

CHAPTER 9

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND POLYNESIAN FAMILIES: PROVIDING APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS

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The work reported here is part of a larger research project examining Pacific Islanders' conceptions of domestic violence, conflict resolution, and ethnicity (Wurtzburg 2000a; 2000b). Here I concentrate on an analysis of Polynesian cultural traits which play a role in domestic violence as experienced by these families. The goal is to provide information relevant to human service work practice with Pacific Island families in New Zealand.

The analysis is based on interviews and field research conducted in New Zealand and several Pacific Islands: Rarotonga (Cook Islands), Viti Levu and Kadavu (Fiji), Tahiti and Huahine (French Polynesia), Tongatapu and Vava'u (Kingdom of Tonga), Oahu and Kauai (Hawai'i), and 'Upolu (Samoa). At each of these locations, pseudonyms were used in the interviews to hide the identities of research participants.

None of my work is concerned with the prevalence of violence either in New Zealand or the Pacific Island nations; this was not a focus of the research and no new information relevant to these questions is presented here. Family violence occurs in all communities, as is well supported in the research literature. While I do not consider the prevalence of violence in various nations, I am interested in Polynesian identity and how it changes with immigration to New Zealand; but first, I turn to the theory informing my research.

Theoretical understanding of domestic violence

It is readily apparent that domestic violence is a strongly gendered activity. Where data are available both in New Zealand and overseas — for example, from questionnaires about the prevalence of family assaults, police records, hospital admissions, court appearances, sentencing documents, and prison

cenuses — they all confirm that most victims of battering are women and children, and that most assailants are men. To make some sense of this, many researchers and practitioners find it useful to conceptualise domestic violence as a means by which men exert power and control over women. This understanding of family violence defines it as a social problem rather than the result of individual behavioural aberrations. This theoretical stance does not deny the role that individual pathology may play in domestic settings.

Aims of this work, and resources for understanding Polynesian domestic violence

Working with people of another culture is often challenging for human service workers and programme facilitators. It is especially difficult for counsellors to determine appropriate interventions when they and their client neither speak the same language nor have a shared cultural background. These concerns are articulated clearly by a Christchurch practitioner: “I didn’t know what was culturally appropriate ... I was so aware of her culture the whole time and thinking, ‘oh, what do I know?’”

The aim of this chapter is to assist human service workers in their interactions with Polynesian families. Use these materials as a framework for initiating dialogue with their clients, who will each have their own interpretation of how the concepts impact on their lives and how they each implement them. When considering how to apply these analyses, human service workers should bear in mind Lisi’s caution that “it’s very hard for one Samoan to comment on their experience and say that that’s the experience of all Samoans ’cause everyone is different.”

Despite the articulated demand by human service workers for resources, there has been little research in New Zealand about the dynamics of non-Pākehā domestic violence (notable exceptions include: Cribb 1997; Cribb & Barnett 1999; Gilgen 1991; McNeill et al 1988; Wurtzburg 2000a). However, noteworthy gains have been made in documenting Oceanic family violence in the islands, although this material is often neglected by New Zealand human service workers and domestic violence programme facilitators. Counsellors working with Polynesian clients would benefit by consulting these works (e.g. Counts 1990; Counts et al 1992).

Another useful avenue is to investigate works which present practical issues about dealing with different ethnic communities. Although many of these publications relate to overseas practice with non-Pacific Island ethnic

groups, some ideas are transferable (e.g. Agnew 1998; Dhooper & Moore 2000; Pedersen et al 2002; Webb 2001). Probably of greatest value for New Zealand human service workers are several resources written specifically to aid counsellors who are working with the Polynesian community here (e.g. Autagavaia 2001; Culbertson 1997; Mulitalo-Lautā 2000; Tamasese et al 1998). These materials primarily relate to Samoan culture, as does the work reported here, which reflects the predominance of Samoans in the New Zealand Pacific Islands community.

In addition to academic or practice resources, there are several networks in the Pacific Islands which are promoting awareness of gender violence (e.g. the regional newsletter *Pacific Women Against Violence*, first published by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre as *The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre Newsletter* in 1997, and the *Newsletter of Mapusaga o 'Aiga*, first published by the Samoan collective in 1996). These materials can show clients that attitudes to violence are changing in the islands as well as in New Zealand.

An additional issue to state here is that I am not Polynesian myself. There are disadvantages and advantages to writing as an outsider, although cultural insiders have suggested that the benefits outweigh the deficits, at least for research in domestic violence. One factor is that I am freed from some of the cultural restrictions placed on insiders. For example, Tupuola refers to her academic publication as a "cultural violation," since according to "the social norms of traditional *fa'a Samoa*, [modes of customary Samoan behaviour] I as a young Samoan woman have no acquired right and privilege to speak of and about the Samoan culture" (Tupuola 1996, p61).

Tupuola lives in New Zealand and has imported Polynesian concepts to this country, which she determines how to implement. I now turn to the process of how other Samoans and Pacific Islanders function in New Zealand, and their considerations about 'island traditions.'

Immigration to New Zealand

The history of Polynesia, including New Zealand, is replete with accounts of voyages, migrations, and territorial incursions. Contemporary travel, whether permanent or a short trip, conforms to this voyaging tradition. People may move their households to find work, to visit other family members, to seek better educational or economic opportunities, or for a variety of other reasons. The cumulative result of this population movement is that modern families often span several islands, even several

nations, and some may be widely dispersed across the Pacific. Marlene's family history is not untypical of Oceanic families: "My mother was born in New Zealand, but her elder sisters were born in Fiji, and it's her mother, my grandmother, who's from Tuvalu."

With regard to immigration, it needs to be emphasised that Pacific Island communities in New Zealand are of fairly recent origin. Only occasional island immigrants settled in this nation prior to World War II. Beginning in the mid-1940s, Pacific Island people — mainly Polynesians — migrated to the major population centres for employment, education, and other opportunities. As a consequence, by 2001, almost 232,000 Pacific Islanders were living permanently in New Zealand — 6.5% of the New Zealand population defined themselves as Pacific Islander (Statistics New Zealand 2002).

The steady numerical growth of the Polynesian community is a result of both immigration and high birth rates. An outcome of this has been an increase in the number of Polynesians who share the additional ethnic trait of being New Zealand born. Their influence has dramatically increased the diversity of cultures derived from the Pacific Islands. There is a wide range of social customs, languages and linguistic prowess present in New Zealand, despite the general misperception among Pālagi (Samoan term for European New Zealanders) that these various groups can be adequately categorised and accurately understood simply as Pacific Islanders. For example, Fagamalama, a Samoan woman living in Christchurch, stated that "[in New Zealand] we are all lumped together as Pacific Islanders, but we all have different cultures ... and we don't even understand each other's languages." Taniela, a Tongan man, expanded on this information with his remark that "every island is completely different, even smaller islands within a group."

As well as language, national origin, and island of birth, other factors contribute to diversity, such as:

Intragroup variations include 'non-ethnic' distinctions, such as Tongans' distinctions between bush and town people, different island or village origins, social rank, church membership, and so on. Individuals also may have disparate identities that defy clear-cut ethnic labeling; for example, one individual may variously identify (and be identified as) Pacific Islander, Polynesian, Tongan, Australian-born Tongan, and simply Australian

(Morton 1998, p4).

This multi-identity trend may be additionally augmented or fragmented when people move every few years. For example, Eleni said “I’m from Auckland, but I was brought up in Samoa ... I’m from all over: Palmerston, overseas, Australia, States, all over.”

In addition to great differences in the origin of the various island communities, Pacific Island settlement in New Zealand has different regional patterns. The Pacific Island community differs dramatically depending on which city is under consideration. Auckland and Wellington have much higher numbers of resident Pacific Island people than do centres such as Christchurch or Dunedin, while Wellington also has proportionally higher numbers of Samoans compared to Dunedin’s Polynesian population. These two types of variation — the percentage of Pacific Island people in the urban population and the proportions of the different Pacific island groups in the city — mean that the New Zealand Pacific Island communities exhibit strong differences from one another. In turn, the specific urban context influences people’s interactions in their community. Lisi’s account is typical of this process. She reported that “in Dunedin, we didn’t have many Samoans at all, and I grew up with probably predominantly European friends. I don’t know. I suppose I was a New Zealander when I was young ... And then I came to Christchurch, and ... I had more Polynesian friends.”

On occasion, differences between the overseas-born and the island-born are dramatically found in a single family group. A typical case is when overseas-born parents migrate to New Zealand with the result that the parents regard themselves as retaining their island ethnicity while their children consider themselves New Zealanders to some extent. Roina presents an example pointing to some differences in viewpoints between ‘traditional’ parents and their New Zealand-born children: “Our [Samoan] children who are born in New Zealand ... are not totally traditional because they have another influence. They are kind of bi-cultural. So there becomes a generation gap.” Helen recounted from her own experience “the frustration of sometimes having children who can’t speak Samoan, and parents who can’t speak English.” These difficulties in communication are important, and I now discuss the issues of language and custom in greater depth since they play such major roles in people’s lives and their integration into New Zealand society.

Language and custom

Language complications create many difficulties for communication

between various generations of the family and the outside community. Lauulu stated that “we ... tried to teach them [the children] how to speak as Samoans and how to listen as Samoans, but when they first went to school [in New Zealand] ... they got frustrated.” In this case, to Lauulu’s regret, the children lost most of their Samoan skills except for one child who returned to Samoa as an adult and regained her fluency. This type of situation is also frustrating for children educated in New Zealand. For example, Patricia said “my ex-husband is Cook Island, and ... spent half his life in the Cook Islands and half here. Even though [he is] fully Cook Island, he will often not speak Cook Island [Māori] because he often feels that he pronounces it wrong.”

Any discussion of Polynesian family interactions must take into account the notion of ‘custom.’ Typically, people draw on their understanding of what is traditional to explain contemporary kinship and the responsibilities of individuals to their communities. For Samoans, these cultural ideals are encoded in *fa’a-Sāmoa*, or the Samoan way of doing things, based on *fa’a*, which denotes ‘making’ or ‘doing’ Samoan. For Tongans, the term is *anga fakatonga*, and for Cook Islanders, *‘ākono’anga*. The words themselves are related, and the concepts also share some similarities. In the case of Samoa:

The faa Samoa was the social and organisational system governing family and village life. This system of chiefly rule was based on a system of rights and obligations whereby all family members shared equal rights to family resources (including rights to land and to be the family chief) and, in turn, family members used these resources to work to achieve the family good. It was a system based on divisions of power, status, labour and expectation — the prime motivational force being to safeguard the family status. Daily behaviour was determined by expectations based on rank and precedence, these expectations being symbolised in demonstrations of *tautua* (service) and *mamalu* (respect)

(Fairbairn-Dunlop 1996, p4).

More specifically, *fa’a-Sāmoa* “places high value on the extended family (‘āiga) headed by the chief (*matai*) who has authority (*pule*) over family matters and land, and who sits in the village council (*fono*) as the family representative” (Va’a & Va’ai 1995, p269). The extended family or ‘āiga is a powerful social unit, which serves to guide and mediate the actions of family members.

Whatever language is used, whether Samoan, Tongan, or English, tradition is often idealised, as in the following account by Kym, whom

I interviewed in Samoa. She affirmed that “our culture is a very peace-loving culture ... respect for others, respect for rank and authority and harmonious relationships.” In her comments, she explicitly described how things should be, rather than how things were.

The notion of custom has additional ambiguities, often political in nature. The past has strong implications for contemporary connections to land and community status, and for this reason, people may emphasise certain family ties while downplaying others.

Other factors may play a role in discussions about traditional behaviour. For example, a Samoan employee of the New Zealand Children and Young Persons Service (now called Child, Youth & Family), stated that “some people have a belief that because we are Samoan that our *faa Samoa* is paramount. My response is, which *fa'a-Samoa*? And according to who? I have seen and experienced a lot of people using our culture as a shield when something goes wrong, or more to the point, when they do something wrong. Culture goes through change.” (Pouli-Lefale 1996, p4)

As further reflection of this concept's ambiguity, John told me that “our [Samoan] people like to paint ourselves as perfect people. If a Samoan woman is constantly beaten up by her husband, because of the shame ... she won't talk about it because she doesn't want to make her parents feel that she's got a violent husband. He [the husband] doesn't like his family to know that things are not going right in the family.” What is evident in all these accounts is that at times Samoan behaviour may be quite different from the idealised picture of *fa'a-Sāmoa*.

Mageo (1998) provides some explanation for both the lack of conjunction between *fa'a-Sāmoa* and Samoan behaviour and the confusion that such discrepancies create, both for Samoans and for non-Samoans trying to understand Samoans. She suggests that:

When people cannot but notice that some experience does not wholly correspond to their culture's ontological premise, their first response is moralistic. They attempt to suppress behaviour incongruent with this premise through a moral lexicon and a moral discourse. Moral lexicons consist of catalogs of virtues and vices and make possible moral discourses, those discourses people employ to evaluate and adjudicate one another's behaviour, such as sermonising and gossiping.

(Mageo 1998, p7).

Gossip plays an important role in moderating Samoan actions, both in Samoa and abroad. For example Eleni said, “Everybody gossips. I think

it's a normal part of life." Luisa, who I interviewed at a women's refuge, remarked that it would have been "difficult ... if there was a Samoan woman working at the refuge ... She might think ... 'I should have stayed there,' or ... she might go around and say 'you know, I saw this Samoan girl at the refuge.'" Similar mechanisms of social control are used in other Polynesian communities. For example, Kasi told me that when he returns to Tonga he is "very careful ... because back in the village ... you'll be a laughing stock if you are [doing] something unusual, not Tonganised."

The above accounts deal with some aspects of tradition in its most ideal form and also with some of the cultural contradictions when people do not act according to its precepts. Spatial and temporal events combine with individual circumstances and character to result in behaviour which is often less than the ideal. In the case of Samoans, aberrant actions may be Samoan behaviour but Samoan people do not consider it to be *fa'a-Sāmoa* — a significant distinction. For this reason, Polynesians may silence community members who try to expose and discuss inappropriate behaviour. For example, Luagalau Foisaga Eteuati-Shon, the Director of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Samoa, called on the distinction between real and ideal behaviour very directly when she said: "the issue of violence ... has existed, but because it involves family and cultural values ... people have been reluctant to discuss it openly" (personal communication 17 July 1997).

While tradition in the islands may be quite restrictive, there may be allowance for greater choice when living in New Zealand. Kasi described this as "living here in New Zealand and bringing the best of Tonga." However, even with the relative freedom that New Zealand residence may permit, Polynesian custom does dictate many behavioural strictures, including governance of family interactions, to which I now turn.

Family

'Family' in Polynesia incorporates a variety of kin who may not be included in New Zealand conceptions of the nuclear family. Households are typically larger and include a greater range of relatives living together than might be typical in a Western context. Helen dramatically contrasted New Zealand living arrangements with those she enjoyed in Samoa: "Instead of living in your extended family in the village, you're suddenly living [isolated] in a flat in Hoon Hay [residential district of Christchurch]." Lauulu pointed to the benefits and disadvantages of New Zealand housing when he said "[in New Zealand] you ... are your own boss ... And if a

crisis happens to you, you have no one to turn to because the family is not there to help out.”

A practice uniting Polynesian household members is their consumption of the same food, although they may not eat together, depending on beliefs relating to gender, status, or other concerns. Symbolically, this reliance on cooking and sharing of the same food is evidence of close ties and dependence on one another within families. While eating arrangements are often rigidly structured, living arrangements are typically flexible, and household composition can alter dramatically within the memory of any family member. On occasion, there may be visitors who stay several weeks or months. These guests may include youngsters who are sent to live with relatives in the larger urban areas while they attend school. Large numbers of children may be living in households without their birth parents. Sometimes such arrangements are formalised as adoptions; at other times the agreement remains informal. These differences in family composition and the raising of children can clash severely with mainstream Pākehā New Zealand ideas restricting where children can live and who has custody of them.

In Polynesia, gender roles are also more flexible than is typical in New Zealand. Gender transformation by boys or men who take on the dress, attributes, and roles of women, however, is more common than women changing their gender. Many Pacific languages have a word for the transformation of men into women, for example, Samoan *fa'afāfine*, or Tongan *fakaleitā*, ‘making like a woman.’ This transformation may last for a short period of time, or may hold for most of the individual’s lifetime. Variation is the norm for many of the islands, however there is less acceptance of transformative gender roles if the family migrates to New Zealand.

Interestingly, “it is a peculiarity of Samoan society that relationships between the sexes are normatively defined in categorical terms. One is either a sister or a lover, a brother or a lover. These relationship types permit no middle ground, either intellectually or emotionally. Yet the cognatic descent system operates in such a way as to render all boys and girls potential relatives of differing degrees” (Shore 1996, p292). This can be viewed as yet another Samoan cultural contradiction, although, as with most cultural matters, this is far more confusing to a cultural outsider than to a Samoan.

In marriage, the transition of becoming a wife or a husband means

involving oneself in many more social connections than merely those enjoined with the individual one marries. In the course of interviews, it was constantly reiterated to me that “when you are married, you are married to the whole family. You are not married as an individual to another individual.”

Marriage means considerable changes for a woman. She is identified with and has the status of her husband’s kin group, rather than that of her birth. Patele expressed some of the conundrums about women’s position in Tonga as he considered his own socialisation: “Everyone teach[es] me to respect all the females, but when you get married you don’t respect your wife.”

The ideal of male strength and power also influences a man’s relationship with his sister. “‘O le tuafafine o le ioimata o le tuagane’ is a well-known Samoan proverb which literally means that a sister is the essence of her brother’s eyes” (Va’a & Va’ai 1995, p267). Traditionally, “sisters were the most highly valued status group in the village; they held and transmitted *mana* (sacred power) while brothers held *pule* (secular power)” (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1996, p7). As a result, even today, sisters may be supervised and chaperoned by brothers or other family members. Taniela recalled: “Mum ... telling me if anyone ever touched my sister, anyone, that I was to punch them. And of course, that’s what I did.”

However, “when a sister ... behaves in a way which makes the group think that she is behaving in a context of free sex ... it is precisely her brother who is supposed to act against her and ‘with strength’ — ‘because it is he who is the man’ (*tamalaoa*) — in order to stop or even punish her (with words but, where necessary, also with blows)” (Tcherkezoff 1993, p72). In a situation of rape, brothers are supposed to punish the perpetrator, possibly with a severe beating or death. An illustrative example is provided by O’Meara, when he “asked one young rape victim why she had not gone to the police, or at least told her family, she replied that she did not want to ‘waste her brothers.’ She explained that if her brothers found out what had happened, they would surely kill the man who did it, and then they would go to jail for their crime” (O’Meara 1990, p107). This belief that men and the extended family will defend or revenge their women’s honour is clearly portrayed in the following account:

The ‘*āiga*[’s] ... primary function is not only to protect the young woman but also to discipline her ... Young women who disobey face severe consequences ... Women are either beaten, labelled *pa’umutu* (prostitute),

ostracised from the 'āiga or become alienated and isolated from their Samoan communities. To escape from these forms of punishment, some young women take drastic measures such as suicide, becoming pregnant to purposely dishonour their families or choosing to completely alienate themselves from their 'āiga and the culture (Tupuola 1996, p63).

Young people are socialised to follow these communal principles and to defer to elders. Gabrielle, newly arrived in Christchurch, told me about how children should be taught to behave, namely that “if someone ... visits the family ... you're not allowed to listen ... You never say a word.” Interestingly, this dialogue — much longer than shown here — contained numerous things that children should not do, but few things that children *should* do. In addition, her account was replete with tales of punishments for bad behaviour, but mentioned no rewards for culturally approved behaviour. These types of interactions contribute to understanding children's socialisation into Samoan hierarchical relationships, as Booth's discussion reveals:

The most significant factor in the determination of status in Samoan society is age. In a gerontocracy such as Samoa, the status of youth is low. The role of adolescents and youth is to serve: service (tautua) is the path to recognition and power, especially for males, and deference to power must be observed ... Females['] ... main role is to uphold the honour of the 'āiga through their dignity, purity and grace

(Booth 1999, p53).

The gerontocratic principle is demonstrated by the prevalence of child discipline. “Samoan punishments are physically aggressive; children are typically slapped or beaten with a coconut frond broom, but angry elders may also resort to heavier and more damaging weapons to extract deference” (Mageo 1998, p21). This description is expanded in the findings from interviews with 30 Pacific Islanders about their childhood experiences in the islands:

When asked what they had been punished for in their childhood the parents and grandparents gave consistent responses indicating that disobedience and defiance were the cardinal sins of their youth, and all but one of the adults interviewed [out of 30] said that they were beaten for such offences. Many mentioned being showered with pebbles or 'back-handed,' while most emphasised the severity of the punishments they received, being beaten with belts, sticks, brooms, sandals, boots, fists. But most believe that this was the most effective way to teach children proper behaviour (Schoeffel et al 1996, p136).

A typical account was related to me by Gabrielle: “Samoan[s are] always strict ... If the kids do something really bad, they smack them hard.” Eleni, a Samoan woman recalled that “my father never hit me, but he used to beat my brothers pretty badly.” Kasi said that as a child he “accept[ed] it ... In Tonga ... that is part of the discipline.” This acceptance of beatings is reiterated by a New Zealand-born Samoan man in his account of being “punished with the belt and with the wooden spoon when I was growing up and I didn’t think it was wrong.” Roina described “one occasion [as a child] when I was smacked with a salu ... a broom that is made up of coconut ribs, and I remember getting some marks on my body ... The Bible says ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’.”

Despite older-generation Samoans’ beliefs that a certain amount of physical punishment is necessary to teach children how to behave, studies suggest otherwise. Recent research in Christchurch found that “those reporting harsh or abusive childhood experiences were at increased risks of violent offending, suicide attempts, [and] being a victim of violence and alcohol abuse” (Fergusson & Lynskey 1997, p617). Unfortunately, there has not been similar research conducted in Samoa, so the validity of this cross-cultural comparison has not been fully demonstrated but can be inferred.

Religion

In addition to family interactions, with their advantages and difficulties, religion was a frequent topic in conversations about ethnicity. Lisi said: “One thing I always associated with being Samoan was church.”

In Christchurch, participation in church services and activities may help provide unity of purpose to Pacific Island people from different islands with different languages. For example, Kasi told me that “in New Zealand, we ... usually live by whatever church you belong to. In Tonga, it’s either the family or the village [with which] you identify. Here you identify ‘which village or which church.’” The Samoan community is similar, as Lisi informed me: “In New Zealand, your village is actually your church ... If you ... met another Samoan, you work out where they’re from through the church. If you go back to the islands, it’s ‘what village are you from?’” Helen, whom I interviewed in Samoa, suggested that from her experience in Wellington, people relied on the church minister to compensate for the absence of networks that they would normally have had in Samoa.”

A minister, Telefoni, remarked that “a lot of people, they look at the church as their top priority. But I always say to them ... if we have things in the church that we have to pay and you know you cannot do it because you have to feed your kids ... your family is top priority.” The topic of church tithing and family provisioning provoked a bitter response from Eleni, who said “my experience with churches is that they just take all your money and let your family starve.”

On occasion, ministers or pastors may be asked by their parishioners for help in dealing with domestic violence. In fact, several people I interviewed suggested that this was a useful strategy for members of their communities. For example, Faamoe, a Samoan man said “this is our own cultural way of dealing with our people.” Telefoni acknowledged that often “you hear [about marital problems] from someone else ... Then you just go and ... talk about how we can make it better.” Another minister, Laulu, described his commitments to his parishioners as including “not only the spiritual aspect, but also ... the social needs of the people.” He confided that new immigrants to New Zealand lack the social networks and restraints they had back home, so in their absence may “ring the pastors or ministers or ... the police.”

I did not survey religious leaders on their beliefs about gender equity or domestic violence and apportioning blame; however, there is a long multi-denominational history of religion being used to justify the abuse of ‘disobedient wives,’ which may influence the understandings and oratory of religious leaders in various ways. The beliefs of the minister may be important to the successful outcome of a family dealing with domestic violence, since, in Lorraine’s words, “the church minister will be that counsellor [for the family].” However, at times women may find it too hard to approach the minister. Luisa, a Samoan woman who migrated to New Zealand at age nine, said it was too shameful to go to a pastor in the Samoan church for help.

This feeling may not be unusual in the Pacific Island community. Jo Cribb interviewed 30 Samoan women in Christchurch and found that one third of them would accept being beaten by their male partner. “Characteristics common to these ten ‘accepting’ women can be identified. They are generally over 40 years old, were born in Western Samoa and live in a nuclear family with a matai as family head” (Cribb 1997, p166). These women said they found it difficult to tell religious leaders about problematic family situations because they felt ashamed.

Many of the interventions — by ministers, family elders, or matai — in domestic relationships do not deal with the violence itself in a lasting manner, and may only provide a temporary solution at best. Often the focus of Polynesian church interventions may be reinstatement of the family unit. Jacqueline, a Christchurch lawyer tellingly observed that “Samoan women ... are pressured by the church, by their husband, by the whole community, by all their relatives ... to reconcile.” One concept which encourages women to return to their partners is shame, which I discuss here.

Shame

Taniela recounted that for Tongans “to get in trouble and to bring shame on your parents or your family is something really bad.” This is especially a concern for women dealing with the dishonourable issue of domestic violence, as discussed by Gabrielle, a Samoan woman who recounted that her family’s reaction to her flight from her husband because he was abusing her physically was to say “shame on you [for going to a woman’s refuge] ... You put the name of the family down.” As she recounted this story to me tears streamed down her face and her voice was a whisper. Despite the physical distance separating her from her father, his words spoken in Samoa to others still possessed great power to wound and upset her. Taniela remembered “as a youngster getting told off by my Mum and just crying and crying ... because I knew Mum was disappointed.” Once again, a very individual reaction is processed in terms of how that individual relates to their family, rather than in terms of an isolated actor confronting the world, which might be more typical of European New Zealander’s views of themselves and society.

Discussion of family violence or other domestic failings in Polynesian communities is considered both taboo and shameful because married spouses are not considered so much as individuals acting within a couple relationship, but rather more as representatives integrated in their larger kin groups, acting within an association involving many family members. This means that domestic violence is considered to be an issue affecting the extended family and is not regarded as a concern for the couple alone. The emphasis on collective kin involvement in nuclear family and individual matters means that there is great pressure to abide by and maintain the social norms about treatment of spouses, since the shame of not behaving appropriately spreads beyond the immediate household to all relatives aware of the situation. For example, Maiava told me that when a Pacific

Island woman got violently beaten by her husband, “the very essence of that is she never thought of herself. It is always the children. It is always the family, the family name, the extended family. The shame that she brought ... She never ever thought of herself. She always thought of the name that she carried, the family name, the status of her family.”

When there is domestic violence, there is immense shame attached to the victim. It is often the view of the extended family and the community that the shame is carried by the woman’s kin, since she has been abused. Lorraine informed me that: “If I will be beaten, if I will be verbally abused, that will be on my ... *‘āiga*, my family too.” This seems to relate to ideas about relative status and the demonstration of higher status by the abuser and lower by the one suffering the abuse. For these reasons, it is not the abuser or the abuser’s kin group which bears the shame, although they are the ones who must make reparation to the woman’s kin to appease her relatives for imposing shame on them. Today in Samoa, according to ‘tradition,’ this takes the form of fines and public apologies.

Pacific Island human service workers active in New Zealand often confront the problems of shame and gossip in a fairly direct fashion, as when John remarks “the policy of confidentiality is paramount in a place like this.” Notwithstanding these assurances, to avoid shame and gossip, Polynesian families may make the decision to deal with non-Polynesian individuals and institutions because, as Helen reminded me, “at least when you deal with *Papālagi*, [Europeans] they don’t know who your family is and they can’t make the connections.” Shame may affect people’s abilities to access Pacific Island-run social services; it may also restrain them from using other community social services which are available to them. Patricia described this process: “Our people are shy, and often don’t know the structures or the processes [in New Zealand], and often because of that lose their confidence in dealing with government departments and ... agencies.” Marlene also provided some insight into people’s abilities to ask for help:

Pacific Island groups in New Zealand ... will not ask for things. And they don’t actually see that they have a right to, even New Zealand born Pacific Islanders ... There’s a real fear that still hangs over a lot of Pacific Island communities here in New Zealand after the dawn raids and the immigration complaints of the ’70s ... That’s a traditional thing as well, that you don’t ask ... The idea is that generally, you provide for the family, not that you ask for something for yourself.

For new immigrants to New Zealand, it may be especially daunting to access social services because, in Eleni's words, "the family is supposed to help, but I ... don't actually have any family to help me. So if it takes asking outsiders I'll do it. Plus, it's not something that's common in our culture. You don't have agencies over there [Samoa] for anything. Even to find a house, you know, you just live in a village and everything is free, communal." If we assume that many Polynesians living in New Zealand find it difficult to ask for help from social services or from individuals who are not related to them, what implications does this hold for practice with this client group?

Implications for practice

As Eleni described, many Polynesians find it challenging to ask outsiders for assistance with problems. There is often resistance to dealing with social service agencies, and there may be significant cultural barriers to surmount at the first meeting with a service provider. As I have documented, there are significant differences between New Zealand clients of European origin and those of Pacific Island background. My focus has been on issues relating to a client's immigration history, language, and customary beliefs, and with their behaviour as determined by their family and their church, often motivated by shame.

This is a broad range of concepts that social service workers must be aware of and need to consider when dealing with Pacific Island clients, and it can seem quite overwhelming. As a result, what often happens with programme facilitation in New Zealand is that while ethnic or language differences among clients may be noted by the provider, little practical change occurs in either the programme content or manner of delivery to cater to these differences. As a result, Polynesian group members may be carried along with the programme, as are other clients if they are able to deal with the language and mainstream New Zealand cultural concepts, but they may just as easily be lost in the process because of the cultural differences of which service providers are insufficiently aware. Even when Pacific Island clients are participating in the group's discussion and activities, it may be difficult for the facilitator to assess whether the material is relevant to their experiences and whether it can be assimilated for future application. It should be recognised that Polynesian clients may have additional cultural barriers to implementation of the suggested cognitive and behavioural changes. In the interests of surmounting

these barriers, service workers need to consider how best to engage with Polynesian clients. Basically, how do we deal productively with all these differences between the client and the rest of the group, or the client and the human service worker?

My first recommendation would be to consider these issues in advance of meeting with the client for the first time. It would be useful to read some of the cited literature which discusses the concepts introduced here. It is often helpful to discuss some of these issues with Oceanic clients in advance of group or individual sessions. I provide some questions as a practical guide for initiating this dialogue (Figure 1).

The Polynesian community in New Zealand includes a diverse range of individuals. Effective intervention requires openness to understanding these differences, while not allowing alternative practices to be used to excuse inappropriate behaviour or abuse.

Conclusions

I hope that this material will assist work with Polynesian clients. Each concept discussed — immigration, language, custom, family, religion, and shame — will vary in importance and application depending on the individual under consideration and their circumstances. I invite human service workers to consider cultural background, both of themselves and of clients, and to ponder how these traits may affect interactions and the provision of services. I also encourage a positive spin on these considerations of differences — view them as a fascinating voyage of discovery, rather than as a painful lesson in political correctness. Learning about clients' cultural backgrounds can provide enjoyable and unexpected insights, and enhance other aspects of both professional practice and life experience.

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Figure 1:

Working with Polynesian clients — some useful questions.

IMMIGRATION HISTORY

- What is your ethnicity?
- Where were you born?
- How old were you when you left your birthplace?
- How long have you lived in New Zealand?
- Where else have you lived?
- Do you return to your place of birth regularly?

LANGUAGE

- What languages do you speak or understand?
- What languages do your parents speak or understand?
- If you have children, what languages do your children speak or understand?

CUSTOM OR TRADITION

- Did your parents raise you according to custom, i.e. fa'a-Sāmoa?
- Do you follow custom?
- If you have children, do you raise your children according to customary ideas?

FAMILY

- Who lived with you when you were a small child?
- Were you 'disciplined' as a child, and for what type of behaviour?
- If you have children, do you 'discipline' your children, and how?
- Who lives with you now, and who has lived with you?
- Do you send funds to family overseas?
- Do you ask a family elder for help with problems?

RELIGION

- Did your parents have religious beliefs when you were growing up?
- Do you have religious beliefs?
- Is religion important to other members of your family?
- Do you attend church?
- Do you support your church?
- Do you ask the minister or minister's wife for help with problems?

SHAME

- Were your parents sometimes ashamed of your behaviour?
- Do you keep secrets from your parents or other family members because of shame?
- How does shame influence your life?