

Tuvaluan

Background

Tuvalu is an independent Polynesian nation. Tuvalu has nine islands. It is one of the smallest countries in the world, with a total land area of approximately 26 square kilometres across its nine islands. Funafuti, the most populated atoll of Tuvalu is the capital of Tuvalu. The population estimate for Tuvalu in 2011 was 11,206¹.

Tuvalu has three main languages – Tuvaluan, English and I-Kiribati. It has two main dialects, one spoken in the northern set of islands and one in the southern group. There are many similarities between Tuvaluan, Tokelauan and Samoan languages. Most Tuvaluans are members of the Christian Church of Tuvalu (Ekalesia Kelisiano o Tuvalu)².

Tuvaluans value their land as an asset and a symbol of status. All families live on their inherited lands. With the exception of land that has been gifted, adopted, exchanged or bequeathed under the terms of a will, land is customarily passed on through the eldest son. Tuvalu has become one of the most endangered countries in the world due to climate change. Some of its people have already left and resettled in other countries, such as on the island of Kioa off the east coast of Fiji's Vanua Levu³, and in West Auckland, Aotearoa. The contamination and loss of homeland due to climate change has potentially severe implications for Tuvaluan culture, identity, spirituality, and future generations.

Tuvaluans in Aotearoa

Tuvaluans	2001	2006	2013
	1968	2625	3,537

Most (95.6% or 3,381) live in the North Island and the rest (4.4% or 156 people) in the South Island. The people are concentrated in the Auckland region (72.4% or 2,562), followed by Wellington (12.5% or 441) and Otago (3.1% or 111) regions, mostly in urban settings. Of those living in the Auckland region, the majority live around Henderson-Massey (64.8%), Whau (6.2%), and Waitakere Ranges (6.2%) areas⁴. Around 40.1% (1,419) of Tuvaluans in Aotearoa in 2013 were born overseas⁵.

The number of Tuvaluan children that come to the notice of Oranga Tamariki is not high. When considering the appropriate cultural approach to use, the organisation has sourced from *Toku fou tiale*, a Tuvaluan conceptual framework developed to address family violence with Tuvalu communities⁶. *Toku fou tiale* informs of important relational concepts and life principles that practitioners need to understand and incorporate into their practice when working with Tuvaluan

¹ Tuvalu Central Statistics Division. (2013). *Tuvalu Statistics at a Glance*. Retrieved 9/3/2015 from <http://www.spc.int/prism/tuvalu/>

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Tuvalu*. Retrieved 10/3/2015 from <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/Countries/Pacific/Tuvalu.php>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Statistics New Zealand. (n.d). *2013 Census ethnic group profiles: Tuvaluan. Population and geography*. Retrieved 10/3/2015 from http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24724&tabname=Populationandgeography.

⁵ Statistics New Zealand. (n.d). *2013 Census ethnic group profiles: Tuvaluan. Key facts*. Retrieved from http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census/profile-and-summary-reports/ethnic-profiles.aspx?request_value=24724&parent_id=24706&tabname=#24724

⁶ Ministry of Social Development. (2012). *Toku fou tiale: A Tuvalu Conceptual Framework for addressing family violence*. Ministry of Social Development. Wellington. New Zealand.

children, families and communities. This approach will be further developed as knowledge and understanding develop about what works best when engaging with Tuvaluan children and families.

Epa Faliki – Tuvaluan Cultural Framework for Practice

Definition

The Epa Faliki is a special mat specifically made for a baby in preparation for their birth. ‘Faliki’ means sacred, and is derived from the word ‘Alik’ means God⁷. For these reasons, the Epa Faliki has been chosen to symbolise the Tuvaluan cultural framework for practice⁸.



*“Lalaga a te Epa Faliki mo fakanofa a te tamaliki mo ona ola puipui”
“The weaving of the Sacred Mat is for the wellbeing and protection of the child”*

The Epa Faliki symbolises the strong foundation from which *tamaliki* develop. The Epa Faliki is where the *tamaliki* rests, where they lie while being fed, taught, and cared for by their parents and *kaaiga*.

Philosophy



The philosophy that underpins the Epa Faliki is reflected in Tuvalu’s national emblem and anthem with the phrase “Tuvalu Mo Te Atua” or Tuvalu For The Almighty. Preparations for the *tamaliki* begin before they are born as the Epa Faliki is woven until it is complete⁹. Every *tamaliki* has their own Epa Faliki, and each mat carries with it the child’s genealogy, identity, hopes and dreams for their future.

The weaving of the Epa Faliki is a celebration of *tamaliki* that have been gifted from God, and therefore a blessing to *matua* (*parents*), *te kaaiga* (family including extended) and the community. The safety and wellbeing of *tamaliki* is ‘sacred’, making the care and protection of, and love for *tamaliki*, the priority not just for *matua*, but also *te kaaiga* and the surrounding community.

⁷ ‘God’ – refers to the Christian religion in this framework.

⁸ Photo used with permission of Litala Eliuta, grandmother of child pictured.

⁹ The Pandanus plant is considered the best source of weaving material for the Epa Faliki, because only the best materials can be used to hold the precious and sacred life. The Pandanus leaf (colour and texture) is used because of its beauty, strength, durability and quality.

Traditional Societal Structure

Kaaiga - nuclear family

Pui Kaaiga - extended family

Sologa - genealogy

Fenua - individual islands

Atufenau - nation

Fakapotopotoga – groups, church, island, island group

Values

When working with Tuvalu *tamaliki* and *kaaiga*, practitioners must understand core Tuvalu values in order to get it right with them.

Children: Children are gifts from God

Tuvalu *tamaliki* are valued and precious to *kaaiga*, because they are blessings from God. The practice approach regardless of the presenting concerns should always take this into account.

Love: Unity in God's love

Tuvalu *kaaiga* support and care for each other in any situation.

Respect: For life and each other

Tuvalu people value respect, humility, and are willing to help those in need.

Family: Guardians for *tamaliki*

Love, support, and care are collectively provided.

Tuvalu Language: Carries cultural identity

Language carries and holds the past, present, and the future for *tamaliki*.

Decision Making, Engagement, Collaboration

***Fakatokaga* – Planning, Preparation, Creation of the Epa Faliki**

- a metaphor for practice



The Pandanus (*kie*) must be prepared for weaving. The preparation includes:

- the location and collection of the *kie* to be used
- preparation of the *kie* (cut, dry, store)
- decision on who will weave the Epa Faliki
- design of the pattern of the Epa Faliki.

The roles and responsibilities for the preparation work is given to people with *mana* and integrity. Through their work and weaving, their *mana* is transferred to the Epa Faliki, and it becomes sacred and blessed for the *tamaliki*. When these preparation steps are applied to practice with Tuvaluan *tamaliki* and *kaaiga*, it means getting the right planning and people involved in order to achieve best outcomes for *tamaliki*.

Faaitega (weaver/practitioner)



The weaver skilfully weaves, shapes, moulds and colours the *kie* to create a beautiful Epa. The weaver, a mother herself, is a key female relationship to the *tamaliki*, and a woman of status and mana within the *kaaiga*. It is believed that the love, care, beauty, skill and expertise in the weaver's hands are transferred into the Epa Faliki. The pattern and colours used in the weave are significant to the genealogy and heritage of the *kaaiga*. When applied to engagement with Tuvalu *tamaliki* and *kaaiga*, the weaving is a joint venture between the *kaaiga*

and Oranga Tamariki.

Important considerations are:

Kie – contributing people and voices

Parents, *kaaiga* and community must work alongside Oranga Tamariki to ensure the wellbeing, safety and care of *tamaliki* in the *kaaiga*. The voice of the *tamaliki* is to be weaved throughout this process.

Family Decision Making – Identification of the lead weaver

The *kaaiga* will identify who among them will take the lead in working alongside Oranga Tamariki.

Tools - *kaaiga* and community resources

Ensure key members of the *kaaiga* (*including extended*), church, and island community are involved in making plans, monitoring and reviewing plans.

Design – identity, heritage, connection

Weave island community and services into plans for *tamaliki*. Ensure community and service providers participate in planning. Provide additional resourcing that may be required to support *kaaiga* to carry out plans.

Colour - beautifying and enhancing

Build and maintain strong, loving, caring and respectful working relationships with the parents, *kaaiga* and community to ensure continuity of wellbeing, safety and care of *tamaliki* in *kaaiga*.

Relational Considerations

Traditional ways of upholding the Child's rights

In the wider community setting, childrens' views are, for the most part, represented by adults. With the migration to New Zealand, the influence of western thinking, and legislation support, Tuvalu *tamaliki* are exercising their right to express their own views. This shift can often create tension in the *tamaliki-matua*¹⁰ relationship.

Gender roles and Decision making

Women contribute equally with men in discussions, but men are usually the decision makers in *kaaiga*.

¹⁰ *tamaliki-matua* – child-parent

The first cousin relationship (e.g. a female and her male first cousins or a male and his female first cousins) is *tapu* in Tuvalu culture and can be more significant than a brother-sister relationship. These relationships can take the lead in the support, care and protection of children.

Relevance of culture and language

Tuvalu *kaaiga* in Aotearoa are primarily first and second generation New Zealanders, and cultural practices in Tuvalu are still largely adhered to. The Tuvalu language is primarily the language used in many *kaaiga*. However, it is becoming more common for generations born in Aotearoa not to do so. With migration, interracial relationships are common, and this is also impacting on the use, or lack of use, of the Tuvaluan language.

Role of churches and community

Most Tuvalu people are connected to a church. As most Tuvalu *kaaiga* in Aotearoa are first and second generation New Zealanders, the connections to church, community and tradition is still strong. Elders, church, and Tuvalu community networks can provide cultural support and advice to *kaaiga*.

Tuvalu Island identity and connections

Each family is linked to an island/s, and each island has its own church. The bond with one's island is often more significant than being known as a Tuvaluan.

Useful Words and Phrases – Tuvalu

Common Greeting and Phrases	
Fakatālofa atu	Formal greeting
Tālofa	Greetings, hello
Ulufale mai	Welcome come in
E ā koe?	How are you?
Au e 'lei, fakafetai, kae e ā koe?	I'm fine thanks, and you?
Fakamolemole, au kō 'sē!	Please
Fakafetai / Fāfetai	Thank you
Tulou	Excuse me
Tofa	Goodbye
Fakamolemole	Please
Fakatoese atu	I am sorry
Family Terms	
tamaliki	child
tamaliki fafine	daughter
tamaliki tagata	son
pepe	baby
Mokopuna	Grandchild (<i>mokopu</i> – great grandchild)
matua	Mother, parent
tamana	father
kaaiga	family
Ha'a	Ancestral family/ancestors