

## Pacific social work navigating practice, policy and research

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This book is the first, in its entirety, focusing on Pacific social work practice, policy, and research. It is heartening to see how far Pacific social work has developed internationally and the growth of Pacific social work knowledge, theories, and practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. Contributions in this book recognise the needs of Pacific people in diverse areas of research that can, in turn, inform policy and practice to better serve Pacific communities. Likened to skilful weavers, the editors have carefully selected strands of Pacific knowledge and experiences that beat to the heart of Pacific social work practice. In doing so, the editors have produced a publication that acknowledges the present, and the ways of the past in preparation for the future. Further, *Pacific Social Work Navigating Practice, Policy and Research*, invites those engaging with Pacific families and communities to decolonise hegemonic practices and claim our space as Pacific people. As highlighted, the book is "striving to promote an ongoing local, regional and international conversation about the importance of decolonising professional practice, including social work" (p. 9). The book is structured into five key parts: Pacific Social Work; Fields of Practice; Social Policy; Research; and Future Directions.

A key theme to emerge from the book is the focus on transforming spaces in social work practice by employing a Pacific lens. The publication clearly demonstrates a commitment by the editors and contributors to enhancing the wellbeing of Pacific families and communities through seeing themselves

reflected in Pacific-centred theory, practices, and approaches. Pacific treasures such as Pacific cultural knowledge and Pacific ways of being have been woven throughout the book to highlight social work practice values in engaging with Indigenous and culturally diverse communities throughout the Pacific region.

Part 1 invites the reader to understand that, although Pacific nations share common cultural understandings, it is also important to engage with Pacific points of difference. As a Pacific social work educator, it is validating to see that "appreciating the cohesion that comes from including cultural diversity and its differences" (p. 9) is recommended.

Part 2 offers inspirational Pacific views and experiences in various settings, drawing from different fields of practice ranging from child protection, disability, and justice to communities of practice. It is a delight to read contributions acknowledging the strength of a Pacific worldview that emphasises interconnectedness amongst people, land and culture when working with Pacific individuals, families, and communities. The publication acknowledges that *vā* (relationships) are pivotal in working collectively and are essential when engaging with Pacific communities and in shared decision making. This section encourages the Western social work world to see the relevancy of Indigenous and Pacific knowledge and concepts to social work practice, and to be allies in supporting Pacific social work to assert its rightful place across social work on a global scale.

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Part 2 emphasises holistic and strength-based approaches to Pacific social work—thereby affirming Pacific identity.

Part 3 of the publication focuses on social policy, engaging the reader with the social policy machinery that exists in the Pacific context. The call is made for Pacific social workers to understand the complexities of social policy making in the Pacific region. This knowledge is important because of how policy impacts daily lives; social workers are uniquely placed to privilege Pacific cultural knowledge when advocating for political change in communities.

In Part 4, the focus turns to research and the authors advocate for research paradigms that embed Pacific knowledges and practices so that it is Pacific-Indigenous research paradigms that are at the fore of research for the advancement of Pacific wellbeing. In promoting Pacific-Indigenous research, this section acknowledges the approaches to research that already exist, including: the Tongan *Kakala* framework; the Fijian *Vanua* research approach; the *Talanoa* approach; and the Samoan *Fa'afaletui* research framework. The authors provide research stories as examples of Pacific-Indigenous social work research.

Finally, Part 5 of the book considers the future direction of Pacific-Indigenous knowledge and practice, calling, in particular, for the inclusion of Pacific-Indigenous perspectives—not only in the practice of social work but also in social work education. The point is made that Pacific and non-Pacific social workers have the opportunity to engage with each other to shape and promote Pacific social work.

Many of the authors have brought to life Pacific knowledges that have been like

footprints in relation to social work practice; we know that Pacific ways of knowing and being have a role to play in social work practice, but perhaps they have been just out of reach. The authors in this book have articulated, and therefore rejuvenated, the meaningfulness of Pacific Indigenous knowledges to social work practice. It is understood that embracing a Pacific worldview is often complex and conflictual due to organisational systems and structures that are not yet in a place to recognise the relevancy of the Indigenous Pacific voice in social work practice. It is therefore encouraging to consider that this publication can be a platform for Pacific practitioners, educators, and researchers to mobilise and begin *talanoa* about aspects of past and current social work systems that do not work for Pacific communities.

The book was designed to assist social work practitioners in gaining better insight to a Pacific worldview. For myself as a Pacific social work academic, there is a great sense of fulfilment and pride at what a great accomplishment the book is, and that Pacific and non-Pacific contributions have been made with a view to being more able to serve families and communities in the Pacific diaspora. Although the publication is a mark of celebration, the book also raises questions to be further explored. How can Pacific social workers lobby for effective policy? How can Pacific social workers utilise empirical data to inform research and practice? How can Pacific social workers contribute to ongoing professional development after graduation and in practice? How can Pacific social workers assist other non-Pacific practitioners to integrate Pacific cultural competency across practice, policy and research? Lastly, how do Pacific social workers maintain their Pacific-ness?

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