

# TONGAN ETHNIC-SPECIFIC APPROACHES TO FAMILY RESTORATION

Sesimani Havea with supervisor Dr Siautu Alefaio-Tugia researched *Tongan ethnic-specific approaches to kainga (family) restoration* and explored the Tongan indigenous concept of *Fofola e fala ka e talanoa e kainga* (Laying out the mat for the families to dialogue) as used in the Affirming Works: Kainga Tu'umalie faith-based programme.

**Affirming Works** is a social service/ community enterprise that provides mentoring and educational services for Pacific people, incorporating the values of love, respect, humility and support, with a view to affecting positive change in the whole community.

**The Kainga Tu'umalie programme** is an Affirming Works–Church partnership project for the prevention and restoration from family violence within Tongan churches. Kainga Tu'umalie metaphorically translates as Prosperous family or prosperous souls, referring to a holistic prosperity in mind, body and spirit.

## WHAT WERE THE KEY FINDINGS?

- The *fofola e fala kae talanoa e kainga* metaphor is a representation of the Tongan culture, underpinned by faith-based principles, such as love, respect, humility and equality
- The 'freedom of voice' that families possess as a result of the merging of Fofola e fala with the faith narrative provides a context for transformative change
- Three concepts highlight the impact of Fofola e fala and explain the strong connectedness and engagement of Tongan kainga to this cultural framework. Fofola e fala is depicted as a uniting concept (Fa'utaha), as a place of safety and refuge (Kolo malu and Kolo hufanga) and as a powerful and living platform (Makatu'unga mo'ui mo e malohi), providing a sense of identity and belonging
- The centrality of spiritual faith within Pacific cultures suggests the significance and potential of the findings of this research and the need to conduct further research exploring faith-based strategies for addressing the issue of family violence

## TONGAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

- Fofola e fala ka e talanoa e kainga is a model that Tongan individuals and kainga can connect, engage and relate to because it was developed from the indigenous cultural worldview of anga Fakatonga (Tongan culture)
- The fala, or mat, symbolises the kainga, safety and equal ground. The strands (feunu) that are weaved to make the fala signify the four pillars of the Tongan culture which are: Faka'apa'apa (respect), angafakatokilalo/ loto to (humility), tauhi vaha'a/va (cultivating healthy relationships), and mamahi'i me'a (loyalty/passion)
- Fofola e fala creates the space and empowers every member of the kainga to talanoa openly and honestly about their personal struggles, including the key issue of family violence



- In the utilisation of this metaphor, there is no hierarchical social structure or status, there is no partiality and everyone has a voice, including children. This is profound given Tonga has one of the most stratified social structures
- There is still the respect for the sister-brother relationship, respect for your elders and respect for your parents but on the *fala* everyone is the same
- Families gained 'freedom of voice' from *Fofola e fala* especially when it was intertwined with the faith narrative and the message of hope. Grace, redemption, healing and restoration are core Christian values that are embodied within this cultural framework

## EXPLORING TONGAN CONCEPTS WITH FAITH LEADERS

- Three themes of **Fa'utaha**, **Kolo malu mo e Kolo hufanga** and **Koe Makatu'unga Mo'ui mo e Malohi** emerged
- **Fa'utaha** - The theme of *Fofola e fala* as a 'uniting concept' or *Fa'utaha* is a Tongan metaphorical concept that explains the impact of *Fofola e fala*. The literal translation of *Fa'utaha* is unity, togetherness, a strong sense of harmony and being in balance as a collective
- **Kolo malu mo e Kolo hufanga** - A place of refuge or '*Kolo hufanga*' - the notion that it takes a whole village to raise a child. The term 'kolo' in the Tongan language not only refers to a place, but is also translated as a village or town. The term 'malu' translates as safety or security, and the concept of 'hufanga' translates as refuge or sanctuary
- **Koe Makatu'unga Mo'ui mo e Malohi** - the notion of *Fofola e fala* as a 'powerful and living platform' that provides a sense of identity and being alive that elevates people to new levels

*The research methodology was talanoa based. Talanoa with seven Tongan community and faith leaders were undertaken within four Tongan churches, with researcher observations and reflections incorporated as a second layer of analysis in the talanoa.*

Pasefika Proud embodies a vision of strong, vibrant and prosperous Pacific children, young people and their families. Wellbeing for Pacific families occurs when all aspects of the individual and collective are in balance, co-existing with environments, kinship and support systems while recognising *mana* and *tapu*.

Pacific cultures are strengths that can be used positively to promote and enhance resilience within Pacific families.

Pasefika Proud mobilises Pacific individuals, families and communities to take responsibility for the issues they are facing, find the solutions and take leadership in implementing them.

**'OUR FAMILIES, OUR PEOPLE, OUR RESPONSIBILITY'**

**Find out more**

Full research reports can be requested from Pasefika Proud. Email: [Pasefika\\_Proud@msd.govt.nz](mailto:Pasefika_Proud@msd.govt.nz)