

PACIFIC FAMILY VIOLENCE RESEARCH SERIES



Family violence is a widespread issue facing New Zealand; we know this from the data available on the subject. We know that family violence generally refers to a number of ‘types’ of violence including: intimate partner violence; child abuse and neglect; violence towards older persons; violence between siblings; and adolescent violence towards parents (Ministry of Social Development, 2002). We also know that family violence has short and long term impacts on the individual, on family systems, and on communities. Furthermore, the economic cost of family violence is excessive when considering health care system costs and loss of earning and productivity costs. However, less is known about family violence as experienced by specific communities.

The lack of data regarding family violence and Pacific communities led the Pacific Advisory Group¹ to set up a research committee, the Pasefika Proud Research Komiti (PPRAK), and develop a research agenda. The Nga Vaka o Kainga Tapu Pasefika Proud Family Violence Research Plan (2013-2018) aimed to improve information and evidence about Pacific family violence. The research plan built on the seven ethnic specific Pacific conceptual frameworks for addressing family violence (Ministry of Social Development, 2012) and highlighted three areas of priority:

1. Generation of Pasefika knowledge(s) where the focus is social and kin relationships.
2. Service delivery where the focus is provider-funder responsibilities and service quality.
3. Workforce development where the focus is the design, development, delivery and evaluation of Pasefika nations training programmes and the creation of databases to identify Pasefika needs and workforce targets.

The Ministry of Social Development provided research funding for the completion of a number of research reports focusing on family violence and Pacific communities. The PPRAK saw this as an opportunity to build capability in Pacific research and to this end applications were invited from researchers who would work with Pacific students to complete research projects.

Overall, five tertiary institutions were involved in the research projects: Whitireia New Zealand, Auckland University, Massey University, the Auckland University of Technology, and the University of Canterbury which administered the projects.

There is a burgeoning body of research stressing the connection between cultural identity, cultural engagement and violence. This literature suggests that cultural engagement contributes to violence desistance (Austin, 2004; Byrd, 2012; Irwin et al., 2017; Shepherd, 2017). The contributors to the MSD funded research projects demonstrate how important it is to understand Pacific notions of family and relationships and Pacific solutions to issues such as family violence.

¹ The Pacific Advisory Group supported the work of the Taskforce for action on violence within families which was in place to strengthen government responses to family violence.

We begin with a research report that highlights how Cook Island concepts can inform work in the family violence area. In the report “Literature search of Cook Islands cultural concepts to inform family violence interventions and practice”, researcher, Dr Jean Mitaera and her students, Langi Paasi and Helena Filipo, from Whitiara New Zealand, conducted a literature review to identify key Cook Island literature in the family violence area. The researchers concluded that the process of transforming Cook Island lives should always be underpinned by theories and practice methods that are Cook Island in origin. This research highlights the importance of indigenous Pacific approaches to family violence.

Sesimani Havea’s work, “Tongan ethnic-specific approaches to family restoration” supervised by Dr Siautu Alefaio-Tugia, Massey University, explored how an indigenous Tongan faith based programme, Kainga Tu’umalie (Prosperous families) combined with indigenous Tongan cultural knowledge can prevent family violence from occurring, and heal and restore families where violence is present. The report emphasises the need for further research about the usefulness of faith based approaches to family violence.

Next, Professor Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, Auckland University of Technology, along with Koleta Savaii and Eti Puni, present research aimed at generating knowledge about social and kin relationships. To this end, the research responds to the question “What makes for a good marriage or partnership?” Focussing on the Samoan community, the project identified a range of factors that influence marriage and partner relationships; recognising how Samoan relationships are constructed and change in light of influencing factors can enhance our understanding of how violence might be prevented and dealt with.

In “Family violence initiatives and Pacific men: A literature review”, Gemma Malungahu and her research supervisor, Associate Professor Vili Nosa at the University of Auckland, focus on the role of Pacific men in strengthening Pacific families. The report explored the available literature about initiatives in this area and considered whether international family violence initiatives could be applied to Pacific men in New Zealand.

The research stresses that family violence work with Pacific men in New Zealand should incorporate a combination of Feminist, Indigenous and Pacific approaches.

The Pasefika Proud research reports champion Pacific voices in the family violence field. The reports emphasise the importance of indigenous Pacific remedies in the fight against family violence.

Responses that are culturally located and therefore driven by Pacific cultural values acknowledge that different cultural communities will employ different processes to heal and transform Pacific individuals, families and communities. The reports reveal that Pacific communities are diverse, adaptive and innovative and that these strengths can be harnessed to develop ways of working with family violence that restore peace, harmony and wellbeing to impacted family systems. There is still much work to be done, but a very good start has been made.

Yvonne

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Austin, A. A. (2004). Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drug Use, and Violent Behavior Among Native Hawaiians: Ethnic Pride and Resilience. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 39(5), 721-746. doi: 10.1081/JA-120034013

Byrd, C. M. (2012). The Measurement of Racial/Ethnic Identity in Children: A Critical Review. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 38(1), 3-31. doi: 10.1177/0095798410397544

Irwin, K., Mossakowski, K., Spencer, J. H., Umamoto, K. N., Hishinuma, E. S., Garcia-Santiago, O., . . . Choi-Misailidis, S. (2017). Do different dimensions of ethnic identity reduce the risk of violence among Asian American and Pacific Islander adolescents in Hawai‘i? *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 27(3), 151-164. doi: 10.1080/10911359.2016.1262806

Ministry of Social Development (2002). *Te Rito*. New Zealand family violence strategy. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Social Development.

Ministry of Social Development. (2012). *Nga vaka o kaiga tapu*. A Pacific conceptual framework to address family violence in New Zealand. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development.

Shepherd, S. M., Delgado, R. H., Sherwood, J., & Paradies, Y. (2017). The impact of indigenous cultural identity and cultural engagement on violent offending. *BMC Public Health*, 18(1), 1-7. 10.1186/s12889-017-4603-2

Pasefika Proud embodies a vision of strong, vibrant and prosperous Pacific children, young people and their families. Wellbeing for Pacific families occurs when all aspects of the individual and collective are in balance, co-existing with environments, kinship and support systems while recognising mana and tapu.

Pacific cultures are strengths that can be used positively to promote and enhance resilience within Pacific families.

Pasefika Proud mobilises Pacific individuals, families and communities to take responsibility for the issues they are facing, find the solutions and take leadership in implementing them.

‘OUR FAMILIES, OUR PEOPLE, OUR RESPONSIBILITY’

FIND OUT MORE

Full research reports can be requested from Pasefika Proud. Email: Pasefika_Proud@msd.govt.nz