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**PASIFIKA WOMEN
AFFECTED BY
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
THE CASE OF TEUILA¹**

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Domestic violence is a pervasive social issue in New Zealand, with the majority of victims being women and children. In 2008, the New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey found that one in five Pasifika had experienced violence at the hands of their partner in the previous year.² Six years later the results of the same survey reported a 19 per cent decrease of intimate partner violence among Pasifika. Despite this reduction, domestic violence is still prevalent in Pasifika communities. Women in general are known to have low rates of accessing the services available to assist them in navigating themselves and their children to safety, and Pasifika women, with even fewer social and economic resources than other women, are thus left in an even more precarious position. The research presented in this chapter focuses on identifying the barriers and supports women encounter when they attempt to access external agency support to gain protection from their abusers in order to deal with the impacts of abuse.

PASIFIKA MIGRATION TO NEW ZEALAND

Although the Pasifika population in New Zealand has grown steadily,³ and the majority of Pasifika youth are also New Zealand born,⁴ it is important to understand the migration history of Pacific peoples to appreciate the current context.⁵ Aotearoa New Zealand was viewed as the land of milk and honey because of better employment and education opportunities. The majority of migration from the Pacific to

this country occurred in the 1950s and 1960s as a tap-on/tap-off source of low-paid, semi-skilled and unskilled labour for secondary industries (for example, factories, cleaning, laundries, and hospital kitchens). New Zealand immigration regulations were adapted according to the economic climate, ensuring a low-wage economy was maintained. During growth periods, Pasifika peoples experienced increased economic security and were able to create their own communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the mid 1970s and 1980s, however, New Zealand's economy declined. Deregulation of the manufacturing sector and privatisation and casualisation of the labour sectors mentioned above meant that many Pasifika peoples were retrenched, which then led to high rates of unemployment.

Limited to insecure employment, benefit reforms and high rates of unemployment, Pasifika peoples became trapped in a low socio-economic status, and subsequently pepper-potted into areas of substandard housing/living environments. To this day, many continue to live in overcrowded houses as part of multiple family groups, which in turn contributes to the prevalence of poor physical and relational health. Pasifika peoples have disproportionately high rates of social problems in Aotearoa New Zealand — including domestic violence. Because of their migration history there has been significant disruption to traditional practices like fa'asamoa — the core protocol and values of Samoan culture — which include courtesy, respect, honour, alofa and being supportive of family (see also the glossary at the end of the chapter for an explanation of Samoan terms and concepts).

Fa'asamoa feagaiga (covenants between men, women and God) value interdependence and familial relationships as key coping mechanisms when faced with daily life and stressful situations. Relationally, feagaiga (the brother–sister covenant) governs the appropriate relationships between men and women.⁶ Within this covenant, a mutually respectful relationship is the norm, where women are deemed sacred and men are to be their protectors.

Pasifika peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand have attempted to recreate fa'asamoa cultural systems via the church community to preserve identity and maintain support networks. However, this has been difficult due to the social and political environment in this country.

Unfortunately for Pasifika women, the church system in Aotearoa New Zealand cannot offer the same support and protection as the village system in the Islands. Eurocentric expectations of women (containing attitudes of women as chattels) disrupted the fa'asamoa system. Messages of love were delivered through the church, but 'love' was interpreted through palagi values that embedded a power structure that deemed women to be subservient and demure, and the sanctity of marriage to be privileged over the safety of women and children. When the church message is combined with working multiple jobs to survive; a higher cost of living; isolation from family as a result of relocation, and an expectation to send money to the Islands, it is no wonder domestic violence has become problematic for Pasifika families who struggle within the dominant cultural systems in this country.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG PASIFIKA IN THE NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT

Pasifika social, relational and family structures have been impacted by migration to Aotearoa New Zealand. Adapting to changes in physical and social environments has created multiple cultural shifts. Associated stress, anger and frustration in navigating cultural and economic obligations has been identified as a contributor to domestic violence.⁷ An example of such cultural shifts is intracultural disagreement about how to manage the expectations to contribute to cultural commitments such as fa'alavelave (Samoan ceremonial exchange practices at special events), and sending remittances to Island-based family while providing for one's own family in New Zealand.⁸ This issue is examined here through an exploration of Teuila's case. Within her example we can see a perceived subservience of women, which is not the fa'asamoa way.

The belief that we should not interfere or speak out still prevails. Women fear being blamed by friends, family and service providers for the abuse perpetrated against them. Primarily, when women decide to navigate their way to safety, they fear that if they seek help from service agencies (such as the police, the courts or other government-funded organisations) their children will be taken from them. Sela, a lawyer, comments, 'CYF use that as a weapon all the time. If you go back to him we're not giving you your kids back. They're not supposed to do stuff

like that but they do.'

The safety of Pasifika women affected by domestic violence is somewhat more precarious than that of some other New Zealanders, due to the social and cultural factors at play. Perceptions of domestic violence and attitudes to violence against women is also problematic in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pasifika women are less likely to access help from services such as Women's Refuge because such actions conflict with faith-based beliefs in the sanctity of marriage, and gender constructs that support male dominance and women's subservience. Pasifika victims of domestic violence have been socialised to believe violence is a private matter not to be spoken of (to be 'swept under the rug') and a source of shame to the family. Shame is to be avoided by Pasifika families at all costs. Such values are further compounded by personal shame (felt by the victims) for allowing themselves to be treated in such a way as to have brought shame upon their family. This is a no-win situation for the victims.

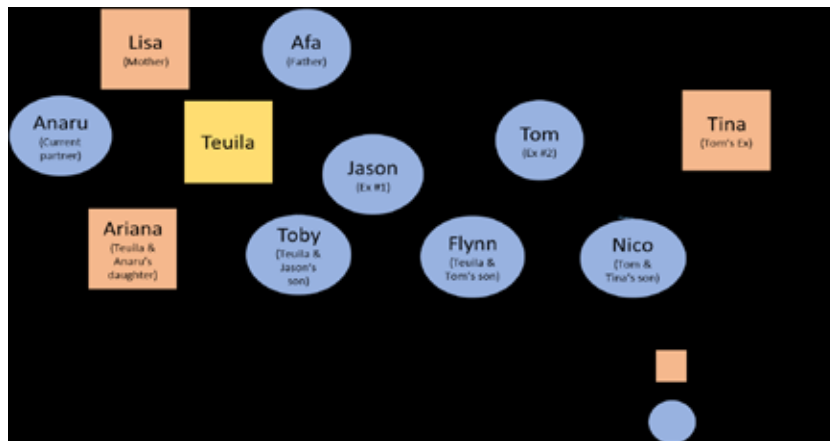
In situations where women have sought help, they report feeling blamed, stigmatised and retraumatised by the processes and systems involved in engaging agency support (as discussed in Chapter 6, 'Out of the Pan into the Fire'). The forced retelling of their experiences of domestic violence to multiple 'support' services revictimises women, particularly when a judgemental eye is cast from the hearing end of those experiences. Judgements reinforce the perception that people don't believe or support domestic violence victims. Predominantly, Pasifika women seek the support of family in the first instance. In some cases, family have been a great source of support for the women, but there are examples of family members colluding to protect the abuser. Teuila's narrative and experiences illustrate many of the issues faced by Pasifika women — the normalisation of violence (specifically violence against women and children), the culture of silence, and the stress of finances and intracultural differences in an intimate relationship.

THE CASE OF TEUILA

Teuila, a 30-year-old mother of three children with both Samoan and palagi genealogy, was born in Aotearoa New Zealand, raised until secondary school in the Pacific Islands, and returned to this country

to finish her secondary education before undertaking tertiary study. Teuila experienced domestic violence in two relationships: first as a teenager, from her first boyfriend, Jason (father of Toby) and more recently from Tom (father of Flynn), now her ex-husband. Her current partner Anaru (father of Ariana) has shown Teuila a healthy relationship free from domestic violence.

Teuila's story is far more complex than can be covered in this chapter. For simplicity's sake only a few people are referred to here, but a visual reference to some of the familial/social relationships in her life are shown in the accompanying genogram.



Teuila first experienced domestic violence at age 14 during her first relationship, with Jason, who was several years her senior. Despite his reputation for being violent, Teuila did not believe that he would be violent towards her. Teuila and her mother had returned to New Zealand so that Teuila could finish high school and proceed to university. Jason subsequently moved to Aotearoa New Zealand to be with Teuila and once here he became abusive, hitting her so as to control what she said. Teuila grew up exposed to violence in social and institutional settings, so she rationalised Jason's violence as normal in relationships. Referring to different social gatherings, Teuila explained that 'it was normal for someone to get a hiding that night'. Intervention would only occur if people felt the physical violence crossed an unspoken threshold: 'So, there's this funny dynamic, that it's acceptable to beat up somebody

but then your family still intervene, because if it gets really hard-core and you're doing it in front of them, they'll still jump in and stop it.'

At school, teachers administered corporal punishment. Teuila was no exception, and she attributed such punishment to her having a 'big mouth'. From a young age she learnt that being hit was the consequence for speaking out. Humour was often used by teachers and children who would come to school with black eyes, and jokes were made about 'stepping out of line' at home. Teuila later compared the teachers' responses to violence in New Zealand with those in Samoa, and noted how vastly different the protocols are: 'In New Zealand if that happened, you know the teachers are on the phone to CYFS straight away. So when you hear things going on next door you know people are calling the police and stuff like that. But that's not part and parcel of what we did growing up.'

Acceptance of violence was insidious. Because Jason hit Teuila when she was alone, rather than in the presence of others, Teuila's mother was not aware of the abuse. The protective factor of witnesses had been removed, and Teuila interpreted Jason's treatment of her as normal and 'instinctively' knew to hide it from others. The pattern of abuse continued until Teuila learned she was pregnant with Toby. Her pregnancy, not the abuse, was the catalyst for the relationship ending. Jason left Aotearoa New Zealand and ceased all contact with Teuila and Toby.

Feeling abandoned and depressed, Teuila engaged the services of a counsellor — which turned out not to be a positive experience for her. She was not able to establish a relationship with one counsellor as she saw someone different at each appointment. Teuila described the service as 'hit and miss' and spent a lot of her sessions repeating her story to someone new. Lack of cultural competency was also an issue raised by Teuila:

They gave me a Māori counsellor one time and I did not click with her at all. I was like 'just 'cos we're brown!' . . . We're a different type of brown. Totally different. In the end, I felt like I was sitting down listening to her story more than I was getting any opportunity to talk about my story. So, that didn't work

either. I didn't find the person that clicked with me, so I didn't pursue it anymore.

Teuila's comments here highlight issues many victims encounter: systemic inequality and a lack of the cultural competence needed to adequately address the long-term impact of domestic violence. Here, the agency assumed that Teuila would receive the type of service she needed from a Māori counsellor. This type of cultural neglect was compounded through the failings of the agency, which made an assumption of her cultural needs from a position of ignorance.⁹ Relationships are highly valued in fa'asamoa, and not to respect the sanctity of relationships leaves issues unresolved.¹⁰ For Teuila, having little rapport with the counsellor left her feeling that her issues pertaining to domestic violence were unresolved. Lack of culturally competent service provision is a widespread problem across the helping professions and services. Teuila's case illustrates the providers' lack of understanding about distinct differences between Māori and Pasifika peoples. Teuila felt that if she had received effective counselling at this point it could have helped her to identify that domestic violence is not a normal feature of healthy relationships.

Seven years later, Teuila met Tom (an Island-born Samoan). Initially their relationship was not abusive. However, intracultural differences began to create tensions in their relationship. Although Teuila had not been raised in a fa'asamoa environment, she believed that she could adhere to fa'asamoa traditional gendered protocols, obligations, practices and ultimately financial commitments. Finances were a constant source of tension in Teuila and Tom's relationship. Tom regularly sent large monetary remittances to his family in Samoa. Teuila resented how much he spent on remittances and fa'alavelave as it placed a strain on already limited family resources. She felt the money sent to Samoa was equivalent to it being 'wasted on playing bingo', because they were struggling to provide for themselves.

When Teuila graduated and started her career, Tom's family began demanding that more money be sent back to Samoa, assuming incorrectly that there was more money that could be sent home. A common misconception Island-based families have is that those based

in Aotearoa New Zealand must have an abundance of money because of higher income levels. What is not well understood is the pressure of managing high living costs in Aotearoa New Zealand without access to communal village resources. Such demands lead families based in this country to seek multiple jobs and to take out high-interest loans from 'loan sharks'. Over-committing financially to maintain cultural obligations guided by the highly valued principle of reciprocity has led to families defaulting on loans, with serious impacts on their overall wellbeing, and ultimately even becoming homeless. While Teuila had a good job and Tom worked two jobs, they still did not earn enough to meet their cultural and day-to-day financial commitments. The stress of juggling their finances was the source of many arguments and ultimately Tom assaulting Teuila.

Teuila was desperate to keep the abuse private for multiple reasons. She did not want her private issues to be in the public domain, as she did not want them to impact negatively on her career. Ironically, the first time Tom was physically violent to Teuila it was he who called the police — he did this to pre-empt Teuila (who hadn't intended to call) and to get his side of the story in first. Teuila was more concerned that the police had been called than about what had happened to her. She described her reaction: 'I thought I had grown some balls and was strong and would never put up with violence again. And then when he did it, I fell back into, this is just normal and this is just what they do, he's just another Island guy that hits his wife or whatever.'

Teuila was infuriated when a domestic violence warning showed up on a mandatory police check as part of a job application. She was mortified that the stigma of domestic violence had crossed domains. Herein began the real fear that her child may be removed by CYFS if the authorities became involved. Teuila and Tom were also engaged in a custody dispute with Tom's ex-partner, as they were trying to get full custody of Tom's son Nico.

Tom and Teuila's lawyer found the family violence warning from the police, which should have been a warning signal that she was advocating for a child to be placed in a potentially violent environment. Instead, she did not ask whether domestic violence was an ongoing issue, and managed to keep the information out of the court proceedings. The

lawyer's actions thus sent the message to Teuila that domestic violence needed to be kept hidden and that they needed to have a 'really good story' about what had happened. Teuila's and the children's safety was never positioned as a priority.

Gender identity and intracultural clashes were significant barriers for Teuila to overcome within her relationship. The influence of Christianity on relationship values meant Tom believed it was not okay for a Samoan woman to have platonic friendships with men. He expected Teuila to be subservient, obedient and never to challenge him. Such behaviours were appropriate for a 'good fa'asamoa wife'. Tom's Christianity-influenced expectations and Teuila's own beliefs about gender norms contributed to an inner conflict for her, which caused her to blame fa'asamoa for the abuse and to hate her own culture: 'I'm too white to be brown . . . Fa'asamoa is you beat up your wife . . . I can't change that . . . I actually don't like violence . . . so I had real big issues with my cultural identity.'

Teuila's first point of call for support was always her mother and extended family. This was both a barrier and a support — her mother would often placate Tom to defuse the situation, reassuring him that Teuila would return. After many years, Teuila decided to end the relationship because she discovered Tom had been unfaithful to her. She noted the irony that her threshold for infidelity was much lower than for violence. Teuila turned to water sports to help her heal from the abuse she endured with Tom. She felt that being on the water, focusing on her paddling, had a meditative effect. It also helped her to strengthen her relationship with her father as well as her Samoan culture. Complementing waka ama was the counselling she received from a male counsellor. She found it helpful to get a male perspective on things and he was able to equip her with tools to help process her experiences.

CONCLUSION

The expectations to assimilate into Aotearoa New Zealand cultural norms, practices and systems have impacted on the health, wellbeing and safety of Pasifika peoples, specifically women. Establishing a sense and place of belonging can be a very difficult process to figure out.

For those not born in Samoa, there is an expectation to assimilate to fa'asamoa. Likewise, those born in Samoa who travel to this country are expected to assimilate to 'our ways'. As a result, Pasifika women affected by domestic violence can feel as if they have to walk in two worlds — not feeling as if they belong in either one. Since social networks for some have been eroded by the migration process, families and Aotearoa New Zealand communities in general must no longer turn a blind eye to domestic violence.

Systemically, the lack of Pasifika-specific and culturally competent mainstream service provision in Aotearoa New Zealand is detrimental to the wellbeing of Pasifika victims of domestic violence. Pasifika women experiencing precarity after fleeing a violent relationship lack resources to challenge the support agencies, who they consider to have knowledge of what is available. In the case of Teuila, when help was sought, the culturally inadequate service and culturally complex dynamics of her domestic violence experience resulted in her feeling revictimised. Such barriers need to be addressed and eliminated to prevent women who leave abusive relationships being placed in a further marginalised and precarious position.

Teuila's story is one example of how traditional Samoan values and social structures have been adapted and experienced in Aotearoa New Zealand. The social isolation that resulted from the move from small villages (with no doors and windows) to houses (with doors and windows) in big cities changed the family dynamic. Teuila's Samoan identity has been disrupted by migration highlighting her internal tension between traditional cultural values, the beliefs of her paternal Samoan grandparents and those of her maternal palagi grandparents. Teuila's case involves multiple dynamics. The contrasting cultural paradigms affect coping mechanisms and can create generational conflict between New Zealand-born women and their Island-born family members or partners. For Teuila, the intracultural conflicts between herself and her ex-husband, who is Island-born, culminated in domestic violence.

GLOSSARY

afakasi: a term used by Samoans to classify those who have one Samoan

parent and one palagi parent; it originates from the word ‘half-caste’

alofa o lou aiga: by/for the love of family

fa’alavelave: Samoan ceremonial exchange practices for events such as weddings or funerals, often requiring significant amounts of money to be found and given out of filial duty.

fa’asamoa: the core protocols and values (referred to as covenants) that form the basis and makeup of traditional Samoan culture. The visible and invisible characteristics — such as fa’aaloalo (courtesy, respect and politeness), paia and mamalu (honour and dignity), alofa (compassion), osiaiga (being proactive in the support of family) and fa’akerisiano (Christian behaviour) — influence and guide individuals’ behaviour and are the ‘umbilical cord’ that attaches Samoan people to their culture.

palagi (pronounced ‘palangi’): a term used by Pacific Islanders to refer to people of European descent.

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- 1 This chapter is influenced by Jessica’s experiences in the social services sector and Bridgette’s research into domestic violence. The findings are based on Jessica’s research for her Master’s thesis, which explores the experiences of five Pasifika women (four Samoan, one Cook Islander) who each experienced domestic violence. Teuila’s story is presented here as an example of the social and systemic barriers all Pasifika women face when navigating their way to safety. Pseudonyms have been used and any other identifiable information has been changed or omitted to protect the identity of Teuila and her family. While this chapter is specifically a synopsis of one Pasifika woman’s story, her experiences are consistent with those of other Pasifika women and their families.
 - 2 New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey, *Te Rangahau o Aotearoa Mo Te Taihara Me Te Haumarutanga 2014* (Wellington: Ministry of Justice, 2014), 78, retrieved from <http://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Publications/NZCASS-201602-Main-Findings-Report-Updated.pdf>
 - 3 Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, *Demographics of New Zealand’s Pacific Population* (Wellington: Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2010).
 - 4 R. Tanielu and A. Johnson, *This is Home: An Update on the State of Pasifika People in New Zealand* (Auckland: The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit New Zealand, Fiji & Tonga Territory, 2014).
 - 5 K. Mila-Schaaf, ‘Not Another New Zealand Born Identity Crisis: Well-being and the Politics of Belonging’, in *Pacific Identities and Well-being: Cross-cultural Perspectives*, ed. M. Agee, T. McIntosh, P. Culbertson and C. ‘Ofa Makasiale (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013).
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(Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2000).

- 7 M. C. Peteru, *Falevitu: A Literature Review on Culture and Family Violence in Seven Pacific Communities in New Zealand* (Wellington: Ministry of Social Development, 2012).
- 8 C. Macpherson, ‘One Trunk Sends Out Many Branches: Pacific Cultures and Cultural Identities’, in *Tangata o te Moananui: The Evolving Identities of Pacific People in Aotearoa New Zealand*, ed. M. Anae, C. Macpherson and P. Spoonley (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2001), 66–80.
- 9 K. Tamasese, C. Peteru and C. Waldegrave, *Ole Taeao Afua: The New Morning: A Qualitative Investigation into Samoan Perspectives on Mental Health and Culturally Appropriate Services* (Wellington: The Family Centre, Lower Hutt, 1997).
- 10 New Zealand Crime and Safety Survey (2014).