

## Māori Cultural Definitions of Sexual Violence

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Exploring definitions of sexual violence in Aotearoa highlights that on the whole such definitions are located within dominant Pākehā frameworks that do not provide adequately for understanding the context of sexual violence for Māori. As such Māori working in the area of healing the trauma of sexual violence have been developing frameworks which are enabling of culturally defined understandings and traditional knowledge as a basis by which to understand sexual violence in Aotearoa. Informed by te reo and tikanga Māori (Māori language and culture) Māori healers, social workers and health providers have moved beyond western definitions and have highlighted the link between acts of sexual violence and the violence of colonial invasion. This article explores Māori perspectives of the origins and impacts of sexual violence for Māori and advocates for Kaupapa Māori and decolonising approaches to be more fully supported and engaged in dealing with these issues within our communities.

### Māori Cultural Definitions of Sexual Violence

In Aotearoa (New Zealand), data and existing research indicates that Māori experiences of both family violence and sexual violence are disproportionate to our population (Lievore, Mayhew, & Mossman, 2007). What is clear is that this situation is one that has come to be a part of Māori reality through the impact of colonisation and historical trauma events (Pihama, et al. 2014). Evidence highlights that family violence and sexual violence were rare within Māori society prior to colonisation (Balzer, Haimona, Henare, & Matchitt, 1997). The report *The Scale and Nature of Family Violence in New Zealand* (Lievore et al., 2007) notes, “there is fair consensus that Māori are substantially over-represented as both victims and perpetrators of violence in families/whānau” (p. 55). Lievore et al. (2007) highlight that Māori women reported nearly double the rate of intimate partner violence than non-Māori.

Māori social service providers have indicated that for some time there has been an issue regarding the collection of accurate family and sexual violence data in Aotearoa. This is affirmed in the summary data sheets provided by the New Zealand Family Violence Clearing House (NZFVC, 2014). What is clear is that a range of databases need to be drawn upon in order to get any indication of the prevalence of sexual violence and its impact upon Māori however in doing so the NZFVC caution against comparatives across databases given the differing methods utilised in the gathering of such data. Some of data in the summaries has been drawn from administrative and service data (i.e. police, courts). These data are dependent on reporting and

recording practices and cannot be used as indicators of the incidence of sexual violence in the population. In addition, they cannot be used to comment on trends in the occurrence of sexual violence over time. Sexual violence is often not reported to authorities and so can be very hard to measure from administrative data. The New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey (2009) shows that only 9% of sexual offences against men and women were reported to the Police (NZFVC, 2014).

One study that enabled some clearer quantitative indication of the prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence by ethnicity is the New Zealand Violence Against Women Survey (Fanslow & Robinson, 2004), which replicated the Multi-Country Study on Violence Against Women (World Health Organization, 2005). This survey highlighted in regards to lifetime prevalence that 53.5% of Māori surveyed experienced some form of physical abuse and 29.1% sexual abuse compared to 31.5% physical abuse and 14.9 % sexual abuse reported by Pacific peoples; 10.5% physical abuse and 3.8% sexual abuse reported by Asian peoples and 30.3% physical abuse and 16% sexual abuse reported by Pākehā. Prevalence rates measured over a 12-month period show that 12.5% of Māori surveyed experienced some form of physical abuse and 5.7% sexual abuse compared to 8.4% physical abuse and 4.2% sexual abuse reported by Pacific peoples; 2.9% physical abuse and 0.5% sexual abuse reported by Asian peoples and 3.7% physical abuse and 1.1 % sexual abuse reported by Pākehā.

The magnitude of the impact of whānau violence upon Māori is highlighted by the Second Māori Taskforce on Whānau Violence (Kruger et al., 2004). Whānau violence is understood by this taskforce to be

an epidemic because of the magnitude and serious nature of it for whānau, hapū and iwi and the way in which it is collectively spread and maintained. Whānau violence is intergenerational and directly impacts on whakapapa. It has taken several generations of learned behaviour and practice to entrench whānau violence as the most devastating and debilitating of social practices. It will take time for whānau violence to be unlearned (Kruger et al., 2004). It is argued by Kruger et al. (2004) that such high prevalence of sexual violence within Māori communities can be located in the act, and impact of colonisation. More recently Māori communities and researchers have been working collaboratively in exploring historical and intergenerational trauma impacts upon Māori wellbeing, including that of the impact of sexual violence (Pihama et al., 2014). This article explores Māori perspectives of the origins and impacts of sexual violence for Māori and advocates for Kaupapa Māori and decolonising approaches to be more fully supported and engaged in dealing with these issues within our communities. One way of doing this is through utilising Mātauranga Māori, traditional knowledge forms, as a means by which to locate culturally defined frameworks as a basis by which to understand sexual violence in Aotearoa.

### Definitions of Sexual Violence in Aotearoa

When exploring definitions of sexual violence in Aotearoa it is evident that on the whole such definitions are located within dominant Pākehā frameworks that do not provide adequately for understanding the context of sexual violence for Māori. A general search was undertaken in order to gauge the broad field of definitions of sexual violence in relation to Māori. While there are a range of definitions in the area of family violence (Ministry of Social Development, 1991; 2002), domestic violence (Domestic Violence Act, 1995) and whānau violence (Kruger et al., 2004), there is no clear definition of what constitutes sexual violence for Māori. In terms of broader definitions of sexual violence, Fanslow (2005) discusses the definitions of child abuse and sexual violence in regards to the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act as follows:

The Children, Young Persons and Their Families (CYPF) Amendment (No. 121) Act 1994 defines child abuse as “the harming (whether physically, emotionally or sexually), ill treatment, abuse, neglect, or deprivation of any child or young person... Sexual abuse includes activities by a parent or caretaker such as fondling a child’s genitals, penetration, incest, rape, sodomy, indecent exposure and exploitation through

prostitution or the production of pornographic materials.” (2005, p. 14)

The Ministry of Health (2002) provide the following definition of sexual abuse:

any forced or coerced sexual behaviour imposed on an individual, including sexual acts imposed on a person unable to give consent, and sexual activity a child or adult with mental incapacity is unable to understand. (2002, p. 85)

In a review for Te Puni Kōkiri (Ministry of Māori Affairs) and the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Robertson and Oulton (2008) noted the following definition:

In this review, we take as our starting point the World Health Organisation’s definition of sexual violence, namely, any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (2008, p.1)

Furthermore they note that the WHO definition is wider than the Crimes Act 1961 in that it recognises that sexual violence can take many forms. They also note that the definition refers to ‘coercion’ where unwanted sex takes place due to the coercion of one party over the other.

A broader definition is provided by the New Zealand Women’s Refuge (n.d.) which includes a range of ways in which sexual violence is perpetrated:

Sexual violence, sexual assaults and abuse include:

- When an adult says sexual things, touches in a sexual way, or has any sexual contact with a child under 16
- Rape
- Forcing you to have sex
- Making you feel guilty if you say no to sex
- When you give in to sex to put them in a better mood or to avoid a hiding
- When you have sex so they will stop pestering you
- Making you do sexual things that hurt, make you feel ashamed, or bad
- Sexual harassment
- Unwanted sexual touching
- Forcing you to watch pornography
- When they keep having affairs and you don't like it
- Not using contraception when you ask them to
- Forcing you to get pregnant
- Not being allowed to take the pill

- Forcing you to have an abortion, or not letting you have one

Each of these definitions are grounded fundamentally in a view that sexual violence is a forced act of physical or coerced sexual acts and fail to provide any understanding of the cultural, spiritual and collective impact. The limitations of such definitions are such that whilst there is a growing body of literature in the area of sexual violence in this country very few of the authors choose to engage directly with Māori. For example, in *An Annotated Bibliography of New Zealand Literature on Sexual Abuse* there are only two references to Māori (Mortimer, 2005). In another report for the Accident Compensation Commission (ACC) there was also virtually no Māori representation. In fact participants were not even asked to identify their ethnicity (ACC, 2008). Also, there was no apparent Māori engagement in the report about ACC funding in the area of sexual abuse counselling (ACC, 2008). This is not only an issue in ACC reports in the area. In a major review of family violence in Aotearoa undertaken by the Families Commission the author referred readers to two reports written by Māori in order to gain a view as to the issues (Fanslow, 2005). The marginalisation of Māori views and understandings of sexual violence has significant implications for how professionals work alongside Māori individuals and whānau in the healing process.

#### Defining Sexual Violence in Relation to Māori

The more general definitions noted previously point to a need to provide definitions that include Māori views of violence that recognise political, cultural and spiritual understandings and explanations. This has been done in the area of defining whānau violence by the Māori Taskforce (Kruger et al., 2004) who highlighted that a clear limitation in existing definitions was the lack of recognition of violence perpetrated upon Whānau Māori through the actions of successive colonial governments. In doing so the Taskforce note that the framework for healing provided in the report is premised upon the notion that colonisation has distorted Māori notions of whakapapa, tikanga, wairua, tapu, mauri and mana, and in doing so any view of whānau Māori must locate colonisation as central to the ongoing “normalisation of whānau violence” (Fanslow, 2005, p.3). The work of the Taskforce aligns to a strong school of thought that argues the need to draw from Te Ao Māori as a source of healing for contemporary issues. Grennell (2006) also advocates the need for Māori to draw upon traditional knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors as a means by which to both understand the cultural impact of violence and through which to enable community and collective healing.

Denise Wilson (n.d.) indicates that sexual violence is a “violation of te whare tangata (that is the house of the people)” (p. 5), which has not only physical and psychological impacts but also causes cultural and spiritual distress. Such abuse is considered, in Māori terms, to be a violation of not only the woman herself but also of past and future generations. This aligns with the concepts discussed by Norman (1992) who highlighted the sanctity of ‘te whare tangata’ and the prioritising of the protection of the life force and spiritual essence the womb of Māori women.

Pitman (1996) provides a Māori view of rape that provides one of the few clearly Kaupapa Māori definitions:

Māori saw rape and especially incest as transgressing the mana, the status, the dignity and the future birth right of not only the victim but also the abuser and his people. Shame was seen, lain, address, actioned and put in its place. People still remember today, in tikanga, the transgressions of Sexual Violence dating back 1,200 years. (1996, p. 45)

She further notes that sexual violence is also imposed more broadly upon Māori as a whole and identifies that there are other forms of rape that occur through the systematic act of colonisation.

Sykes (1996) indicates to us that Sexual Violence is not only about being a crime against the individual person but is an attack on the persons entire being and mana. For Māori women this includes an attack on Māori Wahine as passed down to us from Hine Ahuone. Furthermore, Sykes (1996) makes the following point in regards to Hineahuone and the relationship of her legacy to the position of Māori women:

She is depicted in our stories of creation with all the obligations of nurturing the health of human kind: Te Whare Tangata; of having the primary responsibility for ensuring the survival of her whakatipuranga, her uri, her descendants, of possessing both power over life and over death as well as being vulnerable to abuse by evil forces and being powerless to protect her eldest daughter from the most evil of those forces, sexual violence, sexual abuse. From her comes the ethos that women are to be protected at all costs. (p. 64)

These views expand the definition of sexual violence for Māori to take into account wider whakapapa relationship. This is a critical understanding which is yet to be fully engaged by many, outside of Māori service providers, involved in counselling and healing for Māori who experience sexual violence. This is not a new argument. Since the inception of the Te Kāmano o

Te Whānau Māori Women's Network in the 1980s there has been a call for greater awareness for understanding the impact of colonisation and colonisation as a historically traumatic event that has collective and intergenerational impacts (Balzer, et al., 1997; Mikaere, 1994; Pihama, et al., 2014).

Māori have strongly advocated that any discussion of sexual violence must include all forms of sexual violence which has been perpetrated upon our whakapapa. All forms of violence upon whānau members impacts upon entire whakapapa lines. All forms of violence and rape of ancestral lands is violence upon entire whakapapa lines. Balzer et al. (1997) locate Family Violence in this manner when they state,

a person was not believed to exist as an individual, but was linked through their whakapapa to their whānau, hapū, iwi and ecosystem. A slight or attack on one member of a hapū could therefore be considered an attack on the whole hapū and collective retaliation might be considered warranted. On other occasions the whānau or hapū of the offender might be expected to impose sanctions of their own in order to save face with the offended group... overriding all this. Preservation of the people was paramount and the life-giving roles of land and women were therefore revered. It would appear that the ties to whakapapa, the need for, the preservation of the people and the social order of Māori communities would, if not totally obviating violence against women, at least limit its occurrence (1997, p. 21).

Mikaere (1994) states that "instances of abuse against women and children were regarded as whānau concerns and action would inevitably be taken against the perpetrator". Any form of violence against, and assault on, Māori women was viewed as an extremely serious transgression of tikanga and was treated accordingly with what some would not consider to be extreme responses of death or the perpetrator being 'declared dead'. Whānau and collective response to and punishment for such behaviours is well-documented both in regards to contemporary examples (Balzer et al., 1997; Mikaere, 2003) and within pūrākau (traditional storytelling) (Pihama & McRoberts, 2009)

### Colonisation and Historical Trauma

It has been well-documented that colonisation has interrupted our knowledge, understandings and practices in regards to the protection of our whānau (Ministry of Justice, 2001). Traditional stories, and proverbs, support the position taken by Māori specialists working in the area of Whānau violence that such behaviour was unacceptable prior to colonisation.

Rangimarie Turuki Pere, renowned elder and healer, puts it succinctly:

I te wā i haramai ngā mihingare mai i Ingarangai i ērā whenua. I tīmata mai ēnei tu āhuetanga i a rātou, kāore i hanga mai i a ngai tāua, te tamariki he ariki katoa, te tamariki he rangatira katoa kāore kē e pā atu i a rātou ringaringa, kāore rātou e tūkinō ana i tēnei mea te tamariki. I te wā i tae mai te Pākehā, kātahi ka tāmata ki te whakaaro pai kare kei te raruraru tātou. Ngā tamariki mokopuna me whakatikatika ki a rātou i te kōrero a ngā mihingare me patua e koutou. Kāore e tika kia mahi pērā ngā tamariki mokopuna i tīmata mai i te wā i tae mai a tauwiwi i tae mai ngā Pākehā ki tēnei whenua. Ka mutu! (Māori and Indigenous Analysis Ltd, 2007).

This behaviour came with the arrival of missionaries from England. It did not exist in our culture as children were revered. Children were considered chiefly and so we would never hit them or expose them to abuse. However, through colonisation we experienced significant change that have caused problem for us. Our children were chastised by order of the missionaries. It was not our way, but rather, it began with the arrival of Pākehā. That's it! (Translation).

Colonial belief systems have impacted in major ways on Māori society (Jackson, 1998; Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; Smith, 1999; Walker, 1990; Walker, 1996). The imposition of the nuclear family unit has operated to undermine Māori structures and consequently weaken traditional educational systems that were dependent on the whānau concept (Pihama, 2001). As a unit the nuclear family isolates Māori whānau from each other and from the nurturing, knowledge and support provided within those structures. 'Land Wars' instigated by the theft of Māori land were devastating to hapū and iwi. Acts of legislation by settler governments saw the confiscation of lands of any iwi who were considered 'rebels'. Much of what land remained were created into 'Reserve' lands and leased to Settler families at minimal cost or individualised through various Acts related to Native Lands. The idea of individual title and ownership of property, let alone women being treated as property, was completely foreign to Māori people (Irwin, 1993; Jenkins, 1992; Pihama, 2001). The intent underpinning these acts of colonial oppression was to create instability within Māori structures and to ensure the embedding of colonial hegemony.

Such imposed colonial centred values, beliefs and worldviews have brought about major changes in the ways that we relate to each other (Pihama & Cameron,

2012). Many of our beliefs in the sanctity of whānau have been undermined and replaced with practices that are both unhealthy and harmful (Pihama, Jenkins, & Middleton, 2003). Living in a nuclear family structure has facilitated that process. The nuclear family as a supposedly ‘normal’ family has both domesticated and privatised our ways of being. Living in houses that accommodate only immediate family has meant that the support and knowledge that comes with grandparent generations and wider whānau being present in a daily way is rarely experienced by our people. The idea of ‘private’ or ‘domesticated’ relationships denies any form of collective responsibility and accountability. It is often asserted that what happens in one’s home is ‘no one else’s business’, this provides an environment whereby violence and forms of abuse can be hidden and where it is difficult for others to intervene. The nuclear family has served to undermine the collective relationships of whānau by creating an idea that the ‘normal’ family is the colonial two parent and children unit that is separated culturally, economically, materially and physically from the wider extended and tribal structures. The ‘family’ then became defined by colonial gender beliefs where men were deemed the ‘head of the household’ and ‘breadwinner’ and women as the ‘domestic servant’ and sole child-rearer. These ways of seeing what constituted ‘family’ actively undermined our collective relationships for many of our people. The colonial view of women as chattels, as property of their husbands were embedded in all colonial institutions including that of ‘marriage’, where women were to succumb to the demands of their husbands and where men had the ‘right’ to beat their wives. The system of colonial rule was grounded upon violence (Pihama, 2001).

Colonisation is instrumental in the breakdown of Māori societal structures and the denial of language, knowledge and practices that provided mechanisms of social and cultural control for our people (Te Puni Kokiri, 2008). It has been argued convincingly that colonisation has at its centre the imposition of foreign ideologies of race, gender and class that have significantly influenced our understandings of our relationships within and between whānau, hapū and iwi (Mikaere, 1994 Pihama, 2001). Smith (2005) notes the genocide of Native American people was rationalised and justified through such processes, as too was the construction of the belief that native women were inherently ‘rapable’. Ideologies of cultural genocide, assimilation and integration have underpinned many policies developed in relation to our people and issues that impact upon us (Pihama et al., 2014). The Māori Family Violence in Aotearoa report (Balzer et al., 1997) highlights that there are links between the suppression of Māori knowledge and tikanga; colonisation and the

imposition of western beliefs and practices; and acts of violence within Māori whānau, hapū and iwi.

We make links between the denigration of mana Māori, isolation from ancestral land and cultural practices, the disintegration of social and political structures and the imposition of Western ideologies and practices that play a major role in redefining the position of Māori in the world. (1997, p.7)

It has been argued that the social position that Māori find ourselves in today is a symptom of colonisation (Balzer et al., 2007). This aligns to research by Indigenous researchers, academics and healers who have investigated the impact of historical trauma on the wellbeing of Native American communities. It has been evidenced that Native people experience higher rates of personal trauma than white Americans, and suffer a higher prevalence of lifetime trauma, abuse, interpersonal violence, substance abuse, lower educational success, depression and PTSD (Balsam et al., 2004; Brave Heart, 2000; Duran, 2006; Walters, Simoni, & Evans-Campbell, 2002). Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2000) locates social issues arising from historical trauma within the construct of oppression and the “unresolved grief across generations” (p. 60). A key element of historical trauma is that of historical disenfranchised grief that relates to unresolved grief that is denied, unacknowledged, un-mourned grief (Brave Heart, 2000).

Historical trauma relates to the collective experience of traumatic events. The place of intergenerational transmission of trauma within historical trauma theory is critical as it has been argued that a lack of knowledge of the impact of the multigenerational aspects of trauma has meant that impact on the descendants of survivors of historical trauma has remained misunderstood and has not been treated appropriately (Brave Heart 1999; 2000). Historical trauma is “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” (Yellow Horse & Yellow Horse Brave Heart, n.d., p. 58).

The impact of collective acts of historical trauma has been argued clearly in relation to Māori experiences and in relation to understanding violence, trauma and healing for our people:

Māori are still in grieving mode. A genuine effort must also be made toward healing the past before building a future. In addition to attending to current issues relating to Māori, the government also needs to repair historical damage done to Māori such as loss of land through confiscation and other means. A genuine effort by the

government to come across to Māori and understand and appreciate their point of view means that we can work together to build a more positive future for Māori and New Zealand society as a whole (Ministry of Justice, 2001, p. iv).

#### Reconceptualising Definitions

This article raises questions about how definitions and conceptualisations of sexual violence can, and does, impact on how we understanding pathways for support and healing. Dominant western definitions are located virtually entirely around physical act of sexual violence and forced sexual acts with little or no regard to broader cultural understandings that perceive sexual violence not only as a form of physical violence but also as a cultural and spiritual transgression that impacts both the individual and the collective wellbeing of their entire whakapapa line and whānau. What that means is that acts of sexual violence are considered to be acts of both individual and collective violence.

Sexual violence within Māori understandings is an absolute violation of the mana of the person and the collective mana of whānau, hapū and iwi. It is a violent transgression against a person's whakapapa that reaches back to past generations and has direct impacts on future generations. Sexual violence for Māori is also understood in regards to the violence perpetuated upon whānau, hapū and iwi through colonial invasion. It is connected directly to the rape of the land and the rape of our ancestors through historical trauma events perpetuated through colonial invasion. This aligns to the point made in the Amokura review that whānau violence for Indigenous Peoples cannot be separated from violence upon and against Indigenous communities (Erai, Pitama, Allen, & Pou, 2007).

These understandings are not engaged in public policy or through Pakeha framed definitions of what constitutes sexual violence. Definitions utilised within legislation and government policies, such as those as highlighted at the beginning of this article, continue to locate sexual violence only at the level of individual violence and as such the collective experiences for Māori of colonial violence remain invisible in a healing context.

#### Glossary of Māori Terms

Aotearoa	Original Māori name for New Zealand
Hapū	Sub-tribal or clan grouping
Kaupapa	Māori philosophy, approach, platform, foundation
Māori	Indigenous People of Aotearoa
Mātauranga	Knowledge

What is clear in the historical trauma theory literature is that healing must take place on both individual and collective levels in order for intervention to occur in the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Brave Heart, 2000; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Duran, 2006; Duran & Duran, 1995). This has been articulated by many Māori Providers working in the area of sexual violence prevention and intervention. An understanding and awareness of the intergenerational impact of violence upon whānau, hapū and iwi, and the subsequent manifestation of that in individual behaviours, needs to be more critically engaged both in regards to counselling processes and policy frameworks which determine which, and how, support is provided. These assertions are not new. As noted within the Māori Family Violence in Aotearoa report (Balzer, 1997), it is stated that when seeking to develop interventions for Māori it is necessary to ensure that there is an awareness of colonisation and that many western intervention approaches that are not informed by such understandings prove to be inappropriate for Māori. As Rihī Te Nana (as cited in Pihama & McRoberts, 2009) a senior Māori counselor, has noted;

For Māori, if you don't work with our whānau, then change is really, really slow and sometimes more detrimental to the individual... So when you're working with the whānau, in a sense that everybody is engaged, and the benefit is a more collective than an individual benefit. So my preference is to work with whānau...that's our normal context ... whānau, not an individual, whānau first. Because the strength of that is that the individual and all the individuals that make up that whānau reshape themselves in that kind of development. (2009, p. 90)

#### Author Note:

The authors acknowledge the funding support of the Health Research Council of New Zealand in the funding of the research project He Kokonga Whare: Maori Intergenerational Trauma and Healing that is hosted by Te Atawhai o Te Ao, Whanganui.

## MĀORI DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Pākehā	People of European descent living in Aotearoa
Papatūānuku	Mother Earth
Te reo	Māori language
Te whare tangata	The house of the people, womb
Tikanga	Māori protocols and practices
Whānau	Extended family grouping

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