

WHAKAORANGA WHĀNAU

Whānau resilience

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Abstract

This research explored the capacity of whānau to overcome adversity, flourish and enjoy better health and well-being. It considers the multiple ways in which whānau contribute to the development of its members and the various mechanisms employed to foster growth and security. While external factors, internal dynamics, and financial pressures often constrain capacity, whānau have nevertheless demonstrated an innate ability to respond to these challenges, to make use of limited resources, and to react in positive and innovative ways. A thematic analysis of whānau cohorts and expert responses detailed the components of whānau responses to adversity, and therefore whānau resilience. The framework consists of four resilience themes: (1) Whanaungatanga factors (networks and relationships), (2) Pūkenga factors (abilities and skills), (3) Tikanga factors (meanings, values and beliefs), and (4) Tuakiri-ā-iwi factors (secure cultural identity). Of particular interest is the notion that while Māori share similar resilience strategies to those found in the Western literature, there are unique cultural differences quite akin to a Māori worldview and Māori family dynamics. As such, cultural identity was found within a cluster of resilience factors—factors which are expressions of cultural identity, and which have been used to promote resilience amongst these Māori families.

Keywords

whānau resilience, culture, identity, well-being

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Introduction

Considerable international research has described the various components of resilience and the multiple factors which impede or promote resilient individuals (Garmezy, 1974; Ungar, 2008; Werner, 1990). An aligned issue is the extent to which these generic resilience concepts or factors are in fact applicable to Māori. While the concept of resilience has global, cultural and contextual implications (Ungar, 2005, 2008), the manner in which these are able to embrace the unique experiences of Māori are less well understood (Moewaka Barnes, 2010). The consequences of this knowledge gap are likely to be felt at a number of levels. Certainly the academic and research fraternity has highlighted the lack of robust debate and the manner in which generic theories on resilience can inform our understanding of Māori development (Moewaka Barnes, 2010). Others have likewise considered the implications for health and social service delivery (Boulton & Gifford, 2011).

This article examines the resilience strategies employed by Māori whānau, with a particular emphasis on cultural practices, behaviours and processes. It considers the multiple ways in which whānau contribute to the development of its members and the various mechanisms employed to foster growth and development. An underlying premise is that whānau possess an unlimited potential to transfer positive values, to promote healthy lifestyles, and to attain good health through customs and concepts akin to their cultural identity. Investigating this potential is a key aspect of this research, as is the desire to better understand the factors which promote resilient and robust whānau.

Resilience research has contextualised the risk and protective factors of dealing with stress and adversity; however, much of the research has centred on Caucasian or European participants (Clauss-Ehlers, 2004; Lopez et al., 2002), with little thought as to how perspectives might differ across ethnic groups or cultures (Ungar,

2005, 2008). Exploring how theories of resilience might similarly resonate across indigenous populations poses some exciting opportunities, as does the prospect of better elucidating the role and function of culture.

Within the indigenous resilience discourse, however, there are a number of similar resilience factors which have been identified across various cultures. These protective factors and coping strategies include optimism, flexibility, spirituality, significant attachments, connectedness, family values, family interdependence, social support, support networks, community engagement, education, tribal identity and various cultural themes such as oral traditions and ceremonies (Greeff & Loubser, 2008; Heavyrunner & Morris, 1997; Korhonen, 2007). These studies provide a better understanding of how both generic and cultural indices act as resilience factors to help support families in the adaptation period during and after a crisis. Despite differences in family structures, rituals and practices, there seem to be common factors amongst different cultures and ethnic groups in regards to family resilience strategies (Patterson, 2002).

While the current discourse may offer clues as to the universal characteristics of resilience (Waller, 2001), and even cultural contributors (Ungar, 2008), the relevance of these concepts to Māori is less well understood. Indeed, Māori resilience must inevitably take into account our unique history, culture, experiences and socio-demographic profiles. Fortunately, however, there is a small body of literature, although not significant, which is able to usefully inform notions of resilience, whānau resilience and cultural contributors.

The 2010 Families Commission Report on recessions and Māori resilience provides an informative example of “cultural” resilience as exemplified by Māori (Baker, 2010). It examined the history of Māori society in regards to the changing social, cultural, economic and structural conditions since 1840. Cultural resilience examples from this period

include (a) the development of Māori trusts and incorporations to help manage Māori lands, (b) the development of kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa in response to the dying language, (c) the successful Māori businesses that have flourished pre- and post-Treaty settlements, and (d) the importance of ahi kā as a strong cultural protective factor during the urban drift era. These findings highlight specific examples where Māori have exhibited resilience at various levels and across multiple sectors of society.

Whānau cohort responses

The term “whānau” has received significant interest over recent decades (Lawson-Te Aho, 2010; Metge, 1990). Most commonly referred to as “extended family”, the term is unlikely to encompass the broader meaning commonly understood by Māori (Collins & Wilson, 2008). For the purposes of this article, the 2010 Whānau Ora Taskforce Report offers a definition of whānau and refers to Māori “who share common descent and kinship, as well as collective interests that generate reciprocal ties and aspirations” (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2010, p. 12). There is also support for the idea that “whānau” can include non-kinship ties. To this end, family-like principles can also be evident amongst work colleagues, members of sporting teams, and other activities where collegial cohesion is evident (Durie, 2001; Metge, 1995).

To investigate the resilience strategies employed by Māori whānau, 15 ($n = 15$) whānau participated in qualitative semi-structured interviews. The overall sample of whānau represented those whānau who had experienced adverse life events that affected their day-to-day living. The sample whānau experienced various adverse life events, such as:

- the main income earner had been made redundant (this includes multiple redundancies),
- marriage or partnership breakdowns which resulted in sole parenting,
- a death within the family,
- long-term chronic illness or disability within the family, or
- incarceration of a parent.

Some of the sample whānau also experienced multiple exposures concurrently, such as redundancy followed by a family death. Additionally, as an outcome of the interviews, many whānau also spoke of other stressors not listed above. These varied from racism encounters, to food insecurity, to mental health problems. As a consequence, these sometimes smaller adverse life events compounded the original stressor and further affected the whānau’s daily functioning.

In addition to the whānau cohort responses, qualitative interviews ($n = 10$) were conducted with a select group of experts known to have a particular interest in resilience, community development and whānau development. While academics, policy advisors and clinicians/practitioners were likely to provide guidance on these issues, steps were also taken to ensure that wider comment was sought; in particular, from community-based workers and those who could offer more pragmatic views on whānau development and whānau resilience characteristics. To this end, a 3/3/3 even split of academics, policy/government advisors, clinicians/practitioners and community workers provided the general make-up of this key informant cohort. These interviews sought to discuss issues raised by the whānau interviews, as well as provide further background and pragmatic knowledge to the data. Themes or issues that lacked research depth were also the focus of these interviews.

The information collected from the whānau cohorts was transcribed and analysed thematically, and emergent categories were identified. The various examples and concepts discussed amongst the whānau cohorts were grouped together under various corresponding

“organising” themes. Four “organising” themes were identified in relation to the “global” theme of “Whānau Resilience”. The four “organising” themes have been termed Whanaungatanga (networks/relationships), Pūkenga (skills/abilities), Tikanga (meaning, values and beliefs), and Tuakiri-ā-iwi (secure cultural identity). The following sections outline these themes with specific quotes from the whānau cohorts.

Whanaungatanga factors

There were a number of examples related to networks/relationships that were mentioned by the whānau cohort as key attributes of their resiliency and recovery. Gunnestad, Larsen, and Nguluka (2010) regard “network/relationship factors” as healthy relationships with family, relatives, friends, workmates, neighbours, and members of the community and organisations. Accordingly, the findings highlight similar themes which include strong social networks (for example, kaupapa whānau support), family systems and significant attachments.

Support from kaupapa whānau (for example, friends, colleagues, sport team mates) was a coping strategy mentioned by various whānau. Although not relations by kin, kaupapa whānau still fulfil the supporting and caring roles akin to whakapapa whānau. The following comments were typical:

Although we had lost a son at a tragic time, it was really special that we had people around that cared for us at that time Not just family. More than anything else, it was people that really knew us well ... and you're still embraced by that—still steeped in that Māoritanga. We're not even talking blood here. We were still being embraced, without even realising it, by all the whānau and that of the school [where the parents were employed]—the students, staff and the other whānau that lived there. (Suicide)

I was just fobbing her off and thinking that work was more important, but actually, it's meant that a whole community has raised her. (Sole parenting)

These examples highlight the cultural, emotional and practical support that was provided by kaupapa whānau. The fact that these kaupapa whānau had a somewhat strong association with te taha Māori enhanced the concepts of aroha and manāki.

As well as the examples mentioned above, the presence of the other staff members at the family tangi evoked a sense of “belonging” to the group of work colleagues. A sense of belonging has close ties to the sense of relatedness, one of the innate human psychological “needs” (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Relatedness is characterised by the need to feel connected with others and feel a sense of belonging within social settings (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Such settings can re-affirm social and emotional support, thereby contributing to positive perceptions of the original stressor.

For one whānau in particular, they estimated that the majority of the support they received during their battle with adversity was gleaned from their kaupapa whānau.

Yeah, so most of our resilience would be in our Māori friends and personal friends. That's been the crux of our support, is our own friends and our mother's friends ... Most of them, I'd probably say 98% of them are not blood related in any way. So they were our support mechanisms. (Multiple adverse life events)

The importance of kaupapa whānau also emerged when whānau moved away from their tūrangawaewae. For some whānau, the new location may not have whakapapa whānau present; therefore, kaupapa whānau often functioned as a proxy to the normal roles and positions normally occupied by whakapapa whānau members.

Now that I'm away from my tribe again, I go straight to my mates. They'd probably be my biggest support. (Sole parenting)

This kaupapa whānau theme is closely related to the notion of social support. Different types of social support can include instrumental, emotional, informational, tangible aid, positive social interaction, affection and esteem (Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar, 2005). The evidence suggests that the whānau cohorts accessed their social support systems as both coping strategies and protective factors. These social support systems provided emotional, spiritual and practical support during times of adversity. A key difference, however, is that these social supports are often constructed from within a cultural framework and more often than not linked to cultural concepts such as whanaungatanga. For example, social support provided through whanaungatanga can be linked to intricate genealogical links that can date back many generations, incorporating a number of interlinking families.

Some whānau reflected on their own whānau systems as coping strategies or protective factors when dealing with the adversity of a family member's death. These whānau systems can involve whānau committees and whānau hui, as well as daily routines and plans. It appears that these whānau committees and hui were originally set up following the "urban-drift" period of the 1950s. Developed as a coping strategy for whānau who were coming to terms with life in the city, this social support system and financial assistance aided these relocated whānau in travelling back to their tūrangawae-wae for tangi, hura kōhatu or significant tribal events. The whānau committees and hui provide the opportunity to reacquaint with each other, share resources, discuss upcoming gatherings and plan for future events. A shared whānau bank account may be an example of this, in which each sub-whānau deposits an amount of money each week, month, quarter or year. These whānau accounts serve to provide

financial assistance should a whānau require support.

Most Māori families in our community used to have whānau committees and that was to look after them. I remember my mum had their whānau one, and that was to keep the support there and provide help once they were in trouble. If they needed support for tangi, illness or whatever. (Family death)

The whānau meetings or committees often served as a protective function when adverse circumstances arose such as tangi, or when financial assistance was required. Walsh (2006) reports that economic resources can buffer family experiences of loss and positively influence their adaptation. Worden (1996) also found that families with higher income for disposal who had lost a parent exhibited lower psychological issues than those families on lower incomes.

When we lost dad it was like it was really the end of the world I suppose. And we were lucky we had a strong family that already had things in place like whānau hui, regular whānau meetings, and the family bank account. (Family death)

Accordingly, it is not surprising that access to adequate financial resources can buffer the effects of the stressor. The construction of a whānau committee and bank account allows whānau members to draw on financial assistance when required. This eases the burden of money woes, which can compound the effects of the stressor, and enables the whānau to focus their efforts on overcoming the original stressor.

Members of various whānau spoke about having a "special" relationship with a significant other person. These people were usually an aunty, uncle, nanny, close friend or teacher, or a clinician or practitioner. Higgins (1994) and Rutter (1987) found that individuals who had at least one supportive relationship tended to

function better than expected when considering the issue or crisis they had faced. Werner's (1990, 1993) seminal studies on resilience also found that the resilient children were those who had developed a close bond with someone who provided them with stable care. A member of the following single-parent whānau mentioned the psychological support she receives from her counsellor as an important pillar of her resiliency:

So that is one of my biggest supports—That's my resilience. She is my resilience. If I lose her, I'm going to go through another six months of not being able to understand my behaviours. I get re-occurring nightmares and I need to talk to her about that stuff. (Multiple adverse life events)

Integral to patient–clinician relationships is clear and positive communication. Moreover, there is a need to understand and interpret colloquial language of the patient and how this could accelerate the healing process.

To have the ability to sit in there and kōrero English-Māori pidgin to her and she just gets it straight away. Because when you're frustrated and you're stressed, aye, it just comes out however it comes out, that's how you want the person to take it. It's hard when you get a psychologist who just doesn't understand us. (Multiple adverse life events)

This notion of an “attachment to a significant other” has parallels to the Māori concept of tuakana–teina relationships. These reciprocal types of relationships usually involve an older or more expert tuakana helping and guiding a younger or less expert teina. When required, however, the roles can be reversed, requiring the tuakana to rethink and reposition themselves into a co-learner role. Such relationships have also been compared to mentoring or role modelling (Ware & Walsh-Tapiata, 2010). The following example highlights positive

behaviours a mother developed from the relationship with her young daughter in relation to social interaction:

She's a blessing and she's a huge partner in it all ... and she really brought a whole lot of understanding about what it means to be connected to people. Because over the years I got quite disconnected from people. I'd been carrying things around and translating them into what was wrong with me. You just start to make walls and she broke them all down. So number one, having just our connection that we have. There was really this understanding, that interconnectedness at a different level and having someone be reliant on you for their well-being. (Single parent household)

It appears that the mother in this case may have held a negative self-perception which hampered her interpersonal functioning with outsiders. Fortunately, the child inadvertently was able to break down these barriers. In one sense, the mother provided the maternal love and care required of the child, while at the same time, the child had a positive effect in influencing the mother's thoughts and behaviours towards relationship-building with others. In this regard the presence of a warm, nurturing and supportive relationship with at least one parent or significant attachment was able to protect against or mitigate the effects of family adversity (Werner, 1989). Ballam (2002) also found that a significant attachment was a strategy employed by young Māori girls who exhibited resiliency. For Māori these attachments are likely to function in ways that are consistent with other cultures and established discourse.

Pūkenga factors

There were a number of examples related to “abilities and skills” that were mentioned by the whānau cohort and which contributed to their resiliency. Gunnestad, Larsen, and Nguluka

(2010) link intellectual skills, practical skills and temperament characteristics as protective factors which can promote resilience and which are in many ways not dissimilar to the types of factors identified by the whānau cohorts.

Firstly, the ability of whānau to develop protective factors throughout their lives can help buffer stressors that occur later on in life. Indeed, the role of protective factors is to modify the response to later adversity (Rutter, 1985). Protective factors can be products of the quality of the individual as a person (Rutter, 1985), as well as social resources, the characteristics of relationships, and support within or outside the family (Lösel & Bliesener, 1990).

The following quote highlights the concepts of aroha, manāki and maintaining whakapapa links that were exhibited by the parents throughout their lifetime. In essence, these practices helped develop protective factors, such as social support, which later in life ameliorated the father's death. As such, social support is regarded as one of the most significant protective factors (Muller & Lemieux, 2000).

Yeah built it up, we'd always made sure that we went back home to visit all the aunties and uncles and those kind of things. Every January we'd go up home up north and do the visiting rounds. So we already had all those kind of systems in place before dad died, we already had the strong support from my aunties and uncles, and so they gave me the strength when he passed on. (Family death)

Indeed, those who have an innate psychological preparedness to develop relationships and actively seek social support are more likely to promote better health outcomes (Muller & Lemieux, 2000).

A member of another whānau also mentioned the idea of developing skills and abilities as protective factors throughout one's life. That is, should a difficult situation arise, individuals can then draw on these skills and abilities (protective factors) to help overcome the situation.

The resilience dynamics, as long as they're firmly built in at the beginning, and you consolidate them, and you move with the pros and cons of those foundational principles, then those strategies of resilience come through later on in life. (Sole parenting)

The ability of whānau and its individual members to adapt to changing circumstances appears to help buffer some whānau from unexpected stressors. Walsh (2002, 2007) identifies flexibility as a key process in family resilience. The capacity to change, re-organise and adapt to fit challenges over time encourages high functioning in couples and families (Walsh, 2002, 2007).

Family resilience requires the ability to be flexible enough to change as family members go through crises and challenges (Walsh, 2006). This parent acknowledged the fact that circumstances change, and in order for the whānau to function properly and move forward, her parenting techniques and the family systems needed to change accordingly. Moreover, Pere (2007) found that family systems which incorporated flexible roles and routines were an important resilience strategy employed by Māori whānau whose parents held multiple jobs.

A number of whānau mentioned the education they received as both a protective factor and a coping strategy for adverse life events. On one hand, it provided them with the skills to solve and overcome problems, and on the other, it instilled success and achievement in the whānau as an attainable goal. Some resilience researchers have found that a supportive educational climate and model parental behaviour can encourage constructive coping strategies such as problem-solving skills amongst family members (Rutter, 1985).

I want to say that education, higher education, for me as a Māori woman, has absolutely been crucial to survival and higher level resilience. It has enabled me to role model success and achievement to my children and that's important to me. (Sole parenting)

The ability to draw on previous coping strategies employed in previous adverse experiences was highlighted by the whānau cohorts as both a protective factor and a coping strategy. A number of the whānau had experienced multiple adverse life events over time, and therefore, some of the resilient strategies that had worked previously could then be applied to similar or other adverse life events.

When our first kaupapa of abuse hit us, that gave us enough of a grounding to provide a foundation for ourselves. To help deal with things later on. To deal with any future stuff. (Multiple adverse life events)

These examples highlight the significance of life experiences as important aspects for life development. These encounters enable individuals or whānau to learn and develop new responses to various adverse life events. The ability to transfer these experiences or skills into other contexts and situations seems to positively contribute to whānau resiliency.

Tikanga factors

There were a number of examples related to “meanings, values and beliefs” that were mentioned by the whānau cohorts as important factors of their resiliency. A sense of meaning in life, such as the attainment of a goal, can provide the motivation for people to persevere in their quest. Values can guide people through life, helping them avoid problems and provide well-being (Gunnestad et al., 2010). Beliefs in this instance can be those acquired through religion, as well as cultural beliefs which can form the basis of culture.

It was clear throughout the whānau interviews that positivity or optimism helped whānau remain upbeat during periods of adversity. A positive outlook has been identified by numerous resilience researchers as a characteristic of resilient families (Korhonen, 2007; Rutter, 1987; Walsh, 2002), as well as Māori youth

(Ware & Walsh-Tapiata, 2010).

I try to stop focusing on the things that aren't so cool and then remembering to be grateful for the things that I do have, and the more I do that the better life is. (Sole parenting)

However, a positive outlook is not necessarily achievable at the instance of adversity; it is sometimes at a latter point that positives can arise out of the situation. One particular whānau re-appraised their fragile situation of dealing with the suicide of their child as character building. This shift in attitude from damaged to challenged enabled this whānau to direct their attention to the positive aspects of their lives, as described by this whānau:

Before his death we'd been through some real hardship. [Husband] lost his job, [we] lost our home, and then we lost our son. But I think one of the most important things is that we have strengthened and we've grown as a husband and wife, as parents. Now, even though we had all that glum time, we've been able to buy ourselves a new home. (Suicide)

Research studies overseas have identified religion as a strong resilient factor, especially amongst indigenous cultures and minorities (Greeff & Loubser, 2008; Korhonen, 2007; Stout & Kipling, 2003). Amongst First Nations people, faith seems to promote optimism and help people to cope with difficulties as religious beliefs can provide an explanation and purpose in life (Korhonen, 2007; Stout & Kipling, 2003). Throughout various adverse life events, one particular whānau found solace in their religion.

And how we've dealt with that is we have gone to a hāhi, particularly the Rātana church to look for guidance and support. (Multiple adverse life events)

For this whānau, the religion provided emotional and spiritual support that they could not

attain from their whakapapa whānau as they had relocated away from their tribal links.

When you gather at the pā, you feel that unity of “one”. And that’s what we were seeking, we didn’t have that connection to our iwi. We didn’t have those links. Whereas when you go to the Rātana church and you go through the gate, he iwi kotahi tātou. (Multiple adverse life events)

Tuakiri-ā-iwi factors

Protective factors pertaining to cultural identity were highlighted throughout the whānau interviews. These aspects varied from strong intergenerational family connections, such as whakapapa whānau support, to practising the concepts of aroha, manāki and karakia, as well as the grieving process of tangihanga.

For this particular whānau, the cultural links and support came to the fore when a member of their whānau passed away. Although this whānau had been somewhat isolated from their culture, the cultural values and customs provided support during this time of adversity.

As soon as that happened, that whole culture just kicked in big time. I could hardly believe that it would come in so strong after being away from it for quite a while. It just validated that the whole support is there. (Family death)

The concepts that contribute to this cultural identity (for example, whakapapa) appear to evoke feelings of belonging (for example, relationships with elders and ancestors) and enlightenment.

As I connect back up home and spend more time on maraes, spend more time with my kaumātua, spend more time learning about how deep and rich our culture is, the more it makes sense. The more I do that the more complete I feel. That’s what I mean about

whakapapa being within you, it shapes the way you behave, and the way you react to things. (Sole parenting)

A significant number of whānau noted the support provided by members of their whakapapa whānau as integral to coping with adverse events. This support was acted out through various mechanisms related to emotional support, financial support, practical support and resource support. Pere (2007) also found this type of support from extended whānau members amongst resilient whānau who held multiple jobs. Often, the presence of older generations such as kuia, koro, and great aunties and uncles would also alleviate negative emotions that were associated with stress and adversity. Their mere presence could provide warmth and aroha.

It was good even just to go there and she was so happy, especially to see mum [kuia]. So it’s that intergenerational kind of support that can help people when they’re feeling down. (Family death)

This intrafamilial support provided by family members was similarly highlighted by Greeff and Human’s (2004) study on families who had a parent die. Their findings emphasise the role of intrafamilial emotional and practical support in recovery and enhancing outcomes. Other resilience researchers have discovered similar findings with their respective participants (for example, Heavyrunner & Morris, 1997; Muller & Lemieux, 2000; Reed & Sherkat, 1992; Walsh, 2006).

This type of whānau support is not unlike social support, which is seen as one of the most significant protective factors (Muller & Lemieux, 2000). Greeff and Human (2004) found that social support was critical to the development of coping strategies employed by South African families who had lost a parent. Walsh (2006), and Reed and Sherkat (1992), also found that support from relatives and friends made it easier to bear the loss of

a parent. The support provided can include practical assistance, companionship and a sense of security and solidarity.

Reference to ancestors as a form of emotional support was also noted by the various whānau. A Māori worldview places a strong emphasis on acknowledging and respecting those “kua haere ki tua o te ārai”. The reference to tīpuna in whaikōrero and the naming of marae in respect of tīpuna are just two examples.

The other major thing is whānau support, whānau in the sense of much wider than just your biological. I think through all of this and all the different experiences, is that my whānau includes all those that have gone before us. And it just gives you a lot of peace really, because it's beyond this lifetime. And that's a real cultural understanding I reckon. (Sole parenting)

Ultimately, whānau support functions as a protective mechanism when adversity strikes. Māori maintain that a dependence on family can strengthen and enhance an individual's maturity (for example, through teaching, learning and reciprocal relationships), development, and more importantly, kinship ties. As such, “Interdependence rather than independence is the healthier goal” (Durie, 1998, p. 72). This position is not uncommon amongst indigenous peoples throughout the world in where they seek cohesion, strength and loyalty towards one another (Gunnestad et al., 2010).

For those whānau who experienced a death in their family, the tangihanga process emerged as a resilience mechanism. Although the experience of bereavement is not the same for everyone (Papalia & Olds, 1992), the tangihanga process has maintained its presence amongst Māori since traditional times. The practical, spiritual, social and cultural support gained from the tangihanga process can be critical in enabling whānau to move forward.

I suppose that is how we grow resilient, is

acknowledging that other people who you might not expect, they have got the same love for your loved one. I think that blew me away at dad's tangi, they were as devastated as us and somewhere in that you gain strength. (Family death)

Walsh (2006) notes that open and honest communication amongst family members who are dealing with a family death is a positive coping strategy. Moreover, Raveis, Seigel, and Karus (1999) found that family relationships which are characterised by a sharing of information and the open expression of feelings about the deceased are more likely to experience healthy adaptation following the death of a parent. The marae forum, the tangihanga process and the poroporoaki provide active opportunities to do so.

Going through that tangihanga process was good. When they get up and tell the stories about Hemi, you have a laugh, you have a cry, you have a sing. And even though you're in that real numb dark place at that time, you forget about it for a little while. Just being surrounded by lots of people. I remember all the good things that he did in his life, and sharing that. And that whānau atmosphere of all sleeping together, eating together I think the other thing that really helped us, and we were lucky in a way that we were able to stay on afterwards at the marae, because I sort of felt that as a healing thing too. (Suicide)

This process of story-telling and paying tribute to the deceased during tangi is not unlike the techniques employed by family therapists when dealing with their patients who have suffered a family loss. In her capacity as a family therapist, Walsh (2002) mentions that helping family members in the aftermath of loss should involve “finding ways to transform the living presence of a loved one into cherished memories, stories, and deeds that carry on the spirit of the deceased and their relationship”

(p. 135). Implicit in the tangihanga process are the spiritual benefits obtained by the whānau pani. As such, sharing the experience of death in a manner akin to tangihanga can promote both immediate and long-term adaptation for the grieving family, strengthening the family as a unit (Walsh, 2006).

Indigenous experiences of spirituality have been identified by a number of researchers as a reliable protective factor and coping strategy for families and individuals during times of stress and adversity (Greeff & Human, 2004; Parrot, 1999). Families are able to cope with crisis and adversity by making meaning of their experience through linking it to their multigenerational past and their cultural and religious beliefs (Walsh, 2006).

So te taha wairua from my viewpoint as a single parent has actually been absolutely crucial for assisting us in our journey of resilience and coping. It's important for our family because our ancestors are very important to our whānau. (Sole parenting)

The use of karakia also came to the fore as an important coping strategy for some whānau. For some, it acts as a healing mechanism, while for others it is a way of expressing gratitude for the wonders in their life. For others, the use of karakia was a way to acknowledge their ancestors and their presence, and to seek guidance from them. To this extent, karakia was utilised as a mechanism to contact their ancestors and attain emotional support.

At night, going to the corners of our property and saying a karakia, with a glass of water and flicking my face and asking our tīpuna to help us. I'd go to bed and often in the morning I was really clear about what I had to do next. (Suicide)

Summary

Findings reveal that the notion of whānau resilience has a uniquely Māori interpretation. Its enactment, demonstrated through discussions of resiliency strategies, extends existing discourse by providing examples of ways that whānau contribute to the well-being of their members. As a result of the whānau cohort and expert responses, a Whānau Resilience Framework was also developed (this will be published at a later date). Of particular interest in this paper is the light that participants shed on understandings of family resilience; that is, the idea that, while family resilience and whānau resilience share many common characteristics, key differences exist. Here, we argue that family and whānau are not the same and that Māori notions of whānau will predictably influence the applicability and relevance of discourse on family resilience. Understanding how whānau operate, or have the potential to operate, has implications for service delivery and policy design and will be especially relevant to Māori health and social service practitioners and service providers. In addition, there was a significant emphasis placed on the contribution of culture and resilient whānau. This relationship was not unsurprising in light of previous research. However, what was revealed was the need to re-orientate cultural identity as a separate phenomenon, and to better conceptualise cultural identity as a legitimate and more fundamental contributor to robust and resilient whānau.

Glossary

ahi kā	keeping the home fires burning
aroa	love
hāhi	religion
he iwi kotahi tātou	we are all one
hura kōhatu	headstone unveiling

iwi	tribe	te taha Māori	Māori customs and concepts
karakia	prayer, incantations		
kaumātua	elders	te taha wairua	the spiritual dimension
kaupapa	issue	teina	younger person, younger sibling
kaupapa whānau	groupings of individuals who share a common goal, task or aspirations	tīpuna	ancestors
kōhanga reo	Māori language-medium pre-school	tuakana	older person, older sibling
kōrero	talk	tuakana-teina	reciprocal relationships
koro	elder male	tuakiri-ā-iwi	secure cultural identity
kua haere ki tua o te ārai	those who have passed on	tūrangawaewae	customary link with the land, home ground
kuia	elder female	whaikōrero	Māori oratory
kura kaupapa	Māori language-medium primary school	whakaoranga	resilience
manāki	caring	whakapapa	genealogy
manākitanga	respect, kindness	whakapapa whānau	family by kin
Māoritanga	Māori culture	whānau	family, made up of usually three or four generations of extended family; to give birth
marae	customary meeting place		
pā	tribal meeting place	whānau hui	family meetings
poroporoaki	farewell to the deceased	whānau pani	family of the deceased
pūkenga	abilities, skills	whanaungatanga	close and secure relationships with kin and non-kin, camaraderie
tangi/tangihanga	Māori grieving and burial rituals		

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