

Tokelauan

Background

Tokelau is a non-self-governing territory and has been administered by New Zealand Aotearoa since 1926. It has a land area of 12 square kilometres, and is part of Polynesia.

Tokelau formally became a British protectorate in 1889. In 1926 Britain passed the administration of Tokelau to Aotearoa. While Tokelau was declared to be part of Aotearoa from 1 January 1949, it has a distinctive culture and its own political, legal, social, judicial and economic systems.

The population of Tokelau in 2016 was 1499¹, spread across its three small atolls - Atafu, Fakaofu and Nukunonu. Visitors to Tokelau must go via Samoa then travel by boat as there is no air service to Tokelau.

Tokelauans in Aotearoa

| Tokelauans | 2001 | 2006 | 2013 |
|------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 6,204 | 6,822 | 7,176 |

The majority (95.1% or 6,825) live in the North Island and a small number (4.8% or 348) live in the South Island. Most (90.7% or 6,507) live in urban areas. Tokelauans are the only group that is concentrated in the Wellington region (49.1% or 3,525), followed by the Auckland region (27.3% or 1,959), and the Bay of Plenty region (6.4% or 456). Of those living in the Wellington region, concentrations are in Porirua (56.9%), Lower Hutt City (27.5%), and Wellington City (8.3%)².

Only 1,338 of the 7,176 Tokelauans in Aotearoa in 2013 were born overseas³. The high degree of integration and assimilation into Aotearoa society has affected Tokelauan cultural identity, possibly more so compared to say the Tongans and Samoans. *Gagana Tokelau* (Tokelauan language) is now perceived to be under threat of loss.

The number of Tokelauan children and young people that come to the notice of Oranga Tamariki has not traditionally been high, and is concentrated in the Wellington region. When considering a cultural approach to working with Tokelauan families, Oranga Tamariki gathered cultural advice from its practitioners and sourced from *Kāiga Māopoopo*⁴, a conceptual framework that was developed to address family violence with Tuvalu communities. This approach will be further developed as knowledge and understanding develop about what works best when engaging with Tokelauan children and families.

¹ Tokelau National Statistics Office and Statistics New Zealand. (2016). Retrieved 18/10/2018 from <https://www.tokelau.org.nz/site/tokelau/files/TokelauNSO/2016Census/TokelauCensusTechnicalRelease1E.pdf>

² Statistics New Zealand. (n.d). *2013 Census ethnic group profiles: Tokelauan*. Retrieved 10/3/2015 from http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24713&tabname=Populationandgeography

³ Statistics New Zealand. (n.d). *2013 Census ethnic group profiles: Tokelauan. Key facts*. Retrieved from http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24713&parent_id=24706&tabname=#24713

⁴ Ministry of Social Development. (2012). *Kāiga Māopoopo: A Tokelau Conceptual Framework to address family violence*. From <https://www.familyservices.govt.nz/documents/working-with-us/programmes-services/pacific-framework-tokelau-fa-lr.pdf>.

Kāiga Māopoopo informs of cultural principles and relational concepts that are important for practitioners to understand and incorporate appropriately, when working with Tokelau children, families and communities. *Kāiga Māopoopo* is based on a fundamental belief that all people are entitled to happiness, protection and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. *Kāiga Māopoopo* also stresses traditions around community guardianship of its members particularly the most vulnerable. This cultural framework aligns very well with the purpose of Oranga Tamariki.

Engagement, Assessment and Decision Making

"Ko fanau ko te au o matua" - Children are the heart of a parent.

'Our children and our elders are the most vulnerable in our communities. How well they are doing or how well we care for them signals how well we are doing as Tokelauans'. (Suria Aukuso, Oranga Tamariki practitioner)

Cultural Considerations

Spirituality

Tokelauans are very spiritual and religious people. The church is very much at the centre of village and social life in Tokelau where everyone is a member of a parish family. In Aotearoa, integration into kiwi society has somewhat eroded this aspect of life for some Tokelauans. Consequently, it is not unusual to come across Tokelauans who are not members of a church, or some who have chosen to isolate themselves from local Tokelauan communities. For the majority however, churches continue to be social and communal centres for Tokelauans and a great resource for finding family.

Gagana Tokelau - Tokelauan language

The use of *gagana Tokelau* and common terms (see table at the end of the section) would greatly help engagement with parents, elders and community leaders.

A small proportion of Tokelau children and young people speak their native language, and the possibility decreases with ethnically mixed families and NZ-born generations. It is important therefore to ascertain what language best suits the child or young person, and ensure that they are meaningfully engaged in discussions that are not held in their preferred language. Children and young people who are not fluent in Tokelauan may still understand the words and cultural concepts used during engagement. Hearing their native language may help alleviate a child's or young person's anxiety and build rapport.

The Samoan language is the closest language to Tokelauan, and most Tokelauans are fluent in it. The ability to speak some Samoan may also be helpful when engaging with Tokelauan families.

Important Relational Concepts and Values for Practice

Traditional Expectations of Children

Children are expected to show respect to parents and elders. *'Ko te ava ki matua ko te kimataga o te poto'* - 'Respect for your parents and elders is the beginning of wisdom'. In some households children eat after the parents or elders have had their meal. When walking

in front of a parent or elder, one must always show respect by bowing the head or body and uttering the word '*tulou ni*'. When children address their parents or elders, they show respect by sitting down or kneeling before talking.

Tokelau villages are made up of ancestral plots where family homes are built and they have special names. A child who misbehaves or has done something bad or transgressed against someone else, is often rebuked with the saying '*Manatua o ivi ma tulaga-vae*' – 'Remember your bones (ancestors) and place of standing (where you come from)'. To behave badly or to transgress against others signifies a person who does not know to whom she/he belongs and brings a loss of face for the family.

Fatupaepae – Matriarchal Leader

An influential position in the Tokelau *kāiga* is that of the *fatupaepae*. This is the honourable title given to elderly women or women of seniority descended from the female line. These matriarchs are responsible for overseeing the equal and fair distribution of resources as a means of maintaining the welfare and care of the entire extended *kāiga*. The solidarity of the family group and success of the day-to-day operations depend upon the fairness and authority of the *fatupaepae*.

The *fatupaepae* holds a privileged role and is influential in making key family decisions. This role, more than any other, is the central symbol of *kāiga* and is not based on hierarchy but rather on leadership. The *fatupaepae* represents wisdom, compassion, justice, strength and decision making based on consensus by *kāiga*.

Toeaina – Male Elders

Toeaina (male elders) are the repositories of Tokelau knowledge. In *faka-Tokelau*, *toeaina* are stewards who guide and lead *kāiga*.

'*Manatua te toeaina i te mulivaka*' - 'Remember the old man at the helm of the canoe' signifies the prestigious place male elders hold in their guardianship and leadership role as head of the *kāiga*. They are the keepers or guardians of tradition, knowledge and wisdom. A Tokelauan gathering or a meeting is without *mana* if there is no *toeaina* present. They are the ones who always open, watch over and close any gathering or meeting. *Toeaina* work alongside *fatupaepae* in making decisions that affect *kāiga* and Tokelauan communities.

Kāiga – Kinship Arrangements

The different arrangements of kin groups, the circumstances under which they come together and their purpose are focused on the wellbeing of family members. Traditional features of the *kāiga* are the complementary roles of the *tamatāne* (male) and the *tamafafine* (female). Males are responsible for providing and working for the benefit of the *kāiga*, while females are responsible for the distribution of food and resources provided by the males.

The communal social constraints of living in small island village communities in Tokelau where village affairs are governed by a patriarchal council of elders; or where family life, lore and protocols are often sanctioned by its matriarchal and religious counterparts, have evolved over time as a result of the assimilation of Samoan and western languages, ways, ideas, and values. In New Zealand there are strong local Tokelauan communities in Porirua, Lower Hutt, Auckland, Rotorua and Taupo. Smaller groups have been established in Northland, Hawkes Bay, Masterton and Dunedin. These communities keep alive Tokelauan

values of collective responsibility for the welfare of *kāiga* and community. They are a resource for advice and exploring kin connections.

Vā o te tamatāne ma te tuafafine - the special relationship between brother and sister

The *vā* (relationship) between brother and sister is sacred. It is the most significant and cherished relationship in Tokelau culture. This is concerned with mutual welfare, the welfare of *kāiga*, and that of the wider kin network.

The reciprocal obligations underpinning this relationship are traditionally marked by the brother taking responsibility for the needs and care of his sister once she is married. In turn, the sister would give her son to her brother (a custom known as *mate*) especially if the brother was to leave Tokelau. The sister's son becomes the protector of his uncle to the point of death. This tradition showed this special bond between brother and sister, and some Tokelauans continue it today.

The moral code of behaviour between brothers and sisters includes the observation of respectful language and behaviour between them and towards their children. Their children also commonly refer to their aunts and uncles as mother or father.

Te Kāiga Māopoopoo: Unity and purpose to achieve individual and collective wellbeing through peace and respect.

Adherence to hierarchy and expectations of conduct support family harmony and wellbeing. Typically in a gathering, children and young people do not talk when the elders are present due to cultural hierarchy and respect. If there are visitors, it is the male head of the household whose role it is to engage while his wife, sister or children refrain from talking or joining in the conversation. The male may then signal permission to the others to speak. Social workers who wish to engage with children and adult women in the family may need to initially engage the male head of household as appropriate.

Alofa fai tamāmanu: Compassion shown towards the most vulnerable members of kāiga.

Traditionally this was symbolised by the equitable distribution of fish from a fishing expedition to all members of the village. If a mother with children had no one to take part in the communal fishing exercise she was still given a share of the catch.

Alofa fai tamāmanu is shown especially towards those without *kāiga*, without connection to *fenua* (land), those experiencing suffering, and those unable to take care of themselves including the elderly, sick, physically and mentally disadvantaged.

Vā feāloaki: Establishment and maintenance of harmonious relationships.

Vā feāloaki describes and represents the different relationships and special connections that family members have with each other. For example, under *inati* a brother will give his catch to his sister to distribute to the rest of the *kāiga*. This describes his acknowledgement of his duty and obligations to maintain *vā feāloaki* with his sister and *kāiga* in the context of *faka-Tokelau*.

Respect and honour is shown through the use of language, rituals and dignified behaviour. *Vā feāloaki* is preserved in families through the fulfilment of duties and responsibilities for each other. Honouring these relationships is of high importance.

Fakaaloalo: Expressions via behaviour and language to honour and respect vā feāloaki (harmonious relationships).

Fakaaloalo is exemplified by mutual respect and fulfilment of roles and responsibilities that maintain peace and harmony within the *kāiga*.

Fakaaloalo between *kāiga* members is essential to wellbeing. This is particularly true in the case of *toeaina* and *lōmatutua* (elderly men and women), the *tamana* (older male sibling) and *fatupaepae* (senior female) with other members of the *kāiga*. The *tamana* of the *kāiga* works alongside the *fatupaepae* to make decisions for the *kāiga*. The *fatupaepae* is the matriarch, nurturer and protector of the *kāiga*. *Fakaaloalo* is deeply embedded in the special bond between the *tamatāne* and *tamafafine* (brother and sister).

Māopoopo: The harmonious synchronicity of members of the community working together for a common good.

Māopoopo begins at the planning stage of a mission or endeavour which includes the distribution of benefits to members of the collective. Every person has a role and responsibility to ensure the success of the undertaking.

Fakahoa lelei: The spirit of fairness involved in the equal distribution of communal resources.

In the traditional context, this was illustrated by the fair distribution of a catch to ensure the needs and wellbeing of every person in the *kāiga* were met.

Useful Words and Phrases - Tokelau

| Common Greetings and Phrases | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Malo ni | Greetings, hello |
| Malo hau (<i>single person</i>) Omai (<i>more than one person</i>) | Welcome come in |
| E a mai koe? | How are you? |
| Manuia fakafetai, ka ko koe? | I'm fine thanks, and you? |
| Fakamolemole | Please |
| Fakafetai | Thank you |
| Tulou ni | Excuse me |
| Tofa ni | Goodbye |
| Tulou ni kupu kua hala ni | Apologise, sorry |
| Family Terms | |
| afafine | daughter |
| ataliki | son |
| pepe | baby |
| mokopuna | grandchild |
| tama, tamaiti | child |
| tamaiti | children |
| matua | mother |
| tamana | father |
| tupuna | grandparents |
| kanga | family |