

The impacts on adult children of family and fanau responsibility for elder family members: participant voices.

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HAWKE'S BAY

Introduction

- Commitment to foregrounding participants' voices and narratives from two cultural perspectives
- Creating space for finding commonalities and differences
- Key themes that have the potential to inform social service practice and social policy are highlighted.



Method

- Individual and face to face semi structured interviews with Pacific and Pakeha adult children
- Two focus groups: (Pacific & Pakeha)
- Attending both focus groups



Themes and Participant Voices

The purpose of the study was to identify:

- family decision-making processes
- how families access appropriate social services
- what changes occurred in family dynamics as participants responded to elder family members' needs
- patterns of similarity and difference between the two cultural groups.



Theme One

Reasons for taking responsibility for elderly family member

- Pragmatic reasons.
- Loyalty, family responsibility and duty:

Doing things out of a sense of duty and an intense feeling that they (the elderly parent) had a right until their last breath to be treated with respect and love and kindness.

You have to respect your parents. I am the eldest of my brothers and sisters, my sister and me take turns but I do most of the work because my sister has young children.

Theme One Cont'd

Reasons for taking responsibility for elderly family member

- Going the extra mile

She/he gave up heaps for me and put me through university, wasn't easy, no one in her family had been to university... I can do it for her now that she needs me.

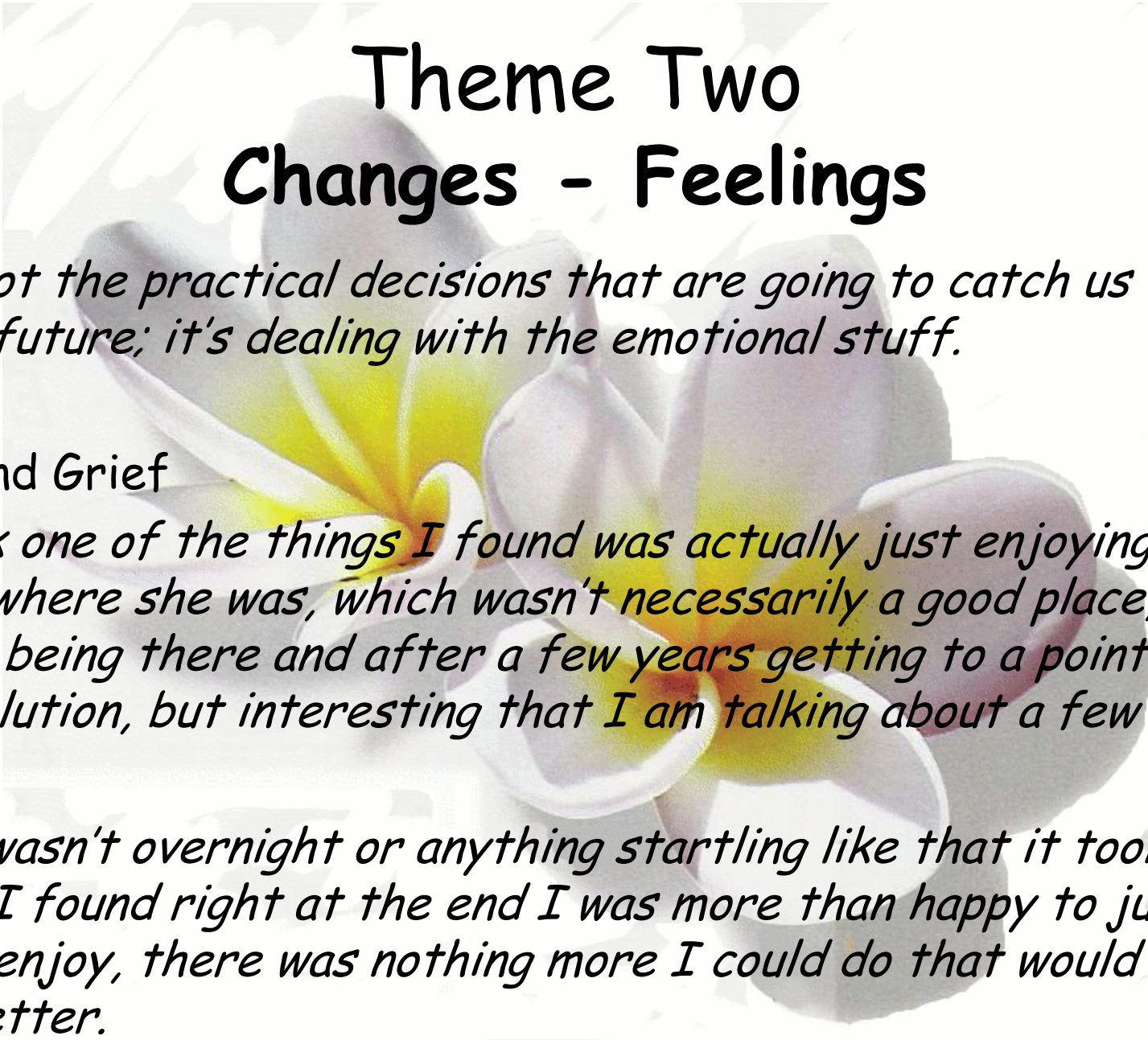
- Values and beliefs

We do this because of our culture. We look after our old people, no matter how tough it is...

I see it from a commitment perspective, that this is my mum and I'm committed to making sure that she has the best quality of care that she can for as long as she can.

- Own choice

I think I have put it on myself to be there for Mum and Dad.



Theme Two


Changes - Feelings

It is not the practical decisions that are going to catch us out in the future; it's dealing with the emotional stuff.

Loss and Grief

I think one of the things I found was actually just enjoying Mum for where she was, which wasn't necessarily a good place, ... and just being there and after a few years getting to a point of resolution, but interesting that I am talking about a few years.

Oh it wasn't overnight or anything startling like that it took time but I found right at the end I was more than happy to just go and enjoy, there was nothing more I could do that would make it better.



Theme Two Cont'd Changes - Feelings

- Feelings (cont'd)

Feelings conflicting with values and beliefs

It was a challenge to my image of myself being caring and kind and loving elderly people -- this was seriously dented, (especially when I was tired).

For others feelings are a challenge that are almost too much:
I think I hide the stress... I think my prayer really helps me, without God I would break into pieces.

Theme Three

Changes - Roles and Relationships

- Roles and Relationships

We begin life as a child then become friends with our parents and finally a parent to the parent.

I feel I am the centre of her world now which I'd rather not be.

Not having a Mum to talk to that is hard - can't even ask Mum about other family members (even though Mum is still alive).

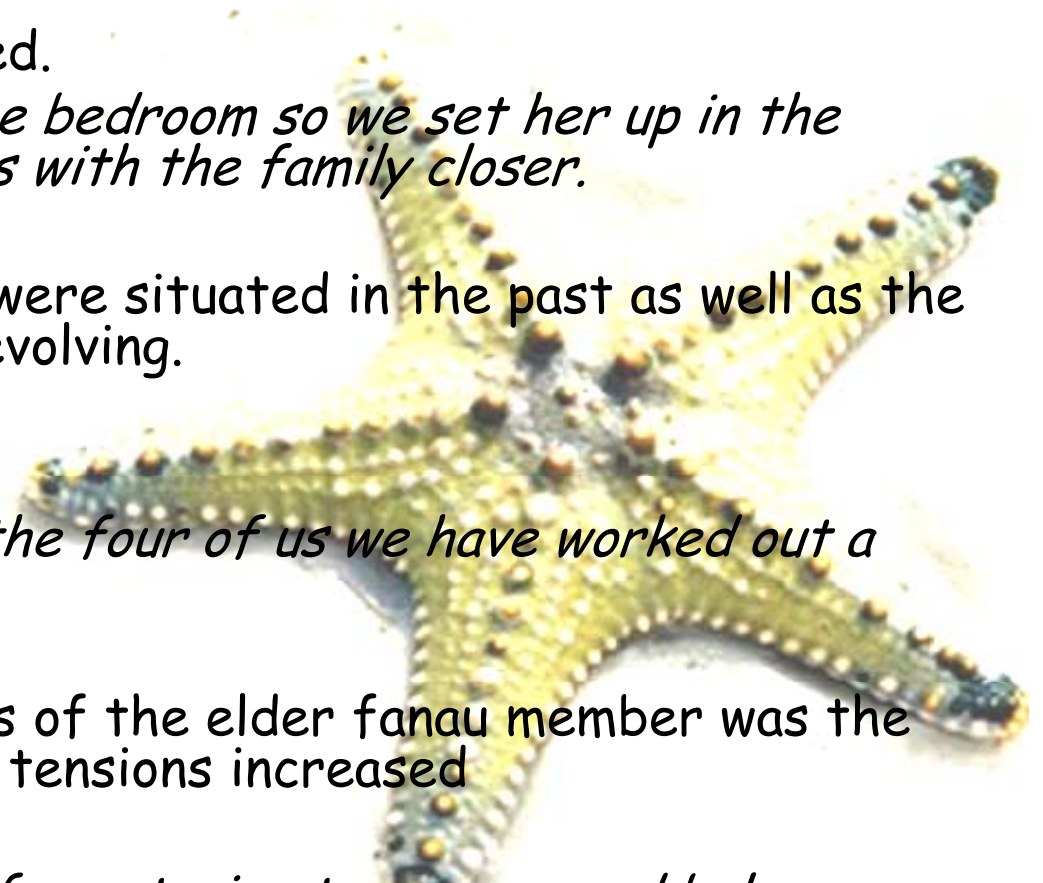
If I have to I will give up work, I want Mum to be as independent for as long as she can, but she is getting no (outside) help because she doesn't want it.

Theme Four

Family patterns and dynamics

- Relationships were highly valued.
Mum did not like to sleep in the bedroom so we set her up in the lounge... made the relationships with the family closer.
- Relationships and biographies were situated in the past as well as the present. At times they were evolving.
- Family patterns were unique.
It is a 17 hour day... between the four of us we have worked out a schedule.
- Keeping the focus on the needs of the elder fanau member was the priority even when stress and tensions increased

In some respects you have to forgo trying to manage and balance family dynamics because the more important issue is your parent's welfare.



Theme Five

Decision making

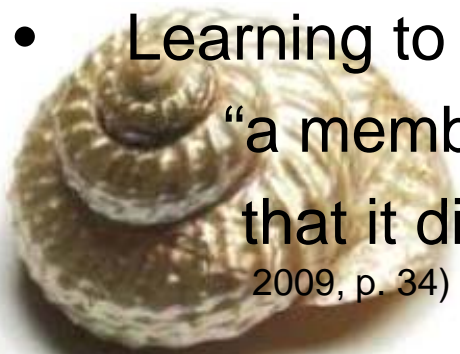
- Involvement of family members was often difficult and complex.

They don't want any responsibility for what happens day to day... They are supportive from a distance but we keep in close contact and I give them feedback on every single thing... We make sure that they are involved in every decision even though they don't want responsibility for it.

- Learning to 'gently steer'.

“a membrane so porous between caring and controlling that it dissolves at the slightest touch” (Sennett, cited in Paul,

2009, p. 34)



Theme Six Strengths



Their strengths included:

- Resilience in times of stress.
- Problem solving and overcoming struggles effectively.
- Making the older person a priority.
- Sustained commitment over a period of time.
- Building and sustaining relationships.

Theme Six Cont'd

Strengths



- Finding spaces and ways to unwind.
 - *There are always barriers...keep positive, have breaks, bring people over to talk to your elder...keep your sense of humour, happiness is part of the healing.*
- A willingness to learn tolerance and to go to the hard places in relationships
 - *I suppose for me to do the role that I'm doing now I actually had to learn to forgive ... to be in that role and be supportive, you actually have to let go of it, of stuff that happened in the past, to forgive.*

Theme Seven

Accessing Appropriate Services

- 'Trial and error' process
- Pakeha played an active advocacy role.
- Pacific fanau had wide family networks.
- Use of social services didn't feature so strongly.
- This raises the question about whether current available support actually meets the cultural, spiritual and emotional needs of Pacific fanau.

If we are unhappy about Dad's care we talk to them.

Implications for social service practice and social policy

- Past histories and present stories must be at the forefront.
- Ensure voices are heard.
- Take account and work with the impact of the life transitions and associated feelings.
- Physical distance that separates children and elder family members.
- Make information accessible and available.



Implications for social service practice and social policy

- Actively attend to the power differences.
- Actively integrate strengths based practice.
- Facilitate and resource opportunities for family group meetings or hui.
- Facilitate and resource appropriate leave and support.
- Apply the relevant Code of Ethics



Finally

As we have talked about this research there has been a lot of interest. Others want to share their stories. The topic has touched a nerve. It is a big issue for people.

We were humbled by the participant's willingness to share with us both their strengths and vulnerabilities as well as the ups and downs of their journey.



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