

Fofola e Fala ka e Talanoa e Kainga: A Tongan approach to family violence prevention and intervention

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Abstract

There is limited knowledge of how Pacific-indigenous approaches can aid efforts to curtail violence within the *kainga* (families). This article documents aspects of the inaugural application of the Tongan conceptual framework of *Fofola e fala ka e talanoa e kainga* (laying out the mat so families can dialogue) as part of the faith-based *Kainga Tu'umalie* (prosperous families) family violence intervention and prevention program in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Fofola e fala* symbolizes a place of safety and refuge for every member of the *kainga* to freely express their feelings. The first two authors were involved in evaluating the program with the first author engaged in direct observations and being immersed in *Kainga Tu'umalie* retreats. Given their depth of cultural knowledge and involvement in the development of this program, seven faith-based community leaders were engaged in *talanoa* (Pacific-indigenous way of dialogue and discussion). Participant accounts form the core basis of our analysis, which highlights the significance of *Kainga Tu'umalie* as a violence prevention program for Tongan families. Of key consideration is the importance of Tongan-indigenous approaches to reducing family violence that draw from a combination of traditional cultural knowledge and Christian values that are central to the realities of being Tongan today.

Keywords

family violence, Tongan indigenous approaches, Christian faith-based intervention programs, Pacific cultures, prevention/intervention programs

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Family violence is a pressing social issue among Pacific peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. Such violence has been linked to gender-role expectations, economic inequalities, the loss of cultural ties, and alcohol and drug misuse (Ministry of Social Development, 2012; The Tongan Working Group, 2012). According to the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse (2016), Pacific peoples are more likely to commit a serious offence against a family member than other ethnic groups. Additionally, Pacific children are more prone to experiencing physical punishment in their homes. It has been argued that these trends reflect ongoing challenges experienced by many Pacific peoples in New Zealand with socioeconomic deprivation, cultural exclusion, and stresses associated with migration to a very different social system (Grainger, 2009; Koloto & Sharma, 2005; Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005).

Within the context of this article, family violence refers to any form of physical, spiritual, psychological, or sexual violence dishonoring the balanced relationships within the *kainga* (families). Any form of such violence is understood culturally as a violation or disruption to the harmonious relationships needed for wellness among Pacific people (NZ Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2016; Rankine et al., 2015).

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We argue that to be effective in addressing family violence for Tongan communities, it is important that Tongan cultural perspectives and gendered relationships are taken into account. This is important because interventions based on Eurocentric notions of the nuclear family also obscure Tongan ways of being and conducting family life that can inform responses to family violence. For example, Tongan culture contains complex gender relations where men and women hold differing roles subject to their cultural roles and rank. Tongan social structure is constructed along a hierarchical system of *Ha'atu'i* (royalty) at the top of the pyramid, followed by the *Hou'eiki* (nobles) and then *Kau tu'a* (commoners) (James, 1990, 2003). At the heart of this social framework is the significance of *kainga* relationships and ties (Agnew et al., 2004; Helu, 1999). Everyday family roles for Tongan people transcend the nuclear household and include the actions of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and so forth. These are key roles held within the *kainga* that mobilize these extended familial relationships and associated obligations of care and mutual respect.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Tongan social structures are complex. This figure presents a simplified version of *kainga* (family) relationships. The *tamai* (father—as depicted in the second-generation family 2) is considered to be the head of his family and it is customary for this man to also care for his sister and her children. Consequently, one's *fa'etangata* or maternal uncles (MS1 & MS2) are considered lower in ranking because of their obligation to their sisters and their children. Conversely, one's paternal aunts (PD1 & PD2) are the highest-ranking family members. These aunts occupy positions of privilege and honor and are referred to as *mehikitanga* or *fahu* (Helu, 1995; James, 2003). The other important dynamic within *kainga* relationships is all maternal aunts (MD1 & MD2) are referred to as *fa'e* (mother), similarly paternal uncles (PS1-PS4) are called *tamai* (father). The cousins on either side of the family are referred to as brothers

(*tokoua/tuonga'ane*) (2F1S1–2F1S3 & 2F3S1–2F3S2) and sisters (*tokoua/tuofefine*) (2F1D1 & 2F3D1–2F3D1). Likewise, for women their sisters' children (2F3D1–2F3D2) are called their children (*fanau*) also because they are considered as mothers to them. The same applies for men, and their brothers' children (2F1S1–2F1D1) will refer to them as a father (Helu, 1999; Kaeppler, 1971). Thus, the implication is that the ultimate responsibility for family violence and efforts to resolve it fall on all members of *kainga*.

Relationships within the *kainga* (family) hierarchy are fundamental to the worldview shared by Tongan people and need to be incorporated within family violence programs. Further, prevention and intervention programs developed within a Eurocentric and individualized model of practice typically only extend to the nuclear family. Such programs are problematic from a Tongan perspective because they can obscure the more collectivist and broader understandings of family that still shape everyday life in Tongan and Pacific communities more generally (Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004; Rankine et al., 2015). For example, the Duluth model of power and control (the violence wheel) is the most commonly used model in New Zealand for screening for and addressing domestic violence cases (Pence & Paymar, 1993). The individualistic assumptions of the wheel are evident in how both victims and abusers are represented devoid of the broader family structures (*kainga*) within which they relate to one another (Mafile'o, 2004; Rankine et al., 2015). The involvement of the *kainga* and related Christian congregation is vital in violence interventions for most Tongan families because it invokes meaningful relationships that often serve as a shield of protection, accountability, support, and positive change for families experiencing violence (Alefaio, 2009; Beautrais, Collings, Ehrhardt, & Henare, 2005; Ellison, Trinitapoli, Anderson, & Johnson, 2007).

Another key reason why orthodox family violence programs often prove ineffective for Pacific

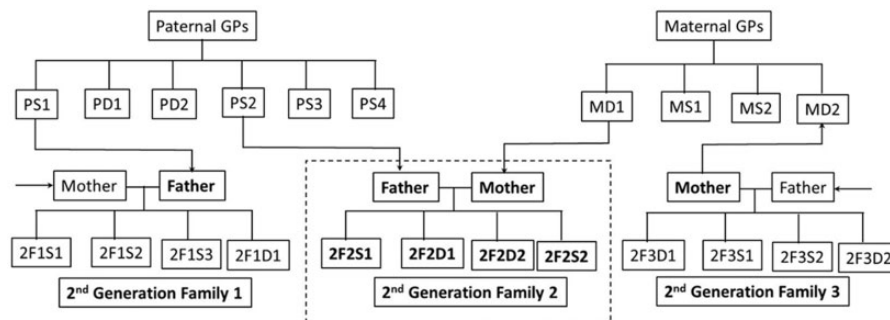


Figure 1 *Kainga* Tonga (Tongan families) social structure.

Note: GP = grandparents, P = paternal, M = maternal, S = son, D = daughter, 2F = second-generation family; all other numbers denote the ranking, e.g. 2F3D2 = second-generation family 3, daughter no. 2.

communities is that Pacific peoples' understandings of violence also emphasize spiritual dimensions that are often purged from Eurocentric initiatives (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2016; Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016). Further, orthodox models for family violence tend to reduce family violence to a dysfunctional pattern of individual behavior used to control victims (Ministry of Social Development, 2012; Rankine et al., 2015; Zellerer, 2003). Violence for Pacific peoples is also constructed as constituting a form of defilement of *tauhi va* (the sacred boundaries of relationships) that fragments families and can lead to disengagements by victims, offenders, and their *kainga* (families). Moreover, the centrality of church communities to the everyday lives of many Pacific peoples and their well-being necessitates engagements with spiritual considerations (Havea, 2011; Ihara & Vakalahi, 2011).

The role of the church and Christianity in contemporary Tongan culture is a central concern. This is because Christian faith and Tongan indigenous understanding have evolved together to become so intertwined within everyday cultural life that they are inseparable and are now twine pillars of contemporary Tongan ways of being (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2016; Havea, 2011). As Pacific academics we still have a long way to go in unpacking, articulating, and documenting what Christianity means for not only Tongans, but also more broadly for Pacific cultures. What is clearly evident is that we cannot ignore the potential of Christian faith as a central element in efforts to address family violence. Further, because Christian churches constitute the indispensable soul of Tongan culture today (Halapua, 1997; Havea, 2011), the influence of faith leaders in Tongan communities provides the platform to explore how faith-based strategies within a Tongan cultural framework can extend our knowledge of and responses to family violence. It makes a lot of sense culturally and practically to draw on the capacities of families and church communities to develop and deliver programs that have positive impacts for the Tongan *kainga* (families) (Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016).

Despite the paucity of research on the impact of faith-based responses to Tongan and Pacific family violence, the international literature highlights the importance of such initiatives for faith-based communities. Previous research has demonstrated both positive and negative results from faith-based interventions (Aten, McMinn, & Worthington Jr, 2011; Kaybryn & Nidadavolu, 2012; Le Roux, 2015; Zust, Flicek, Moses, Schubert, & Timmerman, 2018). Previous studies show that increased participation in faith-based communities not only provides strength, resilience, healing, and wholeness, but also can protect against and prevent the incidence of family violence (Ellison et al., 2007; Nason-Clark, 2009). Collaboration between community service

agencies and faith-based organizations has also demonstrated positive impacts in reducing family violence (Johnson, 2015; Wang, Horne, Levitt, & Klesges, 2009). Conversely, other studies have shown that the relationship between faith and violence can be paradoxical, offering both solutions to and, in some cases, exacerbating violence (Petersen, 2016; Zust et al., 2018). Although faith-based organizations are a source of emotional comfort and practical support, they may also perpetuate silence. Further, some communities are ill equipped in terms of resources and may not have the capacity and capability to respond appropriately to family violence (Nason-Clark, 2004; Pyles, 2007; Zust et al., 2018).

This article reflects on the design and implementation of a Tongan-indigenous faith-based approach for the resolution of family violence amongst Tongan families. Our specific focus is on the utilization of the Tongan framework of *Fofola e fala ka e talanoa e kainga* (laying out the mat for the families to dialogue) as practiced within the Affirming Work's *Kainga Tu'umalie* (prosperous families) family violence prevention program. This program was developed through an initial partnership between the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development (2012) and Pacific communities. This partnership resulted in the development of ethnic-specific conceptual frameworks for addressing family violence, including *Fofola e fala* for the Tongan community (The Tongan Working Group, 2012). More specifically, we will consider how the program centralizes the creation of a safe liminal space (Watkins & Shulman, 2008) on the mat that allows *kainga* (families) to collaboratively deal with the violence and negotiate a violence-free future. We consider how time on the *fala* (mat) together as a *kainga* (family) can produce a platform for the enactment of reciprocal trust (*fefalala'aki*), love (*'ofa*), humility (*angafakatokilalo*), and emotional connectedness (*feongo'i'aki*) that is important for addressing issues of family violence within Tongan communities.

The present study: Affirming Works (AW) *Kainga Tu'umalie* program

This research explores the Tongan indigenous concept of *Fofola e fala ka e talanoa e kainga* (as depicted in Figure 2) used within the Affirming Works *Kainga Tu'umalie* (prosperous families) program. The *Kainga Tu'umalie* program was developed as an Affirming Works (AW) church-partnership project for the prevention of and restoration from family violence within Tongan Christian churches. *Kainga Tu'umalie* metaphorically translates as prosperous families or prosperous souls. The concept invokes a holistic

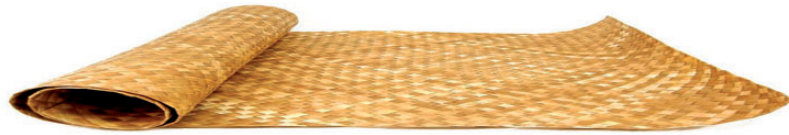


Figure 2 The Tongan mat as liminal space for familial engagements.

prosperity towards linking family, mind, body, soul, and spirit among Tongan people. Within the Tongan language, the concept of *Tu'umalie* (prosperity) can be interpreted as financial or material wealth. However, prosperity in this context surpasses material wealth and encompasses richness in ones' spiritual life that often manifests in strong and healthy relationships (*tauhi va*) with God and other human beings. The basis of the Affirming Works *Kainga Tu'umalie* program vision is the embracing of the existing interweaving of Christian faith within Tongan indigenous cultural knowledge. Adopting this cultural orientation, the program is designed to engage Tongan families in a holistic therapeutic environment immersed in Tongan cultural and spiritual faith.

Four Tongan churches and 49 families (equating to approximately 230 individuals) participated in the *Kainga Tu'umalie* program over four weekend retreats. The idea behind the retreat was to remove families from the stresses and pressures of everyday life and to provide a neutral and safe space where they could relax and enjoy themselves together. The retreat was intended to encourage receptiveness to learning more about and openness to share the highs and lows of family life. The retreat consists of both formal and informal interactions. The formal part involves workshop sessions facilitated by faith leaders addressing different topics, including biblical narratives, the implications of violence, and dreams of our forefathers. Families were introduced to this session through *Fofola e fala* and were challenged to *talanoa* about the impact and the outcomes of violence. The *kainga* are encouraged to lay out the mat and to discuss among themselves about the causes and effects of violence. In response, families literally sit on the "mat" in a round circle and collectively *talanoa* (dialogue). Afterwards each family provides feedback to the rest of the group. The figurative application of this framework had the effect of generating vibrant discussions where each family member had the freedom to share their thoughts and feelings. These were very raw, vulnerable, and highly emotional *talanoa* where tears of parental convictions of weaknesses and acknowledgement of areas for improvement and change were shed. There were also tears of joy and gratefulness for being part of the dialogue as well as laughter, and the singing of Tongan hymns of praise and worship. The informal

activities involved fun activities such as games, a movie, and sports, which allows *kainga* (families) to enjoy time together.

After the retreat there were follow-up sessions on topics that have been identified by the *kainga* for which they needed further support. The application of *Fofola e fala* was also used in these follow-up sessions. Families were encouraged to continue utilizing this Tongan approach in their home environments. Ongoing follow up support services were also put in place, depending on the needs of the families.

Correspondingly, we developed the culturally patterned research approach to documenting and interpreting this violence program, and integrating cultural processes of *talanoa* that extended to participatory immersion by the first author within the context of the program. A key dimension of the *talanoa* approach is the emphasis placed on maintaining healthy relationships, or *tauhi va* (sacred space) amongst *kainga*, communities and individuals. It is an approach underpinned by core Pacific cultural values of respect, humility, and reciprocity (Halapua, 2003; Morrison & Vaoleti, 2008). Linked to the *talanoa* process was the key role played by the researcher in fully participating, listening, observing, appreciating, and reflecting on the activities at the retreats. This is a form of "cultural-participatory immersion" designed to generate substantive knowledge of how the program works, its underlying cultural values, and impacts for *kainga* (Alefaio-Tugia and Havea, 2016). Cultural participation and immersion in the retreats was significant for not only gaining knowledge of the application of the model of *Fofola e fala*, but also for enacting effective engagement with faith leaders involved in the retreats.

In short, the researchers' immersion in the *Kainga Tu'umalie* retreats provided opportunities for *talanoa* (dialogue) and cultural collaboration with community and faith leaders and Tongan *matu'a* (elders), as well as participating families. Seven of the leaders involved in the program were further invited to *talanoa* about their experiences of the program. Six of the leaders' *talanoa* were conducted in the Tongan language and one in the English language. Another element that contributed to open and frank engagement with the seven faith leaders was the first author's position as a Tongan woman who can speak the language, as a daughter of a *Faifekau*

(church minister), and as a wife of another Tongan community and faith leader. Being an insider-researcher with cultural insights also allowed for respectful observance of cultural protocols such as appropriate attire, manner of speech, and the relevant approach to undertake with church and faith leaders. These seven *talanoa* are foundational to the present article. Future publications will explore the experiences of participating *kainga* (families).

More specifically, *talanoa* (dialogue) with faith leaders conducted in the Tongan language were digitally recorded, transcribed in the Tongan language, and then translated into English for analysis. The translated scripts were analyzed through repeated and reflective reading to highlight key themes, relevant Tongan concepts, and the Pacific cultural values at play in the program (Morse & Richards, 2002). The *Fa'afaletui* dialectical approach to qualitative analysis brought a Pacific-indigenous lens to the interpretation of the *talanoa* transcripts (Alefaio-Tugia, 2015). This approach follows the cultural logic of, and resonates with, *talanoa* where it involves collective dialogue with cultural *matu'a* (elders) to deepen knowledge and understanding of cultural concepts and key themes identified from the *talanoa*. In this way, the line between researcher and participant does become somewhat blurred in that participants are also involved in the interpretation of their *talanoa*.

The resulting analysis for this article focused on four primary themes that emerged from *talanoa* (Pacific-indigenous dialogue) and our own observations of the program in action. First, why *Fofola e fala* resonates with Tongan people. Second, seeing *Fofola e fala* as a “powerful and living platform” (*Makatu'unga mo'ui mo e malohi*) that provides a strong sense of faith, cultural identity, and hope for a violence-free life. Third, recognizing *Fofola e fala* as a “uniting concept,” or *Fa'utaha* as translated in the Tongan language, creating unity, peace, and harmony amongst *kainga* (families). Fourth, acknowledging the concept of *Fofola e fala* as signifying a place of safety or *Kolo malu* and refuge or *Kolo hufanga*. Like the *fala* (mat), these themes are interwoven and interdependent, creating a platform of peace, hope, and new life for violence-free families.

Fofola e fala (laying out the mat)

Fofola e fala is a model for how *kainga* (family) members can connect, engage meaningfully, and relate to each other. This model embodies the Tongan indigenous cultural worldview or *Anga Fakatonga*. The *fala* (Tongan mat) symbolizes *kainga*, a place of safety and neutral ground. The *feunu* (strands) that are weaved to make the *fala* signify the four golden pillars of the Tongan culture (*Anga Fakatonga*), which are: *Faka'apa'apa*

(respect), *angafakatokilalo* (humility), *tauhi va* (cultivating healthy relationships/reciprocity), and *mamahi'i me'a* (loyalty/passion) (The Tongan Working Group, 2012).

Central to *Fofola e fala* is the creation of liminal spaces (Watkins & Shulman, 2008) that can enable members of the *kainga* (families) to *talanoa* (discuss/talk) openly and honestly about their personal struggles, including the key issue of family violence. One of the faith leaders referred to *Fofola e fala* as the great equalizer:

If you think of the concept of *Fofola e fala* ... like everyone's the same. You know, whether you're the victim or you're the perpetrator, you're the same on the mat. Whether you're the contractor or the participant, whether you're the church leader or the member, everyone is the same on the *fala* ... (Tepola)

Effectively, the mat offers an intentional cultural enclave within which Tongan social hierarchical relations are suspended, though not totally absent, for a time. In the application of this cultural concept within the *Kainga Tu'umalie* program, the enactment of hierarchical social structure is discouraged so that every person has an opportunity to voice their concerns and to be heard—this includes children. An interesting dimension of *Fofola e fala* is that despite an embedded hierarchical social structure with some family members having more power and authority than others, on the *fala* everyone enters more egalitarian ground and acts accordingly in less hierarchical ways.

Correspondingly, one of the most significant aspects of the *Fofola e fala* is the promotion of genuine dialogue in a culturally textured liminal space where family members can experience “freedom of voice” in ways that also reflect fundamental Christian principles of human dignity and respect. Grace, redemption, healing, and restoration are also Christian principles that are embodied within this cultural framework and are enacted through practices of intervention to address family violence (Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016). Finally, the liminal space created retains respect for the sanctity of Tongan familial relations, respect for your elders, and respect for your parents whilst working together to address family violence and to prevent it from occurring in the future.

This section has presented the use of *Fofola e fala* as being central to the creation and opening up of a culturally patterned liminal space for addressing family violence. In the following section, we extend this exploration to consider the functioning of this space as a powerful and living platform where embedded cultural ways of being and relating as Tongan people are

realized and a strong sense of connection can be shared in addressing violence in a culturally patterned manner.

Koe Makatu'unga Mo'ui mo e Malohi (a powerful and living platform)

Our participants present *Fofola e fala* as a strong platform for familial transformation in addressing violence. This framework is conceptualized in terms of its foundations in both Tongan indigenous traditions and Christian values. It provides *kainga* with a sense of identity and belonging (Koloto & Sharma, 2005; Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005), which enables them to share and to support one another when faced with the devastating issue of family violence. *Fofola e fala ka e talanoa e kainga* affords a platform where trust, love, and emotional connectedness can be cultivated. A faith leader expressed it this way:

Fofola e fala ... is a powerful instrument ... it's an identity. This is who we are that we trust one another, we love one another, we feel for one another so it's a living tradition. (Mosese)

Fofola e fala is presented here as a powerful instrument of engagement because it is embedded in Tongan traditions and identity formations. *Fofola e fala* is also considered by our participants to offer a dynamic living relational space within which individuals and families can receive mutual love, care, support, encouragement to change, and spiritual nourishment. In this space, the church community is believed by the participants to be a key mechanism for providing positive messages for change and supporting the families, including both the victims and perpetrators of violence to enact measures that lead to a violence-free life (Capstick, Norris, Sopoaga, & Tobata, 2009; Rankine et al., 2015). Where such rehabilitative work is implemented within familiar cultural settings, such as the mat, the likelihood of understanding why the offence occurred and how it can be redressed is enhanced.

Space on the mat is created to reconnect people in meaningful and culturally informed ways. This is important because when you are part of the *kainga* (family) and the church congregation, people often gain a sense of reconnection, support, and hope that change is possible. For our participants the mat becomes a microcosm of the church—as a primary contemporary cultural institution—in action. It is human connections and dialogue through engagements with faith in Christian values of peace and care that are understood as being central to families developing violence-free lives. The mat also affords a space in which positive Tongan identities and values, which

have also become anchored in Christian faith, come to life:

It's just like church, when you go to church on Sunday it becomes alive ... The sense of church is a reality so we feel that the church is alive because we are there, you are there and I am there so the *Fofola e fala* ... is almost like the family rises, the family lives ... you know it's just spark[ed] me off on another thing about the church becoming alive when it gathers: "Where two or three come together in my name [Jesus' name], there am I with them" [Matthew 18:20, NIV]. That sense comes true and the family to *fofola e fala*, its identity is identified, it's transparent, we see the identity of what we call *famili* [family] or *kainga* ... so in that way it's a very powerful platform and it is a living platform. (Mosese)

References to the family identity in this extract invoke the culturally patterned nature of human subjectivities. In the context of *Fofola e fala*, this church leader's statements highlight the embedded values and beliefs of the *kainga*, as a sense of validation of a person's value and belonging. Strongly reflected also is the sense of fellowship, of inclusion, in the *kainga*, of gathering together and hence the freedom to contribute, to confront, to care, and to share. Scripture informs the work of faith leaders (Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016) and, accordingly, the reference to the Gospel of Matthew signifies a belief by this church leader in the promise of God's presence, leading, and guidance when Christians gather together. This scriptural reference is significant in the context of this Tongan metaphor because it affirms that wherever and whenever believers meet they constitute a church community of support and care.

Fofola e fala also provides a space in which participating Tongan people can enact their cultural identities based on shared values and beliefs. There is a palpable desire among participating faith leaders for Tongan people to acknowledge and take hold of this cultural treasure to support them through the challenges that come with family violence. In reflecting on the take-up of *Fofola e fala* by families, another faith leader involved in the program stated,

I think that *Fofola e fala* ... has become a living document like a word made flesh ... People are actually applying it to their lives ... Just reinforce that, strengthening it, allows it to be once again Tongan owned and, ... it's a real strength-based approach ... I call it cultural resiliency, where it helps families and cultural communities become resilient using their own cultural protocol's and proverbs so all that

connectedness to values and sense of belonging and mentoring. (Tepola)

The conceptualization of a Tongan framework as an active and transformational platform that enables resiliency amongst families is powerful in reconnecting Tongan people culturally in ways that open up solutions for addressing family violence. This resiliency is rooted in the cultivation of strong connections to cultural knowledge and faith as families work to address violence in their lives.

Tepola also reflected on how—when on the mat—families can minister to one another and together can work to resolve their problems. This faith leader promoted the idea that families and communities can find their own resolutions for healing and restoration in the face of violence. In the process, the Christian faith that Tongans possess is presented as a significant resource for positive change:

When we come to these retreats we are actually all the same, ... and we are all designing solutions to our problems from our families, how we can minister to one another through peer support, through community relationships. But most importantly we can be patient with ourselves to grow, because there are few and far-between practitioners and resources, and so does that mean that our communities continue to stay broken or they start to find ways to heal themselves.

The challenge is presented here for Pacific communities to realize the potential of embedded indigenous approaches for healing and restoration. This reflects the growing acknowledgement amongst Pacific scholars and community organizations that many of the solutions to key issues, including family violence, can be generated from the communities themselves (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Ministry of Social Development, 2012). It also reflects care arguments within the domain of Indigenous psychology regarding the need to embrace the significance of people being able to see and experience their own traditional knowledge and practices in intervention programs (Adair, Adair, & Diaz-Loving, 1999; Groot, Rua, Awatere-Masters, Dudgeon, & Garvey, 2012).

Christian faith is a core dimension of Tongan life today that is expressed through a belief in God, prayer, and worship as significant sources of healing and restoration (Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016; Havea, 2011). Below, Tepola proposes that the secular professionalization of family violence work has displaced faith in the healing process for Pacific families:

So faith brings healing through prayer, through worship, through recognizing that there's a higher being;

that God can bring healing and He just did that through the cross and through a man that was a carpenter's son. I just think that we have like professionalized pain and family violence and we've really removed it from our communities, and they can begin to heal themselves if they have been given a good place and space to heal.

This faith leader argues that the significance of Christian faith immersed with the safe space of the mat can bring healing and restoration for families. All of the leaders were of the view that the fusion of faith and indigenous knowledge can form a powerful and living platform (*Koe Makatu'unga Mo'ui mo e Malohi*) for addressing family violence (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2016; Petersen, 2016). As such, the centrality of spiritual faith in Jesus Christ as a firm foundation (Havea, 2011) was also highlighted by the other faith leaders when conceptualizing *Fofola e fala* as a living platform for passing on intergenerational faith-cultural knowledge:

It is vital that we share and practice what we have learned with the next generation, for parents to pass on their knowledge to their own children, and then they will pass it on to the next generation. Secondly, it's important that we build the family with faith in Jesus as the foundation of all things and allow Christ to control everything in their lives, including violence. (Sione)

In this extract, Sione urges Tongan parents to not only pass on their knowledge and wisdom, but also to model positive and nonviolent values to their children (Hendricks, 2003; Marshall, 2001). This faith leader reflects on this Christian principle as stated in Scripture, where it talks about faith without action as futile or unprofitable (James 2:17), the significance of building the family in Christ as the solid foundation (Psalm 127:1), and cultivating a spirit of submission and humility to the Lordship of Christ (MacArthur, 2000). Trusting these Christian promises is presented as providing strength and love to abstain from violence, and courage to deal with the issues of violence.

To recap, we have examined *Fofola e fala* as a living and powerful platform for healing and restoration that draws on and enacts from Tongan and Christian values. In the following section, we extend this discussion further to consider the mat as a space for unity and peace. We will then conceptualize the resulting liminal space as one of safety and refuge within which issues of violence can be opened up and addressed.

Fa'utaha (*unity/harmony/peace*)

Another key theme that was expressed by the faith leaders is the notion of *Fofola e fala* as a uniting

concept or *Fa'utaha*. The literal translation of *Fa'utaha* is unity, togetherness, a strong sense of harmony, peace, and being in balance as a collective. *Fa'utaha* is a concept that unites relationships, meaning it applies to husband–wife, parents–children, and across broader family relationships. *Fa'utaha* conveys the “essence” of *Fofola e fala* and explains the depth of impact that this Tongan metaphor develops, which is one that builds strong unified relationships through spending quality time within families. This is highlighted in the following extract where the significance of spending quality time with one’s *kainga* is emphasized:

For me it was significant learning about the importance of quality time, a time to *Fofola e fala ka e talanoa e famili* [family] at home, a time of prayer and devotion, a time of sharing [*talatalanoa*], of bringing each members voice to the family circle. (Sione)

Fofola e fala is invoked as a channel for uniting the families fostering a strong sense of connectedness to one another and shared enterprise (Mafile’o, 2004; Rankine et al., 2015). The application of this Tongan framework within the home environment is emphasized by several participants. Spending regular time together at home in spiritual devotion and worship is a traditional practice of Tongan families. This faith leader is acknowledging the importance of this practice (Hendricks, 2003) amidst the busyness of life in the Tongan diaspora.

Below, Sione also emphasizes the pride and joy that can come from the use of a Tongan-indigenous approach that draws on the wisdom and practices of Tongan ancestors. He highlights the literal application of *Fofola e fala* in enabling *kainga* (families) to spend quality time together:

I rejoice ... as this is the proper forum [*Fef*] for constructing and nurturing of the Tongan family, and no wonder why our ancestors practiced this method ... for me that was the impact ... reinforcing the significance of quality time of *talanoa* of dad, mum and the children to develop and maintain oneness and togetherness [*fa'utaha*] within the family structure ...

The application of *Fofola e fala* in everyday life is presented as enabling the *kainga* to spend quality time together and connect meaningfully with each other. Simple relational activities such as praying together that are encouraged in the *Kainga Tu'umalie* program presents opportunities for open and frank dialogue amongst family members. The concept of *fa'utaha* is the positive outcome of valuing family, and spending time together as a family unit is foundational to the program. The promotion of a unified and connected

kainga within the program acts as a preventative measure against further family violence.

Koe Kolo Malu mo e Kolo Hufanga (*a place of safety and refuge*)

The Tongan faith leaders all emphasized the concept of *Fofola e fala* as a space that signifies safety, or *Kolo malu*, and refuge, or *Kolo hufanga*. These concepts were consistently highlighted by the facilitators of the *Kainga Tu'umalie* program. The term *kolo* in the Tongan language not only refers to a physical place, but also is translated as a village or town. The term *malu* translates as safety or security, and the notion of *hufanga* translates to mean refuge or sanctuary.

As evidenced by the following quote, *Fofola e fala* is presented by the faith leaders as offering a safe haven and a sanctuary or enclave for a daughter to be transparent and honest in expressing her emotions towards her father’s disciplinary practices. This is an example of the kinds of courageous acts of such daughters in the context of traditional gendered practices in Tongan culture that require daughters to show respect to their fathers through obedience. This act had the reciprocal effect of convincing fathers to humbly acknowledge their need to be more receptive to the voices of their children and to change their disciplinary practices:

Over the various *talanoa*, I was surprised when my daughter shared [how I applied corporal punishment] because that has never happened before. They [my children] did what they were told and had to keep quiet. You see that was the type of leadership and control that I practiced because I didn’t want to be challenged on what I know ... Afterwards [after the *Kainga Tu'umalie* retreat], I thought this is the sort of thing that I should have encouraged and practiced at home because there has never been a time when I listened to their voices. I’m sure they were longing to voice their opinions, but couldn’t. (Paula)

Fofola e fala can facilitate the process of transforming mindsets and uprooting embedded and dysfunctional disciplinary practices. This was illustrated by the remorseful response by the church leader and acknowledgment of his need to change his authoritarian leadership style. The conviction of this father’s admission of his failures is significant in illustrating the impact of an indigenous model rooted in Christian principles of forgiveness, love, respect, and humility (Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016). The Tongan hierarchical social structure that places men in positions of authority and honor, especially as fathers and church leaders, can sometimes have negative consequences when their decisions and practices remain

unchallenged. The sentiment of this father and church elder is symbolic of the struggle that many Tongan fathers have in disciplining their children in a foreign environment and in ways that reflect their values of faith, love, respect, and humility. This is also reflective of the ongoing challenges experienced by some Tongan and Pacific families as they attempt to uphold their cultural values in a Eurocentric societal context (Mulitalo-Lauta, 2001; Teaiwa & Mallon, 2005).

As a symbol of a place of security, the development of *Koe Kolo malu mo e Kolo hufanga* provided a setting in which fathers could humbly acknowledge the need to review their priorities for and engagements with their families. Moreover, it encouraged *talanoa* and more open communication among family members, particularly for fathers to listen to the voices of their *kainga* (family). Once again we note an acknowledgment by the church leader of his need to prove himself at home first, to be a nonviolent role model at home before he can preach to his congregation:

The program [*Kainga Tu'umalie*] has taught me the importance of communicating with my wife and family about the important issues of life; to talk about our relationship and how we can improve our family, and when my wife shares my shortfall that I have the humility to receive it ... That our family needs to be solid before we can be effective in what we have been called to do. I have to humble myself and like the verse which says "If my people would humble themselves and turn from their wicked ways then I will hear..." [from 2 Chronicles 7:14] (Paula)

Humility (*angafakatokilalo*) is a Christian core value (Mafile'o, 2004) that informs *Fofola e fala* and has the power to transform mindsets, to encourage men to acknowledge their failures and weaknesses, and to commit to being willing to make positive changes in their lives. Humbling oneself in this way enables men to see the error of their ways and be more receptive to the needs of their loved ones.

As a representation of *Kolo malu* and *Kolo hufanga*, *Fofola e fala* engaged parents to reassess and to reapply some of the core cultural values of the *Anga Fakatonga* (Tongan way) to family life. The following faith leader reminisced on how sincere modeling of the values of *'ofa* (love) and *faka'apa'apa* (respect) is both preventative and protective in terms of addressing family violence (Alefaio, 2009; Beautrais et al., 2005):

There were two additional lessons that I learned from the *Kainga Tu'umalie* program. Firstly, the quality of love [*'ofa*], and secondly living a life of respect [*faka'apa'apa*]. If I practice love and respect at home I believe that I will be incapable of behaving badly or doing

anything to harm or offend my wife and my children. (Sione)

Sione also expressed the impact of the greatest love of all, agape love. This sacrificial love is demonstrated in one's actions that reflect the virtues of forgiveness, patience, gentleness, helpfulness, and healthy relationships (Mafile'o, 2004; Mulitalo-Lauta, 2001):

And putting aside the love that we were taught and experienced growing up in Tonga I am talking about the love that only comes from God which is far greater than anything else. When we have this godly love, there is also the outflow of forgiveness [*fakamolemole*], of patience [*anga kataki*] and meekness/gentleness [*anga-vaivaiva*]. The wonderful thing is that I observe this happening amongst the ... families in the way that the couples are relating to each other [*tauhi va*], there is evidence of love, of mutual helpfulness/reciprocity [*fetokoni'aki*] and there is respect from the menfolk to their wives.

What this faith leader is suggesting is that when *kainga* relationships are rooted in the values of love, forgiveness, patience, and meekness, then husbands, wives, children, and *kainga* can relate to one another in more positive and nonviolent ways (MacArthur, 2000; Marshall, 2001). Assertions of God's agape or unconditional and selfless love as demonstrated through the cross of Christ are presented by participants as bringing salvation and hope for those who put their faith in Jesus.

Conclusions

The lack of substantive literature on Pacific-indigenous faith-based approaches to family violence intervention was the catalyst for this article. Our core intent was to document the cultural logic behind the development of a program that better met the needs of Tongan families facing issues of violence. The identification of core cultural concepts by Tongan faith leaders informs our evolving understanding of the *Kainga Tu'umalie* program as an important effort to create a strong sense of identity and a platform of trust, love, and emotional connectedness (*Koe Makatu'unga Mo'ui mo e Malohi*). It is from the liminal space recreated in this program that family violence can be addressed in a culturally sensitive way. What the *Kainga Tu'umalie* program does is open a liminal enclave in which families can suspend aspects of the Tongan social hierarchy and then openly and honestly *talanoa* about violence. The notion of *Fa'utaha* builds strong and united *kainga* (family) relationships through quality family time and spiritual devotion. The concepts of *Kolo malu* and *Kolo*

hufanga signify *Fofola e fala* as a place of safety and refuge that transforms familial relationships and practices. Faith-based leaders also expressed the idea of *Fofola e fala* as the great equalizer that enables the communal sharing of ideas and solutions.

The *Kainga Tu'umalie* program fuses aspects of Tongan indigenous culture with Christianity. In centralizing issues of culture in ways that resonate with Tongan and Pacific families responding to family violence, this article also contributes to the indigenization of psychology (Adair et al., 1999; Groot et al., 2012; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Our approach to this broader agenda does not dismiss the usefulness of aspects of thought that came to Tongan people with colonization. For example, the Christian church is now a central context for engaging with Pacific families around issues of family violence and culturally informed responses (Alefaio-Tugia & Havea, 2016; Capstick et al., 2009; Rankine et al., 2015). Further, the experiences of faith leaders reported in this article speak to the importance of indigenous Tongan and Christian concepts in efforts to heal *kainga* (families). The connectivity shared between Tongan culture and Christian faith creates a familiar platform for families to *talamoa* on key issues of family violence. Correspondingly, participant accounts in this article regarding the importance of spirituality in the *Kainga Tu'umalie* program are also consistent with the more general literature on faith-based responses to family violence. Research in this area readily acknowledges the important role that faith-based communities play in providing opportunities for healing and restoration for both victims and perpetrators of violence (Johnson, 2015; Züst et al., 2018).

At the heart of the Tongan culture and worldview are the core values of *faka'apa'apa* (respect), *angafaka-tokilalo* (humility), *tauhi va* (cultivating healthy relationships), and *mamahi'i me'a* (loyalty/passion) (The Tongan Working Group, 2012). The *Fofola e fala* framework is constructed on this Tongan worldview or *Anga fakatonga*. Underpinning these interrelated and holistic principles and protocols is the virtue of *'ofa* (love/compassion). There was a strong conviction among our participants to revisit and reevaluate whether these core values are manifested in familial relationships. This suggests that family violence within the *kainga* network is, at the very least, symptomatic of a breakdown and a violation of these core values (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2016; Jansen, Johansson-Fua, Hafoka-Blake, & 'Ilolahia, 2012). As such, the key dimensions of *Anga fakatonga* (Tongan way/culture) cannot be separated from faith-based principles. Our participants believe that it is their faith that enables family members, especially fathers, to humble themselves and to learn to love (*'ofa*) and respect (*faka'apa'apa*) their spouses and children. The shield of faith and grace

enables family members to value their relationships and look beyond the struggles that sometimes cause violence. This interconnectedness between indigenous culture and Christian faith presents an opportunity for this intersecting relationship to be taken seriously in addressing family violence.

In conclusion, this article highlights the significance of cultural and spiritual considerations in addressing Tongan family violence. We have highlighted some of the perceptions of faith leaders who are working within the *Fofola e fala* framework and in doing so have demonstrated the importance of creating spaces for care and respite through which issues of violence can be addressed. The centrality of spiritual faith and its inseparability from cultural values within Tongan culture supports the significance of this program. It informs our commitment to further exploration of the impacts of this faith-based approach to working with families and supporting lasting changes of life without violence. In subsequent articles we will document the experiences of participating *kainga* (families) of the program and their efforts to develop violence-free lives together.

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