It is extremely difficult to gauge the nature and extent of sorcery accusation–related violence (SARV) at a national level in any country. In part this is due to under-reporting and because official health and justice records do not typically monitor whether incidents are linked to sorcery accusations. Papua New Guinea poses particular challenges because of its language and cultural diversity, and poor reach and reliability of data collection in government services that respond to SARV. The vast majority of literature on SARV in Papua New Guinea is qualitative in nature, and most is localised, with very few quantitative studies.

Our analysis of media and case law revealed 452 discrete incidents of SARV reported in the previous 20 years, involving 1443 victims (many incidents had multiple victims). This equates to an average of 72 victims per year, and an average of more than 30 deaths per year. Geographic patterns and trends in the incidents and state and non-state responses to the violence are considered in In Briefs 2017/30 and 2017/31. The focus here is a summary of key characteristics of the reported incidents, victims and perpetrators.

### Trigger Events
A specific event was reported to have precipitated the violence in 68 per cent of incidents. The death of a person was the specific trigger in 91 per cent of these cases. In a quarter (26 per cent) of these deaths it is specified that a young person had died. In 9 per cent of cases the violence was reported to have occurred during the mourning or funeral for the dead person. In almost half of the incidents that occurred after someone had died, at least one of the perpetrators of SARV was reported to be related to the dead person. The status or position of the dead person was reported in only 9 per cent of cases; the most common status reported was that of a village chief, councillor, politician or ‘prominent figure’.

### Characteristics of Victims
Of the 1443 victims reported over the 20 years, 1088 were classified as accused victims and 355 as secondary victims, meaning those hurt or killed by virtue of their relationship to the person accused. In just over half the cases (52 per cent) there was only one victim. Of all the victims, 610 were killed (42 per cent), 340 were wounded (24 per cent) and 493 were not physically harmed (34 per cent) but may have been psychologically harmed or suffered from property damage, most commonly arson. The means of death was reported in only a subset of 256 incidents. Of these, the most common method reported was ‘stabbed/chopped/slash or beheaded’ (n = 109), followed by being ‘beaten to death’ (33), ‘shot dead’ (32) and ‘burnt alive’ (29).

Across all types of victimisation (killed, wounded and physically unharmed), where the sex of the victim was reported there were more male than female victims for the 20-year period (296 males killed, 154 wounded, 74 not physically harmed) but may have been psychologically harmed or suffered from property damage, most commonly arson. The means of death was reported in only a subset of 256 incidents. Of these, the most common method reported was ‘stabbed/chopped/slash or beheaded’ (n = 109), followed by being ‘beaten to death’ (33), ‘shot dead’ (32) and ‘burnt alive’ (29).

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Across all types of victimisation (killed, wounded and physically unharmed), where the sex of the victim was reported there were more male than female victims for the 20-year period (296 males killed, 154 wounded, 74 not physically harmed, compared to 194 females killed, 135 wounded, 46 not physically harmed). The gender of the victim varied considerably between provinces, with some...
provinces having more than 75 per cent female victims and other provinces more than 75 per cent male victims. For a few years, from 1998 to 2001, the proportion of females killed on a national basis was higher than males but this trend was reversed after 2001 and continued to 2016.

Among the 610 killed victims, males were more likely to be beaten to death or killed with a sharp instrument than females. Females were more likely to be burnt alive or to die from burns. One in 10 female victims were raped and the majority of these were subsequently killed. A minority (18 per cent) of all victims were reported as tortured, often to obtain a confession. Females were significantly more likely to be tortured than males (39 per cent of all female victims compared with 19 per cent of all male victims).

The age was reported for only 28 per cent of all victims (n = 406). Male and female accused victims were on average in their mid-forties, although there was a sizeable category of older people (60+ years) as well. Men were likely to be older (mean = 46.2 years) than women (mean = 43.8 years, a statistically significant difference).

Characteristics of Perpetrators

The newspaper reports and court cases indicate that SARV often involves large groups directly involved in violence or witnesses to it. For 444 incidents there was a record of the estimated number involved, with the most common category between 6 and 20 people (n = 194). A very approximate estimate (as exact numbers are not often reported) is that during the 20-year period more than 15,000 perpetrators including accomplices and supporters were reported as involved in SARV. For 386 incidents the sex of the perpetrators was reported as male only, while 57 incidents were reported and recorded as involving both male and female perpetrators. Where ages were reported (22 per cent of incidents), the most common category was the age range of 19 to 40 years. In a small number of cases (6 per cent of total), it was reported that either the police, local authorities or church leaders participated in or witnessed or condoned the violence. Glasman/meri (diviners) were reported as being involved in 22 incidents.

The victims’ relationship to the perpetrators was mentioned for 61 per cent of incidents (n = 276). Of the 276 incidents, the majority (70 per cent) lived in the same village. Only a few perpetrators (13 per cent) were mentioned as being from another place or from a neighbouring village. In 14.5 per cent of these 276 incidents, the perpetrators were described as relatives, while 2.5 per cent were described as friends or colleagues. In only 3 per cent of all reported incidents was there explicit mention of underlying issues between the victims and perpetrators, such as land or money disputes.

Conclusion

Although media coverage of SARV is likely to significantly under-represent the true numbers of incidents, it does provide us with some credible statistics in relation to incidents we can be reasonably certain occurred. A number of issues emerge that warrant further attention and investigation. First, the volume of victimisation and the number of injuries and deaths from SARV across the country are very concerning. The numbers amount to a minimum of 30 victims of SARV being killed in about 23 incidents every year. Second, in the majority of reported incidents, there were multiple victims and often extreme violence involved, including torture as well as ongoing insecurity and psychological damage. Third, there are significant differences in the way male and female victims are harmed, with the latter sometimes raped and more likely to be burnt and tortured than male victims. Fourth, this is often a type of mob violence which involves large groups of perpetrators.

Author Notes

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