

## Fijian and Fijian-Indian

### Background

Indigenous Fijians are ethnically classified as Melanesian, however their social and political organisation is more closely aligned to the Polynesian cultures.<sup>1</sup> Fiji is an independent Pacific nation.

There are three main ethnic groups in the Fijian population: the iTaukei (indigenous original settlers of Fiji), indigenous Rotuman people, and Fijian-Indian. The Fijian-Indian population are descendants of labourers from East India who began entering Fiji in 1879<sup>2</sup>. The Fijian Constitution that came into force in September 2013 is published in iTaukei, English and Hindi languages. The Constitution acknowledges the indigenous rights of Rotuman and iTaukei to customary land, cultures, customs and values. While Fijian-Indians are recognised as full citizens of Fiji, they do not have ownership rights to customary land, although they can lease it<sup>3</sup>.

The last Census conducted in Fiji was carried out in 2017 which showed a total population of 884,887<sup>4</sup>.

### Fijians in Aotearoa

The general Fijian population in Aotearoa experienced significant growth between 2001 and 2013. The growth has been more significant for the Fijian-Indian largely due to the displacement effects of the political coups in the country.

Fijian			Fijian-Indian		
2001	2006	2013	2001	2006	2013
7041	9,861	14,445	1,983	5,616	10,926

In 2013, by place of birth, Fijians were the largest Pacific group living in Aotearoa. Around 60.2% of Fijians (8,577 people) excluding Fijian-Indians, were born overseas<sup>5</sup>.

The 'Fijian' category used in the Aotearoa Census count, is likely to have non- iTaukei as well as iTaukei as it is a self-identifying count. The figures do not however include all Fijian-Indians (classified under Asian), Rotuman, Asian, European and other Fijians as indicated by the much bigger 'Fiji Born' number of 52,755 (Census 2013).

The groups of focus in Va'aifetu are the two largest groups, iTaukei the original settlers, and the Fijian-Indians. The Rotuman group is the other indigenous group in Fiji but they have a very small population (783) in Aotearoa<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica. Retrieved 27/12/2018 from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Fiji-republic-Pacific-Ocean/People#ref513672>

<sup>2</sup> Jacqueline Leckirefe. (n.d). *Fijians - The Fijian community*, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Retrieved 18/10/2015 from <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/fijians/page-1>

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Fiji. Retrieved from <http://www.pacii.org/fj/Fiji-Constitution-English-2013.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Fiji Bureau of Statistics. (2018). *Fiji Statistics at a Glance*. Retrieved 18/10/2018 from <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/>

<sup>5</sup> Statistics New Zealand. (n.d). *2013 Census ethnic group profiles: Fijian. Key facts*. Retrieved from [http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request\\_value=24714&parent\\_id=24706&tabname=#24714](http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24714&parent_id=24706&tabname=#24714)

## Language

Fijian, Fiji Hindi (local version of Hindi) and English are the main languages spoken in Fijian homes, but they are not the only ones. Often the different ethnic groups have familiarity with each other's languages. It is not uncommon for iTaukei to speak a bit of Hindi, and vice versa. Integration into Aotearoa society and its education system has decreased the use of indigenous languages particularly among NZ-born Fijians and Fijian-Indians<sup>7</sup>. Fijian Indians have their own version of Hindi referred to commonly as Fijian Hindi which varies from the original language<sup>8</sup>.

Like other migrant groups, Fijian families face ongoing challenges to their traditional values, spiritual beliefs, cultures and languages in Aotearoa. Acculturation has affected fundamental aspects of family hierarchy, gender roles, and the status of the child. Like other Pacific groups, family and faith-based communities are key bastions for cultural identity.

## Socio-Economic

Fijians are more likely to be self-employed or employers than other Pacific Islanders. Fijian-Indians are highly visible in Aotearoa communities running small businesses such as dairies, clothing stores and taxis. Wealth creation, high educational achievement, high positions in occupations and strong socio-economic standing are common aspirations for families and individuals.

Fijian families are at different stages of integration into Aotearoa society. Many are recent settlers in comparison to the more populous Polynesian groups, particularly the Fijian-Indians who left Fiji in large numbers due to political instability, loss of livelihoods and threats to safety over the last 20 years.

## iTaukei – Original Settlers of Fiji

The majority (89.1%, 12,873) of people who identify as 'Fijian' in Aotearoa live in the North Island, while a smaller number (10.9%, 1,572) live in the South Island. Most (88.2%, 12,747) live in urban areas. The Auckland region has the highest concentration (58.8%, 8,493), followed by Wellington region (9.3%, 1,338), and the Waikato Region (7.6%, 1,092). Of those living in the Auckland Region, the majority live around Henderson-Massey (13.1%), Mangere-Otahuhu (11.1%), and Manurewa (10.9%) areas<sup>9</sup>.

The number of Fijian children that come to Oranga Tamariki notice has not traditionally been high. When considering a cultural approach to working with Fijian families, Oranga Tamariki has sourced from *Vuale Doka Sautu* - a Fijian cultural framework to address family violence

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics New Zealand. (n.d). *2013 Census ethnic group profiles: Rotuman. Population and geography*. Retrieved 26/9/2015 from [http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request\\_value=24721&tabname=Populationandgeography](http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24721&tabname=Populationandgeography)

<sup>7</sup> Leckie, J. (July 2012). Fijians - Fijian culture in New Zealand. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand. Retrieved 26/9/2015 from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/fijians/page-4>.

<sup>8</sup> Manju Verma, CYF practitioner and Fijian-Indian cultural advisor. (9/6/2014). Personal communication.

<sup>9</sup> Statistics New Zealand. (n.d). *2013 Census ethnic group profiles: Fijian. Key facts*. Retrieved 29/9/2015 from [http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request\\_value=24714&parent\\_id=24706&tabname=.](http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24714&parent_id=24706&tabname=)

for guidance<sup>10</sup>. This approach will be further developed as knowledge and understanding develop about what works best when engaging with Fijian children and families.

The use of the Fijian native language and some common terms (refer to table at the end of this section) would aid engagement with iTaukei children, young people, parents and elders. It is important to ascertain what language would best suit the child or young person as only a small proportion in Aotearoa speak Fijian (refer to *Va'aifetu* Part 1). Ensure the child is meaningfully engaged and included in conversations where different languages are used. Children and young people not fluent in native Fijian may still understand common terms and cultural concepts used during engagement. Hearing their native language may help alleviate a child's or young person's anxiety and build rapport.

## **Engagement, Assessment and Decision Making**

### *Relational Concepts and Expectations*

**Fijian worldview** - The iTaukei worldview is shaped by traditional social order and structures in the family and wider community. Chiefs (mainly male) occupy the top level, followed by others based on their roles in the community. Traditional roles define the nature of relationships between people, and the different levels of hierarchy within families and within wider society. Order is maintained and promoted when members understand their position in the hierarchy, and act accordingly. Stiff sanctions follow the wilful breaking of protocols and rituals that govern social conduct.

**Sautu** (family wellbeing) - *Sautu* denotes a state of being. *Sau* – reflects being filled with *mana* arising from one's position or performance of a role. *Tu* – is to rise following the successful discharge of one's duty. Fijian families aspire to achieve a certain state of harmony, prosperity and stability, where relationships between members are mutually reinforcing and respectful.

*Sautu* represents a positive achievement for a family. It is compared to the top-most part of a house (*doka ni vale*) which serves as the crowning glory in the building process. *Sautu* is related to a family's ability to sustain itself and deal with life's challenges. It is about good health that is epitomised in the Fijian greeting *bula vinaka* (good health).

**Tabu** - (derived from *veitabui*) is closely associated with *mana* and limits the practice of certain activity or behaviour. This is to reflect the sacredness of a matter, relationship or event. For instance, a chief is said to have *mana*. Being sacred, a chief is approached with deference and respect. There is also *tabu* between family members especially between brothers and sisters.

*Veitabui* establishes codes of conduct to ensure relationships do not become abusive or violent. Public knowledge of the violation of *tabu* lowers the reputation of a family in their surrounding community. This can result in silence within families about shameful violations, such as incest.

**Vakarokoroko** - (respect) is critical to the harmonious relationships within a Fijian family, and by extension, a community. The closer the relationship, for example brother and sister; the stronger the expectations are to demonstrate respect.

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Social Development. (2012). *Vuvale Doka Sautu*. A Cultural Framework for addressing violence in Fijian families in New Zealand Retrieved from <https://www.familyservices.govt.nz/documents/working-with-us/programmes-services/pacific-framework-fijian-fa2.pdf>

Respectful behaviour is expressed through acts of courtesy and the language used by people to refer to each other. A person who regularly displays respect will be regarded as being *vakaturaga* (of chiefly conduct and manner). *Veidokai* (respect or honour) has the same meaning as *vakarokoroko* and they are often used interchangeably.

**Matuvuvale** (Family) - While individualism has traditionally been seen as counter to the collective/common good, it is an increasing reality for Fijians living in Aotearoa. *Veitokoni* denotes mutual support between family members. Reciprocal relationships between family members determine the functioning and strength of their unit. Parents are expected to actively practise *veitokoni* in the family.

**Veirogorogoci** - For family relationships to be sustainable there has to be *veirogorogoci* - a practice of ongoing communication, sharing, listening to each other. For example, when a parent is talking to a child, the child is expected to listen and not interject or interrupt the parent; the child is given time to voice her view after the parent has spoken and the parent is expected to role model *veirogorogoci*. Mediated by the observance of *tabu*, *veirogorogoci* reflects obedience to, and observance of the family order, rituals and processes.

**Veivakabekabei** - The term *veivakabekabei* (praising) denotes the practice and importance of 'valuing and nurturing' others. This promotes relationships and unity. Boasting or grandstanding run counter to Fijian values of *vakarokoroko* and *veidokai*. It is good manners not to put yourself first and allow others to hold standing before you, to show deference. *Veivakaliuci* is often displayed through *veiqaravi* – actions of serving or caring for others including children and elders.

**Kawa** - Fijians place great importance on family lineage and history (*kawa*). In the iTaukei custom, every transitional stage in a child's life is celebrated. Some communities have traditional practices such as naming ceremonies for a first born<sup>11</sup>.

A good *kawa* is interpreted as a reflection of a person's ancestral history, family and quality of rearing. All including children are expected to uphold their family's legacy through achievement and social conduct. To be labelled as '*kawa ca*' (opposite of good *kawa*) is a grave insult to a Fijian and her/his family, and can result in retribution.

**Mana** - The concept of *mana* implies having supernatural powers arising from one's position at birth and connection to the spiritual world. *Mana* reflects a state of reverence and sacred ground in very close relationships, particularly among family. Care is taken to ensure *mana* is not violated and to avoid causing offence. In formal gatherings, *mana* is respected by observing traditional protocols and rituals of engagement.

In traditional customary Fijian gatherings a shout of '*mana e dina!*' at the conclusion of a presentation signifies an appeal to the gods for a blessing; this is a typical expression used in kava ceremonies. In modern Fijian society, the link to the supernatural is now merged with that of Christian teachings and rituals around blessings. 'Amen' now takes the place of a shout of *mana* in the appeal to the Christian god

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<sup>11</sup> Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. Retrieved 10/3/2015 from <http://www.fijianaffairs.gov.fj/>

## Useful Words and Phrases - Fiji

Common Greetings and Phrases	
Bula ( <i>informal</i> ) Bula vinaka ( <i>formal</i> )	Greetings, hello
Bula, ni gole mai	Welcome come in
Ni bulabula vinaka?	How are you?
Au bulabula vinaka, vakacava o kemuni?	I'm fine thanks, and you?
Kerekere	Please
Vinaka	Thank you
Tulou	Excuse me
Moce	Goodbye
Vosoti au	Apologise, sorry
Family Terms	
luvequ yalewa	daughter
luvequ tagane	son
gone	baby
gone lalai	child, children
tina	mother
tama	father
matavuvale	family

## Fijian-Indian

### Fijian-Indians in the Pacific

Between 1879 and 1916 about 60,000 Indians were hired to work as labourers in Fiji's sugar industry. The workers called themselves Girmityas, a word meaning 'agreement'<sup>12</sup>. Later, those who were able to return to India did, while many either could not or chose to stay in Fiji. Those that remained developed their own particular cultural identity while maintaining certain elements of their original cultures. One of the key elements that lost its significance was the caste system.

The Fijian-Indian population thrived to the point where from 1946 to the late-1980s, their population actually exceeded that for indigenous Fijians. Their social, economic, cultural and political influence helped shape modern Fiji. Over time, certain sections of the indigenous population became concerned about their ability to hold power in Fiji. Tensions eventually led to political unrest and the coups that began in 1987. These were difficult times particularly for the country, but especially for the Fijian-Indian population who suffered violence and persecution. Families that had leased customary lands to grow crops for industry and had lived on those lands for generations, suddenly found themselves landless and homeless when the leases expired and were not renewed. The unrest led many Fijian-

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<sup>12</sup> Leckie, J. (July 2012). *Fijians - Fijian culture in New Zealand*. Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/fijians/page-1>

Indians to leave and resettle elsewhere, particularly in Canada, the United States, Australia and Aotearoa<sup>13</sup>.

Fijian-Indians have not traditionally been included in Pacific models of practice in Aotearoa. This has resulted in a gap in our understanding and left these children of the Pacific somewhat invisible. The knowledge contained in this cultural framework is based on information from Fijian-Indian practitioners and cultural advisors.

## Cultural Identity

Fijian-Indians value their cultural identity deeply and resist the intrusion of any foreign values and cultures. Their experiences of gradual loss of their original culture, unequal rights with the indigenous population, and history of displacement go some way to explaining their preciousness around cultural identity. The traditional caste system still holds value for some Fijian-Indians as a link to original cultures and homeland. Attempts to reconnect with Indians from India have mixed results, as Janifa Khan Janif illustrates:

*My leanness enabled me to fit  
the "South Asian" box for health officials  
My "Indianness" was not an entry criteria  
to the "Mainland India Club" as I spoke funny Hindi  
and didn't know my caste or class  
In the eyes of Mainland Indians the generations of hard work  
and prosperity in Fiji by my ancestors could never free me from the shackles of being  
from a lower class with origins in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India  
I could only be a descendant of the slaves not fit to be associated with<sup>14</sup>.*

Despite the political unrest that caused many to leave Fiji, the island nation remains in people's hearts as their homeland. Some Fijian-Indians have never been to India.

Ethnic intermarriage has not traditionally been supported in Fijian-Indian communities although this is becoming more frequent. Historically, some Fijian-Indian families disowned members who married outside their ethnicity which resulted in people being disconnected from each other for generations. This has been found by practitioners who found extended family for those who originally denied having any in Aotearoa.

## Religion and Spirituality

The four main religions are Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. Groups in New Zealand have established religious communities and places of worship such as *mandir* (temple), and *mandalis* (religious gatherings)<sup>15</sup>. It is important to understand the religious characteristic of a family and associated expectations of their children. Spirituality affects many aspects of a person's life including dress, friendships, choice of partner, gender roles, food, time of worship, and so on.

Spirituality is sacred. A red flag outside a Fijian-Indian home is a typical Hindu marker that indicates a sacred space on the family's property that strangers should not encroach on. The

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<sup>13</sup> Leckie, J. (July 2012). <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/fijians/page-3>

<sup>14</sup> Janifa Khan Janif. *Who am I: The KaiIndia's Search for Identity in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Used with permission. (6/11/2014). Personal communication.

<sup>15</sup> Leckie, J. (July 2012). <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/fijians/page-4>

family will take offence if Lord Hanumana who has the head of a monkey is addressed as Monkey God. Likewise, Lord Ganesha who has the head of an elephant is not to be addressed as Elephant God; he is Lord Ganesha who wards away evil. Lord Ganesha's statue would often be located at the entrance of the house. Generally the prayer shrines are located in a room in a closed cupboard.

Hindus observe certain days of the week as sacred, some might observe Mondays and pray to God Shiva, some might abstain from eating meat. Others might treat Tuesday as sacred, be vegetarian for the day and pray to God Hanumana; others might observe Fridays and pray to a Goddess such as Latchmi (Goddess of Wealth). Some Muslims might pray five times in the day. Throughout the year there are other ceremonies that a family or individual may observe. For example Shiv Ratri – a day in the year when families fast and pray to God Shiva, offering sacrifices usually at the local temple. Likewise there is a nine-day celebration called Nauratam where special prayers and sacrifices are offered to Durgaa Maa (Goddess of Strength). Deepawali festival of Lights is a commonly known annual festival that is very important to Hindus.

There is a strong preference among Fijian-Indians to marry within their religion. Where this is not possible, one of the partners may be required to change religion upon marriage, often to the religion of the male. Caregivers or parents would impress upon their children from childhood to uphold their religious orientation. Elders have a role in passing on spiritual and religious knowledge to the younger generation.

### **Patriarchy and Hierarchy**

Fijian-Indian families are usually patriarchal in nature. Some religions have segregated places and times for worship for men and women. The men are often the gate keepers of families, depending on where the family sits in the traditional – contemporary continuum.

A Muslim woman might wear a Burka (veil) and will not unveil herself in front of a man. While Fijian-Indian Muslim women wearing a burka might not unveil she might engage with a male professional, unlike women wearing a burka from other parts of the world. Female professionals might not encounter any difficulty engaging with Muslim men but having a male professional would help engagement. Wherever possible, female professionals should engage with Muslim women. If this is not possible then make an appointment to meet the male leader of the family. Most times it might be easier to meet the family in a neutral place outside their home.

The inferior position of women is reinforced by traditional religions, despite the abuse of power as seen in domestic violence. Arranged marriage is an enduring part of traditional Fijian-Indian culture in Fiji and in Aotearoa. During difficult times, women are expected to uphold their marriage at all costs. Working women still carry primary responsibility for child rearing and the care of the household, although this is slowly changing. The shifts in attitudes and beliefs are due to exposure to new environments, education, and the changing professional and financial position of women. Women are becoming increasingly active in decision-making and are increasingly supported by men.

### **Status and Social Standing**

Families work hard to build wealth and status; financial success is paramount. Power and control in families is associated with finance and educational status. Fijian-Indians bring with them the 'Panchait' system from India which is a process where elders of the

community would gather to deliberate on matters concerning the security and safety of their community. Today, elders with limited earning capacity may have little influence in decision-making within a household. This is a key difference between Fijian-Indian and indigenous Pacific cultures.

Fijian-Indian families have a more nuclear focus compared to the traditional collective nature of indigenous Pacific families. The sharing of resources and ideas is limited to the immediate family, and the extended family is not encouraged to get involved in matters considered the business of the nuclear unit. A family might reluctantly concede to involving extended family in exceptional circumstances such as a Family Group Conference out of respect for statutory authority.

## **Parenting**

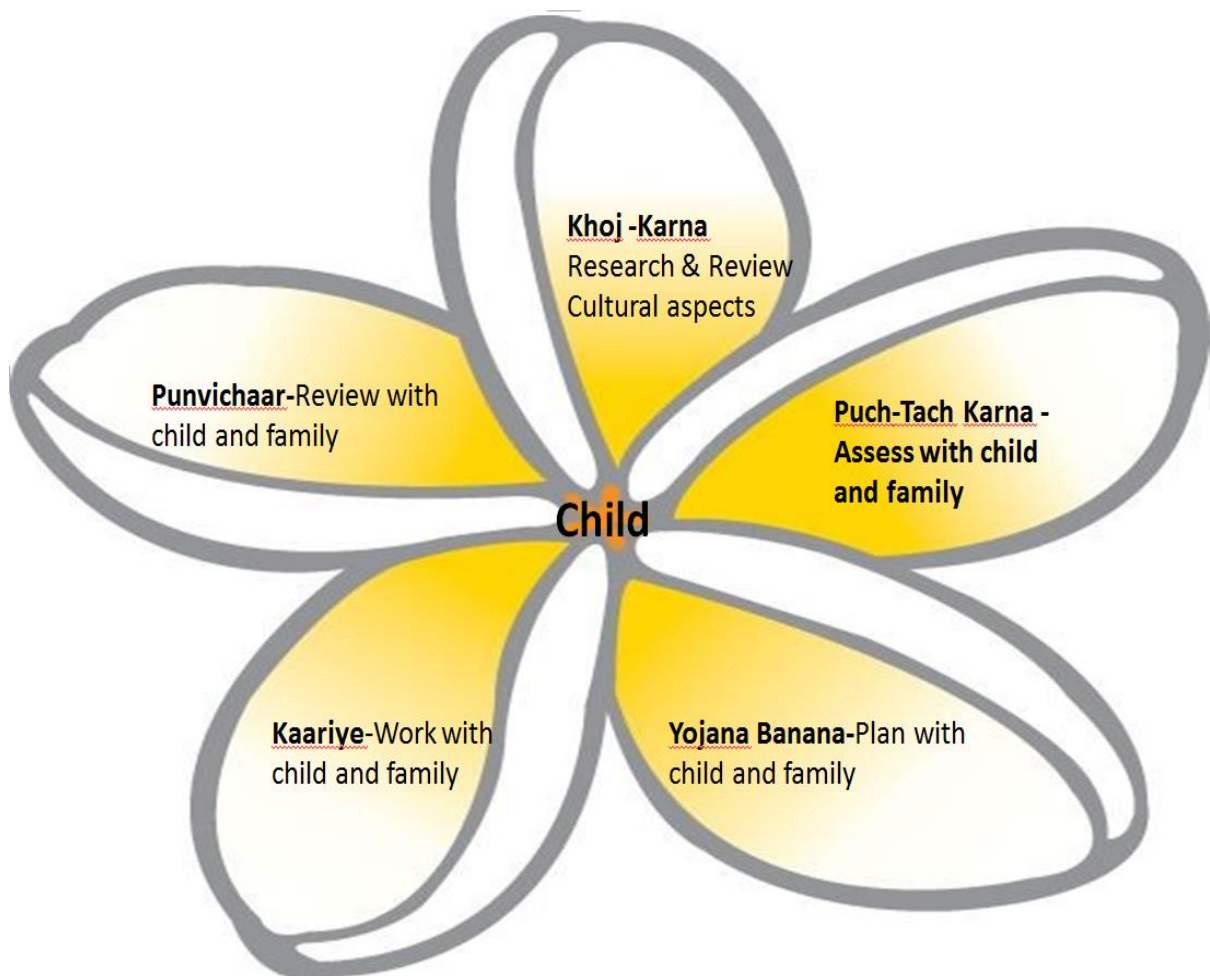
Child rearing practices aim to build resilience to counteract life's adversities. The show of affection may not be as readily demonstrated by Fijian-Indian families as it may be by other Pacific families. Children are raised with high expectations to succeed and to contribute to the family's wealth. Values that may take children away from this traditional path are resisted. Fijian-Indian families look negatively upon children's rights to express views and have more social freedom. This is the biggest area of contention for Aotearoa raised children who are torn between traditional expectations and rules, and other social norms and values that surround them.

A male child is still considered important in order to carry on the family genealogy. The girl child has a spiritual position; for Hindus, she is considered a representative of the Goddess Latchmi.

Childless Fijian-Indian families would adopt children from within their extended family including those born outside of marriage. Stigma is associated with pregnancy outside wedlock. Orphans or children who lose their fathers are integrated into extended families to maintain their identity. Generally a boy would be integrated into his father's family while a girl may be allowed to go with the maternal side.



## ***Bhavish – Fijian-Indian Cultural Framework for Practice***



*Bhavish* means 'future' in the Hindi language.

### **Guiding Principles**

- **Child's Best Interest** – The child is treasured and considered the most important aspect of a family's future.
- **Relationships** – Understanding hierarchy within family/ social structure. Leadership and decision making in families is often male dominated.
- **Respect** - Honouring what is important to the child and his/her family.
- **Reciprocity** - Respecting and understanding core values that harness good outcomes for the child.
- **Integrity and Dignity** - Harnessing integrity by imparting knowledge and dealing with denial whilst upholding people's dignity.

- **Responsibility** - Reintegration of the child, who has been detached from family into the guardianship and care of kin, is a priority.
- **Spirituality** - This is the foundation of lives of most Fiji Indians. It impacts family hierarchy, roles, decision making, beliefs, and social, cultural and political structures.

### Engagement – Assessment – Decision Making

The use of first languages will greatly assist the rapport and ongoing relationship with parents and elders.

Hindi is used daily in many Fijian-Indian families. Children and young people who are not fluent in their native tongue may still understand common terms and cultural concepts used during engagement. Hearing their native language may help alleviate the child's or young person's anxiety and build rapport. It is important to ascertain what language would best suit the child or young person, and to ensure that she/he is meaningfully engaged in conversations where different languages are used.

### Useful Words and Phrases – Fiji-Indian

Common Greetings and Phrases (in Fiji Hindi, adaptation of Hindi)	
Namaste ( <i>formal</i> ) Kaise ( <i>informal</i> )	Greetings, hello
Svāgata	Welcome come in
Aap kiaseh hain?	How are you?
Bahut acha, shukriya aur aap? (or) bhahut thik hain ( <i>hey</i> ) aur aap?	I'm fine thanks, and you?
Theek hai	Good ( <i>in response to 'how are you?'</i> )
Meharbani she	Please
Shukriya	Thank you
Maaf kijiyeh	Excuse me
Nameste	Goodbye
Māphī māmgatā hūm̄	Apologise, sorry (I am apologising)
Family Terms	
beti	daughter
beta	son
baccē	baby
baccē	child
baccōm	children
mām	mother
pitā	father
parivāra	family