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Rebuilding lives: Intimate partner violence and Kiribati mothers in New Zealand

A Cooperative Inquiry

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Social Work
Massey University Auckland, New Zealand

Lydia Ietaake Teatao
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Abstract
This study explores strategies to rebuild lives as a result of intimate partner violence experienced by Kiribati migrant mothers in New Zealand through cooperative inquiry. Cooperative inquiry is a modality of participatory action research (PAR) based on people examining their own experience and action with those who share the same life experiences (Heron, 1996). It is also concerned with re-visualizing understanding of the world as well as transforming practice within it. As a result of working through an agreed set of actions, this process has empowered personal strength and courage for all those who took part, including myself.

The method of cooperative inquiry is to be both a researcher and a participant and it does research with people but not on people. It is not about confirming or validating previous theories or hypotheses. It is about being deeply engaged with the human situation and inquiry initiated on a common interest shared by the group of participants.

All participants, including the researcher, were Kiribati migrant mothers who have been violence free for at least two years. We all worked together as co-participants in this research project. The inquiry was underpinned by the Pacific Framework _Talanoa_ with the Kiribati cultural context, aided by _Te Itera_ model designed by the author.

Key results are significant as they venture to restore and strengthen intimate partner relationships for Kiribati families residing in New Zealand. It contributes knowledge to social agency interventions regarding Kiribati families and their children and provides insights to future immigrants to New Zealand. Research participants also suggest that through being involved in a genuine research, they developed strength and courage commitment within their own extended families, communities and social connections in increasing awareness and education to alleviate intimate partner violence specifically targeting young families.
Dedication

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my dearest loving mother Teuea Florence Tamaroa and darling father Charles Lono Tokataake who passed away long before I did this study.

Mama, you constantly reminded me that violence is not okay for me and for the wellbeing of my children. It had always been your wish that I should do something about it. Papa, I thank you for being a non-violent husband to our mother and a kind hearted father to your children. With your advice and guidance, you have moulded me into a strong and resilient woman. You are both forever remembered and treasured in my heart.

A dedication also goes to my one and only brother, Teken Tokataake and caring wife Irima who have been there for me during the ups and downs of my relationship. You have always provided a supportive and safe haven for me and my children, and a loving violence free home for your own family. Rosie and Mereue, the sisters that have shared the pain and love with me in my journey as a mother and wife, may you shed no more tears.

To all the mothers and wives who are devoted to transform their family life for good, this work is for you.
Acknowledgement

This study has been a process of cooperation that would not have completed without the contributions and support of many people. With humbleness, I would like to thank the following people:

John Heron, it is an honour and privilege to have met you and gained your wisdom and knowledge around cooperative inquiry. Your word of advice that ‘my community needs my facilitation skills’ has empowered me to successfully celebrate the joy of working collaboratively with the Kiribati women in this project.

My deepest gratitude is to Massey University for allowing me to complete my thesis with your Institution. A very special thank you to my wonderful supervisor, Associate Professor Ksenija Napan for your strong support in making sure that transferring to Massey University did happen. Both you and Dr. Shirley Jülich have been staunchly beside me in the writing of this thesis. The advice I have received has been insightful and the encouragement unflagging. I could not have wished for better supervision. Dr. Fotu Fisi’iahi, thank you for having an interest in my topic and for taking the role of co-supervising me in the earlier stages when formulating this thesis at the Unitec Institute of Technology.

Thank you ‘Iosis Limited’ for allowing me to take study leave to focus on my writing. Appreciation also goes to my work colleagues, Team leader and my Social-work team for your continuous encouragement, support and kindness when I needed time to complete this thesis.

A special thanks to Linda Grigg for your keenest support in promoting my research in the local papers with the aim to fundraise for the project. Although there were no funds collected, I received flattering remarks from the community especially from the women.

To Karen Smith, thank you for your skill of proof-reading and editing. You are my great friend, great colleague and great inspirer. Thank you Marian Kane and Anne McClelland for all the kind support you offered.
My acknowledgement also goes to the advisory committee that has been backing me along the way with knowledge and cultural competence in ensuring this research is carried out in accordance with the Kiribati ethos. I am grateful for your dedication. Thank you.

Thank you Sangeeta, Terara, Baretoka, Mark, nieces and nephews for inspiring me along the way. Kastin, Andrena and Enali your innocent presence around me inspire me more to focus on this piece of work. To the families in Kiribati, thank you for your continuous support and love. I am forever grateful. To the many friends and families who cheered me on, thank you so much.

An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to my beloved amazing children James, Mateata and Remiataake who have been part of my journey as a family. Thank you for being patient in tough times. Thank you too for supporting and encouraging me to do this study. You are the precious gifts of my life and I love you dearly.

In particular, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my dear companion, friend and spouse Ietaake Teatao who never faltered in his support for my academic pursuits. Your faith in my ability to complete this work never wavered. Thank you for who you are. Your weaknesses are my strengths. Your strengths are my pride!

Last but not least, to the magnificent, strong and beautiful Kiribati women who participated in this study, it is an honour to have shared our life stories together in rebuilding and restoring our family lives after living with the act of violence with our children. This thesis could not have been possible without your contribution. I would also like to acknowledge your husbands and children for their support in our adventure in the course of cooperative inquiry. May the blessings of Kiribati - Health, Peace, and Prosperity be with you all (Te Mauri, Te Raoi ao Te Tabomoa iaomi ni bane). Thank you very much (Kam bati n rabwa).
Prologue

I was in my second year of a social work degree at Whitireia Polytechnic in Wellington when I felt able to seek help for my own violent relationship. I migrated from Kiribati in 2006 with my three children who at the time were aged 16, 13 and 10 through the Pacific Access Category (PAC) scheme to join my husband. My husband had moved to New Zealand in 2004 to undertake his second class marine engineer studies and stayed on as a result of the PAC.

I was unaware of the domestic violence support available in New Zealand. Even when I did learn about it, like many women, I remained fearful of what would happen to my family if I reported my husband. No-one had told us when we came to New Zealand that we could seek help through social services or the police. We just kept the ways we practised before. When I finally reported the violent incidents that had occurred in New Zealand, I realised the authorities accepted me and were supportive. My husband attended counselling which I believe has changed and renewed our life.

The concept of this inquiry came about when I learnt that some members of my Kiribati community ostracised me for the fact that I took legal action against my husband for physically abusing me. I believe that I am the first Kiribati woman in New Zealand to report domestic violence, a move that took considerable courage for me and my children.

The uniqueness and characteristics of intimate partner violence in Kiribati are not a result of colonisation or poverty but its patriarchal system. It is regarded as a cultural practice. The patriarchal system still exists in the Kiribati society where women are considered inferior to men with minimal recognition of female abilities, for example, no woman goes against men’s decisions. This prospect immensely challenges my role as an active member of the Auckland Kiribati Society in New Zealand.

As a community social work practitioner working at a Non-Government Christian Social Service Organisation in South Auckland called Iosis, I embedded a desire to do this project. This personal interest has strongly supported the progress of this study and significantly has been both a journey of exploration with Kiribati mothers and academic inquiry.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii
Dedication iii
Acknowledgement iv
Prologue vi
Table of contents vii
List of (Figures and Tables) xi
List of Definitions xii
List of Abbreviations xiii
Kiribati on the map xiv
Quote for thesis xv

**Chapter 1 – Introduction**

1
Benefit and value of this research 2
Methodological issues 2
Issues encountered prior to the inquiry process 3
Report structure 4

**Chapter 2 – Background**

5
Introduction 5
Where on earth is Kiribati? 6
Cultural importance and how it is constructed in the Kiribati society 7
The Four phases of human development in Kiribati 8
   *Tetei or Ataei* (New born to young children) 8
   *Te Kairake or Lentaboniba* (Adolescent and young adult) 9
   *Te Rorobuaka or Bouanikaua* (Middle aged mature man) 10
   *Te Unimwane or Batua* (Village Male elder/Old man) 10
Kiribati – the sinking nation 12
Kiribati migration 13
Kiribati and New Zealand 13
I-Kiribati in New Zealand 14

**Chapter 3 - Literature Review**

15
Introduction 15
Intimate partner violence (IPV) 16
IPV – Kiribati context 17
Cooperative inquiry proceeded deeper 62
Our IPV experiences in Kiribati and in New Zealand 63
The Change – Courage versus culture and our coping abilities 67
Personal transformation that encourages change in a family 71
Invaluable commitment to ease IPV 72
The flyer - a strategy to help families 73
Ending the inquiry – A way forward 77
Three months follow up meeting 78
Reflections from the whole process of the inquiry 79

Chapter 7 - Inquiry Outcomes, Critical or Reflective Analysis 81
Introduction 81
Transformative outcomes 81
Propositional outcomes 82
Presentational outcomes 84
Practical outcomes 85
Other outcomes – Participants feedback from the questionnaire 86
Critical or Reflective Analysis 87

Chapter 8 - Validity: Reflections on the quality of the inquiry 91
Introduction 91
Research cycling 91
Divergence and Convergence 92
Challenging Uncritical Subjectivity 92
Addressing Chaos and Order 93
Managing Unaware Projections 93
Sustaining Authentic Collaboration 94
Challenges when using cooperative inquiry 96

Chapter 9 - Conclusion 97
Recommendations 99

References 101

Appendices
1 Massey University enrolment confirmation 112
2 Massey University’s acceptance of Unitec Ethical approval 114
3 Authorisation to begin Research 115
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Information for participants</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a</td>
<td>Information for participants – Kiribati version</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Participants Consent Form</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>Participants consent form – Kiribati version</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Inquiry session plan</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Participants’ background information sheet</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Follow up meeting questionnaire</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>Follow up meeting questionnaire – Kiribati version</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Flyer</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of (Figures and Tables)

Figure 1 Kiribati location in the Pacific region
Figure 2 Closer image of the Kiribati territory
Figure 3 Layout of Kiribati territories in the Pacific Ocean
Figure 4 The inside of Te Mwaneaba
Figure 5 Four-fold knowing
Figure 6 Spiral of cooperative inquiry
Figure 7 Village matai meet inside a fale
Figure 8 The Kiribati special flower head wreath
Figure 9 Te Itera is carefully weaved
Figure 10 Te Itera in its completed form
Figure 11 Te Katoka Bau dance inside a contemporary mwaneaba
Figure 12 I-Kiribati girl presents a traditional garland to Commodore, Task Force Forager Capt. James Meyer during a ribbon cutting ceremony in Tarawa
Figure 13 Selecton plan for participants
Figure 14 Outcome of participants’ recruitment
Table 1 Participants’ demographic information
Figure 16 Factors that contribute to IPV
Figure 17 Underlie factors that contribute to IPV
Figure 18 Common strategies shared by women in the inquiry groups
Figure 19 Overview of the process women in the inquiry group engaged with
### List of Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ataei</td>
<td>Babies or Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batua</td>
<td>Old men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibiran te Itera</td>
<td>The weaving of a flower head wreath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouanikaua</td>
<td>Middle aged mature man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowii</td>
<td>The getting together of people formally to talk or discuss for specific reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fale</td>
<td>Samoan name for house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ientaboniba</td>
<td>Adolescent and young adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ifoga</td>
<td>Samoan way of formal apology in serious matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Kiribati</td>
<td>A person from Kiribati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matai</td>
<td>Chiefly title of the Samoans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noa</td>
<td>Without thought or no value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwaneaba</td>
<td>A meeting house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taan bibiri</td>
<td>Weavers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takataka</td>
<td>Dried coconut flesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tala</td>
<td>To talk/discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talanoa</td>
<td>Talk or discuss, a Pacific research framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>Te</td>
<td>The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te bibiri</td>
<td>Weaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Itera</td>
<td>A flower head wreath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Kairake</td>
<td>see ‘Ientaboniba’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Katei ni Kiribati</td>
<td>The Kiribati culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Katoka Bau</td>
<td>The presentation of a flower head wreath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Kaunganano nakon te Utu</td>
<td>Empowering families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Mwaneaba</td>
<td>The Kiribati meeting house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Rikia ni Kiribati</td>
<td>The Kiribati way of life or rationale way of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Rorobuaka</td>
<td>See ‘Bouanikaua’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Unimwane</td>
<td>See ‘Batua’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetei</td>
<td>A baby or a child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuae</td>
<td>Dried pandanus fruit syrup</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Abbreviations

IPV – Intimate Partner violence
KPC – Kiribati Protestant Church
KUC – Kiribati Uniting Church
NZVAW – Violence against women in New Zealand study
PAR – Participatory Action Research
RC – Roman Catholic
RSE – Recognised Seasonal Employer
SPC – South Pacific Commission
Kiribati on the map

Figure 1: Kiribati location in the Pacific region (Worldatlas, 2015).

Figure 2: Closer image of the Kiribati territory (Search For One, 2015).
“The Mother is the heartbeat of the family. If you take care of her, Everyone does well”
(Dowd, 2008, para. 4).