

# A Cultural-Sensitive Approach to Counseling a Samoan Sex Offender

Byron Malaela Sotiata Seiuli

**Abstract**—Sexual violation is any form of sexual violence, including rape, child molestation, incest, and similar forms of non-consensual sexual contact. Much of these acts of violation are perpetuated, but not entirely, by men against women and children. *Moetolo* is a Samoan term that is used to describe a person who sexually violates another while they or their family are asleep. This paper presents and discusses sexual abuse from a Samoan viewpoint. Insights are drawn from the authors' counseling engagement with a Samoan sex offender as part of his probation review process. Relevant literature is also engaged to inform and provide interpretation to the therapeutic work carried out. This article seeks to contribute new understanding to patterned responses of some Samoan people to sexual abuse behaviors, and steps to remedy arising concerns with perpetrators seeking reintegration back into their communities.

**Keywords**—Fa'asamoa, Samoan cultural identity, Sexual abuse and recovery, Uputāua Therapeutic Approach.

## I. INTRODUCTION

MUCH has been written about the trauma of sexual assaults that target women and children [2], [3]. In New Zealand for example, there is a growing interest by both scholars and practitioners in providing more information on this topic [24]. Yet, there is room to provide more robust evidence of the actual nature of sexual violence due to underreporting and stigmatization linked to sexual abuse overall [5], [10]. Scant consideration has been given to examining the impact that sexual abuse has had within Pacific contexts. This paper aims to provide a timely contribution and discussion on the topic. However, it must also be stated that although a comparative analysis with other indigenous cultural groups similar to Samoans might find value, the primary focus of this paper is to bring to the fore a Samoan-specific case examination on sexual abuse. This work does not constitute a broad or complete interpretation of sexual offending by Samoan or Pacific men, nor does this work seek to be dismissive or minimize the level of trauma and ensuing impact that sexual assaults have had and continues to have on victims and their families, particularly children. This work seeks to further our understanding into the sexual offending of one Samoan inmate, in an attempt to support the safety of women and children from such violations.

*Moetolo* or 'sleep crawler' is not a recent phenomenon within Samoan culture; there have been earlier references

pointing to this type of sexualized conduct such as Tuvalēs' 'Account of Samoan History up to 1918' [28]. In his account, Tuvale provides a definition of *moetolo* as:

One who creeps in the dark – it refers to a man who slinks to the house of a sleeping girl or woman at night – a Don Juan. If the girl or the woman is in league with the "moetolo" no trouble eventuates; but if otherwise is the case, she alarms the household and the intruder is subjected to a thrashing and is made ridiculous before the village and public." [28, p. 3].

Tuvalē further states that the word *moetolo* itself is not an insult, but rather a reference to an event that was practiced in village contexts from time-to-time. Of some concern is the seemingly low level of seriousness that Tuvalē attributes to this behavioral pattern in those earlier periods. Shore's [15] definition of *moetolo* condemns this violation as "a kind of rape done at night by crawling under the lowered blinds of a sleeping house to a sleeping girl, stifling her cries as she wakes and forcing intercourse with her" [15, p.16]. In support of Shore's definition, Isaia [4] too describes *moetolo* as "rape or fa'amalosi (forced against your will)" [4, p.74]. In his discussion of the topic, Isaia argues that the key purpose of this sexual assault was to "deflower a female virgin" [4, p.75], an abominable act that is both unacceptable in Samoan society, and the consequences for those caught in the act – deadly [15]. Hence, if a perpetrator was caught in the vicinity of the family home, male relatives would ensure he received a good beating, a clear demonstration of their role of guardian of family honor.

This article examines the sexual offending history of a Samoan prisoner, Fa'asala (pseudonym – to punish), who was incarcerated for sexually assaulting five young female victims. A number of Fa'asala's victims were young girls under 12 years old. Although the nature of his offending is sometimes referred to as 'hands-off' and therefore not as devastating or traumatic as if he had raped or forced his victims, the Judges' sentencing notes outlined concern that Fa'asala's sexual offending had sinister overtones, while also noting that he was drunk when he committed all of his offences. Furthermore, Fa'asala is to be deported back to Samoa upon receiving parole or completing his sentence. It was imperative from the Parole Board's perspective that Fa'asala received specialized support to help him address his offending and to provide a safety plan to keep him and others, especially young girls, safe.

The next section begins by recounting the steps for which Fa'asala was referred for psychological assessment, followed by a discussion of the type of therapeutic engagement that was

B.M.S.Seiuli is with the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand. He is a teaching fellow and course convener in the School of Psychology, University of Waikato (Correspondence: phone: +6478379223; email: byron@waikato.ac.nz).

most suitable in the work with him as a Samoan man. Insights are drawn from Samoan cultural practices as reflected by the Uputāua Therapeutic Approach [20], while also engaging sexual abuse recovery literature to examine rehabilitative measures for offenders. A significant objective of this paper is to inform readers, particular those helping professionals, who might be called upon to support Samoan individuals and their families impacted in some way by sexual violation such as moetolo or other types of sexual assaults.

## II. FA'ASALA THE SLEEP CRAWLER

Fa'asala is a middle-aged man who was born in Samoa and migrated to New Zealand in search of a better life. Like those earlier Samoans who came before him, Fa'asala was keen to use the opportunity to find long-term employment so that he and his family could access better financial opportunities. Over time, his parents moved from New Zealand to Australia, along with his wife and their two children. Fa'asala remained in New Zealand, moving between family members or extended acquaintances in search of regular employment. Given his limited understanding of the English language, the jobs Fa'asala attained were mainly in fruit orchards as a picker or short-term manual labor. This also meant moving regularly when picking season came around. It was while moving between his uncle's place and another location for employment that a number of the incidents involving sexual assaults took place.

Fa'asala was sentenced in a New Zealand court to six years imprisonment, with a requirement to serve a minimum two-third non-parole period of four years. At the time of his referral to engage with the author in psychological support services pertaining to his offending, Fa'asala was serving the last third of his sentence. It was reported to the author that Fa'asala was referred to the Department of Corrections' Psychological Services for an assessment, but he was considered ineligible to meet 'business rules' due to his perceived low risk of sexual re-offending. From there, Fa'asala was shortlisted to attend a short intervention program for sexual offenders run by the Department called Te Mahinga. However, due to his limited English Fa'asala was encouraged to seek other options for his rehabilitation. A group-based Pacific-focused program called Sails Matagi (Seeking Favorable Wind) which targets Pasifika inmates with violent offences was available at the correction facility where Fa'asala was incarcerated, but the course was deemed inappropriate for what Fa'asala needed. At the time of our initial meeting, Fa'asala had already attended his first parole hearing where he was denied release. Moreover, the parole board requested he attend some form of rehabilitative program or counseling to address his sexual offending. There were no culturally appropriate clinicians within the Department of Corrections with the skills and cultural knowledge to work with Fa'asala on the parole board's request.

The pressing need for Fa'asala to engage in some form of therapeutic intervention to address his sexual offending

prompted a search by the Department for a suitable clinician, with both the cultural knowledge and professional skills, to engage Fa'asala in one-to-one discussions that were meaningful and supportive of his rehabilitative goals. According to the Parole Board report, Fa'asala's rehabilitative needs were three-fold:

- a) Alcohol and drugs – offence related sexual arousal;
- b) Address offending and to follow a relapse prevention plan;
- c) Provide recommendations for safety plan of self and others.

Therefore, any rehabilitative plan needed to consider these key issues and to ensure that Fa'asala understood the ramifications of re-offending to the community he would be released into. The Parole Board's report formed the basis for engaging Fa'asala in therapy with the author.

## III. ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

With approval from the Department of Corrections to proceed with psychological support, an initial fono (meeting) was held which included Fa'asala, the Regional Pasifika Advisor for the Department, the Pasifika case manager who initiated the search and referral for counseling, and the author. After the initial welcome greetings and introductions, the fono proceeded following a common Pasifika pattern for formal meetings when various groups engage within a Pasifika-focused space. That is, the fono started with a prayer in the Pacific language, committing the rehabilitative processes and engagements into God's care, as well as seeking wisdom for those working to support Fa'asala both in the penitentiary environment and when he returns home.

Though the conversation between the two department staff, Fa'asala and the author was focused initially on Fa'asala's offending and rehabilitative goals, much of the discussion followed a strength-based rather than a blame-based approach [18]. This way of working with Pasifika inmates like Fa'asala enabled them to be respected as people, while still maintaining a strong focus on addressing the core of their offending history, especially with those who offend against children in a sexual way [19]. Of significance in this process, the case manager who initiated the referral insisted that the therapeutic and safety plan for Fa'asala be based on the author's Uputāua Therapeutic Approach [20] (Fig. 1). In this regard, the case manager acknowledged the importance of a Samoan approach as being central to Fa'asala understanding concepts that were very familiar and meaningful to his epistemological foundations. Moreover, given that the UTA is contextualized using predominantly Samoan concepts, this resonated strongly with Fa'asala's Samoan identity.

The conceptual framework of a faletalimālō (house to honor guests) is used to discuss various components of fa'asamoa practices deemed imperative to the UTA approach [20] (Fig. 2). These concepts are drawn together from familiar cultural practices, values and beliefs grounded in the world of Samoan people and their traditions.



Fig. 1 Uputāua Therapeutic Approach

Components of UTA Approach			
UTA Component		Conceptual Meaning	Usage and Representation
Roof	<i>Ola fa'aleagaga</i>	Spirituality	Provides a spiritual covering that encompasses both Christian beliefs and traditional spirituality.
Physical Environment	<i>Tu ma aganu'u</i>	Culture and customs	Locates both traditional customs and more recent adaptations as a place of ancestral connection.
Foundation of the house	<i>Āiga potopoto</i>	Family and relationship networks	Serves as the foundation of collective identity and belonging for members.
Internal Boundaries	<i>Le va fealoaloa'i</i>	Relational space	Safeguards individuals and families in their respective roles and responsibilities.
First Pillar of Wellbeing	<i>Ola fa'aletino</i>	Physical wellbeing	Extends to include language, loyalty, service and representation.
Second Pillar of Wellbeing	<i>Ola fa'aleloto</i>	Social wellbeing	Extends to include collective responsibilities, reciprocity and cultural pride.
Third Pillar of Wellbeing	<i>Ola fa'alemafaua</i>	Psychological wellbeing	Important to the domain of thinking, decision-making and leadership.
Fourth Pillar of Wellbeing	<i>Ola fa'alelagona</i>	Emotional wellbeing	Significant to addressing loss and grief, coping and recovery.
External Boundaries	<i>Tausi tua'oi</i>	Community boundaries	Safeguards individuals and family relationships with outside community including healthcare and professionals.
First Step of Engagement	<i>Meaalofa</i>	Gifting	Emphasises the spirit of generosity and support that affirms relational bonds.
Second Step of Engagement	<i>Loto fa'atasia</i>	Co-collaboration	Intentional-sharing approach that enables working <i>with</i> people not <i>on</i> people.
Third Step of Engagement	<i>Mana ma mamalu</i>	Honor and dignity	Acknowledge indigenous expertise to healing and restorative journeys.

Fig. 2 Components of UTA Approach

#### IV. UPUTĀUA THERAPEUTIC APPROACH

*Ola fa'aleagaga* or spiritual life as represented by the 'roof' is the covering that endorses safety and protection for many Samoan people (Fig. 1). Spirituality is largely associated with

Christian teachings and values in modern times [21], [25], [29]. However, many Samoan people have maintained an understanding of spirituality connected to their ancestral past such as those enacted in death and bereavement rituals [22].

*Tu ma aganu'u fa'asamoa* represents the 'land' which advocates for understanding of fa'asamoa cultural practices and its adhering customs. The key values of fa'asamoa include but are not limited to respect for the va fealoaloa'i, acknowledging various feagaiga (covenant) relationships, and honoring personhood and status. Essentially, fa'asamoa serves as the base that upholds the family unit. The cultural context represents one's tulagavae (place of belonging) that enables one to locate and navigate through one's ancestral connections and birthplace. Such a cultural context is not rigid but living and breathing, meaningfully forming Samoan identity wherever situated. In this regard, the flexibility of culture gives space for accessing both traditional and contemporary knowledge that support many Samoans in their development or healing journeys.

*Āiga potopoto* is the family and relationship network which is presented as the 'foundation' of the UTA approach. The formation of many Samoan families in current diasporic localities may contain traces of the traditional as well as a diversity of other ethnic mixes. In this regard, consideration must be allowed for the complexities of cultural variants that exist within each and every family group. And although family units may be regarded as strong, nurturing and collective, this may not be the reality for some families [16]. For many, their Samoan identity is germinated, nurtured, matured and replicated within the āiga (extended family) context. Moreover, gender issues, sexuality, roles and responsibilities, learning, observing, and other activity all find their purposes and meanings within this context. A Samoan proverb that reflects this sense of belonging says: *o le tagata ma lona fa'asinomaga*, exhorting each person in their designated role and responsibility of tautua (service).

*Le vā fealoaloa'i* is the relational space as represented by the 'internal boundaries' that serves to protect the family whilst maintaining safe parameters with others. Teu le vā is a well-known Samoan expression that aligns with safeguarding relationships where one must seek to "nurture, cherish, and take care" of the relational space, firstly within one's family and then with the wider community [19, p.33]. The relational space needs continuous attention in order to avoid the space being soli (trampled) [11]. Failure to take care of the vā has invariably led to dishonoring of, and of trampling upon, the mana (sacredness) and mamalu (dignity) of individuals and families [17]. Such violations can lead to the refusal of ongoing participation until the space has been restored and healed. If the space is deemed unsafe, the prospect of achieving beneficial outcomes in therapeutic engagements is severely reduced.

*Ola fa'aletino* is the first of the four 'pillars of wellbeing' which stands for physical wellbeing. For many Samoans, ola fa'aletino is recognizable in their humility, their sense of loyalty and their easy-going nature. The physical pillar incorporates the values of fa'aaloalo (respect) and reciprocity, connecting many Samoans to the larger tapestry of life: that all are sacred and related [9], [21].

*Ola fa'aleloto* stands for social wellbeing and is represented by the second pillar. The Samoan social self is better understood as "socio-centric" [7, p. 5], and is often visible in their friendly, obliging, warm, and cheerful personas. Social values emphasize collectivity and shared responsibilities to one's family, church, village and nation. Significantly, family members are called to loyalty as their tautua (service), not as independent or self-centered beings, but in close community. The performance of their reciprocal practices is carried out both to support and to communicate connection, understanding that the cycle of supportive contribution will be reciprocated in future incidents. For many, their extended social structure, with its adhering patterns of support, provides the stabilizing force in the face of fa'alavelave (emergencies) or other life challenges.

*Ola fa'alemafaufau* or psychological wellbeing is the third pillar which emphasizes the critical nature that thinking and decision-making contributes to one's holistic wellbeing. The area of psychological wellness examines one's ability to cope and to process situations with which one is confronted from time to time. From personal observation within counseling therapy, the psychological wellbeing of many Samoan people is often ignored or neglected altogether, which is the primary reason for its position in the rear. The importance of Samoan people's psychological wellbeing needs to be highlighted as crucial, particularly in current times of uncertainty, if Samoan people are to attain restorative health overall.

*Ola fa'alelagona* or emotional wellbeing is the fourth and final pillar. Emotional health is another neglected but central part of the Samoan person, hence depicted like that of the psychological wellbeing with its backward positioning. In the context of emotional the āiga plays a foundational role in how emotions are cultivated, articulated, and endorsed. A lack of opportunity to foster robust family connections can lead to the weakening of emotional attachment between individuals and their family or social network. It is well documented that a significant factor contributing to a higher level of mental health fatigue such as stress or depression among Samoan communities is keeping the balance between family obligations and personal economic survival [23], [26]. For some, traditional obligations are an enormous "burden" that many struggle to bear [8, p.132].

*Tausi tua'oi* is the external boundaries represented by the 'fence' that provides a secondary boundary for the āiga with their local community, health professionals, helping agencies, researchers and the likes. This secondary boundary allows for a respectful negotiation of desired outcomes, specific timeframes, meaalofa (gifts, reimbursements, resources, food, etc.), accountability and responsibilities involved in an engagement. The tua'oi is an extension of the internal boundaries that needs ongoing care. The capacity to stay alert is instrumental in ensuring that harmony is achieved within such important social and relational spaces [20].

*Meaalofa* or gifting processes is the first of the three 'steps of engagement' prior to entering into the sanctity of the faletalimālō, a reminder of the crucial role of supporting

healing and restorative practices that is culturally aligned. Meaalofa emphasizes the spirit of generosity: with knowledge, with time, with resources and with relevant support. The important aspects of meaalofa serve as a cornerstone of the Samoan self that affirm and strengthen important relational bonds between the family, the church, and the wider community [18], [27].

*Loto fa'atasia* or collaborative approach is represented by the second step. *Loto fa'atasia* strongly advocates and invites into therapeutic engagement with Samoan communities the practices of intentional co-collaboration [30] or the 'we' approach. *Loto fa'atasia* can be literally translated as "to be of one heart or one soul" [20, p. 46] with those being engaged in the process. The collaborative approach is relational and community-based, not isolated or individuated thereby recognizes Samoan expertise and wisdom in their lives and restorative journeys [17], [18].

*Mana ma mamalu* or maintaining honor and dignity is represented by the third step. This final step endorses the critical role of honoring people throughout the process of engagement. Honor in this context recognizes individuals and families as *tufuga* (experts) of their lived experiences and journeys, similar to the collaborative approach initiated by the second step of the *faletalimālō*. One must enter into the sanctity of people's lives in the spirit of humility that validate expressed life narratives of individuals like Fa'asala beyond merely psychological assessments to define his criminal behavior as is common in some psychological practices.

The intention of the UTA approach in this context is to facilitate the restoring of inmates like Fa'asala back into his family and wider Samoan community. The process seeks to encourage them into being an active participant of their community's healing, not only in the maintenance of his safety plan, but to encourage his activity in keeping his community safe. That is, these are his people, and hurting them in turn only hurts his family and himself.

## V. ENGAGING UTA IN THERAPEUTIC ENGAGEMENT

Fa'asala engaged in six hourly sessions over the period of two months. These were one-to-one apart from the initial session where two department staff attended as discussed earlier. Fa'asala reported his delight when he was informed that a Samoan psychologist was available to engage with him in therapy. Given his ineligibility to receive any of the Department-led psychosocial services, he was enthusiastic to get support towards addressing his offending history. Fa'asala consented for the author to use his narratives and the content of his rehabilitative engagement for writing and presentation purposes such as in this article. He expressed gratitude in being asked to include his narratives and steps to safety to support greater understanding and provide valuable knowledge on working with Samoan sexual offenders.

Using UTA as a guide for therapeutic engagement, Fa'asala was asked questions that explored the role of spirituality in his life beyond starting and finishing each session with a prayer. Spirituality opened space to engage in conversations on

Fa'asala's church background, the role this had while living in New Zealand, and how this has been maintained while in prison. Another Samoan word for church is *malumalu* which can mean covering or protection, hence, the crucial role that spirituality has in providing protection or coverage for many Samoans like Fa'asala. Spirituality also enabled conversations about Fa'asala's ancestral connection to Samoa to occur. Significantly, the ability of the author to speak and comprehend *fa'asamoa* (Samoan-focused protocols, language, etc) created the space to freely engage Samoan cultural concepts that served both a familiar and important core of Fa'asala's identity and sense of belonging [21]. In fact, Fa'asala commented that "...this is why he wanted a Samoan person to work with him [because] they can understand the important role that church and Samoan culture has in my life".

It must be noted that much of the UTA concepts are interconnected and sometimes overlap. For example, spirituality and *fa'asamoa* cultural ideologies exists side-by-side and may be difficult to sometimes distinguish their specific domains in practice. That is, many components of *fa'asamoa* functions in tandem with church life to serve the community [1],[25]. In this regard, the role of ancestral connection is as much spiritual as it is cultural because both served an integral role in Fa'asala's identity as a Samoan man. Spiritual and cultural reconnection transpired naturally in the discussions because many of these retained an important place such as Fa'asala's desire to serve and honor his parents, the wider family, his village and church. The inclusiveness of such cultural and religious foundations reminded Fa'asala of his Samoan heritage that also provided the platform to examine and question his sexual abuse behavior; one that stood contrary to his religious beliefs and *tautua* (service) to those he loved like his children and family. This way of working with inmates who sexually offend highlights the value of UTA as a culturally centered therapeutic approach to engage Samoan sexual offenders like Fa'asala. Of significance is UTA's role to also engage discussions about a safety plan that might integrate and align with the goals set out by the Parole Board as stated earlier. Detail of Fa'asala's safety plan is presented in the next section.

## VI. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

A key part of Fa'asala's recovery lies in the support of his *āiga*. Samoan family networks remain vital in the current environment; though family structures might vary from one family to the next nowadays [16]. As the components of the UTA indicate (Fig. 2), the family represents the foundation of the *faletalimālō*. It is within the sanctity of the family unit that its members function in their respective roles and responsibilities. It is the foundational place of nurturing, maturing and passing on of vital intergenerational knowledge from one generation to the next. Fa'asala reported that his family network remained strong despite his crime. They were still supportive of him and wanted him back upon his release. This type of family support motivates Fa'asala to restore his family's tarnished reputation and trust due to the nature of his

crime. That is, sexual violation, particularly those acted out against children is a condemned and shameful act within Samoan society. It therefore came as a complete shock when Fa'asala was convicted of child sexual offence. His family questioned the reasons that led Fa'asala to commit such a shameful act. In particular, his parents questioned why such a crime suddenly emerged, when nothing of this nature had ever occurred when the family was living in Samoa.

Fa'asala not only acknowledged the shame he had brought upon his own family, but expressed deep remorse for causing pain and trauma upon his innocent victims. However, he was discouraged by his legal representative from attempting to make any contact with the victims of his crimes. Further to this, his own children would carry the stench of their father's disgrace because of their association. This emotional and psychological turmoil led Fa'asala to contemplate suicide soon after being caught, particularly when the news of his crimes reached his family and wider Samoan community. In some instances, the family of the offender is fined heavily by the village elders for bringing disrepute and tarnishing the village's reputation for such criminal offences. There was no mention of such a fine being imposed on his family by the village; however, Fa'asala stated that his parents and children would carry the burden of his appalling actions wherever they were located. Such news is often circulated by Samoan-focused media sources with the name of the offender and their village associations if known.

Despite this social stigma and shame, Fa'asala spoke about his family staying committed to supporting him towards rehabilitation and restoration. That is, they voiced their disapproval of his actions; nevertheless, they had imputed upon him their forgiveness and love. They want to see him return to the family with the knowledge that he is accepted and they will ensure that he remains on task with his safety plan upon release. They also wanted to help restore the *va tapuia* or the sacred space that had been dishonored due to his crime. Meaning, the family were prepared to restore safe relationships that validate *feagaiga* covenants such as those maintained between parents and children, between brothers and sisters, and between the family and the community. They were committed to becoming active agents in Fa'asala's rehabilitative plan, and ultimately, his reinstatement as a valuable member of their *āiga*.

Such an act of restoration is imperative to the total wellbeing of any person, especially one who has been incarcerated for a sexual offence. In this regard, the discussion in accordance with the UTA's pillars of wellbeing (i.e., physical, social, emotional and psychological dimensions) ensured that Fa'asala was able to consider the roles of these key components to his welfare and after his release. It is worthy to note here that Fa'asala had made some decisions that would support his goal not to reoffend. He spoke about the role that alcohol had had on his offending history, whilst pointing out that all of his criminal activities took place after being intoxicated. Fa'asala was recognizing his destructive behavioral pattern when alcohol and smoking marijuana was

involved. He concluded that getting rid of these vices from his life altogether would enhance his chances of not reoffending.

## VII. ADDRESSING DISTORTED COGNITION

Fa'asala's willingness to examine and critically reflect on his own wellbeing became a focus of the latter parts of our therapeutic process. Our conversations enabled permissible space to explore and critically examine areas of 'cognitive distortions' that he had minimized concerning his sexual offending [12]. Along this track, questions were asked that allowed Fa'asala to consider typical offending cycles such as those generally used in rehabilitative programs with prison inmates. That is, Fa'asala's recognition and admission to alcohol use as indicative of his offending pattern needed to be discussed. In particular, it was important for Fa'asala to consider that these incidents were not as 'accidental and unrelated' as he might like to believe. Although they might appear as unrelated decisions, they were inherently an ingrained part of his distorted thinking process often referred to as "stinking thinking" [13, p. 129]. Such distorted thinking patterns were not only linked to his grooming of, or scouting for potential victims, these were also intuitively connected to his involvement in high risk behaviors such as smoking marijuana and getting drunk, which then led to carrying out his plan of fulfilling his sexualized fantasy.

An important realization to facing up to the nature of distorted thinking patterns came through one of these discussions. In the course of one conversation, the author pointed out to Fa'asala that all of his offending was within a relatively close distance from his home. Although he had no known association with four victims of his offending, they were within the confines of his daily travels and noticing. That is, their close proximity meant that he could 'accidentally' observe those belonging to a certain home and whether anyone might pose a risk of a physical assault if he were confronted. Upon this realization, it was pointed out to Fa'asala that most of the homes he invaded were occupied by single-mums with kids, and mainly young or teenage girls. Additionally, there were no incidents in which he accidentally entered a home with only men, a couple on their own, or even an empty home. With this new understanding, Fa'asala acknowledged the importance of his safety plan to include regular attention on his thinking patterns. Even more important was the role that others in his family and community need to have in knowing about his sexual offending patterns, and are therefore able to help monitor his efforts to not repeat his sexual offending. Fa'asala put forward the concept of *ia pulea muamua e 'au lo'u mafaufau*, as playing a key part in his safety plan. Fa'asala accepted that he must take complete responsibility to 'take charge of his thinking patterns' first and foremost. From here, all other areas in his life can be controlled and applied in accordance with his safe plan: to protect himself and others.

## VIII. REINTEGRATION

It is important to mention that throughout the therapeutic work, our conversations remained respectful and courteous,

reminding Fa'asala that he was a person of significant worth despite his sexual abuse behavior. As the UTA approach recommends, those professionals who seek to engage within 'clients' in their cultural space need to do so in the spirit of humility and compassion. This way of working is especially vital when one engages with incarcerated people who are already feeling condemned by society and sometimes, their own families. Due to Fa'asala's crime, this can easily be his experience of penitentiary services especially given his limited English vocab. Therapeutic intension that encompasses the humanity of those being engaged in the process has the ability to promote le va tapuia or sacred space where relationships can be healed and restored. Fa'asala was desperate to restore the relational space with his family and community, and a key factor in the restorative process was the manner in which he was being treated in the therapeutic engagement. Fa'asala was not just a sex offender who deserved his punishment; he was still a man who needed to be restored back into a relationship with those that mattered like his āiga. Yet, despite this recourse for possible integration back into society, there still lies the challenge of those who sexually offend against family or village members.

Within Samoan culture, a traditional form of restorative exchange known as ifoga (self-humility) is the most appropriate and culturally acceptable process for atonement if such an offence occurred within the village. In such an occasion, the offender, together with their kin support group, would seek forgiveness from the victim and their family by "bowing low as a token of submission" while covered with ie toga (fine mats) in front of the victims place of residence [6, p. 109]. This type of public apology is generally performed if the offence is one of a serious nature; sexual abuse falls into such category where an ifoga might be enacted by the offender and his family. If the ifoga is accepted by the victims' family, then an appointed family leader, usually a matai (family chief), will proceed to uncover the ifoga party by removing or lifting the fine-mats, thereby exposing those who are bowing under its covering. Following the acceptance of the ifoga, both parties exchange speeches and gifts (fine-mats, food and money) as a sign of reconciliation and forgiveness. The exchange indicates a closure of the matter, where any plans for vengeance or retribution by the victim's family will cease. Nevertheless, an ifoga does not replace or relinquish any legal precedence set up by a judicial system such as a police investigation or later persecution of the victim. In essence, the practice of ifoga represents a "ceremonial request for forgiveness made by the offender and his kinsman to those injured" [6, p.110], and also as a preventative process whereby family honor can be restored. Given that Fa'asala was sentenced immediately after he was arrested, and that the victims of his abuse were located in New Zealand and not in Samoa, an ifoga did not take place.

#### IX. SAFETY PLAN

It was imperative that Fa'asala became an active agent in considering and initiating key steps for his safety plan. His living plan was not to be initiated by me as the clinician, nor

the staff of the correction facility in which he was being incarcerated. It needed to be a living document that Fa'asala himself considered crucial in keeping himself and others safe. He needed to own his safety plan, and was also prepared to explore both its constitution and implementation through 'what if' scenario-type situations. The limited allocation of therapy sessions meant engaging with Fa'asala in a way that provided the best use of the time we had together. He was not eligible for any home leaves, and was subject to immediate deportation upon parole or release. It must be stated that this way of working with sexual offenders does not in any way guarantee the absence of recidivism because each person must still choose their actions when confronted with trigger situations similar to those that resulted in previous offences. But it does provide them with alternative solutions that may not have been part of their coping schemas previously.

Fa'asala's safety plan needed to reflect the direction provided by the Parole Board in their report. In consideration of their wishes, Fa'asala acknowledged that an important part of his safety plan is directly related to the ongoing role spirituality needs to have in his life after prison. That is, re-offending is much easier when God and his church community remained insignificant in his life. Returning to the role of UTA in therapeutic engagement with Samoan sexual offenders, Fa'asala's desire to reinstate the covering of his spiritual faith remains crucial in combating arousal fantasies that led to sexual assaults. As mentioned already, the Parole Board's report outlines that Fa'asala will be deported when he receives parole, or at the completion of his sentence. In this regard, Fa'asala identified the need to reconnect with his church upon returning to Samoa while also enlisting the support of his sister who is a committed Christian, to help reengage him back into the church community.

One area that needed specific attention in the safety plan in accordance with the Parole Board report centered around the concern that Fa'asala's burglaries was motivated by his desire to satisfy his sexual arousal, particularly with young pre-adolescent and teenage girls. Although it was clearly evident that Fa'asala was under the influence of alcohol when he committed his crimes, he needed to address his sense of entitlement, impulse control and poor decision making leading to his criminal activities. In addition to these, alcohol restriction and management needed to feature strongly in his plan. Although Fa'asala had voiced his desire and attempt to abstain from alcohol completely, this could only happen with the support of various agencies that specialize in this area such as Alcohol Anonymous (AA).

UTA was again used to engage Fa'asala in talanoa conversations on the topic, while also helping him to identify where such support services might be enlisted to with his rehabilitative strategies. For example, using another Samoan concept known as *o le fanau, o le ioimata o matua* which safeguards the *va tapuia* (sacred bond) between parent-child relationships, this concept declares that 'children are the inner pupil of a parent's eye'. This cultural practice speaks of the protective role that parents have in safeguarding all

children from harm. By engaging this familial and relational Samoan concept, Fa'asala was being challenged concerning what sexual abuse of children means from his role as a Samoan father. Here, Fa'asala understood that all relationships, especially with children or females, fell into the realm of feagaiga (scared) covenants. As a Samoan man, it was both his responsibility and duty to safeguard them. From this realization of the inherent role that covenant relationships have in Samoan culture, Fa'asala stated:

“I have a sister who I have total respect for and I have two children that I love very much. I know that the victims of my crime were someone's sisters and someone's child. If I ever think about committing such an act again in the future, what I'm really saying to my parents and my children is that I don't really respect them all. I can't do that to them again.”

Here, Fa'asala situated himself in the context of his cultural landscape (see Figs. 1 and 2) where his family reminds him about the foundation of his identity; his place of belonging as a Samoan man. Because of the feagaiga he has with his āiga, re-establishing his relational boundaries serves a vital part of his safety and living plan.

Engaging the UTA approach helped Fa'asala to explore strategies for not reoffending while also allowing him to see the opportunity to reconnect with his community as protectors of those sacred relationships he once trampled and violated. This way of working is imperative in therapeutic work because it gives offenders like Fa'asala the opportunity to regain the honor and trust of his family and his community through established cultural pathways that are both protective and restorative. Rehabilitative safety plans conducted in this manner allow the work with inmates to move beyond merely focusing on punitive measures, and towards a protective cultural responsibility that is resident within those individuals.

In Fa'asala's case, the safety plan focused on an important cultural understanding that pointed to an opportunity to redeem the honor of his family, his village and his country; something he desperately wanted to do. An important aspect of this rehabilitative journey is that he was not isolated in this redemptive task; his family will be present to support him to reconnect with his village. Such vital steps to engagement (see Fig. 1) allow an inmate like Fa'asala to retain his dignity while still challenging him concerning the nature and consequence of his criminal behavior. Fa'asala indicated towards the end of the therapeutic engagement that it was for this primary reason that he wanted to work with a Samoan clinician; one who could explore Samoan cultures rehabilitative practices to help offenders like him reconnect with their cultural heritage. What he meant is that the psychological work not only helped him to identify his criminal behavior, but importantly, it used Samoan cultural concepts that were familiar and vital to him as a Samoan man to find restorative paths. His journey to remain recidivist free is not only marked by a Samoan safety plan, but one that will help him to re-establish trust and honor for and with his āiga. This is a strength-based approach that engages inmates in

rehabilitative focused therapy, while treating them as people who were capable of transformative action to benefit them and the communities from which they came. Indeed, it is this type of rehabilitative engagement that is life affirming, life honoring and healing, thereby calling offenders like Fa'asala to *teu le va* or take care of the relational space not only with his family and community but with those who were victims of his crime. This way of providing psychological services reflects important steps of engagement in the UTA approach where therapeutic allegiance is achieved when working with people, not on people [21].

It must be stated that this intervention was very brief for the type of rehabilitative work that the author generally engages in therapeutic interventions with clients, however, the briefness was dictated primarily by the referral and sessions approved by the Department of Corrections. No doubt, the limited sessions and timeframe restricted the work that might have been carried out with Fa'asala if a longer timeframe was made available. That is, family sessions might have been possible, thus allowing members who lived closer to the correction facility where Fa'asala was held to engage as part of the rehabilitative process. These discussions might further examine the overall safety of younger nieces or other family members from Fa'asala or others who might pose the risk of sexual violation. It must also be noted that Fa'asala was still incarcerated at the time the counseling intervention was completed with the author. Furthermore, there was no recent contact with his sister in Samoa, to whom he is to be released upon deportation. These aspects of the rehabilitative and reintegration process would have been helpful to explore and discuss in more detail if further counseling sessions were made available. Such concerns were made known to the Department via a final report provided by the author to them.

## X. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Much of the information relating to sexual abuse behaviors, such as those discussed in this paper, are perpetuated by men against women, young girls and children. While sexual offending, particularly those violations that are done against children are abhorrent and condemned globally, there has been very little attention on the impact this type of abuse has had on Pacific communities in New Zealand, the Pacific or in other places [14], [24]. While the notion of sexual offending of any kind is received with widespread condemnation among Samoan communities everywhere, it does not negate the common occurrence of such incidents within the confines of homes, villages and greater community. *Moetolo* or sleep crawling was only discussed in brief as far back as the mid of last century [15], [28]. Surprisingly, such a serious topic as sexual abuse had not received much detailed discussion as an issue of greater concern than it could have.

This case presentation discussed Fa'asala's conviction for sexually offending against five young female victims around their early teens. All of these crimes were carried out while Fa'asala was heavily intoxicated and in the early hours while the victims and their families were still asleep – hence the

term 'sleep-crawler'. While his crimes are sometimes referred to as 'hands off' therefore not involving any physical intercourse or sexual touching, nevertheless, Fa'asala's actions underlie sexualized fantasies and sinister undertones that caused fear and trauma for all of his victims and their families. The therapeutic work completed with Fa'asala over six hourly sessions scheduled over a two month period aimed to examine his thought and behavioral patterns directly related to his offences. These conversations were to help shape a safety plan that would assist him towards culturally responsive strategies that would support his goal to not reoffend.

A key point to highlight by this case is the way in which the therapeutic engagement and safety plan focused on engaging Samoan cultural concepts that were familiar to both Fa'asala and the author, as the most appropriate approach to working with Samoan offenders like Fa'asala. As Tamatea and colleagues pointed out, rehabilitative treatment for offenders, whether administered individually or in a group setting, needs to be conducive and compatible with the abilities and learning styles of the offender [24]. Hence, the value of an appropriate 'cultural' setting, both ethnic and social, enables working effectively with sexual offenders. As this article has demonstrated, the UTA approach provided a culturally informed way of engaging offenders in Samoan specific concepts that respected and honored them as people. In Fa'asala's case, he was treated as a person of immense value, while simultaneously challenging him to accept complete responsibility for his offending history and to take steps to ensure his own safety and that of others is protected. Importantly, his family and community remained supportive of his restoration and reintegration back into their community. In this way, as a protector of the va tapuia, Fa'asala was provided with the opportunity to own his safe living plan and to restore his family's trust and reputation in the same process. Although the sexual assault caused a lot of pain and shame, Fa'asala found a familiar pathway where his Christian faith, his Samoan culture and his āiga provide a supportive environment where he recognized that restoration and healing is not only possible, but is connected to the core of his identity as a Samoan man.

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