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**The effects of positive affective priming on Māori
mothers' attributions for children's misbehaviours and
appropriate methods of discipline**

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ABSTRACT

This study is a test-retest experimental design which sets out to determine if Māori mothers, exposure to emotive (positive) photographs of Māori people (children interacting with adults) would influence their attributions and disciplinary responses for child misbehaviour in a positive direction. I also hypothesised that the exposure to Māori visual icons or objects might have a similar but lesser affect.

The participants were a group of 48 mothers of Māori descent living in the Porirua and Wellington areas. I recruited by approaching the principal from a local primary school and my previous employer, by attending a parent group, and by using a snowballing strategy.

Cultural identity was assessed using a "Lifestyle Questionnaire" and results showed that the majority of participants were well integrated into both Māori and mainstream New Zealand culture.

Participants were randomly divided into four equal groups of 12 participants. Each group was shown different sets of photographs that served as the emotional primes (i.e., Māori people, non-Māori people, Māori objects and non-Māori objects). The two experiment groups viewed the Māori people or Māori objects photographs. Conversely, the two control groups viewed the non-Māori people or non-Māori objects photographs.

The participants undertook a pre-testing exercise prior to viewing the photographs, followed by a post-testing exercise. The pre-testing and post-testing exercises consisted of parent-child scenarios based on child

misbehaviours where the child could be blamed for the misbehaviour, and ambiguous behaviours where the child could not be clearly blamed for the misbehaviour. Participants used 4-point Likert scales to rate their causal attributions for the parent-child scenarios and their likely disciplinary responses.

The data were statistically analysed using a mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA). Most of the results were not statistically significant, apart from two of the positive causal attributions. Child misbehaviour scenarios showed a significant main effect for pre-test and post-test scores, with all groups being more forgiving or excusing the child when clearly the child was to blame. Ambiguous behaviour scenarios showed a significant interaction between Māori and non-Māori groups' pre-test and post-test scores (i.e., Māori groups were more forgiving or excusing the child and non-Māori groups were less forgiving or excusing the child).

The majority of participants' scores showed their disciplinary responses were less harsh at pre-test and post-test. The most likely responses were talking to their child, followed by child apologies and then telling off. The least likely responses were smacking; next in order were doing nothing and ignoring.

This study provided some insight into Māori mothers' causal attributions and disciplinary responses. Recommendations for future research, limitations and positive features are presented.

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FOREWORD

My own parenting is based on my experiences and memories of growing up in a large bicultural whānau (with a Māori mother, a Pākehā father and eight siblings). It was my father who was the breadwinner, and my mother took on most of the parenting responsibilities and worked part-time. She made sure we were all looked after and went to school. Then when my mother died it was my father that kept us together, looked after us and was adamant that we should get an education. Other parenting experiences I have learnt over many years include helping to look after my younger siblings, nieces and nephews, my experiences raising my own children and in my professional role as a Māori Mental Health Clinician working with children, youth and their families.

If I reflect on my upbringing, there were clear Māori and Pākehā differences in child rearing, traditions and values. You learnt to appreciate differences and adapt accordingly. A glimpse of my childhood memories are of āwhinatanga (helping) which included: helping to look after my younger siblings and doing chores including house work or untangling fishing lines for my father. A sense of kotahitanga (unity) and collectivism included family holidays at Te Waitere, near Kawhia, where we would go swimming and catch flounders in our dinghy. Or there were the Sunday lunches with extended whānau at my Nanna Broughton's (my maternal grandmother, who was of Māori descent and had 13 children) homestead. My mother always made sure we were washed and dressed in our Sunday best. At my Nanna's home every

wall in her lounge was covered with photographs of those family members that had passed away and those still living (my whakapapa). Then after lunch we would go and visit my great Grandma Smith (my paternal great grandmother) who was well into her nineties and lived with her daughter and son-in-law (my great aunty and great uncle). We had to be quiet and well-behaved. My father would often take her the freshest and sometimes biggest crayfish he had caught while fishing that week. Consequently looking after younger children and elderly relatives, being honest and kind, respectful of one self and others, sharing, reciprocity, helping and supporting one another are whānau values that were instilled in me at a young age and still continue today.

My personal interest in working with children, young persons and families informs me that children are vulnerable and need appropriate nurturance and guidance. Although parenting can be difficult at times, parents need to invest time with their children. This might mean teaching them about their whakapapa or helping them with homework, giving them opportunities and mauri ora (positive) experiences. So when things are going really well in parent-child relations, parents need to commend themselves. Reflecting on my own mothering experiences there are many priceless and memorable moments. For example, when my first child was born I thought what a big responsibility being a mother would be and then when my second child was born I thought that I was lucky to have a boy and a girl. Another moment was when my son was about five years old at the time and asked me one day "Mum do you own me?" I looked at him and said "Son I don't own you, but I am responsible for you". His reply was "Good, now I can do what I like". This

was his thinking or level of cognitive development at this developmental stage. Now at eight years of age he knows what he wants and often asks permission to do something.

Working as a Māori Mental Health Clinician not only increased my awareness of parenting and child development but also raised my awareness of difficult childhood behaviours and demands placed on families. Often these were children or young persons who were out of school, in trouble with the law and with multiple agency involvement. Most families often wanted their child or young person “fixed” and could only report negative behaviours. But, further clinical assessment of the child or young person might highlight traumatic childhoods, learning and behaviour difficulties and multiple other factors. I learnt that it was best to get involved early as the first two years were when the parent and child were forming a significant attachment and also the first five to seven years are seen as critical years, when the child’s brain has the most development. I believe it is in the early years we should be intervening with knowledge about parenting and behavioural management strategies. We should not wait until the child or young person develops a severe conduct disorder (extreme form of child misbehaviour) and other co-occurring or co-morbid mental health disorders, and definitely not wait until the parents become desperate for help as a last resort.

My work with Māori parents, in particular Māori mothers, with parent training regarding child behaviour management principles, highlighted the gaps in data. This meant that parent training programmes needed to be adapted and cultural components added. Although there is much information on

parenting both in New Zealand and overseas, too much information can be overwhelming and contradictory. Or not enough can be a cause for concern. To date, Māori mothers and childrearing/parenting is an area of study that is badly under-represented in the research literature. Either there is no reference to Māori or ethnic minorities, or suggestions are made that it would be good to investigate further how this might affect ethnic minorities. The gaps in the literature provided little guidance for this study and raised further questions that need to be addressed. For example, how relevant are standard parent training programmes for Māori families? Is there a lack of culturally appropriate parent training programmes for Māori families? Do Māori families volunteer to do parent training programmes to learn how to be better parents if parenting skills are learnt within their families of origin? Where have we gone wrong in New Zealand society regarding parenting and child abuse statistics, despite the fact that, in traditional Māori society, children were valued as taonga (treasures)?

I believe that the research question was worthy of further investigation. This study was one way of finding out at “grassroots” Māori mothers’ thoughts and judgments about certain parent-child scenarios and what their suggested disciplinary responses might be.

INTRODUCTION

There is widespread interest in parenting in Aotearoa New Zealand and much debate about the rights of the child versus the rights of parents, particularly in regard to child abuse statistics. Higher child abuse statistics are being recorded in Aotearoa New Zealand. Does this highlight that Aotearoa New Zealand has more "abusive parents" suggesting a need for more parent training and guidance in childrearing or parenting?

To combat child abuse, Government policies and legislation have been implemented to safeguard and protect children and young persons, as well as deter or punish abusive parents. Parents are now being guided by more stringent regulations in terms of their responsibilities in childrearing or parenting (e.g., age restrictions for when children can start school, be left without supervision, and leave home permanently).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, figures released in 2006 by Anne Tolley (then Associate Welfare Spokeswoman for National Party on Child, Youth and Family) comparing investigation findings by Child, Youth and Family Services in December 2000 and December 2005 show increases in the number of children suffering child abuse, neglect, and behavioural and relationship difficulties. According to Tolley, "emotional abuse increased from 78 investigations in December 2000 to a whopping 479 in December 2005"... "Neglect almost doubled for both Māori and Pākehā children, and leapt from 1 to 50 for Pacific Island children"... "With substantiated cases of abuse totalling 13,000 last year, up from 6,000 in the year 2000, this monthly snapshot

shows clearly that abuse is increasing in frequency and severity” (Tolley, 2006).

One legislative response to poor child abuse statistics by the Government was the introduction of the Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act 2008. The Act makes it possible for parents to be prosecuted for smacking their children. This has caused controversy, with parents becoming more concerned about their rights to discipline their child/children and suggests for me that parents may need to learn new disciplinary strategies other than smacking, particularly since smacking can lead to more abusive disciplinary strategies.

As a nation we should be concerned about increasing child abuse statistics and the implications. No longer can we turn a blind eye to child abuse, neglect and harsh parenting. Often child abuse is reported in the media when it is too late and no one reported their concerns. By being a bystander (not intervening and thinking someone else will intervene) you may ensure that no one will do anything. When what we could be doing is intervening earlier, breaking the cycle of violence and ensuring that parents do have access to appropriate services and supports.

Being a parent is an emotional experience having both highs and lows. Parenting can be rewarding like being there for your child’s significant developmental milestones (e.g., first steps, word, or tooth), celebrating achievements and spending quality time together. On the other hand, it can be challenging, demanding, thankless and can tug at the heartstrings. Challenges might include issues to do with the developmental age of the child

(e.g., “terrible twos”, starting school, difficult teenage behaviour, or leaving home), stress factors (e.g., grief and loss, mental health, illness, divorce, separation, blended families, illness, aging, disabilities, etc.) and combining work related issues. As a parent, no one knows how they will cope with life’s unforeseen challenges, what expectations they may have of themselves or what others might expect from them as parents. But balancing these tasks can be demanding and often parents are left to cope with their own resources.

Parents need support with childrearing (i.e., talking to someone about their concerns, specialist assessment for children with special needs or child misbehaviours, respite care, etc.) and at times expert knowledge in child developmental issues. These supports may or may not be accessed depending on the parent’s feelings, core beliefs and thoughts.

Due to the broad area of literature on parenting, the review of literature focuses on parent attributions (thoughts and judgments), disciplinary responses, Māori childrearing or parenting and emotive priming significant to this study.