

VA'AALO Pastoral Counselling

[Bonito Canoe]

An Approach that navigates va (relational space) to engage Samoans with one's own self, with one another, and especially with God

**ICPCC Conference
Learning to Serve People of Other
Cultures**

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(Founded 2017)

CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH SAMOA

(Est. by London Missionary
Society LMS 1830)



Malua
Theological
College, Samoa
(Est.1844)



Overview

1. Samoa: A snapshot
2. Pacific-specific Models of Health used by counsellors/ mental health professionals/ social workers
3. Counselling in the context of Samoa
 - who performs
 - my research into counselling practices of Samoans
 - *Va'aalo* Pastoral Counselling Model
 - Continuum of Traditional and Contemporary understandings of counselling/ pastoral counselling practices
4. Proposal: *Fetu'utu'una'i le vā* Navigating Relational Spaces
 - Counselling for Samoans is about *Vā* Relational Space
 - Soul Talk Samoa Incorporated

Samoa – A Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KAY0x9ZCjs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KAY0x9ZCjs>



Samoa: A snapshot

Population: 195,979 (2016 Census)

Independence (from NZ Administration) 01 January 1962

Predominantly a Christian nation (made up of):

Congregational (CCCS)	29.0 %
Roman Catholic	18.8 %
Mormon LDS	16.9 %
Methodists	12.4 %
AOG	6.8 %
SDA	4.4%
Others	11.7 %

Languages spoken

Samoaan, English

Pasefika (Pacific) health models have been developed since 1990s

- Some are Pacific people-focused, models which are relevant and applicable to some if not most Pacific communities in New Zealand
- Others have ethnic-specific intent though may still have some Pacific relevance
- These have contributed to building a range of Pacific health models created by, and available to Pacific communities



Collective Relationship

I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share my *tofi* (an inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my belonging (Tui Atua, 2003, p. 51).

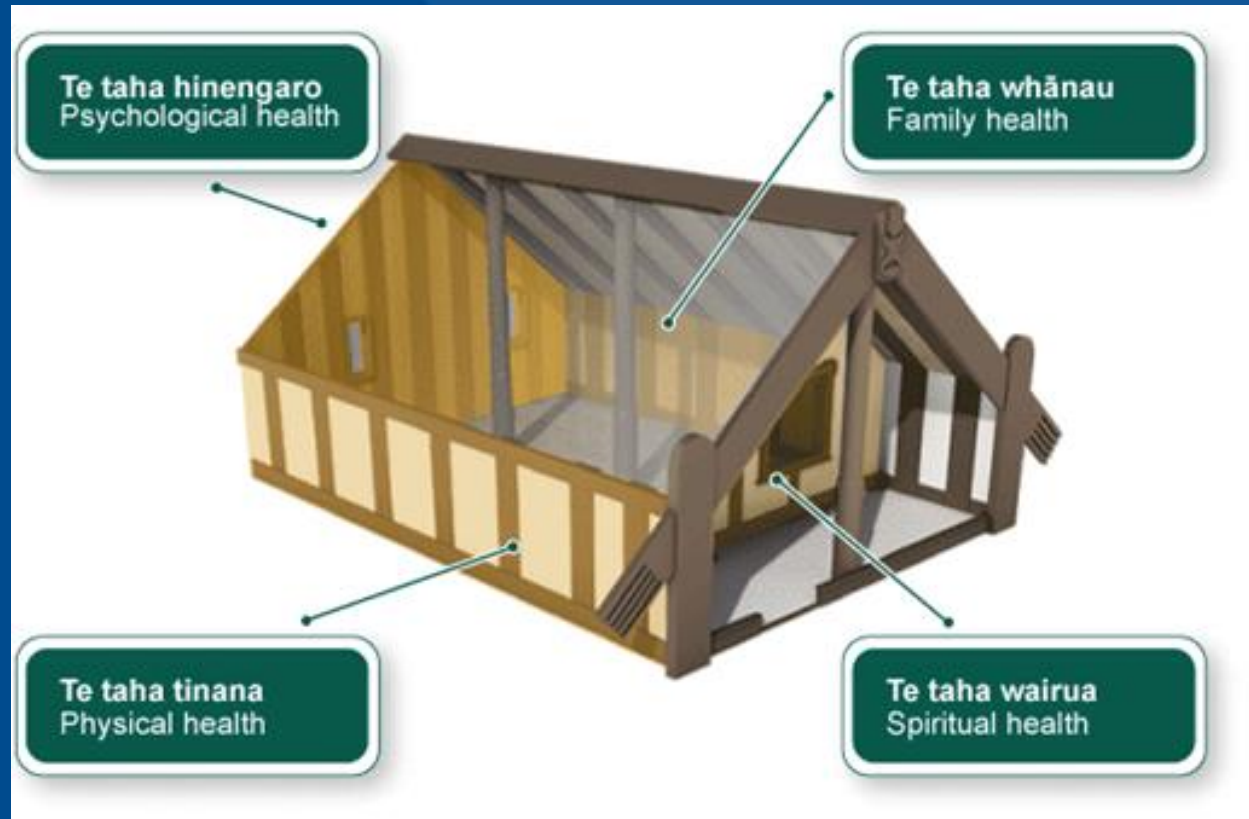
Tui Atua, T. T. T. E. (2003). In search of meaning, nuance and metaphor in social policy. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, (20), 49-63.

Pasefika Health Models

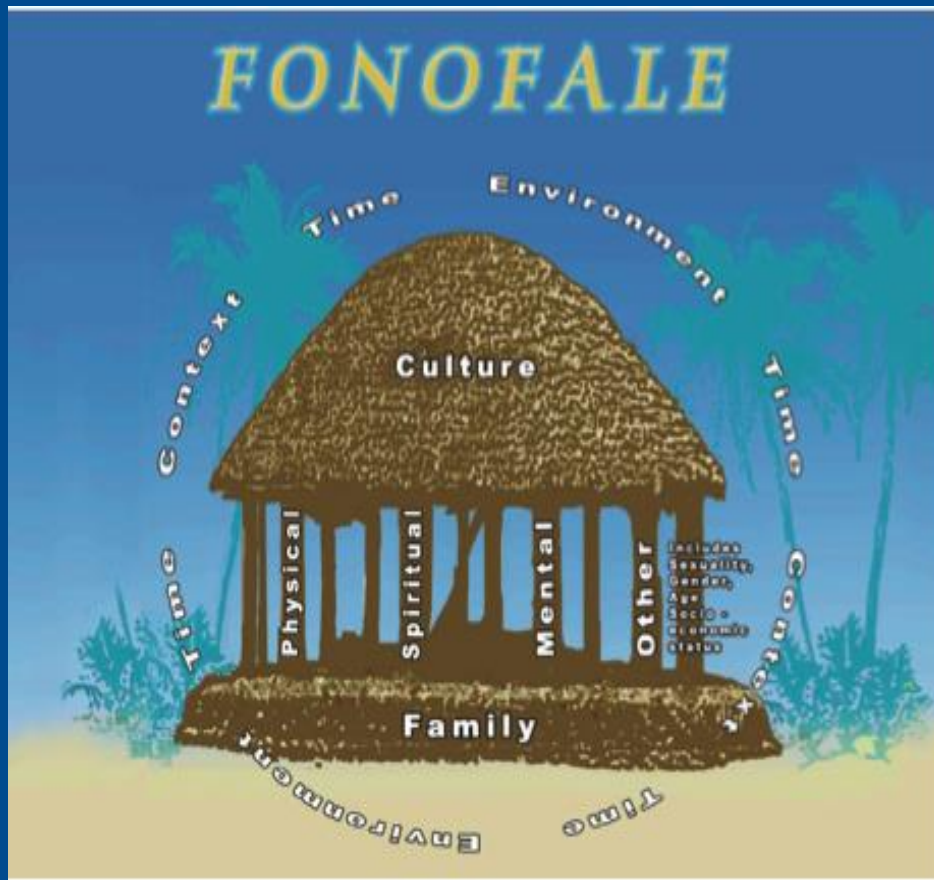
- *Te Vaka Atafaga* –A Tokelauan assessment model
- *Tivaevae* – A Cook Is model (Teremoana Maua-Hodges)
- *Tui Kakala* – Tongan (Konai Helu-Thaman)
- *Fa'afaletui* –Samoan model (Carmel Peteru & Kiwi Tamasese)
- *Fonua* model –Tongan (Sione Tui'tahi)



THE *TE WHARE TAPA WHĀ* MĀORI MODEL



Durie, M. (1998). *Whaiora: Māori Health Development* (2nd ed.). Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford University Press.



FONOFALE MODEL OF HEALTH

Pulotu-Endemann, F. K. (2009). *Fonofale model of health*. Paper presented at the Pacific Health promotion models: A partnership between the Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand and Pasifika@Massey, Wellington, New Zealand.



Uputaua Therapeutic Approach UTA model of health



Seuli, B. M. S. (2013). Counselling Psychology From a Samoan Perspective. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 42(3).

Counselling context in Samoa

- MOH– Government of Samoa Mental Health unit
- Counselling services in various institutions – for eg, Samoa Airport Authority
- Samoa Victim Support Group, Teen Challenge, Returnees Group, FLO Samoa Lifeline
- Church ministers with minimal counselling training through MTC (for eg) as component of their ministry training **approximately 200 (plus a further 170 worldwide)**

...[cont]...Counselling context in Samoa

Who often take on this role?

- Elders, Ministers, *Matai* (chief)

How well are these groups equipped to undertake this role?

- Inherent, didactical, monological approach



Va'aalo pastoral counselling model (VPC)

based on PhD research ¹

¹ Pala'amo, A. (2017). *Fetu'utu'una'i le vā Navigating relational space: An exploration of pastoral counselling practices for Samoans*. (Doctoral dissertation, Massey University, Albany, New Zealand). Retrieved from <https://mro.massey.ac.nz/handle/10179/11813>



University Western Australia, Perth
2014



God, Pastors, Counselling



A Samoan proverb:
“Manoeuvring a fisherman’s rod”
Fetu’utu’una’i muniao

WHAT DOES COUNSELLING MEAN (to Samoans)?

- Pastoral counselling = counselling by ministers
- Counselling to many Samoans is about giving advice
- A Changing Samoa self
- E sui faiga ae tumau fa'avae (Practices change yet foundations remain
 - lived experiences of fa'aSamoa has changed, but the foundations of fa'aSamoa remain.
 - alofa (love), fa'aaloalo (respect), tausí tuaoi (reciprocity)
- *Fetu'utu'una'i muniao* – **Manoeuvring a fisherman's rod**

Seugalupe – Pigeon hunting

Va'aalo (fishing bonito)



Va...

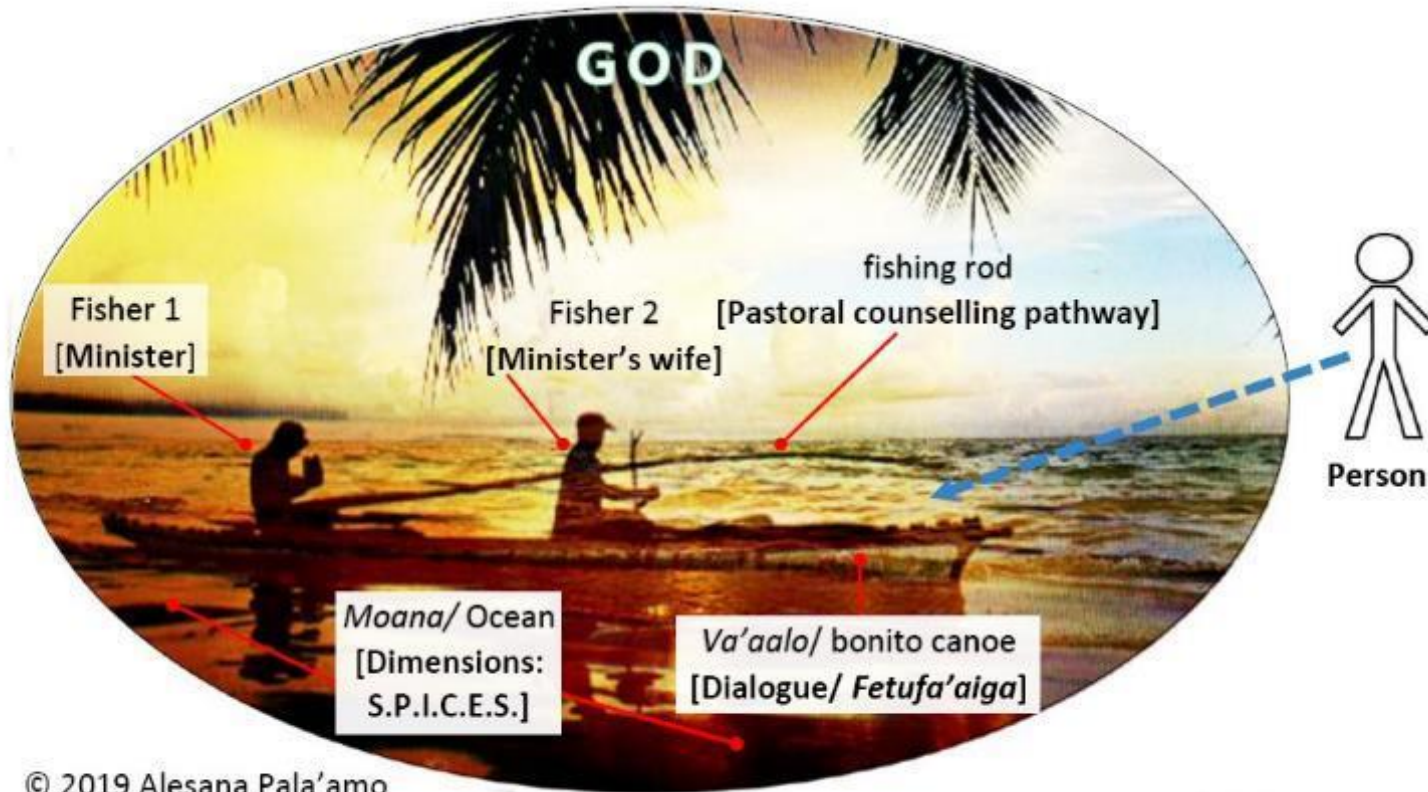
Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of *Va* or *Wa* in Maori and Japanese. *Va* is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates, but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships and the contexts change.... A well-known Samoan expression is "la teu le va"- cherish, nurse, care for the *va*, the relationship. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group unity more than individualism, that perceive the individual person, or creature, or thing in terms of group, in terms of *va*, relationships.

Wendt, A. (1999). Afterword: Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body. In V. Hereniko & R. Wilson (Eds.), *Inside out: Literature, cultural politics, and identity in the new Pacific* (pp. 399-412). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Va...

- As a reference to the bonito canoe (*va'aalo*) used in Samoan traditional canoe fishing, VPC developed from my recent doctoral research. *Va'aalo* pastoral counselling proposes that although respecting *vā* (relational space) is necessary for the harmonious living of Samoans in most situations, for pastoral counselling practices, *vā* must be navigated and manoeuvred in order for this approach to become viable and useful.
- The *Va'aalo* pastoral counselling model is derived from understandings developed from my doctoral research (2017) titled '*Fetu'utu'una'i le vā—Navigating relational space: An exploration of traditional and contemporary pastoral counselling practices for Samoans*'.

Va'aalo pastoral counselling model



3 Stages:

- (i) Engage
- (ii) Explore
- (iii) Empower

STAGE 1:

ENGAGE

Continuum of Traditional and Contemporary understandings of counselling/ pastoral counselling practices

Traditional

- God-directed
- God as top-down
- Minister
- Monologue

Contemporary

- God-inspired
- God alongside
- Minister *and* self
- Dialogue

- What next? After coming into *Va'aalo*?
- **STAGE 2: Explore – S.P.I.C.E.S.**

S.P.I.C.E.S. Assessment Tool.

This tool explores the dimensions of the person seeking help:

Spiritual
Psychological
Individual
Communal
Emotional
Socio-Cultural



STAGE 3: EMPOWER

**...step out of canoe
and enjoy life!**



Va'aalo pastoral counselling

1. Counselling from a Samoan perspective **MUST consider VĀ** or simply, the **Relational Space** between counsellor and client
2. The **counsellor and client** must both navigate this *vā*
3. Only then can **Stage 1 of Va'aalo model** begin to take shape

NEW



AN AGENCY PROVIDING

PASTORAL COUNSELLING &

SOCIAL SERVICES

tatou talanoa...let's talk



1. The availability to use Culturally-appropriate models of counselling (if required)
2. Samoan/ Pacific counsellors
3. Incorporate *Va'aalo pastoral counselling* in our work

<http://saultalksamoa.ws>



FAAFETAI
FAAMANUIA
LE ATUA
GOD BLESS