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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

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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.

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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.

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List of Definitions

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

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).

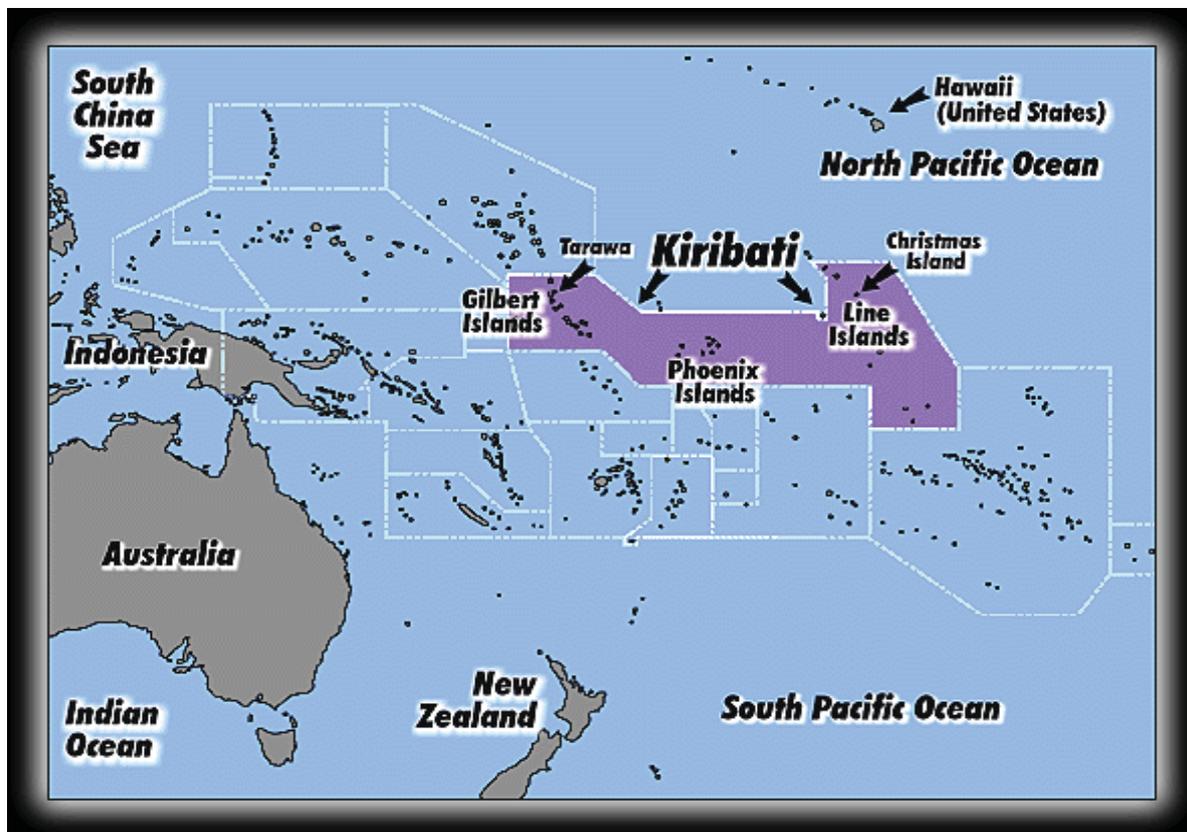


Figure 2: Closer image of the Kiribati territory (Search For One, 2015).

**“The Mother is the heartbeat of the
family. If you take care of her,
Everyone does well”
(Dowd, 2008, para. 4).**