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**From Family Group Conferencing to Whānau Ora:
Māori Social Workers Talk About Their Experiences**

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

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Abstract

This thesis explored the challenges faced by seven very experienced Māori social workers within the care and protection system. The views of these practitioners on what has improved for Māori whānau around recent changes to FGC and newer initiatives such as Whānau Ora were also examined.

In Aotearoa New Zealand the family group conference (FGC) is the legal mechanism through which matters related to the care and protection of children are dealt with; Māori are half of the total families who have participated in FGCs. A critical factor inhibiting our understanding of this disproportionate participation is the culture of silence that exists around the effectiveness of the FGC and related care and protection issues for Māori.

This research uses a Māori centred research approach to explore the challenges participants faced in care and protection and a thematic analysis of their accounts was undertaken. From this analysis it was found that: (a) the participants creatively walked between two world views in order to best meet the needs of their own people; (b) that these Māori practitioners felt over-worked and under-valued; and (c) the participants viewed the practices within FGCs as biased, demonstrating a lack of bicultural ability and contributing to significant barriers that whānau experience. They also noted that these issues were not being talked about in the sector.

The implications of this for Māori relate to them being generalised into the greater mainstream mix of academic research, policy and ministerial reports, rendering them invisible. Only the individual factors of social need are being focused on for Māori because they are measurable, whilst the drivers such as colonisation, structural discrimination and cultural genocide that perpetuate the marginalisation of Māori are ignored. This is proactive monoculturalism and this study talks about it.

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