.3
Percentage travelling >3 km	30	23	23	11	25
Percentage walking > 3 km	1.8	5.2	9.6	5.4	4.4
Failure rates: English *	11	18	23	23	16
Failure rates: Mathematics *	11	12	17	18	13
Failure rates: Basic science *	11	12	20	22	14

Source: Narsey, 2004 *Fiji secondary school entrance examination (FEYE)

The SDL Government's affirmative action policies for indigenous Fijians and Rotumans were especially applicable to education, and continue to direct the policies of the Ministry of Education. In the name of social justice, school development programmes aimed to particularly improve education and training opportunities for Fijian and Rotuman

^{68,69,70}Narsey, 2004.

students and focus school improvement programmes on these communities. To this end, a Fijian Education Board was established to provide advice to the Minister of Education and schools with predominantly Fijian students were designated Centres of Excellence and provided higher standard facilities and equipment.

These policies for education were influenced by the government's political manifesto, the 2000 Fiji Islands Education Commission, which expanded upon the conventional (that is, for Fiji) analysis of ethnic differences in educational outcomes, and the Ministry of Education's own long preoccupation with ethnicity.⁷¹ Other evidence points to gender⁷² or urban-rural differences⁷³ being significant factors in educational outcomes, but these issues have received much less attention. Furthermore, Narsey (2004) found no significant relationship between higher per pupil funding or expenditures and better academic performance, suggesting that the affirmative programmes could have been misdirected. A principal outcome, however, has been a requirement for Indo-Fijian households to spend a larger proportion of their incomes on education.⁷⁴

2.2 School drop-outs

With Government's imbursement of tuition costs, other assistance for disadvantaged children and at least nominal compulsory school attendance, a 2005-6 household survey found that even in urban informal settlements, few children did not attend primary school.⁷⁵ However, for those children who do not complete primary school, the principal reason that they leave school early is the inability of their families to afford school costs.⁷⁶ While schools are now free of tuition costs up to senior secondary classes, schools levy other fees, and other essential expenses include uniforms, books, and transport. Annually, this amounts to around F\$200 per primary pupil and F\$350 per secondary student a cost that is high for low-income families.

The survival ratio (ie. the proportion of children who stay at school from Class 1 to the end of Class 5) has fallen since the early 1990s, possibly indicating the difficulty faced by low-income families in keeping their children in school (Figure 2.10, next page). Without a recent census, it is not possible to measure how many children are now out of school. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number has risen considerably, brought up by increasing economic pressure on many households.



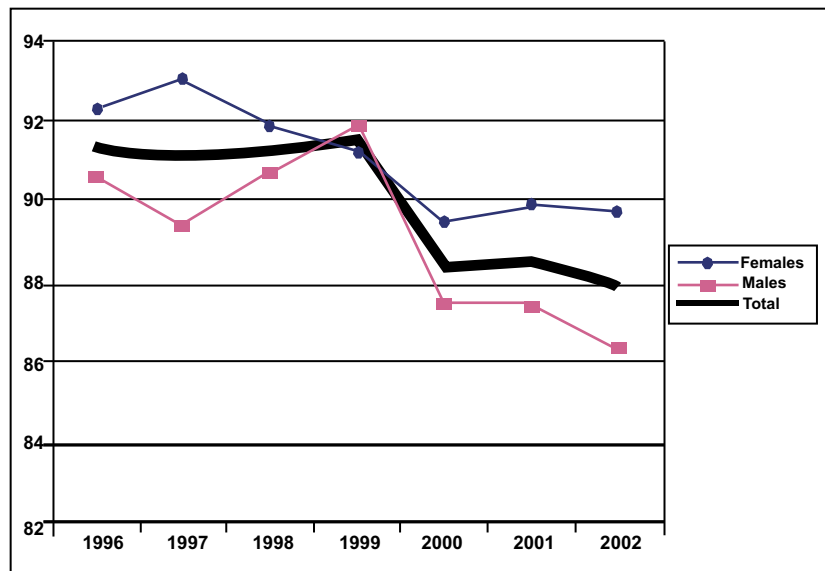
⁷¹Even today, the Ministry's annual reports more often present information by ethnicity than by gender.

^{72,76}Save the Children Fiji, 1998.

^{73,74}Narsey, 2004.

⁷⁵M. Chung with ECREA, 2006.

Figure 2.10 Survival rates to Class 5, by sex, 1996-2002



Source: Ministry of Education annual reports, various years

2.3 Early Childhood Education

Preschool education assists children to adjust to school and may improve their academic attainment. There has been a great expansion of access to early childhood education (ECE) in the past decade. By 2005, 315 ECE centres were operating throughout Fiji, established and operated by local communities. The Ministry of Education licenses and monitors preschools and assists with some training, but responsibility for the operation of preschools and kindergartens falls to community groups, and their facilities and programmes are of varying standards.

In 2005, 19 ECE centres benefited from a total \$100,000 in government building grants, and the first 25 ECE teachers graduated from Lautoka Teachers College with an Advanced Certificate in Early Childhood Education. Other organisations that assist ECE in Fiji include the Fiji Early Childhood Education Association, the University of the South Pacific, UNICEF, and Save the Children Fiji.

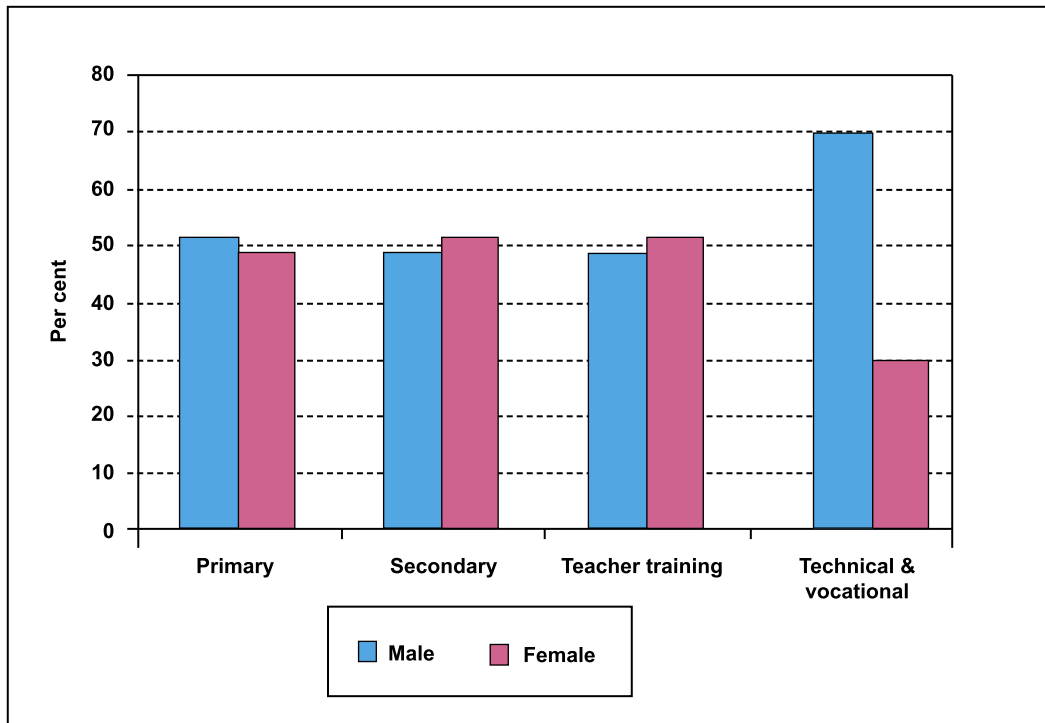
Save the Children Fiji has assisted low-income communities in Suva and Labasa to establish and run ECE centres through its Mobile Kindergarten. This project, which operates in disadvantaged communities, including informal urban settlements, demonstrates the potential of preschools to go beyond early childhood education to also assist in building and empowering communities.

2.4 Post-secondary and Vocational Education

Post-secondary education is available through several Government-run or private institutions, such as the Fiji Institute of Technology, and regional tertiary institutions such as the University of the South Pacific, the University of Fiji, and the Fiji College of Agriculture, but entry into these institutions is competitive and restricted. Once out of school, there are very few opportunities for young people to gain livelihood skills or qualifications. All forms of adult and vocational education are limited and entry is competitive, advantaging either the best qualified students or those who can afford the high fees charged by private agencies. With international donor assistance, the Government plans to make a large investment in vocational education.

It is at this level that a clear disadvantage appears for females, who make up only 30% of all enrolments in technical and vocational education courses (Figure 2.11). This figure has changed very little over the past decade.

Figure 2.11 Enrolments at Education levels and Gender, 2005



Source: Ministry of Education, 2006

Non-formal education, which would cater for a much larger population, is poorly organised and receives much less government attention. There has been no national assessment of the demand for adult education but almost certainly there are far too few opportunities for people youth, adults, men or women to participate in non-formal education programmes of any kind. Most adult education programmes cater for young men but, even there, access to these courses is very restricted in the number of places available, the high cost, and in the range of skills offered. There is almost no public advocacy for women's participation in adult education.

A 1998 survey found that the eight major non-formal vocational programmes received 10,950 applications that year for a total of 4,850 places, providing a place to less than half of the applicants.⁷⁷ But neither number represented the real demand for this training, for many people did not know about these courses or how to apply. Most people learn about them by word of mouth for there is no public listing of training opportunities. Sometimes this information hardly enters the public domain at all because the organisations themselves select people to train, rather than give individuals the opportunity to apply for themselves or assess their own needs. There has been very little review of the non-formal education programmes that do exist, or of formal vocational programmes for that matter. No tracer studies have been conducted to document what graduates of these programmes have achieved.

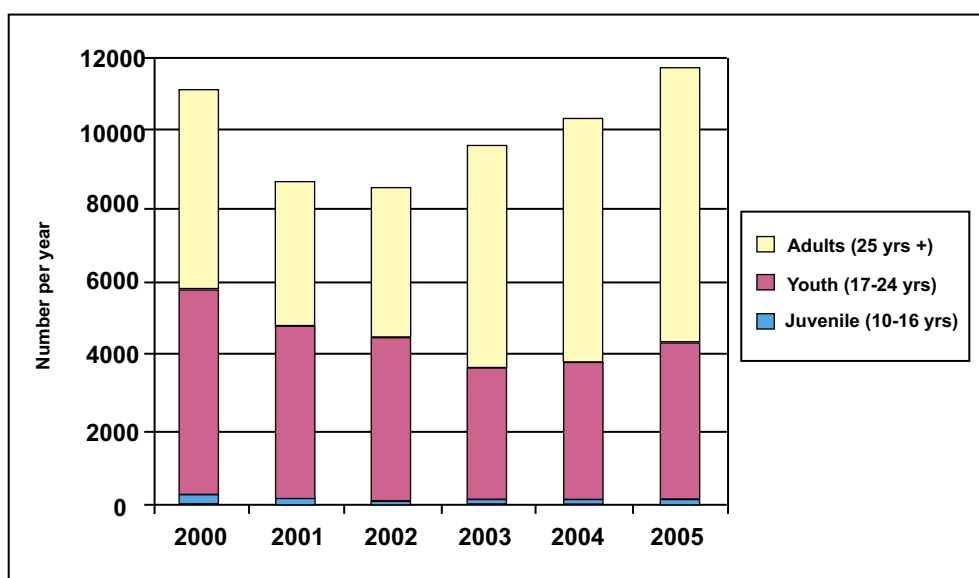
⁷⁷Barr 1990.

3. Youth Development

3.1 Policies and Programmes for Youth

The youth population is the fastest growing segment of the Fiji population. In 1996, the median age in Fiji was 21.2 years and 19.6% of the population was aged between 15 and 24 years. Many social problems cluster around youth, including crime (Figure 2.12). A lot of attention has been given to the problems faced by young people, and to improving their prospects through training in life skills and employment generation, provision of reproductive health services specifically for youth and projects to address issues such as substance abuse. Fiji participated in the development of the Pacific Youth Strategy. Youth delegates contributed to regional strategies of the Pacific Plan and the Pacific Millennium Development Goals.⁷⁸ The Fiji Government recognises that the issues facing children and youth are multi-faceted and need to be addressed in a coordinated way. Key issues are employment, teenage pregnancy and sexual and reproductive health, the latter issues covered elsewhere in this report.

Figure 2.12 Reported Offenders by age-group, 2000-2005



Source: Fiji Police, 2005

A National Youth Policy was developed in 2004 with the assistance of the National Youth Council and representatives of other youth organisations, and incorporated into the national development planning process. Key elements of the policy were youth development and employment; leadership and decision-making; physical education, sports and recreation; youth health; life skills training; youths at risk; youth networking and partnership; cultural, religious, values and virtues, youth rights, and environmental sustainability. In 2005, Cabinet endorsed a 20 year Strategic Development for Youth Plan 2006-2025 of which core areas were health and social services, non-formal education and training, employment and sports.⁷⁹

3.2 Expanding livelihoods

There is a shortage of wage employment in Fiji and young people are disadvantaged by their lack of work experience and often limited employable skills. The link between limited education and restricted livelihood opportunities in Fiji is well documented.⁸⁰ Nationally, there is a marked drop-off in school enrolments after the age of 15 (Figure 2.9 see page 38).

⁷⁸ UNICEF, 2005.

⁷⁹ Fiji Government, 2006.

⁸⁰ Fiji Government and UNDP, 1997.

There has been an expansion of vocational education in the schools but most of it is pitched at higher secondary forms. Many students who could benefit most therefore miss out, and what is available is too limited to meet the demand.⁸¹

Youth employment is being addressed by Government through the Youth Employment Policy Framework and the Labour Administration and Productivity Improvement Sub-Programme under the Ministry of Employment and Productivity. The problem of finding employment for young people, however, cannot be separated from the overall difficulties of creating livelihoods in Fiji. Over the past two decades, the low level of business investment has depressed the demand for labour and restricted the growth of the job market. There has been a progressive erosion of the value of real incomes, especially for waged workers.⁸² The most disadvantaged workers are those in the informal sector, employed domestically, or outside of the main industries, occupations that are entirely unprotected in Fiji.

For both men and women, the proportion of people who are economically active rises with each level of formal education. The proportion of economically active people who earn a wage or salary also rises with each level of formal education, and wage and salary earners predominate in the higher earning deciles of the population.⁸³ The fact that overall this generation of young people have had more access to education than older generations widens their potential livelihood opportunities. Without economic growth, however, there are not enough jobs being created to meet the demand. The decline in livelihoods is greatest in rural areas. Jobs and income are concentrated in the towns, and so is the population of young adults.

4. People with special needs

4.1 Disabled children and adults

Disabled or chronically ill people in Fiji are at high risk of living in poverty.⁸⁴ Although education opportunities for disabled children have recently widened, many older youths and adults had only a chance to attend primary school at most. Many disabled people cannot therefore get good paying jobs and they often face discrimination in the work place.⁸⁵

The number of disabled adults is growing with the increased prevalence of chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension. If the family is unable to pay for the costs of medicine or for looking after the disabled family member, the household will be poor. Because of the burden of care, some mentally or physically disabled or elderly people are neglected or excluded by their families. Many permanently disabled people are left to the mercy of their relatives and their needs may be ignored. This is especially so in areas where there are no facilities for the disabled. The Disabled Persons Association works to empower disabled people, principally by providing them referral services to other government and NGO programmes.

4.2 People living in poverty

Stories abound in Fiji's news media of people facing hard times, and all surveys into incomes or living standards confirm that many households now live on a very thin margin. Political and economic troubles in Fiji have had serious consequences for families and children, particularly through an upsurge in unemployment. Many families have been left for varying lengths of time unable to buy sufficient food, pay for housing or send their children to school. Natural disasters, such as hurricanes, can also be very disruptive to communities. The Government's Natural Disaster Coordination Committee attempts to quickly provide relief and rehabilitation to communities in emergencies.

⁸¹Pers comm., AusAID Review Team, 2006, on vocational education.

⁸²Narsey, 2006.

⁸³Fiji Government and UNDP, 1996.

⁸⁴Fiji Government and UNDP, 1996; Chung with ECREA, 2006.

⁸⁵UNDP and Fiji Government, 1996; Pers comm. Fiji Red Cross

Poverty is the main cause of child labour in Fiji. Children who leave school early mostly do so because their families cannot afford the cost.⁸⁶ Most children who work do so in informal ways, for families as domestic workers, labourers, or farm workers, often being passed from one family to the next with little consideration for their care. Some become 'street children' in the towns, working as wheelbarrow boys in the markets, shoe-shiners, or prostitutes.

The broken lives on our streets

The Suva Market is both home and place of employment for Pita and John. They are the wheelbarrow boys, earning a living by carting produce for farmers, stall holders and shoppers. Pita and John are both 16 years old. They have been fending for themselves since they were 14. Pita comes from a family of five. He was orphaned when only a year old. An aunt took in Pita and two of his siblings. But things started to go wrong for them as they grew older. "In 1995, when I was in class one, I never had any lunch to take to school," says Pita. "I could go without lunch for weeks." "This happened right until class eight, and I missed school a lot. I and some other boys would climb mango and guava trees to feed ourselves." Pita's world came crashing down one day in 2003 when he returned home to find all his belongings by the roadside. He could hear his aunt and uncle arguing. "I knew right away it was about me because my older brother had run away two weeks before. When my aunt told me to look for some place else to live I could feel my heart breaking..."

Pita said he was so depressed that he even thought of killing himself. "Where I was to go, I didn't know." He ended up at the bus stand, hungry and tired. "I wanted to sleep but I couldn't because I was so embarrassed. I waited for nightfall so no one could see me."

It was at the market that Pita met John. John had been an only child, living in Toorak with his parents. He said his was a happy family until his parents separated. Then the heated arguments started. "Every time this happened I would stand and watch, feeling very helpless." John's mother left when he was studying for the Fiji Junior Examination. "I just couldn't concentrate at school," he said. When his father brought in a new woman, John decided to run away. "I couldn't live there because no one loved me."

He came to the market and got into the wheelbarrow business. "At first I thought the *bara boys* would harass and beat me but later I came to understand that we had one thing in common – survival."

John remembers his first encounter with Pita at the market. He felt an immediate connection because he knew at once Pita's story was the same as his. Both boys lament the lost opportunity to get an education.

Source: Fulori Turaga and Shobna Goundar, Wansolwara, June 2005

The Fiji Government allocates only a small proportion of its budget to social welfare, on the basis that it cannot afford a welfare state nor wants to create a 'handout' mentality. Their view has been that families should take responsibility to protect all their members – although there is good evidence that many poor people cannot rely on family support. The main official welfare programme, the Family Assistance Scheme, provides small cash payments to the most destitute households. There have always been more eligible applicants than the programme could cater for, payments have remained very small, and even these payments were cut drastically in the government's last budget.

Other assistance provided by government to disadvantaged groups has included small grants provided through the Department of Social Welfare to assist with housing and help people (principally ex-prisoners) develop livelihoods; capital and recurrent grants provided through CSOs to fund social services; micro-credit services provided through the Ministry

⁸⁶ Save the Children Fiji, 1999.

of Commerce, public legal services provided by the Department of Social Welfare and the Attorney-General's Office on the basis of a means test; provision of tuition fees for all school-children through the Ministry of Education; health services provided for everyone at little or no cost through the Ministry of Health; and special assistance to Fijian and rural people.

The terms 'poverty', 'hardship' and 'disadvantage' now occur frequently in government planning and policy documents. Since 2000, national plans have emphasised the need to address poverty and hardship. Many NGOs working in this area believe nevertheless that there is insufficient political will to fully address the problems. There also are evident contradictions in policies. For example, the Social Welfare Department provides \$5000 grants to Family Assistance recipients to enable them to build houses, at which price the only affordable sites would be in informal settlements. Meanwhile, the stated policy of the Squatter Unit - a department within the same ministry - is to discourage squatter growth through the regular patrolling of squatter settlements, issuing of eviction notices to new entrants, pulling down shacks that have been erected, withholding consent for water and electricity from new squatters, and giving low priority to development of new squatter settlements. The Unit says it uses these strategies with some constraint, being aware that they violate human rights.⁸⁷

Civil society organisations play a very important role in social welfare and development in Fiji. They provide by far the largest part of welfare assistance to poor and needy people in the community, and this has been their traditional focus. Even though many of these organisations are small, have a limited range, and cannot meet all demands on their services, the contribution of CSOs to welfare in particular far out-weighs that of government.

Workers and their families at Vatukoula Gold Mine

Many communities in developing countries have complained of human rights abuses and environmental degradation perpetuated by mining companies. Often these communities have no institution that they can address to seek fair and equitable redress and mining companies have been able to disregard their concerns. The gold-mine at Vatukoula is no exception to this sorry story.

Since operations began in 1935 by Emperor Gold Mining Company⁸⁸, working conditions in the mine and living conditions for workers and their families have been the subject of many reviews, most of them silenced by the company through successful court actions. In 1991, miners went out on strike alleging low pay, negligent health and safety conditions and substandard company housing. This dispute has never been resolved despite an official commission of inquiry, a Senate inquiry and a series of court cases. Many of the strikers have remained out of work for 17 years, although some returned to work for lack of another livelihood. Some of the ex-workers were served with eviction orders from their company-owned housing. The stress of being on strike for so long has led to family breakdown, alcohol and substance abuse, and sometimes domestic violence. The children of strikers could be distinguished from other children by their poor health, lack of food, lack of shoes and proper school uniforms.

Working conditions never improved. An Oxfam inquiry in 2004 found that hazardous working conditions in the mine had caused deaths and injuries. After salary deductions, including costs of safety gear, damaged machine parts and rent for sub-standard company housing, workers complained they had barely enough to feed their families. (Emperor was given special exemptions to basic employment standards in Fiji under the Employment Act.) Women workers were discriminated against by the company refusing to grant them housing, requiring them to work long hours in excruciating conditions sometimes late into the night, and then providing them no transport to safely return home. Workers complained they received no sickness benefits from the company and alleged they were pressured to work when injured and unwell.

⁸⁷ Lingam, 2007:29

⁸⁸ Emperor Gold Mine was formed in 1986 from the assets and holdings of the Emperor Gold Mining Company. The new company was first domiciled on the Isle of Man for tax purposes but listed on the Australian stock exchange, until 2002 when it was fully transferred to Australia (Macdonald et al., 2004).

Living conditions in the workers' quarters remain grim. Drinking water is drawn untreated from the Nasivi River, despite confirmed unsafe levels of mercury, cadmium and e-coli in the water, despite a 1981 UNESCAP report that recommended the company's lease not be renewed until they had satisfactorily monitored their environmental impact, and despite a 1995 official review report that said that "Vatukoula might be one of the last mining towns in the world where untreated water is drawn from taps that is freely available to children." When the mine was working, rainwater tanks and the air were polluted from sulphur clouds emitted from the roaster stacks, causing children to have respiratory problems such as asthma, bad headaches, bleeding noses and itchy eyes. The sulphur plumes regularly affected the local primary school causing children to run inside and close the windows to avoid the white clouds. Air pollution also spoiled food crops. Company housing, which was rented or purchased by workers or illegally occupied by striking workers, was in very poor condition. Families occupied single-room barracks originally built for single male workers, with ten or more families sharing a toilet or shower, and all now in very dilapidated condition. Houses built of corrugated iron were impossibly hot during the day and lacked kitchen or bathroom facilities. Children played around the open drains.

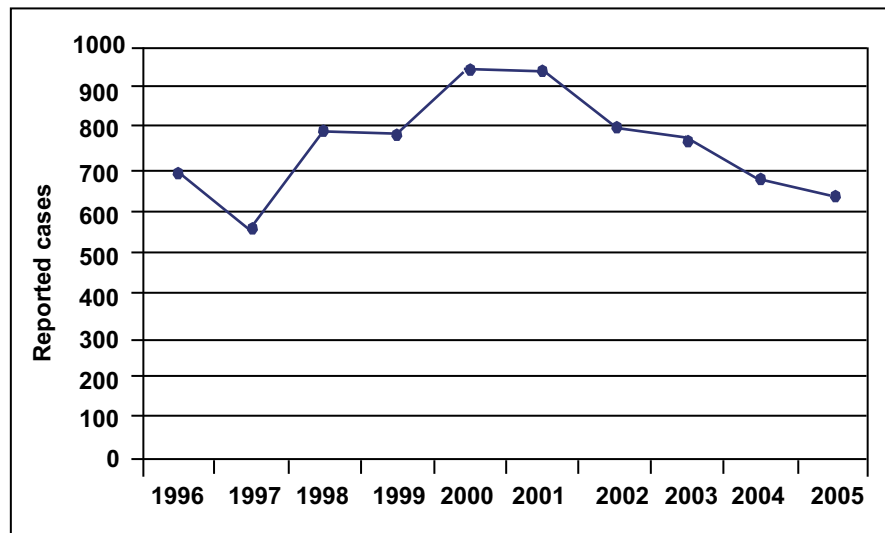
In 2006, Emperor Gold Mine was sold to another Australian company, of which the original company held a large share, but the sale process was delayed. By July 2007, the mine had been closed for 6 months but no resolution was expected for at least another 4 months. Some workers had found seasonal work away from Vatukoula as cane-cutters or forestry workers and sent what money they could back to their families. Many families were left with no income at all. A poor community was now in crisis. Schools in the area were trying to assist children who had no bus fares or meals, but school attendance was dropping. Community leaders had appealed to the National Disaster Management Office for disaster relief but no government assistance had been provided. Families of the 1700 miners who lost their jobs were pleading for assistance from any possible direction.

Sources: MacDonald et al., 2004, and discussions at Vatukoula with Josefa Salau, President of the Fiji Mine Workers Union, Kavakini Navuso, General Secretary of the Fiji Mine Workers Union and Industrial Relations Advisor, and laid-off workers and their families, July 2007.

4.3 Women and children at risk of abuse

Domestic violence is an issue about which there was both community and official denial, and a strange assumption that this particular form of violence could and should be dealt with by families themselves. Led by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement, over the past decade or so there has been a real change in official attitudes to domestic violence in Fiji. The Government recognises it as a pervasive social problem across all communities and the Fiji Police have put in place mechanisms such as a 'no-drop' policy to better report and deal with it. The problem itself, however, remains.

Figure 2.13 Reported cases of domestic violence, 1996-2005



Source: Fiji Police Force, 2005

Physical abuse of children is common in Fiji because it is often considered an acceptable form in discipline. A survey conducted in 2006 found that the great majority of punishments experienced by children were direct assaults, and that younger children received more than older children. These assaults (in the words of the children) included being beaten, hit, slapped or lashed, smacked, whacked, given a hiding, spanked, punched, “donged” (on the head) and pinched. Most of the children reported the school and the home as the places where most punishments were administered and the people who most dealt out punishment were teachers. However, if all immediate family members were added together, the home was where most punishment was meted out. Children were punished for disobedience, poor academic performance and misbehaviour.⁸⁹

Sexual abuse also occurs, with a high number of incest and sexual exploitation cases reported in the media and dealt with in the courts. It appears that both boys and girls are equally involved in prostitution and pornography, and exploited both by locals and foreign abusers.⁹⁰ Children who are at risk for sexual exploitation also tend to be at risk for commercial sexual exploitation, which takes five common forms: prostitution, pornography, child sex tourism, adoption and early marriage. Sexual exploitation can include rape, incest, molestation, domestic sexual and physical abuse, sodomy, paedophilia, and witnessing third party involvement.⁹¹ A study conducted in 2006 found that perpetrators of child commercial sexual abuse included a small number of foreigners resident in Fiji’s towns, who were assisted by ‘middle-men’ (sometimes taxi drivers) or women who worked as ‘local agents’ by arranging meeting points for young girls with men for monetary exchange. The study concluded that commercial sexual exploitation was becoming more organised, lucrative and complex, and the risk to children was rising.⁹²

In 1997, the Juveniles Act was amended in regard to the prevention of child pornography and in 1998, Cabinet passed a motion implementing tougher sentences for perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Those found guilty now face a minimum sentence of 14 years imprisonment and a \$25,000 fine, or a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and fine of \$50,000.⁹³

⁸⁹ Save the Children Fiji, 2006a

⁹⁰ AusAID, 1999; Carling, 2004; Save the Children Fiji, 2006b.

^{91,92} Save the Children Fiji, 2006b.

⁹³ Carling, 2004.

It is difficult to know from the increased number of reports of domestic violence or child abuse whether the problems are growing or their reporting has become more thorough. There are five approved children's homes providing emotional and psychological care to children who have been removed from their homes under Court Order, but child victims of abuse live there together with child offenders, or else they must live with other relatives or even back with the person accused of abuse. This problem is often compounded by a long delay between an incident of abuse and it going to trial. There is a great shortage of skilled child counsellors, however this training is now offered as part of the Certificate in Social Work offered by the University of the South Pacific.

Fiji's Plan of Action against the commercial sexual exploitation of children calls for:

- Development of child-sensitive laws essential to preventing CSEC or the exploitation of children or young people through information technologies and other channels of communication such as videos or the internet;
- Integration of the issue of CSEC into both formal and informal education, to encourage more young people to be involved in combating CSEC through local task forces or children's task forces;
- Strengthening of the National Youth Council to become an independent advisory and consultative body to the government on legislation and other issues;
- Development of greater capacity among government, NGO and CSO bodies, including training on child-friendly services and community training on the CRC and other international legal instruments, parenting, communication, peer counselling, and the training of trainers for teachers, parents, young people and community leaders;
- Greater provision of services for child victims of CSEC, which are gender and culture sensitive, and include peer counselling, hot-line, shelters, medical treatment and psycho-social counselling;
- Establishment of community-based surveillance and monitoring of CSEC to strengthen the social protection of children and to involve the participation of children and young people;
- The linkage of government monitoring of the Stockholm Declaration and agenda for action to other monitoring efforts, such as for the CRC.

4.4 Children and youth in trouble with the law

Although Fiji has a special juvenile justice system and specific legislation, Fiji's 1995 CRC report pointed out the short-comings of the system. The Fiji Law Reform Commission has proposed legislative reform that relate specifically to children and aim to harmonise legislation with the principles of the CRC and CEDAW. However, most of these problems are yet to be resolved.

The Juvenile Courts are held only in Suva and Lautoka, in a normal Magistrate's Court. Children and youth can still be victims of punitive behaviour by the Police or be detained with adults in over-crowded or sub-standard prisons and detention centres.⁹⁴ Child maintenance payments are mostly inadequate to cover a child's needs or are insufficiently

⁹⁴Carling, 2004.

enforced. There is no specific legislation to adequately address commercial sexual exploitation of children, trafficking and abduction. The few existing provisions consider commercial sexual exploitation of children to be a misdemeanour liable for convictions of 2 years imprisonment. The minimum age of criminal responsibility is 12 years, or 10 years if it can be proven that the person had the capacity to know if was a wrongful act.⁹⁵ There are very few trained legal representatives or counsellors for children. The Women's Crisis Centre is the only agency that provides counselling to child victims of sexual abuse. Welfare officers do not accompany children to court and are usually only called in at the stage of a social inquiry report.⁹⁶

Young people are often poorly informed about their rights and legal issues, including the Legal Aid service. Juvenile offenders are often imprisoned in a detention home or regular prison instead of being given rehabilitative punishment, often because of the difficulty of finding suitable supervisors. A survey of juvenile offenders found that none had had legal representation in court.⁹⁷ However, the Police follow a national standard to caution a juvenile for minor offences without resorting to judicial proceedings and practice pre-trial diversion. No juvenile can receive corporal punishment but although the words 'conviction' or 'sentence' cannot be used, they still get a criminal record. The Police also have a Juvenile Bureau that collects information about juvenile justice issues, efforts are being made to improve the standards of prisons and detention centres for juveniles, and a number of training programmes have been held for Police to deal with sexual offences against children and women.

The Geneva Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended the revision of laws, policies, programmes and practices pertaining to the juvenile justice system, to fully integrate the CRC and other international conventions. It also recommended a review of provisions for legal counselling for children in care centres, that detention should be used as a last resort, and that conditions of detention centres be improved. Other potential partners identified to raise awareness of juvenile justice issues are the Pacific Judicial Education Programme, the Regional Rights Resource Team, National Council on Substance Abuse, the Ministry of Youth, Employment Opportunities and Sports, Women's Action for Change, Salvation Army, Fiji Red Cross Society, Save the Children Fiji, Young Women's Christian Association, Chevalier Hostel, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Young Lawyers Association and the National Coordinating Committee on Children.⁹⁸

The Australia/Fiji Law and Justice Sector Programme has refurbished juvenile court facilities, conducted a study into community attitudes on juvenile justice, conducted community and professional training workshops on various aspects of law and order, provided a community volunteer probation officer, and undertaken various other initiatives on juvenile justice.

5. Recognition and protection of human rights

5.1 Children

Most Pacific island countries have long had laws and procedures to protect children from harm or neglect but it is only quite recently, particularly after ratification of the CRC, that wider attention has been given to the implementation of these laws and procedures and to their limitations. However, the CRC proposes more than simply focusing on children in need of special protection with reaction-oriented measures, rather it calls for a holistic approach that focuses on the whole protective environment for all children, to ensure that there are back-up support systems when regular safety nets fail to provide adequate protection for children against violence, exploitation, abuse or discrimination.⁹⁹

^{95,96,97,98,99} Carling, 2004.

Fiji ratified the CRC in 1993 and presented its first implementation report in 1995. The Department of Social Welfare has a child protection unit and is responsible for addressing most child protection issues, but the unit is very understaffed and lacks transport in rural areas. The Ministries of Education, Youth and Health also have responsibilities for child protection. Fiji has ratified ILO conventions regarding the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, acceded to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, and adopted the Stockholm Agenda for Action to prevent the commercial exploitation of children.¹⁰⁰

UNICEF and other development partners have been helping the Fiji Government to strengthen their capacity to support child rights. The commitment of government to child protection as demonstrated through the policies of various ministries and the police is driving this process onwards. The National Coordinating Committee for Children coordinates and facilitates advocacy about the CRC and monitoring and reporting activities to be carried out by the government.

An important part of this process is to educate the public about child rights and children's development. This knowledge helps to build capacity to budget for and develop necessary services for children, and to make people aware of what types of actions constitute child abuse and are unacceptable. The Ministry of Education, for example, has had a policy in place for more than a decade, that head-teachers alone could physically punish children and then only in controlled ways. The fact that teachers still strike children is evident from the number of newspaper reports and court cases against them, but these reports and cases also show that the community is becoming less tolerant of this behaviour.

One of the difficulties in better addressing child protection is the lack of consolidated and disaggregated data on issues such as juvenile justice, child labour, abuse and exploitation, leaving people in key political, administrative and judicial roles reliant on media reports and anecdotes.¹⁰¹ Efforts to develop common reporting databases nevertheless go back to the early 1990s.¹⁰² Another problem in better developing child protection is the little financial resources directed towards this, particularly the limited resources of the Department of Social Welfare, the police, children's homes and detention centres.¹⁰³



^{100,101,103} Carling, 2004.

¹⁰² Fiji Government, CRC Report 1995.

Table 2.13 Missing information on child protection

Issue	Source	Data available
Reported cases of sexual abuse of children and young people	Police	Reported cases of rape, attempted rape, defilement of girls under 13 yrs, defilement of girls 14-16 yrs, unnatural offences, indecent exposure, incest, indecent assault
	Department of Social Welfare	Sexual abuse
Reported cases of child physical abuse	Police	Murder, manslaughter, assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, assault occasioning actual bodily harm, abduction, criminal intimidation, common assault, others
	Department of Social Welfare	Child neglect, abandonment, lost/orphaned, beyond control (removal of child), child available for adoption, victims of parental conflict, truancy
Violence against children in the school		No data available
Violence against children in conflict with the law		No data available
Violence against institutionalised children		No data available
Violence against children in work situations		No data available
Violence against children in the street/community		No data available
Violence against children in the cyberspace		No data available

Source: Ministry for Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation, 2005.

Note: There are protocols for information sharing between the Dept of Social Welfare and the police, but no legal requirements.

Birth registration is an important right for all children. Compared with other Pacific island countries, Fiji's registration system is comprehensive. Registration of births within two months is a legal requirement under the 1975 Births, Deaths and Marriages Act. Birth registries are available in all government centres. About 70% of all births are registered within the correct time period, 28% are late registrations (ie. after 12 months) and an estimated 2% of births are not registered for some reason.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ L. Matadigo, Register General, in UNICEF, 2005.