

*A malu i 'āiga, e malu fo'i i fafo:  
Protection for the family,  
protection for all*

*Samoan people's understanding of primary  
prevention of violence against women*

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The title of the report includes the Samoan proverb, 'A malu i 'āiga, e malu fo'i i fafo'. The essence of the proverb is that community wellbeing begins with respect and protection in families.

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## Contents

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Executive summary	2
Introduction	3
Purpose	3
Scope and structure	3
Research methodology	4
Ethical considerations	5
Background context	6
Literature	6
Vā, Vā tapuia, Vā fealoaloa'i	7
Feagaiga	7
Fa'asinomaga	8
Malupui puia	8
Key research findings	9
Primary prevention in Samoan communities	19
Ideas for primary prevention in Samoan communities	22
Conclusion	24
References	25

## Executive summary

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Samoan communities in New Zealand understand primary prevention of violence against women and girls largely, if not entirely, within the context of fa'aSamoa<sup>1</sup> (Samoan culture). Samoan principles such as the vā tapuia, feagaiga and fa'asinomaga help to inform this uniquely Samoan context. These concepts and others were designed to keep women and girls safe from violence. When they were understood and observed this was perceived to be so. However, when they were misinterpreted, ignored and breached, women's and girls' safety were undermined or at risk.

Research participants shared similar views and experiences about primary prevention. They also held varied views, including for example, what it meant to have and gain respect, or what it meant to grow up as a Samoan in Samoa as opposed to New Zealand, or about issues of cultural adaptation, cultural identity, and Samoan life.

Participants find that Samoan communities do know what works to protect or keep Samoan women and girls safe from violence. They spoke of the potential in social marketing approaches and of open dialogue forums, such as in churches and community programmes, led by Samoan role models and leaders, and involve a good cross-section of the community.

This report recognises that there are programmes that specifically target Samoan men's attitudes and behaviours towards violence. The findings are favourable of these programmes.

Samoan communities also know what does not work to prevent violence. Including, clear misunderstandings about the link between cultural values, individual and collective behaviour, and thought. Cultures of violence and masculinity in the Samoan context can only be read in the context of Samoan societal drivers. Many of these drivers exist in Samoa and migrate with Samoan immigrants to New Zealand and persist to shape their and their children's attitudes and behaviours towards violence. The safety and wellbeing of all in Samoan society is paramount, but especially the vulnerable, including Samoan women and girls.

For the short term, open discussion across generations in appropriate settings (about the factors that keep Samoan women and girls safe from violence), is a promising approach. These discussion forums can mobilise Samoan community efforts to enact primary prevention of violence. In the long term, culturally informed prevention education and practice initiatives can ensure that policy and practice models are appropriately responsive and effective in keeping Samoan women and girls safe from violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Fa'aSamoa is an umbrella concept that covers a broad range of indigenous Samoan institutions, values and principles, and is grounded in indigenous Samoan epistemologies and ontologies quite different to western thought and practice. *Ole tōfā mamao A Samoan Conceptual Framework for Addressing Family Violence*. Ministry of Social Development. (2012).

## Introduction

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### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present some current New Zealand-based Samoan people's understandings of primary prevention of violence against women. The report seeks to generate further in-depth discussion and to contribute to New Zealand's evidence base about cultural attitudes to violence prevention. Previous research has acknowledged that there is limited information for some population groups, including for Pacific women. This report can assist policy makers and practitioners to design and implement effective policies, actions and strategies for primary prevention of violence against Samoan women.

Prevention activities are commonly depicted as operating at three overlapping levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary prevention activities aim to prevent violence before it occurs, promoting non-violent and respectful behaviour. Secondary prevention activities aim to respond to the immediate needs of victims after incidents of violence. Tertiary prevention activities aim to provide support for the long-term recovery and safety of victims, and to strengthen ways in which perpetrators are held to account, are treated and monitored.<sup>2</sup> Secondary and tertiary prevention activities are more common than primary prevention activities. However, with a growing international evidence base about practices in primary prevention, interest in these is increasing.

This report is to be read alongside the Ministry of Women's Affairs recent *Current Thinking on Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women* report<sup>3</sup> and the recent *Pasefika Proud Programme of Action 2014 to 2017*<sup>4</sup> report by the Ministry of Social Development.

### Scope and structure

Pacific women in New Zealand are of diverse ethnic backgrounds and while it is acknowledged that Pacific women as a whole are a group for whom less is known in regards to primary prevention of violence, this report focuses specifically on primary prevention of violence against Samoan women. Samoan women are the largest female Pacific population group in New Zealand. Further work is required to understand how primary prevention might work for other groups of Pacific women.

For the purposes of this report, violence against women encompasses all forms of violence against female partners imposed by all perpetrators, as well as sexual violence in non-intimate relationships.<sup>5</sup>

This report provides an overview of what the Samoan research participants of this project viewed as important in understanding primary prevention. It also presents key themes

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<sup>2</sup> This is most commonly found in the health sector. See <http://www.health.govt.nz/search/results/prevention>

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Social Development (2014) *Pasefika Proud Programme of Action: Addressing violence in Pasefika families and communities 2014-2017*. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development .

<sup>5</sup> The report recognises that while the majority of perpetrators of violence against women are men, that women are also perpetrators of violence against other women. This point was raised at the Wellington and Auckland feedback fono session in September 2015. Ministry for Women Community fono held in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch September 2015.

identified from fa'afaletui (dialogue or discussion sessions)<sup>6</sup> with these participants. It provides an analysis of key themes from their narratives and discusses these in terms of primary prevention.

The report identifies primary prevention activities occurring in New Zealand-based Samoan communities at present and discusses the potential contribution of these activities to forming a broader understanding of what primary prevention of violence against women looks like in a culturally diverse society.

This report is structured in three main parts: background context, key research findings and discussion about primary prevention initiatives.

This report supports the work of Government, Pacific communities and the NGO sector in preventing violence against Pacific women.

The research that informs this report was undertaken in partnership with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples (formerly known as the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs) and the Ministry of Social Development.

## Research methodology

The fa'afaletui methodology<sup>7</sup> was adopted as a specifically Samoan research approach to guide and frame the primary research. The fa'afaletui methodology prioritises fa'aSamoa in terms of how, why and for whom the research is conducted. Focus groups were adopted within this methodology to allow for a systematic comparison of shared experiences, and for the development of consensus views around issues of significance.

The term fa'afaletui was identified as a term of relevance for research by the elder men and women focus groups of a Samoan mental health study. The participants stated that the term fa'afaletui "...explain[ed] the process in which they viewed themselves to be a part of."<sup>8</sup>

Seven focus groups were held in Wellington and Auckland. A total of 49 Samoan males and females participated including men and women of varied age groups (i.e. 20 to 80 plus years), from different religious, gender and educational backgrounds. Most focus group discussions were held in Samoan and transcripts were translated into English.

The fa'afaletui method acknowledges different levels of knowing in the traditional Samoan community. It also prioritises the sharing of views towards a consensus about the range of views present and possible solutions for moving an issue forward. The views of fa'afaletui session participants are woven and explored for what they mean in themselves and for how they reflect a Samoan perspective or worldview.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Tamasese, K. (2005). *Ole taeao afua, the new morning: a qualitative investigation into Samoan perspectives on mental health and culturally appropriate services*. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry 39:300–309.

<sup>7</sup> Tamasese et al 2005 article. In *Fa'afaletui: A Framework for the Promotion of Renal Health in an Australian Samoan Community*. A. McCarthy, R. Shaban, C. Stone. (2011). Suaalii-Sauni, T. and Fulu-Aiolupotea, M. (2014). *Decolonising Pacific research, building Pacific research communities and developing Pacific research tools: the case of the 'talanoa' and 'faafaletui' in Samoa*, Asia Pacific Viewpoint, 55: 3, pp.331-344.

<sup>8</sup> Tamasese, K. (2008). *Achieving wellbeing with Pacific peoples, families and communities: Considerations of gender, culture and socioeconomic contexts*.

<sup>9</sup> Tamasese (2008). McCarthy (2011).

Using the fa'afaletui method, similar to using qualitative research methods, the data was manually coded into theme clusters of recurring subject areas. These were checked further using back-forward translations. The themes were sorted and categorised into sub-themes and aligned to research objectives highlighting reoccurring concepts.

### **Ethical considerations**

The '*Pacific Health Research Guidelines*' (2014) steered the ethical approach for this research. Participants were informed about the research purpose, confidentiality of their identity, security of data, intended use of the data, and that the data would only be seen by the research team. Participants were asked to give written consent to have focus group discussions recorded and a professional counselling service was available to participants.

## Background Context

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### Literature

There is no prior literature specifically on Samoan people's understandings of primary prevention of violence against women. Therefore this report is a new and unique contribution to the field. However, we acknowledge the related work on family and sexual violence by the authors of the reports, *O le tōfā mamao: A Samoan Conceptual Framework for addressing family violence*<sup>10</sup> and *O 'Aiga o le 'anofale o afio'aga ma le fatu o le aganu'u: Samoan pathways to the prevention of sexual violence*<sup>11</sup>.

*O le tōfā mamao* informs much of this report's secondary research. The *O 'Aiga o le 'anofale* report identified protective factors for the prevention of sexual violence, some of which were raised in discussion during the primary research for this report. It also identified causes of sexual violence, prevention strategies, the need for capable leadership and impact assessments of media reporting as key issues for discussion.

In addition, the work by Cribb titled, "*Being bashed is just something I have to accept*": *Western Samoan Women's Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence in Christchurch (1997)*<sup>12</sup> still has salience. It showed a perceived link between prevention and the ability to access 'westernised' support services on one hand, and the failure of traditional Samoan support structures for preventing violence against Samoan women living in modern urban New Zealand settings on the other.

The *O le tōfā mamao* report offers six key concepts, and some of these concepts are referred to by participants of the research for this report. These are: vā generally and vā tapuia and vā fealoaloa'i specifically; feagaiga; faasinomaga; and malupuipuia. We offer the following elaboration on each concept to provide cultural nuance and meaning. The meanings offered draw significantly from the work of the Samoan Working Group responsible for *O le tōfā mamao*.

This report builds on the secondary literature cited here. In the absence of specific research on Samoan people's understandings of primary prevention of violence against women, it is worth acknowledging more broadly, that successful primary prevention initiatives are:

- strong on fostering networks and partnerships
- well-resourced, tailored to the audience and comprehensive
- equipped to deal with disclosure of violence

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Social Development (2012) *O le tōfā mamao: A Samoan Conceptual Framework for addressing family violence*. Wellington: Ministry of Social Development.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (2010) *O 'Aiga o le 'anofale o afio'aga ma le fatu o le aganu'u Samoan pathways to the prevention of sexual violence* By Maiava Carmel Peteru and Teuila Percival Pacific Health School of Population Health University of Auckland October 2010 Commissioned by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs. Wellington: Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs.

<sup>12</sup> Cribb, J. (1997) *Being bashed is just something I have to accept: Western Samoan women's attitudes towards domestic violence in Christchurch*. Masters Thesis.



- able to promote healthy behaviours and challenge cultural norms
- able to promote victim empathy, i.e. not blaming
- able to include males as part of the solution.<sup>13</sup>

## Vā, Vā tapuia, Vā fealoaloa’i

The Samoan indigenous worldview is inextricably interrelated and interdependent. It is encompassed in the word vā<sup>14</sup>. In ordinary usage, the term vā means space. This can refer to the physical distance between objects, places, or people. When used in the context of human relationships, as is the case in this report, vā refers to a relational space, one that includes the physical, mental, spiritual, genealogical and historical. Vā is therefore, as Albert Wendt writes, “not empty or separate, but space that relates”.<sup>15</sup>

There are many forms of vā relationships. The two that concern this research are vā tapuia and vā feāloaloa’i. These are the most common forms of vā relationships practiced by Samoan people today.

Vā tapuia are tapu (sacred) relationships. These relationships exist between parents and children, husband and wife, the living and the dead, human beings and their environment, between the creator and the created, brothers and sisters, older and younger siblings, matai (chief) and family members, the elderly and the young.<sup>16</sup> Vā tapuia are guided by spiritual covenants (feagaiga), and are highly significant to Samoan people.<sup>17</sup>

The term ‘fa’aaloalo’ refers in this context to the respectful undertaking of duties to family and community. Vā feāloaloa’i is the respectful conduct and etiquette that is expected in order to pay proper deference to vā tapuia. It is the mutual and correct observance of protocols between people. Vā feāloaloa’i includes acceptable behaviour, ritual and language.

## Feagaiga

Feagaiga are spiritual covenants between individuals and groups of people, which define protocol and etiquette in vā relationships such as the vā tapuia. The most important feagaiga is that which exists between a brother and his sister, as illustrated by Tuimaleali’ifano<sup>18</sup>:

*E leai se feagaiga e sili atu lona tāua i lo’o le feagaiga a le teine ma lona tuagane.*

*(There is no covenant that is more binding and sacred than the one that exists between the sister and her brother).*

The brother-sister covenant is a reciprocal and sacred obligation to one another’s wellbeing. There is a burden of responsibility to ensure that the needs of a sister are shouldered and met by the brother. In this context, the sister is the feagaiga, the covenant. The role of the

<sup>13</sup> As was the case for the Ministry for Women’s research with Māori women documented in the report: *Wāhine Māori, Wāhine Ora, Wāhine Kaha: preventing violence against Māori women* (2015).

<sup>14</sup> See Aiono-Le Tagaloa 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Wendt 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Tamasese 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Tui Atua 2009.

<sup>18</sup> In Huffer and Soo, 2000.

brother, as perceiving the world in relation to the wellbeing of his sister and her descendants is captured in the following saying:

*O le i'oimata o le tuagane lona tuafafine*

*(The sister is the pupil of her brother's eye).*

The brother-sister feagaiga covenant lasts for their life time. Other feagaiga exist, as between the orator chief and high chief, or between a pastor and his congregation.<sup>19</sup>

### **Fa'asinomaga**

Fa'asinomaga is knowledge that explains identity and how one belongs in the Samoan world. 'Fa'asino' means to direct or to indicate. 'Maga' refers to multiple points or places. The key reference points of an individual's fa'asinomaga can be people or places including āiga (extended family), fanua (family land), nu'u (village), gafa and suafa matai (genealogy and chiefly titles). The saying, '*o le tagata ma lona fa'asinomaga*' makes explicit that every individual is entitled to a designation in the family, the village, and the nation.<sup>20</sup>

### **Malupuipua**

Malupuipua is a place or person of sanctuary, safety or protection. This concept can apply in different contexts, for example, it can be a physical place or a mental state of mind for an individual. It can also relate to the feeling of protection that one may get from a group of people such as in a family or community.

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<sup>19</sup> Schoeffel, P. (1995). The Samoan concept of feagaiga and its transformation". In *Tonga and Samoa: images of gender and polity*. J. Huntsman (Ed). Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies. Christchurch. Pp.85-106.  
Suaalii-Sauni, T. (2007) E faigata le alofa: The Samoan faamatai – reflections from afar. In *Changes in the Matai System, O suiga i le Fa'amatai*. A. So'o (Ed). Apia. National University of Samoa. pp. 33-60.

<sup>20</sup> Tui Atua 2009.

## Key research findings

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*'There is nothing in the beliefs and philosophical principles of fa'aSamoa that condones verbal, physical or emotional acts of violence against members of immediate and extended āiga'.<sup>21</sup>*

Research participants identified both protective factors and risk factors for violence against Samoan women. Some of these factors were described as internal to fa'aSamoa while others were described outside the context of fa'aSamoa. Fa'aSamoa concepts were more likely than those not viewed as fa'aSamoa to be described by participants as both protective factors and risk factors. The following section discusses the key research findings and how fa'aSamoa values were spoken about and perceived to work for or against Samoan women and girls in terms of keeping them safe from violence.

*The protection of Samoan women and girls is inherent in traditional Samoan culture (traditional fa'aSamoa) but a lack of understanding of what this constitutes, non-observance and breaches put Samoan women and girls at risk of violence*

### **Vā tapuia is the overarching protective principle for the safety of Samoan women and girls**

Vā tapuia was the most common and focal concept discussed by research participants. They spoke of it as the guiding principle to appropriate behaviour and conduct between family members. When understood and observed in the appropriate manner, vā tapuia is believed to be the key protective factor against violence for Samoan women and girls.

*O aoaoga na ou maua mai i si o matou 'āiga, o mea lea o le tausī feagaiga. Feagaiga a le tamā ma le tinā, e taua tele. E o'o i le taimi nei e le faapea ua o'o so'u lima i si o'u 'āiga, e le faapea ua iai foi so'u upu malosī i so'u 'āiga, ona e mafua mai le faavāe ua uma ona faataatia mai le amataga o le olaga o le tagata Samoa.*

*What I learned from our family, is respect for the covenants. The covenant between husband and wife is very important. To this day I have never lifted my hand towards my wife or spoken harsh words to her because of the core principles and value foundations that have been laid down from the beginning of a Samoan person's life.*

The vā tapuia was viewed as a restorative principle. It was described as a guiding concept to restoring balance in damaged relationships.

*The vā explains to bring things back to balance. Then it's the culture of the family, it's a practice. It's a tradition that may have been passed down ... when I think about aganu'u (fa'aSamoa) in its purest form, the vā is all about making things balanced.*

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<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Social Development (2012).

## **However, breaches of the vā tapuia can put Samoan women and girls at risk of violence**

Research participants discussed vā tapuia as a concept linked to love and/or compassion, and the loss of love and/or compassion in relationships. Where the vā tapuia is breached, such as in small transgressions against tradition, or in larger forms of violence, such as between a husband and wife, love and/or compassion as buffers of violence is/are lost. All breaches of vā tapuia are considered offensive in fa'aSamoa.

*Sauaina - tusa o le le alofa o le tamāloa; po o se tama'i mea, po o le sa'o o le tinā po o le lē sa'o, ae fa'ao'o lima i ai le tamā. Po o leā se mea e fia alu ai le tinā ae le faatagaina e lona toalua E le tutusa alofa.*

*Violence – it happens because the man doesn't truly love or has no compassion; it might be something small, whether the wife is in the right or the wrong, if he hits her...wherever the wife might want to go and her husband will not allow her to go...the love is not the same.*

Research participants described how some husbands assume power and control over their wives. The imposition of this power imbalance is a breach of the principle of the vā tapuia. Power imbalances put women at risk of violence, physical and non-physical. For example, the use of force and coercion are considered abusive behaviours.

*Sauaga – e tele upu e fetau i le sauaga. E mafua mai ona o le lē moni o le alofa ia te a'u. Fa'apea ua le moni le alofa o lo'u to'alua ia te a'u. Ua vāivāi le alofa, ua le maua foi le onosa'i. Sauaga i totonu o le 'āiga mafua mai i le fia pule.*

*Violence - there are many words for violence. It is caused by a disingenuous love for me. For example, my husband's or wife's love for me is not true, is weak; it is not patient. Violence in the family occurs because of a desire to dominate and control.*

## **The brother-sister covenant or feagaiga is the most significant vā or relationship to acknowledge for the safety of all women and girls**

The most sanctified relationship that should always be guided by the vā tapuia is the covenant between a brother and his sister. The brother-sister vā or feagaiga has important implications for the protection or safety of all women and girls because it also informs behaviour and relationships outside of the family. Research participants highlighted how a brother learns to care for his sister, his feagaiga or covenantal responsibility. A belief in this can define how he behaves in relation to all women throughout his life.

*Our sons are brought up to know who their feagaiga is. It doesn't matter whether they live in Russia or in New Zealand, they will know that; so that when they get married, they will never touch their wives their daughters or any women, be it physical abuse or sexual abuse You don't need a village in New Zealand because you carry that in you.*

## **But the feagaiga must be reinstated if it is to protect women against male violence**

In explaining the significance of feagaiga, female research participants drew on historical references to reflect how the feagaiga has changed over time. They described how in pre-colonial times, women held significant status and authority within the village. With the arrival of Christian missionaries that status was bestowed on missionaries and later Samoan ministers of the church. However, these members of the community were not seen as feagaiga in and of themselves, they were 'like feagaiga' and so given the name fa'afeagaiga ("fa'a" means to be like).

Some female research participants felt that their status as feagaiga was diminished through the bestowal of a feagaiga status to the church. They believed the feagaiga was in a sense appropriated by the church. This perceived loss of status was interpreted by some as a risk factor for violence against Samoan women and girls.

*Unless we re-establish the feagaiga, we will never get rid of violence. That has to be re-established and put in its rightful place. Feagaiga – we women need to reclaim our feagaiga. Our men who would be our brothers, or husbands, fathers they need to recognise their feagaiga.*

## **Vā tapuia requires a clear and shared sense of conduct and respect**

Research participants recognise that upholding the vā tapuia requires demonstrations of mutual respect or fa'aaloalo in all relationships and that when observed, the vā fealoaloa'i (respectful relationships demonstrated by acknowledgment of appropriate conduct and etiquette) comes into play, helping to reduce a propensity for violence.

*It works two ways. If our brothers are to honour and respect us as their covenants, we likewise need to reciprocate by respecting and honouring them. The fa'aaloalo and vā tapuia makes us reciprocate with everyone in the family.*

## **But maintaining the vā tapuia and vā fealoaloa'i has sometimes come with consequences**

Research participants of the younger generation in particular reflected on the vā fealoaloa'i in relation to expectations of appropriate conduct between children and their parents, and youth and elderly. These discussions highlighted that the vā fealoaloa'i has been a barrier for young people, especially where conflict occurs between older people and the young are faced with whether to intervene or not. Children witnessing violence between their parents, for example, feel powerless because of the often unspoken Samoan belief that it would be disrespectful or inappropriate for them to intervene.

*Yeah because you're not in...or like even just saying something to try and stop like if you say, stop, stop. They're like, 'aua e te pisa, e te le tupulaga ma [Be quiet. You are not of that generation].*

*As we boys grew up we said that's enough but we never laid a hand on dad because of fa'aaloalo, that respect...at the end of the day, we'll take the beating for our mum.*

## Identity sets the context for establishing behaviour and navigating behavioural expectations

Research participants interpreted fa'asinomaga as one's birth entitlement, given to all Samoans. This entitlement relates to the notion that every Samoan is believed to be of a family, a village and of the Samoan society. Fa'asinomaga was described as a 'compass' as it sets the context for expectations about behaviour and conduct within vā relationships.

*Whether you know it or not, you belong somewhere. You have an identity. This forms part of your vā relationship with other Samoan people. If you do not know where you are from, it may become more difficult for you to learn appropriate behaviour.*

*Manatua foi le upu o le atunu'u - o le tagata ma lona 'āiga, o le tagata ma lona fa'asinomaga. O tatou uma e leai seisi o tatou e le sau mai se mea. E tofu a ma le 'āiga...*

*Remember the Samoan saying – the person and their family, the person and their fa'asinomaga. There is no one who does not come from somewhere. We each belong to a family...*

Fa'asinomaga is seen as a key part of building protective factors for Samoan women and girls. It requires a strong sense of identity or at least, a sound connection to a positive environment of respectful behaviour. Without these, transmission of behavioural expectations between generations, such as parents and children risk confusion and disrespectful conflictual relationships.

## Sanctuary can be sought to reinforce safety or to minimise fear

Malupuipua was described by research participants as a place or person of sanctuary that people could go to if they wanted to feel safe and reflect in solitude and in a place of quiet. It is a concept of sanctuary that is not just about escaping violence. Malupuipua was described as a place of sanctuary where no one could be pursued.

*I matou nu'u, a faapea e fai se misa'aga ae fasi se tagata.. afai e lē o iai le faifeau, a e sulu loa i le fale a le faifeau, e sa lava e se tagata ona tu iai. Tusa o le malupuipua na. O le tagata lava e soli le fale a le faifeau ia e faate'a ma le nu'u, faasala mamafa e le nu'u. E matuā sa lava. E le gata i le fale a le faifeau, e faapena i totonu o fale o ali'i tāua o le nu'u. Sa'o o le nu'u. Pe fasi le tagata ae sulu i le fale o le sa'o o le nu'u, e sa lava ona toe soli e se tagata le maota o le sa'o o le nu'u. E sa.*

*In our village if there is a fight and someone is physically beaten, they may find sanctuary in the pastor's house, which is often the designated sanctuary in the village. The perpetrator is forbidden to enter this place. If the perpetrator does he will be banished from the village or be fined heavily. Not only the house of the pastor but also the houses of leading matai or chiefs of the family and village may be designated sanctuaries. If someone is physically abused they can seek shelter in the house of the head family or village chief. Once they are in this place no one can do them harm. It is forbidden.*

Violation of the rules of malupuipua was serious in traditional Samoan society and perpetrators were subject to exile bringing shame upon the offender and their family. Research participants acknowledged that while exile for this violation was common practice, it did not, however, and still does not, necessarily stop violence from occurring. Malupuipua is, therefore, only a secondary protective factor and only when it is observed.

*Protective factors for Samoan women and girls exist in concepts discussed outside of traditional fa'aSamoa principles*

## **Role modelling**

Research participants emphasised the crucial role of parents and grandparents in demonstrating respectful interaction and behaviour. They discussed the link between good parenting, good values and respectful relationships both within and outside the family.

*I think it needs to come back to the parents. I'm a single mum and I have a ten year old son and a nine year old daughter. I teach my boy about being respectful to his sister. We can talk about all of this, but for my boy and for my girl that's my job. It's my job to ensure he's going to grow up one day and he's going to love, care and protect his wife, and his daughter and sister, and his grandchildren. It starts and stops with me.*

## **Communication**

Research participants were united in their stance that open communication within families prevents a 'culture of silence' around violence, discussed later in this report. The ability to talk in families strengthens the family unit and when children learn communication skills they are better able to cope with adult problems when they mature.

*A o le isi itu taua ... e acknowledge lou toalua faapea fo'i fanau...o le talanoa, talanoa. O talanoa e le o se talanoa faatonu. O le faasoa.. auā a fia talitonu ma le agaga faaaloalo o nei a mea uma – e sa'o a tala a le isi professor, o aoaoga e le na o se sailiga o le poto lautele, a o le tapenaga o a nai o tatou fanau mo le olaga o la e faatalitali mai ai.*

*Another important issue is to acknowledge your wife and children...it is about talking, talking. It is not talking in terms of telling them what to do, but respectful talking and sharing ... because I believe that in all these things – what one professor says is right, learning is not only about seeking knowledge but preparing our children for the life that awaits them.*

## Leadership

Research participants described the role of leadership by people of influence such as matai (chiefs), faifeau (Ministers of a Christian church) and their faletua (wives), who are afforded the same status and respect as their husbands, as pivotal in setting expectations and role modelling in the community. More specifically, those who are in leadership positions are able to set standards that promote safe and respectful behaviour and relationships.

Such leadership comes in a number of different forms, including the provision of marital advice and guidance, counselling, and sharing prayerful mediation in times of conflict. The teachings of the church include Christian mentoring and support that encourage harmonious family relations.

*O le galuega e silafia lelei e le tamā, le matai, o le tiākono ma lona faletua, ma lona toalua, le la matafaioi, ia fealofani le 'āiga. O le feagaiga lea na e saunoa ai, o le feagaiga a matua ma fanau, feagaiga o tuafafine ma le tuagane, o tauusoga. E oo foi la ia i tatou gafa.*

*The responsibilities of men, faifeau and matai and their wives are to ensure that there is harmony in the family. The covenants that we are talking about are those between parents and children, sisters and brothers, cousins.*

## Christian teachings

Research participants acknowledged that traditional Samoan cultural practices have become influenced by and interwoven over time with missionary Christian teachings. Christianity now performs a fundamental role in Samoan daily life and the status of religious teachers within Samoan communities gives them the authority to define correct behaviour within Samoan relationships.

*The Minister providing advice, how we should act and behave.*

Research participants discussed how Christian teachings and Samoan principles, many of which are discussed in this report, combine to influence their behaviour. They discussed how religious teachings deliberately encourage respectful behaviour and harmony within the family.

*The Bible – relationship with husband, never harm your husband, submit (proverbs), men must love women (like church).*

*Some risk factors are more pronounced for Samoan women and girls than for others*

## Migration and cultural adaptation

Research participants viewed migration from Samoa to New Zealand and a lack of cultural adaptation as a significant risk factor for violence. Breakdown in cultural norms and traditions are in some cases inevitable in the course of resettling into New Zealand life. Some research participants spoke of the challenges, such as alcohol consumption



(discussed later in this report), that impacted on their relationships and new lives in New Zealand. They had left the support and guidance of their home community, and of what was familiar, and were faced with 'temptations' and financial obligations that placed great strain on their relationships, including vā tapuia relationships.

*Ma le isi a taua o le suiga o le si'osi'omaga. Sui atoa le landscape o le environment lea ua o mai nonofo ai. Pei a ona ou fai atu, e faamaualuga le tama leaga o ia – le isi a itu, a aafia lagona a le isi tama i isi ana tama lea po o isi a latou vāega lea e masani ona fai inuga avā pe o iina e sau le isi tamaloa, sau loa taumafai e fai se isi fāiga fou e faaulufale atu i le tinā ma...*

*And the other thing, if we can call it a change in the environment. The environmental landscape that we now live in is completely different here (than in Samoa). As I said earlier violent men are proud and arrogant...another perspective is of a man who during a drinking session becomes angry with a drinking colleague, and tries to retaliate by finding a way to 'gain access' to that man's female partner / wife ... It isn't a practice that happened in Samoa.*

Migration to New Zealand from Samoa presents obvious challenges in maintaining traditional cultural practices such as the vā tapuia, feagaiga, vā fealoaloa'i, faasinomaga and malupuipua.

### **Culture of silence**

Research participants spoke of how violence and threats of violence are regularly ignored.

*I know my cousins who have been in that situation. Like they came to my parents but they [my parents] kind of like swept it under the carpet; they were like no, like nothing's going on... so they just try like deny it ... like they'll accept it.*

Sometimes violence and threats that occur within the community go unchallenged.

*Sometimes like when I go to family stuff... the men are together and the wives, and they're just talking and then something happens and the man would just yell out like, e fai faalelei te'i ua ou alu atu po [oe] (hey do it properly or I'll come and slap [you]...). So I don't know if it's a joke or serious ... but I think the actual violence is like hidden.*

Research participants said that when behaviour of this type is not effectively addressed it can be perceived as community endorsement of violent behaviour and attitudes. Others acknowledged that in some instances while there was a willingness to recognise violence, no action would be done to follow up. For example, grandparents may merely offer their prayers in support of peaceful relations but no actual action is taken to challenge abusive behaviour or to resolve interpersonal conflict or confront the wrongness of the violence. Therefore, it is fair to say that there is a general perceived reluctance, according to research participants, among Samoan people to disclose or discuss violence. This is attributed to ideas of associated stigma and shame. Families do not want to be known as being tarnished by violence, not least because this publicises a breach of the vā tapuia in their home.

*We were told not to tell so whatever happened in the house that was it.*

Victims of violence may also be quiet due to fear of retribution from the perpetrator or from others, such as family members or friends of the perpetrator, or even just for the fear that the scale of violence will escalate.

*I think nothing could replace the fear that I felt as a youngster going home every day because of the violence that took place in our house, and every time you try to do something it just got even worse*

Victims worry that if they speak up, they would have nowhere to go and no support.

*O le to'atele ua leai se mea e sulufa'i ai. Ua nonofo latou i fale, ua lafi uma. (unclear) latou ma le to'atele ae e le iloa e seisi. E le mana'o fo'i le Samoa e iloa e le isi Samoa. E faapena i la'u faalogo iai.*

*There are many who have nowhere to go to seek protection and safety. They stay at home; they all hide ...Samoan people don't want other Samoan people to know. That's what I hear.*

Some participants, particularly younger ones and those who identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI)<sup>22</sup> said that when they were growing up they were unsure of how to address family violence. They chose to keep silent rather than raise an issue that they were unsure how to resolve or felt helpless to resolve. So they would just witness violence and keep quiet.

*My dad used to like hit my mum...and when my parents used to clash my dad would hit my mum I guess as a child seeing that you know you just think it's normal, you just be quiet and you don't say anything. Or you go in the room you know and you don't say anything, and you just hear everything happening kind of thing.*

## **Culture of violence among men and boys**

All male participants involved in this research had personally experienced violence, all as victims of violence, witnesses, and some as perpetrators. For most, violence had been used as a tool of discipline when they were boys. It was an instrument of bullying in school, was a part of weekly sports events, and even in socialising with peers. For some of the participants, this pattern of normalising violence influenced the way they also related to their wives and partners.

For some participants their experience of physical discipline was cruel and violent. The violence started when they were children and were referred to as 'smacks', 'hidings' and 'beatings' with a strap or by hand.

*So my hidings were literally based on the Bible kneeling in front of my dad who would ask me questions you know, o ai na ta le papa? And then he'd drop kick me across the room and would knock me out three or four times in a hiding – maybe more.*

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<sup>22</sup> The research participants who identified as LGBTQI also identified themselves as fa'afafine (translated means 'in the manner of a woman'). Fa'afafine are Samoan biological males who behave in a range of feminine-gendered ways.

These research participants also talked about the continuing presence of violence in their adult lives and within in their respective communities.

*So I spent most of my life fighting big people and especially big islanders. And put a lot of them in hospital. It wasn't just me. Most of us that grew up in the 60s and 70s, that's what we did.*

One male research participant discussed how his early experience of violence left him without the skills he needed to lead the peaceful life he desired.

*I tried hard to be a good man but unfortunately no one ever told me what a good man looked like, what a good man does. Because all the men that I've known in my life all perpetuated violence and that's all I knew.*

*Many Samoan men just hold the Bible and go to church. Other men beat their wives on the way to church. If not that, they hit them in the car park on the way home to have lunch; and they are classified as church members. Even some ministers are perpetrators.*

### **Constructions of masculinity**

Research participants described experiencing a culture of Samoan masculinity that included being “tough, strong, proud, arrogant and competitive” in seeking status within their community. Much of this expectation was imposed upon them as boys by their fathers. It was perceived that the father is the head of the family and had to always be the source of power and control within the family unit.

*You're brought up to be tough you know like you can't show any weakness cause you're a man, so in Samoan culture a man leads the family so if you have a weak man you have a weak family. You're disciplined to be like strong.*

*Because another cause for physical violence is the feeling of anger... the idea or thought that the father or young man is the head of the family, he has power and control. It's all about me, me, it's me.*

*E tolu upu e fa'amatala ai le upu o le sauaga – o le fia pule; feitaga'i ma le fia malosi. O le ita ma le matau'a.*

*There are three words that explain violence – to want to control, conflict and to want to exercise power. There is anger and envy.*

### **Alcohol**

According to research participants alcohol is not the cause of violence against Samoan women but it is a contributor to the frequency and seriousness of violence.

*Ou te lē talitonu e faapea o le pia. O le lagona fia tagata, fia iloa, fia matamuamua, fa'amaualuga o tagata Samoa e trigger mai mea nei... o le pule. E malosi a le pule.*

*I don't believe that beer (is the cause). It is the person trying to be somebody, wanting to be known, being forward, presumptuous, proud and arrogant that triggers these things (anger, violence)...it is*

*wanting to dominate and be in control. Pule (wanting to dominate and be in control / have power) is a strong motivator (of violence)*

Research participants talked about how family arguments would start when family members, usually fathers, who had been drinking would pick fights. Research participants said it was usually the wives who bore the brunt of these arguments.

*I know that like alcohol is one influence for violence.*

*My dad was very saua (cruel). His weakness was alcohol which I believe was to his detriment.*

*pa'i ona o le ona, ua le lelei le mafaufau...ia toe faatoese lea...tele le afaina o le 'āiga, ua le o toe o'o le lima i le tinā...tasi na mea o le sauaga o tinā, o le tele o le vālea ma le alu o tupe ma sau, ma le fia malosī toe po ma le tinā.*

*...(I hit her) because I was drunk, my mind was not right...I apologized...there is great harm to the family. I never hit her again...that is one cause of violence towards women, stupidity and wasteful spending of money, and wanting to be powerful and then hitting her.*

### **Misunderstandings of cultural practice**

Research participants noted that some misunderstanding of fa'aSamoa values and practices can lead to or be a risk factor for violence against women. Obligations to fa'alavelave, the tradition of reciprocal gifting for cultural and family events, has changed over time, in the experience of these research participants. The monetary amount determined by the heads of family for fa'alavelave has increased which in many cases places excessive demands on family or household incomes. The practice of competitive gifting exacerbates the burden causing disharmony in families and the community.

*Auā a faasoasoā tupe a le 'āiga mo fa'alavelave, that's where the violence starts because e faasoasoā atu tupe, e le lava. Ona amata lea o taua'imisa o matua and that's the thing – violence starts from the home.*

*Because when the family allocates their money and a fa'alavelave arises, that's where the violence starts because when the money is allocated, it's not enough. Then the quarrelling between parents starts.*

Other participants did not concede that fa'alavelave or the expectation of monetary contributions in itself was to blame for violence and disharmony in the family. Instead they saw the culprit as the breaching of the vā tapuia that is supposed to keep a check and balance on family relations.

*Money is not fa'aSamoa. You've got to take that out of your mind. I'm a victim as well and our problems don't stem from money...Fa'aSamoa has got nothing to do with it. It's got everything to do with our relationships.*

## Primary prevention in Samoan communities

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Three main types of primary prevention initiatives were suggested by Samoan research participants as having promising potential. These were television social marketing, the use of Samoan proverbs and programmes for men.

### Television media and tailored messaging is effective in engaging Samoan youth

Around the world, social media has been found to fuel social movements and strengthen people's ability to challenge and change power relations in society, providing platforms for debate, reflection, influencing and mobilizing people.<sup>23</sup>

The promise shown by social campaign approaches in preventing violence against women is one that was shared by research participants in this study. This was clear with those of the younger generation, who saw the "It's not OK" campaign as particularly effective for young men. They described television media and social messaging as appropriate and relevant for the audience that the campaign is attempting to capture.

*Yeah I think that it's the way that the message is delivered. I don't think some men like confrontation...but then again it's useful for them. I think it's something that needs to be like replayed like all the time.*

*Yeah I think for the younger generation that ad is more – it appeals more to the teens. I mean like when we talk with our friends and then like something happens, we're like violence is not Ok. It's good for the youth and the younger – but I think that towards older more late 30s it doesn't really – it's just like drilling it when you're younger.*

### Common Samoan proverbs or sayings that promote primary prevention

The younger women research participants highlighted use of indirect phrases or sayings that allude to precautionary or preventative actions and mind-sets useful for campaigning against violence. Such proverbs are common and well known within Samoan families and communities. They are often used at times when young people go out without their parents and function as warnings and reminders of danger and appropriate/inappropriate behaviour.

*Participant: I always get that tafao lelei one.*

*Facilitator: What does that mean to you?*

*Participant: To me it's like be careful when you go out. Make sure of the boys [are] around you, who you're going with. Be safe.*

*Participant: I get a lot in regards to friends. Ua lava le uo e tasi. One friend is enough. My mother she thinks like a lot of friends are the reason you behave a certain way sometimes. She's like your siblings are enough for friends. Or be aware of who your friends are.*

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<sup>23</sup> See Partners for Prevention 2013.

Given that we know how important it is for primary prevention approaches to be culturally meaningful and relevant to those for whom they are designed, the promotion of primary prevention through sayings, parental admonitions, and proverbs is a sound example of what can be built from a cultural basis or perspective.<sup>24</sup>

## **Programmes for men**

The all-male focus group were supportive of men's anger management programmes, whether hosted by the church or facilitated by independent service providers. A key effectiveness measure, they suggest, is designing the programmes to encourage men to talk about violence and about changing their violent behaviour. Essentially, these programmes challenge those Samoan male behaviours and beliefs that create an environment where violence is tolerated and perpetuated.

Though these programmes may not, by definition, be considered as primary prevention (they work with men who have already perpetrated violence), the aspect of their programme that provides broad violence awareness training can. This aspect is for the wider male congregation, some of whom have never perpetrated or ever experienced violence in their lives.

Some research participants, namely those who had experience in delivering these services, stated that targeting church communities and ministers were pivotal because of the significant influence they had within the broader Samoan population in New Zealand. The participants raised a desire for church leaders to engage fully with primary prevention of violence against Samoan women actions.

Participants also spoke of the constructive and positive contribution that the church can have in preventing violence within Samoan families and communities. They raised how the churches are a key support to families in times of conflict and noted how Christian philosophies can be used to reinforce fa'aSamoa values in Samoan specific actions geared towards building and sustaining healthy non-violent respectful relationships.

Boys and men have an important part to play in keeping women and girls safe from violence. This is a given and is recognised as such by primary prevention literature. Exactly what that role is and how it ought to play out in practice or in everyday lives is the point of contention. Indications from this research that current men's violence prevention programmes are well received, is encouraging.

## **What is working?**

Samoan cultural concepts and values, such as the vā, vā tapuia, vā fealoaloa'i, feagaiga, faasinomaga and malupuipua are important to Samoan preventive initiatives in New Zealand today, and ought to be probed for how best to operationalise, including how they strengthen healthy family relationships. Based on research findings, five key principle statements are proposed for inclusion in strategies for primary prevention of violence against Samoan women. These statements are indicative of what participants saw as working in favour of Samoan preventive approaches.

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<sup>24</sup> Ministry for Women 2015.

The five key principle statements are:

- Respectful and open discussions and communication strategies are employed in family, church and other community settings; and all are given equal opportunity to have a say and speak honestly, irrespective of age, gender, education, class difference and religious background
- Samoan youth have opportunities to strengthen understandings of their faasinomaga together with peers, elders, and community leaders
- Education initiatives are relevant to Samoan families and Samoan community contexts
- Samoan community-based preventative initiatives are led and driven by active members of the Samoan community (with support and knowledge from local service providers) and continue to use community leaders (including matai and faifeau) and local community champions (advocates) to promote, drive and shape them
- Samoan community role models, young and old, who are recognised and respected in their community, model respectful relationships.

## Ideas for primary prevention in Samoan communities

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In addition to what research participants described as effective and desirable primary prevention approaches for Samoan women and girls, they shared some further thoughts on what it would take to keep Samoan women and girls safe from becoming victims of violence.

### Culturally responsive interventions

Research participants explained how violence prevention solutions for Samoan communities need to be culturally responsive, a finding that is also well established in violence prevention literature. An important part of this for research participants is that the Samoan community must be part of identifying and 'owning' the issues, and planning work towards solutions so that there is trust in the process and value in the partnerships that are forged.

Research participants noted that successful interventions for Samoan women must include Samoan cultural practices, language and value systems. For Samoan people to engage in interventions they need to feel safe, this includes being part of a familiar cultural environment. From this position of safety, they suggest, will emerge the confidence to challenge cultural misunderstandings that condone or may predispose one to violent behaviour.

### Opening the dialogue

Research participants agree that it is vital to break the culture of silence around violence, and for the community to become accustomed to talking about issues of safety and violence. This may mean breaking tapu about who can speak when. For example, in the case of parents and their children, or between a husband and wife, a chief and an untitled person, a young person and elder, a teacher and student, a brother and sister, and so on and so forth.

An important part of creating open dialogue in terms of safety from violence will rely on the ability of parents and caregivers to have the skills to talk openly with their children about abuse, especially intimate relationship abuse. Initiatives to help parents talk about issues such as healthy behaviour within relationships and what to do when relationships become abusive would be a positive step in the right direction to ensuring safety from violence.

As each Samoan family or sub-community is different, each conversation will be different. Modelling of preventive initiatives for Samoan women and girls and their operationalisation must consider this carefully. Research participants discussed the possibility of targeting local community groups through workshops aligned to churches, or school-based community education programmes. As noted in New Zealand's primary prevention literature, interventions should be tailored to the specific needs of each community.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ministry for Women (2015).



## **Education in schools**

Research participants saw schools as fundamental institutions in which learning about healthy relationships can occur and that school based programmes should include culturally-specific information that can assist students to be more aware of cultural differences in this area. The LGBTQI participants spoke of the value of information about gender identity and sexual orientation within the school curriculum. Research participants discussed the value of open conversation among the school community and how this could foster awareness and acceptance of LGBTQI students; they argued for community role models to talk to students about gender identity and sexual orientation.

## Conclusion

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This report has shown that fa'a Samoa principles continue to hold important meaning for Samoan people in their understanding of what it takes to keep Samoan women and girls safe from violence. Importantly, it illustrates how these principles can meaningfully inform a Samoan understanding of what is a protective factor and what is a risk factor in terms of violence against Samoan women and girls.

A next step would be for the Samoan community as a whole to discuss these concepts to widely gain a shared understanding of them in terms of their relevance for building primary prevention of violence against women strategies, and their role in the design of preventive strategies and actions. Evidence shows that strengths-based approaches are a key element of effective prevention.

Given generational, class, gender, age, educational and religious differences within the Samoan community, it is important that current and future Samoan leaders ensure that all sectors of the community are able to engage meaningfully in dialogue about what keeps Samoan women and girls safe from violence. Although obviously not an easy undertaking, primary research such as this can serve as a starting point for bringing the key sections of the community and its leadership together for dialogue on this critical topic.

Finally, this report shows, through participant narratives, that primary prevention activities are taking place among some Samoan families and communities in New Zealand. It will be important to assess and evaluate these more closely for what is working well and what is not and to identify why.

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