

Kainga (families) experiences of a Tongan-Indigenous faith-based violence-prevention programme

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Abstract

Christianity is an embedded value system within Pacific cultures that is now being employed to inform efforts to address social issues such as family violence. This article chronicles a Tongan woman's cultural immersion with 49 Tongan church *kainga* (families) who participated in the Tongan faith-based *Kainga Tu'umalie* (Prosperous families) family violence programme. *Talanoa* (Pacific-Indigenous way of engaging families in research) with three *kainga* is drawn upon to highlight the impact of the programme in re-awakening the need to rebuild positive familial relationships based on core Tongan Christian values. More broadly, accounts from the *kainga* foreground the importance of interweaving spiritual faith and Indigenous knowledge in efforts to address family violence. This research also speaks to the importance of leveraging collaborative partnerships between community-based agencies and faith-based communities in addressing social issues.

Keywords

family violence, prevention and intervention programmes, Christian faith-based intervention programmes, Tongan-Indigenous approaches, Pacific cultures

Family violence is a serious social issue that impacts all ethnic communities in Aotearoa, that is, New Zealand, including Pacific communities (Koloto & Sharma, 2005; Ministry of Social Development, 2016). Such violence is often conceptualised among Tongan and Pacific communities as a multifaceted problem encompassing physical, spiritual, psychological, and sexual abuse towards members of *kainga* (families). Family violence is often associated with broader socio-cultural norms, material living conditions, substance misuse, and the breakdown in family values (MacArthur, 2000; Petersen, 2016; Ringel & Bina, 2007). Violence among *kainga* is often understood by Tongans and Pacific peoples as a fundamentally spiritual matter that undermines positive familial relationships and associated Tongan-Indigenous and Christian values of care and love (Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016; Dobson, 2004; MacArthur, 2000). Correspondingly, Pacific scholars have approached this issue as one exacerbated by the loss of *'ofa* (love and compassion), *angafakatokilalo* (humility) and *angafaka 'apa 'apa* (respect) in familial relations (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2016a, 2016b; Jansen et al., 2012).

It is also important to consider the societal context in which family violence takes place and in which Tongan people have often been marginalised. Contextual considerations are particularly important given that previous research shows how marginalisation and socio-economic stress are associated with the increased incidence of family violence (Ackerson & Subramanian, 2008; Hamby, 2000). The migration of Tongan people to New Zealand since the outbreak of the Second World War allowed for the fulfilment of ancestors' migrant dreams of providing a good education for their children and the ability to send remittances back to Tonga to help extended families

(Crocombe, 1992). The years of prosperity that made New Zealand seem like the land of milk and honey for Tongans was short-lived from the mid-1970s to the 1980s due to the effects of a major economic recession. This economic downturn led to a much tighter immigration policy control where the then National government singled out Pacific migrants who were predominantly Tongan and Samoan people. The government of the time launched the "overstay campaign" which is also known as the Dawn Raids. This campaign led to issues of stigma and stereotyping of Tongan and Pacific peoples who were labelled and positioned as a new type of "underclass" (Clydesdale, 2008). This stereotyping of Tongans was further reinforced by negative profiles in government and news media reports (Loto et al., 2006). These representational practices have contributed to a symbolic environment that has hampered the efforts of Tongan and Pacific peoples, more generally, in forging prosperous lives for themselves in Aotearoa, that is, New Zealand. Hence, Tongans and Pacific people remain over-represented in the lower income sectors of the labour market, among the unemployed, and as a result many live in crowded homes, with considerable stress, poorer health and lower life expectancies when compared to other ethnic groups (Ministry of Social Development, 2016).

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Mainstream intervention programmes for family violence that predominantly target individual offenders, and which are not sensitive to the socio-economic and cultural contexts of their offending, have proven less effective for Pacific peoples (Rankine et al., 2015; Robinson & Robinson, 2005). This is likely, at least in part, due to such programmes encompassing Eurocentric values that emphasise individual rights and independence without including collectivist and relational approaches that are prevalent within Pacific and Tongan cultures (Ofahengaue Vakalahi et al., 2008; Puchala et al., 2010). Tongan and Pacific peoples are relational beings, and central to our relationships is the *kainga* and the upholding of *tauhi va* (maintaining good relationships) (Mafile'o, 2005; Moala, 2009). Moreover, mainstream programmes generally ignore the importance of spiritual faith to Pacific and Tongan *kainga* as well as how we see ourselves as fundamentally inter-dependent social beings. Correspondingly, it is crucial for scholars and practitioners to develop more culturally and spiritually responsive approaches to violence in the *kainga* (Aten et al., 2011; Petersen, 2016).

There is considerable debate regarding the development of faith-based responses to domestic violence with some scholars arguing that Christian faith is implicated in the perpetuation of violence (Copel, 2008; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016). For example, key scriptures, spiritual teachings, and cultural practices can be employed by perpetrators to justify their abusive behaviour as being mandated from God (Petersen, 2016; Pillay, 2013). Christian faith can also function as a barrier for seeking help. Some victims would rather endure violence to keep the family together than be seen to be compromising their faith by leaving a violent relationship, and as such attracting shame and stigma (Ringel & Bina, 2007; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016; Zust et al., 2018). Alternatively, Christian faith can play a key role in addressing domestic violence and holding perpetrators to account (Ellison et al., 2007; Johnson, 2015). Research suggests that both perpetrators and survivors of family violence can find interpersonal support for change and gain a sense of hope, strength of purpose and justice from their faith-based communities and related family violence intervention programmes (Nason-Clark, 2009; Petersen, 2016; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016). What can render faith-based intervention programmes effective is the implementation of culturally informed strategies and practices that reflect and promote more harmonious, equitable, and loving relationships between intimate partners.

The literature on family violence programmes that take an Indigenous and faith-based approach is scant at best. This article aims to fill this gap and contribute to existing knowledge by highlighting the value for Tongan and Pacific peoples more generally of prevention and intervention programmes that take a faith-based cultural approach. Consequently, we propose that in the presence of competent faith leaders who are versed in the complexities of domestic violence (Drumm et al., 2018; Ringel & Bina, 2007), the enactment of Tongan faith-based cultural values that emphasise love, compassion, gentleness, and collective healing can be fostered in *kainga* (families) to become violence free (Drumm et al., 2018; Petersen, 2016;

Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016). Here, it is important to note that in many respects, Christian and core Tongan-cultural values have now become intertwined and somewhat inseparable. It is well documented that Christianity has evolved as an embedded dimension of Pacific cultural worldviews, including *Anga fakatonga* or the "Tongan way" (Kavaliku, 2007; Taumoefolau, 2005). Christianity is now central to conceptualizations of Pacific cultural worldviews and is inseparable from Tongan and Pacific ways of knowing, being, and conducting relationships with others (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2016a, 2016b; Havea, 2011).

This article documents some of the positive experiences of Tongan *kainga* who participated in the Affirming Works (AW) faith-based *Kainga Tu'umalie* (Prosperous families) family violence-prevention programme. We consider the importance of prioritising Tongan faith-cultural knowledge as a basis for the restorative healing practices that are central to the *Kainga Tu'umalie* programme. This programme constitutes a seminal attempt to draw on Tongan faith and Indigenous concepts to engage *kainga* through Tongan-cultural practices in open dialogue. This includes perpetrating family members owning up to and reflecting on their actions, as well as victims and those who experienced family violence reflecting on the impact that the violence (and their exposure to the family violence) had on them. The article also demonstrates the importance of approaching family violence intervention and prevention programmes in ways that reflect, and are cognisant of, how various cultural norms, values, and practices prevalent within Tongan and Pacific cultures benefit our communities. Our over-arching objective is to highlight the value of incorporating Tongan principles into violence intervention and prevention programmes. More specifically, we explore the dynamics of being violent-free for Tongan *kainga* who have relationships that are rooted in the faith-cultural principles of '*ofa* (love and compassion), '*ofa 'aufuato* (submission), *faka'apa'apa* (respect), and *angafakatokilalo* (humility).

A Tongan-Indigenous faith-based response to family violence prevention

The *Kainga Tu'umalie* (Prosperous families) initiative was developed with Tongan faith leaders in Auckland by Affirming Works (AW), a faith-based social services organisation with a mission to affirm Pacific people to realise and attain their full potential (Afeaki-Mafile'o, 2015). The aim of *Kainga Tu'umalie* as a violence-prevention programme is to engage *kainga* (families) to cultivate life patterns that enable them to build and maintain violence-free family relationships. A distinguishing feature of the programme, which is different from mainstream programmes, is that facilitators (were faith leaders) work with the whole *kainga* as a living entity and not just men or women who have been violent. Another key aspect of the formal programme is the fusion of *Fofola e fala ka e talanoa e kainga* (Tongan-Indigenous cultural metaphor of laying out the mat so the families can dialogue) and the Biblical narrative. *Fofola e fala* is the conceptual and practice basis for this programme. The mat provides a culturally safe

Table 1. Main sessions for the *Kainga Tu'umalie* (KT) programme weekend retreat.

Devotions
Session 1 Creation Story
Session 2 The Fall
Session 3 <i>Fofola e fala kae talanoa e kainga</i> (Laying out the mat so that families can dialogue)
Session 4 Dawn Raids and Spirit of Poverty
Session 5 Outdoor activities
Session 6 Dreams and Joseph movie
Session 7 Church Service
Session 8 Closing Circle

Source: KT Narrative Report (2016).

space and a commitment for family members to collaboratively and openly discuss the often taboo topic of violence. The *fala* (mat) also helps to ameliorate power differences not only between facilitators and participants, but also between different family members, which are common features of Tongan social hierarchical structure (Havea et al., in press). As such, programme sessions (refer to Table 1) are designed to challenge and assist *kainga* (family) members to reconcile their faith and culture to cultivate a deeper understanding of the importance of violence-free *kainga* relationships. On the *fala*, *kainga* are challenged in their *talanoa* (Pacific-style discussions) about the causes and impact of violence upon their lives. This occurs through weekend retreats involving *kainga* from churches who were invited to take part in the programme. The invitations were extended to all church members and families as opposed to only those with reported histories of violence. Table 1 presents main sessions that occur over the weekends.

These sessions were conducted flexibly and commenced with *lotu* (prayer) and devotion by the church leader who also acted as a facilitator. This was followed by the Biblical narrative story of Creation reminding *kainga* (families) of how they were created in God's image. Sessions 2 and 3 are combined introducing family violence in light of the Fall of mankind through Adam and Eve. On the *fala* (mat), individual *kainga* members are invited to *talanoa* about the triggers and effects of family violence. There were also sessions on familial aspirations, the Dawn Raids and developing prosperous mind-sets, and a positive outlook for their *kainga*, rather than fixating negatively on a poverty mind-set. Session 5 involves outdoor fun *kainga* activities, including sports. Continuing with the aspirational theme, the first day ends with the Dreams session and a movie night featuring the inspirational story of Joseph, the Biblical character who was a man of great vision who rose from the pit of slavery to become the prime minister of Egypt (Swindoll, 1998). The movie is used to characterise the qualities of integrity, godliness, and leadership, which are values implicit within the vision and philosophy of this faith-based family violence-prevention programme. Sunday morning session commences with a time of worship led by the Faith leader. The final retreat session provides opportunities for *kainga* to reflect and share their experiences of the retreat. *Kainga* members were often very emotional in acknowledging their own failures and

weaknesses, and in identifying areas they needed to improve in order to develop violence-free families.

Following the retreat, there were follow-up sessions on key areas that had been identified by *kainga* members for which they needed additional support. This included the "Love Languages" session in response to requests for support in improving communication among *kainga* members. The *Kainga Tu'umalie* programme ends with a graduation ceremony in celebration and acknowledgement of the commitment and dedication of participating *kainga*. Ongoing follow-up support was also provided by Affirming Works subject to the needs of the *kainga*.

The primary goal of this faith-based programme is to mobilise faith and Tongan-Indigenous principles in an effort to restore positive *kainga* relations and to stop and prevent further family violence. It encompasses a strengths-based approach that seeks to empower families with Biblical values and principles to build and enable strong, resilient familial relationships. Implicit in the programme sessions is the Christian perspective on family relationships, and the Biblical text of Ephesians by the apostle Paul is drawn upon to illustrate the intention of God's design for successful and harmonious family relationships. This in essence creates a beautiful picture that interweaves Tongan-Indigenous principles and Biblical values for restoring Tongan familial relationships.

The significance of such activities and practices highlights how Christian bible-based scriptures align with the Tongan principles and values offering practical tools that nurture and foster family connections and relationships. A key verse in chapter 5 of Ephesians proposes that family members should "Submit to one another in reverence to Christ" (verse 21). The concept of submission is the overriding principle that permeates God's gracious instructions for a peaceful and harmonious family. Submission from a Tongan Christian perspective refers to a heart manifested in sacrificial love, peace, respect, and humility (Hendricks, 2003; MacArthur, 2000). It is not a concept that demands a sense of control, dominance, or superiority over other family members. The notion of submission is also familiar to Tongan people and akin to the Indigenous concept of '*ofa* *'aufuato*. This concept is the guiding principle for the programme and encompasses mutual submission among all *kainga* members. Interwoven into the programme is the message that at the heart of positive familial relationships is '*ofa* (love and compassion), mutual respect (*faka'apa'apa*), and support that stems from the teachings of Christ (Hendricks, 2003; MacArthur, 2000). Like '*ofa* *'aufuato*, '*ofa* is interwoven as the core value and principle of *Anga fakatonga* or the Tongan-cultural worldview. It manifests as a virtue that goes beyond just mere words, and which is demonstrated in material enactments of love, compassion, and care for other people. Emphasis is placed on a humble (*angafakatokilalo*) servant's love like that demonstrated by Christ. Central in the values of '*ofa* and '*ofa* *'aufuato* is the striving for harmonious *kainga* relationships and evident in efforts to make sacrifices for the well-being of the collective (Havea, 2011; Mafile'o, 2005). The collectivist and relational norms, values, and practices of Tongans and Pacific people and cultures as practised within

the *Kainga Tu'umalie* programme highlight the significance of this faith-based programme.

The present study

This article draws on the first author's cultural immersion within the programme and corresponding weekend retreats involving 49 *kainga* (equivalent of approximately 230 persons). As a team formed around the first author's PhD research, the authors complemented each other. The first (S.H.) and second (S.A.-T.) authors are of Tongan and Samoan descent, respectively. Both brought emic perspectives to the project and were involved in the initial evaluation of the programme, with S.H. also participating in the *Kainga Tu'umalie* retreats. The third author (D.H.) identifies culturally as Pakeha (Maori term for Europeans) and has supervised a number of Pacific graduate research projects. As a cultural outsider, D.H. brought an etic perspective to the project, which encompassed aspects of intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 2011) and involved asking somewhat naïve questions, regarding key cultural concepts and practices. This left S.H. and S.A.-T. to work through translations of key concepts and practices that seemed like common sense from the cultural inside, but which were crucial for analysing the uniqueness of the programme and its implications for participating families.

We will pay particular attention to formal *talanoa* (preferred traditional Pacific-style discussions) with three *kainga* (families) as exemplars of participant experiences of the programme. The first *kainga (family)* consisted of a young couple with five children under the age of 10, where the two older children come from the mother's former relationship. Both parents were born in Tonga, with the father migrating to New Zealand as an adult and the mother migrating as a young girl. The second *kainga* comprised of another Tongan-born couple with four New Zealand-born teenage children. The third *kainga* involved recent migrants to New Zealand comprising of a Tongan father married to a Fijian wife with four grown children and one grandchild born in New Zealand.

Talanoa (Pacific cultural dialogue) were used to create spaces for cultural-participatory immersion (Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016) through which *kainga* were invited to share their stories and to reflect openly on the causes and consequences of violence in their relationships. *Talanoa* refers to a form of collective talk by a group of people through which subjective differences can be outlined and discussed until common ground or *noa* (zero point or balance) is established (Ka'ili, 2017). A central element of *talanoa* is the value afforded to upholding good relationships or *tauhi vā* (sacred relational spaces) among participants and researchers where every participant's voice is valued and respected. Moreover, *talanoa* offer spaces for *kainga* to collectively enact core Tongan and Pacific principles of respect, humility, and reciprocity (Halapua, 2003; Prescott, 2008). These principles governed the *talanoa* with the three families participating in conversations, *lotu* (prayer) and the reciprocal sharing of information. It is important to note these same underlying principles relate both to research *talanoa* and formal engagements within Tongan culture,

and as such this study drew on a research and intervention orientation that is consistent in terms of praxis and recognisable to the participants as Tongan people.

These research *talanoa* were carried out post retreat to enable *kainga* to reflect on the impact of the programme on their relationships and everyday lives. They were conducted in a culturally responsive manner which included starting and ending in *lotu* (prayer) and conversing in Tongan language as required by *kainga*. An important dimension of the cultural-participatory immersion approach was the first author participating in the weekend retreats and being known to *kainga*. This approach has similarities to auto-ethnography whereby the researcher is also an immersed participant in the culture and programme under investigation (Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016; Ellis et al., 2011). This form of immersive community engagement enabled culturally safe rapport, mutual trust, and respect which facilitated authentic participation by *kainga* in open, honest, and deep reflective manner (Health Research Council of New Zealand, 2014).

All three *talanoa* were digitally recorded and the two conducted in the Tongan language were transcribed into Tongan and then translated into English for analysis. The analysis presented in this article is based on a systematic and iterative exploration through repeated reading and categorising of prominent issues from the *talanoa*, as well as the first author's ethnographic field notes from her participation in the programme as well as programme progress reports. A central focus in the analysis was how Tongan faith-based Indigenous concepts and values functioned to help *kainga* understand the importance of violence-free relationships and commit to realising such relationships. A process of reflective analysis was applied to interpret participant accounts in this regard and to consider the impacts of the programme for participating *kainga* (Morse & Richards, 2002). Alefaio-Tugia's (2015) "Fa'afaletui-dialectical analysis" tool was also used to explore the participant accounts from an Indigenous perspective that is consistent with the principles of *talanoa* outlined above. In short, the focus in this analytic approach is on employing collective wisdom of cultural *matu'a* (elders) to enhance knowledge and understanding of the core themes identified in the analysis process.

Narratives of transformation from a Tongan-cultural understanding

The interpretation of *kainga talanoa* draws on three interconnected emergent Tongan-Indigenous concepts of *Ko e Makatu'unga Mo'ui mo e Malohi*, which translates as "A Powerful and Living platform"; *Ko e Kolo Malu mo e Hufanga*, representing "A Place of Safety and Refuge"; and *Fa'utaha*, a concept which includes the meaning of unity, 'ofa (love and compassion), peace, and harmony. These three interrelated concepts not only symbolise the cultural representation of *Fofola e fala*, but they also embody the faith narrative of Tongans as peoples of the Pacific. *Ko e Makatu'unga Mo'ui mo e Malohi* refers to how faith and culture were experienced by *kainga* as a powerful and living

platform for positive change. *Ko e Kolo Malu mo e Kolo Hufanga* signifies a place of safety and refuge, while *Fa'utaha* refers to enabling oneness, harmony, and peace among *kainga*. Interwoven into these concepts are the core Tongan values of 'ofa (love and compassion), 'ofa 'aufuato (submission), *angafakatokilalo* (humility), and *faka'apa'apa* (respect). These embedded cultural values are foundational to effort to "build the quality of life in which happiness, peace, harmony, and creativity reign" (Moala, 2009, p. 111). They are also central to both the programme design and participant reflections. Throughout the participant dialogues emerged what appeared to be a genuine intent by *kainga* participants to live lives that demonstrate these core values and ultimately violence-free lives.

When reading this analysis, it is important to realise that there is a clear gendered dimension to men or fathers' and women or mothers' engagement in the programme. The men or fathers are perpetrators and women or mothers victims. This means the men are working to address their actions with the support of the women. It is also important to note that one of the reasons the programme appears to work culturally is that it involves the men and women working together to realise positive changes with the support of the *kainga* (families).

***Ko e makatu'unga mo'ui mo e malohi* (A powerful and living platform)**

The Tongan-Indigenous concept of *Ko e makatu'unga mo'ui mo e malohi* originated from a Tongan faith leader's description of *Fofola e fala* and is metonymically reflective of how aspects of Christian faith and Tongan culture are interwoven in the practical experiences of participants as a powerful living platform for positive transformational developments within the *kainga*. The manifestation of this Tongan principle is reflected in the desires of families to build and sustain strong and resilient relationships that feature a greater sense of identity and belonging. This was also reflected in how the programme afforded the opportunity for *kainga* to reprioritise and to re-establish positive role modelling within their families. Moreover, this Tongan principle is evident in how the *kainga* foregrounded the importance of the language of love ('ofa) and forgiveness (*fakamolemole*) in creating violence-free households. The programme approach is signified as a strong platform enabling families to be open about their experiences of violence and produce ways of responding to and preventing further violent incidents.

An important outcome from the programme relates to how it enabled fathers to reflect on factors that were driving their violence and to commit to valuing their children and violence-free *kainga*. For example, after participating in the programme, Timote (father of five children) reported giving up his alcohol misuse because of a greater sense of responsibility to his children and a renewed mind-set of 'ofa (love and compassion) towards the value of his *kainga*. The extract from his account below reflects a general sense in which many of the men who had been violent committed

to changing their lifestyles and pledging to acting more consciously in ways that benefit all *kainga* members. Timote recounted feeling liberated by committing to act responsibly with 'ofa (love) and 'ofa 'aufuato (submission) towards members of his *kainga*:

The most important lesson that I learned from the programme is the significance of family especially my children and to take care of them. I thought that my responsibility was just to go to work and come home and sleep and get drunk. After the programme I gave up drinking as well as smoking because I needed to take care and provide for my children. I believe that it was God's leading for me and my family to attend the programme. (Timote)

Alcohol misuse is a key risk factor of violence (Dalton, 2009; Jewkes, 2002). Timote's conviction and consequent decision to stop drinking is consistent with the literature on the positive outcomes of spiritual faith, which can promote personal transformation (Petersen, 2016; Wuthnow, 2004). Through the programme, Timote's vision is rekindled with the realisation that his role is more than just meeting the physical and material needs of his children. As a father, he is also responsible for their holistic well-being—socially, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. Christian scholars support this perspective and reinforce the paramount role of parents in proactive love ('ofa), nurture, and discipline of their children and being effective role models at home (Hendricks, 2003; MacArthur, 2000). The faith-cultural approach of the programme creates a strong and living platform from which Timote expresses a more urgent desire to create a new home environment where the children feel a stronger sense of security, significance, and belonging. A home where the children and the family are devoid of the effects of alcohol abuse and associated violence.

A recurring theme from the *kainga* narratives on their experiences of the programme was the need to re-establish positive roles for parents in the home. This was reignited as a result of the dreams and visions session. Church *kainga* were reminded of the dreams of their forefathers in leaving their loved ones in their homelands in order to pursue better opportunities for their *kainga* and for future generations. Every family member was challenged to dream and to have aspirations for a more hopeful future as individuals, as children, as couples, and as a *kainga*. In the extract below from our discussion of the programme session on Dreams, we can see how the fathers, in particular, expressed the necessity of building a loving, and joyful environment at home that nurtures holistic growth and development before it is too late:

For me it was the session on "Dreams" where families were invited to write all of their dreams. I realised that I have been selfish in insisting that everyone in the family follow my instructions. The environment gave everyone the freedom including my children to write down their wishes. I realise that if I don't change and be attentive to their aspirations there will be a time when they are older that they will leave home because they don't have that joy and sense of belonging (lata 'I 'api) at home. (Timote)

The programme offered such participants spaces in which they could reflect on their actions with a view to moving forward in a manner that involved positive changes in their actions. Particularly towards their *kainga* whereby parents realised the importance of positive role modelling and aspirations in the home environment. There was also a deeper sense of belief in the dreams and aspirations of their ancestors in migrating to “the land of milk and honey”, and the sacrifices that were made in the process. For some, these sacrifices included cultural identity, heritage, and citizenship through their assimilation and compliance to Western masculine ideals (cf. Thaman, 1995). In addition, there was a typical recognition in the extract above that there needs to be a character adjustment on the part of men in order for them to support the achievement of the dreams and aspirations of the *kainga*. The symbolic and practical application of *Koe makatu'unga mo'ui mo e malohi* is shown where these men spoke of the need to foster an environment reflecting the values of 'ofa (love and compassion) and *angafaka'apa'apa* (respect) at home. Moreover, to build the *kainga* as a solid foundation, and to exemplify people of faith in their child-rearing practices.

The principles of Chapman's (1992) book on the five love languages is explored within the *Kainga Tu'umalie* (Prosperous families) programme aimed at improving communication and a greater sense of 'ofa (love and compassion) especially for couples. Chapman's theory is that people communicate in five primary love languages: words of encouragement, quality time together, giving of gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. His core proposition is that maintenance of your spouses' love language(s) enhances the quality of the marriage relationship. Emphasis is placed on being receptive and understanding your spouse's love language, and what makes them happy. During the follow-up sessions, couples were encouraged to openly identify ways in which they can express their heartfelt commitment to their spouse. This resulted in mothers' acknowledging their need to be more sensitive to their husbands' language of love being acts of service and the value they place on having a tidy and clean home:

Me and my husband used to argue all the time. I am the sort of person that is ok, when I clean, I'll clean. And when I am just plain lazy and tired I will just leave it . . . I used to get so frustrated, and we would argue just over me not [cleaning], and then it wasn't until we came to the five languages of love, and then it just made sense to me, that that's his language of love . . . I'm like, "I've made dinner, can't you just be happy with that?" He is like, "No. If you just have the house clean and if I just come and eat kapaika (tinned fish) with bread, I don't care I would be happy with that." (Mele)

Mele's quote suggests a sense of indifference towards her husband's needs and values before learning about the languages of love ('ofa). This was a clear point of contention in their relationship, which created an unhappy and sometimes hostile *kainga* environment. In this regard, the programme was experienced as a transformational platform where this Tongan mother was enlivened to create a more

loving and nurturing environment where there is peace and harmony between her and her husband and their children.

Through the language of love ('ofa), Mele reports her heart softening towards her husband, and there is a strong sense of forgiveness and a desire to have a non-violent relationship with him. This is not to suggest that Mele is accepting his violence. However, it does reflect how her account features the importance of forgiveness as expressed through the language of Christian love and core Tongan-cultural values. The concept of forgiveness in our participants' accounts is akin to the Tongan notion of *fakamolemole*, which is a genuine heart desire and willingness to overlook the wrongdoing of others out of one's own 'ofa (love and compassion), 'ofa 'aufuato (submission), and *angafakatokilalo* (humility). The principles of Chapman's love languages resonated with these Tongan couples as such language aligns closely with Tongan faith-based principles. This can be misinterpreted as a sign of weakness, but from the faith-cultural perspective of Tongan people, *fakamolemole* (forgiveness) constitutes an act of strength, love, self-control, and moral worth. In eliciting such reactions from participants, the programme appears to provide a strong platform for promoting more loving, respectful, and healthy relationships between intimate partners. This is supported by research from other contexts which suggests that this is one of the positive outcomes of faith-based family violence programmes (Petersen, 2016; Ringel & Bina, 2007).

The culturally textured dialogical space offered by the programme also lead many participants to reflect on their *kainga* relationships and how others might benefit from the programme. For example, Timote proposed that his brothers in Tonga would also benefit from the programme. His account reflects how participants expressed the desire to reach out to their *kainga* in Tonga who are also experiencing the same issues with family violence:

I just wish my brothers in Tonga were here to attend and experience it [programme] because their life in Tonga . . . is the same old thing of drunkenness, and I hear that my brother's wife is always "escaping" to her parent's home. I tried to talk to my brother but he just makes a joke out of it but I really wish that he was here to learn so that they'll see the importance of looking after their families. (Timote)

The programme is invoked here as a platform for change that participants see as potentially beneficial to other family members beyond the shores of Aotearoa. This extract highlights the emphasis Pacific peoples place on the collective responsibilities they have to the *kainga*, rather than just themselves as individuals (Finau, 1996; Mulitalo-Lauta, 2001).

In this section, we have discussed the programme experiences of the *kainga* and how the faith-cultural approaches provided an opportunity for family members to reflect on their actions and to commit to cultivating stronger and more resilient familial relations that are devoid of violence. The following section presents the *kainga* narratives on how *Kainga Tu'umalie* (Prosperous families)

provided a space of safety and refuge for transformed mind-sets towards parenting roles and marital relationships.

Ko e Kolo Malu mo e Hufanga (A place of safety and refuge)

The concept of *Ko e Kolo Malu mo e Hufanga* speaks to how a faith-based cultural approach can create a place of safety and refuge for participants. This is a concept signifying Christian faith and Tongan embedded values and principles as central to the creation of places of protection, peace, harmony, rest, and security that is accepting of repentant hearts and renewed mind-sets. It is also a Tongan-Indigenous principle that has utility in encouraging participating *kainga* to open up and share their feelings regarding a father's disciplinary practices and the need for these to change. The space provided by the programme was experienced by *kainga* as safe enough for children to openly share their experiences and perspectives with the other church *kainga* and the programme facilitators. Similarly, the impact of Christian faith combined with a Tongan-cultural approach was experienced as having a profound impact on fathers and encouraged them to humbly (*angafakatokilalo*) acknowledge their shortcomings and to embrace the need to change their behaviour towards their *kainga*. What appears to be elicited here is a form of faith and cultural accountability.

In the following extract, a father presents his willingness to put things right with his children. In doing so, he demonstrates how the programme opened up a safe space for fathers to reflect further and openly on their actions and what was driving their violence:

Over the various talanoa, I was surprised when my daughter shared [how I applied corporal punishment] because that has never happened before. They [my children] did what they were told and had to keep quiet. You see that was the type of leadership and control that I practiced because I didn't want to be challenged on what I know . . . (Paula—Father and church leader)

Paula's response to his daughter's revelation in front of the church *kainga* (families) is significant. It is remarkable in this context for a father who is also a church leader to admit his failures and to allow himself to be vulnerable in the presence of his *kainga* and congregation. The programme appears to have had the effect of convicting this Tongan father of his need to change his controlling leadership style into a more positive and participative leadership orientation. This extract is symbolic of the constant tension that many Tongan fathers have in raising their children in a new country while trying to maintain the authority that comes with their headship of the household and to balance this with their values of 'ofa (love and compassion), 'ofa 'aufuato (submission), *angafakatokilalo* (humility), and *faka'apa'apa* (respect).

In this regard, the programme was experienced as constituting a *Kolo Malu mo e Hufanga* (safehaven) to change perceptions and disciplinary practices in the home. Consequently, there was a heightened awareness by

participating parents that in order for the home environment to change, they needed to change. That in order to create a peaceful and harmonious home setting, parents need to exemplify inner peace, strength, and self-discipline in terms of how they communicate and act towards their children and each other. The acknowledgement of the need to transform mind-sets was a constant theme of the accounts from the *kainga*. The recognition of this positive change in outlook is foregrounded by Mele's account of the content of her prayers in seeking forgiveness, help, and guidance from God:

[The programme] gave me a lot to look at, at my behaviour, towards my husband, my children . . . cos I get to the point where I am now praying like, "Lord, help me to be a mother who speaks, words of love and peace," "Lord help my children to forgive me, for yelling at them, especially every morning, including Sabbath morning when we are getting ready for church . . ." (Mele)

In this extract, Mele presents herself as taking ownership and responsibility for her own actions towards her children and in doing so acknowledges the role of the programme in her reaching this realisation. She proposes that if the parents are verbally and physically violent then it follows that the children will be more likely to act in similar ways. Furthermore, if parents model loving ('ofa) and nurturing behaviour then children are more likely to respond accordingly (Deković et al., 2004; Hendricks, 2003; Stephens, 2007).

Prayer (*lotu*) is an important spiritual practice for Tongan people that was also practised within the programme to encourage honest disclosures and to open up spaces for exploring aspirations for non-violence and loving futures. The yearning of Mele's heart to God in prayer suggests a renewed vision of God, a softened heart, a recognition of her need for forgiveness and help from God. There is an eagerness in this account for a home environment where *kainga* can experience 'ofa (love and compassion) and *melino* (peace and harmony) devoid of violence.

Moreover, the programme was experienced as providing a place of refuge and safety (*Ko e kolo malu mo e hufanga*) within which fathers could repent of their immoral and violent actions. The mind-set of 'ofa (love and compassion) and *angafakatokilalo* (humility) was evident in fathers' expressions of the need for change in their actions: "I used to be a compulsive liar especially to my wife, but after the retreat I was convicted to stop lying . . ." (Sekope). Through such statements, Sekope demonstrates a desire to rebuild his marriage based on honesty and integrity rather than lies and deceit. Moreover, to honour the sanctity of marriage, to model what it means to love his wife sacrificially ('ofa 'aufuato and 'ofa) as the Bible teaches, and ultimately to model what a Christian marriage should be for his children. As Christian writers advocate, these values and principles provide a strong foundation of peace, harmony, and rest (*Ko e kolo malu mo e hufanga*) which serves as a protective armour against violence (Chapman, 2008; Hendricks, 2003).

One of the programme sessions specifically involved *kainga* being challenged to adopt more positive thoughts and outlooks for their children. The aim of this session was

to help families expel the misconceptions that have been embedded through environmental factors such as racism, stereotypes, and the selfishness that can come with capitalism. This session was inspired from the Bible verse: “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23: 7, NKJV). This verse is often interpreted as meaning that a person’s thoughts directly impact their life, and that changing thought patterns can transform lives and the world. This idea can be misinterpreted to mean that a person just needs to think positive thoughts and the world will be a better place. That is not the rationale behind this session. It is about encouraging the spiritual discipline of fostering a positive mind-set which leads to peace and rest despite the negative circumstances experienced.

This session also included testimonies of experiences in the Dawn Raids era in New Zealand history, which Pacific peoples would rather forget. It was a dark time in the 1970s where we were hunted down and arrested in the early hours of the morning for allegedly overstaying temporary work permits. This discriminatory enforcement was justified in light of the economic recession, which meant fewer employment opportunities and higher social costs for New Zealanders. Tongan and Samoan people, in particular, were singled out despite evidence showing that the majority of overstayers were from Europe or North America (Beaglehole, 2015; Spoonley, 2017). Sadly, these events led to a degree of negative stereotyping among Palangi (Europeans) towards Pacific peoples, which has contributed to the way Pacific communities in New Zealand have been denigrated and stereotyped as an “underclass and drain on the economy” (Clydesdale, 2008). These and subsequent events have negatively impacted the mind-sets of Pacific peoples into believing that negative labels and stereotypes have merit. Some have internalised the stereotypes (Thomsen et al., 2018).

In the context of such concerns, Mele’s reports having realised that there is nothing wrong with aspiring for a better and more hopeful future for herself and her *kainga*. Mele represents a generation of Tongan people born in New Zealand who refuse to be defined by their migration history, but who have grown up with and express a deep desire to overcome the stereotyping and negative self-imaging of Pacific people. Consequently, they express a heightened awareness of the need to train their mind-sets to focus on more positive experiences and aspects of their lives in order to achieve the future that they aspire for their *kainga*:

... I think that’s where we’ve realised the whole poverty thinking and the prosperous thinking, [that] it’s not bad to dream and think positively and work towards it, ... that we can better ourselves and not try and you know, “Lets just stay poor because that’s the way we grew up and, let’s just be like that for the rest of our life.” (Mele)

Mele’s acknowledgement of their need for transformed mind-sets suggests a real desire to re-establish her and her husband’s role as positive parents and to create a family home that reflects their values as Tongan people of faith. That creating a peaceful, loving, and harmonious home environment free of violence is not beyond their reach and is within their own ability to story their own lives in ways that reflect their realities and not Palangi stereotypes of

them (cf. Rappaport, 2000). With new found knowledge and understanding of the Pacific migration stories and the injustices experienced, Mele’s generation are encouraged to reach their dreams and the aspirations of their forefathers in their newly adopted home country (Alefaio, 2008). Learning how the first-generation Pacific migrants have persevered and overcome adversity through their faith and cultural values of ‘*ofa* (love and compassion) for their *kainga* has sparked a greater sense of resolve and hope for participating *kainga* to realise violence-free ways of living.

In this section, we have explored the experiences of the *kainga* conceptualised as a safe and restful space for renewed mind-sets towards the marriage relationship and parenting roles. Next, we extend this discussion to consider the *kainga* accounts as reflecting a yearning for unity, peace, and harmony.

Fa’utaha (Unity, harmony, and peace)

Closely linked to the Indigenous principle of *Koe Kolo Malu mo e Hufanga* (A place of safety and refuge) is the concept of *Fa’utaha*, which can be conceptualised as a sense of unity, harmony, and peace. This is a concept that unites or binds *kainga* as one entity united in mind and heart, despite conflicts and disagreements. *Fa’utaha* in essence encapsulates the impact or the essence of the fusion of Christian faith and Tongan-cultural knowledge as practised within the programme. Correspondingly, many participants expressed a strong sense of yearning for this unity, peace, and harmony, particularly in *kainga* relationships between husband and wife and between parents and their children:

Like every family we have our issues, lack of communication; constant conflict over financial issues; and my lack of respect for my husband. I was always angry with my husband over his passivity and lack of clear communication with the children, but after the retreat I felt more love and respect for him and saw his strong points as a hard-working man who is doing his best to provide for the family. (Ma’ata)

The barriers to attaining united, peaceful, and harmonious relationships and *kainga* are identified by this Tongan mother. Feelings of anger, unforgiveness, bitterness, and resentment towards her husband were part of her everyday experiences of life for this *kainga*. Feelings of remorse expressed by Ma’ata regarding harmful emotions were a common sentiment from participating *kainga*. The faith-based cultural approach of the *Kainga Tu’umalie* initiative was a motivational factor to demonstrate ‘*ofa* (love and compassion) and *faka’apa’apa* (respect) towards ones’ spouse and to see beyond their imperfections, shortcomings, and limitations. There is now a renewed sense of pride and appreciation of the strengths and values of husbands and a desire to create a *kainga* and a home that is more loving (‘*ofa*), respectful (*faka’apa’apa*), peaceful (*melino*), and free of violence.

The programme has the positive impact of convicting fathers of their need to build strong, resilient, and unified *kainga* relationships through quality time together in family *lotu* (prayer). One of the objectives of the programme is for

kainga to come together to a safe and restful space and collectively work through issues together as a family and community. The importance of quality time together as a *kainga* was emphasised in both the retreat and the follow-up sessions. A Tongan father acknowledges the significance of family time together in worship:

We have always planned to have a time of family lotu (prayer) but never eventuated, because we always made up excuses. But since the retreat we have commenced a time of family worship. It has also given me the opportunity to connect more with my children. (Sekope)

Sekope recognises his need to model his vital role as the leader of the *kainga* (family). As a Tongan father, he expresses a common cultural desire to be an effective loving person who contributes to a strong *kainga*. Uniting in precious times of *lotu* (prayer) and family worship is a traditional practice of Tongan *kainga* and is often neglected in diaspora given the pace and demands of life today. There is a conviction of the need for his *kainga* to revive this important practice and to make it a priority where it becomes a life pattern.

Hendricks (2003) writes that today more than ever Christian families need to unite in frequent, unhurried times of prayer and worship sourcing inner strength, peace, and courage amid the struggles of life. There is also a greater sense of empowerment and resilience and more intentionality about connecting better with every *kainga* member particularly with the children. Christian writers highlight that the most influential people in children's lives are their parents, not peers which underscores the importance of parents being consistent godly role models for their children (Hendricks, 2003; MacArthur, 2000). Tongan fathers being given the space to pause and reflect as part of the programme results in renewed mind-sets to be more effective models for their children.

A key session in the programme is the *kainga talanoa* about family violence in relation to the Biblical narrative. Individual *kainga* literally sit on the *fala* (mat) and *talanoa* about the triggers and impacts of violence on their daily lives at home, work, or school. Affirming Works community and faith leaders facilitate these sessions. *Kainga* are consistently reminded that the *fala* is a safe space (*Koe Kolo Malu mo e Hufanga*) for *talanoa*. This resulted in very emotional and vibrant sessions where every *kainga* member's voice was expressed and heard. The faith narrative combined with a familiar Indigenous approach of laying out the mat was so impactful liberating children to be open about their views and to be confident in sharing the outcome of their families' *talanoa* with the other church *kainga*:

It's quite an effective tool (Fofola e fala . . .) in getting us as a family to talk to one another. We were surprised and encouraged by our daughter's openness to share her views and her willingness to stand up and share her family's feedback [on the Family Violence session] to the wider group. (Ma'ata)

Ma'ata's account suggests that *talanoa* with her *kainga* was rare. Seeing her daughter's openness and confidence in sharing her perspective encouraged her as a mother to

continue the open dialogue in their home environment. Through these sessions, Tongan mothers' hearts are strengthened to create a home environment that enables their children to freely *talanoa* free of condemnation or fear. There is a conviction of the need to lay out the *fala* (mat) more frequently at home to attain a greater sense of unity, oneness, and togetherness (*Fa'utaha*) creating strong and happy *kainga* devoid of violence.

Every family member reported being positively impacted by the programme and proposed that it resulted in a stronger sense of worth and belonging. The spirit of the *Kainga Tu'umalie* programme was experienced as creating an atmosphere that allowed the children to realise the sacrifices that their parents and forefathers have made to enable them and future generations to have a prosperous future in a new country. They reported feeling closer to their parents:

The whole programme has drawn me closer to my parents, especially my Mum and I have a greater appreciation of what they are doing for me and my brothers. ('Eseta)

'Eseta's account signifies a sense and a desire for *Fa'utaha* (togetherness or closeness) with her parents and brothers. As a result of immersing in this *kainga* focused programme, children reported a sense of emotional liberation enabling them to show more love ('*ofa*), gratitude (*hounga'ia*), respect (*faka'apa'apa*) and humility (*angafakatokilalo*) towards their parents. It is the intent of the programme that promoting unified (*Fa'utaha*), mutually respectful *kainga* acts as a protective factor in preventing further family violence.

Conclusion

The goal of this article was to document the positive experiences of *kainga* participating in the inaugural Tongan faith-based family violence-prevention and intervention programme. In addition, we sought to demonstrate the value of Tongan faith-based approaches to combating family violence in Tongan families and communities. Consequently, we set out to examine what being violent-free might look like for Tongan *kainga* who have relationships that are embedded in key faith-cultural principles such as '*ofa* *'aufuato* (submission), '*ofa* (love and compassion), *angafakatokilalo* (humility), and *faka'apa'apa* (respect). In drawing on three reciprocally connected Tongan-Indigenous principles, we have sought to unpack how the programme can create a safe cultural space in which *kainga* are willing to engage with the issues and reflect on their actions, and consider what needs to change for them to become violent free. We have shown that the concept of *Ko e Makatu'unga Mo'ui moe Malohi* is central to understanding fathers' efforts to reflect on and reconsider the value of their *kainga* and the need for them to be violence free. This is manifested through a greater desire to build spiritually strong and resilient families by being consistent godly role models.

The Indigenous principle of *Ko e Kolo Malu mo e Hufanga* conceptualises the programme providing a safe sanctuary for renewed mind-sets for fathers, mothers,

husbands, wives, and children. Accordingly, participating fathers demonstrated a commitment to transform their destructive disciplinary practices. Mothers articulated the desire to exemplify Godly principles in their home environments. Husbands and wives spoke in ways that invoked their dedication to building stronger marriages based on 'ofa 'aufuato (submission), 'ofa (love and compassion), *angafakatokilalo* (humility), and *faka'apa'apa* (respect). Children also demonstrated how they were emotionally liberated during the programme to share their own perspectives and feelings. The Tongan notion of *Fa'utaha* signifies the longing of every *kainga* member for a greater sense of love, unity, and togetherness within their *kainga* relationships. The re-embedding of these faith-cultural values and principles among *kainga* relationships and in the home is an important step in preventing further family violence.

The positive impact on participating *kainga* in the programme suggests the significance of a faith-based cultural approach for addressing family violence among Tongan *kainga*. This is consistent with some of the global literature on faith-based responses to domestic violence which shows the positive influence of protection, hope, healing, and transformation for religious survivors and offenders (Nason-Clark, 2009; Petersen, 2016; Ting & Panchanadeswaran, 2016). As with conventional family violence programmes, mainstream faith-based family violence programmes' primary focus is on the individual victim and perpetrator (Ofahengau Vakalahi et al., 2008; Zellerer, 2003). This approach is somewhat contrary to the cultural values of Tongans and Pacific peoples who emphasise collective and social responsibility within the *kainga* (families) (Mafile'o, 2005; Thaman, 1995). The positive accounts of *kainga* members participating in the *Kainga Tu'umalie* programme illustrate the potential impact of the collective approach to family violence prevention and intervention among Tongan and Pacific communities. It also highlights the significance of such faith-cultural approaches.

In conclusion, this article underscores the magnitude and potential of faith-cultural approaches in addressing the wicked issue of family violence among Tongan and Pacific families. We have highlighted some of the transformational narratives of participating *kainga* members where they were given safe and culturally appropriate space to pause and reflect and then commit to moving towards violence-free living. It also highlights the significance of partnerships between community service organisations and faith communities. The collaboration between Affirming Works and Tongan church communities affirms the importance of such partnerships and is consistent with the growing global literature recommending the importance of community networks in addressing domestic violence (Drumm et al., 2018; Petersen, 2016).

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