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(Sent via email copy to Dr Kahu McClintock)

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Talofa lava, Tena koutou katoa,

RE: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH FINDINGS: INVESTIGATING PASIFIKA CULTURAL STRENGTHS FOR THE PREVENTION OF SUICIDE.

As agreed with Dr McClintock on December 18 we provide preliminary research findings for our research study. We provide these findings under the specific areas as follows:

METHODOLOGY

FAAFALETUI METHODOLOGY

In this study we have used the Faafaletui methodology with all of the cultural groupings. We have found this method to be responsive with the 3 cultural groups engaged in this study.

The term *fa'afaletui* was the concept brought to the notice of the Family Centre researchers in an earlier study of Samoan mental health. Essentially, *fa'afaletui* is a method which facilitates the gathering and critical validation of Samoan knowledge and we have adapted this in partnership with Elders of the Cook Island and Tokelauan communities for the facilitation of their own cultural *fa'afaletui* groups.

This research has grouped each of the *fa'afaletui groups* by gender, and by relative status and age within each of the cultural communities with each group representing a 'house' (or fale).

In this study the *fa'afaletui* were organized into the 'houses' of the Elder Men, Elder Women, Parents, Younger Women and Younger Men.

Fa'afaletui, for Samoans is the critical process of weaving (tui) together all the different levels of knowledge frames from within the 'houses' of collective representation, in order that the Samoan world view is substantially enhanced, and added to.

In this study we have found that Elders, Parents and young people have found gathering together to discuss and weave together their own experiences, memories and knowledge has been experienced as beneficial and enhancing for themselves as participants as much as it has been beneficial to our research process of gathering data.

In this study we also included a group of Elders representing each of the cultural groups. They acted as a Reference group to whom the research was accountable. The reference group Elders were referred to at each stage of the research. We sought their guidance and clarification as the research activities were carried out and they have been our partners during the research process.

TRANSLATION

As noted in our earlier interim report, *“One of the strengths of working within Faafaletui focus groups that were arranged according to ages and genders is that we have the gift of working within Pacific languages, metaphors and expressions especially with Elders and Parents Faafaletui focus groups.”*

In this study we first worked with our transcribing team to transcribe each of their *fa'afaletui* focus group interviews and simultaneously translating the data into English. However, we have found that the primary material seemed to get 'lost in the translation' process. We then decided to return to transcribing all of the interviews in the base languages that they were conducted in.

What this means in practice is that the transcription and translation task is longer for us because the interviews are first transcribed in the languages spoken and then translated into English from the transcriptions. This has taken between 4-8 weeks.

To ensure the highest level of accuracy and conceptual closeness the translations are carried out in pairs so that the primary material data is as precise as possible. Again, working in pairs requires longer time frames which then impacts on theming, analysis and writing time frames.

In this study all translations and transcriptions are done by members of the same cultural group, and often the same age group.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

USE OF METAPHORICAL & ALLUSIVE LANGUAGE

In this study we have found that amongst the Elders and parents *fa'afaletui* they often used metaphors to illustrate meanings or provide a 'path of words' using concepts, words or images that provide a path of thinking.

Metaphors, because of their allusive quality open space for varying ways of interpretation. This cultural knowledge based practice invites us into variable ways of interpreting meaning rather than meanings being prescribed, definitive or literal.

THE PLACE OF SILENCE

Given the *tapu* core of this study and its contextual landscape we found that there is and needs to be a place for silence.

We have observed there is an almost judgemental quality to some public health approaches which tend to advocate that Pacific communities and families need to talk more openly about suicide. However that approach does not appear to be a proven prevention method and was an approach which was most often met with silence by each of the Elders *fa'afaletui*.

CULTURAL FRAMEWORKS

In this study we have found a place for cultural frameworks that can provide support for suicide prevention. One example is a Samoan cultural framework which instils a new reconstruction of time in order to enable a 'reconsideration' so that what may appear as the only choice during a time of desperation can be 'reconstructed' and stretched or expanded to include a space for reconsideration of other possibilities. A cultural framework is embodied in the "*O le Taea ma le filiga, o le taea ma le mataiga tila*" a metaphor gifted to the research by the Elder Samoan men's *fa'afaletui*.

WELL BEING

We found that the well human being or person was connected to the well-being of all of their relationships and environmental context. Wellbeing is an outcome derived from healthy relationships within and between themselves and their Aiga, Kaiga or Kopu tangata. A well Aiga for example is founded on physical/mental and spiritual wellness.

We have found that all of these are prerequisites to a Well Aiga and therefore a Well Self. They include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Healthful relationships with God/ the numinous
- Connected relationships with their ancestors and Aiga, Kaiga and Kopu tangata
- Healthy Lands and environment

- Healthy economic context , food and housing security, employment that sustains and meets their economic needs,

SPIRITUALITY

As indigenous cultures we found that spirituality and its expression as Aiga, Kaiga and Kopu tangata was a key element to definitions of wellbeing and how it was achieved, maintained and protected.

A key relationship was seen to be with God, Alii or Atua – not just for the Elder generations but young women and men often found that their relationship with God was vital. Young people described ways they turned to this key relationship as a last resort or in times of desperation or when they needed comfort or support.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE

We are finding that young people are struggling with relationships across the spectrum of their love relationships, and that these include between themselves as peers and friends, partners, as well as relating to parental and Elder groups. There is a loss of knowledge around relating and relationship making and maintenance which is leaving younger people vulnerable. We found that there is a need for support then not only for young people – but also for those that raise them in the current globalised, social media driven context they are exposed to.

The spectrum of relationships are often made more complex owing to the instantaneous and very direct world of social media. We are finding that young people and their Aiga, Kaiga and Kopu tangata would benefit from greater levels of protections and building their confidence in being able to choose their levels of participation.

CONCEPTS OF SUICIDE ACROSS THE THREE CULTURAL GROUPINGS

In the discussion of Samoan concepts around the term ‘suicide’ we found these were limited across the cultural groupings.

- Samoan: *Pule i le ola* – meaning sole authority over life – which contravenes the collective and communal sense of self and the relational nature of the well self.
- In Cook Island: Across the different language and cultures included in this study there were no specific concepts or words for suicide.
- In Tokelauan: No singular word or concept, however the concept of *Ta vaka* – which means a departure from people, Kaiga, Motu or Land, by boat and where the meaning is that the person may arrive at another island. *Ta vaka* is not necessarily about self – killing/death or that death was intended.

Once again in the discussion of concepts of suicide a space was given to silence within the Cook Island and Tokelauan *fa’afaletui* and slightly less so in the Samoan *fa’afaletui*.

Finally, through this field work we have found that the pressures of life in New Zealand can often dent and erode the confidence our families and communities feel in our own cultural practices and knowledge's and yet *fa'afaletui* consistently identified the need for community level family based responses that could support the recovery of this knowledge and confidence within their own Aiga, Kaiga and Kopu tangata. As we continue with this research study we remain strongly aware of our responsibilities that we hold alongside the privilege it is to be able to carry out work that can assist our communities to achieve their purposes.

Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese

Tafaoimalo Loudeen Parsons