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## Māori women and intimate partner violence: Some sociocultural influences

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**Abstract:** Intimate partner violence (IPV) has recently been acknowledged as a worldwide phenomenon, with approximately one in four intimate relationships containing some form of violence. This study explores the interaction between relationship dynamics, IPV and whānau and community influences. We completed narrative interviews with two Māori women in December 2010. Our findings confirm the results of earlier studies which have found that childhood experiences of violence, actual or witnessed, have a powerful effect that reverberate within adult lives and into the formation of intimate relationships. Our interviews show that Māori whānau and women are textured by the same patriarchal expectations that privilege men in the Pākehā world. We also found that seeking help from whānau to escape a violent relationship may not be the most welcomed course of action. We conclude with a discussion of future research directions.

**Keywords:** intimate partner violence; Māori women; peaceful relationships; Treaty of Waitangi

### Introduction

In 2010 Te Puni Kōkiri published a report titled "Arotake tūkinu whānau: Literature review on family violence". The review focussed mostly on New Zealand literature and specifically that relating to violence in the Māori world. While they found some evidence to suggest that within the traditional Māori world whānau violence was not acceptable, for 21st century Māori the statistical evidence demonstrates that whānau violence is at epidemic levels. Despite various interventions, Māori children and women are still being harmed, sometimes fatally, in alarming numbers. Drawing on the experiences and expertise of Māori practitioners, which is considered to be a sound foundation for best practice with Māori, the authors present a framework for the development of interventions based on ideals for non-violent behaviour emerging from within the Māori world. The authors noted that there is only a limited amount of research about Māori and domestic violence, and that much of it consists of evaluations to fulfil contractual obligations rather than gaining knowledge about the area per se. Thus, the authors of the Te Puni Kōkiri report called for "a clearly developed research strategy that enables in-depth research to be undertaken from a Kaupapa Māori approach" (p. 54).

This preliminary and exploratory study of Māori and intimate partner violence is a small and humble contribution to such a strategy. It emerges from our interest in exploring intimate relationship trajectories, in particular, how they are established, negotiated, maintained, and if necessary, ended. More specifically, we are interested to know more about how and why some result in violent trajectories and others do not.

## **What is intimate partner violence?**

Intimate partner violence is a complex and widespread social problem that has no boundaries and transgresses all socio-economic and cultural groups (O'Campo, et al., 2010; Stith, 2006). It impacts negatively on survivors' physical and mental health and has social and financial consequences for the victims, their families and communities (Campbell, 2002). Various terms are used to describe the often invisible phenomenon contained mostly, but not exclusively, in the domestic sphere. Referent terms for intimate partner violence are: battered woman syndrome; wife bashing; domestic violence; interpersonal violence; spouse abuse; and gender violence. In this article we use the phrase "intimate partner violence" (IPV) and define it as any act of violence including physical, verbal, sexual or psychological abuse perpetrated by an individual's current or former partner (where partnerships include de jure and defacto marriages, and/or regular sexual partnerships) (Fanslow & Robinson, 2009). By way of elaboration and to provide a little more detail to our definition of IPV, we read abuse as including: using coercion and threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, using strategies of isolation, minimizing, denying, blaming, manipulating and using children, harassment, stalking, forced marriage and marital rape, using male privilege and economic abuse. At the root of these tactics is a desire for power and control over an intimate partner.

## **How do we explain intimate partner violence?**

Intimate partner violence has been conceptualised variously. Finkel, deWall, Slotter, Oakten and Foshee (2009) point to self-regulatory failure, described as acting upon violent impulses, as a critical precursor to violent behaviour toward a romantic partner. Feminist critiques (eg., Anderson, 1997) direct our attention to the sociocultural context in which violent relationships develop, particularly to structural inequality in patriarchal societies and the gendered distribution of sex roles and power as contributors to intimate partner violence (Bell & Naugle, 2008). Social learning theorists (e.g., Bandura, 1977) suggest that violent behaviour is modelled and learned, often from childhood, and is reinforced by broader sociocultural processes, in turn becoming accepted and normative within violent relationships. The normalisation of violence within intimate relationships, families, communities and societies more generally gives some support to there being "cultures of violence" yet avoids an essentialist attribution to whole cultural and ethnic groups. Some people are violent, some are not. More recent conceptualisations of intimate partner violence have become more sophisticated than the aforementioned in order to reflect the complexity and embeddedness of the behaviour and problem not just within relationships but also within the broader sociocultural milieu. The conceptual work by Bell and Naugle (2008) gathers and makes sense of earlier theorising and frames intimate partner violence within a complex of contextual variables (e.g., childhood experiences, use of alcohol and drugs, verbal rules, behavioural repertoires) that may have a proximal relationship. The framework urges researchers, theorists and practitioners towards consideration of these potentially influential variables.

## **Alternatives to violence**

If we are to intervene in intimate partner violence, we need to at least have some idea about what constitutes a violence-free relationship. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a document that can inform our thinking in this regard (Nikora, 2001). Signed in 1840, the Treaty was understood by Māori to protect their rangatiratanga (chiefly autonomy) and resources, and to make for a

peaceful and ordered society (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2011). Over the past two decades, massive efforts in terms of time and resources have been invested into resolving historical grievances in order to allow for peaceful relationships. Guided by a set of evolving principles, Treaty-based thinking instructs us to aspire to relationships that are: honest and genuine, where parties have integrity and are actively protective and allow room for growth to realise potentials and to respond to changing circumstances. At the heart of the Treaty is the notion of partnership, one that encourages cooperation, consultation, mutual benefit, compassion, compromise and good faith (Nikora, 2001; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2011). While written and signed in the context of negotiating a relationship between two peoples, we suggest that the Treaty also provides a starting place for evolving new ways of being in intimate relationships in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The rest of this paper reports on in-depth, loosely structured, narrative interviews with two Māori women. With them, we explored the topics of how their intimate relationships were initiated, maintained and ended.

## **Method**

Erena and Tina (both names are pseudonyms) were recruited through relational networks of researchers within the Māori & Psychology Research Unit at the University of Waikato<sup>1</sup>.

Erena (aged 22) described her upbringing as oriented mostly towards her siblings and parents. Cumulative extended whānau encounters occurred within marae settings and contributed to ongoing and strong affiliations with her wider whānau. She is a fluent speaker of te reo Māori and is currently a student at the University of Waikato. Erena's current partner is Sam and they have been living together for three years.

Tina is a 42-year-old mother of two, originally from Northland but brought up in the Auckland region. Tina's family has strong ties to the Catholic Church, both in Auckland and Northland and, like Erena, values her relationships with other whānau members and often returns to her home marae. Erena is also a fluent speaker of te reo Māori. The father of her two children is Tim.

The interviews<sup>2</sup> with Erena and Tina were transcribed verbatim and interview summaries prepared and presented to them. Any comments, suggestions or changes made by them were taken into account to ensure an accurate recording of their experiences. The transcripts were then subjected to a number of readings to identify, organise and report emergent themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this section we present these emergent patterns which concern: childhood experiences of abuse; how violence enters relationships; gender roles and violence; and reaching out for help. We theorise these patterns against possible socio-cultural influences and discuss future research directions.

## **Childhood experiences of abuse**

How we are socialised as children into being members of the groups, communities and the society we ultimately become a part of has interested researchers across a variety of disciplines for many years (cf., Grusec & Hastings, 2007). Childhood socialisation is the foundation of how we become social and cultural beings. That socialisation occurs principally

within the family (broadly defined to include, where relevant, the wider whānau). This is where children learn the norms of social interaction and the values of what makes for a good citizen. It should be of no surprise then that the childhood socialising environments in which individuals are raised influence the type of relationships they may have as adults and how they might function as social persons. Related to this idea is research that suggests that the experience of abuse as a child is related to an increased risk of entering into a violent relationship in adulthood. For example, Whitfield and colleagues (2003) report that childhood physical or sexual abuse approximately doubles the risk of victimisation within an intimate partnership.

Childhood abuse is a theme that textures our interview with Tina and her discussion of her relationship with Tim. Like some other female members of her whānau, Tina had been sexually abused as a child. The abuser was an uncle, a man who held a leadership position in the church. Tina believes he also abused some of her cousins. Tina's mother had also been sexually abused. We know less about Tim's whānau but he, too, was molested as a child and had opened up to Tina about this in the early stages of their relationship. This shared experience drew them closer together as a couple and Tina justified and excused his abuse towards her because of his childhood experiences. Tina told us:

*This is why we are together. We are both rejects and no one understands us. No one understood why we did that path. Wow we're here for a reason and we just got given two beautiful girls.*

Survivors of child abuse such as Tina and Tim are at a recognisable disadvantage in interpersonal contexts because they often develop a distorted view of what loving and caring relationships involve (Riggs, et al., 2011). Compared with his siblings, Tim felt rejected and that he did not fit in. He never established a functional relationship with his mother. According to Tina these factors contributed to Tim exhibiting feelings of unworthiness, insecurity and low self-esteem. Tina told us that because of his insecurities Tim was constantly making accusations and throughout their relationship made Tina feel as unworthy as he felt. She recalled:

*The accusations were just unbelievable. When we went shopping I had to look at my feet, if I looked up to get some butter or something he would accuse me of looking at someone. I had to drive with my glasses on and look straight ahead. If I wasn't looking straight ahead he would automatically accuse me of looking at other men. I could not believe a person could get that insecure, and I was starting to believe it and walk it and do it.*

In this way, the sexual abuse Tina and Tim both suffered as children simultaneously worked as a connection between the couple and as a significant driver (Riggs, et al., 2011) of conflict in the relationship.

In contrast to Tina, Erena had not experienced any abuse as a child. Nor had she experienced intimate partner violence in any of her previous relationships. Her reflections show how her upbringing and the part played by role models such as her father and grandfather influenced her search for intimacy. Erena told us:

*My previous relationships were often initiated through friends, families or at social occasions. I met my current partner at a rugby game and was attracted to his good looks and his cultural values. Sam's hard working nature which reflected that of my father and grandfather, was pivotal in my decision to initiate a relationship with him. Also we share similar values in regards to where we are going with our lives, knowing we are working toward the same goals. We were both brought up in Māori families with strong ties to their whānau and Māori cultural values. My whānau strongly opposes violence against children and women, and violence in general.*

In different ways, the lives of both Tina and Erena appear to have been significantly shaped by their childhood experiences and by the values they were exposed to as children. In particular, their backgrounds seem to have shaped what they sought in an intimate relationship. For example, as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, Tina found solace and understanding with her partner Tim. Their relationship seemed to be largely based on Tina's attentiveness and feelings of compassion towards Tim and his childhood experience of abuse, and, in return, on his assumed understanding of her experiences. However, this history of abuse was also the springboard for the intimate partner violence that Tina came to experience. In contrast, the values of hard work, being goal oriented and embedded in protective kin relationships strongly opposed to violence helped Erena establish an intimate relationship free from violence.

## How violence enters relationships

The intergeneration transmission of violence is one of the most studied topics in IPV (Stith et al., 2000). As Tina's and Erena's experiences exemplify, children who grow up in families in which they experience or witness IPV are more likely to imitate or tolerate IPV than are children from nonviolent homes (Stith, et al., 2000). Tina discussed her beliefs on the over-representation of Māori in IPV.

*It (violence) is a fact. There's not one family that I know of that has never had abuse as Māori. Māori have so naturalised this. We have made it normal. If you don't get the bash in your family . . . "you Māori or what?" That's the attitude you get.*

Tina continued:

*The (aunties) just lived with it, 20 odd years of getting bashed every other day when they drink. It's normal to them, they normalise it. That's what freaked me out – everybody's normalised it.*

Tina's excerpt suggests a very bleak view of Māori whānau where violence is the expected norm. While the authors know this to be a narrow and over-generalised view, the suggested normative, widespread and inter-generational tone of Tina's observations speaks to the need for urgency in tackling this issue.

In contrast, in Erena's family there are strict protocols on how women and children should be treated. Violence against women and children is not acceptable – a value passed through generations. Erena's grandfather and his siblings taught their children and their grandchildren that violence is not the answer and women deserve to be treated with respect. Erena recalled:

*I was talking to my grandfather and he said that violence just wasn't a thing in his time. It wasn't. Especially violence on kids and especially violence on partners. He just never saw it, never did it and it was never talked about.*

A value of non-violence is reflected in Erena's attitude that violence among partners should be frowned upon and is not acceptable. She adopts an attitude of non-violence in her relationship with Sam, negotiating around potential conflict by sharing feelings and emotions in order to maintain a positive relationship. Sharing enhances their feelings of togetherness and trust helping to build a foundation of mutual love and respect for each other.

*He's the love of your life and you want to spend the good times of your life with him, and he says that like he thinks the same, like he doesn't want to have fun without me. He wants it to be memorable with your best friend.*

Studies examining the effects of domestic abuse on children show it has profound impacts on adolescent behaviour and gives rise to psychological issues in adulthood. Children who witness violence between their parents are at risk of later adjustment difficulties that may

include aggressive and antisocial behaviours (Sousa, et al., 2011). Tina was aware of the impacts of witnessing abuse on her children as she herself had experienced the torment of witnessing her father beating her mother. As she recalled, Tina's biological daughter began to modelling the behaviour of her father.

*It's not their [the children's] fault what they see. When I first got out and went into the refuge, my daughter was two and a half, [and] I was pregnant, and she was kicking me in the guts – the stomach – like her father used to, or grab me by my hair.*

Violence became a normal part of Tina's everyday life, and the violence her children experienced as part of her relationship with Tim was creatively, though painfully, enacted by them. This is what Tina's daughters saw and modelled. They learned from it and unsurprisingly, adopted the same strategies in their own young lives giving strength to the proposition that "violence breeds violence" (Weaver, et al., 2008).

### **Patriarchal expectations and gender roles**

Tina was raised in a whānau where boys were raised to be bread winners. Their role was to go out to work to provide for their families. Men were the "heads" of households. They controlled expenditure and governed resources and behaviour, usually in their favour. Girls were raised to be homemakers. Their "work" was to cook, clean, care for children and serve the household head. Ethnographic studies of Māori families and communities undergoing change (eg., Beaglehole & Beaglehole, 1974; J. B. Ritchie, 1964; J. E. Ritchie, 1963) and urbanisation (Metge, 1964) support Tina's experience and point to the adoption by Māori of Pākehā family relationship styles. This is seen as a product of schooling, religion, urbanisation, industrialization, assimilative pressures, and Pākehā societal expectations (Jenkins & Matthews, 1998; Mikaere, 1999). Tina's analysis of her whānau experience and of her relationship with Tim is a sophisticated one summed up in Tina's words "men are kings, women are in the kitchen". She clearly identified how she was socialised into life as a woman. Tina told us how women were not encouraged to have better jobs than their partners and how significant sacrifices were made by the family to educate her brother at a prestigious Catholic Boys School in Auckland.

*Women weren't allowed to be any better than the men. Men had the big jobs. In mum's family, if the women had the big jobs they were looked down on by the other uncles who were supposed to be the bread winners.*

Erena's family had a similar philosophy to that of Tina. Men were expected to provide for women and women in turn looked after the men. These were gender role expectations that Erena and Tina learned as children within their whānau, their reflections highlighting the inter-generational transmission of such expectations. However, neither woman has accepted these expectations uncritically. While Tina learned about resisting these roles after the harshness of a violent relationship, Erena strove for a more egalitarian relationship with her partner. She told us:

*My father and grandfather – we just always saw that they constantly looked after their wives, and it was the role of the wives to stay home and look after the kids and do the house work and that kind of stuff. But now that times are changing I think it's difficult for Sam and I because he expects me to stay at home and look after the house, . . . [however] I'm going out, working, university and then he still expects me to come home and look after the house on top of going to uni and going to work, and that's just something we have to work through because he's grown up the same as me. His mother has done absolutely everything for them.*

Both Tina and Erena echo a patriarchal discourse where women are expected to maintain relationships and "look after the house." On the other hand, the priority for men is to maintain

their autonomy and authority (Hird & Jackson, 2001). Such a discourse to some extent encourages female passivity—men control, women submit. An argument often made in the literature is that the passivity and submission by Māori women to men is not of a traditional Māori world but stems from the colonisation of traditional Māori life ways through the imposition of a patriarchal monotheistic religion and British settler culture (Mikaere, 1999; Robertson & Oulton, 2008; Smith, 1993). Whatever the origin of passivity, there is clearly an imbalance in gender roles and relationships in many New Zealand households with women doing the bulk of the unpaid work within the home while men participate more than women in paid work outside the home (Callister, 2005; J. B. Ritchie & Ritchie, 1990, 1997). However, Erena told us that for her family, it was neither practical nor realistic, in economic terms, for her to stay home and have children. She comments on this and the dilemmas this presents.

*On our Māori side it seems as though women are still expected to stay at home, where in these economic times, now it's unrealistic for just one partner to work.*

Erena's account is not only concerned with gender roles within the family, but also weaves in the want to avoid socio-economic disadvantage. Facing up to the necessity of going out to work challenges the roles of women as “homemakers” and men as “breadwinners”. This positions women competitively with men, at home and in the workplace. Erena cuts through this gendered way of thinking by simply asserting that it is economically unrealistic for just one partner to work (Ministry of Social Development, 2010). While such an assertive strategy may work for Erena, Tina is differently situated and such a response strategy may not be so welcome.

## Reaching out for help

According to Robertson and Oulton (2008), contemporary research into IPV increasingly reflects an ecological or contextual approach, with a growing body of work examining the quantity, quality and impact of social support on victims, and the ways in which victims access that support. Although research clearly indicates the importance of social support in improving outcomes for IPV victims, victims do not always ask for the support they desperately need (Liang, et al., 2005). Our participants' narratives indicate that individual, familial, economic and cultural factors have impacts on their decisions to seek help and support in the face of intimate partner violence.

Due to health issues, Tina had been told by specialists she would never have children. This was the driving factor in her decision to initiate a relationship with her abusive partner, Tim. He had been given custody of his two and a half year old twin girls from a previous relationship. He was struggling with this responsibility, one he did not want. Tina's love for children and her inability to have children of her own led her to offer to help Tim raise these children. This was the deciding factor in their decision to move in together, firstly as friends and then as intimate partners. Despite the specialist's diagnosis that Tina could not have children, she fell pregnant to Tim. Tina saw this pregnancy as a gift. She also saw it as a reason to stay in the relationship despite the abuse. Later, however, as Tina became concerned about Tim's threats to the children, the children became a reason to seek help and begin exiting the relationship. Tina told us:

*I wouldn't even have gone there [into the relationship with Tim]. He used to use these horrible things, he'd say “Oh well you love my kids more than you love me” and I'd say well actually I do, I loved them first, I would so put my hand up for unwanted children especially because I couldn't have any.*

Throughout the interview, Tina referred to IPV as being a vicious cycle, passed from generation to generation. While the literature supports this idea, it also suggests that children

can be a significant factor motivating battered women to leave an abusive relationship, particularly if a child was hurt, the child commented on the abuse or the child mimicked the abusive behaviour (Zink, et al., 2003). Tina recognised these things in the children in her care. When Tim began trying to hurt their unborn child and to turn his violence toward the twin girls, Tina began to fight back. She recalled:

*[My] worst memories was of him [Tim] trying to beat the baby in my tummy. That's what really clicked after the five years of abuse, because he didn't just want to hurt me, he wanted to hurt my baby. You can beat the hell out of me but you're not touching a poor innocent child and he used to do it because he knew it used to hurt me and I couldn't handle it.*

Within her whānau Tina was nicknamed “the stirrer”. She would stir up the issues instead of conforming to the expected norms or hiding problems. She was seen as a trouble maker or agitator. Unlike other family members Tina now refuses to ignore abuse and allow it to lie hidden. Tina believes that the moment she sought help and entered a refuge she changed the way her immediate and extended family dealt with violence. She told us that it has taken a long time for her family to understand but now women in her own whānau are seeking her help and guidance. For years the women in her whānau had dealt with IPV alone. Tina explained:

*They weren't allowed to leave their husbands. If they did they were shaming the family. You saw your aunty with a black eye but it's all good cause she's not going to leave. She'll be there forever. We will pull in together and hide it. A lot of hiding behind the Catholic [church] . . . don't tell anyone. If anyone finds out our family is the bashing family in the catholic [community], you're shaming your grandmother in our name.*

Religion and the Catholic Church played a pivotal part in Tina's upbringing and adult life. Divorce or separation was frowned upon, so much so, that separating from her abusive partner was an option of last resort in her Catholic Church community. Leaving one's partner was considered shameful and reflected badly on one's family. Tina's family would often hide the truth because they did not want it to be known in the community. IPV was considered a private matter between intimate partners rather than a crime for which the abuser should be held legally responsible. Kim, Talbot and Cicchetti (2009) suggest that shame is an important psychological state for women in abusive relationships and they are often reluctant to leave their partners as a result. Erena told us that although she would be supported by her whānau if she was being abused, she would find it shameful if her entire whānau found out about it:

*If I ever needed support I know I could turn to anyone of my cousins or aunts or uncles. But I think it may also hinder the process because once you turn to one person they'll turn to the next person and the next person. If Sam hit me, I wouldn't want every single person in my whānau to find out. . . . I'd be too ashamed that it happened and I also wouldn't want everyone in my whānau to be concerned about it. Like, I'd want to try to handle it on my own or with just a couple of people to help, not the whole whānau.*

When Tina made the decision to leave her partner and go to refuge she did not get any support from her family. Many of her aunts expressed shame and embarrassment that she was going to what was perceived to be a “white organisation”. Tina recalled:

*I was so ashamed. I had aunts ring up . . . going, “You are so embarrassing, don't ever come back to our family. Now you're going into a white organisation – that's shameful, you're getting our name out there.” They think it's a shameful thing. I think it's a part of the Māori culture.*

While feelings of shame were ostensibly linked to Tina going to a “white organisation”, it is conceivable that there were other aspects to the aunts' reaction. To confess to needing help from a “white organisation” is to infer that help is not forthcoming from those within Tina's



network of whānau, and this is possibly another cause for her aunts to feel shame. Literature about the help-seeking patterns of women who have experienced IPV tells us that many women initially turn to their relatives and families for help but that the help is often not forthcoming because potential helpers are self-conscious and ashamed, do not believe the victim, fear retribution by the perpetrator, or just do not want to get involved. In this regard, Marewa Glover's (1993) work provides a powerful account of women's experiences of male partner violence and the lack of support that is often afforded by whānau, neighbours and even officials.

As well as the shame her family expressed towards her, Tina herself felt a deep sense of shame at being in the violent relationship and having to leave and get help. This finding is consistent with Kim et al.'s (2009) argument that women with a sexual abuse history tend to experience more shame and interpersonal conflict than women without such histories. Tina said:

*It's like I lost my whole self. I still look at myself and say "Wow, did I really feel that worthless to let a man tell me what to say, wear, do?" It was a lot of self-doubt. My whole life—it was like a broken tower. I didn't remember who I was. I was so much living a lie and just trying to keep the peace so the kids wouldn't be hurt.*

Here, Tina expressed her concern at how quickly and easily she lost her entire self-identity whilst juggling her multiple roles as a mother, partner, and peacekeeper. Through Tim's manipulation and control she became a shell of her former self, filled with self-doubt. She not only neglected herself out of necessity to survive but also in submission to Tim who constantly felt unworthy of her love, yet at the same time, threatened by her. She had to appear less able than she was to increase Tim's self-confidence and self-worth.

## Conclusions

The narratives provided by Tina and Erena and the themes arising from our analysis are not unique or particularly distinctive. They do not tell us anything that we do not already know. Earlier studies confirm what we have found here; namely, that childhood experiences of violence, actual or witnessed, have a powerful effect that reverberates within adult lives and into the formation of intimate relationships. Tina and Erena's stories tell us that the lives of Māori whānau and women are lived within the same patriarchal expectations that privilege men in the Pākehā world. Finally, their stories reveal some of the obstacles and challenges to seeking help from whānau to escape a violent relationship.

What is interesting about this study is the hope that both Tina and Erena espouse. Erena was raised in a whānau free from domestic violence. Though still subscribing to some patriarchal ideas, her whānau have clear values and strategies to maintain relationships that are violence free. Erena remains alert to the possibility of violence arising in her relationship with Sam but has developed non-violent strategies to work through possible conflicts before they escalate. Tina's upbringing and life trajectory sits differently to Erena's and is marked by violence and abuse from a very young age. Tina has learned from the violence in her whānau and in her childhood and adult life as evident in her narrative where she presents a sharp analysis derived from rugged experience.

Future research needs to take a more developmental approach to investigating the life trajectories of abused children and women whose lives are marked by intimate partner violence. New Zealanders, not just Māori, are increasingly living lives comprised of a series of usually monogamous relationships. In this pattern, intimate partners might expect to experience separation or divorce and to face the challenges of loss, detachment and

sometimes the grief that is a part of orienting to a new life. Some will prefer the freedom and solitude of living without an intimate partner, but most are likely to form new intimate relationships, maybe have new children, or form complex families with step children whose biological parents may or may not be present in their lives (see <http://www.kiwifamilies.co.nz>). We need to know more about how we negotiate intimate partner relationships across the lifespan, beginning with whānau/family socialisation processes, the contribution of childhood experiences to the way we establish intimate friendships and relationships, through to that age in life when health deteriorates and sickness prevails.

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## Author Notes

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