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**TE HUI KOTAHITANGA MO TE WHAKA-ORA I ROTO I NGA
MATAURANGA O TE MATE HINENGARO:**

**The Intergenerational Transmission of healing from the experience
of mental illness.**

**A thesis completed in partial fulfilment of a
Master of Philosophy in Māori Studies**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on stories and experiences of living with mental illness shared by members of my whānau to explore the research question *What healing strategies do whānau with mental illness use to find wellness?*. This topic was chosen because mental illness is intergenerational in our whānau weaving through five generations.

The aim of this research was: to collect the stories of whānau members to understand their experiences of mental illness, particularly their experiences of healing; to develop a whānau model of healing; to reduce the stigma and discrimination related to mental illness; and, finally to educate the wider whānau, hapū, iwi and community and to facilitate their own healing pathways.

A kaupapa Māori methodology that adopted a pūrākau approach was used for this research. A kaupapa Māori approach ensures that Māori culture, cultural knowledge and practices, such as pūrākau, underpin the research design and research practices. The research involved face to face interviews with four members of my whānau.

Three key themes with a series of subthemes were from the data;

1. Wellness—as understood within the context of whānau, communicating; environment, awareness, causes and trauma
2. Behaviours associated with emotional and physical responses, denial and acceptance
3. Healing as it relates to identity, support, environment, spirituality, communicating and difference.

The three themes were then used to create a whānau cycle of healing to illustrate how whānau moved from a state of unwellness to healing. Key stages of the cycle included awareness, unwellness, behaviours, denial, acceptance and healing.

What is highlighted in this thesis are the healing techniques each individual uses to maintain wellness, the similarities such as health and fitness, busyness one's belief in 'God' or spiritual other in the search for their identity as Māori an important aspect and strand in the healing steps to wellness.

Recommendations from participants were simple; get to know me, be supportive and caring, don't advise just listen, be non-judgemental, my unwellness doesn't only affect me it affects my wider whānau but most importantly they recommended just being there present made a big difference. I didn't feel alone knowing someone was there and I felt encouraged to find wellness.

On a personal level this project created a tsunami of emotions that lead to the decision to write the thesis from the heart and focus on the stories of whānau. A pūrākau and kaupapa Māori approach enabled this to happen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research for this thesis has been five years in the making. The driving force behind this research has been our father, grandfather, great grandfather, great great grandfather, kaumātua and respected elder Rupene Mare. His openness to share his experiences of mental illness publically through conferences, workshops, media and television is awe inspiring opening the door to many people coming forth and declaring their own unwellness and sharing their own stories. Other whānau members also experiencing similar unwellness shared their experiences privately therefore this research will be their first public acknowledgement of their unwellness.

A barrier for the researcher was researching her own whānau and the ability to keep boundaries. It was difficult hearing the traumatic moments of a whānau member's life with a sense of helplessness and "why was I not there to help or support that whānau member during those difficult times". What came out of the research was an innate 'knowing' of each individual whānau member in a deeper and more meaningful way. The researcher felt an intense sense of obligation to ensure that if there are further experiences of unwellness for whānau participants she would 'be there' for them in whatever context that looked like.

Acknowledgements go far and wide but first to Io Matua Kore, God and tupuna who were with me during my own moments of unwellness ensuring in some way I would complete this research.

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What is important to note in this research is that the stories given by whānau participants are a tāonga given to be shared and passed down to future generations.

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