

## Analysis: Pacific peoples

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Date: March 2022

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### Purpose

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During May and June 2021, the Joint Venture engaged with people across Aotearoa New Zealand to inform [Te Aorerekura – the National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence](#). A key part of this engagement was the conversation with Pacific peoples. This paper reflects Pacific peoples experience with the family violence and sexual violence systems and the opportunities for improving how Aotearoa New Zealand work to prevent, respond, heal and recover from these forms of violence. Communities, organisations and individuals were generous in sharing their experiences, and through their insight government agencies have worked to develop a 25-year Strategy designed to achieve the moemoeā, or vision: All people in Aotearoa New Zealand are thriving: their wellbeing is enhanced and sustained because they are safe and supported to live their lives free from family violence and sexual violence.

This paper sets out themes that came out of fono (meetings), written submissions and postcards from Pacific peoples and uses, as much as possible, the words and voices of the people who shared through talanoa (conversations) and contributions. The writing of this paper has been strongly informed by this community.

### Our engagement approach and process for Pacific Peoples

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The JV leveraged off existing relationships held through the Joint Venture Business Unit (JVBU) and JV agencies, in particular Ministry of Social Development (MSD). Fourteen fono were held across the country.

A range of perspectives were heard, acknowledging the unique and evolving identities of Pacific peoples including Pan Pacific, ethnic specific migrant and Aotearoa New Zealand-born perspectives. This included families, church and other community leaders, young people, health and social services, and specialist family violence and sexual violence service practitioners from government, non-government organisations and communities.

Some fono participants also shared their lived experiences of family violence and sexual violence, and shared multiple perspectives from different identities and roles within their families and community. This included church leaders who provide services in the community to Pacific peoples, young people, and members of the rainbow and disabled communities.

Engagement with Pacific peoples focused on the following questions:

- How do you maintain wellness and safety in your family, and community?
- What support does your family and community need to make this happen?



- What things need to be in place to eliminate family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa New Zealand?

A range of techniques were used to document the fono discussions. Notes were sent to our fono partners who participated.

## **What we know about Pacific peoples**

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‘Pacific peoples’ is a term used to represent a collective of populations from different island countries in the Pacific that live in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pacific peoples comprise new migrants and multiple generations born in Aotearoa New Zealand. This presents an evolving, complex set of Pacific identities for its people. There is an emerging collective Pacific identity in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as a resurgence of individual Pacific cultures. Understanding this diversity is vital to any Pacific-led response to family violence and sexual violence.

Collectively, Pacific peoples are the fourth-largest ethnic group in Aotearoa New Zealand. Samoan, Tongan, Cook Islands Māori, Niuean, Fijian, Tokelauan, Kiribati and Tuvaluan comprise the eight main Pacific ethnic groups. The New Zealand census in 2018 reported that 381,642 people identified with at least one Pacific ethnic group, which made up about 8.1% of the population of Aotearoa. Pacific peoples are a youthful and urban population.

Faith, family and cultural values are strong resilience factors for Pacific communities. Pacific peoples aspire to be productive and prosperous but disproportionately experience material hardship.

### **Pacific peoples’ experience of family violence and sexual violence**

From a Pacific worldview, family violence is essentially the fundamental disruption of the va or sacred space that binds families and on a larger scale, communities. Family violence is defined as violations of tapu (forbidden and divine sacredness) of people who experience violence or who use violence within their families. Essentially, any form of abuse that disrupts the sacredness of families and communities is considered family violence. This acknowledges the holistic worldview of Pacific peoples, where the essential sense of belonging and connectedness to one another is inherited and passed down from generation to generation within, and by, family. It also reflects the connection to the cosmos across time and space, and the understanding of self as spiritual, as well as physical, psychological and social.

It is essential to consider this worldview in the context of the Family Violence Act 2018 definition of family violence. This is defined as a behavioural pattern of acts or events inflicted against and by a person that can impact the physical, sexual (and reproductive), psychological (emotional and mental), and social wellbeing of a person and families. These definitions do not include the violation against the spiritual sacredness of people, families and communities.

Since spirituality, inclusivity and sacredness of family are central to Pacific peoples’ identity and belonging, any interventions to address family violence and sexual violence, must be grounded in these realities and values. Any responses that are not holistic or inclusive of Pacific peoples’ cultural values will not be able to provide infrastructure and systems that enable protective, restorative and transformative solutions, support and services.

## Pacific peoples – needs, issues and gaps

Historically, family violence rates in Aotearoa New Zealand have been higher than those in the Pacific Islands.<sup>1</sup> Much of the international and national data show that Pacific peoples experience higher rates of violence than many other ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> Some key statistics regarding family violence for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand as outlined by Pasefika Proud<sup>3</sup> include:

- The likelihood of Pacific children to be hospitalised due to assault, neglect, or maltreatment is 2 times higher than Aotearoa New Zealand European or other children
- Pacific children are 2.5 times more likely to be physically punished than non-Pacific children
- 1 in 10 people who perpetrate a serious crime against a family member is Pacific
- Pacific peoples were 44% more likely to experience physical or psychological family violence compared to Aotearoa New Zealand European.

Between 2009 to 2017<sup>4</sup>, a total of 230 family violence deaths were recorded in Aotearoa New Zealand. Of the intimate partner deaths, most of those perpetrating the violence were men and most of the deceased victims were women. The Family Violence Death Review Committee in 2014 reported that Pacific children are 4.8 times more likely than others in the Aotearoa New Zealand population to die from abuse and neglect.

In addition, Malatest International conducted research for MSD on Pacific peoples' understanding of family violence. Intimate partner violence (IPV) was identified as being high amongst Pacific peoples and it was mostly males using violence against female partners.

There are gaps in data and information to tell a clearer story of Pacific peoples' experience with family violence and sexual violence. For example, *The Cause Collective Call-to-Action* report published key findings about the gaps in information and data inaccuracy due to low reporting of family violence incidences (estimated at 24% of all family violence incidences). A follow-up report, *Current landscape of family violence for Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand*, also noted gaps in information and some of the reasons for this as being the legacy of colonisation and migration, as well as the impact of institutional and social racism/discrimination.

Pacific peoples, and anecdotal storytelling among Pacific population groups such as young people, tell a story of family violence being normalised and, while unacceptable, it is considered more unacceptable to break silence.

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<sup>1</sup> Malungahu, Gemma, and Vili Nosa. *Family Violence Initiatives and Pacific Men: Literature Review*. University of Auckland: Pasefika Proud, 2016. <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/aboutmsd-and-our-work/publications-resources/research/pacific/msd-literaturereview-report-18-v4.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, (UNICEF). 2015. Harmful Connections: Examining the relationship between violence against women and violence against children in the South Pacific.

<sup>3</sup> Pasefika Proud. *Our Families, Our People, Our Responsibility*. <https://www.pasefikaproud.co.nz/>

<sup>4</sup> Family Violence Death Review Committee. 2020. *Sixth report – Tu pūrongo tuaono: men who use violence*. Wellington. Health Quality & Safety Commission.

Pacific practitioners, researchers and academics argue Aotearoa New Zealand's systems and structures have been, and continue to be, designed to accommodate western concepts of family. They also argue these systems (both historical and contemporary) have eroded the diversity and contextual qualities of what family is and means.

## **Pacific services and support**

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Pacific leaders and practitioners describe the impact of institutional discrimination and inequity Pacific peoples experience. Pacific service providers talked about the challenge of working within limited (and often time-limited) funding. There are also stringent monitoring requirements and inadequate contracting models to deliver services to Pacific peoples that are culturally responsive. Providers called for stronger recognition of Pacific cultural frameworks to inform service responses.

Pacific peoples continue to seek help from people and relationships that are trusted, primarily family members, friends and often faith leaders. Often these entrusted people are not equipped or informed to give them the support they need. Situations will often reach crisis intervention before anything can be done.

Addressing violence in the homes and community will require holistic and culturally appropriate services.

### **Investing more in Pacific cultural frameworks**

There are good examples of government working with Pacific leaders and communities across the country and within ethnic specific communities to develop cultural frameworks and approaches to deliver culturally responsive services.

In 2012, the *Nga Vaka o Kaiga Tapu*<sup>5</sup> conceptual framework was developed to further address family violence in eight Pacific communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is informed by, and aligned with, the eight ethnic specific conceptual reports on addressing family violence. It is intended to guide government investment, policy and service design and implementation. To date, it has been used to build the capability of specialist, generalist and community workforces to provide more culturally responsive services to Pacific peoples.

Pasefika Proud<sup>6</sup> is a social change movement by Pacific for Pacific to boost wellbeing for Pacific families and transform attitudes, behaviours and norms that enable violence. The identity and brand embody a strength based, community led approach: Pasefika Proud: Our Families, Our People, Our Responsibility.

## **Emerging themes from engagement with Pacific peoples**

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### **The Strategy needs to address underlying causes of violence including poverty (and intergenerational impacts of poverty) and housing**

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<sup>5</sup> Pasefika Proud. *Our Families, Our People, Our Responsibility*. [PasefikaProudResource-Nga-Vaka-o-Kaiga-Tapu-Main-Pacific-Framework.pdf](#)

<sup>6</sup> Pasefika Proud. *Our Families, Our People, Our Responsibility*. [Pasefika-Proud-Pathways-for-Change-2019-2023.pdf](#)

Pacific peoples told us Pacific families and communities need to understand some of the drivers or other factors impacting on all forms of violence. This includes recognising that Pacific peoples currently have the lowest median income of all people in Aotearoa New Zealand which is often balanced with the cultural value of generosity, giving and community service. These cultural values within the constraints of poverty can compound stress and challenge the ability of adults to provide healthy environments and relational practices for their children and families.

Being employed and able to support family members, and having knowledge about the dynamics of family violence were known factors that protected from family violence.

“Lack of employment, housing, food at home”

“Recognising drinking is a sickness and the impact on children and the family environment. Access to services to help men with drinking”

“Breaking taboo around mental health.” (young person)

“Housing – no state housing in Marton but private landlords. Traditionally a farming community. Late comers, families are disadvantaged living in smaller towns.”

“Stress is a big issue in our families and the conditions that hold the stress in place so they’re always living in stress – socio-economic factors, poverty, housing, education, access to healthcare and services etc.”

## **Reflect Pacific worldviews and ethnic-specific identities, languages and cultures**

Pacific peoples told us the National Strategy needs to be inclusive of ethnic-specific languages and cultures, that describe Pacific ways of knowing how to protect, restore, heal and transform families and communities. They told us that Pacific peoples needed to be able to see themselves and their voices in the National Strategy and Action Plan.

Cultural protocols and processes are important for protecting families. The talanoa process can restore and heal when used with families especially if used alongside church and community spaces.

“Community led approaches – being diverse and somewhat reflexive. That’s an issue of resourcing, how can we do that with different languages and youth needs.”

“Pacific terminologies are important. Need to recognise cultural diversity. Recognising, prioritising and valuing ethnic specific knowledge.”

## **Recognise faith as an important part of Pacific peoples' wellbeing**

Pacific peoples told us that solutions to family violence and sexual violence need to understand Pacific peoples as people of spirituality and faith. They told us government needed to develop and implement holistic policies and practices that valued Pacific peoples' commitment to faith, family and community. Church leaders and community/church spaces are where Pacific peoples socially organise themselves in the Aotearoa New Zealand context and can be a vital partner in any intervention.

## **Invest in Pacific-led early intervention programmes and services**

Pacific peoples told us Pacific families and communities need to be able to lead their own solutions to prevent and intervene with family violence and sexual violence and that these need to be enabled and resourced with support from government. Pacific peoples told us:

“The plan needs to come from the places of violence, also include the voices of the most vulnerable.”

“Work with communities to start our government funded support groups.”

“Need for good role models in areas relating to alcohol, mental health, financial.”

## **Recognise the centrality and sacredness of family and children and young people**

Pacific peoples told us that getting back to the heart of family and loving their children and young people means enabling parents to be the best parents they can be. This means providing culturally-appropriate parent education about healthy relationships and healthy sexuality, which has been a traditionally sacred or tapu conversation. This will enable children and young people to learn about healthy relationships in the home and in schools, or community spaces that are culturally appropriate.

“more one on one time with parent and child.” (young person)

“establishing healthy relationships in families.”

“strengthen the family unit...educate parents and children.”

“Love, humility, respect, honesty – by putting this into action of home then we should not see family violence or sexual abuse at home.”

## **Invest more in education**

Pacific peoples told us that education and increasing knowledge and understanding about healthy relationships need to be prioritised. Particularly, being able to recognise when someone needs protecting, respond with love and empathy and support people to access pathways to help. Education is highly valued in Pacific communities and needs to be accessible for all community members.

“Education is the key. Start from: home, church, school, community groups.”

“Intergenerational talanoa and education.”

“taking care and educating your younger siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews.”

“teaching people communication skills around uncomfortable topics.”

“educate the community on advice, hazards and warning signs.”

“Create a lot of Pacific initiatives that focus on creating this open-door communication.”

“Teaching our Pacific peoples about sex, how to be honouring, what is not good, filtering out the crap that the world tells us about sex. Being able to have these conversations in a Pacifica space and being able to do so freely. Learning about healthy relationships from those that have successful relationships.”

“Change this generation’s mindset on what a healthy, loving and safe relationship is.”

## **Strengthen the workforce to be more culturally capable**

Pacific peoples told us Pacific families and communities need increased funding and resources to be able to build cultural capability across all workforces to engage and support Pacific peoples.

“Support families with counselling and support them so they can be more equipped.”

“Enabling kids to speak up and when they disclose, act on it.”

## **Understand cultural traditions and social norms to create pathways for change**

Pacific peoples told us Pacific families and communities need to be able to challenge what is socially accepted, normalised, or hidden within homes and community spaces.

“It’s not culture (some people quick to say it’s our culture) but a behaviour that we have to change. Our values of love, respect etc remain true but our behaviours don’t reflect this.”

“Trusting services, people who won’t tell family.” (young person)

“Fa’asoa – being able to budget with what you have. Often there’s not enough and something has to give. This can generate stressful situations in the home”

“Faalavelave – too much. The expectation to financially contribute to family events such as funerals, weddings can be a struggle. We recognise we should give what we can afford, but this is easier said than done.”

## **Address the impact and consequences of inequalities and inequities Pacific peoples experience**

Pacific peoples talked to us extensively about the inequalities and inequities they experience on an almost daily basis. They expressed sadness, shame, guilt and fear of not having the right knowledge and support to know what to do, feeling powerless to change things, recognising some things were hidden, and fearful to speak up and ask for help. There are clearly champions in the community that are strongly advocating for the creation of pathways for change, but they need to be resourced for the work they are doing and to be able to raise up other leaders and champions, like youth leaders.

## **Other important considerations**

Pacific peoples talked about stigma and shame as powerful emotional and behavioural drivers to maintaining silence and not challenge existing social norms that need to change, with the right support, tools and infrastructure.



“breaking taboo around mental health.”

The emergent themes from engagement with Pacific peoples were:

- Poverty and housing – address underlying cause of violence, including poverty and housing
- Worldviews – reflect Pacific worldviews and ethnic-specific identities, language and cultures
- Faith – recognise faith as an important part of Pacific peoples’ wellbeing
- Community-led – invest in Pacific-led early intervention programmes and services
- Family/ fanau – recognise the centrality and sacredness of family and children and young people
- Education – invest more in education about healthy relationships
- Workforce – strengthen the workforce to be more culturally competent
- Change – understand cultural traditions and social norms to create pathways to change
- Equality and equity – address the impact and consequences of inequalities and inequities.

### **Pacific peoples: gap analysis**

The talanoa shared with Pacific peoples also confirmed there were significant gaps in the information presented through the draft National Strategy and its supporting documents. Pacific peoples:

- Were supportive of te Ao Māori, believing that “their fight is our fight” but felt invisible being captured under diverse communities
- Were concerned that children and young people seemed to be absent and/or invisible in the draft strategy and action plans
- Were concerned that spirituality and faith seemed to be absent as a key enabler of change for Pacific families and communities
- Want a strategy that recognised that Pacific solutions and government responses need to value the centrality of families
- Sought stronger assurances that government (i.e. Ministers, Chief Executives and senior officials of government departments and the public service) would recognise community-led initiatives and strategies that are already taking place and provide resource to upscale these efforts
- Want government to acknowledge that existing funding and contracting models, as well as the provision of resources and services for Pacific families and communities are

completely inadequate and that work needs to begin immediately to remedy this issue.

## **Bottom lines for Pacific Peoples**

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Pacific peoples call on the government to:

- **Be inclusive:** Acknowledge the shared values amongst the Pacific peoples living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Actively reject racism, discrimination and bias
- **Value lived experience:** Acknowledge the lived reality of children and families from diverse Pacific communities, and understand what is important to them. It needs to give visibility to Pacific cultural frameworks, values and models of care
- **Be holistic:** Faith is important to wellbeing for Pacific families
- **Be family-centred:** Children and young people are at the heart of families and need to be seen and heard in the National Strategy and Action plan
- **Be accessible:** Language is critical for developing shared understanding and enabling families and communities to access support and services. This requires ethnic-specific language and cultural frameworks and tools to be used in policy and practice
- **Be community-led:** Enable genuine partnership with Pacific communities. Safe spaces need to be created for talanoa and train leadership to have courageous conversations with our community and families and develop community led solutions
- **Promote Pacific leadership** in all system levels in order to advocate for resources to address the issues and needs of Pacific family and community
- **Increase Pacific investment:** Resource Pacific-led early intervention programmes and services that are delivered within context and settings, such as parenting, prevention and health and wellbeing support
- **Build culturally responsive workforces:** Upskill people working with Pacific peoples to ensure safe, non-judgmental, empathic and respectful relationships, and understand the dynamics of family violence and sexual violence from an ethnic-specific lens
- **Acknowledge the unique and evolving identity** of Pacific peoples including Pan-Pacific, ethnic specific and Aotearoa New Zealand-born perspectives.