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Family Roots: Sustenance for Samoan and Tongan American Elders

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Family Roots: Sustenance for Samoan and Tongan American Elders

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The heritage of Samoan and Tongan-American elders can be traced back to the people¹ of Oceania (Hau'ofa, 1994). Like their seafaring ancestors, Samoans and Tongans have established a long history of global migration, including migration into the U.S., particularly in states such as Hawaii and California. Despite living thousands of miles away from Oceania, Samoan and Tongan-Americans have managed to maintain many traditional cultural lifeways such as centrality of family as an agent of socialization, communal responsibilities, reverence for the elders (Taufe'ulungaki, 2008), and a holistic view of health and well-being that is inclusive of biological health and psycho-social-spiritual well-being (Durie, 1985). In some contemporary global contexts, Samoan and Tongan families and communities often experience adaptations to their traditional culture that help with surviving in a new and sometimes foreign location. Samoan and Tongan-American elders in particular grapple with these issues of acculturation and assimilation in their families and communities as part of their inherent responsibilities to preserve and continue traditional culture. Based on a larger study exploring factors that contribute to the health and well-being of immigrant Samoan and Tongan-American elders, this article provides a discussion of the family as the root source of risk or protection for the well-being of these elders. In other words, this discussion focuses on family interaction, exchange, and possible reciprocation of support and nurturance for these elders. Practicing traditional cultural roles in an American context can often be challenging for these elders because of the non-traditional family structures and responsibilities of Pacific Islander Americans; therefore, gaining a clearer understanding of the role of the family in sustaining these traditional elders in a non-traditional American context is critical. Subsequently, understanding the possible impact on the preservation and continuation of these cultural practices and responsibilities across generations of elders is significant for cultural survival. Family-related factors such as relationships, expectations, and communication within a cultural context are discussed as possible sources of risk or protection for these elders.

¹ People of Oceania and Pacific Peoples are used interchangeably. The existing literature primarily consists of aggregated information on Pacific people which is discussed here as inclusive of Samoans and Tongans.

Key Concepts:

Aiga	Family
Fa'afaletui, Whare Tapa Wha, Fonofale	Pacific models of health and well-being
Fa'alavelave	Obligations
Fa'aSamoa	Samoaan way
Fahu	Eldest sister in Tongan family
Fale or whare	House
Ho'okele	To navigate
Kavenga	Duties and responsibilities
Pou	House post
Matai	Chief
Me'a Fakatonga	Tongan way

In this study, a Samoan or Tongan elder is defined as an individual age 60 or older, designated by the family and community as a leader responsible for preserving and passing on cultural values, beliefs, and practices from one generation to another. Samoan and Tongan elders are the keepers of cultural knowledge, practices, traditions, and customs (Vakalahi, Heffernan, & Niu Johnson, 2007). Furthermore, community is defined in this study as the Samoan and Tongan-American communities, respectively; however, it is important to acknowledge the influence of larger U.S. communities in the lives of these immigrant elders. Moreover, in alignment with Pacific cultural perspectives, well-being is conceptualized as holistic, balance, and inclusive of bio-psycho-social-spiritual dimensions and occurs on the individual, family, and community levels (Finau, Tipene-Leach, & Finau, 2004).

Literature Review

The existing literature on Pacific Islander-Americans is sparse and outdated and often subsumed within the general Asian Pacific Islander

literature which can trivialize the experiences of Pacific Islanders as a unique community. However, available data show that over a million Pacific Islanders currently live in the U.S., primarily in Hawaii, California and Utah, of which about 40% migrated to the U.S. during the 1990's (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Colonization and immigration experiences created vulnerabilities and challenges such as extreme poverty, disease, crime, and under-education for Pacific Islanders (Kassebaum, Lau, Kwack, Leverette, Allingham, & Marker, 1995; Le, 2002). Statistics show that the average Pacific Islander-American family size is four with a median income that is \$4,100 less than all families in the U.S. population. This family size by income status is problematic because it does not capture the typical intergenerational Pacific family structure and the 18% who are living below the poverty line (26% Samoans, 23% Tongans), which is double the rate for white Americans. Further, only 10% of Pacific Islander-Americans have undergraduate degrees compared to 27% of white Americans and 4% have graduate degrees compared to 11% of white Americans, a lower higher education status than the total U.S. population. Approximately 42% of Pacific Islander-Americans speak a language other than English in the home, a higher proportion than the total U.S. population. Pacific Islander-Americans disproportionately die from cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, primarily due to limited access to programs and services (Population Reference Bureau, 2006; Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, 2011).

In particular, the elders are no strangers to illnesses and health disparities. Lack of knowledge of and access to available services, lack of culturally-informed programs, lack of resources, experiences of racism and ageism, and language challenges are a few barriers to accessing needed services among elderly Pacific Islanders. These health, social, and financial struggles can be personally and culturally problematic for these elders, especially given that the elders are central to the survival of their indigenous cultures and people (Dodd, 1990). Indigenous cultural values, beliefs, and practices such as mutual respect, sacredness of human relations, reciprocity in family supports, connection to the land, and a collective identity that is based on spirituality, physiology, and history are taught in the arms of the elders. They are the spiritual linkage between the past and future emphasizing spirituality as fundamental in Pacific epistemology (Autagavaia, 2001; Bell, 1998; Hereniko, 1995; Mulitalo, 2001; Newport, 2001). They are wise navigators of their families and communities which become more critical in environments like the U.S. where multiple cultural identities are realities and Pacific Islander issues are not always priorities.

Finau, Tipene-Leach, and Finau (2004) indicated that the inability of Pacific elders to meet family and community obligations can lead to poor well-being. Supporting the well-being of these elders is critical to ensuring the well-being of their families and communities across generations (Smith, 1999). From a Pacific cultural perspective, well-being emphasizes a balanced and collective inter-relationship between *Atua* (God), *tagata* (people), and *laufanua* (environment), which relationships are grounded on core values of *tapu* (sacred bonds), *alofa* (love and compassion), *tautua* (reciprocal service), *fa'aloalo* (respect and deference), *fa'amaualalo* (humility), and *aiga* (family) (Agnew et al., 2004; Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, & Bush, 2005). Specific to Samoan culture, a person is a relational being legitimized by sacred relationships with people, land, and the spiritual world. For well-being to occur, the multiple dimensions of the person including *fa'aleagaga* (spiritual and emotional being), *fa'aletino* (physical being), and *fa'alemafaufau* (mental and cognitive being) must be in balance and in harmony (Autagavaia, 2001). Similarly, in Tongan culture, well-being requires balance and harmony in the multiple and complex inter-relationships with people, land, and the spiritual world (Mafile'o, 2005).

The significance of the family in one's well-being is represented by the the *fale* or *whare* (house) which is used as a motif that symbolizes a collective and integrative worldview. According to the *Fonofale* model (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, and Finau, 2001), the roof of the *fale* represents cultural values and beliefs that must be infused into all healings. The foundation of the *fale* represents the family and the *pou* (house posts) represents the biological, mental, spiritual, and other dimensions that contribute to well-being. Surrounding the *fale* is the environment which likewise, contributes to well-being (Anae et al., 2001). This collective and integrative worldview can frame a clearer understanding of the experiences of immigrant Samoan and Tongan-American elders.

Method

Design

The larger study from which this analysis stems used a grounded theory approach which focuses on describing a phenomenon and its meaning from the participant's perspective and lived experiences, through a systematic set of procedures for constructing a theory about a phenomenon that is grounded in data (Charmaz, 2006). In the larger study, the overarching research question was: *What are the family, community, and cultural-based factors that contribute to health and well-*

being for Samoan and Tongan elders? This research question was framed by the *Ho'okele* model, which emphasizes the central role of Pacific elders as navigators of their families and communities (Vakalahi et al., 2007). Informed by this emphasis on an elder's responsibility for their families and communities, this particular article focuses on whether the family in return represents a source of risk or protection for the well-being of these elders. In other words, this discussion basically explores the interaction, exchange, and reciprocation of support and nurturance for these elders from their families. Given that these elders are practicing traditional Pacific cultural roles in an American context where family structures and responsibilities are non-traditional, understanding whether the family is reciprocating support and nurturance for these elders is important.

Although the *Ho'okele* model was developed by the Tongan-American social work faculty, based on indigenous cultural values and beliefs, and members of the research team were of Tongan and Samoan heritage, it was critical to approach this study without pre-determined perspectives or assumptions because of the need to gain a clearer understanding of the role of the family in sustaining these traditional elders in a non-traditional American context. To assist in the meaning making process and ensure pre-determined assumptions were minimized, the collaboration of a Japanese American and African American faculty/researchers were also solicited. The research team included one Samoan social work faculty/researcher and one Tongan research associate who conducted all of the interviews, and one Tongan social work faculty/researcher, all from the local community and trained with English, Samoan and Tongan language capabilities.

Participants

Congruent with Samoan and Tongan cultures, a networking sampling method was used to recruit study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Informed by previous research (Francis et al., 2010; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), a decision was made to recruit a total of 20 participants, 10 Samoan and 10 Tongan. Recruitment ended when 10 Samoan and 10 Tongan elders were identified and signed the consent form. Participant criteria for inclusion included Tongan or Samoan heritage, age 60 or older, and considered an elder in the family and community. The research team solicited participation through contact with networks in Samoan and Tongan churches, activity groups, and community organizations in Hawaii. Recruitment employed the use of flyer distribution and word of mouth communication, both proven effective in these communities. Research team members utilized their community networks to assist in recruiting

participants for the study. To assist with retention, every effort was made to schedule interviews during times convenient to the participants. All participants received a gift for their participation.

Study participants included 10 Samoan and 10 Tongan elders living in Hawaii, proportional between males and females, and ranging in age from 60 (predominant) to 80 (3 elders). Elders lived around the island of 'Oahu. The number of people living in the home ranged from 1 to 10 people, 10 reported by one Tongan elder, with 3 as the median and included children, spouses, nieces, nephews, mother in law, parents, and siblings. Only four elders were currently employed, one Tongan and three Samoans; the rest were living on Social Security benefits and spouse's pension. Annual income ranged from less than \$20,000 to \$80,000 with more elders renting rather than owning a home; highest annual income reported at \$40,000 for Tongan elders and \$80,000 for Samoan elders. All were born in Samoa or Tonga and migrated to the U.S. as early as 1958 and as late as 1997; two elders were second generation immigrants, one Tongan and one Samoan. Samoan and Tongan languages were predominantly spoken in the home. Four elders, two Samoans and two Tongans, reported attending college with the lowest educational level as elementary school reported by two Samoans and three Tongans.

Data collection

The setting for the study was 'Oahu, Hawaii, the most common port of entry and the U.S. location with the largest populations of Samoans and Tongans. Data were collected through individual interviews and a demographic questionnaire. The research team included one Samoan social work faculty, one Tongan research associate, and one Tongan social work faculty, trained researchers, all from the local community, and with English, Samoan and Tongan language capabilities. The collaboration of a Japanese American and African American researchers were also solicited.

In emphasizing the significance of the naturalistic environment, interviews were conducted at each participant's home, a location of preference by the participants. To ensure confidentiality and privacy during data collection, participants were asked for a private space in the home or a time when privacy was at its maximum. Interviewing these elders individually was important for understanding their lived experiences as navigators of their families and communities relative to the meanings and themes of Samoan and Tongan cultures. The individual interviews were a one-time, two hours in length activity that used a semi-structured interview guide approach. All efforts were made to adhere to cultural rules regarding the positions of elders as leaders and final arbiter of the

interview. Participants chose the language in which the interview was completed. In translating data to English, back translation was conducted by the data collectors who were of Samoan and Tongan heritage respectively, to ensure that the contextual meanings were kept. All interviews were conducted by the Samoan social work faculty and Tongan research associate. Interviews were tape recorded and interviewers also took detailed notes.

The interview process began with participants verbally completing a brief demographic questionnaire developed specifically for this study in consultation with local Pacific Islander community scholars and elders. Information in this questionnaire pertained to age, gender, family income, place of birth, number of and relationship between people living in the home, language use at home, educational level, employment status, and type of employment. Upon completion of the demographic questionnaire, participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide also developed in consultation with Pacific Islander community scholars and elders, regarding their cultural, familial, and community experiences as elders and the impacts on their health and well-being. These open-ended questions probed about cultural values, beliefs, and influences including the role of cultural duality (being Pacific in America) and connections and commitment to cultural values, beliefs, expectations, and practices; the role of spirituality and religiosity; experiences as leaders in the family and community, preserving and instilling cultural pride for younger generations; and social roles and hierarchies. Specific questions analyzed for this particular article were, "Tell me about your family relationships. How does it impact your health and well-being? Talk about the expectations and demands of your family on you as an elder. How does it impact your health?"

Data analysis

Following data collection, information was transcribed. Atlas.ti[®] software was used to organize the data. Analysis of the data and meaning making was a collective process conducted by the research team consisting of one Samoan faculty/researcher, one Tongan research associate, and one Tongan faculty/researcher in collaboration with two additional faculty/researchers from non-Pacific Islander cultures which provided a mechanism for minimizing possible personal bias in approaching the data. Although, the Samoan/Tongan composition of the research team may pose possible personal bias, it is clearly an advantage to have relevant and advanced knowledge to protect cultural meanings and practices.

The initial step in analyzing the data was immersion in the data, reading the data transcriptions verbatim, line by line and reading for

natural emergence of themes, patterns and categories. Coding of the data followed and thereafter, memo writing and annotating of interrelationships among the codes occurred. The line-by-line analysis of each transcript was conducted verbatim to discover and describe important themes related to the family as a source of risk or protection for the elders. Memos were used to define interrelationships among themes and identify recurring patterns which were sorted into categories. Constant comparative analysis was conducted in order to identify and compare themes and interrelationships among themes. Line-by-line analysis, memo writing, and constant comparison were conducted until redundancy, a point in which no new themes were discovered (Charmaz, 2006). Discussion among the research team members occurred throughout the process of identifying and deciding on themes, patterns, and categories.

Results

Major themes of family relationships, expectations, communication, and indigenous language used in the family were identified by participants as important family-based factors that contributed to their overall well-being. The Samoan and Tongan-American elders spoke with honor and pride about their families as an important source of support for their well-being and their responsibilities to preserve and transmit customs and traditions.

Cultural foundation of the family relationship

Relationships in Tongan and Samoan families are founded on cultural values, protocols and practices which in turn contribute to the well-being of the elders. The inherent cultural hierarchy in the family structure determines one's responsibilities and obligations to families and communities. Participants discussed a traditional Samoan and Tongan family structure that is based on responsibilities for cultural customs and traditions and inclusive of multiple generations, vertically and horizontally in the family tree. The basic structure of the Samoan and Tongan families is hierarchical in nature with birth order responsibilities and privileges. For instance, the oldest elders in the family occupy the role of head of household which comes with responsibilities in both immediate and extended families. These heads of household lead in rituals and ceremonies held during *Fa'aSamoa* (Samoan way) or *Me'a Fakatonga* (Tongan way). Likewise, the *fahu* (eldest sister in Tongan family) has privileges that spans from giving orders to her brothers which must be obeyed, to asking her nieces and nephews for transportation to church.

With the customarily large Samoan and Tongan family size, structure becomes functional in managing family affairs and ensuring

responsibilities are being carried out. As indicated by the participants, with the family structure, people know their place and adhere to cultural traditions. One elder said, “The Samoans have a leadership structure called the *matai* or chief system. The matai is the head of the extended family. Samoans learn and experience the nature of hierarchical order.” A second elder said, “We still carry on the traditions that our father passed on to us... by showing respect... I don’t have to say that I am the oldest. We connect... we still value that and it is all about sharing emotions and love and to be connected to one another.” Another elder speaking of the lesser expectations of a younger sibling stated, “I am the youngest one of all of my siblings. I always sit and never answer anyone, only when something that I feel that I need to react then I do, but most of the time, I am the comedian of the family.” Still another elder indicated, “Between me and my family, I cannot let go of my cultures, I always have to participate or to give in our family fa’alavelave... cultural practice is important, culture transmitted through the family.”

Speaking of the benefits of traditional Samoan and Tongan family structure to the fulfillment of cultural responsibilities, the carrying out of the *kavenga* (duties, responsibilities) and *fa’alavelave* (obligations) were given as specific examples. One elder said, “We also come up with the monies for fa’alavelave. This works out very well for us.” Another stated, “When I sent money to my brothers or my sisters in Samoa if they call, I feel so good when I do it. However, my children, would say, things such as what do they think is there a money tree here?” Speaking of a large family, another elder said, “I have 6 children, 4 girls and 2 boys. We work together as a family... we take care of each other. Big families helps.” Still another elder stated, “I depend a lot on my children as I grow older. They are the ones who support me. When our *aiga* has a fa’alavelave, my children contribute money to help with my portion of the financial responsibility. Children contribute on behalf of elders to cultural responsibilities.”

Outcome of positive and negative family relationships

Study participants discussed their family relationships with much humor, pride, and confidence. The discussion of the collective/extended family relationship deemed the individual insignificant as a solo entity but noteworthy only as part of the larger collective. General descriptions of the quality of their collective family relationships included reciprocal, happy, close, and inclusive, filled with love and support of an extended family, harmonious, yet sometimes stressful. The sense of responsibility of children to care for their aging parents in their own homes was discussed. Participants linked good relationships to a positive state of

well-being. One elder stated, "When things are going well, all are happy, no stress. If the family relationship is not good, it creates many problems including health." A second one said, "It's very important to have good family relationship it can affect health, negative or positive." Another elder indicated, "Negative relationship can create poor health, both physical and mental. I have good relation with my family and I'm happy and healthy." Still another said, "Yes having good relationship with my family helps, my son takes care of me when I'm sick" whereas one said, "When you're happy you're healthy" and a second elder said, "We always talk about living happy and having fun, even with my husband's family. We get along very well. I joke, and laugh a lot with my in-laws. What is important to me is to be happy."

In terms of the reciprocal benefits of having "good children" who contribute to the family, one of the elders said:

Like I've mentioned previously my children are good. They don't touch drugs... no one is in trouble because of drugs. My children call regularly to check up on me and my mother. They ask if I have money. I jokingly tell them that I don't have money but I'm waiting to see if anyone out there will take pity on me and give me money. My children then tell me when they will come to give me some money. It also works the other way. When they need financial assistance they call me. I then gather my other children and put our resources together to help the child that needs the help. My help (including the children living with me) to my children who live in the home that we bought is to provide food, and when they are short on the mortgage.

Further, relative to stress and regrets, one elder said, "Sometimes I get so stressed... the ones that stays with me, sometimes they stress me out. I know people are different, but sometimes your family relationship is stressful too. For me, it is good to let it out, they may get angry at you." Another stated, "I did not teach my children the Samoan language. Often times they asked me why we did not teach them the Samoan language. I regret it, I wish I did. When we raised our children here, there were not too many Samoans around, so we mingled a lot with other ethnic groups."

Family expectations of the keepers of cultural customs

In response to questions about family expectations of the elders as leaders of the family and community, participants talked about maintaining their well-being to carry out their responsibilities and obligations. Longevity is expected and their leadership is still needed in transmitting

cultural protocols and customs especially in relation to dealing with the ever growing cultural duality/multiplicity of their Samoan and Tongan-American families. Their leadership as keepers of institutional memories is needed in preserving and transmitting Samoan and Tongan languages. These elders are also expected to live long so that their children and grandchildren can fulfill their cultural responsibilities of reciprocating personal care and support.

In terms of the expectation relating to well-being, these elders felt that such expectation helps encourage them in their continuous effort to be well in order to pass on legacies and cultural customs and traditions. Several elders said, "To be healthy and strong. This expectation helps me try to be healthy. To be healthy and live long so, I'm doing my best. They take care of me; they love me and want me to be healthy and happy. I'll do my best to be healthy." Still another said, "My family encourages me to see the doctor or get exercise with my senior group when they see that I'm not feeling good or they see that I'm not going out of the house. Like when something happened to my hand and I didn't pay attention to it until the bump started growing. Fortunately, I went to see the doctor because he found that I needed a lot of medication and was on an I.V. for the whole day."

Regarding longevity to reciprocate care, one elder said, "They want us to live long and healthy so they can continue to care for us so I'm doing my best to be healthy." Several others stated, "To care of us and they want us to be around for our grandchildren. They want me to live long and continue to live with them. To live long for our children so I'm trying to be healthy. They want me live with them so they can take care of me. I'm trying to be healthy so I can enjoy my grandchildren." Still another said, "My children call me when they need something or when they just want to check up on me. I think that losing their father made them more attentive to me. My children know that they can rely on me. I feel better when I know that my children are safe and I know where they are at. I thank God for that," whereas another elder indicated, "My children helps me a lot whenever I need something or financial help they provide."

Communication in the family

Participants described communication in their families as an inter/across generational dialogue and discussion in which members express concerns and a collective solution is proposed. They discussed some cultural protocols in the communication according to birth order and role of the father. Also described was the bilingual and transnational aspect of communication because family members live in different locations around

the world. Face to face visits and gathering during special occasions were common ways of connecting families.

Speaking of open communication, one elder said, "As the father I set example and the tone. Family members can agree or disagree and it's okay if my children disagree with me." A second one stated, "Speak nicely and softly, sometimes I provide direction and it's up to them to follow, some do and some don't and it's ok. I give instructions and it's followed most of the time and its fine." In relation to bilingualism and transnational communication, another said, "Bilingual, despite the fact that our children grow up and raised here, they pick up English and speak fluent English at school, they understand and speaks basic Samoan." Still another elder stated, "My children call me regularly just to talk and check up on their grandma. They visit often. We have family get together on birthdays and special occasions and holidays, or they just stop by for a visit," whereas another elder indicated, "I call my family on the mainland and Samoa often." Such open and collective communication practices seemed to bring enjoyment and happiness to these elders.

Indigenous language connects the family

Participants pointed out the significance of indigenous language as part of cultural transmission and the important role of language in ensuring understanding and connection in the family and between generations. These elders agreed to the importance of knowing multiple languages in avoiding misunderstanding. This is especially important in such large Samoan and Tongan intergenerational and dual identity families. As several elders said, "Very important and it's nice to know both Tongan and English. Both English and Samoan. It's very helpful to understand each other regardless of language." Speaking of the importance of understanding grandchildren, one elder stated, "It's good for me to understand my grandchildren and they can understand me as well." Another elder said, "It's very important to keep our language, I communicate better in Tongan but my children and grandchildren understand English better. It's good to keep our language. I speak in Tongan to my family." Another elder stated, "We are trying to use the Samoan language most of the time. Even when they do not understand, they are learning. We want them to learn and understand their language." Still another elder said, "I speak only Samoan to my family. It's the language that we communicate in." The significance of preserving the indigenous language seemed to have a positive impact on well-being across generations.

Discussion

Overall, the themes discussed in this analysis are relevant across the Samoan and Tongan American communities, particularly in Hawaii. The larger qualitative study provides grounding for future investigation and theory development. Essentially, the family has proven integral as the most significant supporter of the elders and the art of “elder-ing” in the Pacific Islander culture. Without the family, this art may be lost, particularly in contexts outside of the homelands.

As the findings indicate, certain family-related factors can positively contribute to the holistic bio-psycho-socio-spiritual well-being of Samoan and Tongan-American elders. In essence, the leadership and well-being of these elders is integrally connected to the well-being of their families and communities as well as current and future generations. The major role of the family as a context in which Samoan and Tongan cultures are practiced and transmitted was emphasized. Factors such as quality family relationships that are grounded in cultural customs and traditions, positive family expectations that the elders keep themselves well to preserve indigenous cultures for the next generation, open and frequent communication among family members across the globe, and using indigenous Samoan and Tongan languages were identified as important factors that can contribute to overall well-being of these elders.

Overall, study implications are supported in the literature (Ghosh, 2010). For instance, a national research agenda that embraces Samoan and Tongan-American families as central and key to the solutions of their health and well-being challenges is long overdue. In other words, the experts in the solutions for family challenges are the families themselves. An agenda that focuses specifically on the role of families in enhancing the well-being of Samoan and Tongan-American elders is urgently needed especially today as health disparities and rate of illnesses are increasing for this particular population and Pacific Americans in general. This research agenda can include specific and thorough studies on the protective nature of a quality family relationship that centers on intergenerational reciprocation of care, love, and support. In fact, the cultural foundation of family relationships in terms of hierarchy and reciprocity can serve as an inherent structure in which solutions to social challenges of Samoan, Tongan, and other Pacific American elders can be found.

Accurate databases on strengthening existing positive family pressure to help Samoan, Tongan, and Pacific-American elders maintain their well-being to transmit cultural values and practices to the next generation is needed. As keepers of cultural customs and traditions, the

leadership of these elders as experts in negotiating cultural identities such as that of their Samoan, Tongan, and Pacific-American children and grandchildren, can be tapped when working with these families. Likewise, studies on language as a repository of culture and the importance of bilingual and transnational communication for the well-being of Samoan and Tongan-American, and perhaps other Pacific American elders are recommended.

In terms of policy practice, financial support for collecting accurate data and testing culturally-informed prevention and intervention strategies is the most urgent need at this point. Policy advocacy is needed for targeted and sufficient funding of culturally appropriate programs for the well-being of Samoan and Tongan-American elders, or Pacific-American elders in general. For instance, Pacific health models such as *whare tapa wha* or *fonofale* which are based on cultural values and practices can be expanded and tested on Pacific Islander-American elders with additional funding for research and human resources. Finally, recognition of the importance and salience of intergenerational family structures is needed to preserve the positive impact of family on Samoan and Tongan-American elders and encourage other Pacific-American groups to strengthen their own intergenerational relationships.

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