

Ethics of Researching with Whānau Collectives

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Abstract: An ethical framework is required for researching with whānau (family/families) that not only considers respect for Māori knowledge and ways of being, but also reflects the diversity of whānau. Consultation hui were held for participants of the “Research With Whānau Collectives” project (RWWC). Concerns voiced by hui participants queried the notion of Kaupapa Māori research with whānau, who should be conducting research with whānau and what expertise is required, the ethics of research with whānau such as confidentiality, and the ability of research to influence policy. In exploring these concerns Kaupapa Māori is discussed as an approach that is essential for normalising Māori worldviews and practices. Discussion was mindful of whakapapa (genealogy) as being the connection of Māori to whānau, the land, waters and all that is; concerns relating to confidentiality when researching with whānau as opposed to individuals; concerns as to ensuring the diversity of whānau, whilst also acknowledging the rights of individuals within collectives; and the need to ensure a strengths-based view of whānau. Whānau researcher guidelines were developed that extend the role of researchers to encompass whānau.

Keywords: ethics; Kaupapa Māori methodology; whānau research

Introduction

The “Research With Whānau Collectives” project (RWWC) involved working collaboratively with stakeholders including policy writers, researchers, Māori providers and whānau (families), to discern methods that can be used for research and evaluation with whānau. Information is currently gathered on whānau based on the aggregate of individuals within a household. However this information does not take into account the diversity of whānau collectives, which often extend beyond a household. The project aimed to gather a ‘kete’ (toolkit) of methods to use in research and evaluation with whānau. The project commenced with five stakeholder hui (meetings) comprised of colleagues, researchers, Māori providers, policy writers and whānau, to let them know about the research and to ask about the research methods they were using for working with whānau. Stakeholders were asked if they would like to contribute to the project by writing about their method of working with whānau that might be useful for Māori providers. The methods were examined for their suitability for use with whānau within a Kaupapa Māori context, and many of the methods were pre-tested with whānau.

In contemplating the use of these methods by a wide audience, one outcome of the research project is the development of an ethical framework to be considered for use with the kete of research methods. Such an ethical framework would comprise a structure of cultural codes (Smith, 1999), standards or rules that determines acceptable practice in terms of research with Māori collectives. In the determination of an ethical framework, it must be noted that a distinction must be made between what is legally, morally or culturally required in terms of ethical practice. Linda Smith (1999) developed a set of codes to guide research in cultural terms by Māori researchers, rather than dictate codes that people must adhere to. Linda makes the distinction between cultural ethics developed by Indigenous peoples and the Western notion of ethical standards:

Indigenous groups argue that legal definitions of ethics are framed in ways which contain the Western sense of the individual and of individualised property – for

example the right of an individual to give his or her own knowledge, or the right to give informed consent. The social 'good' against which ethical standards are determined is based on the same beliefs about the individual and individualised property. Community and indigenous rights or views in this area are generally not recognised and not respected... Cultural ethics, codes of conduct developed by Indigenous Peoples are then sheer acts of survival to defend and protect against further damage and misappropriation. (pp. 118–119)

It is, however, noteworthy that ethical principles and frameworks have not protected Indigenous peoples from being researched on, and therefore it is all the more important that Māori conduct our own research and evaluations, as well as move to assert ethical principles that are sourced from our tikanga (customs) and mātauranga (knowledge).

This section examines ethical principles that guide indigenous research and then explores in more depth the issues that were raised by stakeholders at the hui for the present project. The culmination of this section is the extension of Linda Smith's 'community-up' research approach to take into account the issues raised by stakeholders about the ethics or tikanga of research with Māori whānau.

Principles and values in Indigenous research

In 2006 a stock take and analysis was carried out of national and international frameworks, policies, guidelines, standards and other public statements, for ethical research involving Indigenous peoples with a particular focus on health and disability research (Kennedy & Wehipeihana, 2006). Five central themes in the form of key principles emerged from the stock take as a result of the analysis of common issues articulated by the Indigenous peoples with whom research was being conducted. Generally, most issues arose as a result of the key principles being contravened; that is, the principles were not understood, not recognised, and/or not valued, and therefore not honoured.

The guiding principles for working respectfully with Indigenous Peoples nationally and internationally that emerged from the stock take (Kennedy & Wehipeihana, 2006, pp. 1–2) are:

- **Self-determination**, including the right to make decisions about all aspects of their lives
- **Clear benefits** to those being researched
- **Acknowledgement and awareness**, which refers to respect and due recognition and appreciation for indigenous culture, values, customs, beliefs and rights, including an acceptance of a worldview that may not be consistent with Western ideologies
- **Cultural integrity**, which relates to the validity of indigenous knowing and ways of being, and that cultural knowledge be protected from misuse and misappropriation, and must be preserved for future generations; and
- **Capacity building**, which enables Indigenous peoples to participate actively in the research, with the aim to ultimately drive their own research.

It is also the observation of these principles by Māori when researching with, and for, Māori that ensures respect for Māori knowledge and ways of being. As Linda Smith (1999) asserts:

Through respect the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct... The denial by the West of humanity to Indigenous Peoples, the denial of citizenship and human rights,

the denial of the right to self-determination – all these demonstrate palpably the enormous lack of respect which has marked the relations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. (p. 120)

Stakeholder concerns about research with whānau

At the consultation hui for the RWWC project participants raised a number of concerns about research with whānau collectives. These included discussion about:

- The notion of what it means to do Kaupapa Māori research with whānau
- Who should do research with whānau and what expertise is required
- The ethical concerns of conducting research with whānau, for example, confidentiality; and
- How the research findings can influence policy.

These are each explored below.

Kaupapa Māori

A Kaupapa Māori framework was stated as necessary for working with whānau collectives as it normalises Māori worldviews and practices. Concern was voiced as to whether research would uphold the mana of whānau by ensuring their stories are told in the way they were intended. The Kaupapa Māori approach will alleviate the concerns stated by many in terms of the need for:

- Integrity and respect for whānau
- Measures that are by, with, and for Māori
- Systems and analysis that are respectful and inclusive of tikanga and kawa (traditional customs and practices)
- Having an understanding of difference within whānau and between whānau; understanding identity versus connectivity
- Collaboration
- Using the right words and asking the right questions
- Elements of control such as who wants to know, who is in control, and who will own the tools that are developed?

Whakapapa

Another theme raised in the stakeholder hui related to the connectedness of Māori through whakapapa. An inherent trait of Māori traditional customs are the connections Māori trace back to the central core of their beginnings, from the time there was Te Kore (the Nothingness); from there legends tell of Rangi, the Sky Father, and Papa, the Earth Mother, being separated by their son Tāne Mahuta to bring about night and day. Tāne Mahuta then created the human form by breathing life into clay moulded into the form of a woman. These ancient beginnings associated with the spirit world have formulated Māori's connectedness to the whenua (land), the rivers, lakes and sea, flora, fauna and all that is. Therein lies the whakapapa of Māori – their ancient histories from which comes their traditional information and knowledge.

Leadership was a topic touched upon in a variety of ways with stakeholders noting that in the days of old, Māori survival continued through:

- Whānau connectedness and effective leadership;
- Good leaders having a team that supported them in their role; and
- Everyone sharing in supporting whānau.

Strong leadership is required, including a connection to the wants and needs of the people, reflecting Māori's connectedness to their whakapapa – genealogy relating to the people and the land. As one participant stated:

You are defined by your whakapapa whether you choose to own or internalise that...Regardless of what we each hold as an individual, we still hold that (whakapapa) as a collective. (AKL participant)

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was mentioned variously, particularly in relation to large groups. Matters for consideration included:

- Who participates in the research and who gives consent for the wider whānau – everyone, those who are present, or representatives elected by the whānau?
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed; for example, information that is disclosed to the whānau that was not previously known to some whānau members who are research participants, or information that is knowingly disclosed by participants despite an agreement to confidentiality.
- Who gets left out of the research and the consent process when looking at whānau, that is, were all whānau consulted and in agreement as to process and disclosure? For example, were rangatahi consulted, were there groupings of people who were not included such as gay and lesbian whānau members?
- What happens if some whānau do not want to participate in research but because of the pressure or united force of whānau they are unable to opt out? As well as ensuring confidentiality and inclusivity, there was also concern that people not be coerced to participate.

Diversity

Many comments and queries were received as to ensuring and respecting the diversity of whānau – recognising the dynamic and fluid nature of whānau; and that it was important that whānau not be homogenised. By the same token concerns were voiced that the needs of individuals not be overridden by the needs of whānau, thereby ensuring individuality and uniqueness is maintained. As one hui participant explained:

It's about embracing the 'au' in whānau; there are a whole lot of 'au' in whānau. (WLG participant)

An interesting challenge noted by a hui participant was that generally people have a tendency to see themselves outside of the negative patterns that are highlighted in terms of Māori. This participant pointed out the reality that Māori at the hui make up part of that picture; she contends that the people about whom negative patterns are ingrained, and who comprise negative statistics, are our whānau. Therefore Māori cannot be viewed in isolation, just as whānau ora (wellness) for an individual is not created in isolation. Māori must be viewed as inclusive of their whānau, and of their surroundings, including their communities.

Strengths-based

Maintaining a strengths-based view of whānau was considered beneficial with many of the hui comments denouncing a deficit approach to research and evaluation with Māori. It was stated at the hui that there is strength and power in the collective, and that the focus needs to be on the things Māori are doing well and are good at. For example, some statistics indicate that Māori are failing with high unemployment rates, and living in crowded conditions, when in fact whānau might be doing well in that they have good whānau support, and the quality of personal/family attachment is excellent. This example relates to a concern where the overall context for whānau is not considered in the interpretation of statistical data. There could be

overcrowding, and many of the residents of a single dwelling may well be unemployed. However, the positive points of note are that the young teenage mother is being guided and supported through the early stages of motherhood by experienced mothers and carers, and unemployed youth are also fed, safe and warm. All residents are very supportive of one another and are making positive contributions to daily household chores, therefore the quality of engagement and interaction within this whānau is much to be admired.

These concerns have built on work by Fiona Cram, Linda Smith and others to assist in the further development of an ethical framework for research and evaluation about community-based research practice with whānau.

Te kaupapa a te whānau: Whānau researcher guidelines

The issue of ensuring the voices of Māori are heard is addressed through the use of a Kaupapa Māori approach by ‘privileging indigenous values, attitudes and practices’ (Smith, 1999). This view is strengthened by Tuakana Nepe (cited in Pipi et al., 2004, p. 143), who talks about Kaupapa Māori as the “conceptualisation of Māori knowledge”, that has its origins in a spiritual base that underpins the thoughts, beliefs, values and interactions of Māori.

Research in a Māori sense seeks to expand knowledge outwards (te whānuitanga), in depth (te hōhonutanga) and towards light (te maramatanga) (Mead & Mead, 2003, p. 318).

Linda Smith developed the ‘community-up’ approach (Table 1) to recognise that researchers have key accountabilities to the indigenous communities they were researching with (Cram, 2009, p. 313). The approach offers an insight into how Māori strive to achieve research with their relations and their communities, and is a useful framework for formulating practice guidelines for Indigenous peoples to guide research and evaluation being conducted in their communities (Cram, 2009, p. 318). In order to ensure the voices of Māori are heard, and their stories are told as they would have them told, there has been a growth in the capacity of Indigenous peoples to conduct their own research and evaluations. The role of researchers in terms of a Kaupapa Māori approach serves two purposes (Cram, 2009, p. 313):

- To affirm and validate Māori worldviews; and
- To critique the Pākehā/colonial construction of Māori.

Table 1 is an adaptation of Linda Smith’s ‘community-up approach’ descriptive table, with a third column added to reflect our realisation that as values and guidelines are required for working with Māori, so too are they imperative when working with whānau. The values and guidelines are an extension of those posited by Linda and Fiona, with a focus on whānau. Kaupapa Māori promotes a ‘by Māori, for Māori’ approach that ensures Māori worldviews. A focus on Kaupapa Māori guiding principles for research with whānau is required to ensure an inclusive approach to whānau as collectives rather than as individuals or single households of individuals. The idea for the principles comes from the concerns shared at the stakeholder hui, and through experiences and feedback of the pre-testing of the tools/methods. This framework can be revised as feedback is received regarding use of the tools/methods with whānau, and as further considerations of the effects of researching with whānau, no matter the context, are realised. As with the methods and tools, this framework does not purport to be the solution, but merely a starting point.

Table 1. 'Community-up' approach to researching with whānau

Cultural values (Smith, 1999)	Researcher guidelines (Cram, 2001)	Te kaupapa a te whānau – whānau researcher guidelines
Aroha ki te tangata	A respect for people – allow people to define their own space and meet on their own terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in cultural ‘rituals of encounter’, guided by whānau • Allow whānau to define their space and meet on their own terms • Whakawhanaungatanga – it is important for whānau to make linkages and connections with each other and with the researcher(s) • Respect the fluidity and diversity of whānau
He kanohi kitea	It is important to meet people face-to-face, and to also be a face that is known to and seen within a community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is important for the researcher to be known and be seen by whānau
Titiro, whakarongo... kōrero	Looking and listening and then maybe speaking. Develop understanding in order to find a place from which to speak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow whānau to set the agenda for the research, including the pace at which it proceeds and decisions about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the whānau’s story? • What do whānau want to speak to? • What is the role of researchers within the space that whānau claim?
Manaaki ki te tangata	Sharing, hosting, being generous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable whānau to participate in the research (e.g. budget for whānau travel) • Provide food and refreshments during research encounters • Allow for appropriate koha for whānau • Enable whānau to move in and out of their [research] space
Kia tūpato	Be cautious – be politically astute, culturally safe, and reflective about insider/outsider status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be cautious that our whānau are kept safe –that whānau are left in the same, or a better, space than before they engaged in the research • Allow whānau the time and space to practice their own tikanga (e.g. karakia) • It may be important for the whānau to know of support services that can offer them ongoing support for any issues and concerns raised during the research

Cultural values (Smith, 1999)	Researcher guidelines (Cram, 2001)	Te kaupapa a te whānau – whānau researcher guidelines
Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata	Do not trample on the ‘mana’ or dignity of a person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the research journey is enjoyable and enlightening for whānau, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with whānau about the research, including sharing the findings and publications • Acknowledge whānau ideas about the current and future research
Kia māhaki	Be humble – do not flaunt your knowledge; find ways of sharing it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be humble – do not flaunt your knowledge, but find ways to create a context for whānau to access it <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer whānau questions (or seek out the knowledge) and share your knowledge • Support whānau in their understanding and use of research findings

Adapted from Smith (2004, p. 12)

Conclusion

Māori research, including and perhaps most explicitly research with whānau, is undertaken within a relationship ethic. Cram et al. (2004) write that:

A relationship ethic ... encompasses notions of: researchers and participants journeying together with reciprocity; participant control over decisions and processes affecting them; and researcher accountability.

Te kaupapa a te whānau – whānau researcher guidelines lays a foundation for how this relationship ethic allows for research with whānau in which the Māori world leads and the research world follows (Irwin, 1994). There will, however, be many situations where issues will arise in terms of research with whānau, however the guidelines for research with whānau advocate a principled approach for a process that is mindful and inclusive of whānau, no matter their context. As noted by Fiona Cram (2009) the guidelines may serve to spark discussion and debate that leads to their expansion, implementation and/or the collaborative development by whānau and researchers of guidelines for how they wish to journey safely together.

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