

Sāmoan Elders' Understanding of Age, Ageing and Wellness

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Abstract

Globally, the health and wellness of ageing populations are topical as people live longer. The Pacific population in New Zealand is similarly ageing. However, little is known about their health, meaning research on their wellness is sparse. Equally, there is a dearth of knowledge about Pacific people's ageing experiences as migrants in New Zealand. This study explored Sāmoan elders' understanding of age, ageing and wellness. It employed a qualitative approach through a Sāmoan lens using talanoa with four focus groups and eight individual interviews with participants aged between 63 and 84 years. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that Sāmoan elders had their own words and terms to describe age, ageing and wellness that related to fa'aSāmoa (Sāmoan way of living). These words were spiritually inspired and respectful, signalling different age stages (matua, sinasina, tofa) and wellness references (soifua manuia/maua/lelei). The qualitative approach through talanoa was effective in capturing elders' understandings, an important consideration for future ageing and wellness research with older Pacific groups. Aligning these uniquely Sāmoan understandings with local policy and service provision for older Pacific people, will facilitate New Zealand health authorities' obligation to ensure all New Zealanders receive culturally appropriate services. These findings provide the foundation for an older Pacific people's wellness model to be utilised in policy and planning for older Pacific people living in New Zealand.

Keywords: Gerontology, Sāmoan elders and wellness, Pacific elders.

Introduction

Worldwide, people are living longer (World Health Organization [WHO] 2012). New Zealand's ageing population has rapidly increased over the last 20 years (Ministry of Health [MOH] 2011). Like their international counterparts, New Zealand health authorities and social services recognise an ageing population's social and economic benefits (Harvey and Thurnwald 2009). Older people bring years of lived experience,

life lessons, wisdom, and the passing down of family traditions, culture, and knowledge; a view shared and held by Pacific and non-western cultures who cherish and value their older loved ones and family members (Durie 1999; Kukutai 2006; Levy 1996; Levy et al. 2002; Nguyen and Seal 2014). Sāmoans have a long, rich history of respect (*fa'aaloalo*) for senior members of their church, family and community (Shore 1998; Tui Atua 2003 2005) that transcends generations and geographical locations (Ihara and Vakalahi 2011, 2012; Lilomaiava Silulu 2021). However, little attention has been given to the growing ageing Sāmoan population's experiences in New Zealand. Their understanding of ageing and wellness can offer valuable insights into a differing experience from dominant views. Sāmoans 65 years and over comprise three per cent, compared to 12 per cent of all New Zealanders (Statistics New Zealand 2013). Given that 4.7 per cent of the Pacific population is 65 years and over (MOH 2014), Sāmoans account for the largest Pacific group for this age bracket and primarily reflect the Pacific ageing population living in New Zealand. A qualitative thematic approach and *talanoa* were employed to explore elders' understanding of age, ageing and wellness.

The Concept of Wellness

The concept of wellness promotes positive good health. It is a shift from the medical model of health that focuses on disease and moves towards a more positive and holistic understanding of health and wellbeing. The WHO states, "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity" (WHO 1948: 100). The definition acknowledges the whole person's physical, mental and social wellbeing. Furthermore, the focus on disease and its treatment, typical of traditional medical models, is secondary to a more holistic approach to health. Smith et al. (2006) defines wellness as "the optimal state of health of individuals and groups" (p. 5) based on two principles: individuals reaching their full physical, psychological, social, spiritual and economic potential and individuals fulfilling their duties within the family, community and other settings.

New Zealand health strategies recognise the need to view older people more positively rather than from the deficit approaches often applied to them. In 2013, the New Zealand government launched the Ageing Well National Science Challenge (AWNSC) – *Kia eke kairangi ki te taikaiamātuatanga* to enhance the country's capacity to address the growing ageing population (Baxter 2016; Doolan-Noble et al. 2019) and their future needs (Parr-Brownlie et al. 2020). Now in its second tranche (funding round) for 2019 to 2024, it is focussed on promoting a more holistic

approach to ageing populations, their family/whānau and community, including the coordination of effective and meaningful services and activities (AWNSC 2018, 2020)

New Zealand Ageing Well Studies

From New Zealand ageing well studies (Doolan-Noble et al. 2019; Parr-Brownlie et al. 2020; Tautolo et al. 2017), the health and wellbeing inequities experienced by older Pacific people have been made more apparent, and the need to address these disparities is immediate, especially with numbers of older Pacific people expected to more than double from 21,300 in 2018 to 46,700 by 2034 (Neville et al. 2022). The New Zealand government's launch of the AWNSC in 2013 increased research capacity on ageing populations as a means to achieving positive and healthy ageing. Nevertheless, the results translating into ageing well studies remain scarce (Parr-Brownlie et al. 2020).

Pacific Ageing Well Studies

Pacific elders' wellness experiences are slowly gaining momentum, with a small growing body of research exploring Pacific elders' views and experiences of wellbeing through a Pacific worldview (Neville et al. 2022; Tamasese et al. 2014; Tautolo et al. 2017). These studies highlight the widespread issues encountered by ageing Pacific people living in New Zealand. There are commonalities between older Māori and older Pacific people. However, older Pacific people's experiences of age, ageing and wellness are more akin and reflective of migrant populations living in New Zealand (Fairbairn-Dunlop and Makisi 2003; Statistics New Zealand 2018; Tamasese et al. 2014). Ageing Pacific people are still considered a migrant group (Parr-Brownlie et al. 2020; Tamasese et al. 2014) with strong cultural ties to the homeland (Statistics New Zealand 2018; Tamasese et al. 2014). While these studies provide baseline information on Pacific people's views and experiences of ageing, little is known about older Sāmoan people's meaningful experiences of ageing well. Given the global interest in ageing populations and wellness interventions to improve their ageing experiences, an exploration of age, ageing and wellness in an ageing Sāmoan population living in New Zealand is warranted.

Ageing Sāmoan Population in New Zealand

Older Sāmoans comprise almost 50 per cent of New Zealand's ageing Pacific population (Statistics New Zealand 2018). This group is still considered a migrant population within New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand 2018), and they are likely to maintain strong cultural ties and responsibilities (e.g., chiefly titles and customary

land ownership) to their homelands. It is important to explore whether and how these 'customary' fa'aSāmoa responsibilities and other factors shape this group's notions of age, ageing and wellness.

Aim

This study explored Sāmoan elders' understanding of age, ageing and wellness.

Research Design and Methods

A qualitative thematic approach explored older Sāmoans' understandings of age, ageing and wellness. Two overarching questions guided this study: 1. What are Sāmoan elders' understanding of age and ageing? 2. What are Sāmoan elders' understanding of wellness

Research Method

The Pacific method *talanoa* was used to collect the Sāmoan elders' perspectives and experiences. *Talanoa* is an oral tradition important to some Polynesian vernaculars, such as Sāmoan and Tongan, involving face-to-face formal and informal conversations. It enables and encourages the sharing of knowledge (Otsuka 2006; Vaioleti 2006) and is used within Sāmoan homes by parents and children, *matai* (chiefs) and families, villages, and churches (Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea 2014). Its use as the data collection method with Sāmoan elders was deemed the most culturally appropriate approach for this study. Two data collection methods, *talanoa lautele* (group meetings) and *talanoa taitoatasi* (individual interviews), were used to obtain a mix of knowledge as shared in group and individual *talanoa* (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). The group *talanoa* was to establish a broad spectrum of views to form a baseline of understandings to be more deeply explored in the individual *talanoa* (Creswell, 2012)

Study Population and Recruitment

The study population focus was elders living within their family's ambit (with adult children and extended living arrangements) or living independently.

Inclusion Criteria

The age group focus was sixty years and above. Pacific people have a lower life expectancy (males 74.5 years and females 78.7 years) compared to the general New Zealand population (males 79.5 years and females 83.2 years) (Statistics New Zealand 2016). Sāmoans account for almost half of Pacific people aged 65 years and

above (Statistics New Zealand 2016; Pasifika Futures 2017), and significant growth is projected in this age group over the next 15 years. Participants had to have lived in New Zealand for at least five years, which was considered a reasonable length of time to give an account of their understanding of ageing and wellness as migrants living in New Zealand.

Exclusion Criteria

Elders residing in rest homes and care facilities were excluded as the focus was on Samoan elders who lived in the family ambit (with adult children and extended living arrangements) or lived independently

Recruitment

Church and community groups providing activities for Sāmoan elders were approached to discuss the aim and rationale of the research. Co-ordinators of these groups distributed the study's information sheets written in English and Sāmoan to their membership. Interested group members were invited to contact the researcher directly if they had any queries or wished to participate in the study. Alternatively, they informed their co-ordinator, who contacted the researcher on their behalf. Following an informed consent process, the researcher arranged the most appropriate date, time, and location for the group *talanoa* with the group's co-ordinator. In this study, *talanoa* took place with four focus groups. Following each of the four group *talanoa*, an invitation was extended to two participants from each focus group to discuss the topics in more depth via an individual *talanoa*. Individual interviews were then undertaken with two people from the four focus groups (n=8). In total, 20 older adults participated, and these people were aged 63 to 82 years. *Talanoa* focused on gathering accounts of older Sāmoans' everyday encounters that contributed to their understanding and experiences of being well, including their reflections on age and ageing. Table 1 and Table 2 shows group and individual participants profiles

Table 1. Group talanoa participant profiles

Group number	Group code	Gender	Age	Marital status	Length of time in NZ (years)
Group 1 Mixed	G1M1	Male	79	Married	20
	G1F1	Female	76	Widow	4
	G1F2	Female	69	Married	**
	G1F3	Female	79	Married	**
	G1M2	Male	75	Married	45
	G1M3	Male	76	**	**
	G1F4	Female	63	Married	**
Group 2 Mixed	G2M1	Male	67	Married	40
	G2M2	Male	69	Married	49
	G2F1	Female	63	Married	40
	G2F2	Female	72	Married	49
	G2F3	Female	66	Married	**
Group 3 Male	G3M1	Male	64	Married	48
	G3M2	Male	76	Married	**
	G3M3	Male	72	Married	8
	G3M4	Male	82	Married	44
Group 4 Female	G4F1	Female	61	Married	48
	G4F2	Female	73	Married	44
	G4F3	Female	68	Married	**
	G4F4	Female	69	Married	8

Key: ** Information missing and/or not specified

Table 2. Individual talanoa participant profiles

Individual code	Gender	Age	Marital status	Length of time in NZ (years)
Marina (GP)	Female	71	Married	13
Timoteo (GP)	Male	74	Married	13
Sieni (GP)	Female	63	Married	45
Aleka (GP)	Male	64	Married	47
*Talalelei	Female	67	Widow	19
*Paulo	Male	76	Widower	60

*Alofa	Female	82	Single	54
Iakopo (GP)	Male	77	Married	45
Key: (GP) = Group participant, * = New participant				

Data Collection

The *talanoa* were conducted in the participants' preferred language of Sāmoa and were audio recorded. All *talanoa* was transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. Group *talanoa* lasted two to three and a half hours, reflecting participants' interest in the topic. Individual *talanoa* ranged between one hour and a quarter to two hours. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process, protecting participants' privacy.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Braun and Clark's (2013) thematic analysis (TA). TA allowed a systematic process to generate codes and themes from participants' *talanoa* (Clarke 2016). Following the translation of *talanoa* transcriptions from Sāmoa to English, the participants' *talanoa* was read and re-read before coding and identifying tentative themes. Once themes were identified and named, relevant extracts were selected to support the themes in the study findings below.

AUTEC Ethics Approval

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) granted ethics approval.

Findings: Sāmoan Understandings of Age, Ageing and Wellness

This qualitative study exploring older Sāmoans' understandings of age, ageing and wellness while living in New Zealand answered two overarching questions: 1. What are Sāmoan elders' understandings of age and ageing? 2. What are Sāmoan elders' understandings of wellness? Key findings were that older Sāmoans had their own concepts and understandings of age, ageing and wellness that were directly related to *fa'aSāmoa* and reflected a Sāmoan worldview.

Age and Ageing

The most used words by participants to describe age and ageing were: *matua* (older), *sinasina* (silvery or white [hair]), *tōfā* (wisdom), *Toea'ina* (old man) and *Lo'omatua* (old woman) or *'Olomatua*. *Matua*, *sinasina* and *tōfā* were often combined with other terms to extend the meaning; for example, *tausi* (take care of or look after), when used in conjunction with *matua*, forms the phrase '*matua tausī*', which means an older person who is being cared for or looked after.

Toea'ina and *Lo'omatua* or *'Olomatua*, loosely translated as the old man and old woman, were common terms participants used to describe more senior people and

distinguish between male and female. *Toea'ina* consists of two words. 'Toe' means nearly, and 'ina' means you have reached or arrived. When you put them together, it means the old man. 'Olomatua is used interchangeably with *Lo'omatua* as they both mean old woman. The term 'Olomatua, can be used to refer to an older woman, as Paulo, a widower, 76 years old at the time, shared:

'Olomatua or Lo'omatua, there is not much difference. 'Olomatua has two words, 'olo' means tower or fort, and 'matua' the longer you stay, the elder [sic] you are. That means old, aye? When you put these two words together, it means something that has long been built up. In the Holy Bible, the Tower of Babel. 'Olomatua is likened to someone who is old. Loomatua means you have not reached it; you have not become old. 'Loo' is like a proverb to a noun that helps explain the last word 'matua'. So 'loo' means they have not reached 'matua' old age.

The gender-specific words' *toea'ina* and 'olomatua relate to elders' place and role as they have reached a particular stage of staying at home, the status of old age, or being older.

Matua

Matua is a mature person, an elder, or an older person was used in combination with other words to signify different ageing stages, for example, *tagata matua* (mature and/or older person) and *matua tausī* (older person who is cared for). *Matua* was not age-bound but related more to a person's behaviour or way of acting. A macron 'ā' added the word *mātua* changes to mean parent. *Tua'ā* is the polite term for parent and was used in conjunction with *mātutua* to describe older/elderly parents as *tua'ā mātutua*. A seventy-two-year-old G3M2 was married and father to 13 adult children at the time of *talanoa* shared:

From an older person comes good advice for the family. A person is mature physically, mentally and spiritually, and that is where wisdom or farsightedness comes from. Old people are the same word if you fa'aSāmoa the word 'years'. It is the same as the old person; similar terms are used to refer to a person who is advanced in years.

Seventy-nine-year-old G1M1 at the time of *talanoa* had three adult children and several grandchildren living with him and his wife added:

Mātua is the word for parent: The formal respectful word for a parent is tua'ā. Tua'ā is what a person who has children is called. Tagata matua also describes a mature (matua) person, a coming of age in the fa'aSāmoa.

The 72 years old father further share that:

The pathway to leadership is to serve. It means a person/young male who serves well and has matured; he is bestowed a chiefly title (G3M2).

Tagata matua translates as a person (*tagata*)old/mature (*matua*). A term with multiple meanings in different contexts can refer to different stages of age and ageing. Participants described the rite of passage to becoming a *matai* as someone becoming an adult, a person of maturity through their service [to *'āiga, nu'ū*]. *Tagata matua* also references people's position within their immediate and wider family. A 63 years old female participant G2F1 at the time of *talanoa* shared her experience as a *tagata matua*:

Because I am a woman and I have nephews that are matai's, they still look at me as the older person in the family even though they have matai titles. Because I am older [than my titled nephews], I am respected as the older person in the family.

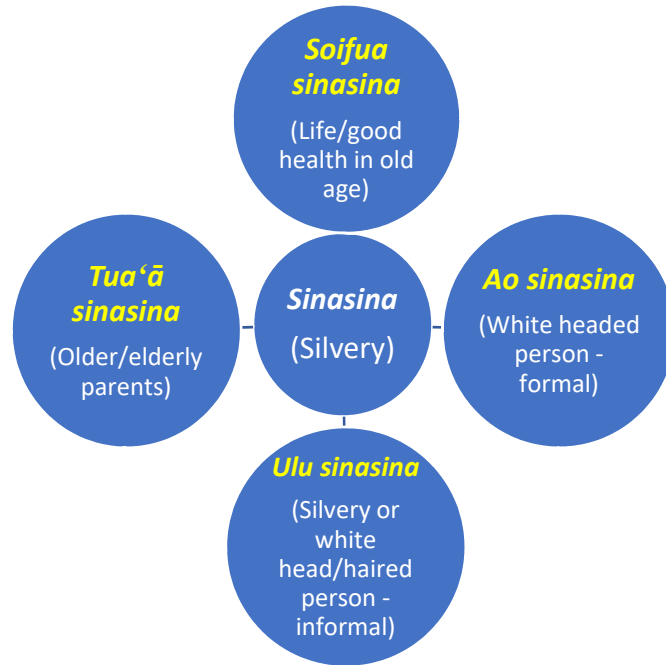
Tagata matua places significance on the eldest siblings, who hold authoritative roles regardless of their gender or being a *matai* or not. Seventy-five-year-old G1M2 shared the term *Matua tausī* to describe another ageing stage. It translates as taking care of the older person. *Matua* means old, and *tausī* means to care for or look after.

It's a person who is cared for, often assisted when fed, can no longer walk, has three or four generations, and receives home care. Because of that word, many people often use it but do not understand its meaning.

Sinasina

Sinasina refers to the whitening or silvering of hair. Sāmoan elders used the term with *tua'ā, soifua,ao* (head – formal word), and *ulu* (head/hair – informal word). Figure 1 shows *sinasina* as the root word and the word combinations Sāmoan elders used to describe age and ageing. Elders' views indicated that silvery or white hair reflected a lifetime of *fa'aSāmoa* knowledge and cultural capital learnt, practised, and passed on.

Figure 1. *Sinasina* and the word combinations Sāmoan elders used to describe age and ageing



Tua'ā sināsina formally describes older parents. Its meaning is more symbolic, depicting older Sāmoans as wise individuals holding a wealth of knowledge. A 79 years old male participant G1M1 shared:

[tua'ā] is the respectful term for parents. Older parents (tua'ā sināsina) are older people who have lived many years, and their hair is white.

Sixty-four-year-old Aleka described *soifua sināsina* as a stage he admired:

O le soifua sināsina, it seems we always look up to, we revere people who are getting older and wise.

Soifua sināsina describes the life and good health of an older person. The oldest participant at the time, 84-year-old G3M4, shared the term *Ao sināsina* is a respected and admired stage of life. *Ao*, the formal word for head, and *sināsina* – white formally references the older person.

A white-headed person is a person who is old in life and who is honoured in Sāmoa, especially in Sāmoa. Respect is due to the person whose hair is white and advanced in years, in all circumstances, for the years that have passed and the years to come.

Timoteo, 74 years old at the time, was married with 13 adult children and shared the term *Ulu sinasina*: *ulu* translates as head or hair, a colloquial term.

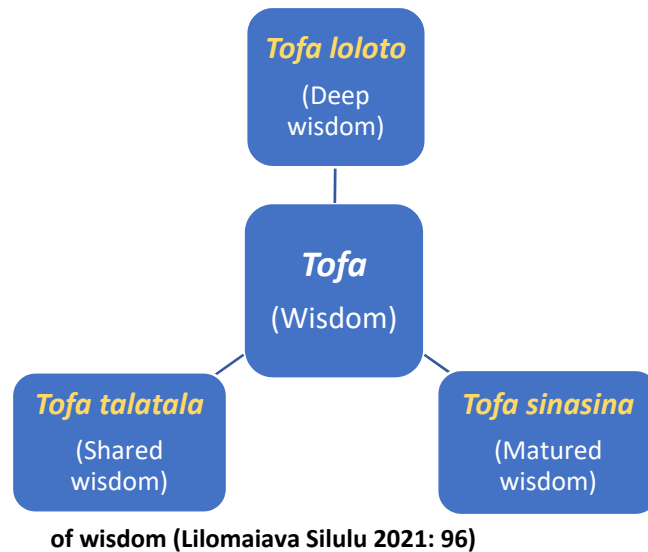
White head/hair (*Ulu sinasina*) is a very old person (*tagata mātutua*) who knows the entire village's history and honorifics.

Sinasina was a feature most associated with ageing and older people. However, participants highlighted a point of difference in its strong link to knowledge, a profound cultural and genealogical wisdom that came with age and experience.

Tofa

Tofa participants used to describe the wisdom and foresight associated with ageing. *Tofa* means sleep. *Moe* is its informal equivalent, and it also means goodbye. *Tofa* is also used to refer to the views and perspectives of the paramount chief, while *moe* references the opinions of the orator (see Tui Atua, 2005, p. 13). Participants used *tofa* to refer to the wisdom of the elders and guardians of Sāmoan knowledge. Elders combined it with *sinasina* and *loloto* to signal the depth and breadth of elders' wisdom. Figure 2 shows *tofa* and how the Sāmoan elders used it to describe wisdom.

Figure 2. *Tofa* and the word combinations Sāmoa elders used to describe different types



A seventy-six-year-old G2M1 at the time of the focus group shared this view about *Tofa loloto*:

There is deep wisdom. Those who are older have deep wisdom and white-headed wisdom (tofa sinasina).

On the other hand, Paulo, a 76 years old male with 60 years living in New Zealand, shared and extended the meaning of *tofa loloto*:

[Tofa loloto] is like a matai who adequately understands the culture. You can hear the beautiful introduction coming through when they utter an oration

Tofa loloto translates as deep wisdom. *Loloto* means deep, having a depth of wisdom.

Paulo also shared the term *Tofa tatala*, explaining that it is similar but also distinct from the terms *tofa sinasina* and *tofa loloto*:

Tofa sinasina is similar to tofa loloto and tofa tatala. Tofa tatala means one holds much knowledge, but they close it off and cannot open it (tatala). It is similar to the popular phrase, "Open up your basket of knowledge". 'Open up your basket of treasures' for there is much that you know. Another person wants you to share your treasures.

Paulo describes *tofa* as treasures some Samoan elders possess but cannot share. Perhaps Paulo indicated the difference between the commonly held and the sacred knowledge that could not be shared in public forums, as Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo (2001) suggest that

Tofa was often used by participants in combination with sinasina, loloto and mamao to describe an older person with a head full of white hair. It signified great wisdom and foresight due to the many years they have lived and the experience and knowledge they have acquired. Tofa tatala is a less common term to describe some older people as possessing tofa (treasures) but cannot convey or tatala. Tamasese (2002) references elders' knowledge as sacred and only available and passed down to direct descendants.

Formal Expressions of Age and Ageing

Few participants used three terms or phrases to reference elders who are very advanced in age: *Toe ulutaia*, *pegapega* – elders needing assistance and care with everyday living and *Ua afu le soifua* and *Ua pulapula lagoto le la* – elders nearing the end of their lives.

Toe Ulutaia

Toe ulutaia elders shared to describe someone who is very advanced in age. G4F2 shared her view of the term:

Toe ulutaia is the oldest person in the entire village. Usually, they are over 80. These people are very important in the village.

Timoteo added his understanding of *toe ulutaia* using the analogy of a ripening *ulu* (breadfruit):

It is like a breadfruit tree. When the breadfruit is old and becomes large, its skin becomes mature. When the breadfruit matures, it becomes hard enough to be used as timber to build houses - *toe ulutaia*. It is what they compare older people to because they know everything there is to know about the village. They understand how the village functions—*Toe ulutaia*).

Toe ulutaia pointed to an even greater respect for these elders due to their long lives and status as knowledge carriers.

Pegapega

G1M2 was the only one to share the term *pegapega*. The term signals the age and stage of being very old and needing to be bathed.

Pegapega is the Sāmoan term that applies to bathing a very old person. It is a Sāmoan term that many people in New Zealand do not understand, but *pegapega* is the bathing of an older person separate from the rest of the family household. These more senior members are bathed in the privacy of their house/residence in Sāmoa. The bathing water is prepared, along with a board for them to sit on and brought to their bedside to bath them because they can no longer bath themselves. This care is called *pegapega*.

Ua afu le soifua and Ua pulapula lagoto le soifua

Iakopo shared these phrases, describing them as the last stage of ageing and before death: *Ua afu le soifua* and *Ua pulapula lagoto le soifua*. These phrases liken the lives of elders nearing death to the resplendence of the sun setting and speak of the beauty, love, honour, and great respect Samoans have for ageing and older people.

The phrase '*Ua afu le soifua*' refers to an elder who is advanced in years and has served his family for a long time. It is a phrase to describe the very old whose lives resemble a sunset. They are still alive but are very old. These are Sāmoan words used to refer to such people as their life is like the glow of the setting sun.

The Sāmoan proverbs *Ua afu le soifua* and *Ua pulapula lagoto o le soifua* are all terms and phrases that are culturally specific and respectful Sāmoan descriptions associated with being very advanced in age. Participants indicated that the Sāmoan terms served as markers or divisions related to ageing.

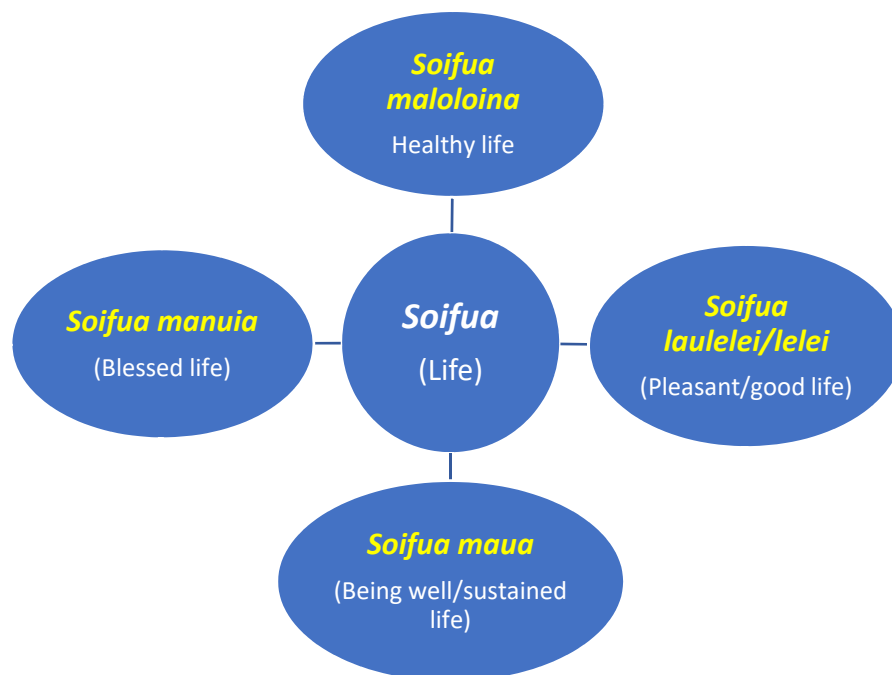
These terms encapsulate the deep cultural respect and meanings ascribed to terms such as *Tua’ā sinasina*, *Tofa loloto* and *Toe ulutaia*.

Soifua – Wellness

Soifua means to live, have good health and wellbeing, and always precedes the other words to describe different degrees of wellness. Elders used five common words and phrases to describe wellness: *soifua* (life, health), *mālōlōina* (being healthy, wellness), *manuia* (happy, blessed, prosperous), *laulelei* (smooth, even) and *maua* (get, obtain). Figure 3 shows the relationship between *soifua* and the word pairings elders used to describe wellness.

Figure 3. *Soifua* and the word pairings Sāmoan elders used to describe wellness

(Lilomaiva Silulu 2021: 109)



Soifua mālōlōina translates as health. Sixty-six-year-old G2F3 expressed her view on *soifua mālōlōina*:

If you live a healthy life, you will be happy. However, if you don’t know how to live well and healthy, you will not be happy; if the body is healthy, you are happy.

Another important term spoke about is *soifua laulelei*, meaning living a smooth, even and satisfying life, according to participant G2M1. Moreover, *Soifua lelei* and *soifua manuia* translate to live well, to be good and happy. G3M3, 72 years old at the time, shared his view of the terms:

As I see M3 and M1 [group members], M3 [72 years old at the time] is living well. Because of our lives now, we take a lot of medication; however, if a person is wise in looking after their health now, those days are gone but right now, if people are wise in taking care of their health, they will live a good life.

Malo le soifua and *lagi e mama* are Sāmoan salutations that illustrate a culture entrenched in wellness ideals. For example, *Malo le soifua* translates as congratulations on living or life; *lagi e mama* is synonymous with *soifua* and translates as clear and cloudless skies used to congratulate someone on having a life free of troubles. These greetings offer those they meet 'good health and life'. The words and language themselves are empowering words that speak life. The youngest participant, 64-year-old G3M1, shared his experience and knowledge of the Sāmoan greeting:

Greeting each other with a wish of good health is very important. When you wish good health, you first congratulate them for being well, which is very important to us. Even from the first greeting, it's expressing gratitude for your strength or good health and life (*soifua lelei*) and clear skies (*lagi e mama*); these are words Sāmoans use to greet another Sāmoan. It is a praise of good health. Congratulations on your smooth life, your clean life. The meaning of those phrases is that life is good. Pure life, obtained life, is life received from the Lord.

As noted, *soifua* is the Sāmoan word for live and good health. Sāmoan elders used the word *soifua* with *mālōlōina* (health and wellbeing), *manuia* (blessed and well), *laulelei* (smooth and satisfying) and *maua* (received and sustained) to describe wellness. G3M1 explained *Malo le soifua ma le lagi e mama* as a greeting of good health to another Sāmoan when you meet. He further shared the salutations *Malo le soifua laulelei*, *Malo le soifua maua* and *Malo le lagi e mama*, described as all having the same premise of living a good life. Sāmoan concepts hold multiple meanings depending on their context. Furthermore, these concepts can be used informally and formally in different settings despite ageing.

Discussion

The Sāmoan elders in this study have adapted to the New Zealand way of life, yet their understandings of age, ageing and wellness remained firmly grounded in the *fa'aSāmoa* worldview.

Age and Ageing

The terms and the language participants used to capture and describe ageing concepts, the Sāmoan values of *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and honour were embedded in the terms and the language. The words elders shared pointed to levels of respect

and behavioural qualities, which reflect the overall revered place of older people in the *fa'aSāmoa*. The formal language used further displayed the distinction of elder roles and responsibilities, signalling their roles as knowledge bearers – custodians of cultural knowledge – coupled with their lived experience as migrants, their place and position in the immediate, extended family, community, and people, as in the *fa'aSāmoa*.

The elders' words signalled a set of values, ideals, relationships and behaviours of respect and status, as in the *fa'aSāmoa*. These terms align with the categories Tamasese et al. (2014) outlined. For example, *mātua* is used when talking about one's parents, while *tua'ā* is the respectful and formal word referring to another's parents. Another example, *Lo'omatua*, was commonly used for older women, whereas *'Olomatua* were accorded special status and recognition.

Elders' role was to safeguard, share and pass on the family *gafa* (heritage, identity, and lineage knowledge) to the next generations. Commonly used terms such as *tofa loloto* (deep wisdom), *sinasina* (silvery haired) and *toe ulutaia* (breadfruit metaphor) reinforced elders' roles as the custodians of cultural knowledge and family history and cemented their place as community leaders. Shore (1998) proposed different terms to distinguish those elders who could not care for themselves from those who were independent. Participants also shared words that made similar distinctions: *pegapega*, *ua afu le soifua*, and *ua pulapula lagoto le soifua* were phrases referencing a group of significantly older Sāmoans nearing the end of their lives, though they were highly respected, loved and looked after by *'āiga* (family) in respect and recognition of their *tautua* (service). Shore also found that people were sometimes classified as 'old' when they became dependent on their children, irrespective of their actual age or appearance. At the time of the study, the elders were not reliant or dependent on their children for their everyday needs, nor did they require assistance with self-care. Most of the older participants were physically active, except for two males, one legally blind and always accompanied by his wife, and another male who needed support when walking. Despite these participants' impairments, it did not hinder their everyday activities.

The terms identified above were deeply respectful, despite extensive global research on older adults' self-perceptions of ageing being influenced by their negative experiences as older people (Isaacs and Bearison 1986 cited in Levy 1996). These participants' understandings of age and ageing were not affected by youth. Shore's (1998) older study participants reinforce this view as they were "accorded respect by juniors by virtue of their age, their experiences and their wisdom" (p. 111). Further research is warranted into Sāmoan youths' understanding of Sāmoan

elders and whether these contribute to negative self-perceptions and influence future negative and ageist behaviours.

The Sāmoan elders' words and terms for age and ageing build and add depth to Tamasese et al.'s (2014) study on Pacific perspectives on ageing in New Zealand. It further highlights the importance of allowing minority and migrant populations on the periphery to determine their own definitions of health and wellbeing to optimise their wellness experience (Durie 1999; Kukutai 2006). Future ageing policies should include the age and ageing references identified by participants in this study when undertaking any planning or practice initiatives involving older Pacific peoples in New Zealand. An ethnic-specific response to government and health agencies calls for more ethnic-specific research to facilitate providing culturally appropriate health and social services (MOH 2007, 2008) for older populations (Kukutai 2006; Parr-Brownlie et al. 2020; Tamasese et al. 2014; Wiles et al. 2011).

Soifua

The Essence of Wellness

Sāmoan participants also used a variety of terms to describe health and wellness. *Soifua* described participants' understanding of wellness. It captured the holistic relationship between the elements of spirituality and mental, physical, and social resources, which fits the Pacific worldview. *Fa'aSāmoa* ideals, behaviours and practices culturally informed elders' views and experiences of wellness. Their holistic view of wellness was evident in their everyday language, such as "*Malo le soifua ma le lagi e mama*", a phrase commonly used in daily greetings to offer praise and a prayer for good health to those one encounters.

While much of the global research on getting older focuses on a medical model of ageing (Bassuk et al. 1999; Bishop et al. 2010; Gates and Walker 2014; Stranks 2007), participants' feelings of wellness were not 'purely medical' but all-encompassing of their spiritual, mental, physical and social environments. Sāmoan elders' wellness was achieved when there was harmony in their lives between spiritual, mental, physical and social elements (Fairbairn-Dunlop et al. 2014; Lui 2007; Pulotu-Endemann 2001; Tui Atua 2007, 2009, 2014; Tu'itahi 2005).

In sum, elders' understandings of wellness were holistic and culturally informed. The central importance of this holistic view of wellness was also evident in the everyday language used. As noted, these elders coupled *soifua* and other words to describe various wellness stages. For example, *soifua mālōlōina* was living a healthy life; *soifua manuia* was living a happy and blessed life; *soifua lelei* and *laulelei* were

living a smooth and steady life, and *soifua maua* was a praise of living a long life and many years.

Limitations and Strengths

Limitations

This research did not include older Pacific people living in rest homes and care facilities, which warrants further investigation. The Auckland region provided the primary research site; therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to represent the understanding of all older Sāmoans living in New Zealand. Furthermore, the perspectives are limited to those older people living within the family's ambit.

Strengths

Talanoa Research Methodology

Applying a qualitative approach was a pivotal and important factor in capturing the views and experiences of Sāmoan elders. The *talanoa* methodology allowed participants to tell their stories and express their thoughts and experiences freely and in a culturally appropriate way. Furthermore, all participants were given the opportunity to share their perspectives. This holistic approach, incorporating spirituality and family, effectively engaged participants and consequently benefits future research, planning and policy in older Pacific peoples.

Conclusion

This study advances local and global knowledge on ageing and wellness studies by highlighting a Pacific way to conceptualise age, ageing and wellness. In contributing to the local research on ageing and wellness, these Sāmoan elders' views give a different experience and level of understanding of age, ageing and wellness whilst living in New Zealand. Their understanding, deeply imbued with spirituality and culture, challenges mainstream notions of age, ageing, and wellness while highlighting Sāmoan elders' significant roles within their church, family, and community.

In challenging the dominant health models and cultures, which do not fit the needs of migrant Pacific people living in New Zealand, these findings can help inform health and social service provision for older Pacific. Further, aligning these understandings with local policy and service provision for older Pacific people, will facilitate New Zealand health authorities' obligation to ensure all New Zealanders

receive culturally appropriate services. Finally, the findings provide the foundation for an older Pacific people's wellness model to be utilised in policy and planning for older Pacific people living in New Zealand.

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