

Collective approach needed to safeguard whānau from violence



Opinion

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Looking into the future, it is time to move beyond the grim reality of sexual violence and violence affecting whānau Māori. As a country, we can no longer tolerate the high rates of child abuse and neglect, intimate partner violence, and other forms of violence that occur within and around whānau.

However, let's stop vilifying those with high needs and blaming them for circumstances beyond their control. We need to recognise the evidence and role the system has in keeping women and children in volatile and unpredictable contexts.

Transcending this actuality through making different choices will greatly benefit whānau, hapū, iwi, communities, and all of Aotearoa.

For decades, many people and groups have been tasked with resolving this problem affecting Māori. A lot of the information and reports produced have provided an understanding of the problem of violence affecting whānau.

Some would call this violence widespread, particularly as it affects Māori so disproportionately. Yet, despite these endeavours and the enormity of the problem, we have seen little in terms of positive change.

So where is the roadmap to the solutions?

For me it meant looking at lessons from the past to open up possibilities for future improvement. I spent a year carefully reading contemporary research literature to produce "A Litany of Sound Revisited" – a 208-page review capturing how we can evolve to move forward and achieve better outcomes.

It pulls together case studies, research, traditional Māori mātauranga (knowledge) and other literature about violence and mahi tūkino (sexual violence) affecting whānau Māori into one place.

The material shows why our pre-colonisation mātauranga and ways of life worked, what the current state of play is for achieving wellbeing, what currently exists for working with Māori, and what is needed to create enduring change for the good of all.

Quite simply, the answers lie in drawing

on the past to inform the present.

Our ancestors took a collective approach to safeguarding whānau from violation, and children were always at the heart of it. Applied in our current context means everyone needs to recognise the pivotal role that they can play in addressing our shameful and shocking family and sexual violence statistics.

This may be in a range of activities such as listening to a neighbour, supporting a woman and her children to be safe, responding to a time in their lives when they have great needs to be safe, or healing from the years of physical, psychological, sexual, emotional, and financial violence.

Now is time to place our tamariki (children) at the centre of all we do today, because they are the adults of tomorrow. They are our leaders, workers, carers and neighbours. Investing in our tamariki and their whānau now will pay long-term dividends. As a professor in Māori health, I speak from talking to many Māori women who desire the best for their tamariki and listening to their moemoeā (dreams and visions).

Māori women want peace and safety.

They want an education to secure a career and become good role models for their tamariki.

They want to live without worrying about how they will protect their tamariki when their options are few. They want their men to heal as well.

The literature review was commissioned by Te Pūkotahitanga, the independent Tangata Whenua Ministerial Group that advises the minister for the prevention of family violence and sexual violence on the progress of Te Aorerekura achieving six shifts towards change.

It broke new ground when launched in 2022 as the first ever all-of-government 25-year national strategy to eliminate

family violence and sexual violence; crafted after engaging with thousands that included Māori, victim-survivors, diverse communities, family violence and sexual violence specialists in the sector and Crown agencies.

The reo Māori name Te Aorerekura came from an intention that the strategy and action plans will provide the guiding light, wisdom, and beacon of hope as part of changing the current reality for whānau.

This means we all need to reflect on how we can individually and collectively change the dial.

While journeys of healing from violence and trauma are not easy or straightforward, they are worth the investment.

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