



# Leading Issues Journal

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# About the Journal

ACLW's online Leading Issues Journal started in September 2000. It is published annually. Its aim is to present significant advances in leadership and women's issues in the community and organisations, in Australia and internationally. Articles and interviews focus on views, reflections, research, practice and media discussions.

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## Editor's Introduction

In this edition, I am proud to feature the work and insights of courageous, innovative, caring and leading women from Australia and abroad who are striving to address gender equality barriers within their own areas of expertise and for the benefit of all women.

**Liesel Talery** discusses her work and passion to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment in democracy building in Liberia, as Gender Director at the National Elections Commission of Liberia. She utilises her skilful leadership to evaluate, monitor and design policies, systems and practices to contribute to gender equality in Liberia.


**Nazhat Shameem Khan** in her reflective paper, whilst reminding us of the value of talking about our experiences of the barriers we face as women, she highlights, "Yet we women, have often been brought up to be self-deprecating. We often fail to value the importance of our own experiences. Our experiences are so important that they shape the type of leadership we are able to offer to the world. Yet we do not want to talk about them." Nazhat goes on to share her personal story which unfolds with valuable insights on leading qualitatively that is embedded in the foundation of one's "experiences of the intersection of culture, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status and religious prejudice in the lives of women."

In her search for any sensible rationale as to why one gender in the workplace continues "to be punished for their biology" - the ability to have children, **Shirley Chowdhary** urges that "we need to think seriously about male parental leave quotas if it could be the one thing that stops employers having the she-could-fall-pregnant-and-need-time-off-and-cost-me-money reaction?" Her reframing of strategies as "dividing parental leave into male and female quotas" has merit and needs to be explored further if we are to have a level playing field in workplaces.

Journalists **Julie Macken and Pamela Curr**'s ongoing 2015 campaign 'Women in support of Women in Nauru' has drawn thousands of signatures from women calling on the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition to end the violence against women and families on Nauru and Manus Island.

The letter says in part:

*We the undersigned women of Australia are speaking out in support of the women, children and men detained on Nauru and Manus Island. Families, women and children who are now suffering ongoing sexual assault and torment both within and without the detention centres of Nauru and Manus Island.*



In this edition, both Julie and Luisa share their journey and frustration over how Australia is dealing with the issue of asylum seekers and why it needs to change.

What would compel a woman to ride 500km on a bike in 5 days in Thailand, not having ridden a bike for 25 years? **Sarah Valentine's** story to take on this challenge to assist orphaned children who are at risk is extraordinary.

In 2012, **Paula Ferrari** felt the urgency to act when she saw “the photo of a little girl, perhaps aged 6 or 7, being held by her mother, legs raised and screaming in pain as women leaned over her genitals, made me physically ill.” Paula co-founded No FGM Australia aiming to protect girls from female genital mutilation, advocate for dignified care and support to empower survivors of FGM. In her article, Paula discusses what has been achieved and what still needs to be done.

Finally, **Dr Roslyn Franklin's** PhD research summary gives a snapshot of her Study - *Making waves: Contesting the lifestyle marketing and sponsorship of female surfers.*

Diann Rodgers-Healey (PhD)  
Director  
Australian Centre for Leadership for Women

# Interview with Leisel Y. Talery, Gender Director of the National Elections Commission of Liberia



Leisel Talery began her professional career as an educator in Liberia and later served in many capacities in education decision making at the Buduburam Refugee Camp in Ghana and Liberia.

She has more than twenty years of experience in managing education programs for students, teachers and community structures. Prior years' experience include working with young people, especially adolescent girls and young women in the areas of skills; training children in child labor or at risk of getting into child labor; capacity building; livelihood skills; sustainable development and formal education election and governance. Leisel has worked with Civil society organizations, women groups, government agencies and ministries.

Leisel has always had a passion for volunteerism, serving as a volunteer over the past thirty years with several non-profit, development and rights groups in Ghana and Liberia, including the Liberia Girl Guides Association (LGGA); Self Help Initiative for Sustainable Development (SHIFSD), Women of Liberia Peace Network (WOLPNET) and Buduburam Refugee Camp Central Education.

Over the past 11 years, she has worked in the non-profit humanitarian sector of Liberia with a focus on Children, Women, Human Rights and Elections. She has also worked for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) as a Program Officer designing strategies for greater involvement in Elections in Liberia, working closely with the National Elections Commission of Liberia (NEC). Working with National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCL), Leisel strengthened this body to meet an overall goal of being

a credible, transparent, accountable and efficient civil society group that coordinates and regulates activities and builds synergies of CSOs/ NGOs.



Having attended several national and international training courses, Leisel possesses several professional certificates in Women Leadership, Facilitation, Women and Human Rights Law, Management, Monitoring and Evaluation, Building Resources in

Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRLeiselDGE).

Leisel has participated in elections observation nationally and internationally and believes that the voices of both men and women should be heard in governance at the community as well as national level.

### **What responsibilities do you have as Gender Director at the National Elections Commission of Liberia?**

My terms of reference as Gender Director include, but are not limited to:

- Devise, formulate and implement projects and programs that will mainstream gender in the electoral management body
- Increase broad political parties' participation in elections by liaising with civil society organizations, political parties, women organizations and other stakeholders on gender equality issues
- Engage in networking with international, regional and local partners on gender and elections initiative
- Take the lead in the conduct of workshops, trainings and seminars with gender mainstreaming contents
- Assist in the scouting for technical support and contributions by international partners and others targeted sources.
- Assist in providing technical support and training in gender approaches for project staff and various program stakeholders and for all program components

- Advise management team on gender related issues, concerns, trends and policies
- Systematically analyze the participation of women and men in electoral processes: as voters, as candidates and (temporary and permanent) electoral staff
- Identify and expose obstacles that impede women's access to full political citizenship, including the role of political parties in enabling women's leadership

### **What attracted you to this position?**

I have always been passionate about working with marginalised and special needs persons. The fact that Liberia elected the first female president in Liberia and Africa served as a key motivation.

Since my High school days, I have been working with various marginalised and special circumstances groups as a volunteer and a paid staff. I have also worked as a volunteer with girls, young women and disability groups in Liberia for a long time as well as during my time spent in the Buduburam Refugee Camp in Ghana as a Refugee.

During my previous work as a Program Manager of the officer with an elections management body, The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in Liberia, where I served as the focal person for and worked closely Gender and Civic and Voters Education, I worked closely with both rural and urban civil society, disability and women groups. Whilst working with these various groups I became familiar with problems hindering women's participation as well as solutions for improvement. When I learned of the vacancy, I applied because of my passion for women's empowerment and my desire to see women participation in politics in Liberia reach at least Thirty percent (30%). I knew that I could help make meaningful contributions in improving the status of women in politics nationally.

### **How does your role as a Gender Specialist in an autonomous independent agency make a difference to National Elections in Liberia?**

My role as a Gender Specialist at the NEC can make a difference to National Elections in Liberia as highlighted below:



Stakeholders from all level of society will be engaged to develop relevant skills and competencies to enable women at the national and local levels to assume active roles in the decision making process which aligns with specific Government policies. My office is working towards a governance and elections system that raises the voice of and provides a space for Citizen's participation in Elections for both men and women. We are also working on a gender policy for the NEC and are liaising with political parties to ensure that political parties' manifestos are gender sensitive. Monitoring and evaluation of elections related activities will be supported by the collection of gender disaggregated data for continuous improvement and sustainability.


**Is there a low voter turnout of women in elections in Liberia and how is this being addressed?**

The data on registered voters in Liberia currently shows women at 47% and men at 53%. Presently there is no data available on the number of person's voting in Liberia on any Election Day. The results of seats won by women in the legislature is usually used as one of the indicator of women's participation in elections in Liberia.

The 2005 general and presidential elections in Liberia brought Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power as the first female president of Liberia and Africa. Those same elections brought seventeen females in the both houses in the legislature. The 2011 elections saw the number of females in the legislature being reduced to 12 females, presently there are 11 women in both houses of the legislature.

The gender section at the NEC has developed a three year action plan (July 2015-June 2018) with three strategic objectives:

- (1) To strengthen the integration of gender perspectives in democratic institutions and processes, To integrate gender equality and women empowerment in all areas of democracy building in and amongst political parties.
- (2) To develop programming responses that will address the inequalities that characterize men and women participation in the electoral process resulting in unequal outcomes
- (3) To provide inputs into NEC organizational policies, systems and practices to contribute to gender equality. The plan contains several specific objectives, outputs, objectively verifiable indicators (OVI), activities as well as projected cost.



The NEC through its gender section is currently seeking funding from interested national and international partners to help fund the implementation of this three year action plan.

**How would you describe your leadership strengths?**

My leadership strengths lies in the fact that I have diverse experiences in working with persons from all levels of community, organizations and government, in designing strategies for partners and establishing methods for progress aimed at attaining results; providing support to both international and local partners and considerable field activities. I possess analytical skills and multitasking abilities. My experiences are also in humanitarian work, working with Civil Society Organizations and Elections. I have strong financial and technical skills and have the ability to monitor record keeping and other deliverables. I have done training both nationally and internationally in leadership, gender, human rights, monitoring and evaluation, democracy and elections, among other areas of interest. I have participated in elections observation nationally and internationally.

**What are your leadership aspirations for the next three years?**

My leadership aspiration for the next three years is to work to ensure that at least (90%) ninety percent of the section's three years action plan is implemented; record at least 30% increase in women's participation in election at all levels of the electoral process and in all areas of elections in Liberia; to evolve from being an election technician to being an election administrator, as well as attend more professional elections management and gender related courses, training, workshops and conferences, nationally and internationally.

# Women's Leadership – structural, cultural and institutional barriers to equality



## Nazhat Shameem Khan

Permanent Representative of Fiji to the UN in Geneva and  
Ambassador of Fiji to Switzerland


UNITAR Panel Discussion

Geneva, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2015

This paper by Nazhat Shameem was part of UNITAR's forthcoming Women's Leadership training [workshop](#) on the 22 and 23 October, in Geneva.

## Introduction


Feminism has re-invented itself in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. From radical feminism, to liberal feminism, to new wave feminism, to difference feminism, we have now arrived at a promotion of the concept of freedom for women. Freedom necessarily means the legal, social and cultural ability of a woman to do anything she wants. A woman is competent and able to become a Chief Executive. A woman



is free to stay at home with her children for as long as she wants. A woman is free to wear a hijab, or jeans, or a swimsuit without social pressure to do any of these things. The word “freedom” for women needs close examination. In many ways, our culture, our upbringing, our respect for our social norms, for our elders, and our families, persuade us to create our own shackles. Sometimes we hold on to our shackles defiantly, even aggressively, truly believing that a woman must be limited to a particular role in society. The complexity of culture, gender and institutional barriers to equality, renders women’s leadership (of women and by women) a challenge which resonates with different nuances from one society to the next. And so afraid are we of upsetting the cultural norms of other societies, so timid are we in forging equality in the workplace because of the fear of being thought culturally insensitive, that we often fail to provide the sort of leadership which is enriched by a personal knowledge of the way institutional and cultural factors prevent the growth of gender equality.

### **Learning from our own experiences**


It is often thought that cultural differences and expectations of women in different societies, explain the greater representation of women in politics and public life in some societies as opposed to others. Thus the Scandinavian countries have higher proportions of women in Parliament and corporate management positions, compared with other Western European countries. Some studies have linked these differences to the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of societies. In other words, the more status conscious, class driven, and gender role determined we are, the less likely it is that there will be more women in public leadership roles. However, such theories do not explain the leadership of some of the world’s most prominent political leaders in very traditional societies, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Israel, Pakistan, and India. Can we then measure general gender equality from the progress of a few women, who have succeeded in attaining leadership? I believe that the progress of some women is an indicator of the lack of any legislative and legal policy barriers to women holding high office, but that it is not an indicator of the lack of social and institutional barriers (most of them hidden until they are felt by a woman who aspires to leadership). The general indicator must come from the proportion of women in Parliament, in Cabinet, in CEO positions, as officials in trade unions, as lawyers and judges, and as project managers in the construction industry. Where we see the underrepresentation of women, we must look for the barriers which exist in society, which prevent effective access to equality. And these are barriers



which we as women experience, but which cannot serve the basis for any assumptions about the whole of a particular society. These are experiences which are very subjective, because they affect different women in different ways. Thus we can only learn about them by talking to women, who have tried to exercise freedom unsuccessfully, or who have succeeded despite the barriers. For those of us who come from traditional societies where culture is valued as a form of self-identification, these experiences are shaped not only by culture but also by class, education, parental attitudes, and economic security.

Yet we women, have often been brought up to be self-deprecating. We often fail to value the importance of our own experiences. Our experiences are so important that they shape the type of leadership we are able to offer to the world. Yet we do not want to talk about them. I was once asked to attend a meeting of the Fiji Women's Association, mostly made up of the wives and daughters of diplomats and expatriates living in Fiji. I asked the organiser what she would like me to talk about and she said – just talk about yourself. I was shocked and embarrassed. I told her I would find that very difficult. I didn't see what my life had to do with anyone else. I found it easy to appear in the Court of Appeal as lawyer and speak for hours on the law, but talking about my own experiences rendered me uncharacteristically silent. This is of course the result of a cultural expectation. Older women in Indian weddings used to warn girls to sit quietly and look demure. A girl who is marriageable is a silent one. We should not be surprised that gender based violence is one of the most under-reported crimes in the world.

So I will begin with my own experiences. After all, they shaped the sort of leadership I now offer to my own country. I was born in Fiji in 1960, the third of four daughters. My mother was a school teacher, herself a well-respected leader of men and women in Fiji, who rose to be a head teacher. My father came to Fiji at the age of 22, shortly after sectarian violence in India threatened to divide communities which had lived side by side in harmony in pre-partition India. He decided to marry my mother because he admired her independence, her education, and her blunt speech. He and she together worked to improve the right of all girls in Fiji to access education. They built a school, and called it the Islamia Girls' High School. It was for girls of all communities who had not passed their qualifying exams and who would have dropped out of the school system without access to High School. These were my parents. For them it was taken for granted that all their daughters would go to university, would do postgraduate courses and would enter professions. When I told my parents I wanted to study law, they decided to send me to the United




Kingdom, convinced that the British universities offered the best law courses in the Commonwealth. They would have mortgaged their house to pay for our education, and for many years, especially when my younger sister joined me to study medicine at St Andrews University in Scotland, my mother's entire salary was sent to us to pay for our education. With these advantages, and with such parents, I know that my access to education cannot be compared to the access that all girls in Fiji had at the time. Education in Fiji from primary school to high school is now free and compulsory, but only since January 2015. Even now, university education for girls is for the privileged, or for the girls who are able to get scholarships. Thus I learnt that as long as I worked hard, passed my exams, qualified for the universities in the United Kingdom, and then for the Bar at the Inns of Court, I would become a barrister. At university a third of the students at my law school were girls. Girls are now in the majority in many law schools around the world.

And then I returned to Fiji to apply for a job.

For the first time I experienced the barriers to gender equality which up till then I had only read about. At every interview I was asked if I had a boyfriend. At an interview for a job in a private law firm, I was asked how I felt about representing men, and representing accused persons in rape cases. I was asked at the Attorney-General's Office, whether I intended to have children, if I married, and whether I would be able to cope with long trial hours and chauvinistic private lawyers. I was never interviewed by a woman. In one Government office I was told frankly that vacant positions were held for law graduates who were male traditional chiefs and that lawyers of Indo-Fijian extract should try to get jobs in the private sector. And, I received rejection after rejection. I couldn't understand it. I blamed myself. I thought I had chosen the wrong career, that Fiji was not ready for women lawyers, and especially Indo-Fijian women lawyers. The worst experiences I had in the job application process came from men of my own culture, who clearly believed that weak, emotional and marriage-prone girls had no place in the legal profession. And in those six months of unemployment, possibly the most difficult in my life, I began to understand how cultural, racial, religious and social attitudes prevent equal access to employment for women. I realised that the application and interview process was gender biased and designed to exclude women. Those were the days when equal opportunity meant nothing, and when racism was institutionalised as a government policy.

I was finally recruited at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution. I was one of only two applicants. We were both girls. The Office of the DPP had never



employed a woman before. I was told frankly at my interview that the office had a professional staff meeting first to decide whether it was ready for a woman prosecutor. And this was in 1984. It was not the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I was taken because I had been qualified at the Inns of Court. So had the DPP.


There was much media attention when I was appointed because I was Fiji's first woman prosecutor. Whenever I now read that a woman is the first woman to be appointed to any job, I pause for a minute to commiserate. Because it is she who will have to ensure the removal of sexually demeaning posters from office walls, she who will have to refuse to make tea when requested to do so by her fellow professionals, she who will be told that she is too weak and emotional to deal with rape or domestic violence or incest cases, she who will have to sit in court listening to closing addresses by defence counsel which deal less with the evidence and more with his outrage that a woman is prosecuting, she who will have to summon up the courage to tell an irritable judge that it is unjust to tell the court that she is asking for an adjournment because she is pregnant, or has just had babies, she who will have to complain about the sexually explicit jokes at the office functions, and she who will have to fight for the right to be promoted when her superiors believe that maternity leave means that a woman loses her brains and professional ability with the afterbirth. Barriers for women will not be found in the laws in most countries. It will be found in sexual harassment, and in the creation of a hostile work environment.

But I am not here to complain about the shockingly unequal work place I found myself in at the age of 22. I am here to say that these are the very experiences which make women discerning leaders. Once we experience these barriers, we must resolve that no other woman should ever have to experience them in the workplace. We must resolve to not only have sexual harassment policies in place, but also to ensure their effective implementation, with the knowledge that it is often hard for woman to complain, or to articulate why she finds the workplace a hostile environment. These experiences enrich our understanding of the way in which culture, gender and ethnicity can combine to create an unequal work space.

I stayed in the Office of the DPP until I was made the DPP myself, and then I remained DPP for the next six years before becoming Fiji's first woman High Court judge.

Judiciaries are infamous breeding grounds for inequality. The tragedy is that the very people we look to for justice, are often unconsciously driven and influenced by the same gender expectations as the rest of our society. This may not be






unexpected. After all the legal profession is itself conservative in nature (although I look with relief at the emerging numbers of liberal and human rights focussed lawyers) and often appointment to the Bench, usually made when a judge is middle aged, is not often offered to people who are controversial or critical of the status quo. This is of course changing now, with the creation of more transparent and representative processes for the appointment of judges, but it was not the case when I was made a judge in 1999. Thus my appointment was met with fear that I would be a catalyst for change, that the judiciary would be a different place with a woman in it, and that I would try to bully my male colleagues into changing the way things had been done for the last 50 years since independence.

Some women would spend a lot of time reassuring the men that nothing would change, that she would be one of them and would adapt to the old ways. This attitude is a trap for women leaders. If you can't use your experiences to change the way the organisation is led, why lead at all? Leadership is usually about managing change. The issue for us all, is not whether there should be change, but how to implement it in the most consultative and painless manner. The issue is not whether or not to rock the boat, but how to do it within organisational protocols so that everyone understands the nature, the scope and the reason for the change. When my children were three years old, their favourite word was "why?" Irritating though it was at the time, it teaches us that everyone is entitled to know why you have changed the recruitment policies, why interview questions have to be vetted for gender and ethnic and cultural bias, why gender training must be compulsory for judges and lawyers, why the new Ethics Code for judges must have an anti-discrimination provision enforcing a judicial duty to prevent discrimination on prohibited grounds in the courtroom and why sentencing submissions by lawyers must include submissions on the substantive effect of gender based violence on a woman or girl.

### **A Qualitative Leadership**

Leadership by and for women must therefore in my opinion be enriched by our own experiences of the intersection of culture, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status and religious prejudice in the lives of women. I was only two weeks old in my job as a prosecutor when, sitting in the magistrate's court waiting for my case to be called on a Monday morning, a woman was brought into court charged with soliciting. She pleaded guilty but made a spirited mitigation. She said that she was not ashamed to say that she was a sex worker. She said however that the





arresting officer had only arrested her because she had refused to do a particular sexual act with him. She said that many police officers asked for free sexual favours in return for a guarantee of freedom in the conduct of sex work, and that she had the right to refuse this particular act. She said that because she was an Indo-Fijian sex worker, the police officer, also Indo-Fijian, felt that she was especially weak and could be readily exploited. She looked to the magistrate to make at least a comment that would express disapproval of such conduct if indeed it did occur. The magistrate said nothing. He sent her to prison for 6 days and said nothing at all about the allegation of corruption. Sitting in court I knew she was telling the truth. After all she had nothing to lose. And her passion was unmistakable. The incident spoke of the way in which a woman may be exploited, on the ground of her economic position, her ethnicity and her gender. The intersection of discrimination. The sort of intersection we now see in the stories of the lives of trafficked women and girls, and in the lives of many housemaids and garment workers.

It is this knowledge which must give our leadership an insight into the effect of policies and laws on the lives of women. It is then our leadership which allows us to change those laws and policies. For those of us who are disheartened and believe that even with legal changes, attitudes will never change, my experience is that they do change, but we must never stop questioning and challenging the philosophical bases of such attitudes. We must challenge judgments which suggest that a lower sentence should be imposed in a rape case because the complainant was drunk, or sexually active, or was wearing a miniskirt. We must challenge sexist remarks made by a colleague during an interview. We must insist that budget submissions articulate how much money has been set aside for gender empowerment. And, most difficult of all, we must keep on with gender competence training at all levels of the work place, although the course participants hate such training and are clearly uncomfortable about the issues you are raising. Discomfort leads to a change eventually even if the first indication of that is political correctness without conviction. I will never forget my orientation in the Fijian judiciary, but I can say with confidence that the judiciary in Fiji is a much more equal place now, than it was in 1999. There is a continuous need for equality competence, but change in attitudes, and in the structure and in the composition of the courts, was inevitable after the appointment of the first woman.

## Some final thoughts

I believe that women's leadership requires an understanding of the way in which laws and policies and attitudes have an impact on the lives and work of women. If you are a woman of colour, your experiences will be enriched by an understanding of the way in which racial, religious and gender prejudice can become a barrier to equal access to services and to employment. Often, we women of colour find that the greatest barriers are erected by the men and women of our own culture, who are especially judgmental because we have decided to move away from the accepted norms and traditions. Dealing with such judgment is difficult for us, because we do not want to lose our cultural roots, nor do we want to reject our cultures themselves. We only want an acceptance that culture can be modified to remove discrimination, to remove barriers to equality. And then, we want to be the agents which modify culture. After all, member States of CEDAW have largely agreed that such modification may be necessary to achieve substantive gender equality. However, the modification of culture and religious practices is one of the most difficult hurdles in the women's movement. So closely do people identify with their cultures, whether it is in the Pacific or in Western Europe, that persuading societies to change the practices which have been preserved for generations, is often politicised, suggesting that there are moves to destroy the culture of a community and indeed to destroy the community itself. It is very difficult and often dangerous. However, we must take heart from the fact that they do not burn widows at the funeral pyres in India any more. Nor are we allowed to strangle our new widows in Fiji, or to burn our witches in Europe. And more and more countries in the world have made the corporal punishment of children, unlawful. Our challenge is to take courage from history, and agree to at least discuss the possibility of change. As I have said a woman who leads qualitatively, leads as an agent of change, with an understanding of how gender, culture, racial and religious prejudice, and intolerance of sexual orientation freedoms can combine to prevent substantive equality and justice in the lives of all women.

# The Game Changer

## Isn't it time to start discussing male quotas in parental leave?



### Shirley Chowdhary


*Shirley Chowdhary is a Sydney-based lawyer and advocate for gender diversity in the workplace. Her career has taken her from a top tier New York law firm and a US global bank in Japan to leading teams of volunteers and writing a biography for a WW2 Prisoner-of-War. She is currently a lawyer at one of the Big-Four banks in Sydney and is raising three children with her husband of 21 years.*

*Shirley is the recipient of a 2015 Cultural Diversity Scholarship jointly funded by the Australian Government and the Australian*

*Institute of Company Directors. The scholarship is aimed at supporting an increased representation of women on Australian boards and fostering emerging female talent.*

When I meet other women at social gatherings or at work functions, the conversation inevitably turns to the topic of working women and more generally the gender-equality debate. We commonly discuss parental leave, pay inequality and even who cleans the house. I'm not sure if this is a result of me becoming more aware of the issues as I get older and my [daughter](#) prepares to enter university, or a general awareness amongst us that things need to change and that the rate of change needs to increase. For all our sakes, I hope it's the latter.

**Humans can do anything**



It's 2015. Humans can land on Mars. We can make cameras as small as a grain of salt. We can even build cars that drive themselves. Once we put our minds to something, it seems that there isn't much we can't achieve. Maybe this is why I find it so hard to stomach the fact that we can't effect gender-related change more quickly. If we cared enough, wouldn't we already be there? However you answer that question, the truth is that we need to take action and do it in a way that will equalise the playing field between men and women in the workplace and at home. We need a game changer and we need to prioritise the debate. Now.

### **Women can do anything**

Women can do anything – we can run listed companies, we can be engineers, lawyers, doctors and take on any of the roles that were reserved for men in our grandmothers' generation. In addition, the [evidence is overwhelming](#) that putting women in positions of leadership, on boards and in senior executive roles adds to productivity, performance and to the bottom line of a company. Yet despite all this, there is one fundamental biological difference that continues to distinguish men from women – we have the babies and men don't.

This biological fact is also the basis for why women need parental leave and why our careers start to lag behind those of our partners. It puts us on track to receive less pay, to accumulate less super and it means that we don't rise through the ranks as fast as our male counterparts.

This biological difference contributes to a difference at home and in the workplace. For example, take the employer who considers two thirty year-old candidates for a job. After reviewing resumes that are "blind" to gender and background, they both land interviews. They are identical in every way except that one is a man and the other is a woman. They have identical education and work experience, they are identical in age and, except for their gender, would also have identical future career prospects. Only one thing differentiates these candidates. In an interview, an employer will look at the female candidate and see someone who is of child-bearing age and may want children. The unconscious bias (or conscious bias, depending on how you look at it) is that we look at these candidates and see one who equates to maternity leave and a break from work, and an extra embedded cost to the company. Clearly, I am stereotyping and not all employers think like this. But if there is an unconscious bias, it comes from the biological fact that women have the children.

## How can we equalise the biological difference?

If we make male parental leave more attractive, if we even go so far as to make it compulsory, can we normalise the issue faced by our earlier two candidates? Perhaps we need to turn the question around - If we normalise male parental leave, aren't we sending a very strong message to employers, to parents and to society-at-large, that parenting is not a burden for women, it is a burden and privilege to be shared between both parents, and one gender should no longer be punished for biology?

The sad thing is that this isn't a new or novel idea. The concept of shared parental leave is well entrenched in [Sweden](#) and [Norway](#). Generally speaking, the Scandinavian systems reserve a portion of the parental leave for fathers. If fathers choose not to take parental leave, that portion of leave is lost. Fathers are told to use it or lose it. Sweden even pays a bonus if parents equally share the parental leave. The result is that 90% of Norwegian fathers take at least 12 weeks' paternity leave. Compare this to Australia where in [2013](#) where the ratio of mothers to fathers taking paternity leave was 500 to 1.

## Do we care enough to have the debate?

Why, more than 20 years after what could be a game-changer in the world of gender-diversity, haven't we considered doing the same? Clearly, shared parental leave is not a panacea for all gender-related issues in the workplace and there will be an economic cost to introducing the concept of a male quota. There are also fundamental differences in the economies and tax systems of Scandinavian countries and a country like Australia – all beyond the scope of this article. But at a very basic level, don't we need to start the conversation about how we can make it work? Don't we need to think seriously about male parental leave quotas if it could be the one thing that stops employers having the she-could-fall-pregnant-and-need-time-off-and-cost-me-money reaction?

Dividing parental leave into male and female quotas would also address the issue that men face into when considering whether or not to take paternity leave. Will this hurt my career? Will my boss think I am less dedicated? What will my colleagues think? I have lost count of the number of times I have heard men asking "How was your holiday?" when a man returns from paternity leave. Sadly, it happens all too often.

Until we remove the stigma that comes with the biological fact that women carry the children and give birth, we aren't going to have a level playing field. Men should be encouraged to take time away from their careers to share the privilege of being with their children in those precious first few years of life. In return, their partners could return to the workforce earlier, or at least have the choice to do so.

Perhaps male quotas in parental leave is not the answer, but isn't it time to start the debate?



# Women in Support of Women on Nauru

**Julie Macken, Luisa Low**

Women in Support of Women on Nauru was formed in 2015 after a telephone call between journalist Julie Macken and Pamela Curr from [The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre](#).

Julie was shocked to see what was developing on Nauru. Women, men and children were being routinely raped, bashed and abused and Australia was turning a blind eye.

These are already some of the most vulnerable people in the world: genuine refugees seeking asylum from persecution who have now been denied basic human rights and had their suffering increased at the hands of the Australian and Nauruan governments. The phone call with Pamela Curr was a turning point.

With violence against women escalating at home in Australia, it seemed that Australian women would identify with the idea of not feeling safe. If the two wrote an open letter from Australian women to Malcolm Turnbull would enough women sign it?

Julie's colleague, campaigner and journalist Luisa Low came on board, creating a [Change.org petition](#) and a full page advertisement which was featured in The Saturday Paper.

Australian women began responding in huge numbers. Within just a few days over 20,000 women had signed including some of the most powerful women in business, media, entertainment and academia.

The campaign was a knockout.

Although while detention continued on Nauru Australians would never know the full story of what was happening unless some media and civil society were able to visit.

The problem at this point was that even applying for a media visa cost \$8000. In the current age of dwindling media and newspaper sales no media outfit was going to take that risk.

It then occurred to Julie that this was actually a collective issue – something a lot of Australians would want to be a part of. So when Julie asked Wendy Bacon if she would consider going as an independent and very highly regarded investigative journalist - Wendy jumped at the opportunity.

The two then discussed who else should go as kind of 'ambassadors' for Australians. Professor Carmen Lawrence's name came up straight away.

Professor Carmen Lawrence is a woman of enormous intellect but also real heart and great facilitation skills. Julie posed the idea to her. After explaining it Professor Lawrence took a deep breath and said, "of course I will go if you think I can be of use."

And as a collective do we think that? Yes, we do.

The next step was to raise \$20,000 to cover the visas, flights, transport, accommodation and security. A big feat which we considered would be impossible in such short time frame.

But we were surprised once again by the sheer number of Australian wanting to see conditions on Nauru exposed. Shortly after announcing the [fundraiser](#) donations came flooding in. Amazingly, in less than 48 hours we had raised the amount needed to send Wendy Bacon and Professor Carmen Lawrence to Nauru.

It has been extraordinary to see women across all the major political parties, disciplines and states, and from all sorts of walks of life jump in, put their money down and count themselves in.



Simply, the issue of violence against women resonates so deeply for many women that it cuts across the whole refugee debate and locates itself in simple questions of respect and compassion and dignity.

*The Australian Women in Support of Women on Nauru is dedicated to exposing the truth of conditions on the island, as well as ending the era of mandatory detention which has continuously led to unspeakable abuses against some of the most vulnerable people in the world.*

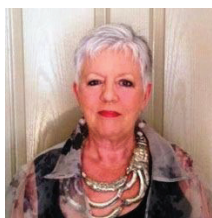
For an update on this campaign see:

<https://www.change.org/p/prime-minister-malcolm-turnbull-the-hon-bill-shorten-an-open-letter-from-the-women-of-australia-to-prime-minister-malcolm-turnbull>

### AWSWN Founding Members:



**Julie Macken** is a journalist with over 20 years experience and is the Media Director of Click Gravity. Julie has a lifetime of experience campaigning for ethical causes and women's rights.



**Pamela Curr** is the campaign coordinator for the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and a humanitarian who has written about and campaigned widely for refugee rights.



**Wendy Bacon** is one of Australia's most respected investigative journalists, academics and activists; having campaigned widely for women's rights, public land rights and civil liberties.



**Professor Carmen Lawrence** is a former Australian politician, former Premier of Western Australia and the first woman to become Premier of a State in Australia. She has publicly described her own former party's policies of keeping asylum seekers in detention as "brutal and inhumane".





***Luisa Low** is a journalist and the Communications Director of Click Gravity, a Sydney-based communications consultancy working in the ethical sphere.*



# Riding for Children

**Sarah Valentine**

*Sarah is the founder and owner of*

[www.sarahvalentine.com.au](http://www.sarahvalentine.com.au) and

[www.bellarinebusinesswomen.com.au](http://www.bellarinebusinesswomen.com.au) She works around Australia with business owners and their teams creating leaders and outstanding businesses.

In April 2014 Sarah Valentine said yes to riding 500km in 5 days in Thailand for Australian



charity Hands Across The Water. What compelled Sarah, who hadn't been on a bike for 25


years, to say yes was the work this charity had done to assist at risk Thai children. To say this charity has impacted these children's life is an understatement.

The journey really began in May when a client of Sarah's donated her a training bike. Now it

was time for the rubber to hit the road! In addition to the training Sarah was also required to raise \$5,000. This wasn't enough for Sarah so she started with a goal of \$10,000. A few months in Sarah hit that target with a number of months to go. So she decided to readjust her goal to \$20,000. Two days before Christmas the target was hit.

Between having a big 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration where she invited friends to donate instead of buying a gift, a Gala Cocktail evening at Terindah Estate, a personal sponsorship from Wise Group of Companies, a trivia night and few other events in between the money was raised.

So finally after 10 months of training and fundraising Sarah set out on the 5 day journey with 45 other riders, all entrepreneurs, like Sarah, from around the country. It was time.



Filled with nervous energy the 5 days began on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2015. The 5 days were not without its challenges. The riders experienced strong head winds, heat of up to 43 degrees off the road, hills (more like mountains), chased by a herd of cattle, a few spills off the bike and stray dogs deciding that the cyclists feet would make a good meal!

However none of that mattered compared to the connection the riders made, starting as business associates, becoming friends and leaving as family. The strength the riders gave each other is indescribable. They were there for one reason and one reason only and that was to save the lives of at risk Thai children. Getting girls off the street and safe from sex slavery, giving medication to HIV children so they will live beyond tomorrow, giving these and many others possibility and opportunity that they would not have had if it wasn't for Hands Across The Water.

By the time Sarah and the riders rode into the first Hands orphanage in Khao Lak Sarah had raised over \$25,000 and collectively the group raised over \$300,000. Every cent of every dollar raised ALL goes to dedicated projects, not one cent is allocated to administration. Sarah's husband and children spent the 5 days in the orphanage making friends, helping where needed and genuinely showing these children we are here.

Riding into the orphanage on day 5 Sarah describes it as being the most powerful moment in her life. The achievement of riding 500km which she believed to be impossible only 10 months prior, seeing the children full of love and gratitude and reuniting with her own children and husband Sarah describes as "Day 5 was the sum of 10 months of ups and downs, exhaustion, joy, self doubt and ending in absolute exhilaration. I would do it all again tomorrow!"

Sarah is now writing a book that links what it takes to do something impossible and how the principles she used can be applied in business. This will be released early 2016.

To learn more about Hands visit their website at [www.handsacrossthewater.org.au](http://www.handsacrossthewater.org.au)



## No FGM Australia

**Paula Ferrari** is the Managing Director of No FGM Australia, a registered charity which aims to protect girls from female genital mutilation, and advocates for dignified care and support which empowers survivors of FGM.

Paula is a mother, educator, health professional and independent scholar who is passionate about including FGM in conversations about family violence affecting women and girls in Australia.

My name is Paula Ferrari. I am a 44-year-old mother of three, a health professional and registered primary school teacher in Victoria, Australia. For the past five years I have also been engaged in educational research. Each of these occupations (motherhood, speech pathology, teaching and research) has contributed in different ways to my understandings of FGM and how to tackle it best as an activist.

After training as a health professional, and then as a primary teacher, I became the mother of twin girls. As Australia has mandatory reporting: all teachers and health professionals are required by law to report any child abuse, physical, emotional or sexual, However I was never, ever aware of female genital mutilation as one possible sort of abuse.

Then in 2012, I was sent a petition at random by a friend asking for governments to 'Stop FGM'. Seeing the photo of a little girl, perhaps aged 6 or 7, being held by her mother, legs raised and screaming in pain as women leaned over her genitals, made me physically ill.

At that time there were several media reports of girls apparently being subjected to FGM in Australia, one in Western Australia and two in NSW. In two of these cases girls were allegedly taken to Indonesia for FGM, in the third the mutilation was done in NSW. I realised that even in Australia, girls were in danger of female genital mutilation.

My new knowledge of the risks facing little girls in Australia burned in me. I had to do something!! I had never before felt such an urgency to act.

Around this time also Health Minister Tanya Plibersek and Prime Minister Julia Gillard were angry and outspoken about FGM, and they organised an 'FGM Summit', where my now-fellow No FGM Australia founder, Khadija Gbla first spoke out about her experience as a survivor of FGM. I connected with Khadija Gbla, and Sydney businesswoman, Sybil Williams. The three of us together formed the not-for-profit organisation, No FGM Australia.



No FGM Australia has established aims and values, and growing recognition as an organisation which aims to protect girls from FGM and empower survivors.

The activities of No FGM Australia commenced with an online campaign including setting up a website, as well as a

Facebook and Twitter page. We began to hold public awareness events, including in 2013 a screening of the powerful documentary made by Equality Now, *Africa Rising*. We have also now established a hotline for girls at risk or for professionals concerned about girls at risk. We have been gradually developing resources for government, service providers, communities and girls at risk of FGM to increase safeguarding of girls from FGM.

Our work is protecting human rights, and in 2014 No FGM Australia was recognised by the Australian Human Rights Commission for our work in Australia protecting girls and empowering survivors of FGM.

But there is still a lot of work to be done.

We are in the process of lobbying politicians to increase resources to safeguard girls from FGM, to include:

- Collection of data on who has had FGM, to enable authorities to identify who is at risk
- Increasing training of frontline professionals including teachers, nurses, doctors and police
- Inclusion of FGM in all school curricula
- Strategies to empower survivors

As child abuse, FGM is everyone's problem. All girls deserve to be safe, regardless of their culture, or skin colour. My vision, and that of No FGM Australia, is a world where every girl has the right to grow up to be the woman she was born to be.



**FGM Hotline 1800 522 707**

**The details of the FGM books are:**

<http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637&calcTitle=1&isbn=9781472419941&lang=cy-gb> / <http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781472419941>

[http://newhollandpublishers.com/uk/1134\\_hilary-burrage](http://newhollandpublishers.com/uk/1134_hilary-burrage)

# Research News

## Women surfers under-paid and over-sexualised

Southern Cross University's Dr Roslyn Franklin completed a PHD on women's surfing sponsorship. Below is a research summary by her as well as information about her current research.



### Dr. Roslyn Franklin

Dip T PE, B Ed, M Ed Studies, PhD

In her early teaching career, Roslyn was a Health and Physical Education teacher in Brisbane and Gold Coast secondary and primary schools for many years and then lectured in this area at Griffith University (Gold Coast campus). Roslyn's previous position at Griffith University was also as the Director, Professional Experience Office where she was responsible for the strategic direction and management of the Professional Experience Office for the Bachelor of Education Primary and Secondary undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Roslyn has a strong interest in the promotion and encouragement of girls and women in sport especially surfing. She has been surfing for forty years and was an original member of the Queensland Women's Boardrider's Club during the seventies and has competed at local, State and National levels. Roslyn's interest in the inequity of sponsorship for female surfers lead her to undertake research in the area for her PhD. She is currently lecturing in Personal Development Health and Physical Education in the School of Education at Southern Cross University at both Lismore and Gold Coast campuses. Additional research interests include the use of mobile technology in the assessment of PDHPE, programs to enhance Fundamental Movement Skill development in children, and the development of generalist early childhood and primary preservice teacher confidence in teaching physical education and health.

## Research Summary by Dr Roslyn Franklin

My original PhD was called - Making waves: Contesting the lifestyle marketing and sponsorship of female surfers

This PhD looked the lifestyle marketing and sponsorship of female surfers by the Big Three surfing companies (Quiksilver/Roxy, Ripcurl and Billabong) to determine whether it has been beneficial to the overall promotion of women's surfing.

### Main findings from my PhD:

- o Continuing inequity in prize money & sponsorship
- o Discrimination in competition surfing conditions and locations
- o Female surfers are effective marketing tool for surf companies
- o Surf magazines and media continue to portray sexualised images of female surfers
- o Continuing emphasis on the "look" as opposed to surfing ability
- o ASP world surfing events dominated by the "Big Three" surfing companies


In this study I found the difference in prize money for women on the World Championship Tour (WCT) only had the possibility to earn a third of what the men could earn on the Tour.

My recent research dialogue at SCU Lismore was called From Gidget to Gen Y - Empowerment or exploitation of professional female surfers?

This research dialogue followed the historical development of women's professional surfing from its beginnings in the 1970s to the current generation. I compared figures from my PhD and found that funding available for the women's WCT has improved but they still only have the opportunity to earn half of what the men can earn and still with a lot less competitions.

In the World Qualifying Series (WQS), which is the lead up to the WCT, the disparity in prize money is even greater and there are many more events for the men than the women (12 compared to 29). For professional female surfers to successfully attend all the necessary events and have appropriate equipment and accommodation requires a minimum of \$40000. Yet several of the top rated 17 female surfers do not have a major





sponsor. Research indicates women represent a portion of the consuming public that companies can't afford to ignore, yet it appears that companies and sporting bodies are adhering to a marketing formula that is detrimental to female spectators and participants of women's sport. In fact, there is a growing stream of research evidence to suggest that this taken for granted notion that "sex sells" women's sport just not true.

**Research:**

- o the use of sexualised images has no effect on the number of fans involved in watching a sporting event
- o the use of sexualised images alienated and offended the core base of sports fans
- o This sexualized ideal has been identified as contributing to female health problems such as eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression
- o Impact on images being presented on young girls

I have included the abstract from the Research Dialogue.

I also delivered a similar presentation at the Women in Surfing Seminar at the Gold Coast Arts Centre in March this year.

**Title: From Gidget to Gen Y - Empowerment or exploitation of professional female surfers?****Abstract**

Today's generation of young professional female surfers appear to display qualities of liberation and self-reliance that challenge previous notions of male dominance in the sport of surfing. Yet there are still mixed messages about whether the promotion of women in surfing through lifestyle marketing is empowering or based on a different form of compliance. While there has been a pronounced increase in the number of women and Gen Y girls participating in competitive surfing, their gendered position is continually under surveillance and being shaped by other surfers, spectators, leading sport and surf brands, the media and society in general. This research dialogue questions how far women's surfing has really come since Gidget and whether the lifestyle marketing of female surfers through sponsorship has substantially improved and contributed to opportunities for them to compete at a professional level and the general advancement of women's competitive surfing.