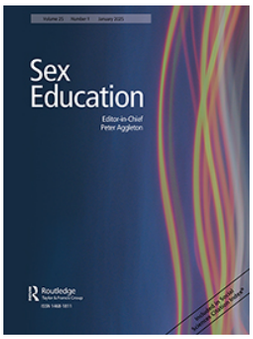

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Pacific high school students' experiences of sexual and reproductive health education in Aotearoa New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

Young people of Pacific heritage living in Aotearoa New Zealand experience poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes. Current understandings of Pacific youth sexual and reproductive experiences are limited and efforts to deliver culturally appropriate sexuality education are made difficult by lack of resources and cultural sensitivities and taboos. This study aimed to understand Pacific youth experiences of sexuality education within the school setting to ascertain culturally responsive approaches to sexuality education for Pacific youth. The study used the Pacific *talanoa* methodology to conduct group discussions with young people aged 16–18 years old. A total of six group discussions were carried out over a three-month period. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study found a lack of information provided at school. Discussion of abstinence, sex before marriage and asking questions at home was aligned to Pacific values of family, taboo, and gender. Perspectives on trust, privacy and confidentiality within the school setting were important to young people, many of whom were not familiar with being able to speak freely about sexual health topics. Pornography and social media were easily accessible to youth and influenced their ability to explore and understand sexual and reproductive health issues and needs.

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Sexuality education; Pacific sexuality education; Pacific sexual and reproductive health education; Pacific youth sexuality education

Introduction

Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) education is evolving to include wider discussion of sex, intimacy and reproductive responsibility that serves to engage with diverse backgrounds and views (Ellis and Bentham 2021; Browes 2015; Haberland and Rogow 2015; Elia and Mickey 2010). Participation in good quality comprehensive sexuality programmes is associated with reduced sexual risky behaviour and adverse SRH outcomes amongst adolescents (Kirby 2008; Esere 2008; Lindberg et al. 2006). For minority ethnic groups, cultural awareness and sensitivity is needed when developing and delivering sexuality education at school (Leung et al. 2019). In the Pacific, a lack of awareness and

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communication about SRH impact young people's ability to access SRH services (Cammock, Lovell, and Vaka 2023; Delaibatiki 2016). In New Zealand, groups representing peoples from diverse cultures and nations across the Pacific are rapidly growing in number, with more than 8% of the population identifying with a Pacific ethnicity (Statistics 2018).

Pacific peoples are a youthful population, with 55% of the Pacific population currently under the age of 25 (Pasefika 2016). Although overall levels of sexual activity have declined for Pacific youth (and young people overall in NZ), Pacific young people's SRH outcomes remain poorer than those of other groups (Fa'avae, Jones, and Manu'atu 2016). For Pacific youth in New Zealand, high rates of teenage pregnancy (Boddington, Mansoor, and Didham 2003; University of Waikato National Institute of Demographic and Economic Analysis 2015), low rates of contraceptive use (Cammock et al. 2018, 2017; Clark et al. 2016), high rates of sexually transmitted infection (STI) (Morison and Herbert 2019), and high levels of reported unwanted sexual contact (Clark et al. 2015) characterise SRH outcomes.

Social and cultural barriers contribute significantly to poor SRH outcomes (Veukiso-Ulugia 2013; Delaibatiki 2016). Research shows that cultural taboos, traditional and Christian values of morality, and family responsibility make SRH decision-making and communication difficult for Pacific youth (Cammock, Lovell, and Vaka 2023). The growth of social media, the increased accessibility of pornography, and growing levels of violence and abuse impact on Pacific youth SRH (Clark et al. 2013) and raises concerns among parents and caregivers (Cammock, Lovell, and Vaka 2023). In New Zealand, one in five Pacific young people report experiencing unwanted sexual contact (Clark et al. 2015). Clark et al. (2015) found that in a cohort of 8,500 high school students in New Zealand, Pacific students were more likely to be sent unwanted sexually explicit material compared to their peers (Clark et al. 2015).

In Pacific communities, cultural values associated with Fijian *tabu* or Tongan *tapu* (sacred bonds), Fijian *loloma* or Samoan and Tokelauan *alofa* (love and compassion), Fijian *veitokoni* (reciprocity) and *veiwekani* (relationship), Fijian *vakarokoroko*, and Tongan *fa'aaloalo* (respect) contribute to Pacific young people's sense of cultural identity (Gegeo 2002) but are impacted upon by exposure to negative and violent content inconsistent with these values. In Aotearoa, New Zealand, Pacific youth, i.e. those aged 10–19 years encounter SRH education within the school system and through school-based health services e.g. in nurses' office, to a varying extent (Ministry of Education 2020). Pacific values and cultural norms concerning sex, relationships and intimacy are addressed in limited ways within the curriculum and success in doing so is dependent on the expertise of educators and health providers. Using a Pacific team of researchers, the current study aimed to explore Pacific youth's views about SRH education within the school setting to ascertain how SRH education could be improved.

Materials and methods

Talanoa methodology

This study utilised *Talano*a methodology (Vaioleti 2006), an approach which has been widely used in Pacific research (Otunuku 2011; Farrelly and Nabobo-Baba

2014; Cammock, Conn, and Nayar 2021; Cammock, Pacific Talanoa methodologLovell, and Vaka 2023). The approach is grounded in a perspective that seeks to privilege Pacific value systems such as respect, reciprocity and relationship (Cammock, Conn, and Nayar 2021). Talanoa research is non-linear, inclusive and fluid, and adopts a holistic approach to understanding phenomena in alignment with Pacific worldviews (Cammock, Conn, and Nayar 2021). Within such a framework, building relationships is critical to enabling engagement, reinforcing reciprocity in exchange and showing respect for cultural values and knowledge systems (Cammock et al. 2022). In this study, recruitment, talanoa discussions and analyses were undertaken in line with Pacific values (Cammock and Andrews 2023). Given the cultural sensitivities and tapu associated with Pacific SRH and the diversity of Pacific ethnic identities, talanoa group sessions with Pacific students took place over a period of 3 months.

Participant recruitment

Using purposive sampling, the study team recruited a group of Pacific youth aged 16–18 years who were students in years 12 and 13 at a high school in South Auckland, New Zealand, a region where 63.6% of the Pacific population in New Zealand live (Counties Manukau 2021) (see Table 1 for participant information). In total, eight students were recruited, four young men and four young women. Eight students were considered sufficient to gain a range of perspectives from both male and female students and to ensure robust discussion in talanoa groups sessions (see appendix A for Talanoa question schedule). Six talanoa group sessions were carried out in total (see Table 2). Each session lasted 90 minutes and was audio recorded for analysis purposes. Two sessions were conducted with young women, two with young men and an additional two with mixed sex groups (see Table 2).

Table 1. Group talanoa participant characteristics.

Participant	Sex	Ethnicity	School year level
Sione	Male	Fijian	Year 12
Israel	Male	Tongan	Year 13
Malakai	Male	Fijian	Year 13
Filisi	Male	Tongan	Year 12
Mele	Female	Tongan	Year 13
Lina	Female	Tongan	Year 13
Tiana	Female	Samoan	Year 12
Aki	Female	Tongan	Year 12

Table 2. Talanoa sessions with youth.

Talanoa Sessions	Aim
Talanoa session 1 x 2 Talanoa sessions (1 Male group and 1 Female group)	Pacific youth experiences of SRH and SRH education.
Talanoa session 2 x 2 (1 Male group and 1 Female group)	Strategies to improve SRH Education
Talanoa Session 3 x 2 (2 mixed sex groups)	Follow up Talanoa on key SRH experiences and strategies

Talanoa cultural considerations

Cultural safety and responsiveness were taken into account when designing the group sessions. Firstly, group talanoa sessions were chosen as the mode for discussion to avoid interactions in which young people might feel intimidated or shy (Cammock, Lovell, and Vaka 2023). Secondly, familiarity among group members was crucial to ensuring participants felt supported and encouraged to raise questions and agree or disagree with other members of the group. Therefore, all the participants already knew each other as friends or peers. These considerations reflect veiwekani (relationship) practices important in talanoa research.

Due to the gendered nature of reproduction and the traditional roles of men and women in Pacific culture, cultural taboos or tabu between male and female relationships were taken into account during the research (Delaibatiki 2016). For example, we paid careful attention to how male and female participants might avoid addressing or raising particular perspectives in front of members of the opposite sex because of such sensitivities. Therefore, young people were given the opportunity to participate in talanoa sessions with only male or female counterparts. However, the configuration of talanoa groups also provided opportunities for both young men and young women to come together in the same session once they felt comfortable being with each other in the research space.

Our role as researchers within the group talanoa sessions was reciprocal, raising and sharing as much or as little within the session as was necessary. This helped young people feel comfortable to express themselves freely. We carried out an informal talanoa (Vaioleti 2006) prior to each session to build relationships and rapport with participants. This involved ice-breaker games and conversations about school, family life and friends. In the young men's talanoa group sessions, a male facilitator of Fijian descent facilitated the discussion, while female talanoa groups sessions were facilitated by Tongan and Fijian female facilitators. Given our identity as Pacific researchers (every member of the research team was of Pacific descent), and our experiences of SRH as young Pacific youth, our insider status (Fa'avae, Jones, and Manu'atu 2016) ensured that we were able to build connections through veiwekani (relationships) (Cammock et al. 2022). This led to good rapport with participants.

Analysis

Drawing on the Pacific cultural values stated above, we conducted a reflexive thematic analysis to identify the experiences and perspectives of participants (Braun and Clarke 2006; Cammock, Lovell, and Vaka 2023). The analysis centres on the lived experiences of participants and sensitivities and perspectives relevant to Pacific youth. This approach accommodated talanoa concepts of fluidity and openness and facilitated empowerment through youth voice prominence (Cammock, Conn, and Nayar 2021).

Each talanoa recording was transcribed and translated for analysis purposes. Analyses involved the generation of codes that were applied to words or sentences that carried particular meanings. The codes were analysed using values considered critical when assessing sexual and reproduction health amongst Pacific youth (Cammock, Lovell, and Vaka 2023; Veukiso-Ulugia 2013). Through such a lens, codes, subthemes, and themes were developed from a conceptual base that acknowledged holism, interdependency, relationality, culture and ethics. For example, analysis of cultural sensitivity was aligned to Pacific values of tapu (sacred bonds) and veiwekani (relationship) especially within the family setting.

All authors were involved in the development of the themes, providing robust discussion and analyses of emergent ideas. NVivo 13 software was used to help with data management and analyses.

Ethical consideration

Ethical approval was received from the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee [20/263]. Information sheets summarising the project were disseminated and students were given 2 weeks to consider participating. Young people who agreed to participate signed consent forms prior to the talanoa sessions.

Results

The thematic analysis identified five key themes which reflected experience across all six talanoa sessions. Quotes from participants are provided verbatim and reflect key perspectives and experiences.

Lack of SRH information within the school setting

Access to SRH information varied depending on the type of school students had attended prior to high school. When young people were asked about where they first gained sexual or reproductive health education, most shared that they had participated in some form of education at primary school. In primary school, SRH education often involved labelling reproductive anatomical images and diagrams. Lina a year 13 student shared, '[in primary school] they gave us a full [diagram] and we had to label [it]'.

Participants shared that the quality and depth of SRH information provided in the high school setting was not sufficient to address young people's needs. For some, exposure to SRH education only occurred in a nurse's office when a particular issue or concern was raised. Young people further shared that often pregnancy tests functioned as a school's gauge of sexual or reproductive activity. Mele a year 13 student shared that at high school, nurses 'just [gave] you a pregnancy test . . . [and] ask[ed] two questions – are you sexually active or are you pregnant – that's it. If the test [came] back positive they [gave] you pamphlets . . . [and said] "OK these are your options"'. Nurses were often referenced as key personnel in providing SRH information and that inconsistencies in experiences could occur depending on who the nurse was. Some nurses took time to talk through contraceptive options while others did not.

Given the inconsistent SRH information available to students, their understanding of SRH information was limited. For example, lack of awareness of the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STI) was discussed in the talanoa sessions. Tiana a year 12 student shared, 'when it comes to pregnancy symptoms it's not that known', with students generally feeling 'traumatised' by the process of finding out if they were pregnant. Students' knowledge of STIs and other illnesses that could be transferred between sexual partners was also limited. Examples of questions raised in talanoa discussions were:

> An STD . . . it . . . obviously has to come from somewhere [but] can you just like get it and you don't even [have sex]?
>
> 'Can you get an STD from masturbating?'
>
> You need it from someone who has it . . . What if you don't know that person has it?

Overall, lack of STI information created a sense of confusion among participants. Their queries raised questions of the quality of information being shared at school and amongst peers.

Sex before marriage

Having sex before marriage was difficult for young people as such practices were not condoned in the home setting. Participants said that parents' expectations about abstinence affected their ability learn about SRH at home. As a result, young people engaged in sexual intercourse and other sexual behaviours outside the home to avoid judgement by parents and family members. Sione, a Year 12 student said,

> 'At home, some are raised by very 'cultural' parents. I don't think they'll be too open to' [sex before marriage]

Year 13 student Israel explained,

> That's why they do it in the bush. Even doing it in the car. If both the girl and the boy's parents was strict and they can't do it in a house physically, they will find literally anywhere.

Pacific young people's failure to meet parents' expectations of abstaining from having premarital sex was part of a broader narrative of individual autonomy and exploring sexual desire away from the control of parents. When away from home and at school, young people felt a sense of freedom especially when opportunities for sexual discovery and experimentation arose. As Year 12 student Tiana explained,

> I mean … it's like they don't get enough freedom at home, so they see [school] as their freedom … to not follow their parents' expectation … when they get [to school], [and] parents aren't around, [they think] I can do this. I can do that. Oh, no one's watching me.

Students warned that because restrictions at home could be very rigid, the school becomes a place where students feel more comfortable engaging with topics of sexual intimacy and relationships. Tiana explained, 'Like they're not given that freedom at home and they're not open with this stuff at home. And when they come here [to school] [they] let loose – it's their free time'.

In the school setting, participants shared the perception that it was '[cool] to lose your virginity', that losing your virginity was 'trendy', and that losing your virginity was something boys and girls loved to 'brag about". Year 13 student Lina, shared, "Some people like to think of it as a label [and] joke about how they 'miss [their] virginity'. Culturally, these notions run contrary to conservative values concerning premarital sex, and virginity. Lina continued, 'You know [. . .] virginity [was] traditionally? a big thing when you [got] married'. If individuals had engaged in premarital sex, they were considered 'a disgrace [. . .and brought. . .] shame to the family'. This influenced Pacific youth to participate in sexual activity out of sight and away from home (McMillan and Worth 2011).

Being open about 'stuff' at home

Young people's ability to discuss SRH issues at school was strongly influenced by their experiences of communicating about SRH at home. Being open about 'stuff'" at home

involved having a general conversation about sexual intimacy with a family member. Israel a year 13 student explained 'if I was to talk about that, [parents will] just tell me to shut up when [I] try talk about it'. Malakai another year 13 male student added that '[parents] don't want to talk about it . . . we don't talk with our family, we don't share with them'. Talanoa participants felt there was a level of maturity that parents felt they [young people] needed to have before participating in discussions about SRH. Aki, a year 12 female student, shared, 'like, at our age now, they think we're too young to be talking about that stuff'.

Participants also explained that discussions at home were difficult to have because SRH was considered a 'taboo topic' and that if they brought the subject up, young people would be considered as going 'overboard' or discussing issues that were not appropriate to talk about at home. Additionally, they felt that such conversations could be 'too much' for some parents to manage, so home-based conversations had their limits. Filisi, a year 12 male student, put it this way:

> 'There's a limit, . . . you don't want to over step that limit, [go] overboard. . .there's a limit for us [in the home] . . . there's stuff to talk about, but not that overboard stuff . . . like sexual, like rude stuff'.

Young people were cognisant of parent's experiences and fears about inadvertently encouraging them to have sex. Such fears prevented positive discussions of SRH. Year 13 student Israel shared,

> 'my parents don't want me and my siblings to make the same mistake my older brother did or that they did . . . like . . . teenage pregnancy. . . So . . . this whole topic is uncomfortable for them because they don't want us to follow the same footsteps'.

Pacific youth felt such responsibilities were important and that risky sexual behaviour could have economic and social implications which affected the wellbeing of future generations. Aki, a year 12 student, explained

> 'You don't want to bring your child into the world . . . and there's "domestics", they're financially unstable and don't have a proper house . . . you wouldn't want a generation to go through that. Like you want to do better. You want to make sure, oh when I was born my mom had her own house. She was independent. My dad [did] not have a broken home'.

These experiences call for careful consideration of how intimacy and sexual relationships issues are dealt with within the school SRH curriculum. Increased awareness of the challenges young people face when discussing sensitive content at home placed added pressure on schools who become the only places in which students are able to express their SRH concerns.

Search for trust, privacy and connection with peers and educators

A significant determinant of whether Pacific youth shared their experiences with others outside the home was trust and privacy. Raising questions at school depended on whether young people trusted others to keep their experiences private. This was especially important for Pacific young men. Sione, a year 12 male student, described it this way, 'The only one I talk to the most is just the boys' to ensure that experiences are kept private. Israel, a year 13 student, shared the mantra 'You don't see, you don't hear

anything, you don't say anything' to illustrate the importance of privacy and trust when discussing SRH. Being able to understand, support and provide advice was key to nurturing and maintaining trust.

For educators and health professionals within the school setting, similar connections were needed in order for young people to feel comfortable sharing their experiences and accessing information. Trust was nurtured through perceptions of shared experiences with teachers and health professionals. Teachers who were perceived to have been through what young people themselves had experienced, and who understood where youth were coming from, were considered trustworthy and relatable. Mele, a year 13 female student said,

> 'Well for me, I reckon people similar to us .... people that like understand ... like people from the streets, you know, that understand [where] we've been, [what] we've both been through ... People that like went from the [bottom], to the [top]'.

Being relatable included having experienced struggles and challenges in life. Lina, a Year 13 student, said,

> 'Yeah, like, [teacher X]. Maybe he's [had] struggles and now he's like succeeding ... He understands that because that's what we're gonna go through too. And he understands the slangs and all. ... he understands our language'.

Teachers who were perceived to be relatable and understanding tended to be those who identified with their Pacific heritage. Lina explained:

> Because [we are] Pacific islanders [and are] brought up [where our] parents are poor ... People have their own stereotypes ... they always expect brown people to like not succeed... But, when you have someone to talk about things like this, like someone who, like who has been there, it just makes you more comfortable with them. It makes you trust them even more. But when you have people who didn't experience what you've been experiencing. It's just different.

Being from the Pacific and having an understanding of Pacific realities were characteristics Pacific youth sought from counsellors, educators and peers. Their ability to trust others with their stories and experiences facilitated communication about SRH needs.

Pornography and social media use

In the talanoa, the use of social media was reported to be widespread among Pacific youth. Participants described exposure to sexually explicit material online, in the form of unwanted adds on the internet, pornography, and the sharing of compromising images with others. In some instances, students had been exposed to sexual material through 'pop-ups' appearing on their devices. Tiana, a year 12 student, said, 'Sometimes [when] we play games random ads just pop up'. Pornography was considered a 'big thing' amongst students because it was 'easily accessible'. Filisi, a year 12 male student, shared, 'to be honest you can watch it on pretty much everything ... you don't even have to be on certain websites', while Sione a year 12 male student added that '[images] could be on social media'.

Participants described how exposure to pornography could occur at a very young age, well before high school. Filisi shared, 'I reckon boys have already started at years seven

and eight. They're coming into college watching porn'. Lina a year 13 student described an occasion in the classroom when students were found watching pornography: 'They got caught in their maths class watching porn . . . all of them'.

Talanoa sessions identified the impact social media and online forums can have on Pacific young people's self-image, their perspectives on what is beautiful, and their ability to be confident in who they are. Increasingly social media was seen as providing 'expectations of what you should like' and such 'comparisons' influenced 'what you wear' making Pacific youth feel they had a 'certain image to [uphold to] please other people'.

Some young people described instances of other youth on social media posing like 'Victoria's Secret model[s]' in an effort to be accepted or liked. When pressed on why young people posted compromising images of themselves online, participants reflected on the emotional and psychological validation that young people sought when doing so. Aki, a year 12 female student, explained,

> I feel like the girls that send [nude images], [are] . . . seeking love from other people . . . they feel like, putting their bodies out there will gain them self love. But that's not how it works.

Malakai, a year 13 male student, added, '[They] feel the need to be accepted or like[d] . . . oh you have a great body like stuff like that, like those compliments . . . because they don't have love for themselves'.

Young people discussed the need for self-love especially among their peers – and the impact that this could have on how they perceive themselves and how they behave on social media. Lina shared,

> 'You have to learn to love yourself, before you love anyone. You look in the mirror every day and be like, you look great today, even if you don't'.

Such insecurities were said to be the cause of mockery and ridicule on social media. As Israel put it, 'Being insecure is a big thing . . . In my opinion, the people who mock are the ones with the lowest self-esteem'. Sione added, 'They mock just to make themselves feel better'. Social media was seen as offering a setting in which the search for validation was widespread, even when individuals are confronted with ridicule.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore and understand Pacific youth perspectives on SRH education and experiences within the school setting. All participants acknowledged the need for SRH education to begin in primary school. While sexuality education is mandatory for students aged 5–15 years in New Zealand schools, there are inconsistencies in the depth and breadth of what is taught. Participants signalled the need for schools to provide comprehensive, detailed information aligned with what was relevant to young people. For young people in this study, this involved the provision of honest and accurate information about pregnancy, STIs, relationships, sexual freedom, abstinence, cultural taboos, pornography and social media use. Similar sentiments can be found in other research on the sexual and reproductive education needs of young people in New Zealand (e.g. Fitzpatrick 2018; Fitzpatrick et al. 2022). For Pacific youth specifically, very little research is available detailing their experiences. A study by Veukiso-Ulugia (2016) found that Samoan youth in New Zealand had access to a wide range of sources of

information about SRH. However, this increased exposure could often lead to greater awareness and concern for SRH matters that schools were often not prepared to address.

Abstinence and 'sexual freedom'

Young people in this study discussed how abstinence messages contrasted with mainstream perspectives on personal sexual decision-making, and exploring preferences and identities, within the school context. Internationally, movement away from abstinence only programmes to more comprehensive forms of sexuality education has been taking place for some time (Haberland and Rogow 2015). In the Pacific, however, these changes have been slow and hindered by a lack of understanding about how to navigate Pacific cultural taboos (Cammock and Andrews 2023).

Veukiso-Uluiga's (2016) study of Samoan youth found that among those young people who had experience of sexual intercourse, two-thirds gained this before 15 years of age. The shame and anxiety created for Pacific youth who have this experience adds to the call for SRH education in schools. According to Anae et al. (2000), becoming pregnant or being caught in a sexual act can indicate that *aiga* or family members are not meeting their duties and responsibilities. The shame associated with these beliefs affects all members of the family, with a young person's sexual behaviour having implications well beyond the individual.

Difficulty discussing sexual matters at home reveal intergenerational miscommunication and lack of understanding between youth and parents (Cammock, Lovell, and Vaka 2023). Veukiso-Ulugia's study found that Samoan parents reported difficulty discussing SRH with their children. A key reason for this centred on their assumption that their children were not sexually active and therefore not in need of such information. Parents believed that the most appropriate time for discussion was after young people were married or when they were older and in committed relationships (Veukiso-Ulugia 2016).

Given that SRH links closely to gender and Pacific ideas about divinity and reproduction in women (Delaibatiki 2016), values of *vakarokoroko* or respect for the processes that bring life into the world are central to Pacific perspectives about sexuality and reproduction. Pacific cultural frameworks that speak to sexual sensitivities, taboos and reproductive responsibility are needed for responsive youth sexuality education. These include content that goes beyond sexual intimacy and discusses gender and the role of men and women in reproduction and family systems (Cammock, Lovell, and Vaka 2023).

Building relationships with educators

Veiwekani or relationships are integral to Pacific cultural systems (Cammock et al. 2022) and are key to ensuring trust is developed and maintained (Cammock, Conn, and Nayar 2021). In this study, the ability of students to trust and build rapport with educators and health staff at schools was key to finding someone they could confide in. Talanoa participants characterised staff who were of Pacific descent who were familiar with their experiences as the educators they could discuss their SRH experiences and needs with.

Use of pornography and social media

Pacific youth in this study described a wide range of pornography use. The New Zealand Office of Film and Literature Classification (2018) recently reported that Pacific youth have one of the highest rates of regular pornography viewing and that Pacific youth are less likely to discuss pornography with their caregiver or parent compared to Māori or New Zealand European youth. The same study found that Pacific youth also tend to have more restrictive attitudes towards pornography use compared to their New Zealand European counterparts (Office of Film and Literature Classification 2018). These findings show that although Pacific youth may have restrictive attitudes about pornography, they are more likely to access it for information. Lack of information and limited opportunities for discussion in the home, likely drive these behaviours.

Approximately, 16% of young people in Aotearoa access pornography using social media websites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat and others (Office of Film and Literature Classification 2018). Misinformation conveyed by sources such as these has the potential to influence viewers in negative ways (Sunkara 2021). In Veukiso-Ulugia's (2016) study of Samoan youth, participants were found to receive pornographic messages via the social media at a young age. Such messages influenced their sense of boundaries and expectations. In the current study, Pacific youth described how pornographic images created unrealistic expectations about young women's bodies and the damage this could do to an individual's confidence.

Strengths and limitations

The study contributes to a very small pool of studies investigating Pacific youth's SRH experiences, and is one of the few studies to examine their views about sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The study focused on the experiences and views of a small group of young people aged 16 to 18. Further research is needed with those under the age of 16 years to gain a deeper understanding of their SRH needs.

The use of the talanoa methodology in this study proved to be a strength. Given the taboo nature of SRH and gendered cultural sensitivities, engaging youth in the talanoa was not always easy and time and resources were needed to ensure participants were comfortable, particularly during the mixed sex talanoa discussion. Our work benefited from sustained engagement with the young people involved over a three-month period while the group sessions were being carried out. The Pacific ethnicity of the team also provided the veiwekani needed for youth to be engaged during this time.

Most students in this study were of Fijian or Tongan descent with only one student being of Samoan descent. Therefore, the generalisability of the findings is limited. Further research involving other Pacific ethnic groups (e.g. from Solomon Islands and Kiribati) is needed. Although talanoa transcripts and preliminary themes were discussed with young people in one of the follow-up talanoa sessions, further follow-up would have aided in adding the validity of results.

Conclusion

Good quality sexual and reproductive health education in school has the potential to provide young people with key information and access to services. The emphasis given to personal decision-making in school and lack of trust in some SRH educators created challenges for some of the participants in this study to negotiate. Addressing cultural issues such as taboo within the school system requires input from trusted community members and an understanding of Pacific young people's varied interests and needs. Engaging and being transparent with parents about what is being delivered at school must occur if they are to fully appreciate what is taught in school-based SRH education and gain their support in ensuring young people grow to be loving and respectful adults and partners in the future.

Disclosure statement

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Appendix A

Indicative questions asked in the talanoa sessions

- What Sexual or reproductive behavioural expectations do Pacific Youth experience? Do these differ when at home or at school? With friends or with family?
- How can Pacific Youth, families, and community address SRH cultural taboos
- How do Pacific Youth communicate/discuss SRH needs and experiences?
- How can Pacific Youth, parents, families, communities improve SRH communication in the home, community or school?
- What do Pacific Youth enjoy or understand about current SRH education?
- What do Pacific Youth think is needed in current SRH education? How should this be delivered? What role do parents, community and schools play?