

# *EQUALITY IN FLAMES:*

**THE IMPACT OF THE  
LAHAINA WILDFIRE  
DISASTER ON GENDER  
EQUALITY AND FILIPINO  
WOMEN IN HAWAII**



**TAGNAWA**



We affirm that Hawai'i is Kānaka Maoli land and acknowledge the first people of this land are Kānaka Maoli. We recognize that Hawai'i was unconstitutionally annexed by the United States as a means to land grab in Hawai'i, the Philippines, and throughout Oceania. We also recognize that the original women of these places were exploited before the land. Western colonizers demanded and stole women and girls before land and water, and masterminded the legal and cultural dissolution of gender equality in both Hawai'i and the Philippines.

Finally, we recognize the constant danger faced by environmental justice activists in our 'āina aloha — the Philippines — so we dedicate this report to them, to Lahaina, and to Borikén, where we first shared our findings.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION

Environmental disasters impact everyone in our community differently, usually unequally. There is a documented need to examine gender when researching, learning from, and then designing appropriate responses after a wildfire disaster.

This is the first report to explore the impacts of a wildfire disaster on gender equality and women in Hawai'i. Most importantly, **Equality in Flames** presents both data and solutions to enact more equitable disaster preparedness, response, and relief in other high risk fire hazard areas.

The report is a holistic evaluation using qualitative and quantitative data to share lessons about organizing after wildfires in the United States. There is a particular need to reshape disaster response in areas with large immigrant communities whether across California, Nevada and Texas, or west and south O'ahu. This is a cautionary tale about the potential consequences to a community absent reforms to current models of environmental disaster response.

There is a growing global crisis of mass destruction by wildfire that demands we design systems of resource management and response that break tired molds. This work is not just about fires, but presenting new lessons and constructive feedback for organizers, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), American Red Cross (ARC), public and non-profit organizations, and philanthropy to better respond to climate change and associated disasters.

This report is intended to be a preliminary investigation around gender equality in the context of a recent U.S. wildfire and examination of the ways in which the August 8, 2023 Lahaina fire strengthened patriarchy, or worked to increase inequality. The report analyzes post-disaster outcomes for women generally and the accounts of Filipino women specifically. In adherence with the **Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing and Principles for a Just Transition**, we offer solutions based on the direct experiences and requests of the people most impacted by the disaster.

Although Tagnawa was established to serve the Filipino community, this report also advocates for research and federal Community Development Block Grant public services funding to address the experiences, needs, and recommendations of Kānaka Maoli, Latina, Black, and Pacific Islander women.

## FILIPINO WOMEN: WOMEN AT THE CENTER

Filipinos constitute the largest immigrant community in Hawai'i. In Lahaina, the percentage of Filipinos is nearly double the overall Filipino population in Hawai'i, where Filipinos make up just over 25%.<sup>1</sup> We hope the focus on the Filipino community can serve as a framework in other parts of the country to focus on relevant immigrant communities in their regions after natural disasters.

Women, and Filipino women in particular, in Lahaina, Maui stand at the intersection of historical and contemporary global forces. Their lived experiences are shaped by centuries of land dispossession, migration, plantation economies, and water privatization as well as more recent challenges such as climate change, environmental deregulation, and over-tourism.<sup>2</sup> The disruption caused by these forces span 247 years for Native Hawaiian women ("natyves" of "Owhyhee") and 504 years for Filipino women ("indios" of "Las Islas Filipinas"), reflecting deep-rooted colonial and capitalist exploitation.<sup>3</sup>

The overrepresentation of Filipinos in Lahaina's population is a direct consequence of these historical processes.<sup>4</sup> Notably, Hawai'i is also the only "U.S. state" where immigrant women outnumber men.<sup>5</sup> The high concentration of Filipino women in Lahaina and the region's continued water scarcity can be traced to the same root cause: American Factors (Amfac), formerly Hackfeld & Co.<sup>6</sup>

As one of the Big Five plantation oligarchy that dominated Hawai'i's economy, Amfac owned Lahaina's Pioneer Mill and O'ahu's Waipahu Mill (O'ahu Sugar Company), the second-largest sugar plantation in Hawai'i.<sup>7</sup>

Through its accumulation and control of vast lands for plantation use, Amfac manipulated water distribution and labor migration into Lahaina for generations.<sup>8</sup>

When the plantation economy and sugar profitability declined in Hawai'i in the 1960s, Amfac transitioned to the new mono-economy: resort development in West Maui. The transformation of sugar plantations into tourism was not merely economic but also spatial and structural: "where the molasses tanks and cattle pens stood is a portion of a championship golf course, one of many features in the Kā'anapali resort area."<sup>9</sup>

Despite the change in industry, the underlying systems of resource extraction remained intact. The same land, the same people were subjected to the same resource management systems that prioritize sustaining a single mono-economy. The effects of these resource management systems that extract maximum profit reinforce gender inequality and racial hierarchy. Filipino women from the plantations became the primary labor source for the growing hotel industry, perpetuating their economic marginalization.<sup>10</sup> Tourism operations also continued the same water overuse, mismanagement, and diversion as sugar, exacerbating ecological strain and inequitable resource distribution.

This study aims to center the voices of Filipino women and examine the ways that disaster response has solidified or ignored these histories to the detriment of better disaster response efforts. The experiences of 70 Filipino women are featured alongside state and county data and the accounts of 7 Maui experts in mental health, gender based violence, criminal justice, reproductive health care, and community organizing.





## STUDY DESIGN

Tagnawa, a Filipino feminist disaster response organization on Maui and O'ahu, organized a team of Hawai'i experts on women's rights and gender justice to determine if there is any evidence of worsening gender inequality in the context of the 2023 Lahaina fire. This study was designed and led by Filipino women.

This study methodology uses mixed methods to holistically evaluate the unfolding situation post-fires. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through four different methods:

1. Concise literature review to articulate the historical-cultural context of the 2024 Lahaina fire and Filipino migration to Hawai'i, and their shared causes.
2. Formal information requests to the Hawai'i Department of Human Services, Department of the Prosecuting Attorney for Maui County, and Maui Police Department, as well as extended communications and meetings with Maui County officials. Data from the Hawai'i Department of Health Vital Statistics was also analyzed.
3. In-depth written surveys completed by 70 adult female Filipino fire survivors on Maui in English, Ilokano, and Tagalog. Mindful that both Hawaiian and Filipino cultures traditionally embrace gender fluidity and more than two genders, we defined Filipino women expansively to invite feminized and women-identifying Filipinos including trans women to participate. Participants' names and other identifying information were removed from the data collected. Participation was voluntary and compensated as a way to directly support fire survivors.
4. Key informant interviews focused on Maui-based specialists in mental health, reproductive health care, criminal justice, and community organizing and services. All interviewees serve Lahaina fire survivors. Seven interviews were conducted and analyzed for this study. A formal request for an interview was submitted to FEMA and although it was acknowledged, the agency did not provide a subsequent response prior to the completion of this report.

This study recognizes that comparing gender inequality pre- and post-disaster is difficult. There is no immediate baseline data for direct comparison of outcome measures. There is no entity or project that defines gender equality and consistently measures overall progress toward gender equality in Hawai'i.

To develop a localized, comprehensive, and standardized measurement for gender equality in Hawai'i is not the business of this report. However, in order to conduct a preliminary evaluation of the 2023 Lahaina wildfire's impact this report looked at two commonly used indicators of gender equality: women's health and experiences of violence. Although official statistics often fail to capture the true extent of gender-based violence, this report attempted to establish a baseline from law enforcement data, state reporting and intake data, and observations from key experts. Special attention was paid to the connection between wildfires and sexual violence, including commercial sexual exploitation.





This report was authored by Khara Jabola-Carolus, a Filipino community organizer and the former executive director of the State of Hawai'i's commission for women, and Nadezna Ortega, a Filipino diasporic cultures scholar and Ilokano-language revivalist leader. Both authors hold juris doctors from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa with a specialization in Native Hawaiian justice issues and local, federal, and international laws affecting Native Hawaiians. This work is grounded in a deep commitment to protecting the people, land, and waters of Hawai'i.

## SALIENT POINTS

### Violence

- Each type of environmental disaster—whether a wildfire, earthquake, flood, drought, volcano, or hurricane—has specific gender outcomes, with wildfires being the only disaster type where male fatalities generally exceed those of females. This transpired in Lahaina.
- There are some indicators that **sexual and domestic violence increased after the Lahaina fire.**
- Incidents of felony abuse with injury of a family member increased in both 2023 and 2024 per Maui Police Department crime data.
- Judiciary personnel noted an increase in reporting of domestic violence in the form of **obtaining TROs/orders of protection after the Lahaina fire.**
- After the Lahaina fire, most help-seeking victims of domestic violence experienced increases in verbal and psychological abuse, as well as higher instances of coercive control.
- After the Lahaina fire, many domestic violence victims reported heightened fear of leaving their abusers due to not having any housing as a result of the fire.
- After the Lahaina fire, **more landlords attempted to remove tenants that were experiencing domestic violence**, not just the abusers but the victims who called the police too many times and were drawing unwanted negative attention to their units.
- Community organizers and direct service providers in Lahaina, especially those who have been notably active and engaged over the last 20 months since the fire, contend that there has been a marked increase in domestic violence post-disaster.
- **More child sexual abuse than usual was uncovered as a result of the Lahaina fire.** Displacement from regular routines has uncovered instances of intrafamilial child sex abuse that may not have been uncovered absent the wildfire. The family habits that created the environment for hidden child sexual abuse were completely undermined by the fire and several instances of child sex abuse were uncovered in the process of families being displaced from their habitual residence during the disaster.

**16%** of Lahaina fire survivors surveyed have engaged in survival sex or sex acts in exchange for food, clothing, money, and housing after the fire. This may indicate an increase in commercial sexual exploitation post-disaster and warrants further research.

- Women Helping Women (WHW), Maui's main domestic violence provider, received higher than average calls to their domestic violence crisis hotline following the 2023 Lahaina wildfire, but not an increase in actual services provided by WHW. **Calls to the WHW hotline more than doubled from approximately 150-250 per month to 550 per month in the first two months after the fire**, and the agency also documented a concurrent rise in sexual assault cases and substance abuse issues. Maui Sex Assault Center has also experienced a rise in crisis calls for sexual abuse and forensic interviews.



- **FEMA policies are significant structural influences on family dynamics and male behavior.** They exacerbated stress levels particularly among displaced people of color, immigrants, and Limited English Proficiency survivors, and should be redesigned with the aim to mitigate domestic violence.
- Mental health service providers and law enforcement **officials predict that there will be an increase in gender based violence reporting as the recovery progresses** and especially after FEMA housing assistance ends because survivors will no longer fear jeopardizing recovery benefits if they formally report perpetrators who they live with.
- Red Cross and FEMA did not adapt practices to local conditions or approach fire survivors through a "cultural" lens but rather a continent-centered view.
- FEMA did not adequately coordinate with local experts on gender-based violence after the Lahaina fire. **FEMA did contact and consult certain local organizations for women individually but this was not done in an organized manner.**
- The cases received by the Maui Prosecutor showed that certain forms of sexual violence that do not rely on a victim or bystander reporting (e.g., electronic enticement of a child by sexual predators uncovered by undercover operation) increased after the Lahaina fire.
- Community organizers report that MPD has expressed concern about high levels of domestic violence in FEMA's new Kilohana temporary housing complex, which is predominantly occupied by fire survivors.
- With sexual abuse clients from Lahaina, if the children are sexually abused, there has been more minimizing of that abuse because of the need for resources. **Mothers in particular are minimizing child sexual abuse to try to keep the family together, for the sake of surviving the fire financially. This was described as the "most surprising outcome" of the Lahaina fire by one mental health practitioner.**
- In 2023, rape arrests decreased in Lahaina by 50% but increased by 433% in Wailuku and 133% in Kihei. According to Maui Police Department, the incidence of rape did not change (i.e., it remained as usual) in the county, but **the location of rape incidents changed as Lahaina residents were displaced to other towns in Maui County and off island.** This assertion could not be substantiated due to the lack of detailed population data concerning displaced survivors during that particular time period.
- Law enforcement, criminal justice data and state reporting data on domestic and sexual violence by itself is not enough to determine whether gender based violence increased after a wildfire, and further research is needed to determine correlation to the fire. This is due to a host of factors such as new disincentives to formally report violence and less (or more) police manpower at a particular time.
- **Immigrant women felt unsafe in emergency shelters and resorted to sleeping with children in vehicles—only using shelters to obtain food and other necessities.**
- Positively, Hawai'i's statewide network of domestic violence organizations provided critical support, including therapists from other organizations donating time to Maui organizations and providing donations from the community.

## Health

- Mental health practitioners in Lahaina report a gendered division of healing, and that it is causing disunity between men and women. **Gender stereotypes are preventing Lahaina men from healing.** Male fire survivors are isolating themselves and coping with substance abuse and work more than women.
- **The Lahaina fire severely and adversely impacted women's reproductive health.** The fire shut down essential services that were already limited in West Maui, especially for women. Access to reproductive health care was virtually nonexistent and women could not access contraception after the fire.



- **The wildfire ignited toxic masculinity.**

Female fire survivors and community organizers shared stories that some men chose to act macho and stay behind to protect their home from fire against the pleadings of their female partners, which led to disproportionate male death in the fire and caused trauma to the female survivors. They described male attitudes as: “If I’m going down, I’m going down with the house.”

- Some pregnant women reported foregoing prenatal appointments due to lack of services in the disaster zone and fear of being blocked from returning to Lahaina.
- **There was a lack of access to menstruation products** after the Lahaina fire because tampons and pads were not widely provided at shelter sites.
- Women formula feeding infants could not find clean water, bottles, or diapers and living in unhygienic conditions meant **there was no way to safely feed their babies** in the immediate aftermath of the fire.
- Mental health professionals observe that some clients who are recovering from substance abuse have relapsed because of displacement and separation caused by the wildfire.
- Grassroots midwifery and local health care organizations, such as Pacific Birth Collective, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies, and Maui Medic Healers Hui, played a critical role post-disaster to fill gaps in prenatal, postpartum, and obstetric care when hospitals became inaccessible and before large-scale organizations and government were able to fully operationalize in the area. Through Pacific Birth Collective, **midwives and essential baby items—including formula—were delivered by jet ski to areas of West Maui cut off from all access.**



- The premature reopening of tourism to West Maui contributed to a sense of powerlessness and second class status among fire survivors, which increased stress levels and male aggression including more road rage and male rage online.
- Some key informants believe that the disaster resulted in an increase in unplanned pregnancies due to insufficient access to contraception post-disaster. According to Department of Health Vital Statistics, Maui births declined in 2024; however, this does not account for Maui population decline and increased outmigration due to the fire. Further research is needed.
- According to community organizers, displaced **people of color, immigrant, and Limited English Proficiency survivors were more frequently relocated by FEMA** than white and English speaking survivors who were better able to advocate for themselves and petition relocation notices.
- Mental health practitioners in Lahaina report that single mothers face unique emotional challenges after the fire that differ from two-parent households. The absence of another parent limits women’s opportunities for emotional respite and open expressions of grief.
- Access to healthcare was and remains a challenge for immigrant women post-disaster, and there is concern about fertility issues in the near future that may be linked to chemical burn exposure.
- According to multiple community organizers, there is a gendered division of recovery labor: women in relationships, marriages, or with children were tasked with the paperwork part of recovery, and did more resource navigation and aid applications, which may be linked to higher literacy among women in certain immigrant groups. Men tended to perform more visible forms of recovery such as aid delivery.



## KEY FILIPINO-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

70

adult Filipino women who survived the 2023 Lahaina fire were surveyed between February 10 and March 21, 2025.

21%

of participants said they have felt unsafe in places where they sought shelter after the fires.

56%

More than half experienced an increase in conflict in their home and relationships after the fire.

29%

Nearly one-third of Filipinas believe the role or responsibilities put on them as women affected their ability to secure financial assistance or generate income after the fires.

41%

did not have access to mental health services to cope with the toll of the fire.

Sex trafficking affects Filipinos in Hawai'i, too.

22%

of the Maui child sex trafficking victims reported to Hawai'i Department of Human Services (DHS) since the Lahaina fire have been Filipino. While reports of child sex trafficking to DHS have decreased post-fire, the proportion of victims who are Filipino has risen. The decrease also does not account for population decline and outmigration from Maui after the disaster.

10%

reported that the disaster negatively impacted their access to menstrual products and hygiene. This number is likely higher among the general female survivor population as nearly half of all respondents (49%) were at the age or older of the average onset of menopause (51) in the United States.

24%

Almost one-quarter said their caregiving duties for children or elders, or family obligations make it harder to return to work or access disaster resources.

Survival sex in exchange for basic necessities post-disaster was reported by 16% of female Filipino fire survivors. These women engaged in a sexual relationship or sex in order to have a place to stay, food, or money after the Lahaina fire. This includes kissing, hugging, touching, and intercourse with a landlord, an employer, family members, friends and acquaintances. The most common reasons were for



**FOOD (86%)**



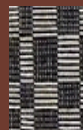
**CLOTHES (71%)**



**MONEY (62%)**



**LONG-TERM HOUSING (48%)**  
**TEMPORARY SHELTER (43%)**



## KEY QUOTES

“Women are taking on more of the long-term recovery of the Lahaina fire. Women are continuing, when the men went back to work. Right after the fire, if some people didn’t feel women stepped up enough, it’s because women weren’t in the position to work at the hubs and deliver aid because society made us feel like women do the stuff at home, take care of the kids, and do the paperwork while men are out there in the action. Men do the sprint in the beginning; women have to do the marathon. Women are the follow-through people. Women see everything through and bring disaster recovery to the finish line.”

—JORDAN RUIDAS, LAHAINA COMMUNITY MEMBER AND ORGANIZER WITH LAHAINA STRONG

“Community midwives are an essential part of disaster response. They bring skilled care directly to families, even when infrastructure breaks down. They are trusted, known, and mobile. The Pacific Birth Collective’s response showed what’s possible when midwives are supported: food deliveries, emotional support, clinical care, and coordination with other providers. Midwives aren’t just birth workers—they are public health assets. Investing in local midwives is investing in resilience.”

—KIANA ROWLEY, BSN RN, SNM, BOARD PRESIDENT, PACIFIC BIRTH COLLECTIVE

“The Lahaina fire doubled women’s responsibilities at home. For moms, because they’re the primary caregivers, they usually take care of processing paperwork, having to still go to work and anything with the children.”


“Our community is generally afraid of authority figures because of their status so reporting [gender based violence] is generally lower. And, culturally, there is a pressure to not speak about men’s violence because there is a loyalty to the family and it’s important to protect that image.”

—VERONICA MENDOZA, FOUNDING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ROOTS REBORN

“Things women need don’t receive the same attention during the recovery process. I feel like it’s not just because of gender but it’s because of race.”

“I don’t feel that women’s needs receive the same attention during the recovery process. After the Lahaina fire, while food, water, and shelter were prioritized, essential feminine products like pads, tampons, and hygiene supplies weren’t as readily available. It felt like these important items were overlooked, even though they’re crucial for women’s well-being. This experience highlighted the need for better awareness and inclusion of women’s necessities in disaster relief efforts.”





“As a Filipino woman born and raised in Hawai‘i who speaks English, my challenges in getting help included cultural pressures to prioritize family over my own needs, which made it harder to seek support.”

“The food distribution center made it difficult for me to get food for me and my family. They would question me and then limit me from getting the same amount of food that my neighbors get. Because we are seven persons [living in one house] but technically different households under the same address, they would question me and my sister. It makes us feel shame to ask for help. That’s why my family and I sometimes do not go even though we need the food.”

“With women’s coping, it’s the numbing that I’ve seen. Women think: ‘I have to support my husband and children, and still have to work.’ Mothers are in survival mode, making sure the husband is well enough to go to work and children are taken care of, finding a place in Lahaina but having to move to Kihei, and dealing with the fear of having to pay back because they’re renters. A lot of the logistical stress falls on the mom. I hear moms say, ‘I’m afraid to shed a tear because it’s never going to stop.’ One of the complaints of moms is feeling they cannot break down in front of their child.”

“Filipinos in Lahaina had a community within their household and one of Filipino coping mechanisms –being together– is now being ripped apart and we are having to go through this disaster recovery without our support system. This really affects the Filipino community.”

“I did go through some applications with FEMA and Red Cross and there were no questions about ‘How is the home?’ or ‘How are you coping?’ The applications were about numbers, not the actual story of what’s happening within families. The applications don’t address gender-based violence. I personally have never seen a question from FEMA and Red Cross asking, ‘What is your home like, what happens at home?’”



## Recommended Solutions to Designing Equitable Disaster Response

- Establish a joint federal and local gender violence-fighting headquarters immediately after a fire disaster to ensure coordination between Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), American Red Cross (ARC), state, city and county entities and local anti-violence specialists including the area's service providers and trusted community leaders. For example, bringing in all members of the Maui Sexual Assault Response Team (MSART) and domestic violence infrastructure together in a command center.
- FEMA and Red Cross should implement a more stable staff and volunteer structure with longer term assignments to improve care, build trust, and reduce stress and retraumatization of fire survivors.
- FEMA should revise its weekly check-in practice to include all adult household members, ensuring men, women, and gender minorities have equal opportunities to disclose violence and seek help, not just male heads of household.
- FEMA should reduce frequent relocations of hotel-dwelling or temporarily housed fire survivors, which may have inadvertently resulted in racial disparities and increased violence.
- Government should provide advocates to displaced people of color and Limited English Proficient survivors to help them petition relocation notices.
- Treat wildfires similar to mass shooting events—integrating crisis intervention, mental health services, safe housing for victims, and gender-specific counselors into the immediate response.
- Require mandatory training of temporary FEMA and Red Cross personnel on the demographics, cultural protocol, and languages of the local area.
- Permanently adapt FEMA systems to be more immigrant-friendly. At the outset of the response, FEMA systems were not designed for the living arrangements of people of color or immigrants. FEMA was unfamiliar with the multigenerational household lifestyle in Hawai'i although the state has the largest proportion of multigenerational households in the United States. This complicated survivors' ability to access financial assistance when multiple households lived at one address. According to survivors, it took FEMA approximately three months to rectify their process.
- Ensure adequate safe housing for domestic victims so that they do not get displaced by landlords for reporting domestic violence post-disaster.
- Enlist and place dedicated advocates to handle working with victims of domestic and sexual violence at shelter sites throughout the disaster response and recovery.
- For domestic abuse in families with children, one of the problems with reporting is that the safe parent may doubt their ability to remove the child(ren) from the home through a DA legal proceeding, increasing the sense of risk in reporting abuse. Improving safe reporting channels and providing meaningful legal counseling may help in this regard as well as support overcoming economic and cultural relations that may also create obstacles to reporting and extracting from an abusive situation.
- Develop more systematic training of family court judges on the relationship between domestic violence and child custody.
- Train community leaders on domestic violence who most frequently interact with survivors -- religious leaders, teachers, nurses, hairdressers, etc.
- Improve gender-based violence data collection and sharing.
- Address lost trust in the public safety role of government organizations that can result from wildfire disaster. This is important to prevent victims from isolating and a reduction in formal reporting by victims.
- Delay reopening tourism in disaster sites in or near tourist destinations until the survivor community is resourced and stabilized.







- FEMA, ARC, State and County should coordinate to ensure the availability of free menstrual products at all shelters and resource sites after a wildfire disaster.
- FEMA and ARC should implement regular town hall meetings and public relations campaigns to clarify the distinctions between critical and mandatory paperwork and issuances, as opposed to those that may be considered less essential. FEMA should provide clear guidance on issues that can be petitioned versus those that cannot, and potentially reduce the alleged disproportionate relocations of people of color. By empowering individuals with the knowledge and resources necessary to effectively self-advocate, FEMA and ARC can enhance community safety and mental health, and ensure that residents are better equipped to navigate the complexities of aid processes.
- Fund FEMA to implement these reforms.
- Increase female leadership in preparedness, response, and recovery decision-making to ensure disasters are approached from a woman's standpoint and better prioritization of sexual and domestic violence.
- Pass state legislation that expands midwifery licensure pathways and increase the number of local midwives in neighbor island and rural communities as a core part of wildfire preparedness.
- The Governor's Office of Wellness & Resiliency should scale gender-specific initiatives for male mental health to reduce misogyny, anger, aggression, and substance abuse post-disaster. The areas on O'ahu with the highest fire risk designation are also areas with the highest number of domestic violence felony and misdemeanor abuse calls to police.
- The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency should launch a localized version of Australia's "Live and Leave!" campaign for men to counteract cultural pressure on men to "stay and defend" their properties and be "heroes," which has resulted in higher male fatalities during wildfires.
- Continue analysis on Maui Police Department crime data for 2024 and 2023 data broken down by month and neighborhood and compare for per capita population loss and growth in these areas.
- Organize trauma-informed "healing circles" for women in the Los Angeles recovery and partner with local wellness and healing practitioners.
- Activate youth in high fire hazard areas with age-specific conversations about disaster preparedness plans and practice these plans.
- Philanthropy should specifically fund feminists post-disaster. Men need feminism to fully recover from disasters. Feminists should spend more money and time speaking to men.
- Better prioritize the needs of women with disabilities. Ensure Deaf survivors have equal access to disaster information and essential resources.



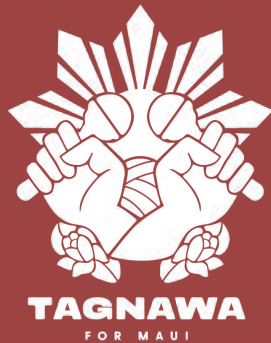




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## ABOUT TAGNAWA

Tagnawa means “mutual aid” in Ilokano, a native language and people of northwestern Luzon, Philippines. Tagnawa is a Filipino feminist disaster response organization on Maui and O’ahu. Tagnawa is dedicated to serving and empowering immigrant women after U.S. environmental disasters. Tagnawa was the first organization providing Ilokano and Tagalog translations and conducting needs assessments in hotels and emergency shelters after the Lahaina fire. We then tied our findings to political action and legislative advocacy at the Congressional, State, and County levels. By prioritizing community-driven solutions, Tagnawa exemplifies a localized approach to the growing global crisis of mass destruction by wildfire.

Tagnawa strongly believes that safety from sexual and domestic violence is a basic necessity. Violence against women and children should be considered a primary concern during wildfires and other disasters, not a secondary issue to be addressed after the provision of “basic needs.”

Tagnawa believes in urgent action. Requests for more data or for disaggregated data are one of the most common delaying tactics to excuse legislative inaction on gender justice in Hawai’i. Collecting data has become an end in itself. While we should continue to investigate disaster outcomes, action on prevention modalities must be prioritized.

Beyond immediate and short-term response, Tagnawa is committed to building Filipino community power to secure our long-term needs after disaster recovery. As Filipinos, we know that the severity, frequency, cause and effect of extreme weather events are deeply political. Many environmental disasters are not mere acts of nature but the result of human-made systems of oppression - rooted in histories of colonization, land grabbing, political dynasties, and sugar oligarchs. These are not unique to Hawai’i but are hallmarks of global capitalism, driving environmental and social crises worldwide.



↑ EARLY OUTREACH AFTER THE 2023 LAHAINA FIRE WHERE TAGNAWA, THEN UNFUNDED AND VOLUNTEER-ONLY, WENT DIRECTLY TO SURVIVORS TO HUMANIZE FILIPINOS AND ENSURE LANGUAGE ACCESS.

Tagnawa recognizes that true recovery, healing, and freedom are built through solidarity. We work alongside Native Hawaiian women from Lahaina Strong and Maui Medic Healers Hui. We also advocate for safety, dignity, and justice in disaster response for Latina, Pacific Islander, and Black women on Maui. We cherish and support the work of Roots Reborn to empower all immigrants. Our shared struggles reveal the complexities of our lived experiences. We are structurally positioned as binary opposites within the system and structure of settler colonialism. However, just as we have differences, we also have an abundance of connections.



↑ TAGNAWA VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE RESOURCE NAVIGATION AND CONDUCT NEEDS ASSESSMENT INCLUDING GENDER VIOLENCE SCREENING IN FILIPINO LANGUAGES AT TEMPORARY SHELTER SITES WITH ROOTS REBORN.

As researchers from blended Filipino immigrant-Native Hawaiian families, we know that immigrant-settlers are also deeply connected to land in Hawai'i. We are connected to Native Hawaiians through histories of colonization, labor extraction, displacement, and fragile survival. Like Native Hawaiians, immigrants cherish our relationships with place, and recognize that our security and health are interwoven with the health of the land, waters, and women.

At its core, Tagnawa is committed to aloha 'āina, deep love and responsibility for the land, waters, and people of Hawai'i. We reject disaster recovery models that prioritize profit over people, upend the host culture of Hawai'i, exclude feminists, and neglect the needs of the majority of people especially the most vulnerable. Our vision for wildfire recovery is not just about rebuilding structures back to right back where we started pre-disaster—going nowhere would be a waste of billions of dollars. We believe in building a Lahaina that restores relationships with the land and with each other, ensuring that our communities not only survive but unite.







## BACKGROUND

This report contributes to a small but growing body of research in the field of feminist disaster studies in the United States, centering an anti-imperialist, environmental justice lens to examine how the 2023 Lahaina wildfires exacerbated pre-existing structures of gendered, racial, and colonial violence. While mainstream disaster research often treats gender as a secondary variable, Equality in Flames exposes how patriarchal norms, settler-capitalist extraction, and one-size-fits-all emergency response converge to produce disproportionate outcomes for Indigenous, immigrant, and working-class women. By interrogating the Lahaina fire through this framework, we challenge the traditional disaster industrial complex - where recovery policies prioritize property over people and reproduce the very inequalities that render women vulnerable in the first place. Equality in Flames is intended to be an early social investigation into this topic in Hawai'i and to support the redesign of exclusionary disaster response models.

The expectations placed on people based on their gender, people's sense of what is "normal" behavior for their gender, the amount of power people have because of their gender, and gender bias grandfathered into the structures and cultures of disaster-serving institutions all play a significant role in worsening environmental disaster outcomes. In fact, gender can even pre-determine whether a person will live or die during a particular type of environmental disaster.


Globally, women perish at higher rates than men during water-related disasters like floods because of culturally enforced norms that limit women's swimming ability- girls are less likely to be taught to swim.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, men are more likely to die during fire-related disasters.

While the exact reasons are not fully understood, research in Australia has found that civilian men tend to eschew early evacuation to "stay and defend" their property, which is socially rewarded as "heroic."<sup>12</sup> Firefighting is also hypermasculinized and continues to be culturally designated as a man's job. The lethal influence of a culture's idea of masculinity during wildfires has spurred advocates in Australia to launch a "Leave and Live!" public awareness campaign targeted toward men.<sup>13</sup> This campaign directly confronts this lethal masculinity, yet U.S. disaster response continues to romanticize male self-sacrifice while ignoring its roots in settler-colonial property fetishization.<sup>14</sup>

The 2023 Lahaina fire destroyed 2,200 structures, including 700 affordable housing units, and was the deadliest wildfire in the last 100 years of United States history. The fire reached an official death toll of 102 people as compared to 29 people in the 2025 Los Angeles fires, according to figures available at the time of this writing. As in most wildfires, the majority of fire-related deaths in Lahaina were men. And, predictably, many male victims of the LA and Lahaina fires were often memorialized in the press media as "protectors" who stayed behind in an attempt to "save" and "protect" their loved ones and homes.<sup>15</sup> Elaine Enarson, a scholar with expertise on masculinities and disasters, also found that men's sense of failure to live up to "masculinity" when their home burns fuels their violence post-disaster.<sup>16</sup> As of April 20, 2025 only 10 homes in Lahaina have been rebuilt.

The different negative effects of a wildfire on different genders extend even farther because women enter into disasters with more structural disadvantages than men.<sup>17</sup> The two main reasons for "women's greater exposure, sensitivity, and vulnerability to climate change, no matter where they live:"





1) women are more likely than men to be poor and 2) women are expected and often forced to bear greater responsibility for caregiving and domestic labor.<sup>18</sup>

There has been less research on gender outcomes of wildfires within the United States than in Australia, and research tends to focus on medical studies related to childbearing and birth outcomes of women who were pregnant or soon to become pregnant after a wildfire.<sup>19</sup> Studies within the last decade have found increased rates of maternal gestational diabetes and gestational hypertension, differences in the ratio of male-to-female births (i.e., the secondary sex ratio), and higher incidence of birth defects following in utero exposure to wildfire smoke.<sup>20</sup> Other research suggests a reduction in breastfeeding among women who evacuated from a wildfire disaster.<sup>21</sup> The risk of hospital admissions for respiratory problems from wildfire smoke is also significantly higher for women than men.<sup>22</sup>

There is a need to evaluate gender equality more broadly post-wildfire in the United States. While violence against women is unofficially deprioritized during environmental disasters, it has consistently been found to increase. This is happening in the United States and other countries in the Global North, not just in the Global South as some assume.<sup>23</sup>

Research related to the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires found that women in high-bushfire-affected communities experienced higher levels of violence than communities that were not affected by bushfires.<sup>24</sup> Crucially, Australia research on wildfires has shown that while there may be increased or new violence, “formal reporting might not always occur.”<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that in other areas “during disasters, women become more vulnerable, and this vulnerability emanates from the disaster itself,

as well as from other factors and conditions that originate from women’s general position in society.”<sup>26</sup> Tagnawa set out to investigate if this held true in Hawai’i in the context of the 2023 Lahaina fire and what we can learn for future disasters.

The increasing criminalization of environmental justice activism is a threat to gender justice. The March 2025 federal deregulation of major environmental protections in the United States makes it even more urgent to apply a feminist perspective to emergency management, response, and recovery because environmental disasters can surge sexual and reproductive health problems, mental health morbidity, and gender-based violence. Immigrant women are especially vulnerable to these harms.

## FILIPINO WOMEN IN HAWAII

Filipinos have been used by the ruling race to solve labor shortages in Hawai’i – at the cheapest cost possible – for 174 years and counting. Behind the large number of Filipino women in Hawai’i stand a small group of sugar plantation owners. The Hawai’i sugar industry did not recruit Filipinos until they saw Filipinos as convenient, specifically in 1900 when Filipinos became U.S. nationals exempt from immigration restrictions. From 1835 onward, physical space and economic place in Hawai’i were organized by sugar oligarchs around gender, nationality, race, and class. Plantation owners assigned Filipino women, the group that they recruited last to Hawai’i, to the lowest position, i.e., in terms of both wages and job types, in the local labor system and went to great efforts to keep them on the plantation intergenerationally. This has shaped Filipino women’s position in contemporary Hawai’i society.





The Lahaina community is Filipino-heavy and water-scarce by design. The abundance of Filipinos in Lahaina and lack of abundant water share the same root cause: American Factors “Amfac” (formerly Hackfeld and Co.). As one of the Big Five and owner of Lahaina’s Pioneer Mill and O’ahu’s Waipahu Mill (the second largest sugar plantation in Hawai‘i), Amfac accumulated vast properties for plantation sites across Hawai‘i, and managed and manipulated water and immigrant flows into Lahaina for almost 100 years.

Amfac, whose president also led the Hawai‘i Sugar Planters Association (sic) at the time, recruited large numbers of Filipinos, including the last 4,000 sugar laborers from the Philippines after WWII, in an attempt to dilute the power of organized labor. Unlike the Chinese Exclusion Act and anti-Japanese Immigration Act of 1924, Hawai‘i’s sugar industry was also able to successfully lobby Congress for an exemption from immigration restrictions on Filipinos after the 1934 Tydings McDuffie Act limited Filipino migration to the United States to fifty people per year. Then the United States continued to generate waves of Filipino immigration by passing the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and actively recruiting Filipino nurses, and creating societal unrest through financial support of regimes such as the Marcos dictatorship.

Hawai‘i sugar planters failed to weaken Filipino, Japanese, Chinese and Hawaiian labor solidarity embodied in the ILWU. That and other factors led to a decline in sugar profitability and the plantation economy in the 1960s. As a result, Amfac transitioned to resort development in Kā’anapali. The transformation of sugar into tourism was literal: “where the molasses tanks and cattle pens stood is a portion of a championship golf course, one of many features in the Kā’anapali resort area.”<sup>27</sup> The transition involved the

same land and same people. At Kā’anapali, “women from the plantation villages were to be the source of hotel workers.”<sup>28</sup>

For these reasons, there were double the Filipinos in Lahaina than the state average when the August 8, 2023 Lahaina fire struck. Across Hawai‘i, there is a long lineup of eminent Filipino female leaders like Cathy Betts, Jennifer Rose, Della Au Belatti, Gemma Weinstein, Rosalee Agas-Yuu, Patricia Halaḡao, Belinda Aquino, Rose Churma, Bennette Misalucha, Amy Agbayani, Deanna Espinas, Pia Arboleda, Melinda Tria Kerkvliet, Radiant Cordero, and more. Specifically, Filipino feminists have been highly visible and effective drivers of gender equality in Hawai‘i which is connected to the organizing strength of feminism in the Philippines and the transnational nature of Filipino social justice movements. The last two Executive Directors of the Hawai‘i State Commission on the Status of Women have been Filipina feminists with backgrounds in Filipino cultural preservation and self-determination activism.

Globally, the Philippines is a leader in innovations that incorporate feminist design into disaster response. Philippines disaster response infrastructure may be less resourced but when it comes to institutionalizing women’s inclusion, the Philippines is more advanced than the United States and Hawai‘i. Local governments each have a Gender and Development Office (GAD) with a disaster code that integrates gender concepts and children’s rights. There are numerous individual examples of leadership in this area, such as when Marikina Mayor Marcelino Teodoro received international recognition for organizing emergency shelters with modular tents designed to improve women and children’s safety after a catastrophic flood in 2018.



# RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA SOURCES

Data was obtained from diverse sources to account for the ways that gender based violence and women's health struggles are often hidden under layers of secrecy, dependency, shame, and fear. Disasters can exacerbate factors associated with delays in self-reporting of violent victimization. Victims can become more financially reliant on their perpetrator, prioritize their financial needs over safety, lose their support system, and carry more fear of not being believed due to the perpetrator's status as either a disaster victim or hero or both. Worse, reporting delays can create the appearance of a reduction in sexual violence post-disaster while creating a public safety problem where reoffenders can continue to abuse others undetected and worsening mental health morbidity because disclosure can provide therapeutic benefits to victims.<sup>30</sup>

## 1. Key Informant Interviews

The purpose of key informant interviews (KII) is to include a big picture vantage point on gender impacts from Maui-based officials, local non-profit service providers, and community organizers, especially those who administer reproductive health care and anti-violence (i.e., child abuse, intimate partner violence, sexual assault and sex trafficking) reporting systems as they are "information insiders" monitoring trends around major thematic areas of gender equality. A formal request for an interview was submitted to FEMA and although it was acknowledged, the agency did not provide a subsequent response prior to the completion of this report. Seven KIIs were analyzed for this report. Key leadership from Lahaina Strong, Roots Reborn, and Pacific Birth Collective are cited and quoted throughout the report.

The format of the KIIs varied based on the preference and availability of the informant, but most were conducted on Zoom or phone call. With the exception of one informant who confirmed their participation via e-mail, participants submitted a consent form, using Google Forms, which contained the purpose of the study, the interviewer's contact information, the statement of voluntary participation of a participant, and the assurance to uphold confidentiality if selected by the participant.

## 2. Surveys

Key informant interviews are balanced by the expert voices of 70 Filipino women directly impacted by the Lahaina fire, who were identified and surveyed by Cheryl Alcantara, lead community organizer for Taghawa and herself a Filipina who survived the 2023 Lahaina fire. The Filipina Fire Survivor Survey (FFSS) is a post-disaster survey for Filipino women-identifying individuals affected by the fire in Lahaina with 51 closed and open-ended

questions regarding the following topics: resource accessibility, mental health, reproductive health, employment, housing, nutrition, family dynamics, caregiving, experiences of violence, and experiences of commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. The FFSS also allowed space for more open storytelling, reflection, feedback and problem-solving. Participation was voluntary and compensated as a means to aid fire survivors.



## 2. Surveys (Cont.)

Demographically, all respondents identified as Filipino women. Four percent of respondents identified as LGBTQ.

Forty-four percent of respondents spoke Ilokano and 31% spoke Tagalog at home, with 10% speaking a variety of Filipino languages at home. The remainder spoke Bisaya, Hawaiian Creole English/Hawaiian Pidgin, or English, or a mixture. One respondent was from the Deaf community.

Respondents were aged 20 to 92; with an average age of 38 years old. While any age can be sex trafficked, there are trends within the sex industry: Only 6 respondents fell within the age range targeted by sex traffickers and sex buyers, i.e., 18-25 years old, according to a former

State law enforcement official consulted in this research. The majority of respondents had United States citizenship; however, over 25% of respondents were green card holders (legal permanent residents), which is a category increasingly vulnerable to deportation under the Trump administration. None identified themselves to be undocumented immigrants. Over three-quarters, 79% of respondents (N=55), were born in the Philippines; 20% were born in Hawai'i.

Only one individual was pregnant during the fire. The majority of respondents work in Maui's hospitality industry. All respondents lived in Lahaina at the time of the 2023 fire.

## 3. County and State Crime and Reporting Data

Data was obtained from Maui Police Department (MPD), Department of the Prosecuting Attorney for Maui County (Prosecuting Attorney) and state Department of Human Services (DHS), although one Uniform Information Practices Act (UIPA) public records request for call volume for child abuse and neglect allegations on Maui is pending. Data received from MPD and the Prosecuting Attorney was not disaggregated for race or indigeneity, and is not limited to Filipinos.

County and state data was meant to develop a baseline on gender based violence and a macro-level understanding of gender based violence post-disaster. One limitation on this source was the lack of characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity), consistency, and uniformity in crime data collection between state and county agencies.

At this preliminary stage of data collection, it was not possible to draw a correlation to the wildfire disaster with the crime data provided. However, helpful insights from officials at these entities allowed for deeper understandings of what may be occurring in the fire survivor community.

Law enforcement data on gender based violence must also be weighed against concerns from mental health providers, community organizers, fire survivors, and law enforcement personnel themselves about increased reluctance to report violence after the Lahaina fire. The top reasons for post-disaster silence according to key informants were:

1. Immigration status and the large immigrant population of Lahaina.
2. Dependency or perceived dependency on perpetrators for disaster relief resources.
3. Lack of opportunities to report gender based violence in a safe or comfortable way.
4. Lost confidence in law enforcement and government due to the fire disaster.
5. Pre-existing fear of law enforcement and authorities among immigrants.
6. High cultural value placed on family loyalty and cohesion, particularly among Native Hawaiians and immigrants.

### 3. County and State Crime and Reporting Data (Cont.)

Given these factors and other feedback from key informants, it is likely that the true extent of gender based violence post-disaster is much worse than the figures reflected in state and county data.

Law enforcement, criminal justice data, and state reporting data on domestic and sexual violence by itself is not enough to determine whether gender based violence increased after a wildfire, and further research is needed to determine correlation to the fire. This is due to a host of factors such as new, disaster-related

disincentives to formally report violence and less (or more) police manpower at a particular time. In 2023, Maui Police Department Communications Section dispatched 149,155 police events which resulted in 45,110 police cases, 20,612 fire cases, and 21,674 medical cases. This was 20,482 more police events than in 2022, or a 16% increase. The total number of dispatched police events in 2024 was not available.

#### Maui Police Department

MPD provided annual crime data reports and responded to inquiries requesting additional clarifications. Data obtained from Maui Police Department was not disaggregated by gender or race although MPD does collect gender data in name records entered for any person contacts made whether victim or offender. Annual reports for 2021-2023 were not broken down by quarter or month, which made it difficult to analyze as a whole.

When deciphering police data, “incidents” (depicted in the far left column of MPD annual crime data worksheets) do not represent the number of incidents that occurred in a year but rather occurrences of a specific type of crime during an incident. For example, there could be a call for service in which police officers attend the scene for “theft.” On arrival, officers may determine that the incident is “shoplifting” and “disorderly conduct.” This would result in a single incident being created (or reported) but there are two offenses within the incident.

An additional challenge for the research team was the reliability of MPD data as there were also admitted errors in data collection made by MPD. For example, there was a misrepresentation of rape statistics:

“At some time in 2022 officers were instructed to enter Sexual Assaults under “Sexual Assault 1,2,3, 4 Investigation” and the [Criminal Investigation Division] CID official would reclassify after full investigation to appropriate offense.’ Therefore, comparison from one year back and forward [from the August 8, 2023 Lahaina fire] would not be accurate as the Research Analyst was not informed and therefore was not reporting the investigations within the data set.”

Furthermore, increases or decreases in MPD arrest numbers can be due to a host of factors according to the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney for Maui County. For example, there may have been more reports made and MPD had more manpower to work on cases in a particular year.

The comprehensive MPD Crime Data report for 2024 has not yet been released to the public, but we were able to obtain piecemeal information in Bureau updates from the Maui Police Commission meeting archives. Human trafficking cases were not included in the MPD annual report but electronic enticement and general information about Operation Keiki Shield was included.

MPD manpower was affected by the Lahaina fire. Total 911 calls surged in 2023 compared to 2022, then decreased in 2024 by 27%.

MPD also provided the following statement:

As our community continues to recover and rebuild in the wake of the wildfires, we recognize that the trauma and stress of displacement can often bring hidden struggles to the surface.

Please know that help is available, and you are not alone. Survivors of domestic violence deserve safety, support, and compassion. If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse, please know that it is safe to come forward. Reporting to law enforcement or a trusted official is a brave and vital step toward protection and healing. Our officers are trained to respond with care and discretion, and our top priority is your safety and well-being.

By speaking out, you are not only protecting yourself, but you may also be helping others in similar situations. Together, we can build a stronger, safer community where everyone feels seen, heard, and protected.

If you need immediate assistance, please call 911. For non-emergency resources or to speak confidentially with an advocate, contact the Domestic Violence Action Center at (808) 531-3771. Additional resources include Women Helping Women (808) 579-9581 and Parents and Children Together (808) 243-7001.

## Department of the Prosecuting Attorney for Maui County

The Department of the Prosecuting Attorney for Maui County ("the Prosecuting Attorney") provided a summary of sexual assault and domestic violence cases for 2022, 2023, and 2024. Specifically, cases were shared with the "domestic violence" attribute, i.e., cases of violence involving family or household members. A case signifies a report received and the offense listed is the lead or more serious offense. The report at times includes more than one offense.

A list of abuse (petty misdemeanor, misdemeanor, felony), violation of TRO, and violation of Order for Protection offenses were also included.

These specific offenses were selected because they are the domestic violence offenses that offenders are commonly charged with in Family Court. Offenses were listed by month and included a count of the number of offenders as some offenders had more than one offense. The Prosecuting Attorney acknowledged that numbers do not accurately add up because the attribute given to a case or offense may be incorrect. For example, a felony abuse offense should be a "felony" (not "family adult").

## Hawai'i Department of Human Services

Two Uniform Information Practices Act requests were submitted to the Hawai'i Department of Human Services to obtain data on reports of child sex trafficking and child abuse and neglect allegation in the year before, during, and after the Lahaina fire. Ethnicity data was also requested. Data related to child sex trafficking was shared but data on child abuse and neglect allegations is pending.



↑ Graph from “MPD Chief’s Report, February 19, 2025”



## 2023 CRIME DATA

MPD	Crime Against	Crime Category	1/1/23-12/31/23	1/1/22-12/31/22	Percentage change
INCIDENTS	Violent crime	MURDER	3	4	-25%
		RAPE** (includes Sex Assault 1, 2, investigations)	122	142	-14%
		ROBBERY	44	48	-8%
		AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	462	489	-6%
		Armed with firearm	28	30	-7%
		Armed with knife	69	71	-3%
		Attempted murder	3	6	-50%
		Other dangerous weapon	110	96	15%
		Hands, fists, feet, etc	69	92	-25%
		Felony abuse of family, with injury	88	85	4%
		Felony abuse of family, strangulation	84	95	-12%
		SIMPLE ASSAULT	1566	1514	3%
		Abuse of family, no injury	472	559	-16%
		Abuse of family, with injury	395	361	9%
		TOTAL of the listed VIOLENT CRIME	2,197	2,197	0%
	Property crimes	BURGLARY	572	591	-3%
		LARCENY/THEFT <small>excl. UEMV / THEFT from VEHICLE +/- 1%</small>	2749	3012	-9%
		THEFT FROM A VEHICLE / UEMV	995	1214	-18%
		MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT +/- 2%	935	905	3%
		TOTAL of the listed PROPERTY CRIME	5,251	5,722	-8%
	Crimes against society	DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE	517	609	-15%
		DRUG/NARCOTIC OFFENSES	1600	2455	-35%
		TOTAL of the listed CRIME AGAINST SOCIETY	2,117	3,064	-31%
	Total listed incident offenses	<small>calculated by adding the incident offenses. This does not represent number of incidents reported</small>	9,565	10,983	-13%

† Graph from "Maui Police Department 2023 Annual Report"

Data obtained from the Department of the Prosecuting Attorney for the County of Maui showed cases received but not necessarily prosecuted. It can take months or even years, especially for the more serious domestic violence cases, and especially sexual assault cases, to be prosecuted. The overall number of "domestic violence" attribute cases, i.e., crimes of violence involving family or household members, referred to the Prosecuting Attorney decreased after the Lahaina fire (comparing 2022, 2023, and 2024 cases). The cases were for abuse (petty misdemeanor, misdemeanor, felony), violation of TRO, and violation of Order for Protection offenses as these are the domestic violence offenses that offenders are commonly charged within Family Court. Within domestic violence attribute cases, petty misdemeanor abuse did increase after the Lahaina fire, which includes intentionally or knowingly striking, shoving or kicking a family or household member in an offensive manner or subjecting them to offensive physical contact or coercive control.

The overall decrease in domestic violence cases received by the Prosecuting Attorney could be attributed to victims not reporting the violence at all or not reporting right away, not being in a safe situation, undocumented immigrant status, housing and financial instability, and police being preoccupied with the 2023 fires so they did not arrest the alleged perpetrator right away or needed more time to investigate. Representatives from the Prosecuting Attorney also cautioned that gender-based violence victims tend to report abuse late regardless of these factors:

**"For domestic violence victims, the main reason based on our experience working with victims is financial dependence to the abuser. They also fear retaliation. For sexual assault victims, it's fear of not being believed and shame and guilt."**

The number of cases assigned to victim advocates at the Prosecuting Attorney in November 2023 jumped 60% from the previous months, an increase that stuck out to one official; however, these cases also included assaults, terroristic threatening and property crimes such as burglary and theft.

Ultimately, the number of cases received by the Prosecuting Attorney every year fluctuates, making it difficult to conclude with certainty that the decline in numbers in 2023 and 2024 has direct connections with the Lahaina fires.

## DV OFFENSES

2022

Case Type/Offense	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total number of counts
Abuse (petty misdemeanor)	2 counts (2 offenders)	3 counts (3 offenders)	3 counts (3 offenders)	7 counts (7 offenders)	8 counts (8 offenders)	6 counts (6 offenders)	7 counts (7 offenders)	6 counts (6 offenders)	5 counts (5 offenders)	6 counts (6 offenders)	8 counts (8 offenders)	4 counts (4 offenders)	63
Abuse (Misdemeanor)	66 counts (36 offenders)	48 counts (27 offenders)	75 counts (43 offenders)	48 counts (30 offenders)	77 counts (37 offenders)	60 counts (30 offenders)	49 counts (22 offenders)	152 counts (41 offenders)	40 counts (25 offenders)	47 counts (30 offenders)	36 counts (26 offenders)	48 counts (19 offenders)	144
Abuse (Felony)	16 counts (11 offenders)	31 counts (14 offenders)	9 counts (7 offenders)	11 counts (10 offenders)	7 counts (5 offenders)	13 counts (12 offenders)	12 counts (5 offenders)	19 counts (14 offenders)	9 counts (8 offenders)	16 counts (12 offenders)	13 counts (7 offenders)	6 counts (5 offenders)	160
Violation of TRD	13 counts (8 offenders)	9 counts (8 offenders)	5 counts (4 offenders)	11 counts (12 offenders)	3 counts (3 offenders)	2 counts (2 offenders)	7 counts (7 offenders)	50 counts (8 offenders)	1 count (1 offender)	5 counts (3 offenders)	8 counts (5 offenders)	170 counts (17 offenders)	262
Violation of an Order for Protection	12 counts (6 offenders)	17 counts (8 offenders)	14 counts (10 offenders)	16 counts (9 offenders)	45 counts (17 offenders)	14 counts (8 offenders)	9 counts (7 offenders)	23 counts (12 offenders)	18 counts (8 offenders)	11 counts (7 offenders)	28 counts (13 offenders)	34 counts (14 offenders)	292

2023

Case Type/Offense	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total number of counts
Abuse (petty misdemeanor)	3 counts (3 offenders)	8 counts (7 offenders)	4 counts (4 offenders)	5 counts (4 offenders)	6 counts (6 offenders)	7 counts (7 offenders)	10 counts (10 offenders)	8 counts (6 offenders)	3 counts (3 offenders)	3 counts (2 offenders)	8 counts (6 offenders)	8 counts (7 offenders)	71
Abuse (Misdemeanor)	28 counts (23 offenders)	134 counts (36 offenders)	33 counts (22 offenders)	40 counts (34 offenders)	50 counts (34 offenders)	33 counts (26 offenders)	42 counts (34 offenders)	34 counts (26 offenders)	31 counts (20 offenders)	43 counts (29 offenders)	50 counts (38 offenders)	52 counts (24 offenders)	569
Abuse (Felony)	12 counts (4 counts)	8 counts (8 offenders)	6 counts (5 offenders)	6 counts (6 offenders)	10 counts (8 counts)	18 counts (10 offenders)	13 counts (8 offenders)	8 counts (4 offenders)	15 counts (7 offenders)	3 counts (3 offenders)	11 counts (8 offenders)	7 counts (6 offenders)	115
Violation of TRD	31 counts (15 offenders)	11 counts (4 offenders)	6 counts (4 offenders)	5 counts (4 offenders)	12 counts (6 offenders)	8 counts (4 offenders)	6 counts (3 offenders)	4 counts (4 offenders)	11 counts (6 offenders)	3 counts (3 offenders)	70 counts (8 offenders)	3 counts (3 offenders)	150
Violation of an Order for Protection	25 counts (10 offenders)	18 counts (8 offenders)	24 counts (15 offenders)	41 counts (13 offenders)	22 counts (9 offenders)	20 counts (12 offenders)	11 counts (7 offenders)	4 counts (2 offenders)	4 counts (4 offenders)	8 counts (6 offenders)	12 counts (6 offenders)	22 counts (10 offenders)	209

2024

Case Type/Offense	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total number of counts
Abuse (petty misdemeanor)	8 counts (7 offenders)	4 counts (4 offenders)	6 counts (7 offenders)	7 counts (7 offenders)	7 counts (7 offenders)	9 counts (7 offenders)	5 counts (5 offenders)	4 counts (4 offenders)	8 counts (5 offenders)	5 counts (4 offenders)	5 counts (5 offenders)	4 counts (4 offenders)	72
Abuse (Misdemeanor)	33 counts (24 offenders)	41 counts (30 offenders)	26 counts (23 offenders)	44 counts (30 offenders)	37 counts (33 offenders)	53 counts (31 offenders)	34 counts (22 offenders)	61 counts (29 offenders)	23 counts (16 offenders)	42 counts (36 offenders)	31 counts (27 offenders)	47 counts (37 offenders)	454
Abuse (Felony)	9 counts (6 offenders)	17 counts (13 offenders)	3 counts (3 offenders)	6 counts (5 offenders)	7 counts (6 offenders)	12 counts (12 offenders)	11 counts (8 offenders)	5 counts (5 offenders)	4 counts (4 offenders)	10 counts (8 offenders)	7 counts (7 offenders)	11 counts (8 offenders)	132
Violation of TRD	4 counts (2 offenders)	4 counts (4 offenders)	2 counts (1 offender)	8 counts (3 offenders)	4 counts (1 offender)	26 counts (15 offenders)	9 counts (6 offenders)	3 counts (3 offenders)	1 count (1 offender)	8 counts (4 offenders)	9 counts (5 offenders)	19 counts (13 offenders)	87
Violation of an Order for Protection	36 counts (12 offenders)	9 counts (7 offenders)	14 counts (10 offenders)	40 counts (14 offenders)	21 counts (14 offenders)	41 counts (11 offenders)	11 counts (8 offenders)	4 counts (3 offenders)	14 counts (7 offenders)	18 counts (11 offenders)	13 counts (8 offenders)	26 counts (10 offenders)	316

### B. FINDINGS FROM KIIS

The following conclusions emerged from key informant interviews on the topic of domestic violence:

1. There has been an increase in domestic violence after the Lahaina fire.
2. There is post-disaster silence and delayed reporting by gender-based violence victims.

3. There will be an increase in formal disclosures of gender-based violence as the disaster recovery progresses.
4. FEMA and Red Cross programs and processes did not adequately address domestic violence and may have exacerbated gender-based violence especially among displaced people of color, immigrants, and non-English proficient survivors.



## Increased Domestic Violence

Judiciary personnel noted an increase in reporting of domestic violence in the form of obtaining TROs/orders of protection after the Lahaina fire. There appeared to be an increase in requests for court intervention in domestic abuse situations as well as child abuse situations after the Lahaina fire.

Women Helping Women (WHW), Maui's main domestic violence provider which runs the only 24-hour crisis hotline in the County, received higher than average calls following the 2023 Lahaina wildfire, but not an increase in actual services provided by WHW. Calls to the WHW hotline more than doubled from approximately 150-250 per month to 550 per month in the first two months after the fire, and the agency also documented a concurrent rise in sexual assault cases and substance abuse issues. The double in domestic violence calls was publicized by FEMA in November 13, 2023 through a press release that not only highlighted the trend but also provided a comprehensive list of hotline numbers to national and local resources.

WHW also reported that most victims of domestic violence experienced increases in verbal and psychological abuse, as well as higher instances of coercive control. Many domestic violence victims reported heightened fear of leaving their abusers due to not having any housing as a result of the fire. More landlords attempted to remove tenants that were experiencing domestic violence, not just the abusers but the victims who called police too many times and were drawing unwanted negative attention to their units.

Community organizers and direct service providers in Lahaina, especially those who have been notably active and engaged over the last 20 months since the fire, also contend that there has been a marked increase in domestic violence post-disaster. Roots Reborn, a multicultural immigrant justice and disaster response 501(c)(3) organization based on Maui, provides extensive

legal services, resource navigation and direct aid to fires-affected immigrants. According to the organization's founding Executive Director Veronica Mendoza, "Definitely violence has increased in our communities. We have seen several family separations and restraining orders for impacted families. We believe kids are the ones that are suffering the most and in silence."

Testimony from Jordan Ruidas, a Lahaina community member and organizer with Lahaina Strong, added: "I have not seen any domestic violence personally but I hear about it all the time. At a meeting we had recently with MPD, they discussed how there are a lot of domestic violence incidents going on in temporary housing, which is majority fire survivors. I think it's definitely because men are trying to control anything they can control."

Mental health practitioners reported an increase in relationship conflict by clients but no formal reporting of domestic violence.

## Post-Disaster Silence and Delayed Reporting

The conditions created by the Lahaina wildfire combined with the immigrant status of many Lahaina residents may be discouraging victims from formally reporting sexual and domestic violence to law enforcement and health care workers. Accurate data on sexual and domestic violence during the 2023 Lahaina wildfire disaster will likely take years to uncover due to delayed formal reporting by victims. Delayed reporting of gender-based violence is common during non-disaster times, but certain factors that can lead to delayed self-reporting were worsened by the wildfire.

Multiple mental health providers believe that victims are not reporting domestic violence to them because therapists are seen as authority figures, but mostly because of financial dependency on perpetrators:



“Clients don’t overtly share about domestic violence because there’s that fear they are going to get their [FEMA] housing taken away or it will mess with their displacement and recovery.”

“If there is violence within the home, it still seems too early to talk about that or bring attention to that. Because all resources from all family members are needed at this time and if you talk [about abuse], that person might be removed from the home. Financial support and housing needs to be intact. The most important thing for Filipino fire survivors is finances so there’s a lot more leeway for violence. The thinking is, ‘I can understand why this person is stressed and they are going to show it physically.’ So in my practice I haven’t seen gender based violence even though my adult clients are supposed to be there to talk about it.”

Mental health providers also noticed a lack of realistic opportunities for Lahaina survivors to report violence:

“We don’t talk about domestic violence at most organizations serving Lahaina survivors. It’s present but we just don’t know how to talk about it, how to approach it. It’s such a taboo here. Talking about domestic violence is going against societal norms.”

Finally, mental health providers also cited historical-cultural influences on silence among Filipino survivors:

“At this point, how you treat your husband and wife comes from colonialism”.

## Regarding FEMA and ARC Systems

This section offers constructive feedback for how the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and American Red Cross (ARC) systems function in Lahaina and could be improved according to key informants.

Community organizers contend that FEMA disproportionately relocated displaced people

of color who were either not aware or empowered to petition relocation orders, and this may have exacerbated family conflict and domestic violence among Filipinos, Tongans, and Spanish – especially non-English speaking or immigrant – fire survivors.

In addition, FEMA and ARC processes did not provide adequate interventions on domestic violence or opportunities for victims to disclose gender based violence:

“I did go through some applications with FEMA and Red Cross and there were no questions about ‘How is the home?’ or ‘How are you coping?’ The applications were about numbers, not the actual story of what’s happening with fire survivors or at home. The applications don’t address gender-based violence. I personally have never seen a question from FEMA and Red Cross asking, ‘What is your home like, what happens at home?’”

Certain FEMA processes also seemed to ignore and maintain unequal gender dynamics within households:

“When FEMA was asked by Maui domestic violence advocates about any opportunities for victims of domestic violence to notify FEMA personnel about abuse that was happening in their household and/or while in the designated hotels, providers were told that check-ins with the families were done on a weekly basis but only with the heads of households, which in almost every case is the male in the home. Since domestic violence affects women and girls at a higher rate than men and boys, this set-up never gave any safe opportunity for female victims to disclose any acts of abuse.”

Anti-violence advocates did vocalize their concerns with FEMA about the design of the weekly check-in process and suggested amending the head of household policy, but FEMA did not have a response. However, advocates believe the certain FEMA administrators might have been open to adjusting the policy but did not have an opportunity to follow up.





As a result, some advocates felt that gender based violence was not a priority for FEMA and ARC. This was also based on observations at FEMA and ARC shelter sites where the focus was on “immediate needs.” The manner in which FEMA did provide domestic violence supports was not effectively designed:

“FEMA talked all about the immediate needs, which makes complete sense. However, there were so many pamphlets and informational packets given to wildfire victims that it would’ve been unrealistic to think they could process all of that information. Having a dedicated advocate or a training worker to handle working with victims of DV would’ve been extremely helpful.”

## Role of Tourism

The reopening of the tourism industry in West Maui just two months after the catastrophic August 8, 2023 Lahaina fire may have exacerbated male aggression and even fueled forms of domestic violence like coercive control. According to Hawai’i law (Hawai’i Revised Statutes Sec. 586-1), coercive control is a pattern of behavior when an individual seeks to limit or take away a family member or household member’s freedom or sense of self through actions such as controlling their money, name-calling and degrading them, or damaging their property.

At the time of tourism’s reopening, over 7,700 fire survivors were displaced across 40 Red Cross temporary housing locations. The reopening was opposed by hundreds if not thousands of fire survivors and community organizations such as Lahaina Strong, which sent a delegation to the Hawai’i State Capitol on O’ahu to personally deliver a petition signed by 15,000 people to the Governor, protesting the plan.

Nonetheless, the reopening of tourism proceeded, creating a sense of powerlessness and second class status (relative to tourists and corporate interests) among fire survivors. This also increased stress, which female organizers in Lahaina say affected male survivors in unique ways such as increased road rage, male rage online, and controlling behavior. According to Jordan Ruidas of Lahaina Strong:

“Some men are trying to control anything they can control because so little is out of their control, especially with the current rebuilding of Lahaina. Anything they can control – their money, kids, partner – that’s heightened. Tourism added another layer of things out of our control so men tried to compensate by controlling the people immediately around them.”

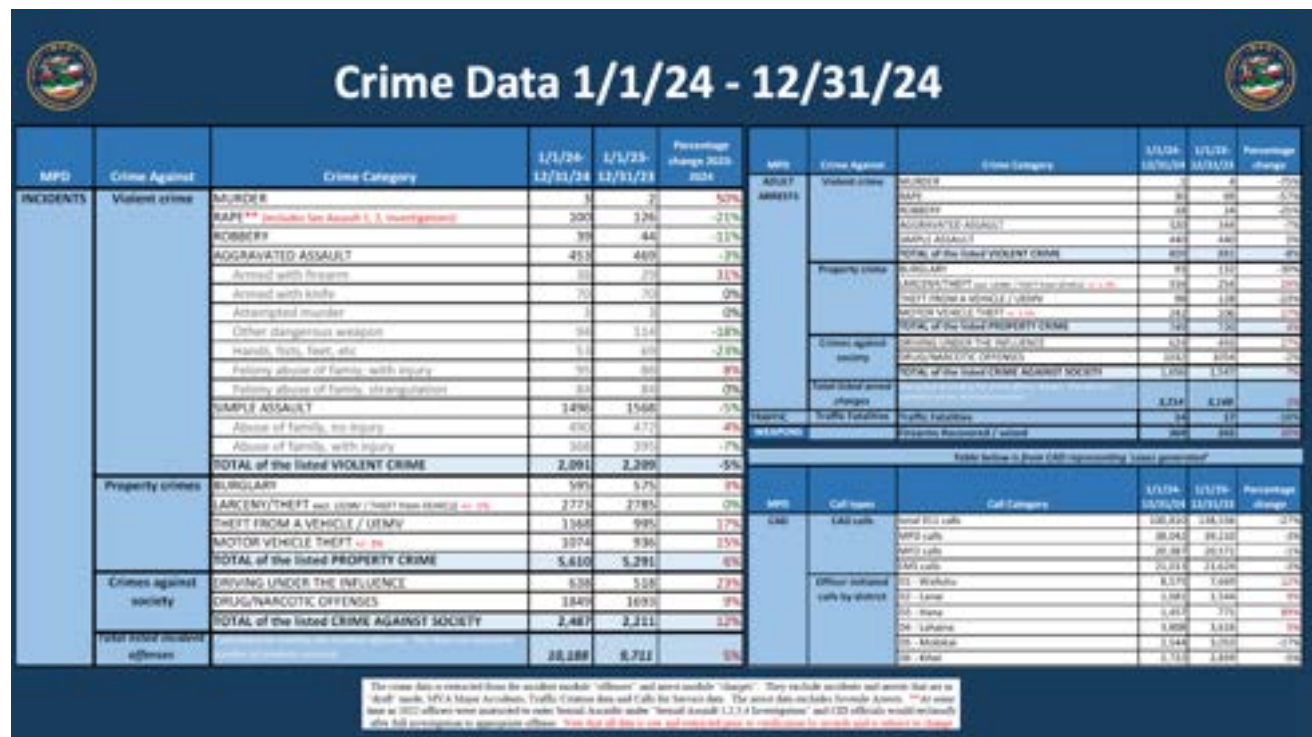
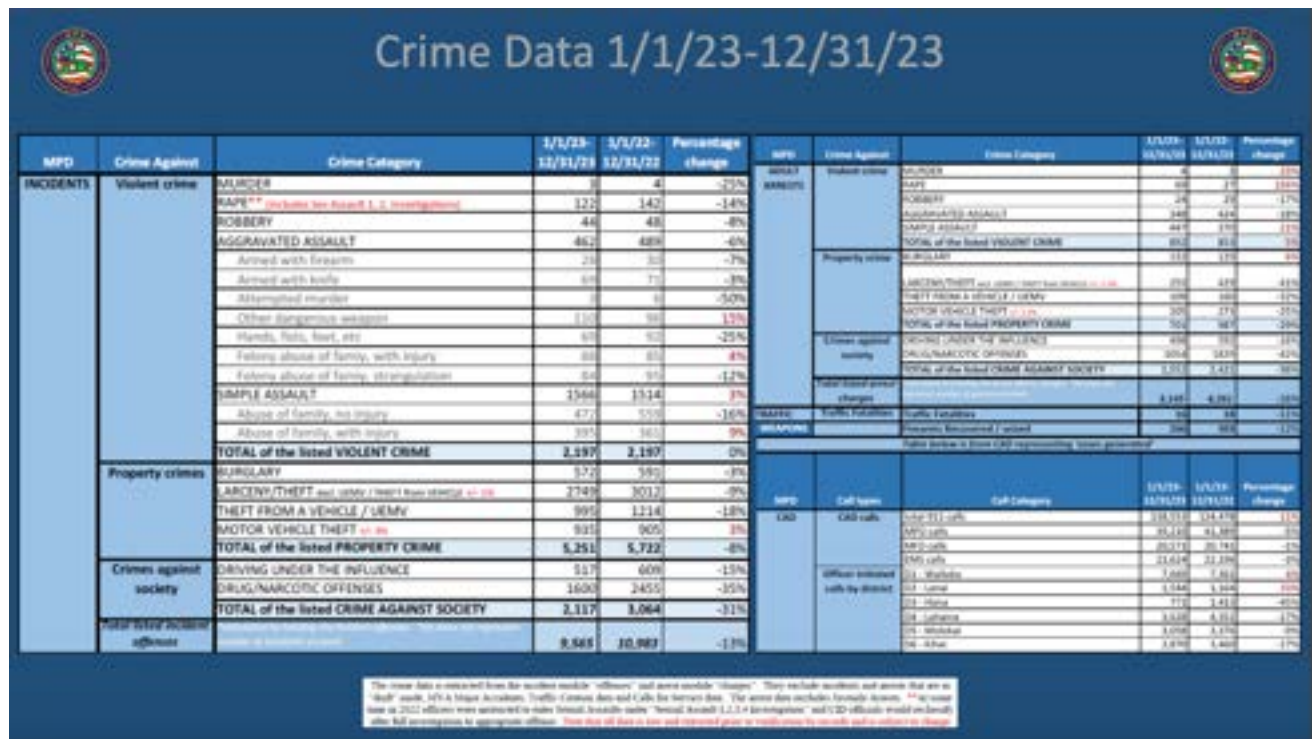
## II. Sexual Assault

### A. FINDINGS FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT DATA

In 2023, rape arrests decreased in Lahaina by 50% but increased in other areas of Maui– by 433% in Wailuku and 133% in Kihei. According to Maui Police Department, the incidence of rape did not change (remained as usual) in the county that year, but the location of rape incidents changed as Lahaina residents were displaced to other towns in Maui County and off island. More research is needed determine whether the rape increase in each area correlates with population changes post-disaster at that point in time. Data should be measured per capita but population changes in Lahaina, Wailuku, and Kihei at certain times after the fires is not readily available.

Unfortunately, comparison of MPD rape data from one year back and forward from the Lahaina fire would not be accurate because at some time in 2022 officers were instructed to enter Sexual Assaults under “Sexual Assault 1,2,3, 4 Investigation” and the Criminal Investigation Division official would reclassify after full investigation to appropriate offense; however, the Research Analyst in 2022 was not informed and therefore was not reporting the investigations within the data set.

MPD	Crime Against	Crime Category	1/1/22- 12/31/22	1/1/21- 12/31/21	Percentage change
INCIDENTS	Violent crime	MURDER	4	1	300%
		RAPE** (includes Sex Assault 1, 2, investigations)	143	189	-24%
		ROBBERY	48	34	41%
		AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	489	465	5%
		Armed with firearm	30	31	-3%
		Armed with knife	71	59	20%
		Attempted murder	6	8	-25%
		Other dangerous weapon	96	79	22%
		Hands, fists, feet, etc	92	75	23%
		Felony abuse of famiy, with injury	85	84	1%
		Felony abuse of famiy, strangulation	95	89	7%
		SIMPLE ASSAULT	1515	1322	15%
		Abuse of family, no injury	559	582	-4%
		Abuse of family, with injury	361	330	9%
		TOTAL of the listed VIOLENT CRIME	2,199	2,011	9%
	Property crimes	BURGLARY	591	423	40%
		LARCENY/THEFT excluding UEMV / THEFT from VEHICLE	3011	2432	24%
		THEFT FROM A VEHICLE / UEMV	1213	884	37%
		MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT	905	730	24%
		TOTAL of the listed PROPERTY CRIME	5,720	4,469	28%
	Crimes against society	DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE	609	719	-15%
		DRUG/NARCOTIC OFFENSES	2455	2901	-15%
		TOTAL of the listed CRIME AGAINST SOCIETY	3,064	3,620	-15%
	Total listed incident offenses	*calculated by totaling the incident offenses. This does not represent number of incidents occurred	10,983	10,100	9%
MPD	Crime Against	Crime Category	1/1/22- 12/31/22	1/1/21- 12/31/21	Percentage change
ADULT ARRESTS	Violent crime	MURDER	3	0	-
		RAPE	27	42	-36%
		ROBBERY	30	18	67%
		AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	422	422	0%
		SIMPLE ASSAULT	367	339	8%
		TOTAL of the listed VIOLENT CRIME	849	821	3%
	Property crime	BURGLARY	126	113	12%
		LARCENY/THEFT excluding UEMV / THEFT from VEHICLE	423	289	46%
		THEFT FROM A VEHICLE / UEMV	160	113	42%
		MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT	276	208	33%
		TOTAL of the listed PROPERTY CRIME	985	723	36%
	Crimes against society	DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE	592	695	-15%
		DRUG/NARCOTIC OFFENSES	1833	1882	-3%
		TOTAL of the listed CRIME AGAINST SOCIETY	2,425	2,577	-6%
	Total listed arrest charges	*calculated by totaling the arrest offense charges. This does not represent number of persons arrested	4,259	4,121	3%
TRAFFIC	Traffic Fatalities	Traffic Fatalities	22	16	38%
WEAPONS		Firearms Recovered / seized	303	464	-35%
Table below is from CAD representing 'cases generated'					





According to the Prosecuting Attorney, there has been a 43% decrease in total sexual assault cases referred to their department from 2002 to 2024. One law enforcement official attributed the decline to the wildfire affecting police manpower and worsening the factors that lead to delayed reporting by victims to law enforcement, rather than a reduction in the actual occurrence of sexual assault. Within sexual assault cases, the only type of sexual violence case that increased after the fire, in both 2023 and 2024, was a sexualized form of child abuse known as “electronic enticement of a child.” This is likely due to the fact that electronic enticement of a child is less dependent on a victim’s self-reporting and typically involves undercover operations targeting child sexual predators that are proactively organized by law enforcement coalitions known locally as Operation Keiki Shield.

<b>Case Attribute</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	
Felony (minor victim)	27	28	19	
Felony (adult victim)	31	19	6	
Misdemeanor (minor victim)		1	1	
Misdemeanor (adult victim)	4	2	1	
Internet Crimes against Children	3	12	10	
These numbers reflect the cases received from Jan. 1, 2022 to Dec. 31, 2024.				
For some cases, the date of the offense may have occurred before Jan. 1, 2022.				

† SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES, DEPARTMENT OF THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY FOR MAUI COUNTY, EMAIL SENT MARCH 14, 2025.

<b>Case Type/Offense</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>SA 1 (707-730)</b>	22 offenses (20 offenders)	31 offenses (20 offenders)	9 offenses (8 offenders)
<b>Continuous SA of a Minor Under 14 years old (707-733.6)</b>	1 offense (1 offender)	2 offenses (2 offenders)	0
<b>SA 2 (707-731)</b>	5 offenses (4 offenders)	7 offenses (5 offenders)	2 offenses (2 offenders)
<b>SA 3 (707-732)</b>	20 offenses (18 offenders)	12 offenses (11 offenders)	5 offenses (5 offenders)
<b>SA4 (707-733)</b>	20 offenses (17 offenders)	11 offenses (7 offenders)	4 offenses (4 offenders)
<b>Electronic Enticement of a Child 1 (707-756)</b>	3 offenses (3 offenders)	6 offenses (6 offenders)	6 offenses (6 offenders)
<b>Electronic Enticement of a Child 2 (707-757)</b>	0	1 offense (1 offender)	0
<b>Indecent Electronic Display to a Child (707-759)</b>	0	1 offense (1 offender)	0
* these reflect cases with an offense date between Jan. 1, 2022 to Dec. 31, 2024.			

† SEXUAL ASSAULT CASE TYPE/OFFENSE, SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES, DEPARTMENT OF THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY FOR MAUI COUNTY, E-MAIL SENT MARCH 14, 2025.





## Findings from Kills

Mental health providers reported that Maui Sex Assault Center has seen a rise in crisis calls for sexual abuse and forensic interviews in 2025. Multiple mental health professional and criminal justice experts on Maui believe that we may not see reporting of sexual assaults that happened right after the fire for years because of delays in sexual violence reporting, especially when the perpetrator is known and not a stranger. The vast majority of sexual violence cases among U.S. adults go unreported to law enforcement – in 2019, only 34% of rape/sexual assault cases were formally reported, and the disaster created even more disincentives to report sexual and domestic violence.<sup>33</sup>

## III. Sexual Exploitation

### A. COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Commercial sexual exploitation, prostitution, and sex trafficking are legal terms of art with specific meanings in Hawai'i and federal law. A person is only a sex trafficking victim if they meet specific legal criteria. In recent statutory reform, the Hawai'i State Legislature redefined sex buying as commercial sexual exploitation, establishing it as a criminal offense. This change reinforces the idea that economic coercion for sexual gratification is not sanctioned by the state. According to Hawai'i law, commercial sexual exploitation occurs when a person provides, agrees to provide, or offers to provide a fee or anything of value to another person to engage in sexual conduct.<sup>34</sup>

Sexual conduct in exchange for basic necessities post-disaster was reported by 16% of female Filipino fire survivors. These women engaged in a sexual relationship or sex in order to have a place to stay, food, or money after the Lahaina fire, i.e., for something of value.

The sexual conduct included kissing, hugging, touching, and intercourse with a landlord, an employer, family members, friends and acquaintances. The most common reasons were for food (86%), clothes (71%), money (62%), long-term housing (48%) and temporary shelter (43%).

Thus, based on the statutory definition, there are people who have committed commercial sexual exploitation of vulnerable fire survivors, and this is occurring in connection to the fire disaster. We believe further investigation is needed, as well as immediate intervention. Commercial sexual exploitation is not a victimless crime. Engaging in transactional sexual conduct out of necessity rather than desire or pleasure, can cause guilt, shame, and low self-worth, suicide, sleep disturbance, suicidal thoughts, sexually-transmitted disease, depression, anti-social behavior, pregnancy, and substance abuse.

### B. SEX TRAFFICKING

In 2016, Hawai'i became the last state to criminalize sex trafficking as a violent crime and class A felony. Hawai'i state law defines sex trafficking as compelling someone to prostitute by force, fraud, coercion and intimidation, or profiting from the prostitution of a minor.

Sex trafficking is the most violent way to recruit someone into the sex trade and make them prostitute for the abuser or trafficker's benefit. The violence of trafficking is not limited to kidnapping or torture, although those forms of violence occur more often in cases that involve people of color. Grooming, manipulation, and tricking which leads to exploitative labor or sex are the most common elements of trafficking.

Child sex trafficking is defined more expansively. Federal law defines minors under 18 trading sex with adults as exploited people.

Under federal law, whether someone is a sex trafficking victim is determined by age, not only the presence of a trafficker or pimp because minors cannot equally contend with the pressures of homelessness, hunger, economic desperation, and manipulation by older adults. States may extend the definition of youth to anyone up to 24 years old.

The number of child sex trafficking victims on Maui reported to the Hawai'i Department of Human Services decreased by 18.8% in the 12 months following the Lahaina fire. However, the number of Filipino victims increased: 22% of the Maui child sex trafficking victims reported to DHS since the Lahaina fire have been Filipino. From August 2022 to August 2023, 11 victims were reported. From August 2023 to August

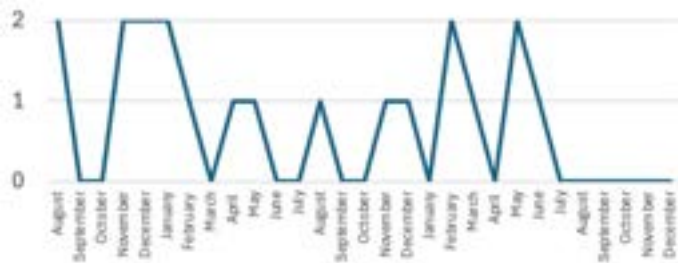
2024, 9 victims were reported. Sex trafficking in Hawai'i affects Filipinos. Sex trafficking on Maui has gender and racial patterns with 73.9% of victims identifying as female.<sup>35</sup> Of Maui sex trafficking victims identified and surveyed in 2020, 9% identified as Filipino and 48% identified were Native Hawaiian.

This report was unable to determine if the decrease in child sex trafficking reported to DHS correlates with the population decline and outmigration on Maui post-fires during the same time periods. What is known as of January 2025, from an analysis of state income tax filing addresses, is that the 2023 Maui wildfires reduced Maui's population by at least 1,000 residents, of which approximately half have moved out-of-state.<sup>36</sup>

Month	Year	Number of Child Sex Trafficking Victims on Maui Island Reported to CWS	Primary Ethnicity of Victim(s)
August	2022	2	1 White; 1 Unknown
September	2022	0	Not Applicable
October	2022	0	Not Applicable
November	2022	2	Unknown for both
December	2022	2	1 Mixed*; 1 White
January	2023	2	1 Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish; 1 Unknown
February	2023	1	Hawaiian or Part Hawaiian
March	2023	0	Not Applicable
April	2023	1	Hawaiian or Part Hawaiian
May	2023	1	Unknown
June	2023	0	Not Applicable
July	2023	0	Not Applicable
August	2023	1	Mixed*
September	2023	0	Not Applicable
October	2023	0	Not Applicable
November	2023	1	Unknown
December	2023	1	White
January	2024	0	Not Applicable
February	2024	2	Both Filipino
March	2024	1	Hawaiian or Part Hawaiian
April	2024	0	Not Applicable
May	2024	2	1 Hawaiian or Part Hawaiian; 1 Unknown
June	2024	1	Hawaiian or Part Hawaiian
July	2024	0	Not Applicable
August	2024	0	Not Applicable
September	2024	0	Not Applicable
October	2024	0	Not Applicable
November	2024	0	Not Applicable
December	2024	0	Not Applicable

† HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES; APRIL 14, 2025, E-MAIL; UIPA REQUEST

Number of Child Sex Trafficking Victims  
on Maui Island  
Reported to CWS



† DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES, APRIL 14, 2025;  
E-MAIL; UIPA REQUEST

The Lahaina wildfire increased the number of people at-risk to sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. The wildfire disaster has increased sexual and domestic violence, substance abuse disorders, unstable living situations, financial precarity, which are all documented risk factors for sex trafficking in Hawai'i. This raises concerns about increased sex trafficking on Maui.

There is a documented connection between sex trafficking and domestic violence. Addressing the rise in domestic violence post-fire is an important sex trafficking prevention modality. On Maui, 56.5 percent of surveyed sex trafficking victims reported being victims of domestic violence according to a study led by the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women and Arizona State University in 2020.

There is also a link between sex trafficking and homelessness. The Lahaina fire left thousands of people homeless. The fire completely destroyed the town of Lahaina and 2,000 homes. Eighteen months into the recovery, when we began this research, only two homes (permitted) had been rebuilt in Lahaina.<sup>37</sup> The continued lack of long-term housing is a significant factor that creates vulnerability to sex trafficking. The second most common reason that sex trafficking

victims in Hawai'i were sex trafficked is for a place to stay (24.7%), second only to exchange for drugs.

A place to stay was among the top three reasons why sex trafficking victims on Maui identified as being forced to exchange sex. Over half (52.1%) of the sex trafficking victims in the same study reported having ever been homeless.<sup>38</sup>

### C. CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

More child sexual abuse than usual was uncovered as a result of the Lahaina fire according to one judiciary official involved in the study's key informant interviews. Displacement from regular routines has uncovered instances of intrafamilial child sex abuse that may not have been uncovered absent the wildfire. The family habits that created the environment for hidden child sexual abuse were completely undermined by the fire and several instances of child sex abuse were uncovered in the process of families being displaced from their habitual residence during the disaster.

Maui Sex Assault Center has also seen a notable rise in crisis calls for sexual abuse and forensic interviews. Specific to sexual abuse clients from Lahaina, if the children are sexually abused, there has been more minimizing of that abuse because of resources. Mothers in particular are minimizing abuse to try to keep the family together, for the sake of surviving the fire financially: "The family would rather have abuse skated over than dealing with the sexual abuse." The minimization of child sexual abuse was described as the "most shocking outcome" of the Lahaina fire to one mental health practitioner.

Although child abuse is not always sexual in nature, a formal UIPA request was submitted to DHS to access child abuse and neglect reporting data for Maui. The request remains pending.

## FINDINGS: HEALTH

### A. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

The Lahaina fire severely adversely impacted women's reproductive health according to health care providers, community organizers, and survey respondents. Testimony from key informant Kiana Rowley, a registered nurse, midwife, and the board chair of Pacific Birth Collective was particularly instructive:

"The fire shut down essential services that were already limited in West Maui, especially for women. Access to reproductive health care was virtually nonexistent in the early days: no water, no power, no clinics. Women couldn't access contraception, basic care, or midwifery support. Living in unhygienic conditions made it even more critical to address women's health concerns, but there was nowhere to go. Those formula feeding couldn't find clean water, bottles, or diapers—there was no way to safely feed their babies. These aren't just health issues; they're survival issues."

-KIANA ROWLEY, BSN RN, SNM, BOARD PRESIDENT, PACIFIC BIRTH COLLECTIVE

Reproductive health care delivery in West Maui ceased overnight after the fire. Some pregnant women reported foregoing prenatal appointments due to lack of services in the disaster zone and fear of being blocked from returning to Lahaina. Rowley explained:

"Roads were blocked, cell towers were down, and health workers couldn't reach the people who needed them. One woman gave birth prematurely in a hotel with no ambulance service available, and a community midwife had to be called in to help stabilize and transfer the baby. Midwives were some of the only providers who could navigate around the chaos—making house calls, checking in with families, and showing up where no one else could. Through Pacific Birth Collective, midwives and essential baby items—including formula—were delivered by jet ski to areas of West Maui cut off from all access. That's what community response looks like."

Some key informants believe that insufficient access to contraception post-disaster has led to an increase in unplanned pregnancies among fire survivors. According to the Department of Health Vital Statistics, and accounting for the gestational period, Maui births declined in 2024 compared to the same timeframe the previous year. However, this does not account for Maui population decline and increased outmigration due to the fire. As of January 2025, 7.3% of Lahaina residents have moved out of Maui County.<sup>39</sup> One in five fire-affected households are seriously considering moving away from Maui according to the Hawai'i State Rural Health Association.<sup>40</sup> Further research is needed.

There was also a lack of access to menstruation products after the Lahaina fire because free tampons and pads were not systematically provided at shelter sites. In the FFSS survey, 10% of respondents reported difficulty accessing menstruation products; however, it is highly likely that the extent of this problem was broader among the general





population because a disproportionate share of FFSS respondents (49%) were at the age or older than the average onset of menopause in the United States, i.e., 51 years old.

“After the Lahaina fire, one of my biggest struggles was accessing essential feminine products like pads, tampons, and hygiene items. It was an incredibly stressful time, and not having those basic necessities added to the emotional and physical toll. Finding these products felt overwhelming, especially when stores were closed or supplies were limited. I realized how crucial these items are for comfort and dignity, and how easily they can be overlooked in disaster relief efforts.”

Basic consideration and support for women’s unique health needs was also lacking:

“[I needed] somewhere safe to use the bathroom so I can urinate. It’s not like a male who can stand and pee on the side of the building.”

“At the time we needed hygiene products such as genital wipes and pads. I did not change my underwear for more than 24 hours. I had the only bra I had on me which was stink from sweat. There was a lady who had her period who my sister-in-law helped; a folded thin toilet tissue was given to her.”

Some respondents articulated an awareness of gender discrimination over the absence of menstruation products:

“I don’t feel that women’s needs receive the same attention during the recovery process. After the Lahaina fire, while food, water, and shelter were prioritized, essential feminine products like pads, tampons, and hygiene supplies weren’t as readily available. It felt like these important items were overlooked, even though they’re crucial for women’s well-being. This experience highlighted the need for better awareness and inclusion of women’s necessities in disaster relief efforts.”

“While general aid like food, shelter, and financial assistance is available, support for women’s unique challenges such as childcare, reproductive healthcare, and mental health can be overlooked. For example, after the Lahaina fire, many women had to balance finding housing and financial stability while also caring for family members, often without additional support. Emotional labor, grief, and the pressure to be the backbone of their families made it harder for women to focus on their own recovery. More targeted resources, like mental health counseling for women, childcare assistance, and career support, would have helped ease these burdens.”



Overall, these findings highlight the critical role that community organizations and specifically midwives play in environmental disaster response. When the health care system failed, midwives filled in the gaps:

“They offered prenatal and postpartum support, breastfeeding help, birth control counseling, emotional support, and emergency labor care. Because community midwives are deeply connected to families and local providers, they were able to organize grassroots support quickly. While hospitals and clinics were inaccessible, midwives were on the ground—first to arrive, last to leave. They addressed not just births, but the larger picture of women’s health in a disaster zone. Their presence helped stabilize families in the middle of chaos.”

—KIANA ROWLEY, BSN RN, SNM, BOARD PRESIDENT, PACIFIC BIRTH COLLECTIVE





## B. MENTAL HEALTH

There is a gendered division of healing, and gender stereotypes are preventing men from healing. This is causing further disunity and conflict between men and women. Although not at all unique to Maui or Lahaina, male fire survivors are under intense pressure to present themselves as emotionally strong—to “suck it up,” avoid crying, and act tough.

Female fire survivors, some community organizers, and mental health practitioners in Lahaina report that male survivors are isolating themselves and coping with substance abuse and work because they believe stoic suffering is essential male behavior. Male survivors in Lahaina are also uncomfortable with “sharing feelings” within Western mental health models as these are not adapted to Native Hawaiian, Filipino, Latino or local cultures’ hegemonic masculinities.

Substance abuse, especially among male survivors, was reported by both community organizers and mental health practitioners in Lahaina. Mental health professionals observe that clients who are recovering from substance abuse have relapsed because of displacement and separation caused by the wildfire. One mental health professional described it this way:

**“Men here who don’t know how to self-regulate they relapse on alcohol, drinking excessively to cope with not naming grief and loss and sense of worth here, and relapse and are lashing out at each other at the people “in the way” in the hotel rooms. Yes, we can talk about self-regulation in therapy, but a lot of what I’m doing is case management like answering who can help with TROs and safety planning for domestic abuse because that’s very limited in Maui. And lack of childcare is something I worry about because like a tornado, the kids are there in the way and this affects them and the whole unit.”**

Patriarchy conditions men into believing that emotional suppression, bravado, and isolation are normal. During disasters, this is life threatening for bystanders and men themselves. Female survivors shared stories that some men chose to act macho and stay behind to protect their home from fire against the pleadings of their female partners, which led to disproportionate male death in the fire and caused trauma to the female survivors. They described male attitudes as: “If I’m going down, I’m going down with the house.”

Community organizers expressed frustration that suicides among fire survivors are not being taken seriously by government officials. In December 2023, MPD and the state DOH denied any increase in suicides; however, there has been a sustained increase in call volume by 41% to the national suicide hotline from Maui following the fire, while in-state answer rates dropped according to a University of Hawai‘i study published in JAMA Open Network in 2024. According to Department of Health (DOH) Hawai‘i Health Matters, men on Maui are three times more likely to die by suicide than women.

Mental health professionals in Lahaina summarized, “Men and women have different experiences, different languages about what they’re going through and different coping mechanisms as well.” Mental health practitioners in Lahaina report that single mothers face unique emotional challenges after the fire that differ from two-parent households. The absence of another parent limits women’s opportunities for emotional respite and open expressions of grief. Single mothers are reserving emotional expressions such as crying to designated moments like one-hour therapy sessions each week, if at all.

According to Veronica Mendoza, twenty months after the fire, women in general “have not come ‘down’ from their fight or flight survival response. They are still running on adrenaline as they navigate recovery and not in a good mental space.”



As one female survivor explained:

“A woman can only handle so much while trying to remain steadfast in her own self to properly serve her loved ones. Women’s mental health specifically is detrimental. Especially with lack of support physically and financially. Single mothers need help. Elderly women with disability needs help. Our young girls and teens need support and protection. The traumatic effects [of the fire] physiologically changes the make-up of people’s brains making them susceptible to suicide, bullying, and predators. [Women] need to feel safe and are falling into lies, abuse, trafficking.”

Tourism was also cited by women survivors as an aggravation to mental health and recovery:

“As a Filipino woman balancing work in hospitality and food service with my education, I faced challenges related to cultural expectations, and gender roles, which made career advancement difficult. The pressure to manage customer interactions while juggling work and school was emotionally taxing. These challenges worsened after the Lahaina fire, as I struggled with the fear and uncertainty of my loved ones’ safety, the loss of family members, and the instability of my living situation. These experiences made accessing resources and support even more difficult while trying to manage my responsibilities.”

Some women also reported experiences of racism:

“Resource providers make assumptions or disregard our presence when waiting for assistance. They primarily assist those who are more vocal, ambitious, and have their same color of skin or race. Yes, I do think being a woman affects access to resources and assistance.”

“Some workplace discriminate [against] Filipinos. Specially, if they just came from the motherland they assume that they can’t understand or speak English.”

“I feel I was discriminated based on nationality. Me and my family were separated into different locations. When we went to get food at the distribution centers, my family and I were questioned due to [having the] same address on our ID. Multigenerational household of 7 but displaced in different parts of Lahaina and Maui. They would give me and my sister a hard time questioning us about our address. That is why my family and I did not really want to go get help because of how sometimes we were treated. We saw others (not Filipino or maybe local Filipino) get more and sometimes we are denied to get the same amount maybe it’s because we are Filipino [immigrants].”

While all genders have taken action to assist in the Lahaina fire response and recovery, within that activity there is a gendered division of labor and differences in short and long-term roles. As Jordan Ruidas explained:

“Women did hold more equal roles in 2023 compared to the 2018 Lahaina fire. In 2018, it wasn’t equal to the same extent. Hard to compare Lahaina to somewhere where it’s their first time enduring a fire. Lahaina was just so used to wildfires so everyone is used to helping out. But still, men were doing the drop offs and loads of aid; women were stationed at the hubs and taking care of kids.”

According to multiple community organizers, mental health practitioners and direct service providers, women in relationships, marriages, or with children were tasked with the paperwork part of recovery, and did more resource navigation and aid applications, which may be linked to higher literacy among women in certain immigrant groups. Men tended to perform more visible forms of recovery such as aid delivery.

One organizer shared that the most important advice they have for the 2025 Los Angeles fire recovery is to heavily and widely invest in women’s mental health because women survivors carry the bulk of long-term recovery work at the family and community levels.



## FILIPINO SPECIFIC FINDINGS

Filipinos have one of the largest disparities in earnings between genders in Hawai'i and rank equal to Native Hawaiians. Filipino women earn 85% of what Filipino men earn in 2024.<sup>41</sup> This gap is credited to household gender dynamics and the unfair distribution of caregiving responsibilities. Further, Filipino women in the Philippines and in the diaspora experience high rates of male control and gender based violence. One study by the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence found that 95% of Filipina victims in the San Francisco Bay Area reported having experienced physical violence by an intimate partner.<sup>42</sup>

Beginning in 2000, the reputation of the Filipino community in Hawai'i has been marred by the troubling association with domestic violence fatalities. That year, shock erupted in Hawai'i when news media announced 5 of the 7 women killed in domestic violence related homicides were of Filipina descent; a disproportionately high rate (71%) given that Filipinos represented only 12% of the total population of Hawai'i in that year.<sup>43</sup> A study over the next decade (2000-2009) found that Filipinas were more likely to be fatal victims of domestic violence while Native Hawaiians and Japanese were less likely to be fatal victims.<sup>44</sup> Filipinas represent the highest share (28.9%) of victims of fatal domestic violence relationships in Hawai'i, and Filipino men are the largest share (22%) of perpetrators.<sup>45</sup>


Additionally, community-based research revealed that male violence is often excused by Filipino women "as anger, stress, and drunken behavior, rather than as 'abuse'"<sup>46</sup> There is also cultural pressure among Filipinos to tolerate male violence for the sake of the all-important family. Filipina respondents in one Hawai'i survey indicated that it was "their responsibility to keep the family intact at all costs, particularly if they have children, regardless of intimate partner violence being present."<sup>47</sup> These findings underscore the need for an understanding of the factors that contribute to the normalization of gender based violence in the Filipino diaspora.

In April 2025, Maui made headlines with back-to-back domestic violence-related killings, which both involved Filipinos (either in the victim's or perpetrator's lineage). These were followed by a high profile attempted murder by a Maui doctor of his wife while hiking on O'ahu.

Although neither femicide victim, Janine Cabalo Sturgeon of Kahului and Cynthia Moore of Ha'ikū, or their abusers appeared to be directly affected by the Lahaina fire, their tragic murders speak to the pervasive presence of domestic violence in the Filipino community and the difficulty of exiting abusive relationships on Maui.

Most respondents did not explicitly report domestic violence; however, more than half (56%) experienced an increase in conflict in their home and relationships after the fire. Mental health practitioners serving Filipino clients in Lahaina believe that they are silent about domestic and sexual violence due to fear of losing disaster relief and recovery resources, particularly FEMA housing, and general financial support connected to the perpetrator, as well as patriarchal cultural norms.

Three percent of respondents uncovered sexual abuse against elderly people after the fires in their own family or in another family; one individual uncovered child sexual abuse after the fires in their own family or in another family. One individual stated domestic violence from their partner began after the fire.







Respondents did not report signs of sex trafficking however they did report signs of commercial sexual exploitation: 16% of Lahaina fire survivors surveyed have engaged in survival sex or sex acts in exchange for food, clothing, money, and housing after the fire with a landlord, employer, acquaintance, friend, or family member. This may indicate an increase in commercial sexual exploitation post-disaster and warrants further research. Only 6 respondents were within that age range targeted by sex traffickers and sex buyers, i.e., between 18-25 years old, according to a Hawai'i State law enforcement official. Further, very few victims and survivors of sex trafficking choose to report even in non-disaster circumstances. No respondents said that any disaster recovery and relief worker or volunteer made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe by making sexual or inappropriate comments. However, 21% of participants said they have felt unsafe in places where they sought shelter after the fires.

This was further substantiated as a widespread problem by key informant Vero Mendoza who reported that feeling unsafe in emergency shelters “was generally true of our [immigrant] community. I saw women with their kids sleeping in their cars at the shelter and using the shelter for food and other necessities.”

41% did not have access to mental health services to cope with the emotional toll of the Lahaina fires. Mental health practitioners also explained a unique component to Filipino mental health struggles:

“In our community, the women were the caregivers for elderly folks in Lahaina. Another thing not really talked about is the layer of grief because the houses were very much multigenerational and now families are separated and spread out in condos and hotels, from Wailuku to Lahaina. Having to now worry about their parents who live at a distance—this is big in my casehold.”

“They’ve worked so hard since sakada [migrant sugar worker] days, their grandpas. Some Filipinos didn’t believe in banks so kept their wealth in the home so when the house is gone, and years of hard work are gone and on top of that they’re displaced— it’s soul crushing. Generations of hard work turned to dust. The grief is so heavy and everyday they have to drive through Lahaina and still see that it’s gone.”

While many respondents cited their continued need for material support for gendered needs such as bras, underwear, and clothing, others described fellowship with other women as their top need as women. “Peace,” “time”, and “self-love,” “fairness,” and “respect,” were also named as top needs. Almost one-quarter (24%) said their caregiving duties for children or elders, or family obligations make it harder to return to work or access disaster resources.

Language challenges and difficulty speaking English were a significant problem for many respondents, especially if their households, previously under one roof, were separated after the fire. Multiple women also named ageism as a significant challenge to recovery.

Nearly one-third of Filipinas (29%) believe the role or responsibilities put on them as women affected their ability to secure financial assistance or generate income after the fires.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

This report demonstrates the need for designing equitable disaster response. The Lahaina wildfire disaster in combination with the unique demographics of Lahaina created complex conditions that simultaneously intensified gender based violence, made certain types of violence more difficult for perpetrators to conceal, while discouraging victims from formally reporting violence to law enforcement or health care professionals – what we term “post-disaster silence.” Patriarchy causes men unnecessary suffering during wildfires such as disproportionate fatalities, isolation, and mental health neglect. When combined with misogyny, these problems endanger other disaster survivors.

The findings also surfaced the toll to women’s health, gendered differences in mental health, and gendered divisions of disaster recovery that burden women.


Major indicators of gender equality worsened after the Lahaina fire. Critically, these outcomes could have been averted, and can be prevented in the future.

These findings matter because they expose hidden crises: disaster policies routinely overlook gender, rendering survivors’ struggles invisible—but this report pulls back the curtain. They challenge the dangerous assumption that disasters “level the playing field,” when in truth, they magnify inequality—and ignoring this reality costs lives. Most critically, they demand action, because these harms are preventable. Equitable disaster design is not just ethically necessary; it’s practical, and better systems save more people. Good design delivers good outcomes—and the time to act is now.

The following are suggested solutions to better serve women, immigrants, and people of color after disasters:



1. Establish a joint federal and local violence-fighting headquarters immediately after a fire disaster to ensure coordination between FEMA, Red Cross, state, city and county entities and local anti-violence specialists including the area’s service providers and trusted community leaders. For example, bringing in all members of the Maui Sexual Assault Response Team (MSART) and domestic violence infrastructure together in a command center.

**“[FEMA and the Red Cross] didn’t do things through a “cultural” lens but rather a mainland-centered view. They didn’t consult local experts in an organized manner. In my opinion, they consulted with lots of organizations who help women, but they didn’t gather us all together to figure out how best to help survivors. A lot of us found out just by word-of-mouth that FEMA and Red Cross contacted agencies. We’re in Hawai’i and so many of us are all connected...sooner or later we were bound to find out that some agencies were contacted while others were left out. One group they could’ve connected with would’ve been Pouhana ‘O Nā Wāhine. [This was a] missed opportunity to get the cultural lens.”**

2. FEMA and Red Cross should implement a more stable staff and volunteer structure with longer term assignments to improve care, build trust, and reduce stress and retraumatization of fire survivors.
  3. FEMA should revise its check-in practice to include all adult household members, ensuring men, women, and gender minorities have equal opportunities to disclose violence and seek help, not just male heads of household.
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4. FEMA should reduce frequent relocations of hotel-dwelling fire survivors, which may have inadvertently resulted in racial disparities, and provide advocates to displaced people of color and Limited English Proficient survivors to help them petition relocation issuances.
5. View FEMA policies as important structural influences on men's behavior.
6. Treat wildfires similar to mass shooting events—integrating crisis intervention, mental health services, safe housing for victims, and gender-specific counselors into the immediate response.
7. Require mandatory training of temporary FEMA and Red Cross personnel on the demographics, cultural protocol, and languages of the local area. Permanently adapt FEMA systems to be more immigrant-friendly.
8. At the outset of the response, FEMA systems were not designed for the living arrangements of people of color or immigrants. FEMA was unfamiliar with the multigenerational household lifestyle in Hawai'i although the state has the largest proportion of multigenerational households in the United States. This complicated survivors' ability to access financial assistance when multiple households lived at one address. According to survivors, it took FEMA approximately three months to rectify their process. FEMA should have known how to handle multigenerational households within their resource delivery system as Hawai'i is not the only disaster-ridden state where there are multi-generational households.<sup>48</sup>
9. Ensure adequate safe housing for domestic victims so that they do not get displaced by landlords for reporting domestic violence post-disaster.
10. Enlist and place dedicated advocate or a training worker to handle working with victims of domestic and sexual violence at shelter sites throughout the disaster response and recovery.
11. For domestic abuse in families with children, one of the problems with reporting is that the safe parent may doubt their ability to remove the child(ren) from the home through a DA legal proceeding, increasing the sense of risk in reporting abuse. Improving safe reporting channels and providing meaningful legal counseling may help in this regard as well as support overcoming economic and cultural relations that may also create obstacles to reporting and extracting from an abusive situation.
12. Develop more systematic training of family court judges on the relationship between domestic violence and child custody.
13. Train community leaders on domestic violence who most frequently interact with survivors -- religious leaders, teachers, nurses, hairdressers, etc.
14. Recognize that patriarchy causes men unnecessary suffering during wildfires such as disproportionate fatalities, isolation, and mental health neglect. When combined with misogyny, these problems endanger other survivors.
15. Obtain and analyze Maui Police Department crime data for 2024 and 2023 data broken down by month.
16. Improve gender based violence data collection and sharing which is a perennial problem in Hawai'i.
17. Address lost trust in the public safety role of government, County and police, that can result from wildfire disaster. This is important to prevent victims from isolating and a drop in formal reporting by victims. We hope this report will increase resources to organizations advancing gender equality and will inspire government and non-profit institutions to transform U.S. disaster response to be more responsive to women's unique needs.
18. Delay reopening disaster sites to tourism in tourist economies/destinations until the survivor community is resourced and stabilized.
19. FEMA, American Red Cross, and State and County should coordinate to ensure the availability of free menstrual products at all shelters and resource sites after a wildfire disaster.



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20. Increase female leadership in decision-making to ensure prioritization of sexual and domestic violence.
  21. The Governor's Office of Wellness & Resiliency should scale gender-specific initiatives for male mental health to reduce misogyny, anger, aggression, & substance abuse post-disaster. The areas on O'ahu (Ewa to Ka'ena Point) with the highest fire risk designation are also areas with the highest number of domestic violence felony & misdemeanor abuse calls to police as documented by Civil Beat in December 2024.
  22. Reintroduce the Right to Exit bill from the 2022 Legislative Session to provide financial support to survivors trading sex for anything of value.
  23. Partner with private foundations or public agencies for immediate action to offer a special package of resources to any fire survivor forced by circumstance to engage in sex or a sexual relationship for basic post-disaster needs. Look to successful national models advancing economic freedom for women led by The Bridge Project and Free Form.
  24. Men need feminism to assist them with emotional regulation and healing after fires. Feminists should spend more money and time speaking to men, and develop outreach and programming for Filipino men in focusing on digital and physical beach spaces like Hawai'i's podcast circuit, beach (fishing), garage, backyard and home gatherings, church and construction project. Disaster philanthropy should move more money to feminist organizers after wildfires.
  25. The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency should launch a localized version of Australia's "Live and Leave!" campaign for men to counteract toxic masculinity and cultural pressure on men to "stay and defend" their properties and be "heroes," which has resulted in higher male fatalities during wildfires.
  26. Better prioritize women with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response because they are at greater risk of harm during disasters. Ensure equal access to crucial information and resources for the Deaf community.
  27. Fund FEMA to implement these reforms. Combat federal freezes to FEMA payments in order to ensure funding to states is rapidly and adequately released.
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