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Rangatahi Oranga:
Family functioning, cultural orientation and depression among New Zealand adolescents

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Mental health disparities between Maori and NZ European adolescents are well documented. Cultural-vulnerability theory posits that cultural dimensions may explain some of the difference in distress levels between different ethnic groups. The aim of this research was to explore the relationships between family functioning, cultural orientation and depression among NZ Maori and NZ European adolescents and examine whether cultural orientation - individualism and collectivism - would moderate the relationship between perceived family functioning and depression scores. Self-report data assessing individualism, collectivism, family functioning and depression were collected from 299 Maori and NZ European high school adolescents. Family dysfunction was found to positively correlate with depression scores for adolescents in both groups, however the relationship was stronger for adolescent males than females, and for NZ Europeans than Maori adolescents, and the relationship was strongest for Maori male adolescents specifically. The study's major findings were that collectivism had a moderating effect on the relationship between family functioning and depression for NZ European females only, and that for Maori male adolescents who were highly individualistic, family functioning accounted for 20% of the variance in depression scores. A further finding was that Maori adolescents displayed both highly individualistic and highly collectivistic tendencies, which indicates that there may be multiple culture-related pathways to depression for Maori youths. The findings suggest that Maori male adolescents may be more vulnerable to the deleterious effects of family dysfunction than Maori females, especially if they display tendencies towards individualism. The implications for these and other findings are discussed.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: Definitions and related aspects of culture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The origins of individualism and collectivism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysing individualism and collectivism</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal and vertical classifications</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological advantages and disadvantages of individualism and collectivism</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture-personality discrepancy</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: Maori and NZ European cultures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture, race and ethnicity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maori collectivists and NZ European individualists</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-definitions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal goals</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizontal and vertical classifications</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: Depression in adolescence</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions and related aspects of depression</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression in adolescence</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epidemiology of depression</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Etiology of depression</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genetic factors</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosocial factors</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality factors</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Theoretical formulations of depression</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychodynamic perspective</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive theory and related perspectives</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio-psycho-social model</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diathesis-stress model</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family stress model</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-ecologic model</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person-environment fit model</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anomie theory</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR: Family dysfunction and adolescent depression

Definitions and related aspects of family
Family and whanau functioning
The impact of family dysfunction on adolescents
Cultural differences in the importance of family: Collectivists and Individualists
Cultural differences in the importance of family: NZ Maori and NZ Europeans
Expectations of the individual
Extended family

CHAPTER FIVE: Cultural-vulnerability theory

CHAPTER SIX: The present study

Hypothesis 1: Ethnicity and depression
Hypothesis 2: Gender and depression
Hypothesis 3: Maori and collectivism
Hypothesis 4: NZ Europeans and Individualism
Hypothesis 5: Family dysfunction and depression
Hypothesis 6: Moderation analyses

CHAPTER SEVEN: Method

Part I: Survey questionnaire
Participants
Measures
General Functioning sub-scale of the McMaster Family Assessment Device
Development of the GF-FAD
Scoring
Psychometric properties
Individualism and Collectivism Scale (I-CS)
Development of the I-CS
Scoring
Psychometric Properties
Center for Epidemiological Studies - Depression Scale for Children (CES-DC)
Development of the CES-D
Scoring
Psychometric properties

Part II: Interview phase
Participants
Procedure and ethical considerations

CHAPTER EIGHT: Results Part I

Statistical analyses
Screening and missing data
Data analyses
Selection of statistics......................................................................................................49
Descriptive statistics.......................................................................................................50
Hypothesis 1: Ethnicity and depression....................................................................51
Hypothesis 2: Gender and depression.......................................................................52
Hypothesis 3: Maori and collectivism.........................................................................53
Hypothesis 4: NZ Europeans and individualism.......................................................53
Hypothesis 5: Family dysfunction and depression...................................................54
  Ethnicity differences........................................................................................55
    Maori adolescents..........................................................................................55
    NZ European adolescents...........................................................................55
  Gender differences..........................................................................................55
    Female adolescents......................................................................................55
    Male adolescents..........................................................................................56
  Gender comparisons within ethnic groups...................................................56
    Maori female adolescents..........................................................................56
    Maori male adolescents.............................................................................56
    NZ European female adolescents...............................................................56
    NZ European male adolescents...................................................................57
  Multiple regression analysis for the Maori sample........................................57
  Multiple regression analysis for the NZ European sample...............................58
Hypothesis 6: Moderation analyses.......................................................................59
  Moderation 1: Individualism..........................................................................59
  Moderation 2: Collectivism............................................................................60
  Moderation 3: Maori females and Collectivism...............................................62
  Moderation 4: Maori females and Individualism.............................................62
  Moderation 5: Maori males and Collectivism..................................................63
  Moderation 6: Maori males and Individualism................................................64
  Moderation 7: NZ European females and Individualism................................65
  Moderation 8: NZ European females and Collectivism..................................66
  Moderation 9: NZ European males and Individualism....................................67
  Moderation 10: NZ European males and Collectivism....................................68

Summary of results for part I.......................................................................................69

CHAPTER NINE: Results part II..........................................................................................70
Thematic analysis report.............................................................................................70
Theme 1: Idiocentrism/individualism.........................................................................70
  1.1 Personal needs before family needs.........................................................71
  1.2 Independent individuals, unaffected by one another’s problems...............73
  1.3 Personal success is of personal importance.............................................76
Theme 2: Allocentrism/collectivism..........................................................................78
  2.1 Family needs come before personal needs.............................................78
**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1  
Characteristics of healthy families compared with the qualities of healthy whanau....................23

Table 2  
Characteristics of dysfunctional families and dysfunctional whanau...........................................23

Table 3  
Number of participants in each ethnic and gender group and percentage of total sample...........35

Table 4  
Mean collectivism scores for Maori and NZ European high school students..............................53

Table 5  
Mean individualism scores for Maori and NZ European high schools adolescents.....................54

Table 6  
Ethnicity comparison of correlation coefficients for family functioning and depression............55

Table 7  
Gender comparison of correlation coefficients for family functioning and depression............56

Table 8  
Gender and ethnicity comparison of correlation coefficients for family functioning and depression...................................................................................................................................57

Table 9  
Unstandardised (B) and Standardised (β) Regression Coefficients, and squared Semi-Partial Correlations (sr²) For Each Predictor in a Regression Model Predicting Depression Scores for Maori adolescents, N =82.....................................................................................................................................................58

Table 10  
Unstandardised (B) and Standardised (β) Regression Coefficients, and squared Semi-Partial Correlations (sr²) For Each Predictor in a Regression Model Predicting Depression Scores for New Zealand adolescents, N = 155.....................................................................................................................................................59

Table 11  
Hierarchical multiple regression of Individualism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Individualism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients (β), R, R², and adjusted R² for total sample .....................................................................................................................................................61

Table 12  
Hierarchical multiple regression of Collectivism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Collectivism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients, R, R², and adjusted R² for total sample ....................................................................................................................................................62

Table 13  
Hierarchical multiple regression of Collectivism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Collectivism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients, R, R², and adjusted R² for Maori females...................................................................................................................................................................................63

Table 14  
Hierarchical multiple regression of Individualism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Individualism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients, R, R², and adjusted R² for Maori females..........64
Table 15
Hierarchical multiple regression of Collectivism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Collectivism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$ for Maori males...

Table 16
Hierarchical multiple regression of Individualism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Individualism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$ for Maori males...

Table 17
Hierarchical multiple regression of Individualism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Individualism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$ for NZ European females...

Table 18
Hierarchical multiple regression of Collectivism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Collectivism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$ for NZ European females...

Table 19
Hierarchical multiple regression of Individualism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Individualism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$ for NZ European males...

Table 20
Hierarchical multiple regression of Collectivism, GF-FAD and the interaction of Collectivism on depression showing standardised beta coefficients, $R$, $R^2$, and adjusted $R^2$ for NZ European males...
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1
Initial themes and sub-themes formulated during step three of thematic analysis......................44

Figure 2
Modified themes and sub-themes formulated during step four of thematic analysis...................45

Figure 3
Final conceptualisation of themes and sub-themes in the thematic analysis..............................45

Figure 4.
Pie charts illustrating that the distribution of depressed and non-depressed Maori and NZ Europeans adolescents was approximately the same.................................................................51

Figure 5
Pie charts illustrating that the distribution of depressed and non-depressed participants was similar for both the male adolescent and female adolescent samples......................................................52