

The inseparable connection between climate change and mental health and wellbeing

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- There is a deep and inseparable connection to the environment and the cosmos for Pacific peoples beyond that of simply **belonging**. Our natural surroundings are embedded in the Pacific psyche and ways of knowing, doing and being.
- The Ocean, a living entity, has been an integral part of the beliefs and cultures of Pacific peoples. **Often seen as having its own spirit and consciousness: a life source, a powerful deity or divine force.**
- Creation stories tell how the ocean was formed and how it shapes the world around us. Many view the ocean as a ‘measina’, a taonga, a treasure to be protected and preserved. **Our environment was never meant to be feared, but respected and embraced.**
- We have scientific knowledge to work towards protecting our oceans, **but wider thinking is also required.**



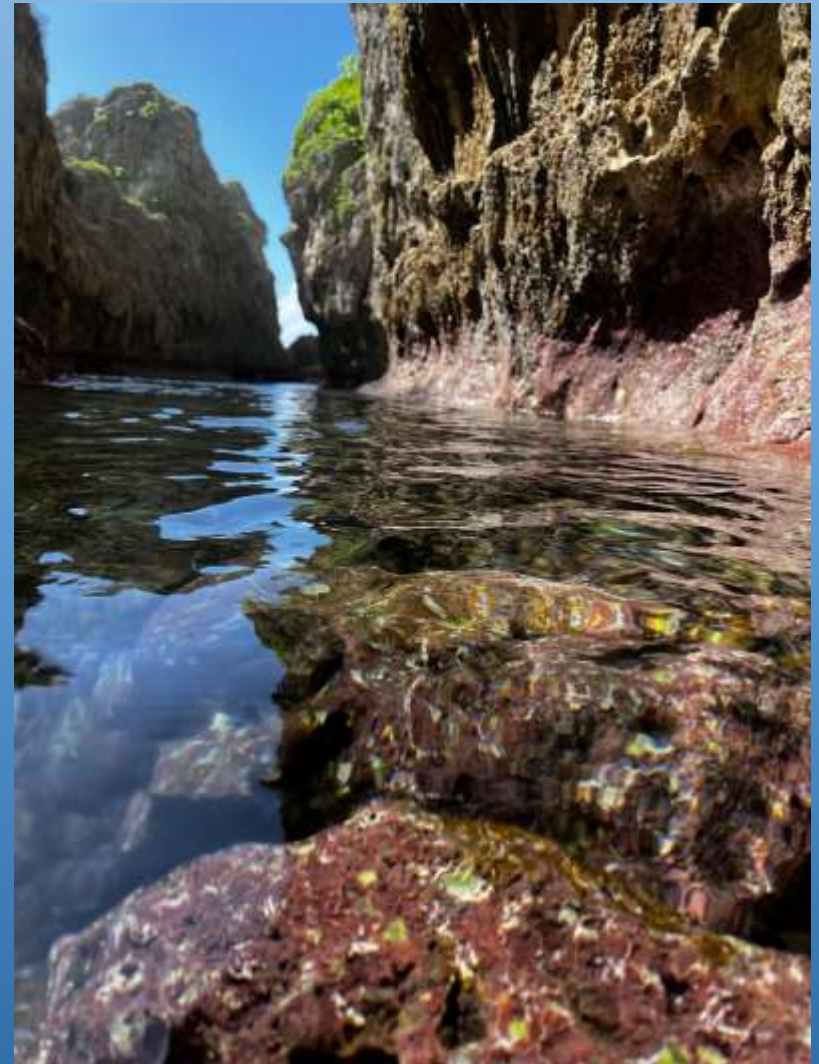
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Climate Change and
mental wellbeing: The
impacts on Pacific
peoples

Key:

A Pacific led and centred
approach

Growth of Pacific
research capacity



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Niue

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Cook Islands

- Dr Teina Rongo - Marine Biologist and Chair of Kōrero o te 'Ōrau
- Dr Evangelene Daniela Wong - Te Marae Ora Clinical Psychologist

Aotearoa

- Josiah Tualamali'i - Mental health and wellbeing expert and youth advocate
- Laura Tongalea - Addictions expert and practitioner

Aims



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An attempt to create a space where the privileging of Pacific peoples' views takes precedence

1. Explore links between climate change and mental health and wellbeing, and the impact of climate change upon overall health outcomes for Pacific peoples
2. Conceptualise these linkages and how they may be defined in Pacific contexts
3. Investigate current unmet need and practical solutions
4. Advance new knowledge and understandings to inform the design and implementation of policies and approaches to better support the mental health and wellbeing needs of Pacific communities in the face of climate change

Methods & Research Design

- This study involved a mixed methods approach initially over a 36-month period in research sites in Aotearoa NZ, Niue and the Cook Islands
- Phase One: A literature review, Delphi method (n=70 panellists), and talanoa with up to 50 participants
- Phase Two: Key informant interviews and focus groups in all sites

Phase 2: Thematic areas for further exploration



- Links between climate change and mental health and wellbeing
- Experiences and understandings of climate related (im)mobility
- Mental health and wellbeing understandings, informed by traditional knowledge and practices
- Prejudice and discrimination towards mental distress and mental health
- Climate change impacts on mental health and wellbeing and maladaptive coping skills
- Solastalgia in Pacific contexts and terms
- Actions/solutions to address climate change impacts on mental health and wellbeing

Identity and sense of belonging - Home is your umbilical cord

“When you think about it, the whole movement of shifting people, it's really difficult and not just in terms of the physical movement, but emotionally mentally preparing people to move because I think, our people, because of ties to the land, you're born in your house, you die in that house, like the whole ‘how many generations have been through that home.?’ you know, we attached [sic] more than you know, like, in New Zealand, you shift from flat to flat. You know, it's like just a shelter for you. But here your revered homes is like everything, your umbilical cord.”

Loss and sense of belonging – sacrificed relatives

“You also remember your lineage when you think about when the climate [natural disaster] actually hits the shores - the very first that are sacrificed would always be your relatives. And I'm talking about those who are deceased, those who are buried, because where have we been burying them? Right along the shorelines. So, for example when Heta hit Niue in 2004, it just seems like it was yesterday, the very first that were sacrificed were the peoples that were buried along the lines. So they ended up in the seas, never to be found really, and that concerns me and our family.”

Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being

“In terms of just what we can do, it goes back to that keeping our people as connected to the environment as possible, and ensuring that there's no hindrance...And, you know, if there's government support that helps them re-establish what traditional frameworks are, then that's important, because the more that's lost, the harder it's going to come back. And I think we're always going to end up going back to the ways of ancestors.”



Holistic and indigenous Pacific approaches



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That whole thing around pito 'enua [belly button or center], when we designed the concept of Cook Islands health and wellbeing and pito 'enua, you know, that was developed over 12 Islands...when you live on an atoll or an island in the middle of nowhere, it cannot be a disconnect - land from your vaerua [spirit] life away from everything, pito 'enua, your physical and mental, social, and emotional, it's all interconnected with environment both ways. You know that work, identified the importance of environment for Cook Islanders, in terms of their broader health and wellbeing and I think that tells you, yeah, how important that is for Kūki [Cook Islander].

In a coconut shell



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- The recurring themes we found drew attention to mental health as a hidden concern, often marred by prejudice and discrimination.
- The importance of culture and spirituality, family and community, including the connections to ancestors, the environment and resilience have been emphasised.
- Linkages are made to economics, livelihoods, and workforce along with government and legislation, education, migration and the impact of disasters. Overall, these factors assist in revealing climate change as an initiator and an exacerbator of mental health concerns for Pacific peoples and providing the necessary first step in understanding the narratives and deeper connections between the concepts.
- Continuing to listen to the voices of our Pacific peoples, and taking meaningful action is the only way to effectively respond. It is one thing to have Pacific at the table, it is another to be listened to.