



Christian Faith and Family Violence

A Report for Samoan Communities
in New Zealand

Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko
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Preface

Everyone has a role to play.¹

Family violence is an issue for everyone. It is a global challenge present in every society and every community. Family violence includes all forms of violence, mistreatment or threat directed against a family member or intimate partner. Different types of abuse often take place alongside each other, and serve to enable and reinforce each other. This includes physical and sexual violence, as well as other harmful behaviours that might be less apparent to outsiders, such as psychological or emotional abuse. Very often it is sustained by financial dependency and can take the form of economic control. Family violence can also be expressed through neglect, especially when this impacts on the safety, health or well-being of young children or elderly dependents. When a family member is present during family violence to another family member, such as a child witnessing assaults against his or her mother, it often impacts on that family member as well.

Men as well as women can be victims of family violence. However, statistics show that violence against children and against women is particularly high, and that most family violence is carried out by men. The World Health Organization's *Factsheet: Violence against Women* describes physical violence against women as a 'major public health problem and violation of women's rights.'² It notes:

- Recent global prevalence figures indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

- Most of this violence is intimate partner violence. Worldwide, almost one third (30%) of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner.
- Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.³

The New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse 2016 Data Summary for Violence against Women indicates that 78% of recorded assaults against females are committed by an offender identified as family, 14% by someone known to the victim but outside the family, and only 8% by a stranger.⁴

Family violence is shaped by differences in power within the family, and within wider society. A common feature in family violence is a mistaken sense of entitlement in asserting control over another family member. Those who experience violence often feel isolated, and unsure how to respond. Repeated abuse can undermine a person's confidence and self-esteem. This can lead to self-doubt and a misdirected sense of self-blame. In some cases, it can lead to destructive coping strategies, including self-harm. In many cases, people who suffer family violence associate their experience with shame or stigma, and are often reluctant to disclose it. This instinct to remain silent can be confirmed and reinforced if victims of family violence are not listened to when they speak out, or if what they say is not taken seriously.

1 United Nation Women Asia Pacific, "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women." 25 November 2013. Available at: asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2013/11/fiji-international-day-for-the-evaw Accessed 1 July 2016.

2 World Health Organization, "Factsheet: Violence against Women," (Geneva: WHO, January 2016). Available at: who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/ Accessed 1 August 2016.

3 World Health Organization, "Factsheet: Violence against Women".

4 New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, "Data Summary 2: Violence against Women". University of Auckland, July 2016. Available at: nzfvc.org.nz/data-summaries/violence-against-women. Accessed 1 August 2016.

More needs to be done to acknowledge the extent of the problem and find ways to change the destructive attitudes and behaviour that create it. Family violence is deeply damaging to those who experience it, to others in the family who witness it, and to everyone in wider society who is affected by it. In a different way, family violence is also very damaging to those who commit it. Churches and church organizations around the world are becoming more aware and more outspoken on how societies need to change. In some countries, if other facilities are not available or accessible, the church can provide immediate practical assistance to those experiencing family violence. For example, by offering a safe and secure refuge if this is not available elsewhere. In such cases, the church can also provide practical assistance such as accompaniment, when reporting family violence to the relevant authorities and ensuring that the report is taken seriously. Churches can also take practical steps to publicise information on what social services are available to those experiencing family violence. Practical steps like this to show Christian love and Christian care are all important elements in a church response to family violence.

In addition to these direct and practical primary responses, churches can take a leadership role in promoting what might be called secondary responses. Secondary responses are less focused on immediate relief and more concerned with long term changes in social attitudes. The church can do much to expose and confront the problem, and to promote a more caring and compassionate response to those who suffer from it. Churches can also contribute towards programmes that prevent family violence, and which challenge the attitudes and behaviour that is based upon. This is especially true in societies where a significant percentage of the population identify themselves as church members.

Recent reports have highlighted the importance of cultural context and cultural values in responses to family violence. In the Pacific Islands, and Pacific Island communities in New Zealand, the churches have to be part of this process. For Pacific communities, the churches have an unparalleled social position and moral authority. Any initiative for social change must

take seriously how Christian values and church teaching might promote, or prevent, a positive response. The potential within the churches is extraordinary. However, if churches and church members are to contribute towards constructive change, they will need an informed understanding of the problem and a clear sense of how Christian faith can contribute to change. This report by Dr. Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko helps to unmask the realities of family violence as a social issue. It shows the complexity of the challenges associated with family violence, and how the churches can offer a constructive Christian response, built on shared values in Samoan communities.

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We hope the resources will be of use to church members in Samoa (laity and clergy), and members of Samoan churches in Aotearoa New Zealand. In addition, we hope that the resources will be of interest to a wider Pacific constituency, in New Zealand and in Pacific Islands, and to other churches and agencies working on family violence.

Professor David Tombs
Howard Paterson Chair of Theology and Public Issues
Director of Centre for Theology and Public Issues
University of Otago

1. Introduction

Violence pervades the lives of many people around the world, and touches all of us in some way. To many people, staying out of harm's way is a matter of locking doors and windows and avoiding dangerous places. To others, escape is not possible. The threat of violence is behind those doors – well hidden from public view.⁵ In a National Statement by faith communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, it makes the assertion that, “Family violence in our communities is one of the most significant moral, spiritual and social challenges that we currently face as a country. As communities of faith in Aotearoa New Zealand, we believe it is our responsibility to take a stand and address this challenge. Family violence is completely unacceptable and is never justified.”⁶

Public and private sectors in New Zealand and Samoa, as well as government ministries and some religious organisations, are currently engaged in a range of projects to address family violence. As a result of these efforts, a great many resources have been produced. In recent years in New Zealand, initiatives such as the *It's not Ok Campaign*; the *White Ribbon campaigns* to raise awareness of the need to eliminate domestic violence; and the *We're Better Than This Video Campaign* launched by the *New Zealand Herald* are all efforts to bring family violence out into the open. Resources⁷ on family violence have also incorporated migrant community core cultural concepts to enhance understanding surrounding

the seriousness of this issue and the responsibility of each person living in New Zealand to combat family violence. All of these attempts show that New Zealand, like many other countries, is searching for effective ways to prevent and respond to the problem of family violence. This is so because it has become very obvious that the enormous costs of family violence on individuals, communities and society are too significant to be ignored.⁸

On March 19, 2012, the Crimes Amendment Act was passed in the New Zealand Parliament. This Act stated that “...if an individual could be reasonably expected to know about the abuse, they will be charged as a party to it.”⁹ The changes in the Act “... are intended to protect children and vulnerable adults from assault, neglect and ill-treatment by creating liability for not only those people who are actively involved in the mistreatment, but also those who have frequent contact with the child or vulnerable adult and fail to take reasonable steps to protect them from mistreatment by others in certain circumstances.”¹⁰ This Act challenges the culture of silence that surrounds family violence. This culture of silence means that there are many family members who witness violence but never report it because they view it as a private matter that is only to be dealt with in the context of the family, unaware that witnessing violence and not reporting it is a crime.

5 World Health Organization, “World Report on Violence and Health,” (Geneva: WHO, 2002), vii.

6 “Faith Communities against Family Violence: A National Statement,” *The Journal of the Office of the Children's Commissioner*, no. 84 (Summer 2014), 2.

7 Maiava Carmel Peteru, “*O Le Tofa Mamao*: A Samoan Conceptual Framework for Addressing Family Violence,” (Wellington 2012). The Ministry of Social Development, “*Nga Vaka O Kaiga Tapu*: A Pacific Conceptual Framework to Address Family Violence in New Zealand,” (Wellington 2012). Key documents on addressing violence in seven ethnic specific communities: *Turanga Maori A Cook Islands Conceptual Framework...*; *Vuvale Doka Sautu*: A Fijian Cultural Framework...; *Koe Fakatupuolamou he tau Magafoa Niue*: A Niuean Conceptual Framework...; *Toku Fou Tiale*: A Tuvalu Conceptual Framework...; *Fofola e Fala kae Talanoa e Kaiga*: A Tongan Conceptual Framework...; *Kaiga Maopopo*: A Tokelauan Conceptual Framework...; and *O le Tofa Mamao*: A Samoan Conceptual Framework...

8 New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, “Data Summaries 2015: Snapshot,” (June 2015), 4.

9 E. Catherine Dickey, “Family Violence in Aotearoa New Zealand,” in *Family Violence from a Global Perspective: A Strength-Based Approach* ed. John DeFrain; Sylvia M. Asay; Marcee Metzger; & Bob Myer (Los Angeles Sage Publications, 2013), 238.

10 Cited in Hiranthi Abeygoonesekera, Brendon Gray, and Margaret Barnett-Davidson, “Crimes Amendment Act (3) 2011,” *The New Zealand Medical Journal* 125, no. 1353 (2012). Vol 125, No, 1353: 159-160.

In Samoa, the Crimes Act and the Family Safety Act were enacted in 2013.¹¹ These Acts address issues of sexual and physical violence and domestic violence. The Family Safety Act focuses on domestic violence, and the Family Court, which will adjudicate domestic violence cases, was established in early 2013. Although these laws have been passed, there has not been sufficient time to judge their success, and meanwhile cases of violence in general and domestic violence in particular continue to be prevalent.

In order to eliminate all forms of violence in Samoan society and Samoan communities in New Zealand, there must be an ongoing networking and information-sharing by concerned representatives of churches, governments and civil society. This "...requires the bringing together of expertise and resources of committed governments, civil society organisations, development partners, faith-based organisations, the private sector, youth and media through effective partnerships. Everyone has a role to play."¹²

The *foafoa* (conch shell) image used in the front cover of this report represents an appeal to all people to come together and dialogue about ways to prevent family violence from shattering the sacredness of human relationship. The symbol of the mat¹³ (in the back cover of report) is an open invitation to join the conversation. By sitting on the mat already rolled out, we are prepared to engage in the process of searching for ways to end family violence.

My work in the Pacific region led me down the path toward doctoral research on a contextual public theology for Samoa, using domestic violence as a case study. I have continued to be involved in efforts to combat family violence among Pacific communities in New Zealand, including the opportunity to write this report on the interface between Christian faith and family violence in Samoan communities. The hope is that this report can relate the message of the gospel on this important issue in a contemporary and culturally sensitive manner that is relevant to the Samoan setting and the needs of Samoan people living in New Zealand.

Dr. Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko
Harold Turner Research Fellow

11 Tolofuaivalelei Falemoe Leiataua, "Commission for the Status of Women in Samoa," ed. Community and Social Development Ministry of Women (Apia: MWCSO, 2013).

12 United Nation Women Asia Pacific, "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women". asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2013/11/fiji-international-day-for-the-evaw

13 Picture taken by Yona Julia Maliko.

2. Unmasking Family Violence in Samoa and Samoan Communities in New Zealand

Introduction

Family violence is a serious social problem in Samoan society and among Samoan communities in New Zealand. Several unique cultural factors impinge on our reflection on this problem. In Samoa, 99.7 percent of the population belong to a church, and the constitution of Samoa is explicitly based on Christian principles. In New Zealand, Samoans make up the largest Pacific Islands ethnic group. In 2006, it was noted that about 131,100 people of Samoan ethnicity were living in New Zealand. This is about 49 percent of all those with Pacific ethnicity residing in New Zealand.¹⁴ Cluny Macpherson echoes the widely-held view that "...the majority of Samoans (in New Zealand) have consciously sought to retain and maintain their language, values and social institutions with which they identify."¹⁵ The 2006 New Zealand Census, shows that 86 percent (105,903) of the Samoan population in New Zealand stated an affiliation with a religious denomination. 77.9 percent of New Zealand-born Samoans self-identified as Christians, while 94.9% of those who were born in Samoa characterised themselves as Christians.¹⁶ These figures support the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of Samoans living in New Zealand belong to the Christian faith.

Yet the irony is that it is in this overwhelmingly Christian community that family violence proliferates. The increase in reported cases of family violence in Samoa and New Zealand is raising the public's awareness of its devastating impacts on the victims, who are overwhelmingly women, children, youth and elderly people.

Because it is such a serious and growing social problem, it is a priority for Christians to offer a relevant theological contribution as a preventative approach that counteracts socio-cultural, religious, and political realities which have, intentionally, justified or condoned family violence in Samoan and Samoan communities in New Zealand.

Samoan Culture and Christianity

Samoa is a small island nation state in the South Pacific, comprising two relatively large islands, Upolu and Savaii, two smaller inhabited islands, Manono and Apolima, and a number of smaller islands. Samoa has an estimated population of 198,000.¹⁷ It regards itself as a Christian nation. As Manfred Ernst notes, "It would be hard to find any other nation in the world where society and the churches are so closely interwoven, and where the historic mainline churches have had and still have such a great impact on nearly every aspect of life, as Samoa."¹⁸ In Samoa, church and the state are inextricably intertwined. While Christian beliefs and practices are crucial elements of individuals' worldviews and lifestyles, the church plays a central role in the social, political, educational and economic life of Samoan communities and the nation.¹⁹

Samoans have been migrating to New Zealand since the mid-1800s, but it was not until after the Second World War (1939-1945) that the number of Samoan migrants coming to New Zealand became significant. The 1960s and early 1970s saw significant increases in the size of the Samoan community in New Zealand, reflecting

14 New Zealand Statistics, "Samoan People in New Zealand: 2006," (Wellington 2007).

15 Cluny Macpherson, "To Go or Not to Go: Migrant Relocation Decisions and Labour Shortage in Western Samoa," in *Essays on Urbanisation in Southeast Asia and the Pacific*, ed. R. D. Bedford (University of Canterbury, Christchurch: Department of Geography, 1984), 143.

16 Statistics, "Samoan People in New Zealand: 2006."

17 Statistics, "Samoa: Populations and Housing Census 2011 Analytical Report," ed. Population and Housing Samoa Bureau of Statistics (Apia, Samoa: Census-Surveys Division Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

18 Manfred Ernst, *Globalization and the Re-Shaping of Christianity in the Pacific Islands* (Suva The Pacific Theological College, 2006), 547.

19 Cluny Macpherson and Laavasa Macpherson, "Churches and the Economy of Samoa," *The Contemporary Pacific* 23, no. 2 (2011): 305.

New Zealand's demand for labour through the encouragement of immigration by the New Zealand administration.²⁰ This trend continues to the present day.²¹ Sadly, Samoan people's quest for a better life and opportunities in terms of education and employment in New Zealand, is marred by incidents of family violence which destroys the lives of family members.

Defining Family Violence

There are many ways of defining family violence. Family violence is sometimes used interchangeably with the term domestic violence. Family violence is commonly defined by government agencies as:

a broad range of controlling behaviours, commonly of a physical, sexual and/or psychological nature, which typically involve fear, intimidation and emotional deprivation. The term domestic violence is also sometimes used. It occurs within a variety of close interpersonal relationships, such as between partners, parents and children, siblings, and in other relationships where significant others are not part of the physical household but are part of the family and/or are fulfilling the function of the family.²²

The New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse Paper submitted in November, 2014, defines family violence as "violence and abuse against any person whom that person is, or has been, in a domestic relationship with. This can include sibling against sibling, child against adult, adult against child and violence by an intimate partner against the other partner."²³

In May 2015, the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse presented a follow-up paper which stated, "Family violence is an issue of power, commonly the abuse and misuse of power by men over women, parents over children, and adults over their elders."²⁴ The definition of family violence as an issue of power is also reiterated by Catherine Dickey, who argues that "One component of domestic violence on which most agree is that it is mainly about control and power of one individual over another."²⁵ Control and power are manifested in physical, psychological, sexual, and even spiritual forms of violence. Robert T. Ammerman and Michel Hersen make the claim that, "Family violence is best understood within the context in which abuse and neglect takes place. Indeed, family violence is a symptom of deeper and more extensive problems in the individual (i.e., perpetrator), family, and society."²⁶ In light of these definitions, we are faced with an issue that is multifaceted in its characteristics and manifestations. Consequently, addressing family violence requires contributions from a variety of disciplines and perspectives in order to understand and adequately address its complexities. There is no single cause of violence happening in families and communities. The Pasefika Proud Programmes of Action constructively suggests, "To achieve a higher rate of responsiveness to potential and actual situations of violence (primary prevention and early prevention) within Pasefika families and communities, an integrated, multidisciplinary, whole-of-Government response, that works together with ethnic-specific and collective Pasefika communities is needed."²⁷

20 Edwin Peter Hendriks, "Migration and Culture: The Role of Samoan Churches in Contemporary Aotearoa" (MSc thesis, University of Canterbury, 1995), 1.

21 Ibid.

22 Ministry of Social Development, "Te Rito New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy," (2002), 8.

23 New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, "Data Summaries 2015: Snapshot," 4.

24 Ibid., 11.

25 E. Catherine Dickey, "Family Violence in Aotearoa New Zealand," 246.

26 Robert T. Ammerman; & Michel Hersen, "Family Violence: A Clinical Overview," in *Case Studies in Family Violence*, ed. Robert T. Ammerman and Michael Hersen (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000), 8.

27 Ministry of Social Development, "Pasefika Proud Programme of Action: Addressing Violence in Pasefika Families and Communities 2014-2017," (Wellington 2014).

Statistics

The *Family Violence: It's Not Ok Campaign* presents the following grim realities concerning cases of family violence in New Zealand society:

... [A]bout half of all homicides in New Zealand are committed by an offender who is identified as family. NZ Police recorded a family violence investigation on average every five and a half minutes in 2014. 76% of family violence incidents are NOT reported to Police. 101,981 family violence investigations were recorded by NZ Police in 2014, up 7% from 95,101 in 2013. In the four years from 2009 to 2012, an average of 13 women, 10 men, and 9 children were killed each year as a result of family violence. 24% of women and 6% of men have experienced one or more sexual offences at some point during their lives. Disabled women are about twice as likely to be victims of violence or abuse compared to other women. [With regard to] Children and young people, 14% of young people report being hit or physically harmed on purpose by an adult at home in the last 12 months. 20% of girls and 9% of boys in New Zealand report unwanted sexual touching or being forced to do sexual things. [Concerning] partner abuse, 50% of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) deaths occurred at the time of actual or intended separation. 1 in 3 women experience physical and/or sexual violence from a partner in their lifetime. 76 per cent of recorded assaults against females are committed by an offender that is identified as family. In the four years from 2009 to 2012, 76% of intimate partner violence-related deaths were perpetrated by men, 24% were perpetrated by women. It is estimated that between 2-5% of the older population in New Zealand experience some form of elder abuse. Economically, family violence is estimated to cost the country between \$4.1 and \$7 billion each year.²⁸

A particularly worrying aspect of family violence in New Zealand is its pervasiveness among Māori and Pacific Islands people. Although statistics do not pinpoint cases of family violence among each of the Pacific Islands ethnic groups, this reality

warrants an urgent public response from all sectors of New Zealand society.

In Samoan society, the issue of family violence tends to focus only on domestic violence on women and children, although other forms of violence are committed as well. Many family violence incidents are not reported nor given immediate attention, as they tend to be dealt with as private matters. In relation to the issue of domestic violence, NGOs in Samoa are at the forefront in their advocacy for justice. Their work has been pivotal in beginning to expose the shocking realities of family abuse in the country. It is now thought that, "In Samoa, 46 per cent of women are physically abused, and up to 8 per cent are beaten unconscious by their spouse."²⁹ "Studies conducted by the UNICEF have shown that Samoa displays among the highest levels of violence and aggression in East Asia and the Pacific... The prevalence of domestic violence and child abuse in Samoa is concerning, with the Samoa Family Health and Safety citing 46.4% of women between the ages of 15-49 experiencing some form of physical, emotional or sexual violence by an intimate partner."³⁰ Certain sectors of the media have recently been more forthcoming in reporting some of the horrific stories of domestic violence happening in the ostensibly religious nation of Samoa, such as the following:

"Incest and Abuse"

...a man [was] found guilty of raping his 14-year old step-daughter. The man was sentenced to eleven and a half years in jail... Earlier this month, a 36 year-old father was jailed for 20 years for raping his 15-year-old daughter... In a similar case, a 46 year-old father was jailed for ten years for one count each of rape and carnal knowledge.³¹

In short, the reality of family violence in Samoa and New Zealand are alarming. They portray a picture of communities experiencing a crisis in moral values. With the shocking statistics on family violence in Samoan communities in mind, we end this section by the claim that family violence severs sacred relationships, at the core of Pacific communities' existence.

28 Cited in New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, "Data Summaries 2015: Snapshot."

29 Virginia Haussegger, "Pacific Women Suffering in Terrible Silence," *Sydney Morning Herald* November 25, 2011.

30 Maddison Clarey, "New Perspectives in Fight against Domestic Violence," *Samoa Observer*, 14 January 2016.

31 Sarai Ripine, "60-Year-Old-Father Jailed for Raping Daughter," *Samoa Observer*, Wednesday 20 March 2013.

3. A Theological and Cultural Framework for Responding to Family Violence

Introduction

Family violence is an issue that requires an urgent response from Christians, churches, ethnic communities, and all institutions and organisations that seek to promote the common good. A Christian response to family violence should be rooted in our Judeo-Christian theology of self. It is only by knowing ourselves as beings created in God's image that we will also understand the consequences of our attitudes and actions toward self, other, creation, and God. The Samoan understanding of self likewise offers a potential ethical framework for rejecting family violence, as it is a socio-centric self that is inextricably bound up with the common good of others and creation.

A Biblical Understanding: We are Relational Selves

At the very beginning of our biblical story, in the Book of Genesis, we learn that both males and females were made in God's image. This means that our understanding of who we are is grounded in our desire to emulate the compassionate attributes of God, a God who is always in an ongoing relationship of unconditional love with all people and all of creation. This is a God who is "...slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Psalm 103:8). Samoan Christians are challenged to reflect this unconditional love of God through their love of and respect for others, on the basis that we are all relational beings, made in the image of and absolutely loved by God.

Scripture also tells us that on the night of Jesus' arrest by the temple guard, Jesus asked his disciples to remain alert, attentive, and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26: 36-56). Jesus is calling on us, as disciples, to cultivate

the same attitude of wakefulness, attentive listening, and prayerful discernment. If Samoan Christians and churches remain passive, denying or turning a blind eye to the agony that many families confront on a daily basis, and separating themselves from the problem of family violence, they will be failing to follow Jesus' directive. The Church must not "sleep" while its own church families struggle with family violence. It must rise up to directly confront and battle against the problem of family violence—a problem that can be overcome through the power of a relational theology of the unconditional love of God and Jesus Christ, and with the practical help of the ministries the Church provides. Otherwise, family violence will continue to destroy families for generations to come.

A Samoan Understanding: We are Relational Selves

Tui Atua, the current Samoan Head of State, explains how *fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way) is, for many Samoans, the very essence of their identity. Tui Atua describes the Samoan identity as follows:

I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share a '*tofi*' (an inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging.³²

In explaining the Samoan identity, Tui Atua elaborates on the *fa'asamoa* as a collection of spiritual and cultural values that motivate people.³³

32 Tupua Tamasese . Tui Atua, "Fa'asamoa Speaks to My Heart and My Soul," in *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, ed. l'uogafa Tuagalu Tamasa'ilau Sualii-Sauni, Tofilau Nina Kirifi-Alai, and Naomi Fuamatu (Lepapaigalagala, Samoa: The Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa, 2008), 80.

33 Cited in Michael J. Field, *Mau: Samoa's Struggle for Freedom* (Auckland: Polynesian Press, 1991 [1988]), 20.

In this sense *faàsamoā* is an umbrella term that inculcates ethical principles and traditions by means of shared core values. This is captured in Drozdow-St. Christian's statement that *faàsamoā* "...is a kind of shorthand Samoans use to indicate a wide range of things. These include their perception of how their ancestors lived, to their persistent concern with propriety and a truly Samoan way of living, to the tension between what many see as conflicting interests of tradition and the need for modernisation and development."³⁴

This Samoan collective sense of self, which is shared with many other Pacific Islands cultures, should be a resource that can be drawn upon to guard against family violence. If it is true, as Tui Atua says, that "I belong to my family and my family belongs to me," then the well-being of everyone in the family must be safeguarded at all costs. No individual can take advantage of or undermine any other individual in the family and community that are so essential to what it means to be human. This socio-centric understanding of the self, which values the common good, should be a protection against any threat to the safety of any member of the family, especially the most vulnerable. As Michael Roberts asserts,

Family violence is a terrible scourge on our society. It creates deep psychological scars on the victims and intrudes on their future enjoyment of life for many years often never finding complete solution...It also denies the humanity of the perpetrator, who themselves maybe perpetuating the cycle of violence they received themselves or observed in their home as children.³⁵

Critical reflection is required at the deepest level to understand why it is that this rich cultural resource has not been sufficiently inculcated in contemporary Samoan communities to prevent the scourge of family violence which exists today.

The Problem of Biblical Interpretation³⁶

The Ministry of Social Development in its "Nga vaka o kaiga tapu: A Pacific Conceptual Framework to address family violence in New Zealand" has rightly argued that the misinterpretation of Biblical texts is a factor that contributes to family violence. In reality, the Bible has often been used to justify violence against women and children. Samoan family relationships are strongly influenced by the patriarchal system which dominates the Old Testament. This is a result of missionary teachings, whereby the English missionaries in the nineteenth century placed strong emphasis on the Old Testament. The New Testament was read but was hardly used in preaching. The missionaries described God as a patriarch, and espoused the subordination of women which was typical of the Victorian England from which they hailed.³⁷

This patriarchal theology continues to shape Samoans' interpretation of the Bible. A literal reading of biblical passages is still used to justify men's dominance over women and their physical 'discipline' of women and children. The Bible is not only taken out of context but used to buttress the imbalance of power between men and women.

There are also specific biblical passages which have often been employed by Samoan clergy to justify the patriarchal theology which condones violence against women. Some of the passages most frequently used to justify male dominance include the following: In the second creation story in Genesis 2: 4b-3:24, it is argued that 'out of man woman was taken' means that women are inferior to men and must submit to their control. 1 Corinthians 11: 2-6 is likewise often cited, and the words 'the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband' have been interpreted literally, ignoring the contextual considerations in first-century Corinth.

34 Drozdow-St. Christian, *Elusive Fragments*, 40-41.

35 Michael A. Roberts, "Focussing on the Blessings: Family Violence and the Role of Faiths," *The Journal of the Office of the Children's Commissioner* 84, no. Summer (2014): 18.

36 This section is adapted from Ah Siu-Maliko, "Public Theology, Core Values, and Domestic Violence..." (Phd thesis, 2015), pp.290-93.

37 This has been noted by another Polynesian woman theologian, Lousiale Uasike, whose Tongan culture shares many affinities with Samoan culture. She describes how the Victorian missionary culture bolstered existing patriarchal island social structures, noting that "...the Christianity that was brought to Tonga arrived in patriarchal form, and this comfortably reinforced the existing Tongan patriarchy." Lousiale Uasike, "Women in Transforming Mission: The Wesleyan Authority of Experience and Women Doing Theology in Tonga," D.Min. dissertation, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 2014, 128.

In the light of this legacy of unquestioningly accepting the patriarchy embedded in biblical narratives, a re-reading of the Bible 'with fresh eyes' is essential if the Samoan churches are to challenge the theological underpinnings of their complicity in family violence and thereby restore relationships shattered by violence.

4. The Role of Samoan Churches in Combating Family Violence

Introduction

In New Zealand, Samoans carry the image of the church as the most central place where their sense of community and spirituality are nurtured. Samoan churches in New Zealand are considered as places where individuals can reaffirm their cultural and Christian identity in order to maintain stability while living as 'strangers in a strange land'. Samoan churches are intended to cater for the holistic needs of Samoan people. The high number of Samoans showing allegiance to the Christian faith also suggests that the Samoan churches have the potential to play a crucial role in terms of a crucial message regarding the important role of Samoan churches in terms of addressing social issues that impact the Samoan community and other communities in New Zealand, including the issue of family violence. A study conducted in Christchurch, New Zealand reveals a claim by a Samoan participant, "In New Zealand, your village is actually your church... If you... meet another Samoan, you work out where they're from through the church. If you go back to the islands, it's, 'What village are you from?'"³⁸

The Role of Church Leaders

The highly respected leadership role of the minister in Samoan churches implies that they should be committed to understanding the situations their parishioners and communities inhabit and responding to these situations with effective pastoral care and advocacy. With regard to the problem of family violence, this requires church ministers to engage in shared learning with parishioners based on a dynamic and critical reflection on the church's moral responsibility to address social ills. Church ministers must also play a leading role in equipping the laity for their own ministries of care. Members of a parish cannot be expected to live out a life of Christian discipleship and witness to those in need without

being informed and prepared for this type of ministry.

A Press Release from Pasefika Proud on 22 June, 2016 reported that "Pacific leaders from churches and social services around New Zealand came together for the first time at the Pasefika Proud National Pacific Leaders Fono, hosted by the Ministry of Social Development, to find solutions to end family violence in Pacific families."³⁹ In gatherings such as this, church leaders must have the courage to speak to the situations their communities are encountering, both within and beyond the parish, pointing their churches towards God's desires, and helping parishioners to engage with one another, with their local community, and with the larger society in positive ways. Liz Tanielu, Pacific National Director at the Ministry of Social Development affirms that "Faith plays such an important part in the resilience that our [Pacific] families have, and it's up to us [Pacific leaders] to work with them to provide them with the tools to develop their skills even further."⁴⁰

In addition to providing more effective pastoral care for victims and perpetrators of family violence, church leaders must make it known that violence of any form is a violation of who we are intended to be as those made in God's image. It is also a violation of the biblical image of the church as the 'Body of Christ'. In this metaphor, every part of the body is of equal value, and all members of the body must work together to create faith communities that work for the common good of all. The church must be an extension of Christ's loving, empowering presence to all who are experiencing abuse. In addition to responding with care to individual crises, pastors and congregations also have the responsibility to shape norms for family life in a way that prohibits manipulative control, coercion and violence of any kind.

38 Susan J. Wurtzburg, "The Pacific Island Community in New Zealand: Domestic Violence and Access to Justice," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 14, no. September (2003): 437.

39 Pasefika Proud, "Pacific Leaders Share Solutions to Prevent Family Violence," news release, 22 June, 2016.

40 Ibid.

Breaking the Silence

Lois Gehr Livezey writes:

For the most part, the complicity of the churches and their theologians in sexual violence is a complicity of silence. We have simply crossed to the other side of the road, in the dubious tradition of the religious leaders in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Even today, when issues of sexual violence receive considerable media attention, surveys and studies indicate that the majority of ministers and seminary students know almost nothing about the dynamics of sexual and family violence and have little or no experience in dealing with it.⁴¹

Besides being an agent of spiritual formation and nurture, the church has a prophetic calling. The church is called to break the silence on the issue of family violence. Breaking the silence means to speak openly about violence, naming it for what it is and naming it as a sin before God.⁴²

According to the Catholic priest, Kevin Barr, the church is the conscience of society, and today society needs a conscience. Unfortunately, the church is not the conscience we need to liberate society, as she is often seen to be silently tolerating some forms of violence.⁴³ Churches and societies must do away with unjust structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression of women and children at all levels. They need to lobby for policies and legislation changes as imperative components of concrete actions. Thus, a collaborative effort between social institutions is necessary to effect change in attitudes that violate the integrity and dignity of all people.⁴⁴

[Samoan] churches cannot turn a deaf ear to the cries of the victims. In fact, the victim must be heard. Why? Because ... Our Lord encourages the cries of the oppressed. The many psalms that call out for God's protection indicate that we serve a loving Lord who never gets tired of listening to –and acting on– the cries of the needy. God is the One who, in unfailing love, comes close to his suffering people. . . . Listening is also important because many victims of violence are reluctant to speak openly. They may fear that openness will lead to retaliation by the abuser.⁴⁵

The conservative nature of many of the mainline churches in Samoan society and New Zealand has resulted in the church becoming an institution that supports the status quo. One clear evidence of this is the church's failure to become prophetic is its silence on the issue of family violence. This silence means turning a blind eye to the suffering of some of the most vulnerable members of society.⁴⁶

Research on domestic violence in Samoa found that "...domestic violence is not a priority of mainstream churches and religious organisations. Comments were made that churches need to look to their own practices first. At the same time, churches were seen to be the agencies which should be playing a lead role in addressing domestic violence and abuse issues."⁴⁷ It's been noted that "Many of the interventions – by ministers, family elders, or matai – in domestic relationships do not deal with the violence itself in a lasting manner, and may only provide a temporary solution at best..."⁴⁸

41 Lois Gehr Livezey, "Sexual and Family Violence: A Growing Issue for the Churches," *Christian Century* 31 (1987): 938.

42 Marie M. Fortune, *Violence in the Family: A Workshop Curriculum for Clergy and Other Helpers* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1980), 204.

43 Weavers, *The Church and Violence against Women: A Theological Education Course Book* (Suva: SPATS, 2006), 42.

44 Ibid.

45 David Powlison, Paul David Tripp, and Edward T. Welch, *Domestic Abuse - How to Help* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2001), 2.

46 Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Public Theology, Core Values and Domestic Violence in Samoan Society" (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2015), 270.

47 Michael Roguski; and Venezia Kingi, "Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme: Update of Baseline in-Country Review Samoa Report" (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington, 2011), 37-38.

48 Susan J. Wurtzburg, "The Pacific Island Community in New Zealand: Domestic Violence and Access to Justice."

5. Christian and Samoan Values as an Effective Response to Family Violence

Introduction

Mataafa Keni Lesa, the editor of *Samoa Observer* newspaper, has stated, “The truth is that what’s keeping this country [Samoa] peaceful and stable are its core cultural values and Christian beliefs. We should never let go.”⁴⁹ Fa’afouina Iofi reinforces the widely held belief that “Samoan cultural values can be integrated with Christian understanding to help Samoans affirm the best in their cultural heritage. It will encourage them [Samoans] to make a relevant contribution toward the enrichment of life in the communities and churches to which they belong.”⁵⁰ Within this framework, Samoan family violence can be viewed as a problem that requires a renewed search for the common good of all human beings and a re-affirmation of the value and dignity of all life that undergirds the Samoan-Christian way of life. The essential role of Samoan cultural and Christian values in shaping Samoan identity ought to be reflected more in Samoan people’s behaviour and relationship with each other, within the various spheres of Samoan society and in particular the family.

Aiga (Family) as the Breeding Ground of Non-Violence

“In the family a child receives powerful messages and examples of the kinds of behaviour which are regarded as good and acceptable. Through being loved, we learn to love. Through being trusted, we learn to trust. Through being treated reasonably and gently, we learn how to handle anger, aggression and frustration.”⁵¹ In the Samoan culture,

The term *aiga* is often translated ‘extended family’ but it also means family in the sense of immediate relations. The *aiga*

is the basic social unit of Samoan life, comprising grandparents, parents, children and other relatives. Sometimes a Samoan *aiga* even includes strangers who are taken in when they have no other place to live. Indeed, in Samoa no one can truly be a stranger because everyone has a place of origin, a sense of direction, and a space in a particular social location. A person finds a sense of identity in his or her kin-group and *nu’u*. The basis of this identification is knowing one’s *faia* (how one is related to other people in the *aiga*).⁵²

In Scripture, Paul’s Letter to Titus speaks to the essence of Christian family life. Titus 2:11-13 reads, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” This is a call for the Church to end violence in the home. Each has been given the directive to love others as Christ loves them. Therefore, violence toward family members should never be permitted and must not be regarded by the Church as an insignificant sin. The Church must understand that the voices of clergy and church leaders matter in the lives of family victims and the perpetrators of that violence.

Christian Faith and its Values

The Christian faith has much to contribute to the search for constructive ways to eradicate family violence, since Christian values appeal to the underlying moral worth of every person or group, underpinning what a person prizes most. Every human being is like the ‘pearl of great price’ in Jesus’ parable (Matthew 13: 45-46).

49 Mataafa Keni Lesa, “Those Evils Are Already Here,” *Samoa Observer*, 8 March 2013.

50 Faafouina Iofi, “Samoan Cultural Values and Christian Thought: An Attempt to Relate to Samoan Traditional Values to Christian Understanding” (D.Min thesis, School of Theology at Claremont 1980), 32.

51 Duncan B. Forrester, *Forrester on Christian Ethics and Practical Theology: Collected Writings on Christianity, India, and the Social Order* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 415.

52 Ah Siu-Maliko, “Public Theology, Core Values and Domestic Violence in Samoan Society,” 100.

Christianity teaches us a set of beliefs that form the basis of a worldview that guides our actions, including the following:

1. As noted earlier, we are created in the image of a creative and compassionate God, who has imprinted His image upon the hearts and souls of all of us. This means that every human being is worthy of respect. Appealing to this image is a corrective to any impulse toward violence against others.
2. The New Testament gives explicit prohibitions against the mistreatment of people. In his Letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes, “Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.” Paul makes it clear that we are all made one in Christ, who breaks down all dividing walls. He says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal.3:26-28). In this unity, in which we are bound together in love, there can never be any justification for violence.

Practical Recommendations for Churches

A contextually sensitive approach in Samoan churches to addressing family violence is one that will incorporate core Samoan values that cohere with Christian values. Several concrete suggestions that incorporate these shared values are proposed here:⁵³

1. Appealing to the Samoan value of *alofa*, which has parallels with the Christian concept of *agape* (selfless love):
 - Samoan professionals who have expertise in family violence can be invited to visit churches, where information about the causes and effects of family violence can be presented in a non-threatening way, as a compassionate practice of *alofa/agape*.
 - Churches can sponsor ‘family life’ forums centred on the value of *alofa/agape*, with a particular focus on what it implies for family relationships.
2. Appealing to the Samoan value of *fa’aaloalo* (respect), which has parallels with a Christian theology of relationship based on mutual respect:
 - Churches can sponsor workshops on topics such as: “What does it mean to enact Christian *fa’aaloalo* in the context of marriage?” Discussions can be enhanced through the use of role plays.
 - Churches at the national level can provide refresher courses for ministers, where they can engage in theological reflection about the Christian implications of *fa’aaloalo*. Participants can then design action plans for their congregations around practical ways to foster *fa’aaloalo* in family relationships.
3. Appealing to the Samoan value of *soalaupule* (dialogue), which has parallels with how Jesus related to others in ways that promoted honesty, trust and openness:
 - Because family violence is such a sensitive topic, especially for those who may have been victims or perpetrators, churches can sponsor female-only and male-only *soalaupule* sessions led by trained animators who can create ‘safe spaces’ that encourage the open sharing of experiences of family violence.
4. Appealing to the Samoan value of *amiotomu* (justice), which has parallels with a Christian prophetic theology of justice:
 - Congregations can cultivate ‘prophets’ in their midst who will call on those in positions of power to safeguard the rights and safety of the victims of family violence through the enactment of just laws and policies. These prophets will be equipped and supported by congregations to make full use of the media and public actions to promote *amiotomu/justice* in relation to family violence.

⁵³ These practical suggestions are adapted from Ah-Siu-Maliko, “Public Theology, Core Values, and Domestic Violence,” Chapter 7, pp. 273ff.

To implement a Christian theological contribution on family violence, Samoan theologians and concerned citizens must work together to critically examine the issue at hand. This entails scrutinising the facts surrounding family violence, in the light of the Samoan and New Zealand contexts, drawing on both contributions from relevant secular disciplines and theological wisdom. The role of the church must also be analysed critically in terms of its calling to be an agent of God's empowering and reconciling love. Since the church is a very powerful institution in Samoa and thus a likely agent to implement ways to prevent family violence, it must contribute to the proclamation and embodiment of a message of hope and a call to action for the flourishing of all Samoan communities in New Zealand and abroad.

6. Conclusion

Family violence is a distortion of the image of the God who created us all and with whom we seek to humbly walk. Family violence is everyone's concern, it is a public concern, even if it happens in the privacy of the domestic sphere. It is a concern for everyone in the world. We should be concerned for the well-being and common good of all people, as in the prophetic message in Jeremiah 29: 7, "...But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

The severity of this crisis makes it imperative that we take action to combat family violence. Implementing laws which penalize violent acts towards women, children and others are helpful in defining as a society what is acceptable and unacceptable treatment of people. That is the task of both Samoan and New Zealand society. At the same time, as Christians we approach this problem not merely as citizens but from the perspective of our faith, based as it is on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, who came so that everyone may have life to its fullest.

In order to overcome violence of any sort, we must act as agents of love, justice, hope and peace. As Micah 6:8 reminds us, "He has told you oh mortal what is good and what the Lord requires of you, but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God."

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By Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko
Centre for Theology and Public Issues | University of Otago



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