

How young Māori wāhine

Jessica Gerbic



Ko Kopukairora tōku Maunga
 Ko Waitao tōku Awa
 Ko Mataatua tōku Waka
 Ko Ngati Pukenga, Ko Ngati Pikiao, Ko
 Dalmatian, Ko Irish, Ko Scottish ōku Iwi
 Ko Te Whetu O te Rangi tōku Marae
 Ko Jess tōku ingoa.

I am completing my Doctorate of Psychology at the University of Auckland working towards becoming a registered clinical psychologist.

Introduction

This article is a summary of my Doctorate thesis findings thus far. My research sought to understand how Māori wahine cope with parenthood from a kaupapa Māori perspective. In the western world teen parenthood has become seen as a social and public health problem (Wilson & Huntington, 2006). The majority of the research compares young parents to wahine who delay the decision to have children later on in life, viewing teen parenthood as an interruption to the normative desired pathway (Clark et al., 2011; Moffitt, 2002; SmithBattle, 2007).

Aotearoa has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the OECD (Daguerre & Nativel, 2006). Māori wahine have the highest rate of teen parenthood. However, the gap is narrowing between Māori and non-Māori. Socio-economic disadvantage has been indicated as a key factor, this

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finding is broader than the financial disadvantage.

Little research has been undertaken regarding Māori cultural views or Māori approaches to what is now defined as teen pregnancy (Pihama, 2011). Unfortunately, lack of research in this area from a Māori framework has led to teen parenthood being conceptualised and understood outside of a Te Ao Māori frame (Daguerre & Nativel, 2006).

Murupara is situated in the Bay of Plenty. While it was once known as a booming forestry town, more recently its profile has been tarnished by negative media attention focussing on gang violence in the area. Murupara is plagued by high levels of deprivation, according to the NZDep2013 Index of deprivation (created from the 2013 census data).

This research aims to explore wahine's experiences in a rural setting of parenting. Interviews are to be conducted with 12 mothers and 6 community members who work alongside these wahine. The research follows a qualitative Māori approach using values such as aroha ki te tangata (respect for the people participating), Kānohi kitea (meeting face to face), along with ako Māori (learning, teaching, reciprocity) (Bishop, 1998; Smith, 1999) to gather their experiences. The interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis. Analysis thus far of 11 interviews (6 mothers and 5 community members) has indicated some emerging themes.

Themes:

Protective factors

Whanau:

A lot of the mothers and community members shared how whanau can be a big support if the whanau (in terms of parents and siblings etc., not always the partner) was caring and lived locally.

One mother commented:

"It was an emotional thing for, but like my dad was really excited, he took me places... he was really happy... buying me everything for my baby... I had a lot of support."

Tamariki:

The tamariki remain the mother's main priority, and it shows in the way the wahine want the best for their tamariki.

Community members commented:

"A lot of them look at their children and say I don't want this for my child. So firstly it's all... they don't mind them getting abuse but if it turns to the children... I am not going to put up with that... So that is a big turning point for some mums."

Challenges

Housing:

It was reported landlords aren't being held accountable, often the housing services in the area work in favour of the landlords opposed to whanau. Both mothers and community members talked about the impact these houses have on their health – physically and mentally.

Community members comment:

"I notice young mothers, pregnant mothers, mothers with children, they want to keep a nice home, the issue I notice is that the home isn't nice, the home isn't fit for a mother and her children with black mould in the corner of the lounge, you know seals on the window are broken, continuous condensation in winter, no fireplace... the problem is the house itself isn't."

Isolation - Domestic violence:

Isolation for these wahine remains a big issue. Physical isolation of the community (located 40 minutes from Rotorua) and the emotional/social isolation when living with a controlling partner. It is isolation in both forms that maintains intimate partner violence in the community.

This reflected shared experiences of violence:

"You know someone was beaten up when they come out with a black eye... people just pretend that it's not important and for some people that's normal... there is also reasons for that. That's all to do with taking away from their maleness and their sense of power and so they had to replace it with another sense of power."

Roles and financial need:

The role of wahine in the community appears to be a bit of an issue. In regards to mahi, the wahine and community members discussed how work was seen as a man's role. Often the tane see themselves as the provider. Wahine in non-supportive relationships discussed how their partners didn't like them working

I had one mother say:

"I always wanted to go and work. It's just he didn't like me working. He would rather support me and stuff."

Additionally, partners run these wahine down and trample on their mana. This is intensified when they enter into relationships with tane in gangs. These gangs create a blokey environment, where wahine have no role in the gang structure, except to cook, clean and have sex.

Conclusion

Currently, the research findings highlight how whanau and tamariki enhance these mothers' lives. While housing, isolation and the wahine's roles hinder these mothers from thriving. This quote challenges some of the current discourse around teen parenthood and young mothers, by acknowledging intergenerational circumstances

Community member:

"A lot of them don't know what love is, what true love really is, what it looks like, what it tastes like, what it feels like, they really don't but, they love love, love their surroundings, you know making a home... They often can't see past their four walls of what they know, what they've always known... remember these mums at home, their mothers didn't have jobs, their mothers were on the benefit, but they love what they have and they have accomplished everything on their own with the support of you know what's around

them whether it's an agency... Whanau... friends... or a partner... bottom line they love what they have."

It highlights the creative ingenuity of the mothers in utilizing available resources. These wahine deserve to be respected for their resilience, to be viewed from a strengths' perspective rather than as a problem to be controlled.

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