



Research Communications

Maternal experiences of childhood

Pacific Island mothers in New Zealand

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Abstract

The increase in reported acts of abuse within Pacific Island families in New Zealand raises the question of possible differences in Pacific child raising practices and expectations, including perceptions of what types of behaviour are abusive and what is disciplining. All too little research is available in this area. This study looks at parenting practices generally, focusing particularly on Pacific women's perceptions of the way they were raised, in terms of the abusive and nurturing behaviours they experienced from male and female parents.

The study group comprised more than 1200 mothers whose babies were born at Middlemore Hospital, Auckland, in 2000. Results suggest that abusive and supportive behaviours co-exist; physical abuse being recalled more strongly than emotional abuse, and mothers seeming both more abusive and more supportive than fathers. In terms of ethnicity, Tongan (and most other) mothers reported lower abuse rates and higher rates of supportiveness than Samoan mothers. Significantly, mothers born in New Zealand were more likely to report maternal and paternal abuse than those born in the Islands, though place of birth showed no significant effect on maternal and paternal love and support. Clearly, more research and discussion are necessary.

Keywords

family violence; Pacific Islanders in New Zealand

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AVAILABLE DOCUMENTATION POINTS TO AN INCREASE IN THE REPORTED ACTS OF abuse within Pacific Island families in New Zealand. Anecdotal reports suggest this is due to differences in Pacific child raising practices and expectations, including perceptions of what types of behaviour are abusive and what is disciplining. Some consider the use of physical discipline to be an integral part of Pacific child rearing practices and reinforced by Christian teachings. To others, abusive acts suggest migrant families are under pressure as they cope with the changes associated with living in New Zealand today, including the increase in nuclear family units, the nature of urban life and Pacific peoples' increasing economic vulnerability.¹ In this scenario, physical punishment is seen to reflect migrant fears that as their children become more exposed to New Zealand ways they will start to reject the customary values and obligations to serve and respect their parents and elders (see Fairbairn-Dunlop 1981; Schoeffel et al. 1996; Fairbairn-Dunlop & Makisi 2004).

There has been little research into Pacific child raising patterns in New Zealand despite the fact that Pacific Island people are one of New Zealand's fastest growing populations.² Such research is vital to inform government policy decisions and programmes, such as access to health and social resources, particularly in the Auckland region, where two-thirds of the Pacific population resides; its lack reflects the fact that research into child abuse issues generally is in its early days. Furthermore, the fact that abuse is a culturally defined concept encapsulating cultural norms of acceptable parenting behaviours, male-female roles and father-daughter relations points to a need for sensitive research strategies³ and processes. This study of women's perceptions of the parenting practices they experienced in their own childhoods addresses one aspect of the much larger picture of parenting practices in Pacific families in New Zealand.

A brief review of the literature highlights factors to be taken into account in research in parenting practices generally. First is the debate on definitions of what behaviours constitute abuse. Abuse is commonly classified into general categories of emotional abuse (EA), physical abuse (PA) and sexual abuse (SA). Further distinctions have been made between emotional abuse and psychological abuse, with emotional abuse defined as a 'sustained, repetitive, inappropriate, emotional response to the child's experience of emotion and its accompanying



expressive behaviour' (O'Hagan 1995). Kelder, McNamara, Carlson and Lynn (1991) have noted that perceptions of what is abuse and what is discipline can vary by factors such as social group and individual characteristics. Samoan parents exemplify this: reports show Samoan parents most often explain hitting as a disciplining act of love, and as a duty to 'show children the right way' (Fairbairn-Dunlop 2001a & b). Duituturanga (1988) found 'purpose'—i.e. motive, consequence and context—was also an important factor in defining physical abuse. Duituturanga's sample of Pacific parents believed that if the intention was to cause injury then the action was seen to be violent, but if the motive was to discipline, then the action was not perceived to be violent. She found the consequences of a disciplinary action were also important, that 'minor bruises could be accepted as a reminder of the lesson to be learnt whereas black bruises, cuts, burns, broken bones and serious injuries were often considered as unacceptable consequences' (1988:111).

Research on the emotional effects of abuse has shown that trauma in childhood can affect personality functioning and one's basic beliefs about the world and oneself (Epstein 1990; Janoff-Bulman 1992). A connection between exposure to an abusive environment and the long-term effects on adult functioning has also been established (see Briere & Runtz 1990; Moeller, Bachman & Moeller 1993), while emotional abuse has been found not only to inflict emotional pain on the child but also to impair emotional development and lead to aggressive or hostile behaviour in adulthood (O'Hagan 1995). The intergenerational hypothesis of a relationship between the childhood experience of abuse and parental child abuse is frequently cited in family violence literature (see Berger 1980; Friedrich & Wheeler 1982). Briefly, this hypothesises that early social learning of aggressive responses to others (especially family members) and the experience and observation of aggression can contribute to violence transmission—or the learning of violent behaviour (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz 1980). Simply put, a child who experiences abuse often becomes an abusive adult.

How abusive acts are perceived by the victim is another aspect of parenting research. Because physical abuse is often considered to be normative or deserved, those experiencing this tend not to view their parents' behaviours as 'abusive', 'not loving' or 'non-supportive'. Furthermore, children often



report feeling loved, wanted and cared for by the parents who are abusing them (Herzberger, Potts & Dillon 1981). Other findings are that an individual who has been exposed to abusive or supportive behaviours from both parents may have a different outcome compared to an individual who has experienced such behaviours from one parent only (Briere & Runtz 1990). Indications are also that positive parenting and abusive parenting can co-exist: if only one parent is abusive, the other parent may provide positive and supportive parenting.

The influence of gender is another consideration. The sex of both the parent and child can affect the perception and the reporting of certain abusive behaviours (Koski & Mangold 1988; Nicholas & Bieber 1994). For example, fathers tend to be physically larger and stronger than mothers and may be more punitive and aggressive with their children (Power & Shanks 1989; Siegal 1987). Not only that, it has also been suggested that individuals may rate the same behaviours on the part of fathers as more abusive than when done by mothers (Kean & Dukes 1991). Young adult females were more likely than males to rate such behaviours as abusive (Dukes & Kean 1989; Kelder et al. 1991).

There has been some research on the perpetrators of abuse. For example, studies looking at the degree of perceived nurturance from mothers versus fathers most often demonstrate that mothers are regarded as being the primary source of nurturance and affection (Abraham, Christopherson & Kuehl 1984; Forehand & Nousiainen 1993). Also, Nicholas and Bieber (1996) found that emotionally abusive behaviours by one parent affected the behaviour of the other parent, resulting in less supportive behaviours by both the abusing parent and by the other. This pattern was consistent for emotionally abusive behaviours but not physically abusive behaviours.

The available literature suggests three major foci for research and education in Pacific parenting. First is the need to document what are the parenting practices of Pacific Island parents today, including who is doing the parenting, and how parenting behaviours are learnt. Starting points include Turner's findings (1884:78) that new born infants in Samoa were over-lavished with attention, and in turn, Ritchie and Ritchie's proposal (1974) that these so called 'golden years' of infancy came to an abrupt end at around two years of age when toddlers were passed over to the care of older brothers and sisters,



thus receiving the very clear message that the days of their indulged babyhood were over.⁴ In-depth study of the effects (including feelings of dislocation) of this sudden shift on children's self-concept and confidence is certainly warranted. Second is a group of questions arising out of the work of the Ritchies and others relating to the differences in child rearing practices in a traditional Polynesian extended family (seen in the adage 'it takes a whole village to raise a child') and the nuclear family unit, which is becoming the mode in Samoan families in New Zealand and in Samoa as well. The pressures in a nuclear family unit may escalate as parents find they have total responsibility for the social, spiritual, educational and economic welfare of their children—a role for which they themselves may not be well prepared. Third are questions relating to parenting education generally and the appropriate way to carry this out. The desire by a significant group of Pacific parents to learn new parenting behaviours has been emphasised in McCallum et al. (2001)—who found Samoan parents were making a conscious effort to break the cycle of harsh discipline they had experienced in childhood—and in Fairbairn-Dunlop's study (2001a & b)—in which women were emphatic that they would *never* hit their children, because of 'the way we were brought up'. These women were keenly interested in learning alternative parenting and disciplining practices.

The present study: what, how and who

This study centres on Pacific women's perceptions of the way they themselves were raised, and more specifically, of the abusive and nurturing behaviours they experienced from male and female parents. No specific age or time is stipulated for this 'looking back', so the maternal responses give a generalised picture. The study does not try to answer questions of what constitutes abuse, but measures responses to a set of general indicators of abusive and nurturing behaviours. The sample group is looking back into their childhood, with all the benefits and constraints of hindsight and selective memory this recall strategy implies. Nevertheless, it is proposed that the general picture of Pacific child raising patterns that emerges sets a base for further in-depth research. This could include, for example, the study of how the mothers of this sample are raising their own children, i.e. the exploration of the intergenerational theory of abusive behaviour. These data have been collected as part of the Pacific



Islands Families: First Two Years of Life (PIF) Study, which is a longitudinal investigation of a cohort of 1,398 infants born at Middlemore Hospital, South Auckland, during 2000. The research questions are:

- 1) Are there differences between the maternal and paternal supportive and abusive parental behaviours that mothers experienced in their childhood?
- 2) Are there differences *by ethnic group* in the maternal and paternal supportive and abusive parental behaviours that mothers experienced in their childhood?
- 3) Does mother's place of birth influence these reported maternal or paternal supportive and abusive behaviours that mothers experienced in their childhood?

Method

Design and procedures

The measurement of maternal childhood history was based on the Exposure to Abusive and Supportive Environments Parenting Inventory (EASE-PI) (Nicholas & Bieber 1997). The 70-item EASE-PI contains six scales derived through replicated factor analyses, which measure retrospective accounts of exposure to parental behaviours that are emotionally supportive (L/S), promoting of independence/self individuation (I), and providing of positive modelling and fairness (M/F). For the purposes of this study a scale of 19 items was selected from the items for the EA (emotionally abusive), PA (physically abusive) and L/S scales. Item selection was based on the item having a factor loading of 0.70 or greater with the factor to be measured. The authors state that this measure was designed to assess important aspects of the parent-child environment, including behaviours that were independently deemed to be abusive, but that may or may not be experienced as abusive by a particular individual. There is no assumption as to the existence of trauma as a result of exposure, nor that exposure to the behaviours constitutes abuse per se. Similarly, with supportive behaviours, no assumption is made as to the individual's qualitative experience of feeling supported or loved. Cronbach's coefficient alpha reliability values for the maternal and paternal respectively

were emotional abusiveness, 0.86, 0.90; physical abusiveness, 0.85, 0.85; and love and support, 0.77, 0.79.

Sample

Data were collected as part of the Pacific Islands Families: First Two Years of Life (PIF) Study. The PIF Study is a longitudinal investigation of a cohort of 1,398 infants born at Middlemore Hospital, South Auckland during the year 2000. Middlemore Hospital was chosen as the site for recruitment of the cohort as it has the largest number of Pacific births in New Zealand and is representative of the major Pacific ethnicities. All potential child participants were selected from live births at Middlemore Hospital for whom the child had at least one parent who identified as being of a Pacific Island ethnicity and also a New Zealand permanent resident. Recruitment procedures occurred through the Birthing Unit, which provided a daily list of Pacific admissions, in conjunction with the Pacific Islands Cultural Resource Unit.

Approximately six weeks after the birth of their child, the mothers were visited in their homes by Pacific interviewers who were fluent in both English and a Pacific language. Once eligibility criteria were established and informed consent was gained, mothers participated in one-hour interviews concerning the health and development of the child and family functioning generally. This interview was carried out in the preferred language of the mother. All procedures and interview protocols had ethical approval from the National Ethics Committee. Detailed information about the cohort and procedures is described elsewhere (Paterson et al. 2002).

Overall characteristics of the cohort

Ninety-six per cent (N = 1,590) of potentially eligible mothers of Pacific infants born between 15 March and 17 December 2000 gave consent to be visited in their homes when the infant was six weeks old. Of the 1,477 mothers who were contacted and who met the eligibility criteria, 1,376 (93.2%) agreed to participate in the study. A more conservative recruitment rate of 87.1% would include mothers who consented to contact and were (a) confirmed eligible or (b) of indeterminable eligibility due to inability to trace. Of the 1,376 mothers in the cohort (1.7% gave birth to twins), 47.2% self-identified their major ethnic

group as Samoan, 21% as Tongan, 16.9% as Cook Islands Maori, 4.3% as Niuean, 3.4% as Other Pacific, and 7.2% as Non-Pacific. The mean (SD) age of mothers was 27 (6.2) years, 80.5% were married or in de-facto partnerships, 33% of mothers were New Zealand born and 27.4% had post-school qualifications (see Table 1).

Table 1 Characteristics of the sample group of mothers (n = 1,376)

Item	Category	Percentage
Total, by major ethnic group (self-identification)	Samoan	47.0%
	Tongan	21.0%
	Cook Islands Maori	16.9%
	Niuean	4.3%
	Other Pacific*	2.4%
	Non-Pacific**	7.2%
Mean age (SD)		27 (6.2) years
NZ born	NZ born	33%
Partnerships	married or in de-facto partnerships	80.5%
Post-school qualifications		27.4%

*Other Pacific group includes mothers identifying equally with Pacific and non-Pacific groups, or with Pacific groups other than Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island Maori or Niuean.

**The non-Pacific group refers to non-Pacific mothers of infants fathered by Pacific men.

The analyses were based on the numbers of mothers who responded to all items of the maternal and paternal EASE scales, and ranged from 1,227 mothers for the Paternal Emotional Abuse scale to 1,346 mothers for the Maternal Love and Support scale. The demographic profile of these mothers is similar to that of the full cohort.

Findings

Findings are discussed in two sections: first, the reported experiences of the total sample by emotional abuse, physical abuse and love and support. Secondly, the incidence of these behaviours is explored by ethnic groups (Samoan, Cook Island Maori, Niuean, Tongan, Other Pacific and non-Pacific). This is followed by a discussion.

Total sample responses

Emotional abuse

Table 2 depicting responses to the individual items on the maternal and paternal emotional abuse scale shows similarities in the pattern of emotional abuse reported for both male and female parental behaviour. By far the strongest impression is the extent to which these respondents did not in fact recall being severely emotionally abused by either their mothers or their fathers. More than 90%, for instance, asserted that their parents had never or only rarely been cold and rejecting, making this the least experienced form of abuse. Reports of the absence of emotionally abusive behaviour consistently exceeded half and frequently constituted 80–90% or more of the responses. Overall, mothers were more inclined to insult or swear at offending daughters (though 63.8% did so never or rarely) or make them ‘feel terrible’ (66.7%, though, doing that never or rarely). At the same time, amongst the often/very often rankings for maternal emotional abuse, insulting or swearing was the most frequently reported abusive behaviour (10.6% for mothers and slightly lower for fathers at 7.1%); and in the sometimes response as well, where roughly one in four ranked maternal, and slightly less than one in five paternal behaviour of this type. From mothers, verbal emotional abuse was closely followed by actions that ‘made you feel terrible’ (9.3%) and criticism (8.0%); from fathers, by action that ‘made you feel terrible’ and/or ‘made you feel like a bad person’. It is notable that as children, the respondents seem to have been quite accepting of such discipline: parental actions rarely (89%) triggered feelings of ‘making you want revenge’.

Table 2 Percentage responses to EASE items for maternal (n = 1,338) and paternal (n = 1,227) emotional abuse reported by mothers in the cohort

EASE Subscale and Item	% Responses		
	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Very Often
<i>Maternal emotional abuse</i>			
Insulted or swore at you	63.8	25.6	10.6
Made you feel stupid	79.8	13.5	6.7
Ridiculed your feelings	79.9	14.7	5.4
Made you want revenge	88.0	6.4	5.6
Made you feel like a bad person	81.0	12.8	6.2
Criticised you	80.5	11.5	8.0
Was cold or rejecting	92.4	4.1	3.5
Made you feel terrible	66.7	24.0	9.3
<i>Paternal emotional abuse</i>			
Insulted or swore at you	75.6	17.4	7.1
Made you feel stupid	85.1	10.3	4.6
Ridiculed your feelings	85.7	9.9	4.4
Made you want revenge	89.4	5.5	5.1
Made you feel like a bad person	86.7	7.9	5.4
Criticised you	88.6	6.5	4.9
Was cold or rejecting	93.2	3.2	3.7
Made you feel terrible	74.2	19.9	5.9

Physical abuse

Table 3 displays responses to the individual items on the maternal and paternal physical abuse scale. Again, the overall recollection suggests that parents were not grossly physically abusive; nevertheless, rates of recalled physical abuse tend to be higher than of emotional abuse and mothers are remembered as resorting to this type of behaviour more frequently than fathers. (This may reflect the fact that childcare is more often a woman's than a man's role; constancy of contact breeds opportunities for irritation.) The maternal and paternal acts of physical abuse are reasonably similar. Hitting scored highest in both the sometimes and the often/very often categories, closely followed by hitting with objects; indeed, fewer than half the young mothers were able

to say that their mother had never or rarely hit them, and figures for infrequency of paternal hitting approached two-thirds of the cohort. Pulling hair was relatively often reported for mothers, but was an unusual tactic for fathers. Actions such as breaking or smashing objects, pushing or grabbing and beating you up were not so common, from either parent.

Table 3 Percentage responses to EASE items for maternal (n = 1,341) and paternal (n = 1,231) physical abuse reported by mothers in the cohort

EASE Subscale and Item	% Responses		
	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Very Often
<i>Maternal physical abuse</i>			
Threw things at you	72.5	21.3	6.3
Pulled your hair	58.3	30.0	11.7
Broke or smashed objects	88.3	7.5	4.2
Pushed or grabbed you	83.8	11.6	4.6
Hit you	41.8	43.3	14.6
Hit you with objects	51.1	37.3	11.6
Beat you up	89.1	7.3	3.6
<i>Paternal physical abuse</i>			
Threw things at you	81.5	14.1	4.5
Pulled your hair	92.9	4.8	2.4
Broke or smashed objects	90.1	5.5	4.4
Pushed or grabbed you	89.7	6.3	4.1
Hit you	59.2	32.7	8.0
Hit you with objects	65.2	27.5	7.4
Beat you up	91.8	4.2	4.0

Loving and supportive behaviours

As a complement to the data on abusive behaviour, Table 4 demonstrates that this group remembers experiencing a high level of love and supportive behaviours, especially emotional support (78.8% maternal and 74.9 paternal). Comforting and doing loving things also scored highly, while spoken words of love and shows of physical affection rated slightly lower. While this pattern warrants further study, it is line in with the findings by Mead (1928) and

Fairbairn-Dunlop (1981) that Pacific parents tend to show their love and support in non-verbal ways.

Table 4 Percentage responses to EASE items for maternal (n = 1,346) and paternal (n = 1,237) love and support reported by mothers in the cohort

EASE Subscale and Item	% Responses		
	Never/Rarely	Sometimes	Often/Very Often
<i>Maternal love and support</i>			
Comforted you	6.0	18.9	75.1
Did loving things	6.3	16.8	76.9
Was physically affectionate	31.9	21.5	46.6
Told you she loved you	26.4	19.3	54.2
Supported you emotionally	10.1	11.1	78.8
<i>Paternal love and support</i>			
Comforted you	14.1	19.5	66.5
Did loving things	10.1	18.5	71.4
Was physically affectionate	39.3	20.4	40.3
Told you he loved you	30.9	19.4	49.7
Supported you emotionally	12.4	12.7	74.9

Generally, paired t-tests revealed significant differences between the overall maternal and paternal scales. Reports of maternal emotional abuse were significantly more frequent than of paternal abuse ($t(1203) = 7.33, p < 0.0001$); maternal physical abuse was reported significantly more often than paternal physical abuse ($t(1212) = 13.65, p < 0.0001$); and the recollection of maternal love and support was also significantly more frequent than of paternal love and support ($t(1217) = 8.66, p < 0.0001$).

Responses by ethnicity and place of birth

To investigate associations between the EASE-PI scales and both ethnicity and place of birth, participants scoring in the top third of the distribution on each of the scales of the EASE-PI were considered to have been exposed to a higher degree of abusiveness or supportiveness. Those participants scoring in the lower two-thirds of the distribution were considered to have been exposed to a lower degree of abusiveness or supportiveness.

Table 5 lists the variables examined for potential association with a higher degree of maternal and paternal emotional and physical abuse and love and support. In terms of ethnicity, Tongan mothers in the cohort reported significantly lower maternal emotional abuse (20.8%) than did Samoan mothers (34%), and lower paternal emotional abuse (23.9%) than did Samoan mothers (34.8%). Tongan mothers also reported a significantly higher degree of maternal love and support (59.6%) and paternal love and support (67.4%) than Samoan mothers (23.4% and 26.9% respectively). Tongan mothers reported having experienced significantly lower maternal physical abuse (23.9%) than Samoan mothers (46.4%). Cook Island Maori also reported significantly lower degrees of paternal physical abuse than Samoans; only Niueans, in fact, exceeded Samoans on this variable.

Other differences highlighted were as follows. (1) Most groups reported lower degrees of maternal physical abuse than Samoans. (2) In addition to the Tongans, Other Pacific and non-Pacific mothers also had higher degrees of love and support than Samoans. (3) In addition to the Tongans, non-Pacific mothers also had higher degrees of paternal love and support than the Samoans.

In terms of country of birth (Table 6) mothers who were born in New Zealand were significantly more likely to report higher maternal and paternal emotional abuse. However, those mothers who were born in the Pacific Islands were more likely to report higher maternal physical abuse. Place of birth had no significant effect on maternal or paternal love and support.

Table 5 Numbers (row percentages) and univariate odds ratios for EASE-PI subscales by ethnic category

EASE-PI Scale	Ethnic Category	Relative score ²				Univariate odds ratio (95%CI)
		Lower		Higher		
		n	%	n	%	
Maternal emotional abuse	Samoan	426	(66.0)	219	(34.0)	1.00
	Cook Island Maori	155	(72.4)	59	(27.6)	0.74 (0.53, 1.04)
	Niuean	36	(62.1)	22	(37.9)	1.19 (0.68, 2.07)
	Tongan	224	(79.2)	59	(20.8)	0.51 (0.37, 0.71) [‡]
	Other Pacific ²	24	(57.1)	18	(42.9)	1.46 (0.77, 2.75)
	Non-Pacific	65	(67.7)	31	(32.3)	0.93 (0.59, 1.47)
Paternal emotional abuse	Samoan	390	(65.2)	208	(34.8)	1.00
	Cook Island Maori	136	(70.8)	56	(29.2)	0.77 (0.54, 1.10)
	Niuean	29	(56.9)	22	(43.1)	1.42 (0.80, 2.54)
	Tongan	201	(76.1)	63	(23.9)	0.59 (0.42, 0.82) [†]
	Other Pacific ^{1,2}	22	(57.9)	16	(42.1)	1.36 (0.70, 2.65)
	Non-Pacific	57	(67.9)	27	(32.1)	0.89 (0.54, 1.45)
Maternal physical abuse	Samoan	345	(53.6)	299	(46.4)	1.00
	Cook Island Maori	171	(79.2)	45	(20.8)	0.30 (0.21, 0.44) [‡]
	Niuean	43	(74.1)	15	(25.9)	0.40 (0.22, 0.74) [‡]
	Tongan	217	(76.1)	68	(23.9)	0.36 (0.26, 0.49) [‡]
	Other Pacific ^{1,2}	27	(64.3)	15	(35.7)	0.64 (0.33, 1.23)
	Non-Pacific	82	(85.4)	14	(14.6)	0.19 (0.11, 0.35) [‡]
Paternal physical abuse	Samoan	394	(65.9)	204	(34.1)	1.00
	Cook Island Maori	144	(74.2)	50	(25.8)	0.67 (0.47, .96) [*]
	Niuean	31	(60.8)	20	(39.2)	1.24 (0.69, 2.24)
	Tongan	189	(71.1)	77	(28.9)	0.79 (0.57, 1.08)
	Other Pacific ^{1,2}	26	(68.4)	12	(31.6)	0.89 (0.44, 1.80)
	Non-Pacific	63	(75.0)	21	(25.0)	0.64 (0.38, 1.08)
Maternal love and support	Samoan	494	(76.6)	151	(23.4)	1.00
	Cook Island Maori	159	(72.3)	61	(27.7)	1.25 (0.88, 1.78)
	Niuean	45	(77.6)	13	(22.4)	0.94 (0.49, 1.79)
	Tongan	115	(40.4)	170	(59.6)	4.84 (3.58, 6.52) [‡]
	Other Pacific ^{1,2}	26	(60.5)	17	(39.5)	2.14 (1.13, 4.05) [†]
	Non-Pacific	54	(56.8)	41	(43.2)	2.48 (1.59, 3.87) [‡]
Paternal love and support	Samoan	437	(73.1)	161	(26.9)	1.00
	Cook Island Maori	133	(67.2)	65	(32.8)	1.33 (0.94, 1.88)
	Niuean	41	(80.4)	10	(19.6)	0.66 (0.32, 1.35)
	Tongan	87	(32.6)	180	(67.4)	5.62 (4.10, 7.68) [‡]
	Other Pacific ^{1,2}	24	(63.2)	14	(36.8)	1.58 (0.79, 3.14)
	Non-Pacific	49	(57.6)	36	(42.4)	1.99 (1.25, 3.18) [†]

P<0.05; [†]P<0.01; [‡]P<0.001¹Lower and higher relative scores fell within the lower two-thirds and upper one-third of the distribution respectively.²Includes mothers identifying equally with two or more Pacific Island groups, equally with Pacific Island and non-Pacific Island groups, or with Pacific Island groups other than Tongan, Samoan, Cook Island Maori or Niuean.

Table 6 Numbers (row percentages) and univariate odds ratios for EASE-PI subscales by country of birth

EASE-PI Scale	Country of birth	Relative score ²				Univariate odds ratio (95%CI)
		Lower		Higher		
		n	%	n	%	
Maternal emotional abuse	Other	275	(63.2)	160	(36.8)	1.00
	New Zealand	655	(72.5)	248	(27.5)	1.53 (1.20, 1.96) [†]
Maternal emotional abuse	Other	232	(60.7)	150	(39.3)	1.00
	New Zealand	681	(73.9)	241	(26.1)	1.61 (1.25, 2.07) [‡]
Maternal physical abuse	Other	313	(71.6)	124	(28.4)	1.00
	New Zealand	572	(63.3)	332	(36.7)	0.68 (0.53, 0.87) [†]
Paternal physical abuse	Other	261	(67.8)	124	(32.2)	1.00
	New Zealand	586	(69.3)	260	(30.7)	1.07 (0.83, 1.39)
Maternal love and support	Other	280	(63.8)	159	(36.2)	1.00
	New Zealand	613	(67.6)	294	(32.4)	1.18 (0.93, 1.50)
Paternal love and support	Other	236	(60.8)	152	(39.2)	1.00
	New Zealand	535	(63.0)	314	(37.0)	1.09 (0.86, 1.40)

*P<0.05; †P<0.01; ‡P<0.001

¹Lower and higher relative scores fell within the lower two-thirds and upper one-third of the score distribution respectively.

Discussion

Mother/Father differences

Generally speaking, research shows that mothers are expected to be more emotionally supportive of children than fathers (Abraham, Christopherson & Kuehl 1984; Forehand & Nousiainen 1993). The women in this cohort described their parenting experiences with their mothers as having been more emotionally abusive and more physically abusive than with their fathers. At the same time, however, this sample reported more loving and supportive parenting behaviours from their mothers than their fathers. That women in Pacific societies spend more time with their children on a daily basis, and child-raising may still be more widely seen as a women’s domain of responsibility, may be a significant factor here: more in-depth research is needed.

*Abusive and supportive behaviours co-exist*

The data highlight the co-existence of abusive and supportive behaviours in the total sample. However, the co-existence of these behaviours at individual level cannot be determined. Anecdotal reports of a tendency for Pacific parents to react quickly to a perceived wrong behaviour (e.g. the quick 'hit' 'and then it's over') may be a factor here but again, more research on this point is needed.

Ethnic differences

Tongan mothers reported significantly less maternal and paternal emotional abuse and maternal physical abuse than Samoan mothers. In terms of love and support, Tongan mothers were six and a half times more likely to have experienced higher maternal love and support, and seven and a half times more likely to have experienced higher paternal love and support.

Birth

Mothers who were born in New Zealand were significantly more likely to report higher maternal and paternal emotional abuse. However, those mothers who were born in the Pacific Islands were more likely to report higher maternal physical abuse. Place of birth had no significant effect on maternal or paternal love and support. Generally, this finding supports the view about the added pressures living in New Zealand can bring for Pacific parents. However, there are no data on the nature of the sampled households (i.e. whether they are extended or nuclear).

Conclusion

As stated, this research presents a starting point for further research in three areas: Pacific Island parenting practices; any changes in these practices; and factors influencing changes. Planned follow-ups will include a focus on personal interviews to add qualitative interpretations to these data and an exploration of the intergenerational hypothesis.

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Notes

- ¹ The report *Pacific Progress* (Statistics New Zealand 2002) notes major disparities between Pacific people and others across a range of socioeconomic indicators, including unemployment, occupational and industrial distribution, personal and household income, housing tenure and access to household amenities.
- ² Pacific people are one of New Zealand's fastest growing populations, in 2001 constituting over 6.5% of the population. Samoans comprise about 50% of this group, Cook Island Maori 23%, Tongans 18%, Niueans 9%, Fijians 3.0%, Tokelauans 3% and Tuvalu Islanders just under 1%. Of those of Pacific ethnicity, 58% are New Zealand born; and 54% of newborn children of Pacific ethnicity report multiple ethnicity (Statistics New Zealand 2002; Cook, Didham & Khawaja 1999).
- ³ Fairbairn-Dunlop has used both oral histories and self-report strategies to examine Samoan women's disciplining behaviour within a family setting (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1996; Fairbairn-Dunlop & Makisi 2004).
- ⁴ This phenomenon, which the Ritchies (1974) labelled child caretaking, often coincided with the arrival of a new baby in the family.

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