

Evaluation of Amokura: An indigenous family violence prevention strategy

Di Grennell and Fiona Cram

Abstract: The Amokura Family Violence Prevention Strategy (Amokura) is an integrated community-based, initiative to address family violence in Northland (Tai Tokerau) New Zealand. The initiative is led by the Tai Tokerau Iwi Chief Executives Consortium (Consortium) which is made up of the Chief Executives of seven iwi (tribal) authorities. The initiative consists of four project areas that provide a whole of population approach to addressing family violence prevention and early intervention: research, education and promotion, professional development and training, and advocacy. At the end of year 1 (2005) a formative evaluation was conducted and this led into the development of a research plan for years 2 & 3, and a summative evaluation plan for year 3. The evaluation and research work are both driven by theory and community aspirations, and have been developed collaboratively (involving the Consortium and their management team, the community, and the evaluator). This paper examines what has been learned from the intersections of theory and practice, as communities strive for the goal of zero tolerance of violence. A special focus will be on the evaluation of complex community initiatives.

Keywords: community-based evaluation; family violence; prevention strategy; professional development

Introduction

Family violence has been an ongoing concern for Māori for many years, with calls for Māori to be committed to eliminating family violence through culturally appropriate initiatives and programmes that restore whānau and communities (Balzer & McNeill, 1988; Kruger, Pitman, Grennell, McDonald, Mariu, Pōmare, Mita, Maihi & Lawson-Te Aho, 2004). However strategies that are based on strengthening whānau are a relatively new phenomenon in a field that has often taken an individual or couple-based approach to intervening in family violence. The challenge is therefore to not only look for and document whānau and community-based strategies for preventing violence but to also develop whānau and community-based measures of the success of such strategies.

Amokura (the Amokura Family Violence Prevention Strategy) is an iwi led whole-of-community initiative in Tai Tokerau (Northland). This paper highlights the important contributions made by the Tai Tokerau Iwi Chief Executives Consortium in leading this work and provides an overview and evaluation of the initiative as well as an assessment of what has been learned in the first three years of the programme.

Family violence prevention Consortium

The first iteration of Amokura in 2000-02 was a whānau approach to focus mainly on secondary interventions with victims and perpetrators of Māori family violence within Taitokerau. In this second iteration, the Amokura strategy uses an integrated community-based approach to address family violence in the Tai Tokerau (Northern) region of New Zealand. The initiative is led by the Tai Tokerau Iwi Chief Executives Consortium (the Consortium) which is made up of the Chief Executives of seven iwi (tribal) authorities: Te Aupouri, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Kahu, Whaingaroa, Ngapuhi, Ngāti Whatua and Ngāti Wai. These

are not all the iwi authorities in Te Tai Tokerau, and the Consortium maintains that it is not an exclusive group. Similarly, while the focus of the Consortium is on the well-being of whānau, hapū and iwi, it also holds that “the cultural obligation of manaakitanga extends the responsibility of care to all within Tai Tokerau rohe” through a collective tribal response (Family Violence Prevention Consortium, 2004, p.3).

The Consortium was coming together prior to contracting for Amokura and a number of Consortium members believe that Amokura has provided a focus for this coming together to happen at a faster pace than it would otherwise have happened. There was scepticism about whether this could work as such a consortium had never happened before. However they decided to proceed with the collaboration and funding from the Department of Child, Youth and Family, our governmental social service agency, enabled them to meet, consult and prepare a programme plan for the delivery of Amokura.

The Consortium maintains that “Iwi are the enduring base for social organisation in Tai Tokerau and the consistent advocate for the well-being of the people” (Family Violence Prevention Consortium, 2004, p.3). The branding adopted by the Consortium is: “Tiketike – work carried out with the highest integrity” and the meaning behind the Amokura name is expressed by the Consortium as (Family Violence Consortium, 2004, p.3):

The sighting of the amokura when far distant from land and from home is an assurance of a return to a safe haven. It is therefore symbolic of the safety that should be afforded to all whānau in Tai Tokerau, and reminds Consortium members of their roles in promoting freedom from violence.

The Consortium’s approach for Amokura is to “utilise strategies aimed at preventing violence and identifying opportunities to intervene early so as to stop the cycle of abuse” (Family Violence Prevention Consortium, 2003, p.2). The emphasis is on Māori frameworks and collective responses to whānau violence prevention that advocate for zero tolerance of violence. The Consortium also has a goal of demonstrating positive leadership with respect to whānau ora (family wellbeing). The four project areas developed within the Amokura initiative are: research, education and promotion, professional development and training, and advocacy. These are profiled below following an overview of Māori whānau (family) violence.

Preventing Māori whānau (family) violence

There is no universally accepted definition of family violence. The New Zealand Domestic Protection Act (1982) defined domestic violence as “violence which occurs within a particular range of relationships that one person may have with another, and as such can be perpetrated by any one person against another”. The Domestic Violence Act (1995) broadened this definition to include psychological or emotional abuse with protection extended to all family members. In addition, other forms of abuse, such as spiritual abuse and cultural abuse, are often well recognised by Māori. Manuka Henare also describes Māori families as having “suffered constitutional, legal and ethical abuse” (Henare, 1995, p.16).

A population/ecological model of family violence presented by the Ministry of Health (2002) builds a multi-level picture of risk factors for family violence that begins to address family violence within a broader societal context. The causes of Māori family violence are acknowledged as complex and as sourced from both historical and contemporary factors. For example, some causes are the loss of traditional ways of life as a result of colonisation, and the pressures of low income and unemployment. The complexity of the explanations demands complexity from the solutions if Māori family violence is to be successfully addressed.

This move to a more complex understanding of family violence is reiterated by Jewkes (2002). After reviewing the international literature on intimate partner violence, she argues for five prevention strategies:

1. Creating a climate of non-tolerance of intimate partner violence
2. Empowering women and improving their status in society
3. Reducing use of violence
4. Changing community norms
5. Research and monitoring

Pouwhare (1999, p.44) also recommended that whānau, hapū and iwi need to adopt a zero tolerance to violence in order to dismantle the attitudes and behaviours that support family violence. This type of awareness-raising among a population is seen foundational to the social sustainability of family violence prevention and intervention activities (Ellsberg & Arcas, 2001). It has also been advocated that the initiatives aimed at the prevention of Māori family violence need to: incorporate Māori values and concepts (Leahy, 1999); “recognise and provide for the diverse and specific needs of whānau, hapū and iwi” (Ministry of Social Development, 2002, p.15); and “build the capacity of whānau, hapū and iwi to resolve family violence issues within their own communities” (ibid.).

Within the Mauri Ora Framework developed by the Second Māori Taskforce on Whānau Violence, whānau violence is seen as a learned behaviour that has become normalised because it can be rationalised by ‘imposter tikanga’ (Kruger et al., 2004). Causation is found in both historical and contemporary factors as above. Violence is seen as damaging the mauri ora (life principle) of both victims and perpetrators: “it creates dis-ease and imbalance which results in a state of kahupō, which can be described as having no purpose in life or spiritual blindness”. The restoration of mauri ora is achieved through a transformative process that “includes contesting the illusions around whānau violence, removing opportunities for the practice of whānau violence and replacing these with alternative behaviours and ways of understanding” (Kruger, et al., 2004, p.15-16). The Taskforce endorsed the objective of zero tolerance to whānau violence, while at the same time acknowledging that achieving this will take time. Three fundamental tasks are identified by the Taskforce as underpinning a conceptual framework for achieving whānau wellbeing:

- **Dispelling the illusion** (at the collective and individual level) that whānau violence is normal and acceptable’.
- **Removing opportunities** for whānau violence to be perpetuated through education for empowerment and liberation of whānau, hapū and iwi. and
- **Teaching transformative practices** based on Māori cultural imperatives that provide alternatives to violence
(Kruger et al., 2004, p.5)

Over the past 20-25 years there has therefore been a growing recognition of the need for a structural analysis of family violence. This has occurred alongside the endorsement of the need for holistic Māori models of prevention and intervention. An important building block that has emerged from the family violence literature is the need for initiatives that challenge community acceptance of family violence as normal. It is a growing community ‘zero tolerance for violence’ that supports and sustains other programmes and services that work to alleviate violence from individual to community to societal levels. This emphasis on community is accompanied by acknowledgement that the communities asked to lead change “are also the the public spaces where the attitudes, beliefs and systems that normalize violence flourish and reproduce” (Grennell, 2007, p.6). It is within this policy and practice environment that the Amokura initiative was implemented in Tai Tokerau.

The Amokura Family Violence Prevention Strategy

The Amokura initiative was developed by the Consortium to be consistent with their focus on early intervention and prevention of family violence, as well as consistent with the Mauri Ora Framework (Kruger et al., 2004). The Consortium's values underpinning this include:

- Being the leading advocate for issues related to zero tolerance to domestic violence within Māori whānau in Te Taitokerau.
 - Focusing on a positiveness of promoting zero tolerance to domestic violence and the need for quality services that are appropriate, affordable and available to all.
 - Maintaining good practice and aspire to best practice in service delivery.
 - Providing credible, honest and accurate information.
 - Recognising the value of each individual and respect diversity.
- (Family Violence Prevention Consortium, 2003)

Through Amokura, the Consortium aspires to facilitate whānau oranga (family well-being), through relationships with iwi, hapū, whānau and communities; along with co-ordinating a range of family violence programmes, initiatives and services for maximum benefit. The Amokura initiative is seen by the Consortium as breaking new ground every step of the way.

Intersections of theory & practice

In searching for a theoretical approach, it was recognised that Amokura is a Comprehensive Community Initiative (CCI) which requires taking a comprehensive approach to changing communities in order to improve the well-being of residents. It is also noted that the complexity of the initiative presents challenges for evaluation. Comprehensive Community Initiatives is a term “used to describe the full range of initiatives that take a comprehensive approach to change communities in order to improve the well-being of their residents” (Principles for evaluating comprehensive community initiatives, 2001, p.1). These initiatives work to prevent a range of health, social and other societal issues, including violence, through coordinating community processes that engage individuals, families, organisations and institutions.

According to Chaskin (2001, p.292), CCIs “emphasize the centrality of meaningful resident participation in the change process and the importance of developing their human and social capital as a condition of sustainable community change”. In other words, the focus of CCIs is on meaningful change in the lives of participants. Amokura is just such an initiative in that it is multi-pronged, community-oriented and aiming to improve the lives of those living within Tai Tokerau (Northland). “This sacred responsibility for the well being of our whānau and tamariki mokopuna is a collective one, and is not limited to organizational structures or specific projects” (Grennell, 2006, p.1).

The evaluation of a CCI is challenging because of the complexity of these initiatives. Yet evaluation plays an important role in both strengthening CCIs and building the capacity of communities to create and sustain change. Evaluation is the critical assessment of projects. The Amokura research strategy calls for an independent formative evaluation of the Amokura project. The goals of the evaluation were:

- Assurance and affirmation that the Consortium is on the right track;
- Transparency and accountability;
- Evidence on which to base project improvements; and
- Knowledge of the logic and rationale for what is happening with the project.

In the remainder of this paper, the objectives and the implementation of the four Amokura project areas are briefly described.

Research

The overall aim of the Consortium's research project area is that all three project areas of advocacy, education and promotion, and professional development and training will be informed by the research activities. The research project area objectives are:

- To become the recognised knowledge base for family oranga (well-being), violence prevention and early intervention in Tai Tokerau.
- To conduct our own research using locally based researchers and apply knowledge gained to Consortium activities and through iwi, hapū and whānau channels.
- To train and mentor locally based researchers for the future.

The research project area aims to source knowledge about whānau oranga and violence prevention and intervention in Tai Tokerau from multiple sources. This is done from within a Kaupapa Māori philosophy and with a view to achieving positive outcomes for whānau. Alongside the evaluation activity undertaken by Amokura, three research projects were developed with the aim of increasing knowledge about whānau ora through undertaking 'by Māori', strengths-based research. The focus of the research work area was therefore on whānau oranga (family well-being), rather than on family violence *per se*. The participant groups for these projects were: kaumatua kuia (women elders), kaumatua tane (men elders), and rangatahi (young people).

Kaupapa Māori literally means 'a Māori way'. In the research area this meant looking at what was the 'Māori way' for the different groups involved in each of the three research projects. For the kaumatua (elders), the approach was hui (gatherings) at which they could meet and talk about whānau oranga. For the rangatahi (young people), a photo-voice project on whānau oranga allowed them to express their own understandings through pictures. Their capacity was built through training in how to use the camera, how to frame pictures, as well as in the ethics of taking pictures of people. A commitment made to support their aspiration of overseas travel, was fulfilled when they attended and gave a presentation at an indigenous social work conference in Hawai'i. The research project with Māori men studied the pathways taken by men as they moved away from family violence. This project began with the men developing the ethical principles that would guide the project. The final report of this project is currently being reviewed by participants and prepared for publication.

Other research projects about whānau oranga, including the literature review, annotated bibliography and best practice projects, were developed to extend the knowledge base of researchers, provider organisations and the wider community. An important component of the research project area has been outreach or knowledge sharing. This has been in three main areas: networking with organisations, research conferences, and research relationships. As a result of the research activity Amokura has become a recognised knowledge base for whānau oranga, violence prevention and early intervention in Tai Tokerau. The expertise of Amokura is also recognised nationally and has gained praise internationally. Amokura has also achieved its objectives of conducting its own research and of training and mentoring locally based researchers.

Education & promotion

The objective of the education and promotion project is to deliver a social change programme about family violence prevention that has consistent ideology, values, messages and branding. The programme is evidence-based and includes multi-media techniques.

Many of the Amokura initiatives in the education and promotion stream are social marketing activities around promoting the 'Step Back' message that was developed by Mai Media. Essentially this 'Step Back' brand invites people to step back and think before acting, and to take responsibility for the choices they make. The hip hop style of the visual brand is designed to make it appealing to youth. The Consortium was unanimous in their endorsement of this brand and it was launched at a 'Step Back' concert on 27 February 2005.

The promotion of 'Step Back' has involved the development of a range of promotional merchandise, 'Step Back' jingles played on local radio, and 'Step Back' concerts that are promoted as whānau and community days. Early on there was engagement with the non-violence message and the 'Step Back' brand. Two young people decided that they would write a 'Step Back' jingle and this was then produced and added to those being aired on local radio. Well-known national and local artists have become involved in the 'Step Back' concerts and local councils have assisted with funding.

Comments from participants at the Ngapuhi Festival concert where the 'Step Back' message was promoted in 2006 included:

The work you are doing is desperately needed in Tai Tokerau.

Our tamariki definitely need this – our parents need to learn how to break the cycle and it's awesome that you are putting a Māori face to it because our people will listen if it is coming from Māori.

One highlight was the launch of the waka tete (a canoe suitable for women) named 'Uerangi' at Whaingaroa in November 2005. The waka tete development and launching provided a setting for discussing gender roles and gender equity in a culturally safe way (cf. Jewkes, 2002). With its accompanying messages of non-violence, the launch was a special occasion for Te Runanga o Whaingaroa and Amokura. The launch was coordinated by the CEO of Te Runanga o Whaingaroa, Ms Judy Steele, who describes the project as follows:

The waka tete ... is rich in symbols that represent the divinity of women and the promise of safety. ... The tauihu (figurehead) of the waka tete is a tawake bird. The tail feather of the tawake is the Amokura. The amokura is recognised in Taitokerau as representing the promise of safety. ... The waka tete is an opportunity to utilise the metaphor of moving forward, together, to strengthen all members of the community. (CommunityNet Aotearoa New Zealand, 2005, p.1):

Managing expectations about the outcomes from these initiatives is in the first instance, about establishing timeframes for change. For example, theoretically, it takes at least three years for a community to recognise and become knowledgeable about a brand. Any additional outcomes achieved by Amokura then become bonuses that point to the overwhelming success of the initiative.

Word has spread about: Amokura, the Consortium, 'Step Back' and the accompanying promotion of non-violence, and whānau oranga. Amokura has also successfully linked its brand to other brands (e.g., Everyday Communities) to reinforce its message to wider audiences, making it more and more an iwi led, for whole-of-community' initiative. The Everyday Community initiative, for its part, provided resources for communities to develop resources and deliver violence prevention activities, thereby increasing levels of community engagement.

Professional development & training

The aim of this project is “to provide appropriate, quality professional development and training for Māori ... and other practitioners in response to need” (Family Violence Prevention Consortium, 2003, p.12). The objectives are:

- Volunteers, whānau (families) and community empowered to participate in family violence prevention and early intervention.
- Increased capability of the non-dedicated workforce to practice early intervention and prevention across all areas of service delivery to whānau.
- Increased pool of dedicated family violence workers.
- Increased capability of providers in identified priority areas of evaluation & supervision.

Professional development and training are seen as essential components of ensuring that the early warning signs of domestic violence are recognised and responded to. Those identified as being in positions to recognise such signs and therefore in need to training, experience and guidelines are ‘first contact kaimahi, volunteers, kaumatua, and kuia’ (Family Violence Prevention Consortium, 2003, p.12). The Consortium has therefore been contributing to the professional development and training environment in Tai Tokerau.

In the early stages of Amokura, a gaps and needs analysis was completed and this enhanced the project’s understanding of the training and development needs of providers. Workshops covering a range of topics were then organised or facilitated. The wānanga, workshops and networking forums organised and promoted by Amokura have quickly grown in popularity to the point that many have been oversubscribed. Undoubtedly word-of-mouth marketing has greatly enhanced advertising efforts, with people telling others, as well as feeding back to Amokura, about their positive experiences at these professional development opportunities.

In addition, provider interest in a certificate-level qualification to benchmark the skills and knowledge of workers has led Amokura to deliver the National Certificate in Social Services – Abuse, Violence & Neglect. Led by Moana Eruera, this programme has been reviewed by Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi (the social services Industry Training Organisation (ITO)) as well as by local experts for its ‘fit’ with Tai Tokerau. Those who have participated in the National Certificate training programme have ranged from very experienced to new practitioners. An additional three students became the first diploma level graduates in this field, noting:

It has increased awareness when working with whānau to ensure we fit with them, not the other way around. It provided reaffirmation in how important it is to gain a good understanding of their social and cultural environments...this in turn assists us as practitioners to best support whānau as they restore their mana and enhance their well-being. (Tania Siteine, Wendy Johnson, Marino Murphy, Tikitike Special Edition, March 2008)

In the field of whānau oranga, Amokura has become a leading organiser of professional development and training opportunities for social service providers and agencies within Tai Tokerau. They have done this through meeting the needs of providers and agencies in Tai Tokerau and by providing Kaupapa Māori training and development solutions that are usually delivered on marae or schools, and often linked to community occasions.

Advocacy

The aim of the advocacy project is “to contribute to public and policy makers’ understanding of effective interventions and practices for family violence prevention and early intervention through provision of research and evidence based information” (Family Violence Prevention Consortium, 2004, p.21). The advocacy objective is therefore:

- To establish the Consortium as the expert base to advocate for prevention of, and early intervention in family violence.

Iwi providers have long argued that Wellington-derived domestic violence policy and funding is mis-matched to the needs and aspirations of Tai Tokerau whānau. Amokura has identified the limitations of mainstream approaches to family violence arguing that “analysis of family violence and models of practice are grounded in cultural values, beliefs and practices” (Grennell, 2006, p.2). The advocacy intervention is therefore designed to bridge these gaps. The Consortium recognises the commitment, work and struggle by Iwi, Māori and mainstream providers working in the area of domestic violence and the advocacy project enables “the opportunity for co-coordinated review and contributions to strategic policy development and for exerting influence on key regional agencies and groups to ensure good outcomes” (Family Violence Prevention Consortium, 2004, p.21). The advocacy project area therefore confirms the Consortium’s commitment to being spokespeople for the Amokura project and, more generally, for violence prevention.

Networks and relationships underwrite Amokura’s work across all of the work streams. Advocacy is about utilising and building on these relationships to advocate for non-violence. These occur at multiple levels ranging from local providers of services and local communities and schools through to national forums where decisions are being made about initiatives to address Māori whānau violence and family violence more generally through to international forums where the approach being taken by Amokura can be show-cased and subjected to peer review.

There is a recognition that there are existing local initiatives in this area and Amokura is there to support them, including providing them with tools for their own advocacy purposes. Amokura has a clear policy of not competing with local service providers for contracts, and this has contributed to the development of trusting and collaborative relationships. Research and policy information is widely distributed by Amokura, locally and nationally, through a range of networks. This information is appreciated, as attested to by the following examples of feedback:

I hadn't considered how community interaction related to whānau violence and how community building could work to stop it.

More kōrero around the motu(country) needs to happen; awesome!

It is also recognised that the Iwi Consortium are being showcased by Amokura so a commitment is required from the tribal councils and organisations to being violence-free. A draft policy on Zero Tolerance to Violence that was distributed to the iwi authorities provoked a great deal of discussion of the policy and the issues it raised. In late 2005, five of the seven iwi authorities involved in the Consortium had adopted their own policies, based on the drafted policy from Amokura. This platform also enabled the Consortium to advocate at a national level, with the mandate of their tribal councils, for an amendment to our legislation that would repeal Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961 and thereby remove the legal justification for child assault.

Conclusions

Over the first three years of its operation, Amokura has moved steadily and steadfastly towards achieving the ambitious goals set by the Consortium. Across all four project sites (research, education and promotion, professional development and training, advocacy) Amokura has met the objectives and often exceeded expectations.

The relationships and networks of members of the Amokura project team have also grown and strengthened. In addition, the Executive Director continued to be a key strength of Amokura and her expertise in the area of whānau oranga (including domestic violence) is recognised locally and nationally. National and international recognition of the work of Amokura also endorsed the approach taken as being at the cutting edge of prevention and early intervention work.

In addition to fulfilling contract obligations, Amokura has secured positive feedback from the people and the communities it has worked with. This is evidenced in the numbers of invitations Amokura has received to discuss issues and ideas with local and national groups, the verbal feedback received by staff and contractors, and the well-attended wānanga and workshops that have been run. Outcomes have been written about by participants in their post-workshop evaluations. In addition, the evaluation of the Everyday Communities initiative also documented outcomes, as well as the esteem with which Amokura is held in many communities in Tai Tokerau (Cram, Taupo & Kennedy, 2006).

The evaluation of Amokura as a Comprehensive Community Initiative has facilitated the acknowledgement of the ‘ripple-out’ effects of Amokura project initiatives – from individual and whānau participants to the whole of the Northland community. This approach sits well with an understanding that the prevention of whānau violence needs to include strategies for changing community norms to ones of zero tolerance for violence (Jewkes, 2002; Pouwhare, 1999). The Consortium’s commitment to the Mauri Ora framework also means that the fundamental task of ‘dispelling the illusion’ is sourced from within the Māori world but offered as a koha (gift) to the whole of the Tai Tokerau community (Kruger et al., 2004).

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Author Notes

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Di Grennell (Ngāti Mutunga, Ngai Tahu) is Executive Director of Amokura. Fiona Cram (Ngāti Pahauwera) is Director of Katoa Ltd., a Wellington-based research and evaluation company.

E-mail: fionac@katoa.net.nz