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A Case Study for Helping to Prevent Postnatal
Depression:
Towards a Cultural Tool for Maori Women

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A thesis presented for the Masters Degree of Philosophy
Massey University,
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November 2005

ABSTRACT

Postnatal depression is a depressive illness that affects 10-20% of all women. However, in societies with strong kin-based support structures and where customs and rituals are integral to everyday life, there is a very low incidence of postnatal depression. Indeed, there is little mention of depression in pregnancy and motherhood within traditional Maori society. Today, through the impact of colonisation, Maori women live in a very different world to that of their ancestors. The dissolution of the whanau structure, the loss of Te Reo and customs, the increase of solo-parent families and families living in poverty, the effects of drug and alcohol abuse and the increase in family violence mean that Maori women are more likely to suffer from depressive and anxiety based illness than non-Maori. Despite this statistic, there has been very little research conducted around Maori women and maternal mental health.

This research attempts to identify the key issues that affect Maori women during pregnancy and motherhood and which impact on their maternal mental health. It also provides a critical analysis of the efficacy of current maternal mental health services, treatment and tools in meeting the needs of Maori women. Finally, these insights provide the basis for recommendations to improve maternal mental health services for Maori women and principles to guide the development of a tool to help prevent postnatal depression in Maori women. Ultimately this research is about realigning our thinking about working with Maori women and maternal health. The focus is on providing services, tools and an environment that is collaborative and draws on a range of resources to help Maori mothers succeed in all areas of their life, validating the use of cultural rituals, customs and practices within service provision. There is also a need to conduct research that recognises the diverse circumstances and needs of Maori women and that draws on Kaupapa Maori epistemology and paradigms to inform the research. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this research clearly illustrates the importance of strong whanau structures and systems and the need to provide a society that allows Maori women to benefit from the support of friends and family, regardless of how that 'whanau' is defined.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is the product of the support, love and guidance from a number of people.

Thanks to the Health Research Council for their belief and support in the relevance and value of my research to Maori health research and New Zealand society.

To the participants in this project, thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences. This work is a tribute to you all. It is my hope that your experiences will resonate within the wider community, both Maori and non-Maori, and move our society to improve maternal health services for Maori mothers.

To Te Rau Puawai for supporting me back into postgraduate study, for recognizing my potential and indeed the potential of all Maori students. To the Te Rau Matatini team, for allowing me to learn from the expertise of your roopu and encouraging me to pursue the research path. To Kieran and Wheturangi – thanks for never giving up. Nga mihi.

To my whanau: Your support has been the only thing that has kept me going through the hard times, when you believe that you will never reach the end and question why you began in the first place. To my parents in particular – who have always believed in me and the value of my chosen path.

To my friends, this journey has really taught me the value of good friends, friends that really had little interest in my academic work, but were completely devoted to ensuring I had fun.

Ki a Wararahi me oku tamariki, i whakaakotia e koutou katoa i ahau nga akonga teitei ake ki nga akonga a pukapuka, a rangahau ranei.

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GLOSSARY

This glossary contains those Maori words used throughout the thesis that are not defined in the text.

Aroha	-	love	Tapu	-	sacred
Hapu	-	subtribe, pregnant	Tamariki	-	children
Hoha	-	nuisance	Teko	-	excrement
Iwi	-	tribe	Tikanga	-	customs
Kai	-	food	Tohunga	-	expert
Kaimoana	-	seafood	Wahine	-	woman
Karakia	-	prayer	Waiata	-	songs
Karanga	-	call	Wananga	-	learning
Kaumatua	-	elders	Whanau	-	family
Kohanga	-	learning nest	Whakapapa	-	genealogy
Kuia	-	elderly woman			
Mahi	-	work			
Marae	-	meeting area			
Mirimiri	-	massage			
Mokopuna	-	grandchildren			
Noa	-	profane			
Poho	-	chest			