

**What supports and systems propel Māori and Pasifika young people involved in the youth justice system away from or towards involvement in the youth justice system?
Learning from Māori and Pasifika young men who have experience of the Youth Justice System in Victoria.**

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**Thesis submitted for the fulfilment of the requirements for
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Abstract

The over-representation of Māori and Pasifika young people in the youth justice system in Victoria generated the rationale for this thesis, which examines the systems and supports available for Māori and Pasifika young people in the Victorian youth justice system. Whakawhiti kōrero with 5 Māori and Pasifika young men aged 20 to 30 who lived in the western suburbs of Melbourne and had had some level of involvement in the youth justice system in Victoria. They were conducted in tandem with whakawhiti kōrero with 2 professionals who were experienced in working with Māori and Pasifika young people and their families in the Victorian youth justice system. The findings are situated within an account from an emic perspective of the lived experiences of Māori and Pasifika young men, their mainstream schooling and how they had been affected by other determinants such as low socio-economic status, breakdown in family relationships and substance abuse. The thesis references a lack of cultural competency within Victorian education and youth justice systems. This finding is echoed within literature from New Zealand that situates Māori and Pasifika cultural competency as being the key for support within such systems to engage with and provide positive educational and other institutional outcomes for Māori and Pasifika young people.

Student declaration

“I, Joseph Eruera declare that the Master of Research thesis entitled What supports and systems propel Māori and Pasifika young people involved in the youth justice system away from or towards involvement in the youth justice system? Learning from Māori and Pasifika young men who have experience of the Youth Justice System in Victoria is no more than 50,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work”.

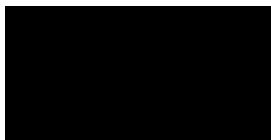
“I have conducted my research in alignment with the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) and [Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures](#).

Ethics Declaration

“All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee and HRE24-060.”

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Glossary

Kaitiakitanga

Kaitiakitanga represents the importance of protecting Māori knowledge and means that you need to approach research from a place without hurtful or selfish intention and aim to truly benefit Māori (Webber-Dreadon, 2020).

Kaupapa Māori research

Kaupapa Māori is simply translated as “the Māori approach” by the Te Aka Māori Dictionary. In terms of research, Smith (2015) used the term “kaupapa Māori research” and this is the term that is used in this research. Kaupapa Māori research should be done by Māori with Māori and to benefit Māori (Smith, 2015). The 4 principles that kaupapa Māori research is focused on are whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga.

Manaakitanga

Manaakitanga talks about how we treat people in our presence and the hospitality we show (Barnett, 2001). It represents the need to show generosity and respect for people; this can be shown in the way we treat each other. Some examples are making sure guests are looked after by providing food and refreshments (Barnett, 2001).

Māori and Pasifika

The term “Pasifika” originated in Aotearoa New Zealand and represents the people of the Pacific Islands of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia who have migrated to live in New Zealand (Enari & Haua, 2021). In Aotearoa New Zealand, the term “Māori” is used to refer to the Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand. The Māori are considered tangata whenua (people of the land). In Aotearoa New Zealand, the terms “Pasifika” and “Māori” refer to 2 different groups of people, as Māori are Indigenous to the land and Pasifika people have migrated or have a history of migration to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Razi's (2020) definition of the term "Pasifika" in the Victorian context includes Māori. Māori and Pasifika people in Australia, unlike in Aotearoa New Zealand, have many similarities in terms of migration and policies that affect them. This thesis separates Māori from the definition of Pasifika and uses the phrase "Māori and Pasifika" to make the distinction between these 2 groups of people. The majority of Pasifika people in Melbourne originate from the countries of Fiji, Samoa and Tonga (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Rangatiratanga

Rangatiratanga is a principle that recognises the importance of Māori having autonomy and control in research (Hiha, 2016). It comes from the phrase tino rangatiratanga which is loosely translated to "Māori sovereignty or self determination" (Te One & Clifford, 2021).

Supports and systems

"Supports and systems" is a broad term and in this thesis it is defined as anything that has had some sort of positive impact on the trajectory of the lives of these Māori and Pasifika young people. Examples of supports are micro factors such as family, friends, youth workers, teachers and coaches, in basic terms individuals or groups of people who have impacted these young people's lives. The word "systems" in this thesis refers to macro factors such as the education system, youth justice system and welfare system framed by legislative policies.

Whakawhiti kōrero

Whakawhiti kōrero is a data collection method that reflects similar characteristics to semi-structured interviews (Poli, 2024). Whakawhiti kōrero is a conversational interview that allows for open-ended questions so participants are able to share their stories.

Whanaungatanga

Whanaungatanga is a framework for relationships for Māori and reflects that people should be treated like family in the sense of principles such as aroha (love), awhi (helpfulness), manaaki (hospitality) and tiaki (guidance) (Bishop et al., 2014).

Young people

The term “young people” is defined differently throughout the world; for example, the African Youth Charter (2006) defines a young person as being aged between 15 and 35. The definition of the term that is used in this research is the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria’s (2007) definition, which refers to young people as being aged between 12 and 25. This definition is similar to the statement that youth justice in Victoria involves statutory responsibility for young people aged 10 to 24 (Justice Victoria, 2020).

Youth justice system

The youth justice system is responsible for the statutory supervision of children and young people aged 10–24 who are involved in the criminal justice system (Justice Victoria, 2020). The system supervises children and young people in both community and custodial centres. In the community, children and young people are supervised by community youth justice workers, who work out of justice service centres across the state. Young people in the youth justice system in Victoria have various levels of involvement, as some young people’s criminal charges may be identified as more serious and some may have more frequent involvement with the youth justice system. The youth justice system has different interventions and programs for the various levels of involvement. Lower level involvement interventions may include cautions from the police, fines, good behaviour bonds and Children’s Court youth diversion (Justice Victoria, 2022). A higher level involvement intervention may include youth justice group conferencing, youth justice bail in community supervision and time spent in a custodial centre (Justice Victoria, 2022). This relates to the thesis as the participants had varied levels of involvement in the youth justice system. Some of the participants had experience with the lower level interventions and some had experience with the higher level interventions.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This research was conducted to address the issue of Māori and Pasifika over-representation in the youth justice system in Victoria. Māori and Pasifika cultures have been disrupted by colonisation and with systems in Australia having colonial influence it pushed this research to have a decolonial theoretical framework. It takes on the learnings from Māori and Pasifika young men who had a history of youth justice involvement in Victoria and professionals who have worked with Māori and Pasifika young people involved in youth justice. This research with decolonial theory as its very foundation aims to represent the young men by using their stories to identify the key supports and systems that contributed to them both being involved with and propelled away from youth justice involvement. The power structures created by colonisation in Australia continue to provide challenges for marginalised groups such as Māori and Pasifika people. The colonial history of mistreatment of Māori and Pasifika in Australia is highlighted through policies such as the White Australian policy in the early to mid-1900s (Lee, 2009), and even now we see policies that disadvantage Māori and Pasifika people such as 444 visas and the 501 deportation policy.

The research aims to show how supports can have a positive influence on Māori and Pasifika young people in youth justice systems. Bartels (2011) and Grover (2017) explained that the key characteristics of young people involved in youth justice systems are related to poor experiences within educational domains, impaired or damaging family relationships and low socio-economic status. Research such as that of Liddell et al. (2016) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) focused on Pasifika young people involved in youth justice not only explained the challenges they face, but also identified how supports within systems can help propel Māori and Pasifika young people away from punitive involvement with youth justice.

The literature provides insight on how colonial systems in Australia such as education provides uneven support that does not favour Māori and Pasifika students. Blackberry and Kearney (2021) research refers to low expectations from teachers on

Māori and Pasifika students. This would suggest that Māori and Pasifika students in Australia before they are able to show their ability to learn, they are already identified as uninterested or incapable to gain an education to the same standards of other students. This view on Māori and Pasifika being unsophisticated or unable to gain an education is a historic colonial view (Enari and Haua, 2021). Education is a contributing factor to youth justice involvement. With the education system in Australia holding the power and providing unequal access for Māori and Pasifika students, how can we blame Māori and Pasifika students for having a poor relationship with education.

This research aims to identify how supports and systems can help propel Māori and Pasifika young people away from youth justice involvement. The response from literature such as The Centre of Policy and Development (2020), The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024), and Save the Children et al. (2023) was to challenge the current system of youth justice by suggesting an entire system change to a child rights approach to youth justice. This would encourage a step away from a youth justice system that focusses on punitive action to one that focus on prevention.

This research takes on a kaupapa Māori research methodology, which is situated in decolonial theory and Indigenous knowledge methodology (Denscombe, 2025). Being of Māori cultural heritage, I situated a cultural understanding between myself and the participants as an intersubjective bridge which allowed for whakawhiti kōrero. In kaupapa Māori research the 4 principles of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga are employed.

My background and upbringing

I am a Māori man born in Rotorua, Aotearoa New Zealand, but moved to Melbourne, Australia, at the age of 2 and I was raised moving between houses in a low-income household and low socio-economic areas. I have 2 brothers and 2 sisters, and I am the second oldest in my family. My friendship group were people of similar background to me, with many culturally identifying as being Māori or Pasifika. My

household had many challenges and I witnessed many traumatic events as I was growing up.

During my primary school years, I was doing okay academically and socially. I spent a lot of time with my older brother, who is 5 years older, and his mates, who were frequently getting involved in the youth justice system. From the ages of 9–12, I was exposed to adverse childhood experiences at home. My connection to my Māori culture was strong during this period of time as my nan lived in Australia and took me to New Zealand every year or 2 to connect with my extended family and my Māori heritage.

In my first 2 years of high school, I started to disconnect from my family and my culture. I remember staying out all night in the streets at the age of 13 and going home the next day with no consequences from my family. I was allowed to do whatever I wanted. I started getting in trouble at my mainstream school and I was not encouraged to go to school by my parents. My parents had not had much success at school themselves as my mum was a young mum who had had my brother at age 13. My dad had grown up without his dad in the home and his mum had worked a lot, which meant that he was not often supervised. My parents had little parenting support or modelling. I ended up being asked to leave the mainstream school in Year 8, so I tried to enrol in my zoned mainstream high school. This school was not interested in enrolling me and, as a result, aged 14 I was out of the school system for approximately 12 months. This was when I was most surrounded by youth justice interactions, hanging around the streets with friends who were often in custody in youth justice centres and on youth justice orders. During this period of time, even though I had many Māori and Pasifika friends, I felt as if we had all drifted away from our Māori and Pasifika identity and started to connect with the street culture, which was graffiti and “lad” culture.

Eventually bored with not going to school and having friends who attended alternative school settings, I enrolled in Kensington Community High School. Attending this school was a shock to my system. Teachers were non-judgemental and attempted to create professional relationships with students and there were youth workers who would work with students. This was a school I enjoyed going to;

they even catered the curriculum to the learning group and had many hands-on activities. I managed to maintain my attendance and going to school kept me out of trouble. After a year I disconnected from Kensington Community High School even though I enjoyed it as my friends who were a year or 2 older had stopped going to school. I was around 16 and had another year and a half away from school. I ended up enrolling in another alternative school called St. Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre when I was 17 as a few of my mates had also started attending there. I enjoyed my time at St. Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre as it was structured in a similar way to Kensington Community High School. I made strong relationships with a couple of teachers and youth workers at the school. When I was 18, I was looking towards the future and, as I didn't feel as if I had skills or interest in anything specific, the teacher encouraged me and another close friend to consider youth work. I enrolled in a Certificate IV and Diploma in Youth Work, which was a major challenge. I completed a Certificate IV pathway program and then completed a Diploma of Youth Work. I received a lot of support from a teacher at St Joseph's in terms of providing me with lunches and even driving me to TAFE on days I felt like quitting.

After completing the diploma, I attempted to go straight into a Bachelor of Youth as my confidence was increasing. I was, however, experiencing challenges at home so my teacher at St. Joseph's referred me to emergency housing in a youth foyer. This made it easier for me to engage and I felt confident in my first 6 months of university. Fast forward a couple of years, I ended up getting through and my life was in contrast to friends who were in and out of prison.

When I was 21, my partner was pregnant with my son so I needed to get a job. I turned to St. Joseph's, my old school, as they had a job advertisement for a youth worker. They ended up employing me for 3 days a week as an education support officer. I ended up doing well and 6 months in they employed me full-time as a youth worker in a classroom. I worked there for 5 years and for the last 6 months I have been employed as a Pasifika worker in a semi-leadership role working with Aboriginal, Māori and Pasifika young people who are at risk of being involved in youth justice systems.

My experience with supports and systems in Victoria

There were a few systems and supports that assisted me to be in a position to complete a bachelor's degree and have a career in youth work. I was having trouble with mainstream education, being asked to move on in Year 8 and then not being able to enrol in my zoned school. Being able to access alternative education gave me an opportunity to engage in education. I attended Kensington Community High School and St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre, which gave me a safe place, had no judgement and safely encouraged me to engage in education. The hands-on activities made it fun to engage in learning and the positive relationships with teachers made it bearable to do academic work. Although I was disconnected from education and had no interest in it, alternative education made it bearable enough that I learnt subjects such as writing and numeracy. Alternative education provided support financially also as they funded transport by providing a yearly public transport ticket and free food throughout the day. St. Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre funded my Australian citizenship; as I was a New Zealand citizen, I couldn't get HECS or Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) financial loans. They funded the citizenship application and supported me to complete the application requirements. I was not one to put myself in vulnerable situations and had no trust in adults. The main thing alternative education did was make me feel safe to learn and gave me an actual opportunity to get an education.

Playing rugby league as a 12- to 13-year-old gave me an identity, especially as in my spare time I was still hanging out with my older brother. Playing rugby league put me in a position to create friendships with boys who were "normal" and not getting in trouble. I had good relationships with both my rugby coaches as well which gave me an idea of a healthy relationship with an adult. Playing rugby league gave me confidence and my self-esteem grew as I felt I was good at something.

Throughout my years in alternative education, the key adults in my life were my teachers and youth workers. As a young person, I did not have other trusting adults I could depend on. No one taught me basic stuff like hygiene, going to the doctor's and dealing with Centrelink. It was these key adults who helped me with these basics. Having relationships with key adults helped me build self-esteem and

confidence. I had only been exposed to one world that lacked opportunity and turned into going to jail, becoming a drug dealer or, if you were lucky, getting a job in a factory. These key adults showed me opportunities with more positive outcomes such as a career in youth work. This is a major reason I pursued youth work, as key adults took the effort to build rapport and become trusting adults in my life, and I know first-hand the difference that can make in a young person's life.

Having a friend who was interested in doing youth work also was a major factor in my ability to complete the Diploma of Youth Work. My friend was in the same world as me, with a history of engaging with youth justice. He was the one who wanted to do the course and I joined him as we were the same age. Having the support of someone in my world made this easy, as I got to hang out with my mate every day and we did homework together. My teacher from my past school also made this possible as she helped me with homework and provided me support when I was feeling like quitting.

Through my experiences I have learnt a lot regarding how supports and systems can determine positive outcomes. As I moved away from my traditional Māori culture and adopted a new "street" culture, mainstream education was not catering to my experience or needs and there is plenty of literature identifying the barriers to education for Māori and Pasifika and the determinants that can make it challenging to safely transition into adulthood.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature review

This literature review explores the complex historical, cultural and systemic factors that shape the experiences of Māori and Pasifika young people in Australia. A specific focus is to identify why Māori and Pasifika young people are overrepresented in the youth justice system in Victoria. To understand the supports and systems that influence them away from or towards youth justice, it is necessary to review the current research on Māori and Pasifika experiences. It will expand into existing research that covers the impacts of colonisation and how education, legal and social systems contribute to the young peoples lived realities. This chapter uses current literature to identify current approaches to support Māori and Pasifika young people and aims to provide perspective of the barriers they deal with that are deeply rooted in today's society.

This chapter begins by discussing the origins, religions and customs of Māori and Pasifika people and how colonisation impacted them. It then highlights research that contextualises the systemic factors such as 444 visas and deportation. It then looks into Māori and Pasifika family dynamics and further discusses Māori and Pasifika young people. The literature review explores how the education system provides significant barriers and then analyses frameworks, such as cultural competency pedagogy and a strengths-based approach that challenge those barriers. To conclude, the literature review looks at how to address the overrepresentation of Māori and Pasifika young people and systemic changes, such as a child's rights approach to youth justice.

Origin of Māori and Pasifika

Māori and Pasifika people's ancestors have a history of migration through islands around the Pacific Ocean dating back close to 3000 years ago (Harris et al., 2020). The early migration to the Pacific Islands is complex and is often debated between scholars as to the origins and details of the Lapita people. They are recognised as the first ancestors and inhabitants of the Pacific Islands (Kirch, 2010). The Lapita people are thought to originate from Austronesia and Melanesia, and to have

migrated throughout the Pacific Islands, for example, Samoa, Fiji and Tonga. Samoa has evidence of inhabitants from 2750 to 2880 years ago, although the first major modification to the landscape happened around 1500 years ago, and around this time it is thought that the Lapita people initiated a complex history of migration (Harris, et al., 2020). Similarly, Tonga's first settlers are thought to have arrived around 2880 years ago with the Lapita people (Kirch, 2010). See Figure 1.

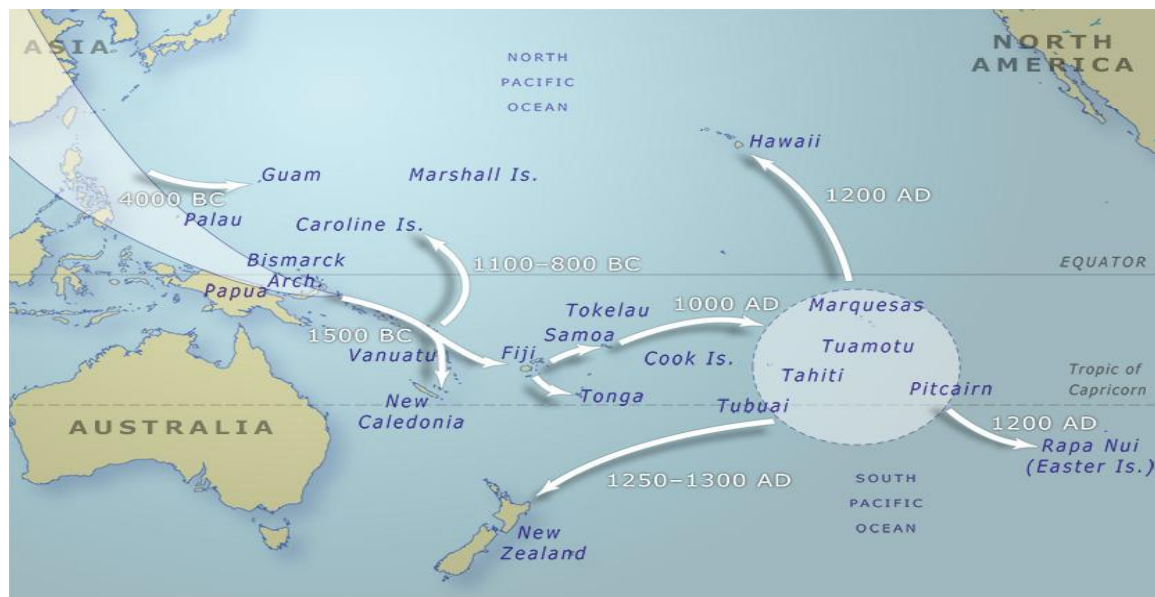


Figure 1: The direction and timing of settlement

Note. From “Pacific migrations – From West to East Polynesia”, Irwin, G. (2005), Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand.

(<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/map/1772/the-direction-and-timing-of-settlement>), CC BY-NC 3.0 NZ.

History documents the Māori people as the first settlers in Aotearoa New Zealand (Lowe, 2008). Lowe (2008) explained that archaeological data points to Aotearoa New Zealand being first settled around 1250–1300 AD. Lowe (2008) indicated that Māori migrated from eastern Polynesia. In Māori cultural lore, it is said that Māori came from Hawaiiki and every iwi, or tribe, has a connection to a waka (boat) that their tupuna (ancestors) travelled on from Hawaiiki to Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, I am from the Ngāti Awa iwi (tribe) and my tupuna travelled on the Mataatua from Hawaiiki to Aotearoa New Zealand. The history of migration of Māori

and Pasifika people shows a connection between these cultural groups that emerged 3000 years ago.

Colonisation

Māori and Pasifika cultures have been disrupted by colonisation, with systems in Australia having colonial influence. The literature provides insight into how colonial systems in Australia such as education produced an environment that is providing uneven support which does not favour Māori and Pasifika students. Blackberry and Kearney's (2021) research refers to Pasifika students as being deficit theorised and low expectations of Māori and Pasifika students. This would suggest that Māori and Pasifika students in Australia, before they are even able to show their ability to learn, are already identified as uninterested in or incapable of gaining an education to the same standards as other students. This view of Māori and Pasifika as being unsophisticated or unable to gain an education is a historical colonial view (Enari & Haua, 2021). Education is a contributing factor to youth justice involvement and, with the education system holding the power and providing unequal access for Māori and Pasifika students, how can we blame Māori and Pasifika students for having a poor relationship with education?

Māori and Pasifika countries faced numerous colonisation attempts. The UK was not the only nation to colonise the islands; Germany, France and the USA have also left their marks on many Pacific countries (Heathcote, 2022). The French colonisation of the Tahitian Islands, now part of French Polynesia, and the US colonisation of the eastern Pacific Island of American Samoa are but 2 examples showing that some Pacific Island countries are still under some sort of control from the countries that colonised them.

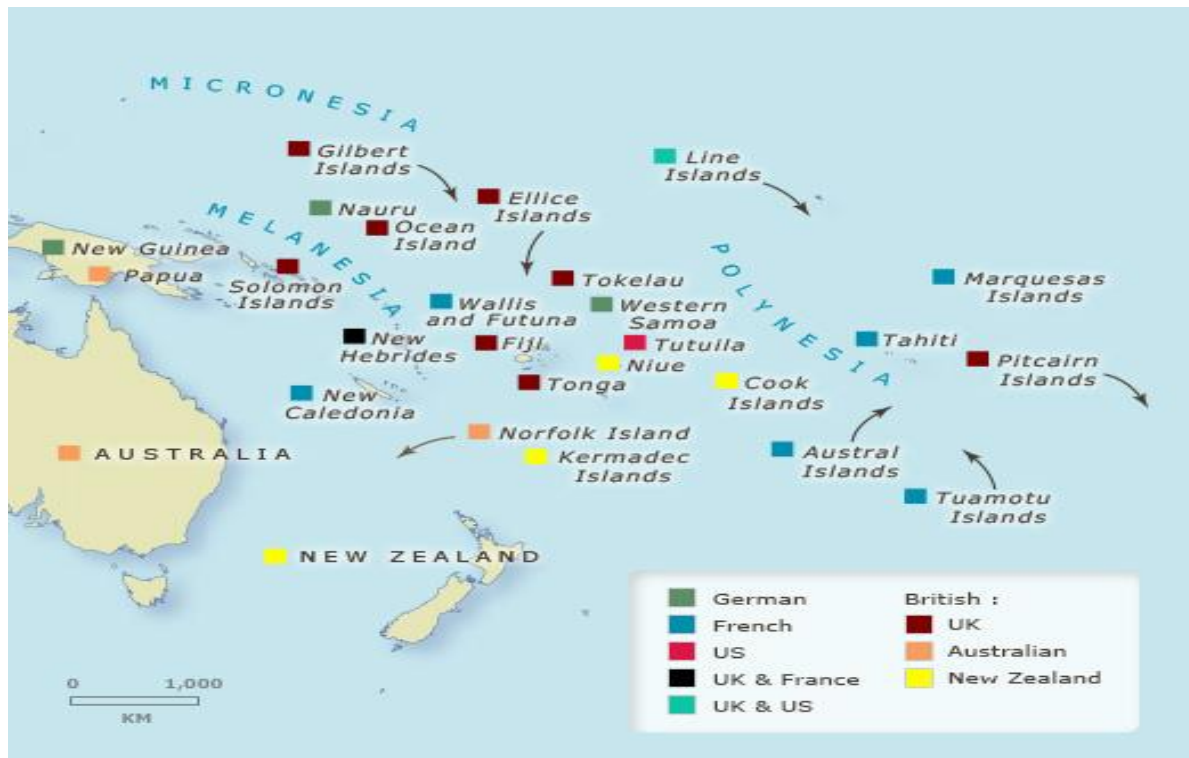


Figure 2: Colonial control in the Pacific

Note. From “Pacific Islands and New Zealand – New Zealand and the Pacific”,
Fraenkal, J. (2012), Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand.

(<https://teara.govt.nz/en/interactive/36846/colonial-control-in-the-pacific>), CC BY-NC
3.0 NZ.

The colonisation of Māori and Pasifika countries challenged the Indigenous peoples of these countries through exploitation and the forcible taking of land and resources, in addition to disrupting the social structures and belief systems of the Indigenous peoples (Wirihana & Smith, 2019).

Religions and customs of Māori and Pasifika countries

In Māori and Pasifika cultures there is a traditional belief system that originated before colonisation. There are some similarities between the beliefs of Māori and Pasifika peoples. An example of this is Maui, the demigod, who is recognised throughout Pacific Island countries and Aotearoa New Zealand (Marck, 1996). In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Māori traditionally believe the world was created by the sky father, Ranginui, and the earth mother, Papatuanuku, along with their children, Tane (god of the forest), Tangaroa (god of the sea), Tawhirimatea (god of winds and

elements), Rongomatane (god of the kumara and cultivated crops), Haumia (god of the fernroot and wild fruits and herbs), Tuamatauenga (god of people and war) and Whiro (god of evil, disease and pestilence) (Herzog, 1996). The children plotted to separate Ranginui and Papatuanuku. Tane pushed Ranginui with his legs, bracing his shoulders on Papatuanuku and splitting them apart, bringing light into the world (Herzog, 1996). There are traditional beliefs similar to this across Pacific countries. With the introduction of colonisation of Māori and Pacific countries came the intermingling of two separate sets of beliefs.

The colonisation of the Pacific Islands brought Westernised religions such as Christianity. Many Pacific Islander communities were influenced by this and turned away from their traditional customs and converted to Western religions (Lamb, 2010). The first missionaries were from an evangelical Protestant missionary group called the London Missionary Society, which visited Tahiti in 1795 (Lamb, 2010). Christian and Catholic missionaries came to Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific Islands in the 1800s (Lamb, 2010). As there were missionaries from different religions, when a chief would take on a religion, the rival chief would take on an opposing religion. Lamb (2010) said that “in Tonga a chief Taufa’ahau became a Methodist, so several rival chiefs became Roman Catholic “(p. 127).

In Samoa, missionaries arrived in 1832 and chiefs in Samoa who converted to these Western religions still used methods of both their religion and traditional culture in solving social and political issues and problems (Lamb, 2010). In Aotearoa New Zealand, the missionaries were widely unsuccessful in converting Māori people to Christianity when they first arrived in 1814 (Kitchko, 2020).

The missionaries in the early 1800s believed that Māori people needed saving from their primitive and barbarous nature, and that converting the Māori people to Christianity would do that (Kitchco, 2020). There is a similar history in most Māori and Pacific countries as missionaries spread their religious beliefs and converted many people to their religions throughout the Pacific Islands. Religious conversion has had a significant impact on the current make-up and customs of the islands in the Pacific Ocean and Aotearoa New Zealand (Lamb, 2010).

Fa'a Samoa is a Samoan framework which can be translated as "the Samoan way". It is an Indigenous framework that defines what is important to Samoans. Fa'a Samoa has 3 primary principles. These principles are:

- ava (respect)
- fa'aalaolo (reverence and humility) and
- alofa (love) (Siauane, 2006).

From birth, Samoans are taught to respect their elders, parents and other members of the village. Ava teaches that it is important in their culture to be respectful in everyday situations (Siauane, 2006). If there is a failure to be respectful by an individual or family, there are serious consequences; the village will deal with the family or individual by giving sanctions in the form of access to food and if this is not followed, then it can lead to expulsion from the village (Siauane, 2006). Alofa (love) is shown in Samoan culture by fulfilling your role in your family and village, and showing alofa through your actions (Siauane, 2006). An example of this is providing food and financial support, and ultimately doing what is needed for your family and village (Siauane, 2006).

Similarly, in Tonga they have a phrase called angafakatonga which means "the Tongan way". Angafakatonga means to respect people with higher social status and the church, as well as being loyal to family (Morton, 1998). Fijians have the phrase bula vakavanua which also includes similar principles of respect, love, honour, kindness and deference to others (Thaggard et al., 2023). This shows that there are large similarities in cultures throughout the Pacific Islands and they share key values like respect for elders, religion, and looking after the family and village.

Māori and Pasifika in Australia

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Census data, the population of Māori and Pasifika people in Australia is 445,127 and in Victoria is 79,395 or 1.2% of the state population. The population consists of people from these backgrounds: Cook Islander, Fijian, Kiribati, Māori, Melanesian, Melanesian and Papuan, Micronesian, Micronesian, Nauruan, New Caledonian, Niuean, Oceanian, Papuan,

Papua New Guinean, Pitcairn, Polynesian, Samoan, Solomon Islander, Tahitian, Tokelauan, Tongan, Tuvaluan and Vanuatu (Victorian Government, 2024b).

Māori and Pasifika people have been migrating to Australia since the late 1800s (Enari & Haua, 2021). Throughout this period, they have faced discrimination and been disadvantaged by different government policies. Lee (2009) said the White Australia Policy discouraged migration from the Pacific Islands to Australia between 1901 and 1971. Pasifika people were labelled unsophisticated and unsuited to live in Australia (Enari & Haua, 2021). Māori and Pasifika people in Australia who moved from Aotearoa New Zealand after 2001 are often placed on a 444 visa, which restricts them from the same benefits as Australian citizens such as welfare and housing support (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2021). The Australian government is able to deport people as the *Migration Act 1958* allows deportation if an individual fails a character test. The character test considers a person's criminal record and, for many migrants from Aotearoa New Zealand, this has been the grounds for being deported from Australia to Aotearoa New Zealand. Artus et al. (2023) stated that since 2014, more than half of deportees from Australia have been New Zealand nationals although they only make up 10% of the immigrant population in Australia. The research above suggests that Māori and Pasifika people in Australia face disadvantage and barriers to succeed in living well in Australia.

In the following subsections I will discuss the current literature that relates to the experiences of Māori and Pasifika young people in Australia. This will identify frameworks and research that provide evidence on how supports and systems propel Māori and Pasifika young people towards or away from the youth justice system.

444 visa

Māori and Pasifika people in Australia who moved from New Zealand since 2001 are often placed on a special category 444 visa, which restricts them from the same benefits as Australian citizens and other permanent residents (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2021). The special category 444 visa is given to New Zealanders entering Australia and gives New Zealanders the right to permanent residency, as well as the right to work in Australia (Mcneil & Marmao, 2023). Although this gives

New Zealanders the opportunity to reside in Australia, the special category 444 visa restricts access to welfare support, student loans, disability services, public housing and disaster relief (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2021). An example of this is that people on a non-protected 444 visa are unable to get support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which is a government scheme in Australia that supports and funds services for people with impairment or disability (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2018).

Deportation

In the early 1900s the Prime Minister of Australia, Edmund Barton, spoke directly about deporting Pasifika people (Mcneil & Marmao, 2023). The White Australia Policy was in place from 1901 to 1973 (Mcneil & Marmao, 2023). In 1975 the Australian Government was noted to have deported 11 Pasifika people (Mcneil & Marmao, 2023). The Australian government is able to deport people under the Migration Act if they fail a character test and this has caused many Māori and Pasifika people be deported (Mcneil & Marmao, 2023).

A change to the Australian 501 legislation in 2014 was created with the purpose of being able to deport people and cancel the visas of people who failed a character test and were believed to be of bad character (Mcneil & Marmao, 2023). Mcneil and Marmao (2023) said that between half and three-quarters of 501s (deportees) are deported to New Zealand although New Zealanders only make up 7% of migrant people in Australia. Stanley (2018) said that on 31 March 2017, 181 detainees had New Zealand citizenship, which is over an eighth of the population detained in detention centres at that time. It is thought at that time that half of the detainees had lived more than 5 years in Australia (Stanley, 2018).

The human rights of Māori and Pasifika people are not considered within the 501 legislations. There are many stories of deportees having to leave behind family members, including children (Stanley, 2018). There was a case where an American Samoan who had never been to New Zealand and who migrated to Australia from American Samoa at the age of 14 was deported to New Zealand at the age of 41 (Mcneil & Marmao, 2023). The deportees are held at detention centres and often placed there as soon as they have finished their prison sentences, meaning they are

detained for extended periods of time (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024c). There have been many reports in the New Zealand media of physical abuse of deportees at detention centres from the staff who work there (Stanley, 2018).

Māori and Pasifika families in Australia

As mentioned by Bartels (2021) and Grover (2017), a major factor in young people being involved in youth justice is what happens within families. Examples of this are intergenerational trauma, poverty, family conflict and lack of prosocial supports; these can contribute to a young person being involved in youth justice (Bartels, 2021; Grover, 2017).

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) did research that involved interviews with Māori and Pasifika young people, parents, workers and professionals, and community leaders and elders, giving different perspectives on what is happening in Māori and Pasifika families that is contributing to the over-representation of Māori and Pasifika young people in youth justice. The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) said this is currently happening within Māori and Pasifika families: “poor parent/family relationships, affected by intergenerational and family conflict, family separation and stress, parenting practices and approaches including discipline, and family violence” (p. 5).

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) explained that family conflict is a major contributing factor to the over-representation of the Māori and Pasifika community in the youth justice system. Māori and Pasifika young people are exposed to a culture that differs to what their parents were exposed to, which creates differences in values, expectations and cultural norms. This causes a rift as Māori and Pasifika parents do not have the ability to relate to their children (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2021). Shepard and Ilalio (2015) said, “group participation in law-breaking behaviour is a common by-product, and often a reaction to the frustrations and pressures of familial disorder” (p. 7).

Ravulo (2009) did research that involved participants who were Pacific Islander young people. This included 9 interviews with Pasifika young people who had varied

involvement in the youth justice system in New South Wales. Ravulo (2009) used a questionnaire that was used previously in their research and the participants were Māori and Pasifika young people aged 12–20 who had spent time incarcerated in youth justice centres in Sydney. They also had data on young people who were not Pacific Islander who completed the questionnaire that was used to compare the 2 groups. Ravulo (2009) used the term “Pacific Islander” rather than Pasifika as their definition did not include many Pasifika countries like Papua New Guinea.

Ravulo (2009) compared non-Pacific Islander young people to Pacific Islander young people and identified that the Pacific Islander young people generally had a larger immediate family. Ravulo (2009) detailed that the Pacific Islander young people more often had parents who worked than non-Pacific Islander parents. Although Bartels (2011) suggested that socio-demographic factors and social disadvantage are the main factors in young people being involved in youth justice rather than being from a certain group of people, Ravulo’s (2009) comparison data suggested that being in certain groups of people will provide different levels of socio-demographic factors or social disadvantage.

Ravulo (2009) highlighted 2 subjects’ Pacific families and Pacific accommodation. Ravulo (2009) expanded on Pacific Islander parents, saying, “Pacific parents may still carry out excessive punishment that is based on aggression, rather than as a means to correct negative behaviour” (p. 161). Family violence or aggression in Māori and Pasifika homes is commonly found within the literature, as it is also mentioned by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) and Liddell et al. (2016).

Ravulo’s (2009) research identified that out of the participants 82% lived in public housing and 67% of the non-Pacific Islander young people lived in public housing. Ravulo (2009) found that overcrowding was common in households, with the majority living in 3-bedroom houses with more than 6 people.

Māori and Pasifika families face financial pressures. Shepard and Ilalio (2015) identified that Māori and Pasifika families have major financial pressures, as many do not have the luxury of falling back on welfare supports with the restrictions of the 444 visas. Māori and Pasifika families are often of low socio-economic status

(Shepard & Ilalio, 2015). Orton and Edwards (2020) did research titled “Pacific Islander communities and employment in Australia” where they analysed the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016 Census of Population and Housing (Census) data to ask 2 questions: Where do Australian Pacific Islanders work? And how does labour force participation compare to the broader non-Pacific Islander Australian population? In this analysis Orton and Edwards (2020) identified 265,796 Pacific Islander people and acknowledged that of Pacific Islander people aged 15 and over, 42% of them were employed full time and around 30% were not part of the labour force at all, with men having a higher employment rate than women. Orton and Edwards (2020) stated that Pacific Islanders, compared to the rest of Australia’s resident population, had higher participation in the labour force. Orton and Edwards (2020) recognised that there was often not a high level of education attained by Pacific Islanders and that was reflected in what jobs they had, with the 3 most popular jobs being in the fields of warehouse/transport/postal, construction and manufacturing.

Greace et al. (2023) did a study named “Pasifika communities in Australia”. It is an overview of the 2021 Australian Census data and explained the trends and themes in regards to the Māori and Pasifika communities in Australia. One of the key statistics compared the Pasifika general population to the Australian general population in level of education; a highlight of this is that Māori and Pasifika will more often have completed certificate-level education whereas the Australian population will more often have completed a bachelor-level degree or above (Greace et al., 2023).

Greace et al. (2023) identified in their research, similar to Orton and Edwards (2020), that Māori and Pasifika men’s highest percentage of employment is in construction, and Māori and Pasifika women’s highest percentage of employment is in healthcare and social assistance. One of the largest differences between the general Māori and Pasifika population and the Australian population is that Māori and Pasifika people more often have one parent working full-time and the other parent not working, which may be because of the higher number of children that require care in the household (Greace et al., 2023). Greace et al. (2023) explained that 17.5% of Māori and

Pasifika households have 4 or more children, with 11.2% having family households of 2 or more people and 33.8% having family households of 5 or more.

Although Orton and Edwards (2020) suggested that the Pacific Islander community in Australia had a higher chance than other Australian residents of having someone in the household employed, in other research it is mentioned that there are other causes that create financial pressures. Both Ravulo (2009) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) mentioned that overcrowding was happening within Māori and Pasifika households. Overcrowding in Pasifika families' homes is commonly noted in the literature. Paterson et al. (2018) identified in New Zealand that overcrowding within Pasifika homes happened more often than with other ethnic groups. The overcrowding in Māori and Pasifika homes in Australia is consistent with Greace et al.'s (2023) statistics from the 2021 Census which explain that Pasifika have 33.8% of family households of 5 or more and 8.9% have 8-person households compared to 1.6% of the general Australian population having 8-person households.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2020) highlighted that there was a lack of financial literacy in Māori and Pasifika families and that sometimes funds could be given to churches instead of paying essential bills. Orton and Edwards (2020) recognised that on average Pacific Islander people in Australia were earning over the median income of Australian residents, while other research suggests that often Māori and Pasifika people have major financial pressures and are in the low socio-economic bracket, which may be caused by 444 visas, overcrowding in homes and lack of financial literacy.

Youth justice system in Australia

The British empire when they began to colonise Australia, they did so with the aim to send convicts and create a penal colony (Maxwell-Stewart, 2010). Youth justice was not something that was focused on in those times as young people normally had the same consequences for crimes as adults, the youngest of the first fleet was John Hudson who was sentenced at nine years old and arrived in Australia as a thirteen-year-old (Timbury, 2015). The British colonies initially recognised Australia as Terra nullius (land belonging to no one) which did not acknowledge indigenous people as inhabitants or owners of the land (Creyke et al.2020 p.38).

New South Wales was the first British colony where they brought the English common law which was legitimatised in the Australians Courts Act in 1828, which enforced English law and statutes around Australia, English styled legal institutions were implemented in Australia the main one being the Westminster system (Zhang et al, 2024). The justice system continued to have reforms away from British control as Australia looked on to independence and enforced the Australian constitution in 1901 (Zhang et al, 2024).

The creation of the youth justice system in Australia was first started in 1895 with the formation of the child court system (Cunneen, 2012). In the beginning to the mid-1900s youth justice had a reform to the welfare model (Legal Information Access Centre, 2005). The welfare model was an aim to turn to focus on “the best interest on the child” it did not involve only young people and children that were offending but young people and children that they felt have been neglected and needed care and protection (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Canberra, 1998).

Australians’ welfare model of youth justice in the early to mid-1900s saw that young people and children who they felt were neglected were taken from their families and placed in boys and girl’s homes (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Canberra, 1998). The Bayswater boys’ home is an example, it was established by the salvation army and held both boys who offended and some that did not (Victorian Government, 2025). The boys’ and girls’ homes were often run by Christian influenced groups (Victorian Government, 2025). In the Gosford and Westbrook boys’ homes they aimed to train boys to become agricultural workers, the boy’s homes aimed to reform the boys with cultural education that was influenced by American and British teachings (Carden, 2024).

Youth justice system in Victoria

The youth justice system in Victoria is responsible for the statutory supervision of children and young people aged between 10-24 that are involved in the criminal justice system (Justice Vic, 2020). They supervise children and young people in both community and custodial centres. In community they are supervised by community youth justice workers that work out of justice service centres across the state

(Justice Vic, 2020). The custodial centres that are used in Victoria are Parkville Youth Justice Precinct who hold 10- to 18-year-old males and 10- to 21-year-old females (Justice Vic, 2020).

Māori and Pasifika young people and the youth justice system

Māori and Pasifika people make up only 1.2% of the population in Victoria (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). It is reported that Māori and Pasifika young people are over-represented in the youth justice system in Victoria (Justice Victoria, 2020). Throughout the literature, Shepard and Ilalio (2015), Liddell et al. (2016) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) have highlighted many determinants of this and also ways we can better support Māori and Pasifika young people in Victoria.

Liddell et al. (2016) undertook a qualitative project and the participants were young people who were currently involved in the youth justice system in New South Wales. Liddell et al. (2016) identified many supports and systems such as education, finances, family, friends, youth justice and culture. Liddell et al. (2016) said that Pacific Islander people (in schools) are labelled as deviant and are placed on behavioural management programs that further isolate them. A young person identified school as a place where he learnt criminal behaviour (Liddell et al., 2016). Two young people in the research project identified that the only way to avoid offending was to stay home (Liddell et al., 2016). In this research a young person discussed how, without school or work commitments, this would bring vulnerable young people together and that was when offending would happen (Liddell et al., 2016).

Shepard and Ilalio (2016) reviewed literature that aimed to identify the determinants for Māori and Pasifika young people and what would help them to not engage in the youth justice system. They identified that Māori and Pasifika young people who are over-represented in the youth justice system in Victoria (Shepard & Ilalio, 2016) often disengage from school early and that this is a key risk factor for engaging in criminal activity (Shepard & Ilalio, 2016). This literature review identified that there is a need for culturally competent services to work with culturally and linguistically diverse young people (Shepard & Ilalio, 2016). Shepard and Ilalio (2016) said:

Regrettably, programs and services that address the unique needs of at-risk MPI [Māori and Pacific islander] people in Australia have been largely unavailable, exposing a serious gap in service delivery (p.10).

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) in its research to identify community views of the over-representation of Māori and Pasifika young people in the youth justice system sought perspectives from community cultural elders, parents, youth workers and young people who had not been identified as having engagement in the youth justice system. The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) and Liddell et al. (2016) both acknowledged peer influence as a major factor that influences offending. A limitation of the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) study is that it focused on community views and did not have participants who had experience of involvement with the youth justice system as a young person, whereas Liddell et al.'s (2016) study had participants who were young people involved in the youth justice system.

Factors of overrepresented groups in the Youth Justice system

Bartels (2011) said that “The over-representation of specific groups is not causally related to ethnicity; rather, sociodemographic factors and social disadvantage can better explain criminality than membership in identified groups” (p. 2). The socio-demographic factors that were identified by Bartels research (2011) are: economic and social exclusion; intergenerational trauma; lack of prosocial supports in Australia; and feeling excluded from both family and mainstream communities (Bartels, 2011). This is similar to the study of Grover (2017), who mentioned the key characteristics of young offenders are often poverty, poor relationships with school and family conflict.

The Centre for Policy Development (2020) explained that “there are more people trapped in a cycle of disadvantage than ever before in Australia and it is impossible to break out of the disadvantage without engaging the state and systems” (p. 6). The systems that are in place to support people who are disadvantaged, such as the criminal justice system, employment, housing, health and social services, often underdeliver for them (Centre for Policy Development, 2020). An example of this is the 444 visa holders, especially the non-protected version which includes many

Māori and Pasifika people in Australia, who have no access to the NDIS or public transport concessions, limited access to Centrelink benefits and limited access to student loans (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2018).

The cost of Youth Justice in Australia

There have been calls for harsher consequences for young offenders in Australia throughout media platforms. In Victoria they were answered as a stronger youth offender law was passed in 2024 and this means that there are tougher consequences for repeat offenders (Victorian Government, 2024c). The Justice Reform Initiative (2025) press release said the net cost of youth justice surpassed one billion dollars for the first time in 2023–2024. The Justice Reform Initiative (2025) blamed the current punitive approach and explained that the cost to imprison a single child in Australia is \$3320 per day and this comes out of taxpayers' pockets.

The Justice Reform Initiative (2025), Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) and Save the Children et al. (2023) have called for national youth justice system reform as it would lower costs. The Justice Reform Initiative (2025) said that if we continue to imprison young people, that cost will continue to go up.

The logic of Save the Children et al. (2023) and the Australian Human Rights Commission's (2024b) viewpoint is that if there is reform towards a children's rights approach, then there will be more focus on prevention and fewer young people and children will be incarcerated. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) has requested better rehabilitation practices that provide a trauma-informed environment with restorative justice principles such as a process of collective resolution like group conferences with offender and victim.

Bagaric's (2022) arguments against rehabilitation are that making the incarceration experience unpleasant reduces further involvement in criminal activity and that rehabilitation only has slightly better results than the punitive approach. One of Bagaric's (2022) main points is that the time must fit the crime and people convicted of serious offences should be more harshly dealt with. The children's rights approach considers that if prevention and early intervention have more funding and the youth justice system is focused on those, there will be fewer serious offences as more

young people and children will get the support they need before it gets to that point (Save the Children et al., 2023).

Understanding Māori and Pasifika young people

The literature commonly refers to a need to better understand Māori and Pasifika young people, and this better understanding in supports and systems can bring better outcomes. Ravulo et al. (2016) said, “rather than seeing young offenders as problematic individuals, social workers should be versed in understanding the many contexts in which this person exists” (p. 88). This then extends to Siteine (2010), who explained the importance of identity for students in schools and how teachers can mould that identity with how and what content they teach, in particular for Pasifika students, who are often viewed as deficient in education. Kearney and Blackberry (2021) said deficit views and low expectations then gave Māori and Pasifika students a negative outlook on school and teachers. The literature from Kearney and Blackberry (2021) and Reynolds (2017) said that Pasifika students found more success with teachers if they felt the teachers cared for them.

The literature that identifies a need to further understand Māori and Pasifika young people often mentions the importance of relationships to them and how this correlates with their need to feel accepted. Reynolds (2017) mentioned that male Pasifika students in high school saw acceptance as an important factor in whether or not they optimally engaged in education. This included acceptance from other male Pasifika students, non-Pasifika students and teachers (Reynolds, 2017). *Va* is a Samoan word for the “relational space in between” and Poltoorak (2007) said that the best English word to translate the word *va* is “relatedness”. Reynolds (2016) identified that *va* was the key to engaging Pasifika students and how these students may present as quiet but, through building relationships with them, they tend to open up and be more expressive.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) said that Māori and Pasifika young people are living between 2 worlds. Liddell et al. (2016) said Pasifika elders thought Pasifika young people, especially ones who were involved in youth justice, may live in between 2 worlds, one world including their families’ traditions and culture, and the

second world being a Westernised version of traditions and culture. Liddell et al. (2016) said the Pasifika parents of young people who were involved in youth justice struggled to transition from Pasifika values to Westernised values, which impacted the young people. The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) explained that young participants in their research said, within the 2 worlds it was hard for Māori and Pasifika young people, and they felt lost and not fully at home. Although Liddell et al. (2016) interviewed Pasifika young people in Australia involved in the youth justice system, they said no young people felt uneasy about their identities and felt proud of their Pasifika culture, and they said this could be a result of being seen and not heard. Liddell et al. (2016) explained this as Pasifika elders commenting that Pasifika young people were not able to give their opinions to elders and were to be seen and not heard.

The role of education

In Australia, by law education is compulsory for people aged 6–17 years (Victorian Government, 2024a). Although education is compulsory in Australia, there is various evidence provided by Blackberry and Kearney (2021), Hart (2021) and Shepard and Ilario (2016) noting the numerous obstacles Māori and Pasifika face within the education system. In Kearney and Donaghy's (2010) research a Pasifika young person explained that they had faced negative racial stereotypes from teachers in secondary education. This provides an outlook on the type of education experience Māori and Pasifika students may have. The evidence provides us with an understanding that engagement with school is important to keep people away from crime (Bartels, 2011). Teather and Hillman (2024) said, "in Australia offences committed by children aged 10 to 17 have risen 18.2% since 2022 and these figures are directly affected by educational outcomes impacted by disability and disengagement" (p. 2). The relationship between not engaging in education and engaging in crime is evident, as explained by Bartels (2011) and Grover (2017); both label a lack of engagement and poor engagement in education as key characteristics of young people who are involved in the youth justice system.

Blackberry and Kearney (2021) interviewed Māori and Pasifika young people who attended tertiary institutions. Their research focused on Māori and Pasifika young

people in the Gold Coast and Logan area in Queensland, Australia. They talked about 3 categories of challenges for Māori and Pasifika engaging in education:

- financial factors
- sociocultural factors, and
- educational factors.

A financial factor in Blackberry and Kearney's (2021) research was that Māori and Pasifika people in Australia are unable to access various social services and are ineligible to get HELP, which is Australia's government student loan scheme for university students. A sociocultural factor mentioned by Blackberry and Kearney (2021) is that there are conflicting ideologies between Western culture and Māori and Pasifika cultures as they have a cultural expectation to support extended family. This means that sometimes Māori and Pasifika young people are not pursuing higher education as they face pressure to gain low-skilled jobs to contribute to the family's needs (Blackberry & Kearney, 2021). The educational factors raised by Blackberry and Kearney (2021) involved teachers having low expectations of Māori and Pasifika young people, and racism and deficit theorising were described as factors as to why Māori and Pasifika young people have a challenging time engaging in education.

Blackberry and Kearney (2021) suggested ways to improve the educational experience for Māori and Pasifika young people. They highlighted the importance of a culturally responsive pedagogy, which requires teachers and schools to create inclusive learning environments where all students are welcomed and supported for the best opportunity to learn (Blackberry & Kearney, 2021). Teachers would need to build an understanding of their students' cultures and build culturally safe and appropriate curriculum content (Blackberry & Kearney, 2021). Blackberry and Kearney (2021) mentioned the importance of relationships in Māori and Pasifika cultures and of teachers being able to show empathy towards students. In summary, Blackberry and Kearney (2021) emphasised that schools and teachers should not look at Māori and Pasifika young people as the problem, but use their initiative to build their own understanding of Māori and Pasifika young people's cultures and needs for successful learning in an education environment.

Teather and Hillman (2024) discussed how the education system in Australia does not cater to young people who are at risk of involvement in the youth justice system, as well as young people with disability. Teather and Hillman (2024) recalled that in 1987 the Dawkins reforms brought neoliberal education policies by implementing the National Curriculum. This brought systems such as NAPLAN and put pressure on teachers to replace self-knowledge with competitive testing (Teather & Hillman, 2024). Teather and Hillman's (2024) stance on this is that these neoliberal policies in schools are not best practice for young people and they need a different approach to learning. Teather and Hillman (2024) suggested that value-based learning would create a better school environment and may reduce youth justice involvement for young people.

Blank et al. (2016) undertook a comparative study of Māori and African-American students in relation to unconscious bias in education, using US literature to learn from studies of African-American students. Blank et al. (2016) recognised that Aotearoa New Zealand Māori and African Americans have similar social spaces in their societies and acknowledged that there are similar consistent patterns of disadvantage between the educational outcomes of Māori and African-American children. Blank et al. (2016) explained that unconscious bias in education settings is a challenge both groups face and that this promotes personal, interpersonal and institutional racism. Blank et al. (2016) mentioned that Māori and African Americans have low expectations put on them by teachers, creating less chance of achievement. In short, Blank et al. (2016) explained that unconscious bias is there for Māori students in New Zealand Aotearoa which produces barriers to achieving success in school.

Hart (2021) did a literature review on young people involved in the youth justice system and their experiences in the education system in Victoria. This literature review largely referred to African and Pasifika (including Māori) young people who were involved in the youth justice system and the disadvantages those cohorts face within the education system. Throughout the literature review it was mentioned that Pasifika people are not given opportunities to work or go to school, and lack a feeling of belonging to society (Hart, 2021). This literature review identified many barriers for Māori and Pasifika young people to engage in education, for example, parents

lacking knowledge about schools and education systems, isolation and stereotyping of Pasifika young people (Hart, 2021).

The literature on the education experience of Māori and Pasifika students in Australia highlights how difficult it is for Māori and Pasifika students to succeed in education. The research puts the responsibility on teachers. Kearney and Donaghy (2010) referred to teachers not caring about Pasifika students and the stereotypes teachers place on Pasifika students. Kearney and Donaghy (2010) said it was not all teachers and there was one teacher in particular who cared about a Pasifika student's education. The damage of stereotypes is that someone may not be able to see past them and explore a person's individuality (Blum, 2020). An example of this is in the study of Kearney and Donaghy (2010), where 2 of the participants were Pasifika young people who had pursued tertiary education and had been stereotyped by teachers in secondary school to not care about education. Siteine (2010) spoke about teachers and that they have influence on students' identity; if teachers stereotype students, then this can encourage the stereotypes to become the students' identity.

Culturally competent pedagogy

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) highlighted that there is a lack of understanding of Māori and Pasifika students in Victoria. In New Zealand, this is well-researched and educational institutions have many notable examples of how to be culturally competent in regards to Māori and Pasifika students. An example of this is the following research by Reynolds (2017), Hill et al. (2019) and Siteine (2010). Reynolds (2017) said, "Pasifika students are generally taught by palangi [European origin] teachers in a system originally designed to meet the perceived needs of European settlers" (p. i).

Reynolds's (2017) research defined what Pasifika success in education looks like to male Pasifika (excluding Māori) high school students in New Zealand. Reynolds (2017) highlighted the following as keys to Pasifika success from Pasifika students: acceptance, participation, comfort and extension of range. See below summarised definitions of these ideas from Reynolds (2017).

Acceptance is being accepted by other male Pasifika students and acceptance between teachers and Pasifika students. Male Pasifika students seek connection with other male Pasifika students in an aim to create a brotherhood with each other. Pasifika students also want acceptance from non-Pasifika students and teaching staff.

Participation means for male Pasifika students to see success through action. Participation is seen as a goal by both Pasifika parents and students. Participation by “trying my best” is male Pasifika students finding success by trying their best at school. The male Pasifika students referred to trying their best and receiving some negative responses from teachers when this did not come with good grades. Reynolds (2017) explained that it was not that the male Pasifika students did not want to receive constructive feedback, but that it needed to be communicated in a way they found respectful.

Comfort is related to Pasifika students seeing success when they are comfortable at school. Kindness is a key word in the idea of comfort for Pasifika students and they see it in teachers who smile and are gentle and not harsh. The Pasifika students found comfort in teachers who accepted them and they felt their teachers had their backs.

Extension of range means a Pasifika student is able to feel comfortable and function well in a variety of situations. Relational range is defined as Pasifika students being placed in new environments where there are few Pasifika people and being able to create friendships with non-Pasifika students. Values are also extended in the Pasifika students through intermingling of their values with other perspectives.

Hill et al.'s (2019) research highlighted the importance of investigating what cultural minority groups value and using this effectively to teach. Through their investigation, they recognised that Pasifika students value opportunities to work in groups, which gives teachers an indication to use group work when working with the Pasifika student cohort.

Siteine (2010) explained the importance of identity for Pasifika students and that the teacher has a great influence on this. Siteine (2010) recognised that Pasifika students' cultural identity may vary and that there is importance in learning about the students' cultures. Siteine (2010) highlighted that what teachers bring to the classroom in terms of the content they teach has an influence on students' identity. The identity of students in the classroom deserves careful attention, especially with Pasifika young people, as Siteine (2010) said, "ideological understandings of Pasifika identity, deficit views and the lack of choice about identity can serve to promote fixed, unrealistic, fragmented and singular identities" (p. 9).

Ferguson et al. (2008) did research that reviewed literature on the experiences of Pasifika learners in the classroom in Aotearoa New Zealand. The solution to bringing success in education to Pasifika students is multifaceted and there are multiple adaptations needed to support Pasifika students in the classroom (Ferguson et al., 2008), although Ferguson et al. (2008) explained that change can be achieved in a short time if there is a cohesive approach to adapt teaching practices and overarching policies.

There is a need for Pasifika students to have high expectations placed on them within education; as Ferguson et al. (2008) said, "It involves a commitment to the belief that students from all backgrounds and ethnicities are capable of success" (p. 51). Culturally competent pedagogy in schools is a must in order to provide Pasifika young people with genuine opportunity to gain an education (Ferguson et al., 2008). There is high importance of teachers and school staff nurturing relationships with Pasifika students' caregivers to develop knowledge on how to better support Pasifika students (Ferguson et al., 2008).

Ferguson et al. (2008) identified macro issues such as teachers not adapting their practice to the current student cohort. They explained that some teachers still had an inappropriate approach to teaching, whereas other teachers were striving to adapt their practice to bring better outcomes for Pasifika students. There is a need for teachers to learn about their Pasifika students. Ferguson et al. (2008) said:

Such professional learning must necessarily focus upon fostering teacher attitudes, knowledge, skills, and practices that will acknowledge, value, nurture, and build upon the cultural capital that Pasifika learners bring from their diverse and unique nations. (p. 51)

Reynolds's (2017) ideas about how to engage Pasifika young people in education regularly have to do with relationships and connection or building an understanding of Pasifika young people. Reynolds (2017) in his title *Together as brothers* highlighted the importance of male Pasifika students having a "brotherhood" of friends in school who were also Pasifika and how this helped them engage in education. Reynolds (2017) had many other examples that relate to the need for connection and relationships, and the importance of those concepts for Pasifika students.

Siteine (2010) put the onus on teachers not to pigeonhole students' identity, particularly with Pasifika students. Siteine (2010) said:

One person can be, without contradiction, a New Zealand citizen, of Samoan heritage, with German ancestry, a Christian, a woman, a heterosexual, a feminist and an All Blacks supporter, and none of these identities can be taken to be the person's only identity. (p. 9)

Value based education

Siteine's (2010) focus on identity also provided similar ideas to values-based learning. Teather and Hillman (2024) suggested that values-based learning is Finland's "superpower" and is needed in Australia as it has been shown to be successful in Finland.

Berkowitz (2011) said:

Values education is the attempt, within schools, to craft pedagogies and supportive structures to foster the development of positive, ethical, pro-social inclinations and competencies in youth, including around strengthening their academic focus and achievement. (p. 1)

Berkowitz (2011) provided a perspective on values education or values-based learning that there are many connections between values-based learning and the above literature on culturally competent pedagogy for Māori and Pasifika students. Berkowitz (2011) highlighted the importance of group work in values-based learning and this was also important to Pasifika students in Hill et al.'s (2019) research. Berkowitz (2011) mentioned nurturance, trust and trustworthiness, which were highlighted by Reynolds (2017) as male Pasifika students' need for caring relationships. The Māori and Pasifika student secondary experience was referred to by Kearney and Donaghy (2010) and in their research Pasifika young people felt that teachers had low expectations for them to achieve in education. Berkowitz (2011) said values-based learning sets high expectations for students both with their behaviour and academically.

Strengths-based approach

The strengths-based approach is a framework that emerged in the 1980s in the USA to challenge the deficit-based approach (Pulla, 2017). The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2012) defined the strengths-based approach:

The strengths-based approach is an approach to people that views situations realistically and looks for opportunities to complement and support existing strengths and capacities as opposed to focusing on, and staying with, the problem or concern. The problem and the person are separate; however, the problem is never minimised. (p. 6)

The Department of Early Childhood Development (2012) also acknowledged what the strengths-based approach is not and explained that it is not only seeing a student's learning development as positive and denying other areas that need development.

Lopez and Louis (2009) explained that a strengths-based approach in education begins with educators identifying what their students do best and then applying their strengths in the learning process, giving the students the ability to achieve a

previously unattained level of personal excellence. Lopez and Louis (2009) provided an outlook on 5 key principles of strengths-based education, the needs to: measure students' characteristics and do strength assessment; personalise the learning experience towards students' strengths; connect with the supportive individuals of the student to celebrate strengths and achievements; give students the opportunity to use their strengths inside and outside the classroom to build positive behaviours and results; and intentionally build strengths by educators and students to pursue new experiences and opportunities to practise their strengths in different settings. Lopez and Louis (2009) noted that these principles are not to be exercised in any particular order.

In Gardner and Toope's (2011) research they asked the question, What does it mean to engage in strengths-based approaches from a social justice perspective? This research was a qualitative study where they did semi-structured interviews with educators and analysed the transcripts to identify themes. A key phrase in Gardner and Toope's (2011) research is "student-in-context" and recognising the student-in-context; this referred to the ability of an educator to build an understanding of their student's economic, familial, community and cultural backgrounds. An example of recognising the student-in-context from Gardner and Toope (2011) was that students had challenges outside of education and examples of this were poverty and academic issues, as well as not fitting into the usual mainstream schooling system. Gardner and Toope (2011) identified that the curriculum and pedagogical process should consider the student's context first and be able to be altered to cater to the student's strengths. Self-advocacy by allowing students to be involved in the decision-making about their education is an important aspect of the strengths-based approach within a social justice perspective (Gardner & Toope, 2011). Focusing on a student's strengths leads to high levels of engagement and productivity overall (Lopez & Louis, 2009).

Throughout the literature such as the studies of Sheppard and Ilalio (2015) and Liddell et al. (2016), a common theme with Māori and Pasifika young people involved in the youth justice system or at risk of involvement is a lack of positive engagement in education. The overlapping idea of the strengths-based approach from Lopez and Louis (2009) and Gardner and Toope (2011) was identifying the need for educators

to understand their students and recognising the student-in-context. There is a correlation of ideas in the literature on culturally competent pedagogy such as the work of Siteine (2010), Reynolds (2016) and Hill et al. (2019), who all noted the need to build understanding of Māori and Pasifika students which can promote their engagement in education.

Addressing over-representation of Māori and Pasifika in youth justice system

With the over-representation of Māori and Pasifika in the youth justice system, there has been suggestions about and attempts to address it. An example of this is the study by Sheperd and Ilalio (2015), who mentioned a service called Bridgingworx which focuses on diversion and reintegration, as well as mentoring and educating Māori and Pasifika young people who are involved in the youth justice system. Shepard and Ilalio (2015) said Bridgingworx is “For Pacific people, by Pacific people” (p. 11). This means that all staff are of Pasifika or Māori descent; this suggestion was also made in research by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2015) which said one reason for having programs run by people of the same cultural background is that they understand where the young people are coming from which means rapport and trust are easier to build.

Ravulo et al. (2019) did research that offers information on how youth justice should be delivered for Pacific young people and their families. Ravulo et al. (2019) explained that “a multidisciplinary approach to youth justice is needed as its impact affects families and communities”. The suggestion is for social workers who work with Māori and Pasifika young people to use 2 Pacific models, which are the fonofale model and the talanoa model (Ravulo et al., 2019). This is similar to Shepard and Ilalio (2015), who explained they had used the te whare tapa wha model when working with Māori and Pasifika young people who were involved in the youth justice system. The fonofale model incorporates the values and beliefs of people from Pacific countries such as Samoans, Cook Islanders, Tongans, Niueans, Tokelauans and Fijians (Pulotu-Endemann, 2001). The fonofale model was created as a health model for Pasifika people from these countries (Pulotu-Endemann, 2001). The fonofale model is represented in the form of a house, with each part having a meaning such as the foundation representing family, the roof representing culture

and the 4 pou (pillars) meaning spiritual, physical, mental and social (Pulotu-Endemann, 2001).

The te whare tapa wha is a model that represents the 4 dimensions of Māori wellbeing; similarly to the fonofale model, it is represented in a form of a house or whare (Tulip, 2001). The te whare tapa wha 4 dimensions of Māori wellbeing are: taha wairua (spiritual health), taha tinana (physical health), taha hinengaro (mental and emotional health) and taha whanau (family health) (Tulip, 2001).

The talanoa model is the next model mentioned by Ravulo et al. (2019). The talanoa model represents a traditional Pacific model of oral traditions (Ravulo et al, 2019). Vaioleti (2006) interpreted talanoa as follows:

Talanoa can be referred to as a conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking, whether formal or informal. It is almost always carried out face-to-face. Tala means to inform, tell, relate, and commence, as well as to ask or apply. Noa means of any kind, ordinary, nothing in particular, purely imaginary or void. Talanoa, then, literally means talking about nothing in particular, and interacting without a rigid framework. (p. 23)

The use of the talanoa model allows for Pacific young people and their families to feel they are being listened to and given the opportunity to speak freely without interruption (Ravulo et al., 2019). These models show a pathway for how previous people have worked with Māori and Pasifika people in health and wellbeing settings. Ravulo et al. (2019) said that:

developing a cultural understanding of the individual and family may assist in counteracting significant social, and welfare needs, whilst positively engaging the young person and their support in the possible process of change beyond offending. (p. 87)

The suggestion from Ravulo et al. (2019) and Shepard and Ilalio (2015) is that these traditional models – talanoa, te whare tapa wha and fonafale – can be used in practice to engage Māori and Pasifika young people who are involved in the youth justice system and their families.

The literature on addressing disadvantage as well as reforming the youth justice system may provide more ideas on how we can address the over-representation of Māori and Pasifika young people. The Centre for Policy Development (2020) acknowledged that there are 3 pillars needed to break cycles of disadvantage, being communities, evidence and coordination.

Communities is long-term investment in local communities and supporting disadvantaged families, particularly the people most at risk of entering the criminal justice system (Centre for Policy Development 2020). Ravulo (2009) explained that protective factors for Pasifika young people from the community are involvement in sporting clubs, involvement in church or other spiritual activities, healthy relationships with police who appreciate Pasifika culture, healthy relationships with teachers who appreciate Pasifika culture and participation in cultural activities. These community protective factors could be targets for long-term investment.

Evidence is researching to build understanding of effective approaches and inform new strategies (Centre for Policy Development, 2020). The Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) explained there is a need for better data and evidence on Māori and Pasifika communities living in Victoria, especially in regards to Māori and Pasifika youth offending. The Centre for Policy Development (2020) explained that relevant stakeholders need to be involved in the research.

Coordination is working with government to build policies and law reforms that truly support people of disadvantage (Centre for Policy Development, 2020). An example of an attempt at this is Smart Justice for Young People (2023), who provided an action plan to address the over-representation of First Nations children and young people, multicultural children, young people, children and young people who live in out-of-home care, and girls and young women with complex needs. Smart Justice for Young People's (2023) action plan has 6 areas of focus: children, family and community; housing and material needs; policing, criminal and civil justice systems; health and wellbeing; and education. They pleaded for the Victorian government to take on their suggestions; an example of one of these is:

Mandate all government and government-funded community delivered services across justice, policing, education, health, housing, child and family services to regularly undertake foundational and booster training

on cultural safety, antiracism, gender inequity, and trauma-informed practice as part of the Framework. (Smart Justice for Young People, 2023, p. 15)

A children's rights approach

The history of policy and law reforms in Australia regarding youth justice has been outlined by Armytage and Ogloff (2017). Past policies included A Balanced Approach, which included a diversion program, better rehabilitation for high-risk young people, and pre-release, transition and post-release support programs for young people incarcerated in youth justice centres (Armytage & Ogloff, 2017). Armytage and Ogloff (2017) provided evidence that at times in the past the Victorian government was willing to reform policies. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) called for national reform to the youth justice system in Australia. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) explained that the youth justice system in Australia has been ineffective at keeping children and communities safe, and expressed the need for a national reform. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) said, "This lack of engagement with international commitments shows that there is a poor culture of upholding child rights in Australian policymaking" (p. 112). The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) explained that the national reform should adopt the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* into Australian law and would need a "whole-of-government" commitment.

A children's rights approach to youth justice was outlined by Save the Children Australia et al. (2023). A children's rights approach to youth justice is an approach that is informed by international laws and treaties such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Save the Children Australia et al., 2023). Save the Children et al. (2023) said the key children's rights from the convention are the best interest of the child, non-discrimination, the rights to life, survival and development, and the right to participate, be heard and be taken seriously. Save the Children et al. (2023) said the children's rights approach recognises the specific needs of children and young people:

Children and young people who have contact with youth justice are a vulnerable population, often with complex and intersecting needs.

Special protections, over and above the rights of the general population, are important. (Save the Children Australia et al., 2023, p. 12)

The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) interviewed children and young people who were involved in the youth justice system and identified the specific needs of the young people, explaining if these needs were met, how that would help. A specific need described by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) is for children and young people to have a safe place to live and have all their basic needs met. The need for positive activities was explained by the young people and children to the Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) and that there are too many barriers to doing activities such as sport as this requires you to have finances to pay for uniforms, equipment and travel to and from training. Save the Children Australia et al. (2023) explained that using the children's rights approach would more effectively reduce crime and be a long-term solution to offending behaviour.

Case et al. (2015) did research from a perspective that focused on youth justice in England and Wales. They used the model Child First, Offender Second which also has a children's rights focus in youth justice. In Case et al.'s (2015) model Child First, Offender Second, they gave similar descriptions to those of the Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) and Save the Children et al. (2023) on children's rights approaches to youth justice such as prevention, diversion and intervention. Case et al. (2015) said their idea of prevention was "positive promotion", which is the promotion of positive behaviours, outcomes and opportunities for children and young people. The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) similarly identified ways of prevention in the need for better processes for young people and children who are involved in youth justice to get support for going to school and getting a job. Case et al. (2015) said that in the Child First, Offender Second model, diversion is "diverting children into positive, constructive interventions that promote success, achievement, capacity-building, access to entitlements and support services and produce reductions in negative outcomes" (p. 10). The idea of diversion and the need to enhance the diversion process are explained by Save the Children et al. (2023), who said that children and young people should be diverted from the youth justice system whenever possible. Save the Children et al. (2023) said that the power of diversion

normally lies with police and that they are less likely to use diversion options with young people of multicultural backgrounds.

Early intervention

Early intervention is an action that is required in order to implement a children's rights approach in youth justice (Save the Children et al., 2023). The New South Wales government (2024) said that early intervention in regards to youth justice is "activities, programs and services designed to support families who show signs of needing support or vulnerabilities that may escalate into child abuse or neglect" (p. 1). The Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) explained that past policies in youth justice focused on punishment instead of early intervention. Early intervention focuses on the needs and development of children and young people, allowing a process that addresses the root causes of why a young person or child could be involved in the youth justice system (Save the Children et al., 2023). Although the idea of early intervention is important to the children's rights approach to youth justice, Church (2003) explained that not all early intervention is helpful and it requires particular processes for it to be effective. Church (2003) identified that the earlier the intervention, the less difficult it will be to promote positive behaviour for children and young people. Early intervention is a process that needs key stakeholders like parents, teachers and family members to work together for it to be effective (Church, 2003).

Research from Berryman and Woller (2011) provided a perspective on how to effectively provide early intervention in education for Māori families in New Zealand. Berryman and Woller (2011) explained the importance of relationships and building trust with the Māori families before the early intervention could proceed or be effective. Another key response from Māori families in Berryman and Woller's (2011) research is that they appreciated when early-intervention providers respected and understood the family's cultural identity. Early intervention is important in order to provide outcomes in youth justice according to the children's rights approach, but early intervention will only be effective with Māori and Pasifika people if it is able to consider what is important to them, such as respect for cultural identity, relationships and trust.

Social capital

The idea of social capital is discussed throughout the research on Māori and Pasifika young people involved in youth justice. Putnam (1993) said “social capital refers to features of social organisation, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (p. 2). Trust is a major component of social capital and expresses that if someone lives within a society that has high level of social capital, they will have more resources to gain the skills needed to be competent to gain the opportunities given to them within the society, then to be able to gain trust and build networks (Cox, 2002). The core idea of social capital is that social networks are valuable (Putman & Goss, 2002). Reciprocity is an idea that is intertwined in the theory; an example of this is the social exchange when someone is helping someone else out without expecting anything back; immediately this will lead to reciprocation by the person that received the exchange by exchanging with someone else in their community (Putman & Goss, 2002). Social capital is not always beneficial for people who are living within a society with high social capital as there may be social exclusion. Social capital may only benefit the privileged in the society and socially excludes the people of lower socio-economic status and the people from minorities (Uphoff et al., 2013).

Robinson and Williams’s (2001) research outlined a Māori view on social capital. They explained that Māori families (whanau) then connect with a bigger group of people which is a hapu and then that connects to an even bigger group of people which is the tribe (iwi); this explains that there is a natural way of gaining social capital in Māori communities. Robinson and Williams (2001) noted these 4 key points regarding Māori social capital: whanau is the nucleus of all things and Māori norms and community values come from traditional values; it is essential to know your place within the whanau, hapu and iwi, as well as knowing where you belong physically or geographically; relationships in Māori society are developed by informal association rather than formal association; and whanau, iwi and hapu must take priority over functional contracts such as in education, health or welfare. Robinson and Williams (2001) said, “Membership in customary Māori associations is based on an exchange of obligations and acceptance by the group” (p. 56). A key phrase Putman (1993) used throughout their research is “voluntary activity”; this is not

reflected as much in the Māori definition of social capital, as Robinson and Williams (2001) stated that Māori associations are not driven by rules but by obligations based on common ancestry and this means that, instead of being voluntary activity, Māori have an obligation to do these acts.

The commitment within Māori and Pasifika people to their family, community, church and culture would suggest that they may have higher levels of social capital, but Robinson and Williams (2001) explained, “Māori have become more introverted and consolidated in their views, their social capital has become isolated and less accessible for connecting with society as a whole” (p. 56). A capital-rich community will provide more chance for community members to achieve educational attainment (White, 2005). The community’s capacity will alter the community’s access to social capital; in summary, it is not about how strong the bond is but the capacity of the members in the community (White, 2005).

Conclusion

The literature review demonstrates that Māori and Pasifika young people are shaped by the supports and systems around them. The systemic barriers such as the impact of colonisation, policies of exclusion, and lack of culturally safe educational environments provide perspective of the challenges that they face while living in Australia. This contextualises the systems in Australia and that it is set up for Māori and Pasifika young people to have more chance to be involved in the Youth Justice system compared to other Australian residents. The research indicates strategies such as culturally competency, systemic changes to youth justice and organisations that have programs tailored to support Māori and Pasifika young people could help lessen the chance for Māori and Pasifika young people to be involved in Youth Justice.

The literature review identified that there is current research regarding the systemic barriers and the determinants. There are still gaps in research that provides Māori and Pasifika voices who have been profoundly impacted by these structures in Victoria. To deeply investigate the supports and systems that influence these young people this research will use a decolonial lens and intentionally move away from using a deficit approach. This will be done by using culturally safe methods to

explore lived experiences of Māori and Pasifika young men who have had a history of youth justice involvement in Victoria.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The literature review highlighted the power structures that impact the supports and systems that is surrounding Māori and Pasifika young people. This research is guided by a decolonial theoretical framework, which allows the study to provide a true reflection of Māori and Pasifika knowledge. This chapter outlines the methodology that is used in this research. The methods and principles of this research were directly applied from Kaupapa Māori research to provide a culturally safe environment and amplify Māori and Pasifika voices.

This chapter first looks at my insider researcher status, using reflexivity to identify how my personal experiences shaped this research. It then explores decolonial theory and the impacts of colonial systems in Australia. Within decolonial theory it is important to adopt Indigenous methods. This research utilises Kaupapa Māori research and is guided by key principles such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga. The chapters then explain the specific methods used, which were whakawhiti kōrero and thematic analysis. The chapter ends with an overview of the limitations of the research, the reciprocity and benefit, and the ethical considerations.

Insider research

In this research, I the researcher am an insider to the research, being Māori and also being surrounded by people who were involved in the youth justice system growing up. Although it is crucial to be an insider within decolonial research, this does come with challenges that the researcher must be prepared for. Chammas (2020) said:

An insider-researcher may be defined as a scholar who is native to the setting of the research and who conducts research involving populations of which s/he is also a member. (p. 537)

The challenges of being an insider are listed by Greene (2014) as relating to subjectivity, bias, confidentiality, power and shifting social identities. To address these, I put in place measures to counteract them. Being too subjective was a concern and I took on advice from Chavez (2008); right before the interview started I gave a disclaimer that I would not speak as if I knew what the participant was talking about. I also only picked Māori and Pasifika participants that I had not had much interaction with in the past and avoided asking people I felt I had a friendship with. Bias is not only something that insiders have but also outsiders; to address bias is to be aware of your biases and not let them disrupt the research (Greene, 2014). Confidentiality needs further focus from an insider and in this thesis I the researcher interviewed people of my community and may have had social interactions with people who knew the participants. To maintain confidentiality, all data collected and everything about the participants' involvement will be kept confidential and only used in the thesis and its requirements. The names are also coded in the thesis, to their age and cultural background for the young men, and Professional 1 and Professional 2 for the professionals who were interviewed.

Reflexivity

As previously stated in this thesis, I have lived experience regarding the research subject. I am an insider with my own knowledge of the supports and systems, and how they influence involvement or propel Māori and Pasifika young people towards or away from youth justice, through my experience as a young person and my experience as a youth worker supporting Māori and Pasifika young people involved with youth justice.

The biases I have did influence my selection of questions to both the young men and the professionals, as I already had knowledge regarding some supports and systems. The major biases for me were in education, as I worked in an alternative school as a youth worker but was also a student during my time as a young person and it made a positive impact on my life. I had been excluded from mainstream school and working within education gave me a bias. The bias was that mainstream education does not positively support Māori and Pasifika who are involved or at risk

of involvement with youth justice and increases the chance of them being involved with youth justice.

I had limited knowledge of what the youth justice system was actually like. Although I was surrounded by people involved in it, I had never been incarcerated in a youth justice centre myself. When I was supporting young people involved in youth justice, I felt that I did not get to see the full picture as I worked in a school and did not see the intricacies of the youth justice system.

While I was growing up, although there were similar attributes between my family and other Māori and Pasifika families, there were major differences also. Examples are that a lot of my Tongan and Samoan mates were religious and that some of the Māori and Pasifika young people I grew up around had large amounts of family in Melbourne whereas I only had my immediate family.

Although I did have limited knowledge of these systems, I still had some knowledge of family and youth justice which I formed my questions around. As a young person, I saw mistreatment by police towards Māori and Pasifika young people and knew that they were unable to access Centrelink. This gave me a bias that government systems were not there to support this group of people and brought inequality and disadvantage to Māori and Pasifika people.

Theoretical framework

Decolonial theory identifies how imperialism enslaved, killed and assimilated Indigenous people, while the introduction of social darwinism promoted the belief that white people of European origin were the superior race (Paul, 2003). The idea of the white European race being superior in the British Empire saw governments in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand adapt laws and policies throughout the 1900s with the goal of assimilating the Indigenous people into white society. The British Empire defined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as “black, uncivilised and pagan” so they were not given citizenship rights (Armitage, 1995, p. 22). In Australia the government introduced a policy of assimilation in the 1930s, as it saw the opportunity to assimilate Aboriginal people into the white European society

because the “mixed-blood” Aboriginal population appeared to be growing compared to the “full-blooded Aboriginal” (Armitage, 1995, p. 19). The process of assimilation included Aboriginal children getting taken away from their families and then placed in camps so they could learn British standards (Armitage, 1995, p. 44).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, similarly to the Australian government, the New Zealand government brought in policies to assimilate Māori into white European society. The *Māori Social Advancement Act 1945* was an attempt to bring more Māori into urban areas and assimilate them into the European urbanised society; this was done with pressure from government to conform to the pakeha (white) way of life and move away from traditional cultural activities and Te Reo (Māori language) (Williams, 2019). The *Native Schools Act 1867* was a law that attempted to assimilate Māori children into the white European way of life (Waretini-Karena, 2013). These policies represented imperial research which backed the actions of government attempts to assimilate Indigenous people and have had lasting impacts on Aboriginal and Māori peoples and their cultures.

With the deprivation that was brought by colonial powers, for future generations of Māori and Pasifika people it brought historical trauma. Historical trauma is emotional and psychological trauma that has happened throughout generations of a certain group (Brave Heart, 1998). Māori historical trauma started with the loss of entire villages in the land wars and then policies that followed which restricted Māori culture and Te Reo (Wirihana & Smith, 2019). Smith (2021) said on the loss of Indigenous knowledge:

Remember, for example, that colonial processes such as religion and education actively set out to destroy the existence of Indigenous knowledge or systems for knowing in many ways – whether by beating children at school, isolating the leaders and healers, burning places of significance, or using ridicule and cartoon characters. (p. 278)

These moments in history caused a loss of identity and weakened social structures, and continue to provide barriers for Māori as a collective (Wirihana & Smith, 2019). Historical trauma can be a contributing factor in child abuse, poverty, substance abuse, violence, suicide and other social issues (Weiss et al., 2023). Māori have a

high incarceration rate for the population in Aotearoa New Zealand and Williams (2019) argued that an impacting factor is the past policies that were enforced by the government in an attempt to assimilate Māori. Māori are over-represented in Aotearoa New Zealand in categories such as domestic violence, child abuse and suicide (Wirihana & Smith, 2019). The lasting effects of imperial rule over Aotearoa New Zealand presented Māori with a future of battling through a loss of culture and identity; this has contributed to significant challenges for Māori through generations.

Power

Power has been researched throughout history by some of the most famous social theorist and philosophers (Dahl, 1957). Shaik (2009) said, “Aristotle defines power as a source of change and rest” (p. 1). Aristotle’s lifetime was 384–322 BC and the discussion of power is an ancient one that has been carried on throughout time (Galym & Shuga, 2023). Power in terms of social psychology is defined to be a complex concept that has the ability to influence and effect change in interpersonal relationships and societal structures, while social power is the ability to control others (Aanstoos, 2023). Social power is a construct that is broad in definition. Fiske and Berdahl (2007) split their definition into 3 sections: power as influence, power as potential influence and power as outcome control. Social power is explained to have 5 different types in regards to the application of power: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power and expert power (French et al., 1959). Reward power and coercive power are similar in the sense that the power is influenced through a potential outcome; with reward power it is someone saying you will be rewarded with something of value if you follow that person, while coercive power is more of a manipulation where someone with power manipulates a person without power by holding a consequence or punishment over them (French et al., 1959). Expert power is the notion that a person has power because they hold knowledge in a place of need for others, while referent power is held because they are of a group that is attractive to others and has power over others who want to be a part of the group also (French et al., 1959).

Decolonial theory talks about the need to dismantle the power structures created by colonisation (Omodan & Dastille, 2023). Colonial power and settler colonialism are

decolonial theory concepts; they refer to the structures of power held by colonisers (Mendoza, 2020). Colonial power was coined by Anibal Quijano, who identified that colonisation created a global capitalist system which uses race, gender and structured knowledge output to have power over Indigenous people so that colonisers are able to gain (Quijano, 2000). Settler colonialism refers to the destruction and genocide of Indigenous people by settlers so they can take control of the Indigenous people and their land (Wolfe, 2006).

Colonial systems in Australia

Education and youth justice systems in Australia that were influenced by colonial laws and policies over the time of imperial rule can be found in the education systems. Gandolfi (2024) mentioned the phrase “ontological colonisation” and said that Indigenous people had to be ontologically changed so they were able to provide value to the imperial colony (p. 135). Hall (2008) said education was a key to that process of amending the ontology of Indigenous people, which would then make Indigenous people capable of providing labour for the imperial colonies (p. 774). The ontological colonisation of Indigenous peoples through education is a process that is still happening now (Gandolfi, 2024).

Indigenous Australian history is not told in full in schools and parts are silenced, such as the history of assimilation, and even when Indigenous history is spoken about, it is from a white European perspective (Brown, 2018). Education in Australia has been shown to be a vessel to promote ontological colonisation and the content that is shared has been regulated to silence the history of Indigenous Australians.

The youth justice system in Australia has come to the forefront as human rights organisations have noticed the mistreatment of, and some argue racism towards, Aboriginal people. Jash and Boltje (2024, Feb 25) from the ABC stated that 33 Indigenous young people have died in custody since 1991 and that they are over-represented in that statistic. This is not only a current issue as in 1987 a Royal Commission was formed by the Australian prime minister to investigate the deaths of Indigenous Australians in custody across Australia between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989 (Nagle & Summerrell, 1996). The findings from the Royal Commission did

not unveil any brutality on the part of police and prison officers, but did identify a lack of care which had played a part in Indigenous Australian deaths in custody. The Royal Commission summed up that there was a major over-representation of Indigenous Australians in custody within the justice system, which has not been historically kind to them with past policies of assimilation and displacement that were normally enforced by police (Australasian Legal Information Institute, 1998).

A racial discrimination complaint has been submitted to the United Nations by Associate Professor Hannah McGlade with the support of the Human Rights Law Centre arguing that the recent “tough on crime” laws and policies are too harsh and that Indigenous Australians suffer ongoing cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment at all levels of the criminal justice system (Human Rights Law Centre, 2025). The Australian Human Rights Commission (2025, p. 1) quoted its president on Australian Indigenous deaths in custody:

Since colonisation, Australian law has too often delivered injustice for First Nations people. Police have often been the agents of this injustice, helping to administer laws and policies like those that enabled the Stolen Generations. Mistrust continues between First Nations communities and police. When police investigate themselves, it breeds mistrust and increases the risks of poor investigations and lack of accountability. While coronial inquests provide some independence, they rely on police-gathered evidence.

The acknowledgement of racism towards Indigenous Australia is backed by research from the Australian Human Rights Commission, which found that Indigenous Australians face systemic racism through legislative frameworks and government practices (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2024a). The youth justice system in Australia has not been well received by human rights organisations, as they feel it has failed the Indigenous people of Australia with its punitive laws and its mistreatment of the Indigenous people in custody.

Decolonising research

The word “research” is a dirty word to Indigenous people because of its connection with colonialism (Smith, 2021, p. xii). Colonialisation saw the use of scientific research to take ownership of Indigenous people’s land and excuse the processes of colonisation (Smith, 2021, p. 28). Research is not a method that is normally welcomed by Māori and Pasifika people, as colonisers abused their power to take and coerce. There are avenues to conduct research that consider the colonial impact on Māori and Pasifika, and embrace Indigenous methods.

The Indigenous world view goes across many countries and cultures. There are differences but some commonalities within Indigenous peoples. Although Indigenous people live across the world from each other, there are shared experiences through their colonial experience and Indigenous experience. Claiming or reclaiming is a shared idea through Indigenous peoples; Indigenous research is often aimed at claiming or reclaiming what is rightfully theirs (Smith, 2021, p. 164). This coexists with the idea of naming, which is reclaiming the names of everything that exists in the Indigenous world view (Doyle, 2013). The reclaiming of languages and cultural practices that have been devastated at the hand of colonisers is important; this brings the need to rejuvenate and many Indigenous communities are working to regenerate their languages (Smith, 2021, p. 169).

Storytelling is how history is passed on through generations for Indigenous people. The point of storytelling is not only to pass history on, but as a way to pass down Indigenous values and customs (Smith, 2021, p. 166). Storytelling is how the Indigenous world view is expressed and is a retrieval of Indigenous voice, Indigenous land and Indigenous sovereignty (Sium & Ritskes, 2013). Reframing is a process that is done by Indigenous peoples; an example of this process is where non-Indigenous people researched the destruction and assimilation of Indigenous people but this can be turned around by Indigenous people to celebrate the survival of their Indigenous world view in their groups of people (Smith, 2021, p. 166).

Historical trauma has been previously discussed in this thesis along with the poor health and wellbeing that the trauma has contributed to for Indigenous people. There

is an active focus across Indigenous communities to restore the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people through a process of healing rather than punishing (Smith, 2021 p. 177). The Indigenous world view is the key to decolonising research and it needs to be embraced when doing research that aims to benefit Indigenous peoples. The methodology's very foundation is based on decolonial theory.

The methodology of this thesis is guided by kaupapa Māori research and decolonial theory. The participants were Māori and Pasifika young men aged 20–30 who had a history of involvement with the youth justice system in Victoria and 2 professionals who had had ample experience in working with Māori and Pasifika young people who were involved in the youth justice system. The research has taken a decolonial approach to benefit the Māori and Pasifika community by providing a depiction of what supports and systems both influence them towards and propel them away from youth justice involvement. The data was provided by Māori and Pasifika young men and the research was done by me, a Māori research candidate. The data collection was completed through whakawhiti kōrero, which has characteristics of semi-structured interviews. I then analysed the data with the use of thematic analysis. The research was done with the consideration of providing an ethical research process by gaining informed consent and identifying strategies to ethically carry out insider research. The methodology presented an opportunity to use a decolonial approach in order to provide a voice for these Māori and Pasifika young men, who represented a marginalised community that is over-represented in the youth justice system in Victoria (Justice Victoria, 2020).

Kaupapa Māori research

Decolonial theory pushes for the use of Indigenous methods through Indigenous world views (Omodan & Dastille, 2023). Kaupapa Māori research is an adaptation of the Māori world view to a research methodology; in simple terms kaupapa Māori means “the Māori way”. Smith (2015) said, “kaupapa Māori research is research by Māori, for Māori and with Māori” (p. 47). Kaupapa Māori research challenges the individualistic research approach as kaupapa Māori research is a collectivist approach to research that must benefit the people being researched (Bishop, 1999). The idea of kaupapa Māori is the way of life of Māori before colonisation and the

principles and values that the traditional Māori world view consisted of then, and it also aims at protecting them (Bishop, 1999). Kaupapa Māori is the Māori world view and comes with the intricacies of their Indigenous knowledge.

Māori kaupapa principles

The 4 principles of kaupapa Māori research used in this thesis are whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga (Hiha, 2016).

Whanaungatanga

Whanaungatanga was defined by Bishop et al. (2014) as “the process of establishing extended family-like relationships” (p. 189). In research terms, Māori participants should be treated as whanau (family) in accordance with the Māori world view and principles of aroha (love), awhi (helpfulness), manaaki (hospitality) and tiaki (guidance) (Bishop et al., 2014). Whanaungatanga was used with the participants as throughout the thesis there are data and literature that continually acknowledge the importance of relationships for Māori and Pasifika peoples. Whanaungatanga gave me as the researcher a framework to conduct myself so as to be relational throughout the research process with the participants.

Manaakitanga

Manaakitanga is translated by the Te Aka Māori Dictionary as “hospitality, kindness, generosity and support – the process of showing respect generosity and care for others” (p. 1). Mead (2016) said, “it is the expected standard of behaviour, an ideal that one should aspire to reach” (p. 39). Manaakitanga is highly important to the Māori world view and in a research sense it can relate to the hospitality given during the research process and being kind and generous to all involved in the research. Manaakitanga was present in this research process by making sure there were food and refreshments available during the kōrero, as well as making sure the area of the interview was clean and the participant was comfortable throughout the kōrero.

Rangatiratanga

Rangatiratanga is a main principle in kaupapa Māori research. It is the ability for Māori to have autonomy and control of the research. In terms of research practice,

this is to be honest with Māori research participants in the use of the research and for them to have a say in what information is being used (Hiha, 2016).

Rangatiratanga was a principle that brought focus towards being transparent throughout this research process and making sure the researcher had informed consent with each participant.

Kaitiakitanga

Kaitiakitanga is the guardianship of knowledge or research (Boulton, 2014). Kaitiaki is translated as “guardian or protector” and tanga translates as “preservation or conservation” (Webber-Dreadon, 2020). Kaitiakitanga explains that if research or data is used, it must benefit Māori (Growing up in New Zealand, 2021). In this research, the kaitiaki obligation was of me, the candidate researcher, and I protected the data with the guidance of rangatiratanga. The data has only been consented to be used for my Master of Research thesis and if it is to be published, I will do so only if it is of benefit of the group being researched and will go through formal ethics routes to acquire further consent.

Whakawhiti kōrero

Whakawhiti kōrero was translated by Wilson and Steagall (2022) as follows: “Whaka is a prefix which enacts whatever verb follows; whiti means to cross, exchange or transfer, and kōrero is to talk, speak, tell, or address. Quite simply, whakawhiti kōrero is the exchange of talks” (p. 160). Poli (2024) explained whakawhiti kōrero to have similar characteristics to semi-structured interviews. The method requires that informed consent is received before the kōrero begins (Elder & Kersten, 2015).

Whakawhiti kōrero enables a place for the researcher to hold a conversational type of interview that allows the use of open-ended questions and for participants to share their stories, with gentle prompts to promote more conversation, and lets the researcher clarify participants’ stories (Poli, 2024).

Method

The potential participants were people I may have heard about or had slight interactions with growing up and I knew that they had some sort of involvement with youth justice. I did not ask anyone I considered to be my friend to be a participant in the research, only people I knew slightly who had grown up around the same area as me in the western suburbs of Melbourne. Participant recruitment began by reaching out to possible participants in direct messages on social media platforms, as this was the most private avenue, then followed up with phone calls to provide further information. I understood they might feel obliged, as sometimes I grew up around people familiar to the possible participants; while reaching out I put a lot of emphasis on not applying pressure and letting them know that it was okay for them to say no. The participants who agreed then had a time and date set up to do the whakawhiti kōrero at my house. The professionals were people whom I had previously worked with and I reached out to them in phone calls and they expressed willingness to be involved. I sent a further email to them with information regarding the structure of the questions, the consent form and the information to participant form.

This section will provide vignettes of the Māori and Pasifika young men about their type of youth justice involvement.

Māori young man 28 years old – Spent time remanded in Melbourne Youth Justice Centre (known as Parkville) on multiple occasions.

Māori young man 27 years old – Spent time remanded in Melbourne Youth Justice Centre and sentenced to prison when he was in his late teenage years.

Māori young man 26 years old – Had community youth justice orders without incarceration in a youth justice centre.

Tongan/Samoan young man 26 years old – Had community youth justice orders without incarceration in a youth justice centre.

Samoan/Ethiopian young man 26 years old – Spent time remanded in Melbourne Youth Justice Centre.

Informed consent was gained through explaining the consent form and information to participants form, and then the participant signing the consent form before the whakawhiti kōrero. I explained to them that consent could be retracted at any time if they became unwilling to be involved or want to withdraw from the research.

Data collection

Data was collected through the method whakawhiti kōrero. The researcher performed whakawhiti kōrero with 5 young men aged 20–30 years, each of whom had a history of involvement with youth justice, and 2 professionals who had worked with Māori and Pasifika young people who were involved with the youth justice system in Victoria. The whakawhiti kōrero with the young men were held in my home one on one on separate dates.

I understood the participants and was mindful of their backgrounds as I had grown up in similar circumstances and it is explained in the data that as they grew up, they did not do things that were “normal” and that was frowned upon by people in their friendship groups. Whanaungatanga and manaakitanga were used as I built rapport and was friendly with participants, as well as having food and non-alcoholic refreshments available. Before the whakawhiti kōrero started, I as the research candidate went through consent form and information to participants form with each participant.

In the whakawhiti kōrero, I asked 14 open-ended questions with gentle prompts to promote more conversation if needed. An example of a question is – As a young person, what reasons do you think you got in trouble with police? Then a follow-up to that question and prompts was – What was going on for you then? Prompts – Did you stop going to school? Were you spending a lot of time away from home? Prompts were only used if there was a lack of a response, to spark further conversation.

The whakawhiti kōrero with the professionals were conducted on Microsoft Teams and Zoom. The consent form and information for participants form were emailed to both professionals. I as the candidate researcher provided the professionals with 9 different supports or systems; for example, 3 of them were education, family and friends. I asked them to explain in their experience what the supports or systems were like for Māori and Pasifika young people who are involved in youth justice in Victoria. The closing question in the whakawhiti kōrero with the professionals was – Do you have any ideas how we can better support Māori and Pasifika young people to help them stay away from youth justice involvement?

Data analysis

Thematic analysis is seen as a foundational method for qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a data collection method that analyses themes in data gathered through qualitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes from the data and these were used in the thesis.

The themes were guided by the data and the questions. The data seemingly fit under categories such as Education, Family, Māori and Pasifika young people in Victoria, and the Youth Justice system in Victoria. Then, during the grouping themes appeared. Examples of these themes included connection, connection or lack of connection to Māori and Pasifika culture, positive comments towards alternative education, negative experiences in mainstream school.

Limitations to the research

This thesis study has limitations. One focal point is that “Pasifika” refers to many different countries but within this thesis there were only Māori, Samoan and Tongan participants. Only having 7 participants limited the findings, as if there were more participants this may have brought more rich data. Although it lacked perspective from different cultures that are in the Pasifika definition, it collected data through the 2 largest population groups, which are Māori and Samoan. Me as the researcher being an insider also brought challenges to the research, although this position is thoroughly stated within the thesis.

Reciprocity and benefit

This thesis provides knowledge on what supports and systems help Māori and Pasifika stay away from youth justice involvement. It provides a perspective from Māori and Pasifika young men on what assisted them to stay away from youth justice involvement. This knowledge could help bolster systems such as education and youth justice to create more inclusive and supportive programs that could bring more positive outcomes for Māori and Pasifika young people.

Ethics

The ethics process begun with going through formal avenues and applying for ethics approval with the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC). With support of my supervisors, I wrote an application which considered many of the challenges stated in this thesis such as gaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and insider research strategies. The application ID was HRE24-060. The ethics application was approved and deemed low risk by the VUHREC.

The VUHREC follows guidelines from the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023, within it talks on potential harm that can be inflicted on participants in research (The National Health and Medical Research Council, 2023). In regard to this research three types of harm was focused on which was psychological harm, social harm and legal harm. Below are the strategies I used to minimise the chance for harm during my research.

The participants and I often grew up around the same communities. This meant I needed to be extra careful with confidentiality and to not disclose any information or even that I interviewed the participants in any social interactions. I made sure to not speak about participants involvement in the research within social circles.

There was a psychologist available to be contacted and her details were on the information for participants form. I understood that through the conversation some topics might make participants feel uneasy; for example, some of the young men explained broadly that male figures could be aggressive in their families. I did not

dwelling on this subject or ask further questions about it. I did not recognise any distress at any point in the whakawhiti kōrero.

The young men have had previous involvement in youth justice, which meant there was a risk of them disclosing information regarding crimes committed. Before the whakawhiti kōrero I explained to the participants that we must not speak about crimes that had been committed and only speak about what the influences were, for example, not going to school or being in a low socio-economic bracket. The questions were designed to direct participants to only share about supports and systems. There was no disclosure of criminal activity.

I followed university protocols and procedures as data from this research was stored in a Victoria University database which is used for storing and keeping data confidential for research students. The data will be stored for the minimum five years which is the recommendation from the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2023 (The National Health and Medical Research Council, 2023).

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the data gathered guided by the decolonial-led methodology displayed in the previous chapter. The data was used to answer the research question of what supports and systems influence Māori and Pasifika young people towards or away from the youth justice system in Victoria. This section focuses on the voices and lived experiences of the young men and professionals who participated in a whakawhiti kōrero.

To begin the chapter, the findings introduce the key themes of the data, which included a summary of the barriers and protective factors presented by the young men and professionals. The next part of the chapter is the discussion, which takes a more in-depth and detailed look at these themes. The discussion uses direct quotes to provide transparency and accurately represent the participants' experiences.

Findings

Similar to the research covered in the literature review, the data highlighted the significant barriers to education. The Māori and Pasifika young men felt that teachers did not understand them, and one young man even felt as they were racist. An ongoing theme in this research was that mainstream school was simply not a place that the young men felt they could learn or achieve.

To understand the barriers further, the young men explained that challenges within their homes and families influenced them towards youth justice. This included relationship breakdowns, family using alcohol, parents being too strict or, parents not having boundaries by allowing their children to be out on the streets doing whatever they wanted.

The participating professional discussed the systemic challenges that Māori and Pasifika young people face. This was that schools and youth justice lacked resources in terms of being culturally competent, and that this contributed towards these institutions providing poor outcomes for Māori and Pasifika young people.

Loss or lack of connection continued to be mentioned in regard of being a contributing factor to why the young men were influenced towards youth justice involvement. They discussed the loss or lack of connection towards family, teachers, and some young men mentioned the loss of culture. This displacement was mentioned to be a reason to turn to the streets and the culture it presented.

The loss of connection for the young men turned to resulted in them finding something to replace that connection. The relationship breakdown at homes led to the young men being out on the streets, connecting to like-minded friends. The young men not being connected to their culture turned them to find a new culture that often encouraged acts that were law-breaking. The young men were unable to find connection at mainstream schools, freeing up their days and giving them even more time to spend with like-minded friends and be at risk of getting in trouble with police.

The young men did discuss that all was not gloom and that there were protective environments where they did find connection. Alternative education was one of those places that both the young men and professional explained focused on connection and better understanding there students. More so than people of other cultural groups, it was explained by a professional that Māori and Pasifika had had some sort of involvement in cultural, sporting groups or had some sort of role model.

The professionals acknowledged systemic changes were needed, and if people who worked in youth justice better represented Māori and Pasifika backgrounds, this would go along way to provide better outcomes for the young people. This meant that schools and youth justice should aim to be more culturally competent, and Māori and Pasifika people having more of a presence in staffing groups within Education and youth justice.

Discussion

Education is a protective factor

Education is a major protective factor for young people to not engage with youth justice (Grover, 2017), as the majority of young people go through the mainstream school system. Not attending school creates more opportunity to be involved in the youth justice system.

I stopped going to school after my nan passed and I had a heap of mates that were never in school at the time and they were just doing dumb stuff. I was, like, I do what I want. I'll go hang out with the naughty boys. –
Samoan/Ethiopian young man 26 years old

Going to school helped me a lot. Because actually it was somewhere for me to go and, I guess, get away from doing the bad things. – Māori young man 26 years old

Lack of connection and understanding at mainstream schools

The findings show that the mainstream secondary school system in Victoria may not suit Māori and Pasifika young people who are at risk of involvement or involved in the youth justice system.

When I was going to school I went to a youth school [alternative education school]. I went to a public school for two weeks and got suspended, then went to the youth school. You go to a normal school and they don't have patience for you and don't have the time for you and don't accept who you are. They kind of push [you] to the side. – Māori young man 28 years old

Racist pricks, bro. They used to treat me like I was the dumbest kid around and didn't give me the time of day. To be honest I had trouble learning at school because some teachers just talked to me like I was dumb. – Tongan/Samoan young man 26 years old on his experience with teachers in a mainstream school

This is consistent to research done by Kearney and Donaghy (2010), Liddel et al. (2016), and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) which labelled the lack of connection and understanding mainstream school provided Māori and Pasifika young people.

Cultural competency pedagogy

Cultural competency and cultural pedagogy for Māori and Pasifika young people were lacking at schools in the experience of the professionals interviewed. They recognised that there wasn't just a lack of these but that they were nonexistent.

I mean, to be honest, it's pretty nonexistent [for] Pasifika and Māori people, like, you never get training in it. It's really hard to find specific training. – Professional 2 on cultural competency and cultural pedagogy for Māori and Pasifika in schools

The first thing that came to mind is the Pasifika and Māori kids are typically larger. I think that's a huge factor. Even in primary school they're bigger, so staff are more easily threatened. So instead of a kid having a tantrum and getting a therapeutic response, they are getting a fear response from the adult. They are being excluded not because their behaviour is different to the other kids', but the perceived threat is very different. In my experience, viewing that in high schools and alternative ed schools is very consistent. They will do one thing, a different young person from a different culture and different body shape will do the same thing and you won't see the Māori and Pasifika young person and the other young person will be back at school the next day because of the perceived threat, not necessarily that they have actually done anything. – Professional 1

Professional 2 said that Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander cultural competency and cultural pedagogy are embedded in the child safe policy for schools as well as the curriculum at schools in Victoria. This is something that the professionals mentioned are needed for other cultures such as Māori and Pasifika to help engage them in education. Having cultural competency embedded in the child safe policy could encourage schools to navigate how to engage Māori and Pasifika young people safely in education. Having Māori and Pasifika cultures intertwined in the curriculum could promote identity and a sense of belonging for Māori and Pasifika students. An example of this is in New Zealand they have weeks that are connected to a certain culture, for example, Samoan language week or Cook Island language week, as well many more Pasifika cultures having a week dedicated to highlighting and learning the language of the culture.

All Aboriginal kids, they're required to have that cultural support or safety plans. But that's not required for Pasifika or Māori kids, which I just think is a huge gap. Because we do so much work investing in cultural support for those kids, and really specifically look at how we're doing that, [but] no one does that for the Pasifika kids. – Professional 2 on policy within schools

Connection to alternative education

The education system may not cater for Māori and Pasifika cultures, especially the mainstream schooling system, as 4 of the 5 young men who participated had left or been excluded from mainstream schools and then attended an alternative education setting. The Māori and Pasifika young men mentioned the need to be listened to and having positive relationships with the staff at school for it to work. Alternative education settings provided a safe place for the young men to engage in education. This is because of a stronger connection with the teachers and youth workers, and that they were non-judgemental.

I went to Parkville College, which was for kids in and out of juvey, and my two teachers were mad [cool]. They actually care because they are not working at a normal school. They weren't just there to read off a book and actually cared about your life and not just what you have done in the past. – Samoan/Ethiopian young man 26 years old

Understanding. Yeah, they understood where [I was] coming from and how I would react to certain things. – Māori young man 26 years old on the teacher and youth workers he had in an alternative education school

I think the difference is, in alternative education, you have people that have received lots of extra training in how to build really good relationships. And often the models in alternative education are very relationship based. So they do things like have kids in the same class with the same teacher, which helps really foster very positive relationships that young person can then rely on, whereas in mainstream secondary school, and you have to be in secondary school if you're involved in the youth justice system, because you have to be older, older than twelve, you, like, you're constantly getting different teachers. It's really hard to form those really strong, trusting relationships with adults because you just don't see them as much and they haven't received as much training on how to foster that in a safe and healthy way. –

Professional 2

This is further discussed in Reynolds (2017) research which provided a guide on how to bring success to education for Pasifika young people in New Zealand. Reynolds (2017) regularly referred to the importance of relationships and connection for Pasifika students and how this can encourage educational success.

Strengths-based approach

The strengths-based approach was identified by Lopez & Louis (2019) as a framework that leads to productivity and engagement at schools.

The strengths-based approach as well as just doing things that they enjoyed were key components in why the Māori and Pasifika young men had engaged in alternative education schools.

I really like skating and they always took me. Had a program there for kids that wanted to skate, so that was every Thursday and Friday, they'll take us out skating. – Māori young man 26 years old on what he liked about the alternative education school he had attended

They helped you with what you wanted to do and did not force it on you. – Māori/Samoan young man 27 years old on teachers at the alternative education school he had attended

The education journey

The Māori and Pasifika young men explained that going to school was something that had kept them away from youth justice, but acknowledged that their journey with education had ups and downs. They acknowledged that mainstream school settings had provided major barriers for them to engage in education, with many descriptions of negative experiences within mainstream schools. The importance of relationships is discussed throughout the literature on Māori and Pasifika people; mainstream schools may not attend to that need for Māori and Pasifika students. Alternative education schools have shown the opposite and that relationships are a part of the outline of the schools, for example, having the same teacher throughout the year, as

well as the training that is prioritised for staff to build skills on how to build healthy relationships with their students. If mainstream schools took on similar practices as alternative schools, Māori and Pasifika might have more positive experiences with education and this might lessen the chance of them getting involved in the youth justice system.

Family

Family is the backbone in Māori and Pasifika cultures and what happens within the family has implications for whether or not a young person is involved in youth justice. As mentioned previously, there are cultural differences between Māori and Pasifika. This may see some groups be more connected to religion or having different family norms. The family settings for the Māori and Pasifika young men varied in the sense of who they had lived with growing up, but who they had lived with did influence the choices they had made depending on the relationships they had with the people in their household.

Stuff that was going on at home, I guess, not wanting to be home,
hanging out with mates and being in a strict household. –
Tongan/Samoan young man 26 years old on why he had got in trouble
with the police

Family relationship breakdown

There were comments about a lack of positive relationships with men in their households and that men could be aggressive at times.

I had my old man there, but it was hard learning off him because at times
he was aggressive. – Tongan/Samoan young man 26 years old

[I lived with] just one sibling and lived with Mum and grandparents. Me
and my grandpa never got along and it wasn't the greatest environment.
– Samoan/Ethiopian young man 26 years old

Ravulo (2009) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) both explained that family conflict or violence is still evident in Māori and Pasifika homes and may be a contributing factor towards the young people being involved in the youth justice systems.

Connection to family

Family was a reason for both sides of the spectrum of influence towards or away from youth justice involvement for the young men. It was identified that family was a huge motivating factor in why the young men did not want to get into trouble with police: because they did not want to disappoint their family. However, it was sometimes the reason they may have got into trouble, because of relationship breakdown or unwillingness to follow the household rules. The young men spoke about their older brothers and how they had influenced them, and how the young men had looked up to them and what they did, but also how their elder brothers were protective over them.

I do look up to one of my brothers. Yeah, he was doing a lot of bad things. And when I was younger, I thought that was cool. You know, I wanted to be like him. – Māori young man 26 years old on his older brother

My brother was always involved in bad shit, but he always made sure I stayed away from it. Out of fear I never did [anything]. I was never influenced to go do dumb shit from him. He would always call someone to make sure I wasn't there and at home. He was a good influence, keeping me out of trouble although he was getting in trouble himself. – Samoan/Ethiopian young man 26 years old on his older brother

Alcohol usage

Alcohol played a major role within some of the young men's households, and they said seeing the use of alcohol by their family members may have influenced them to also drink alcohol.

I'd say, in our culture, there's a lot of alcohol involved. – Māori young man 26 years old

I think, in our culture, it is so easy to get caught up in the drinking. We see it at a young age, our parents drinking, having all these drink ups. – Tongan/Samoan young man 26 years old

The young men acknowledged that using alcohol would cause challenges and get them in trouble with police.

“The drinking and getting caught up with bullshit” – Tongan/Samoan young man 26 years old on why Māori and Pasifika young people get involved in youth justice

“Drinking” – Māori young man 27 years old on why he got in trouble with police

Financial factors

Mostly the Māori and Pasifika young men's families had faced barriers that are often faced by people in low socio-economic brackets such as a lack of financial security and living within crowded households in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods. The professionals who were interviewed identified similarly that, mostly, in their experience at least one parent would work, but said that uniquely the young people they worked with, their families often were not Australian citizens and unable to get support through welfare services such as Centrelink.

The difference between Māori and Pasifika young people and other young people of other different cultural backgrounds is that I did find that you worked with families who were not Australian citizens and they couldn't access Centrelink benefits and so on. It was pretty unique to that cohort and a huge challenge. – Professional 1 on Māori and Pasifika accessing Centrelink benefits

The importance of family

The importance of family to the young men was evident and this is consistent with frameworks such as fa'a Samoa and whanaungatanga which outline the importance of family to the Pasifika and Māori cultures. This being said, the young men had experienced many challenges within their families such as alcoholism, relationship breakdown and parents who were struggling in terms of finances. This extended to the extra stress that families would feel as they were unable fall back on supports such as Centrelink.

Māori and Pasifika young people in Victoria

Māori and Pasifika young people are over-represented in the youth justice system in Victoria and there is a vast range of contributing factors to why that is. The Māori and Pasifika young people were found in the findings to have something to worry about higher than themselves, such as religion and family, and to have key values such as respect towards adults.

I have always found Pasifika young people far easier to reason with. They have this level of respect and understanding of adults that isn't as common of young people from different cultural backgrounds including Australian, even if their behaviour in or out of school is very concerning and unsafe. Through their culture and having something that is bigger than themselves, and [as] a part of that they have sort of built in a willingness or belief that they should listen to adults and have respect for them. – Professional 1 on Pasifika young people

Loss of connection to Māori and Pasifika culture

The loss of connection with traditional Māori and Pasifika cultures was mentioned by the young men and that culture had been a major part of their lives as kids but as they grew up they had moved away from it. Although the participants who were not

Māori had continued to connect with their Pasifika cultures, they all connected with the “street culture”.

I disconnected from it when I first moved over [from Aotearoa New Zealand]. I'll be honest, I moved away, I left that whole lifestyle. Like, there it's my old past and here is my new culture. I connected with the street culture over here. – Māori young man 28 years old on his connection with his Māori culture

I would say, street culture. Yeah, never really got into knowing my culture as much as I would like to. I've pretty much been in Australia my whole life, so I haven't really taken the time to get to know my culture. – Māori young man 26 years old on whether he was connected with street culture

Connection to peer groups and trying to fit in

The reflection by the young men on why they had become involved with youth justice was often that they had spent a lot of time with their friends on the street, just hanging around.

We could only meet up on the streets or out in public to do what we wanted because, at the end of the day, we were all going through the same things. That's how we bonded together, doing stupid shit. – Tongan/Samoan 26 years old on his friends

I did have a lot of time on my hands. I could pretty much just go out and do whatever I wanted. – Māori young man 26 years old

Trying to fit in and trying to make a name for themselves were discussed throughout the data. There was a need to be seen as tough and making choices that kept you away from youth justice was frowned upon.

Hanging out with the wrong crowd, but I think I was just trying to fit in.
Trying to make a name for myself, trying to be a person that I wasn't. –
Māori young man 28 years old

I'll just follow. – Samoan/Māori young man 27 years old on following his
friends who were getting into trouble with police

So that's the downfall, it's that I think they get really drawn into their peer
groups. And at that age, it's a really tricky age. Again, research would
show that if they don't have really good, stable family supports, then
they're far more driven by what their peers think than by what their
parents think. And so, if their peers are doing something that's not great,
they're going to do that thing that's not great, – Professional 2 on Māori
and Pasifika friend groups

Connection to community

The Māori and Pasifika young people had often spent time in certain cultural groups,
church and sporting groups. This was said to have encouraged these Māori and
Pasifika young men to stay away from youth justice.

Yeah, that was actually a real good community. Everyone was from the
west side at the rugby club, everyone was churchy boys, so everyone
was good. – Samoan/Ethiopian young man 26 years old on whether
playing rugby league had kept him out of trouble with police

A lot of it would have been active in sporting, whether it be anything to do
with the skate park or boxing. – Māori 26 years old on what had kept him
out of trouble with police

Professional 1 explained that Māori and Pasifika young people involved in the youth
justice system, or at risk of being involved, are more often than other young people
of other cultures in a comparable situation to be involved in prosocial activities that
expose them to prosocial people and role models.

It probably wasn't hugely common, but more likely that you would see Pasifika young people go to a Pasifika cultural group or would have role models doing boxing or something. – Professional 1 on Māori and Pasifika young people

How can we help Māori and Pasifika young people stay away from youth justice?

The Māori and Pasifika young men explained their thoughts on how we can help Māori and Pasifika young people who are involved in youth justice to stay away from youth justice. The responses of the young men varied but all reflected what would help.

When I was going through my Parkville [juvenile detention] stage, there was quite a few Islander boys that just wanted someone to, like, hang out with that weren't there. Mates doing bad shit. It just comes back to an ego thing where all their mates were getting into trouble so they had to and if they wanted to do something different, the boys would make fun of them and they would feel bad and would fall back into that life. Just interacting with them with activities. A place where they can't get judged for doing something normal. – Samoan/Ethiopian young man 26 years old

Bringing the community together. Because there's a lot of boys rolling around the street. I reckon something set up for them. Something to go to every weekend would be good. Even exercising, a lot of exercising, just meet at the park or something to do some training together. That'll bring a lot of a lot of people together. – Māori young man 26 years old

The findings refer to Māori and Pasifika young people needing more opportunity to engage in prosocial activities. If this idea could be captured and a service could provide these young people with support to engage in a space that was non-judgemental, that offered some of these prosocial activities, this might defer Māori and Pasifika young people from being involved in the youth justice system.

Another response from the young men acknowledged the need to get to know young people to further support them.

I think, get around them and support them in what they are doing and understand what they have been through. Because a lot of kids and adults have past trauma and a lot of walls and boundaries [are] put up where they can't open up to themselves, so they either go through destruction or self-medication. – 28 year old Māori young man

Another response to the question of what we could do to support young Māori and Pasifika young people to stay away from youth justice is that some young people will not listen or change regardless of what supports they are given.

I guess I would love to say, you can do this or that, but I knew how I was as a kid and I didn't want to hear shit from no one else. I didn't want to hear nobody's opinion. I was just doing what I was doing, because at the end of the day the kids are going through the same thing at home that we were going through, at the end of the day the streets are like an outlet, a free space for the boys to go do what they want. – Tongan/Samoan young man 26 years old

The mention of how their relationships with men in the young men's households were and this comment brings a reflection that provides some insight: that if there is not more stability in Māori and Pasifika households, then extra supports may not attract Māori and Pasifika young people because of what is happening at home.

The professionals had more macro ideas on how we can better support Māori and Pasifika young people.

Well, it comes down to money. If we could get more Pasifika people to get in education, for example, uni to do things like youth work, teaching, social work, criminal justice etc. If that was more accessible, so we had more feet on the ground of people of different backgrounds, that will be

one thing. – Professional 1 on how to better support Māori and Pasifika young people who are at risk of involvement or involved in youth justice

More understanding in mainstream schools like the western suburbs of Melbourne and we've done a bit of training with schools out there that have a huge proportion of Pasifika kids. Those schools need to be receiving free training that's funded by the government on how to actually work with those families and how to get families included in the educational journey. Because, again, if parents feel more involved, they're more inclined to be engaged with their child and the child will feel more connected to them. – Professional 2 on how to better support Māori and Pasifika young people who are at risk of involvement or involved in youth justice

The idea of Māori and Pasifika people getting university education and being able to then support Māori and Pasifika young people in key systems such as education and youth justice may provide the young people with someone who is able to advocate for their needs and engage them, as they may understand the young people more. One barrier to this is the negative educational experience that the young men and professionals explained that Māori and Pasifika people have in Victoria. Another barrier is that often Māori and Pasifika people who come from Aotearoa New Zealand are on 444 visas, which means they are unable to get HECS or HELP educational loans so they will need to pay for university and TAFE fees upfront (Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2018).

Māori and Pasifika overrepresentation in the youth justice system

Professional 2 discussed that they had observed the current state of one of the main juvenile detention centres in Victoria, Parkville, which had many Māori and Pasifika young people incarcerated.

When we went into youth justice, especially into Parkville, like, this is purely observational, but the number of kids there that were Pasifika, it

was just absolutely absurd, like, it was so high, the percentage. –
Professional 2

Youth justice workers

The young men who were interviewed had all had some sort of involvement in the youth justice system. The findings showed that these young men had had some good interactions with youth justice workers, but also that some had seen youth workers just because they had to.

It was pointless, like, it was mandatory to see her because I was on bail.
– Samoan/Ethiopian young man 26 years old on his youth justice worker

For me, like, I was born in New Zealand, I had a youth worker or counsellor [in New Zealand]. He was the exact same, it felt like home and I was comfortable and he was someone I could trust. – Māori young man 28 years old on his youth justice worker

Navigating a foreign system

The professionals identified many issues with the current state of the youth justice system and discussed ideas about how the youth justice system could work towards better outcomes for Māori and Pasifika young people.

Trying to navigate a system that has no connection to your culture and your own lens on how you view the world is a huge problem. –
Professional 1 on the youth justice system in Victoria

The professionals mentioned that the youth justice system in Victoria, especially the Children's Court system, needed to introduce a system that gave the young people and their families a better experience by altering it to accommodate their culture. The recommendation was to introduce a similar system to the one that the Indigenous people of Australia have in the Koori Court. The professionals explained the need to better support Māori and Pasifika parents and guardians who are supporting their child through court as there is sometimes a language barrier.

Part of that is also the language barrier, you know, if the parent can't speak English, they can't articulate how they are going to care for their kid if they were bailed and provide supervision and all of that. But these are parents trying to navigate a system that is totally foreign to them and it is probably needing to help them navigate the system. We are not good at that. – Professional 1

Professional 1 explained that they had noticed that the youth justice system was employing more mentors who were Māori and Pasifika backgrounds, but there was more that needed to be done. Professional 1 commented on the need for more culturally appropriate systems in youth justice. The 2 examples they provided were the Māori and Pasifika court system and the advocate system, where someone of their culture gets called in after a Māori and Pasifika young person gets arrested to support the family and the young person through the interview process.

Professional 2 explained the need for the youth justice system to better understand young people and why they act the way they act and also their traumas, which include disconnection from culture.

I think a part of trauma is cultural disconnection. And again, that's often spoken about in the context of Aboriginal young people, which is so important, but it's also really important for Māori and Pasifika kids, and that's never mentioned. – Professional 2

Social capital

Robinson and William's (2001) definition of social capital is as follows:

Social capital refers to the collection of resources to which an individual or a group has access through their membership in an ongoing network of mutual acquaintance. Features of this social structure, such as relationships, norms and social trust, help develop coordination and cooperation for common benefit. (p. 54)

The Māori and Pasifika young men mentioned that their networks as young people had consisted of like-minded friends and family, and it was evident that with these networks the young men had not had much success in education. Examples of the people who the young men had had around them growing up were described, with 3 of them explaining that their older brothers had also been getting into trouble with police. Gaining services through alternative education and youth justice workers had grown the young men's social capital. The Māori and Pasifika young men explained they had gained key networks such as youth justice workers, teachers and youth workers. Through these networks the young men said they had gained access to benefits, such as assistance to enrol into TAFE courses and having trusted adults in their lives.

They helped me with a lot of things, actually; they helped me opening a bank account and got me into my course at VU [Victoria University] doing carpentry. – Māori young man 27 years old on his youth justice worker

The young men explained these benefits and the positive relationships they had built with these key people. This being said, the Māori 28-year-old young man acknowledged that these relationships had been temporary and that at some point that person was not his youth justice worker anymore.

I think you get to an age and they can't be your youth worker, there should be an adult youth worker. You have them for so long, then all of a sudden they can't be your youth worker anymore. It's like, now who can I go to? Who can I trust? – Young Māori man 28 years old

With the gain in social capital for these young men, they gained better opportunities that they may not have been able to gain without these key networks, although they were limited in time as many people do not go to school past 18 years of age and youth justice workers only work with young people who are involved in youth justice. With these relationships being limited in time, they may not have gained as much social capital as they could have. The gain of social capital had come with new opportunities such as exposure to new people and different education avenues,

which may have grown the young men's capacity to engage as positive members of society and therefore gaining more networks that could further support them to promote themselves towards positive lives.

Power

The notion of power in a decolonial sense identifies that colonisation created power structures to control and benefit the colonisers (Quijano, 2000). Decolonial research should aim to challenge the colonial structures of power by using Indigenous viewpoints (Omodan & Dastille, 2023). In this research we discuss colonial systems such as education and youth justice. Mainstream secondary education and youth justice in Australia can take on an approach that is less relational and expects conformity from their students or the young people involved. The colonial structures in Australia have a simple answer for Māori and Pasifika who do not conform to their conditions and that is to exclude and deport them.

The Māori and Pasifika young men talked about mainstream school not working out for them, which led to suspensions and then having to seek other options to get an education.

They kind of push [you] to the side. – Māori young man 28 years old on his mainstream high school teachers

Alternative education takes a more flexible approach, to conform with young people instead of just expecting young people to conform with it. This saw a more successful approach for the Māori and Pasifika young men as we have seen through their explanations of alternative education.

The idea of being powerless in many realities of their lives is one that these young men may have been challenged with, as in decolonial theory race is often seen as a social construct created by colonisers so they are able to be in control and have the power (Quijano, 2000). Just the fact that they were born brown-skinned Māori and Pasifika people may mean the encounters that they had faced within colonial systems may have been able to be foreseen.

Summary

Throughout the discussion there are multiple overlapping ideas that are highlighted in current literature. The many negative experiences Māori and Pasifika young people have in mainstream schools are highlighted throughout the data and the literature. Liddell et al. (2016) said that in secondary school Pasifika young people were labelled deviant, while Kearney and Donaghy (2010) said Pasifika young people faced negative racial stereotypes. In the data, the young men expressed that mainstream schools had not suited them and that teachers had not had the ability to understand them and they even felt some teachers had been racist. Mainstream schooling and teachers' negatively stereotyping and lack of cultural competency may be contributing factors to Māori and Pasifika being over-represented in the youth justice system.

Cultural competency pedagogy as seen through research done in Aotearoa New Zealand such as that of Reynolds (2017), Hill et al. (2019) and Siteine (2010) has ideas on how to provide positive experiences for Pasifika young people in secondary school. These ideas relate to the ability to better understand Pasifika young people and what they respond to in education. Reynolds (2017) explained that Pasifika young people responded well to teachers they felt put in effort to understand them and felt they had their backs, and to teachers who were kind and focused on building a relationship with the young people. Siteine (2010) identified that it is the teacher's responsibility to respond individually to young people and especially Pasifika young people, who can be pigeonholed into stereotypes. Hill et al. (2019) recognised that Pasifika students in numeracy classes responded better to group work and schoolwork that they saw as being useful and practical for their future. If mainstream schools in Australia were to aim to be more culturally competent for Māori and Pasifika young people, this might provide better educational outcomes for them and then lower the chance for them to become a part of the youth justice system. The professionals who participated in this research discussed the need for cultural competency in the youth justice system and adaptation of the youth justice system to have more Māori and Pasifika practices so it is not so foreign to them. Vaioleti (2006)

explained the talanoa model and this process is a key to problem-solving in Pasifika cultures; it could be something children's courts or youth justice interventions could use to accommodate Pasifika cultures.

Connection was a common theme within the findings. This showed that the young men had had many positive relationships with teachers, youth workers and youth justice workers, and they felt this had influenced them away from youth justice. This is consistent with the professionals, who explained that the specific training done in alternative education to gain skills to build relationships gave Māori and Pasifika young people more chance to engage. There were many examples from the young men that if a person such as a youth worker, teacher or youth justice worker was patient with them and put effort into better understanding them, then they would engage in the prosocial activity that the person was providing. The need for Māori and Pasifika young people to be better understood in major systems such as education and youth justice was mentioned throughout the data. The literature on Māori and Pasifika cultures reflects the importance of relationships to them. Bishop et al. (2014) explained the Māori framework whanaungatanga, which refers to having family-like relationships with wider networks such as teachers. Reynolds (2016) said the Samoan word va (relatedness) highlights the importance of relationships for Pasifika young people. The findings reflect that if major supports and systems better connected to and attempted to understand Māori and Pasifika young people, this might be the key to lowering the over-representation of Māori and Pasifika young people in the youth justice system.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Ravulo (2019) and Shepard and Ilalio (2010) both highlighted traditional Māori and Pasifika methods and frameworks that could be adopted by youth justice and youth justice intervention programs; these included the Māori te whare tapa wha, the Pasifika fonfale and the Pasifika talanoa. The suggestion is that the adoption of

these methods would enable Māori and Pasifika young people and their families to have greater engagement with the programs or interventions that are offered.

Reforming the youth justice system would mean moving away from punitive action and focusing on prevention, diversion and intervention. The argument from Australian Human Rights Commission (2024b) and Save the Children et al. (2023) is that if these 3 factors are the focus, this will mean that young people and children will get the support they need, which will lower their chance of involvement or further involvement in youth justice. This argument is also one that was presented by the Justice Reform Initiative (2025), which acknowledged that youth justice costs the taxpayer, as the youth justice net cost was over one billion dollars in 2023–2024, and they said if a children's rights approach was enforced in Australia, this would go a long way to lowering the cost of youth justice.

This thesis has focused on the lived experiences of 5 Māori and Pasifika young men aged from 20 to 30 years who had had a history of involvement in the youth justice system and assisted by perspectives provided by 2 professionals who had worked with Māori and Pasifika young people involved in the youth justice system. The Māori and Pasifika young men acknowledged the determinants they had faced, which were similar to those mentioned in the literature review; lack of engagement in education, family breakdown, alcohol and drug use, and hanging around like-minded young people.

The Māori and Pasifika cultures echo the importance of relationships and connection. The challenges Māori and Pasifika young people face may lead to a lack of opportunity for them to engage with “supposed” protective supports and systems such as education. The word “supposed” is highlighted as education, especially mainstream education, did not provide a protective experience for the Māori and Pasifika young men in this thesis or Māori and Pasifika young people described throughout literature such as the study of Liddell et al. (2016). The mainstream education system has been shown to have neglected the Māori and Pasifika young men in this research, with their comments about it not working for them because the teachers lacked the ability to connect with them and did not understand them.

Where the Māori and Pasifika young men found success in their education was in alternative education settings. The young men acknowledged how they had felt understood and had had strong relationships with teachers and youth workers. This was confirmed by the professionals, who said that alternative education schools trained staff in building relationships with their students. This thesis and the literature from Blackberry and Kearney (2021) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) suggest that Māori and Pasifika young people are misunderstood in education settings in Australia.

This misunderstanding may not be only within education, but also within many other supports and systems such as youth justice and their own families. The key to engaging Māori and Pasifika young people in any protective supports and systems may be putting an emphasis on building connection with them and building an understanding of them. This research suggests cultural competency is something that is missing within systems such as youth justice and education in Australia. Culturally competent systems may promote more involvement by young people's families as they will have more understanding of what is going on for their young people. The idea of being seen and not heard is also something that may be happening for Māori and Pasifika young people throughout supposed protective supports and systems. If they are given a voice and are understood, this may be a pathway to lowering the chance that they will be involved in the youth justice system.

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