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***Sexual Health Knowledge, Attitudes and
Behaviour of Sāmoan Youth in Aotearoa
New Zealand***

**A thesis presented in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy
in
Public Policy**

**at Massey University, Albany
New Zealand**

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2017**

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ABSTRACT

Sex and sexuality in many cultures are sensitive topics. For many Pacific communities where sex is often regarded as *tapu* (sacred), cultural and religious values largely frame how sexuality and pregnancy are understood. For many Sāmoans, sex is regarded as a taboo subject. While sexual activity may be a pleasurable experience, its consequences can be life-altering. In New Zealand, the sexual health status of teenagers, particularly Pacific young people, is concerning. Compared with other countries, the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended teenage pregnancies and suboptimal levels of contraceptive use in New Zealand are high. From a public health perspective, these issues pose serious social, economic and health risks. For teenagers, early sexual involvement and pregnancy can drastically affect their social, educational and emotional development and life chances. In an attempt to understand and address these sexual health issues, public policy agents seek appropriate information that can assist them in designing responsive interventions.

This mixed methods study explores the factors that influence the sexual health knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of Sāmoan secondary school students in Aotearoa New Zealand. An analysis of information from 535 Sāmoan students that participated in the *Youth '07* health survey was undertaken. Individual interviews with eight key informants, and eight focus groups comprised of 55 Auckland Sāmoan secondary school students were carried out.

This study presents a comprehensive picture of the sexual health patterns and issues unique to Sāmoan youth living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Three broad factors - the individual, family and wider environment - influence the sexual health knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of Sāmoan youth. This study proposes that to address sexual health issues for Sāmoan communities requires an understanding of three essential concepts: '**Context**', '**Communication**' and '**Co-ordination**'. The significance of this research and its findings extend to a range of audiences including Sāmoan young people, families, schools, health and social service providers and policy agents.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family:
my husband Peter, my mother Malia Paula Ulugia Alefosio,
my children Paula and Michael and
our *āiga* - past, present and future.

To you Lord - The supreme creator, doctor, philosopher, healer,
sexual health and relationship expert.

The I AM, the author of my past, present and future.

In this journey of life, you continue to reveal LOVE in its various manifestations
For this gift, I am extremely grateful.

Love is patient, Love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking,

It is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts,

always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13: 4 - 8

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey would not have been possible without the support and investment of many individuals and communities.

I wish to acknowledge my study partners. Thank you to the Sāmoan young people and the key informants for your willingness to support this study. Thank you to the management and staff of the participating secondary schools. Linda McQuade, Vicar of Education for the Auckland Catholic Diocese - thank you for always believing in me. Many thanks extend to Dr Terryann Clark, Elizabeth Robinson and the Adolescent Health Research Group (AHRG) responsible for the *Youth 2000* survey series. Special thanks to Andrew Va'a and Gavin Faeamani.

To my Massey University āiga:

To my supervisors, Associate Professor Grant Duncan and Professor Cluny Macpherson - I am deeply indebted to you both. Thank you for your guidance, insights, honesty, commitment, patience and above all unwavering belief in me. What a remarkable journey this has been. May you be truly blessed.

To Dr Lily George – a truly inspiring and humble woman. I am so grateful to have you in my life. Words do not capture the capacity and the essence of you. Thank you for your love. I would not be here if it weren't for you.

To my Pasifika@Massey family: Dr Malakai Koloamatangi and Ben Taufua, and my Pacific brothers and sisters. Thank you for your ongoing support, belief and encouragement. Thank you for creating environments such as our writing retreats where we can connect, seek refuge and draw strength from each other. For Pasifika@Massey, *"Success is the norm and Achievement is celebrated!"* I look forward to sharing in many celebrations.

To Dr Allanah Ryan and the staff at the School of People, Environment and Planning in Albany, and the staff in the former School of Social and Cultural Studies in Albany and the many Massey staff I have had the pleasure of working with over the last 15 years - thank you for being generous with your time and talents.

Many thanks to the funders that have enabled this study to come to life: Massey University Graduate Research School; the School of People, Environment and Planning; the North Shore Branch of the New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women; and the Health Research Council of New Zealand (Pacific Career Development Awards).

Many thanks to my colleagues at Integrity Professionals (IPRO) and The University of Auckland – Pacific Health Section. Thank you to the School Community Services team from Counties Manukau West, Otahuhu and team at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, Manukau Campus.

Thank you to my Faith community: St Joseph's and St Joachim's Parish, Otahuhu, St Therese Parish, Mangere East, our wider Catholic family including the Franciscan Friars, the Benedictine Nuns, and the Sienna family. Thank you to Calvary community, the Iosefo and Leleisiuao-lagaluga family, Men's group, and the many loved ones who have faithfully stood in the gap and committed this project in prayer.

Finally, to my āiga – thank you for a lifetime of love and support. I wish to acknowledge the Veukiso's, Laumatia's, Leafa's and Fuga's. I hope I can be as much of a source of strength as you have all been to me. To Mum, you hold the highest degree imaginable. You instilled in me a love for God, learning and others. Congratulations – your hard work and prayers have led to this - a journey from those ABC's to a D R. To my children, Paula and Michael, my angels! You have been a part of this journey from the start to the finish. Your enthusiasm, energy and the wonder you have for your natural world continues to motivate me. May your light continue to shine. To my husband, Pete – your commitment, patience, love, sacrifice, friendship and humour has enabled this dream to become a reality – we've done it! I'm looking forward to our next adventure together.

GLOSSARY OF SĀMOAN WORDS AND PHRASES

Āiga	A generic term for kinship and family which is commonly used by Sāmoans when talking about family household and/or extended family units.
Amio foi lele, le talafeagai	Behaviour that is inappropriate.
Ava	Reverence.
E sā	Not allowed.
Fa'aaloalo	Respect.
Fa'a Sāmoa	A term that describes the Sāmoan way of life; the customs and language of Sāmoa.
Fa'afafine	Sāmoan biological males who behave in a range of feminine-gendered ways.
Fale	Sāmoan house.
Fono	Councils or meetings great and small and applies to national assemblies and legislatures, as well as local village councils or any type of meeting between people.
Mamā	Pure.
Matai	Sāmoan chief.
Palagi	A non-Sāmoan person, term used to describe European westerners or Caucasians. The term is also used to describe foreigners or anything that does not belong to Sāmoa or Sāmoan culture.
Sa'o	Senior chief of a village or family.
Tapu	Sacred.
Tafao	Going out in a social setting.
Ta'u valea ai le āiga	The idea that one has brought shame to the family; dishonoured the family name. The family name has been defiled; tarnished; shamed; made foolish.
Teine lelei	Concept used to describe a 'good Sāmoan girl'.
Va fealoaloa'i	A term that recognises that people are sacred.

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