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"He Tapu te Whare Tangata"

Support for Young Maori Mothers During Pregnancy, Birth and Motherhood

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

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is to explore the experiences of six young Maori mothers as they perceive them, in particular looking at their experiences of support or lack of it during pregnancy, birth and motherhood. Research shows that extra social support improves the experience of pregnancy, delivery and early motherhood (Oakley, 1992) but also that there is a lack of support often felt at times in the lives of mothers. Little is known, in a formal sense, of young Maori mothers' experiences of support and this research aims to understand and make sense of these experiences.

The study also uses an holistic Maori perspective which relates the health and wellbeing of Maori society to historical, structural and cultural factors in an attempt to explain or make links with the present experiences of young Maori mothers. Issues that affect support of Maori women including colonisation and the breakdown of whanau, hapu, iwi, are explored. The impact these factors have had on Maori women are discussed and establish a setting from which the lives of the women can be viewed. The research grew from work with young mothers in the community and aims to empower those involved and collectively negotiate theory. For this reason a qualitative approach is used in the form of in-depth, open ended interviews and hui.

The main findings are that the first pregnancy was an extremely difficult time for the women and was often characterised by a lack of emotional support from partners and often family, combined with a lack of material resources and support. The study showed the special need of support for teenage mothers because of their often disadvantaged or impoverished material circumstances. It also showed that extended whanau support was often used especially after the birth of the baby, however judgemental attitudes got in the way of helping. Though informal support was preferred, community support was also helpful, especially for those who did not have a lot of assistance from whanau.

The women's place in their whanau, culture and society showed the impact of a number of macro-social processes such as colonisation, assimilation and urbanisation which had

resulted in the loss of Maori culture and the low socio-economic position of many of the women and their whanu. The study showed the great stress that is often placed on whanau who are often confined to a low socio-economic status and have few resources. The strength and maturity of the women, however, was a positive outcome of the hardship and difficult circumstances they experienced.

The conclusions for policy and practise are that there is a necessity for information, advocacy and many kinds of support for young Maori mothers which needs to be offered in a caring and non-judgemental manner.

Dedication

To my sister Rebecca Rawinia Tuhi
who applies herself to learning
about the ways of our tipuna
for the benefit of the whanau

and who strives to follow in the footsteps of our Dad
who showed love and concern for his Maori people

Taku teina, Kia kaha i roto i to mahi,
Whai tonu te matauranga a kui ma, a koro ma,
Pupuri tonu i nga kupu tapu a te Atua
hei oranga mau.

"We need to actively honour, to celebrate the contributions, and affirm the mana of Maori women: those tipuna wahine who have gone before us; those wahine toa who give strength to our culture and people today; and those kotiro and mokopuna who are being born now, and who will be born in the future, to fulfil our dreams"

Irwin, 1992: 1

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii

Dedication iv

Acknowledgements v

Table of Contents vi

List of Tables and List of Figures x

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON SOCIAL SUPPORT 7

2.1 Conceptual Definitions 7
2.2 Clarifications of Types of Support 9
2.3 Relationship of Stress to Support 9
2.4 Social Support as a Moderator of Stress 11
2.5 What Kind of Support Works? 12
2.6 Transition to Parenthood 14
2.7 Relationship of Support to Parenting 15
2.8 Partner Support 16
2.9 Formal Community Support 16
2.10 Class and Gender Differentials in the Effects of Social Support 19
2.11 Without Support 20
2.12 Lack of Partner Support 21
2.13 The Experience of Teenage Mothers 21
2.14 The Traditional Ideology of Motherhood 22
2.15 Aotearoa/New Zealand Research 23
2.16 Summary 28

CHAPTER THREE: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON MAORI PERSPECTIVES AND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG MAORI MOTHERS 32

3.1 Maori Definitions of Health 33
3.2 Breakdown and Isolation of Whanau 35
3.3 Urbanisation 36
3.4 Theory of Colonisation 38

3.5	Treaty of Waitangi	39
3.6	The Impact on Maori Women	41
3.7	Statistical Profile of Maori Women in Aotearoa/New Zealand	43
3.8	Demographic/Population Profile	44
3.9	Fertility	44
3.10	Maori Teenage Fertility	46
3.11	Risks or Consequences of Socio-Economic Disadvantage?	47
3.12	Maori Families	49
3.13	Education	50
3.14	Summary	51

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1	Theoretical Orientations of the Researcher	56
4.2	Specific Research Procedures	58
4.3	The Research Sample	62
4.4	Feelings About Being Interviewed	65
4.5	Ethical Issues	65
4.6	Limitations of the Study	67

CHAPTER FIVE: EXPERIENCES AND SUPPORT IN PREGNANCY, BIRTH AND MOTHERHOOD

5.1	Description of the Participants	69
5.2	The Experience of Having a Child at a Young Age	69
5.3	Circumstances Surrounding the Pregnancy	71
5.4	Being a Young Mother	75
5.5	Sources of Support During Pregnancy, Birth and Motherhood	77
	5.5.1 Support During Pregnancy	77
	5.5.2 Support During the Birth and Immediately Afterwards	78
	5.5.3 Support After Birth and in the Pre-School Years	79
	5.5.4 Support From Partners	80
5.6	Source of Support Most Valued	80
5.7	How the Women Felt Supported During Each Stage	81
	5.7.1 Types of Support Given During Pregnancy	81
	5.7.2 Types of Support During Birth	82
	5.7.3 Types of Support During Motherhood	82
	5.7.4 A Combined List of Types of Support	83
	5.7.5 Support in Specific Situations	86
5.8	Lack of Support	89
5.9	Stressful Experiences Surrounding Pregnancy, Birth and Motherhood	91
5.10	Partner's Involvement with the Child(ren)	93

5.11 The Impact of a Lack of Support on the Women's Lives 94
5.11.1 Positive Outcomes for the Women 95
5.11.2 Coping 96
5.12 Needs 98
5.13 Other Circumstances and Issues of Importance 99
5.13.1 Being on a Benefit 99
5.13.2 Jobs/Education 101
5.14 Views of Being a Mother 102
5.15 Summary 103

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS ON COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND CULTURAL IDENTITY 105

6.1 Part One: Community Support 105
6.1.1 How Was Support Shown 107
6.1.2 Use of Health Practitioners and Ante-Natal Classes in the First Pregnancy 112
6.1.3 The Appropriateness of Services 113
6.1.4 The Women's Feelings About the Community in Which They Live 115
6.1.5 Summary of Part One on Community Support 116
6.2 Part Two: The Place of Maoritanga in the Women's Lives 117
6.2.1 Cultural Identity 117
6.2.2 Whanau 120
6.2.3 Marae 121
6.2.4 Whakapapa 122
6.2.5 Te Reo Maori 123
6.2.6 Cultural Heritage 125
6.2.7 Influence of Pakeha Culture 126
6.2.8 Identity as a Maori Woman 127
6.2.9 Nga Tikanga 131
6.2.10 Summary of Part Two 131

CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION 133

7.1 Sources of Support Received 133
7.2 Types of Support 138
7.3 Experiences of Being a Mother - the Need for Support 139
7.3.1 Unplanned Pregnancies 139
7.3.2 Interrupting Education 139
7.4 Extremely Difficult Circumstances Surrounding Pregnancy 140
7.5 Impact of a Lack of Support 146
7.6 Isolation 148

7.7 Negative Outcomes of Teenage Parenting 149
7.8 Positive Outcomes 151
7.9 Views of Maori Identity and Place in Maori Culture and Society and its Relation to Support 151
7.9.1 The Relationship of Cultural Identity to Support of the Women in this Study 156

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 162

8.1 Conclusions to Research Questions 162
8.2 Discussion of Conclusions in Relation to the Literature 165
8.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Research Method/Process 167
8.4 Further Research 169
8.5 What Can We Learn: Application to Social Work Structures and Agency Programmes, Methods and Techniques 169

REFERENCES 175

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1	Sources of Support During Pregnancy, Birth and Afterward	78
Table 5.2	How Family Support Was Shown	84
Table 5.3	How Friends and Neighbours Showed Support	84
Table 5.4	How Community Support Was Shown	85
Table 6.1	Sources of Support from the Community	106
Table 6.2	Feelings of Connectedness to or Isolation from Aspects of Maori Society	119

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 6.1	Putangitangi - a Model of Cultural Identity	106
Figure 7.1	Place in New Zealand Society, Maori Culture and Whanau	157