

Grounded in the Village: Applying the Kau Tu'ulafale Framework to Sexual and Reproductive Health Engagement with Pacific Youth

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Background/Purpose:

Pacific young people continue to face inequities in sexual and reproductive health (SRH), including limited engagement with services, cultural stigma, and barriers to accessing accurate and relevant information. Conventional approaches to SRH often overlook the importance of cultural identity, relationality, and collective responsibility in Pacific communities. The Kau Tu'ulafale Framework, coined by Village Collective, draws on Pacific concepts of service and support systems to reframe how SRH engagement can be delivered with and for young people.

Approach:

The Kau Tu'ulafale Framework is grounded in the cultural role of the tu'ulafale as the supporters and gathering of the village and aiga who surround and uphold the performer, or kau tau'olunga. Within this framing, young people are not positioned as individuals navigating SRH in isolation, but as part of a collective where they are supported, upheld, and accountable to their community and vice versa.

In practice, this framework was applied through youth-led talanoa, culturally grounded workshops, and community-based activations. The model emphasises relational trust, cultural safety, and collective ownership, where the "village" actively enables and sustains wellbeing. SRH topics such as consent, relationships, contraception, and sexual wellbeing were embedded within these spaces in ways that align with Pacific values and communication styles. Young people were supported to lead conversations, shape messaging, and act as connectors between their peers, families, and health services, reflecting the role of the kau tau'olunga being upheld by their tu'ulafale.

Outcomes/Impact:

Application of the Kau Tu'ulafale Framework resulted in increased youth engagement and deeper participation in SRH-related activities. Young people demonstrated greater confidence in navigating SRH conversations, increased understanding of key topics, and stronger connections to support pathways. The framework supported the reduction of stigma by situating SRH within culturally familiar and relational contexts. It also strengthened peer and community relationships, enabling more open and sustained dialogue around sexual health and wellbeing.

Innovation and Significance:

The Kau Tu'ulafale Framework offers a culturally grounded and conceptually distinct model for SRH engagement that moves beyond individualised, clinic-based approaches. By centring the collective role of the village in upholding young people, this framework reframes SRH as a shared responsibility rather than an individual burden. This approach provides a meaningful pathway to address inequities in SRH outcomes for Pacific communities and demonstrates the value of Indigenous and

culturally anchored frameworks in advancing health equity.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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