



The everyday lives of young Māori fathers: An explorative study

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Abstract

Little research exists that explores the positive aspects of young Māori fathers. The aim of this study was to explore the everyday lived reality of expectant and young Māori males as fathers and partners, within the context of a positive based approach and Kaupapa Māori research framework. A secondary objective of this study was to provide ideas to enhance parent resources for young Māori fathers, such as father centric parenting programmes and mobile applications. The research was derived from semi structured interviews which explored the unique experiences and narratives of eight young Māori fathers between the age of 16 and 25 years of age. Using thematic analysis, the findings were categorised into key themes that portrayed their perception and attitudes to roles, responsibility, relationships, barriers, and wellbeing strategies. The young Māori fathers showed a strong desire to be involved with their children and that the quality of *whānau* (family) relationships provided resilience, support, and motivation to fulfil the responsibilities of fatherhood. The young Māori fathers had strong goals and aspirations but acknowledged barriers that delayed their ability to achieve them. In the outcome of the study I have

tried to challenge negative stereotypes that persist in New Zealand and portray a positive understanding of young Māori fathers. Furthermore, the research supports the need for restorative cultural practices as the key to wellbeing for our whānau and further investigations in regard to policy reforms and resources to include full participation in society for young Māori fathers.

Keywords: Māori; fathers; parenting

Introduction

The family is the most important fundamental unit in society, and while the structure, and function of the family vary in definition, the basic purpose of the family unit remains relatively the same cross-culturally (Georgas, 2003; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2003). Some of the purposes of the family unit are: to satisfy the physical and emotional needs of its members and for the wellbeing of children by providing shelter, sustenance, protection, procreation, continuation of cultural values, knowledge, identity, and socialisation (American Psychological Association, 2015; Cribb, 2009; Georgas, 2003; Mokomane, 2012; Patterson, Farr, & Hastings, 2014; World Health Organisation, 2004). Parents play a vital role and help to facilitate the fundamentals of the family unit, especially in the development and safety of children (American Psychological Association, 2015).

However, the family unit can also be the centre of concerns and problems, especially for young people (Burton, Foy, Bwanausi, Johnson & Moore, 1994; Higgins & McCabe, 2003; Lavoie et al., 2002; Martin, Rotaries, Pearce & Allison, 1995; Walker, 2014). In New Zealand, *rangatahi* (Māori youth), identified that their families were the greatest cause of anxiety and problems, despite a plethora of overrepresentation in other negative social statistics (Child Poverty Action Group, 2012; Ministry of Youth Development, 2010). The worry and anxiety of rangatahi towards family, not only suggests that there are significant family problems that impact on health, and socio-economic wellbeing, but also, that family are of great importance to Māori.

The overrepresentation in negative social statistics are not just localised to rangatahi, but across all age groups (Karena, 2012; Kingi, 2011; Pihama et al., 2014; Quince, 2007) and often portrays Māori as deviant and unable to help themselves (Groot, 2006; Johnston & Pihama, 1994; Wall, 1997). Although cultural stereotypes and prejudices illustrate a culturally deviant social group (Karena, 2012; Quince, 2007), systemic disadvantages have a greater role in the outcome of social problems than culture, and that Māori are disproportionately exposed to risk factors compared to *Pākehā* (non-Māori; Durie, 1994; Dyal, 1997).

Many of the risk factors are more congruent with systemic issues and out of the control of the individual (Hodgetts et al., 2010). The New Zealand government, considers protection from negative outcomes to be primarily the responsibility of the parents or caregivers despite the overwhelming influence of systemic issues (such as historical trauma, colonisation and urbanisation) (Care of Children Act, 2004; Karena, 2012; Kingi, 2011; Pihama et al., 2014; Quince, 2007). However, Herbert (2001), states that achieving positive outcomes are difficult when environmental factors are extreme, because it affects parent's ability to use their environment effectively. While it is undisputed that parenting is not an easy task, it appears to be even more difficult for Māori, especially when it comes to breaking 'negative' perpetual cycles of abuse, poverty, family dysfunction and institutional racism (Strickett, 2012; Coote et al., 2009; Taonui, 2010).

In New Zealand, the dominant Pākehā structure is the nuclear family, consisting of two parents with children residing in a single household, and is dynamically different to that of the Māori whānau structure (Bengtson, 2001; Georgas, 2003; Lippman, Wilcox & Ryberg, 2013; Matthews & Matthews, 1998). Historically, whānau existed as a unit within a collective community with heavy involvement from *tūpuna* (grandparents or ancestors) and *kaumātua* (Elders); providing protection, sustenance, and wellbeing for the family (Durie, 1999; Ka'ai, 2005; McRae & Nikora, 2006; Ministry of Justice, 2001; Pihama, 2011; Te Awe Awe-Bevan, 2013). Historical accounts from Europeans settlers also acknowledge that traditional Māori fathers were kind, and involved parents, and where violence was an infrequent exception to the rule (Taonui, 2010). Therefore, Taonui (2010) through the lens of postcolonial theory, proposes that "...the current high levels of male Māori violence towards women and children has genesis in the post-contact period" (p.195). Also, several key historical events have jeopardised the whānau structure, hindering positive family outcomes and isolating families from support, for example colonisation, historical trauma and urbanisation (Alfred, 2009; Keane, 2012; Kingi, 2006; Taonui, 2010; Turner, 1999).

The international literature conveys similar effects of colonial practices amongst other indigenous cultures and the repercussion on family function, specifically in regard to father involvement (Ball, 2009; Blankenhorn & Pearlstein, 1999; Roberts, Coakley, Washington & Kelley, 2014). The literature shows an awareness of the social and political barriers, mental health, and historical trauma affecting young men from being good fathers and partners (Alfred, 2009; Keane, 2012; Kingi, 2006; Hodgetts et al., 2010; Quinlivan & Condon, 2005; Rouch & Johns, 2005; Taonui, 2010; Turner, 1999).

What is needed, is more appropriate and available parenting resources for young māori fathers and a shift in focus to a more positive based research and literature that portrays their positive contributions (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010; Rouch, 2009; Rua, 2015). Positive based research and support for young Māori fathers is lacking and there is a need to further investigate the everyday

lives of young and expectant Māori fathers to gain an understanding of how these young fathers maintain wellness; within the gaze of a Māori worldview, (Rua, 2015); and to challenge negative stereotypes and barriers that persist in society (Barret & Robinson, 1982 Kiselica & Sturmer, 1993; Rouch & Johns, 2005).

The New Zealand government also has an obligation to provide support, and foster the reconnection and establishment of traditional whānau structures and *Māoritanga* (Māori practises) under the partnership of the Treaty of Waitangi (Boulton & Gifford, 2014; Penehira, Green, Smith & Aspin, 2014). In doing so, many of the problems observed in contemporary society will decline and Māori will be able to make further progress towards self-determination, *hauora* (health) and success. Furthermore, the knowledge that was derived from this study needs to be used in an effective way to provide support to enhance positive fathering (e.g. parenting programmes, parenting applications, policy changes) (Ball, 2009; Figueiredo et al., 2008; Meunier & Baker, 2012; Rua, 2015).

The scope of the study explored the everyday lives of expectant and young Māori fathers to gain an understanding of their perception and attitude to being a father and a partner and how young Māori fathers navigate these roles in their everyday lives. The framing of “*everyday lives*” (Chaudhary, Anandalakshmy & Valsiner, 2014; Hodgetts et al., 2010) attempts to gain a holistic understanding of the realities of daily life and knowledge that these young Māori men experience and acquire, going into and through fatherhood, for example: their successes, aspirations, relationships and barriers. The research took a non-judgmental perspective moving away from a deficit-based research approach, and focuses on what young Māori men are doing right, 'a positive-based research focus' (Hodgetts & Rua, 2010; Rua, 2015). A positive research approach allows for an exploration of the resources, awareness and knowledge needed to better help young Māori men to fulfil their potential and that in so doing, society can better facilitate positive Māori identities and responsible involved fathers.

Methodology and Method

Kaupapa Māori Approach

A Kaupapa Māori approach was employed for the research because it centralises Māori aspirations, epistemologies, values and world views as the norm (Mane, 2009; Pihama, Smith, Taki & Lee, 2004). Western based research paradigms can be used in Kaupapa Māori but is critical of the implications, and power imbalances of using such methodologies (Durie, 1997; L. T. Smith, 2012; Walker, Gibbs & Eketone, 2006). Therefore, Kaupapa Māori research methodologies should promote positive Māori outcomes, intervention, address power imbalances, and be constructed using interdependent knowledge (Bishop, 1999; Mane, 2009; Pihama, Smith, Taki & Lee, 2004; G. H. Smith, 1997).

Narrative Approach

A Narrative research approach was also used to gather qualitative dialogue, to understand the everyday lived experiences of young Māori men in their roles as fathers and partners. The function of this approach fits within the principles of Kaupapa Māori as it invokes attentiveness and interest to learn within a sociocultural perspective, and the participant's perceptions, aspirations, relationships, practices, values and purpose in life (Bell, 2004; Elliot, 2005; Moen, 2006; Wengraf, 2001). To do this, a face to face semi-structured interview was completed with questions that allowed participants freedom to express their views, idea and emotions whilst providing a collective comparison and meaningful patterns (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Riessman, 2008).

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis of the data derived from the interviews was used to identify collective themes of participant's narratives (Joffe, 2012). Thus, the themes that emerge from the research should, in an empathetic way, reflect and explore the lived social realities of these fathers, and validate how they think, feel, and behave (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Joffe, 2012; Stiles, 1993).

Ethical Approval

Prior to obtaining ethical approval and as a cultural advisor, I met with members of the Māori and Psychology Research Unit (MPRU), to

discuss ethical considerations and ways to minimise risk. Following MPRU's recommendation ethical approval for this study was granted from the School of Psychology Ethics Review for Human Research Committee at the University of Waikato.

Participants

The study recruited eight males of Māori descent, who were fathers between the ages of 16 to 25. The study was open to expectant young Māori males within the same age bracket, however, I was not able to recruit any for the purposes of this study. Of the eight young Māori fathers, one was referred by friends and the other seven volunteered. The average age of the young Māori fathers at the time of their first child was 19 years.

Fathers were given the choice to use a pseudonym, but many elected to use their real names for the study. This is an appropriate Māori practice that was supported by the Māori Psychology Research Unit (MPRU) and approved by Waikato University Human Research Ethics Committee

The names of the fathers are:

- Honz
- Devon
- Leighton
- Rawiri
- Kale
- Billy
- Piripi
- Robbie

Posters and flyers were circulated around the University of Waikato campus, and Te Kohao Health. However, the most effective method of recruitment was through Facebook.

The demographic information was collected via a questionnaire prior to the commencement of the interview that provided background and other information.

Interview Schedule and Questions

The interview schedule consisted of 17 questions and one sub question with prompts. Two different interview schedules were used to provide greater relevance for the two groups; expectant and young Māori fathers. However, the

expectant version was not used due to a lack of recruitment.

The construction of the questions was derived from the findings of Ball's (2009) study with indigenous Canadian Indians that highlighted areas of focus. These areas included: personal wellness, learning fathering, socioeconomic inclusion, social support, legislative and policy support, and cultural continuity. Interview questions were also developed in conjunction with my supervisor due to knowledge gaps in the literature, such as wellbeing strategies, and empirical observations as members of the Māori population.

Interview Procedure

Fathers were given a copy of the interview questions, information sheet and the purposes of the study prior to meeting face to face interview to allow for a well-informed decision. The majority of the young Māori fathers chose to be interviewed in their own homes. Before beginning the interview, 5 to 10 minutes were allocated to establish a relationship and common ground (*whakanoa* and *whakamhanaungatanga*). The process of *whakanoa* was particularly useful for calming those fathers who were nervous. Aligning with the sentiments of the research committee question 11a (sexual relationships) was explicitly highlighted and explained that participants did not have to answer the question and any question that made them uncomfortable.

At the end of the interview, the feedback process was discussed. The young Māori father's rights to withdraw their information and confidentiality rights were restated. As part of Māori custom, food was provided after the interview, to give thanks for their time. Time was also given to *tautoko* (support) and *awhi* (embrace) the young Māori fathers by addressing issues that appeared to cause distress during the interview. Participants who expressed distress during the study were provided access to a clinical psychologist to discuss their concerns if necessary.

Discussion

Whanaungatanga: The Power of Family Connectedness, Maintaining Relationships from a Young Māori Father's Perspective

The father's perceptions of societal roles and responsibilities compared similarly to Roberts, Coakley, Washington and Kelley (2014), and Rua (2015), in which their role is to provide, protect and support their whānau in the hopes of offering better opportunities and positive life outcomes. Fathers expressed traditional views of their roles but included perspectives that were dynamically changing roles, to include greater contributions in the home, and in childrearing, as identified by Rua (2015).

Traditionally it's been mum taking care of the kids, dad brings home the bacon, but, already in our relationship that role has been swapped...after university, I stayed at home with the kids and she went and worked full time (Leighton)

A significant contribution to the adaption of fatherly roles appeared to be influenced and shaped by the life experiences the young Māori fathers went through. For example, the fathers who grew up with a solo parent prioritised the role of being present in the lives of their children. That is to say, the lived experiences that the fathers had been through, appeared to affect the way in which societal expectations of roles and responsibilities were prioritised.

However, the greatest importance for the young Māori fathers was situated in the whanaungatanga and quality of their close relationships. These relationships were maintained with great care and centred on values of *āta*, *aroha*, and *manaakitanga*, which established a process of nurturing relationships that were caring, compassionate, and respectful; and established an obligation to contribute, support, and provide for their whānau members.

I would like to be honest, I'd like them to be honest in our relationship, and I hope that they could talk to me about anything. I just wish I had more time to spend with them (Devon).

...do everything that you can in your power, to make sure that your child is raised in a good manner (Rawiri).

The integral principle of *whakapapa* (genealogy) had great importance for the young Māori fathers as a foundational construct of their identity and is consistent with previous research. Located within the narratives of the young Māori fathers were references to a sense of belonging:

- Special affinity to the land–identity,
- know where home is, where you've been,
- building to where you're gonna go,
- proud,
- presence,
- culture,
- connection and
- I know where I stand

These phrases and key words provide acknowledgement, understanding, and powerful connection to people and place, from which these young Māori fathers descended.

The stories of their tūpuna and homelands contain histories and memories unique to them, and provided a powerful everyday dialogue of role models and values that defined who they are. The influence of whakapapa to motivate these young Māori fathers had a profound effect and desire to maintain the *mana* (control) and *mauri* (life force) of their tūpuna; for example, Billy who desired to be in the army, to represent and maintain the memory of his grandfather, or Kale who had immense pride in the conduct of his people at the *tangihanga* (funeral) of his wife.

The importance of living tūpuna as influential figures provided young Māori fathers such as Leighton with desirable father characteristics. The loving, caring, compassionate and understanding characteristics of Leighton's grandfather were attributes that Leighton desired to emulate as a father.

He [grandfather] was really loving, really caring and really understanding of people's environments and the way in which they would act, and why they were that way. He was just the definition of love... And he was just a really good person, there's no other way to explain it, he was just a really good person (Leighton).

This experience supports the influence of strong grandparent-child bonds within traditional Māori whānau structures, and the influence of involved grandparents in raising and protecting

grandchildren (Ka'ai, 2005; McRae & Nikora, 2006). Therefore, grandparents provide living examples of role models and provide powerful constellations for positive parenting characteristics and the transmission of culture; important for the wellbeing of Māori youth. The views and attitudes of the young Māori fathers aligned with Māori worldviews of belonging and the importance of looking to the past, for guidance in the present and future (Walker, 1996; Ministry of Justice, 2001).

The importance of relationships for young Māori fathers extended beyond grandparents and parents to include wider kin connections, for example; aunts, uncles, community leaders (Ministers) and public figures (Celebrities).

The findings also highlighted the diverse support systems the young Māori fathers accessed and/or had available to them. That is to say, whānau and other meaningful adult relationships allowed the young Māori fathers to draw upon the unique knowledge sets of various people. What becomes apparent as we discuss the implications of the findings, was the importance of meaningful and quality relationships, and the facilitation of these relationships to positively impact on their outcome and transition into parenthood, as opposed to family structure alone.

However, the most critical whānau relationship for the involvement of fathers, appeared to be their partners or the mother of their children.

The maintenance of this key relationship was maintained with the upmost regard and essential to the positive outcomes for their children (Roberts, Coakley, Washington & Kelley, 2014; Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). The narratives of Leighton and Honz in particular provided accounts that their partners are the most important people in their lives.

Love my wife, because she's gonna take care of my children. So, the first thing would be to love her, make sure she's alright and then I know the rest of my family will be ok... (Honz)

Leighton, further expresses the importance of his wife's wellbeing by providing a space for her to reach her goals and aspirations. These views highlight the importance of maintaining the dynamics of partner relationships (Meunier &

Baker, 2012; Mund, Finn, Hagemeyer, Zimmermann & Neyer, 2015).

As a partner, I've always been of the understanding, that it's my role, to make sure my wife reaches her full potential. That's in a spiritual sense, that's a physical sense, mental...I feel that I'm responsible to help her to be able to do that, and to fulfil that potential that she has (Leighton).

Although no direct research was conducted on the actual wellbeing of their children, research by Rosenberg & Wilcox (2006) found evidence that supports the expression of respectful partner relationships in facilitating healthy children. Furthermore, these relationships were founded on mutual understanding, respect, care and support that extended to all aspects of their life (Meunier & Baker, 2012).

The maintenance of partner relationships centred on two primary factors, relationship building and intimacy. For the fathers who were with the mother of their children, regular dating provided opportunities to spend quality time together, discussing family matters, and reviewing goals. Although the frequency of dating differed from father to father the reoccurrence was consistent. For the fathers who were not with their children's mother, while the relationship was in a manageable state, fathers such as Piripi and Devon were aware of the instability of the relationship impeding access and involvement with their children.

Changes in sexual relations with their partner was observed for some and not for others. For those fathers who experienced changes to their sex life after having a child, their attitudes were very understanding and did not express any detrimental effects on their relationships. For Kale, the changes in his sexual relationship decreased in frequency, but the level of intimacy increased, making the sexual experiences more meaningful.

Probably the way my wife was with my daughter made me love her more. Like she was so awesome, she was such an awesome māmā... But yeh I think sex became more meaningful after baby was born, just cause of how beautiful she was and how awesome of a mum she was (Kale).

Therefore, when sexual relationships were centred on intimacy and mutual understanding,

there appeared to be no ill effects to their relationships, regardless of their desire to increase the frequency of sex.

Expressions of love permeate the narratives of the young Māori fathers. An attitude which Rua (2015) also found as a changing point of view within the male Māori population, and highlighted by Kale who spoke of the expression of emotions as previously been tapu and a new concept within his community. These expressions of emotion were highlighted in their interactions specifically towards their children and was an intimate bond that motivated these young Māori fathers to fulfil the roles of fatherhood. The ultimate expression was in the sacrifice of time from their children, in which these men get up and go to work to provide better opportunities for their families.

For fathers such as Rawiri, Robbie, and Devon, the immediate need to provide for their families delayed the pursuit of their aspirations in preferred careers. This point of view was supported by Rosenberg and Wilcox (2006), in which young fathers experience more significant barriers such as lower socioeconomic status and poor educational achievement that in turn negatively affected employment opportunity (Card & Wise, 1978; Kiernan, 1997). Nonetheless, Rawiri, Robbie and Devon went to work, not because it was required of them but because it was an expression of their love for their families. Leighton, perhaps expressed the sentiments of the love and enjoyment of being a father best.

I come home, and my kids put everything back into perspective for me. You know I'm not chasing the money; it's just about being happy with them. (Leighton).

Therefore, relating back to the historical review of Taonui (2010), the young Māori father's expressed narratives that align more closely to traditional values of Māori fathers who are kind, caring, and give support to women and children; men who are engaged in the raising of children, and whānau systems that support in the raising and protection of children from adverse environments and systemic barriers. Moreover, the accounts of the young Māori fathers challenged negative stereotypes that persist in society, that young fathers are irresponsible,

apathetic, and unsupportive (Barret & Robinson, 1982; Kiselica and Sturmer, 1993; Rouch & Johns, 2005). Furthermore, the accounts of the young Māori fathers depict fatherhood as a maturing experience that provides these men with motivation, aspiration, and resilience (Barret & Robinson, 1982; Card & Wise, 1978; Kiselica & Sturmer, 1993; Rouch & Johns, 2005).

Whānau remains an important institution, in which meaningful relationships emerge from and the foundation of our sense of belonging (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). Meaningful relationships emerged from the shared collective responsibility and caring attributes of its members. In this way, extended family kin provide a safeguarding mechanism for family (Lippman, Wilcox & Ryberg, 2013). For example, in Kale's account, the conditions within the home were less than adequate with his parents and subsequently he and his sister were raised by his grandparents. Being raised by his grandparents not only provided Kale with a safer environment, but allowed him to be immersed in *tikanga* (customary practise) and *marae* (meeting house) life, something his younger siblings missed out on. Honz's account also highlighted the support of extended family kin in feeding and supporting his family, helping to relieve them of parenting stressors from time to time. Furthermore, Piripi's access to uncles who have different expertise, offered him more diverse support networks. These views are supported by Lippman, Wilcox and Ryberg (2013), in which extended kin provided social and financial support to protect families from negative outcomes; and older generations become a resource for children (Bengston, 2001).

Whānau Structure

The young Māori fathers considered two parent household to be more ideal for the wellbeing of their children. Several reasons for this view, could be supported retrospectively, as the majority of young Māori fathers observed the hardship of their mothers as solo parents and the impact and implications of parenting alone. For example, Robbie acknowledged the impact of his parent's separation on his mother. Devon, also acknowledged the hardship of growing up with a solo parent and sentiments of always been poor.

I grew up without a father, and I know what it's like to rely on mum and always be broke. I don't want that for my boys... (Devon).

Other influences for the young Māori fathers two parent ideal, may stem from ridicule during childhood as expressed by Kale. The ability to positively reflect on what could be considered a negative upbringing was an attribute that the young Māori fathers possessed. Therefore, as a community and society we need to create a space for fathers to be involved, so that our tamariki can experience the prosocial outcomes associated with a father's love. (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001).

Ideal family structures were along a continuum between nuclear and traditional whānau structures. The majority of the young Māori father's ideal family structure included three generations, but the constitution of which whānau were included in that definition varied between fathers. For example, Piripi and Robbie resembled a more traditional whānau structure, whereas Honz considered more immediate family descent lines, his children, grandparents, and the inclusion of Honz's sibling's families, taking a more restricted three generational family structure. These changes to the whānau structure are likely a result of colonial and urbanisation influences, which have changed traditional support structures and forced smaller family units (Cooper & Wharewera-Mika, 2011; Herbert, 2001; Kingi, 2011; Taonui, 2010).

I don't want to be bias or anything but if you can stick together as two parents bro, if you can, if it's not working out its not working out, but for your child you want to have both parent's bro (Rawiri).

Pretty much just me my missus and a few kids. Another three more hopefully boys and 1 girl (Billy).

Heaps of kids. Just me, my wife and my kids, and then eventually my grandkids (Leighton).

I would argue that the young Māori fathers aligned more towards traditional whānau or pan tribal structures. Firstly, the majority of the fathers included three generational family structures with the inclusion of various extended kin (Walker, 2014); secondly, Grandparents played an everyday role in raising at least three of the fathers, with the rest making mention of their importance (Durie, 1999; Te Awe Awe-Bevan,

2013); and thirdly, extended family relationships shared the roles and responsibility of parenting, providing support to other whānau members (Ministry of Justice, 2001; Pihama, 2011; Walker, 2014). Therefore, I would suggest that whānau structures have adapted to work within contemporary society, but the essential values of whānau support systems and structures are still maintained and perceived to be ideal by the young Māori.

Ko Te Whakaeatanga Hei Whakakaha Te Oranga: Maintaining a State of Balance Key to Wellbeing

In contemporary society, *utu* has become known as revenge and is perceived to have negative connotations. However, viewing *utu* as a principle and mechanism to maintaining harmony and restoring *mana* (status), it becomes a guide to achieving wellbeing, and a state of *ea* (steady state of balance; Mead, 2013). The protocols of *utu*, maintained the observance of *tapu* (sacred), which was given to protect the *mana* and *mauri* of people and essential to maintaining physical, spiritual, social, and psychological wellbeing (Durie, 1985). The ways in which the young Māori fathers maintained their wellbeing appeared to follow similar adherence to traditional Māori perspectives of holistic health. In this way, the young Māori fathers not only focussed on their physical, spiritual and psychological wellbeing, but also the wellbeing of their whānau (Durie, 1985; Pere & Nicholson, 1991). The young Māori fathers therefore, acknowledged the importance of the collective wellbeing of the family group, often offsetting their personal goals and aspirations to put their children and partners needs ahead of their own. The centrality of whānau wellbeing, aligned with other research in which whānau wellbeing enhanced the wellbeing of self (Rua, 2015; Waitoki, Nikora, Harris & Levy, 2015).

The types of strategies that the young Māori fathers used to cope with the stressors of life, could be categorised into three main areas: sports, music and entertainment, and quality time with family. Sports enhanced the wellbeing of the young Māori fathers not only for physical health but because it was a space to express themselves, lower stress levels, and maintain other social relationships. Music and video games was a way

in which the young Māori fathers used to block out the realities of life and to find respite at an individual level. Therefore, music and video games were used to reset or balance to their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Quality time with whānau provided a space for perspective gaining and was the single most effective strategy for maintaining wellness, and supports the positioning of whānau as the most important support structure and strategy for maintaining wellbeing (G.H. Smith, 1997). The influences of whānau permeated every dimension of health, in that their family relationships are strong connections that are affixed to Māori dimensions of health (e.g. physical, spiritual, whānau and social, and psychological). Whānau, thus motivated the young Māori fathers to develop and grow personal characteristics that helped them to meet the roles and responsibilities as parents and partners. For example, Devon's narrative expressed that he would not be the person he is today if it was not for his children, as his family have made him a better person. This view is also supported by research from Moezzi (1998) and Rouch and Johns (2005).

Mental Health and Coping Mechanisms

The interplay of different dimensions of health appeared to have great significance on the development of resilience, particularly to mental health. The prevalence of mental health issues appeared to be a lived reality for many of the fathers, who identified personal or close association to friends and family who were suffering with mental illness. The wellbeing strategies and relationships coupled with optimistic perceptions on life, significantly lessened the effects of stress, depression and anxiety that the young Māori fathers identified. The importance of family to support young fathers such as Rawiri's partner, allowed him to resolve his challenges more effectively than medication alone. Other close relationships such as Kale's access to work colleagues, trained in clinical psychology, helped him to identify his thought processes as a normal progression of grieving. Furthermore, the perceptions of optimism and the use of wellbeing strategies helped fathers like Honz and Billy, maintain good mental health. These findings further support the centrality of whānau and relationships as the key to intervention and wellness (G. H. Smith, 1997).

The attitudes of Devon and Robbie's perception of mental health provided insight into further intervention for young Māori fathers and mental health. Firstly, Robbie's narrative highlighted the expectation and responsibility of whānau and friends to identify symptoms that impede his mental health. This perspective highlighted the importance of family to intervene and bring raise awareness of the unhealthy behaviour of its members.

Although the young Māori fathers related to experiences of mental illness, some of their sentiments expressed a lack of understanding and lack of knowledge about mental health. The second point, focusses on Devon's perception of his diagnoses of depression and anxiety. According to Devon, he felt normal, despite health professionals stating otherwise. What could be determined from Devon's narrative, was that Māori sometimes do not fit within western paradigms of health, in which western world views may over-pathologize what can be considered normal to Māori.

I've been like this my whole life so its normal to me you know. I feel like there's nothing wrong with me (Devon)

Conclusion

This explorative study has attempted to portray views, opinions and experiences of eight young Māori fathers. The young Māori fathers portray loving, caring, and compassionate qualities that are reflective of historical accounts of positive parenting. The study also highlights the young Māori fathers' determination and resilience to overcome their challenges, and question the negative stereotypes persisting in society. Their ability to draw on their intimate relationships, whānau support systems and wellbeing strategies, provided a safeguarding effect that allowed the young Māori men to fulfil their responsibilities and achieve balance and wellbeing; despite being in adverse environments, exposure to increased risk factors, and experiencing systemic barriers. The young Māori fathers acknowledged changing dynamics to traditional roles to include greater contributions in the home and expression of healthy emotions. Lived experiences also influence what qualities and roles are expressed,

often based on what the young Māori fathers observed was lacking in their own upbringings.

A central reason for the success of the young Māori fathers was dependent on quality relationships which helped to model and emulate attributes such as awahi, manaaki and aroha. It is also important to acknowledge that key relationships were not dependent on gender and often included relationships with people outside of whānau. However, whakapapa remains important to identity and belonging. Crucially important was the maintaining of relationships with the mothers of the children who ensured the wellbeing and access to their children. Because of this, many of the fathers gave high priority to the mother's wellbeing and attainment of her goals.

For many of the young Māori fathers, becoming a parent is an irreplaceable experience. In many instances, having children provided the fathers with intrinsic motivation and meaning which in turn increased their health and wellbeing. Considering the histories of collective and individual experiences with mental health and aversive environments, quality relationships appear to be a key indicator to successful and involved Māori fathers. Furthermore, holistic outlook on health and practices (e.g. sport and exercise, *karakia* (ritual chant), meditation, and relationship building exercises) further ensure the health, wellbeing and success of young Māori fathers.

Therefore, considerations going forward in the development of resources, support services and policy changes should focus on fostering strong intimate and whānau relationships, support holistic health, increased access to children and educational achievement.

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