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# Samoan Kids in the City:

## The Impact of Samoan Parenting Practices on Samoan Children's Independent Mobility and Physical Activity

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Public Health

Doctor of Philosophy in  
Public Health

At Massey University, SHORE & Whariki Research Centre, Auckland,  
New Zealand

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2017



# Abstract

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Physical activity (PA) is vital to the optimal health and development of children and in turn, independent mobility (IM) - outdoor play and travelling to destinations unsupervised - is an essential component of PA for children. There is a growing body of research on the extent to which children's daily IM and PA are influenced by parents' experiences and perceptions of streets and public spaces as safe and desirable – or otherwise. However, little is known about Samoan parents' experiences and perceptions of their social and physical surroundings and the associated impact on their children's daily IM and PA.

Extended families, traditional households and the village-based life of Samoan people are changing. For Samoan people in New Zealand, the transition from a traditional ad hoc and exchange-based way of life to a modern, more formal and cash-based socio-economic reality has seen Samoan parents increasingly living in a 'rat race'. This modern reality has influenced Samoan parenting practices in New Zealand.

This research is nested in and arose from the 'Kids in the City' (KITC) research project – a Health Research Council funded study of the independent mobility and physical activity of children, in relation to neighbourhood urban design and neighbourhood perceptions of safety in six Auckland neighbourhoods. The critical realism approach from KITC was used to identify the underlying mechanisms influencing Samoan parents' parenting practices and children's IM and PA behaviours. Three methods were used to collect the data: computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI) with parents (n=36); semi-structured interviews with parents (n=14), follow up interviews with parents (n=8), and key informant interviews (n=6); as well as 7-day self-reported travel diaries kept by the children (n=37). Triangulating the data collection methods allowed varied perspectives on the influences of Samoan parenting practices to be gathered, as well as information on how their perceptions of their neighbourhoods were shaped, and how these perceptions then informed their decision-making around their children's activity behaviours.

Key themes that emerged from the findings were: 1) Samoan parenting incorporates Samoan practices with Western practices and the values and beliefs that underpin these; 2) Samoan cultural affiliation impacts on how parents perceive their social and physical surroundings as positive or negative; and 3) parents' perceptions of their surroundings largely informs where

children are allowed to go and not go – unsupervised. The findings make it clear that cultural perceptions influence the decisions Samoan parents make about where they will allow their children go without adult supervision, thereby rendering notions of IM to be of little value. They do not see the value of IM when the developmental benefits of being physically active can be achieved through collective family, church and other activities. Further, Samoan ontology and epistemologies need to be valued and validated in urban planning and design to allow a better understanding of how and why Samoan children interact with their surrounding social and physical neighbourhoods – independently or otherwise.

# Dedication

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of three special people:

My late grandparents who represented all the beauty of the Samoan culture and a true heart for Jesus:

Magele Fiamatai Tava'e  
(1 February 1939 – 17 August 2016)

&

Vaeluaga Pepe Tava'e  
(1 January 1939 – 8 August 2014)

My late great-aunt who was a parent in service, love and dedication; and was a true child at heart:

Tivinia Sameme Fred  
(20 September 1935 – 25 January 2017)

Finally this thesis is also dedicated to my husband and our three amazing children who show me every day the grace and love of our God:

Andrew Alosina Fa'avale

Auro Adelina Fa'avale

Felani Pepe Ta'otoga Fa'avale

Selemaea Tuala Tava'e Fa'avale

# Acknowledgements

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*'Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.*

*You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.'*

*Hebrews 10: 35-36 NIV*

Without the strength and the grace of God, and the sacrifice of His son Jesus Christ, I would not be who I am and where I am today. I am so grateful for His abounding love and mercy through this process, and the privilege to steward this opportunity.

I truly would not have been able to complete this doctoral journey without many people who stood with me, behind me, in front of me, and all who cheered me on.

A most special thank you goes to my Primary Supervisor, Dr. Lanuola Asiasiga, who rode the highs and lows with me, who supplied me with endless support and encouragement, and never gave up on me when at times I gave up on myself. Thank you Lanuola for being a great role model, guide, mentor, and friend. I'll miss your weekly calls to talk studies and life.

A special thank you to my co-supervisors, Dr. Penelope Carroll and Professor Karen Witten, who from the beginning encouraged, supported and shared their wealth of knowledge with me. Thank you for your endless support, your constant edits, and your belief in me.

Thank you to Associate Professor Vili Nosa for his continued mentoring and encouragement, even abroad. Thanks for not letting me give up. Fakaau lahi.

Thanks also the SHORE and Whariki team; especially Lina Samu, Victoria Jensen, Dr. Suzanne Mavoa, Paul Sweetsur, and Dr. Judy En-Lin. Special thank you to Lisa Morice and Jan Sheeran for helping with editing, proofing, formatting and printing to get this PhD over the last leg. Thanks also to the Kids in the City team especially Moushumi Chaudhury, Dr. Melody Smith, Dr. Hannah Badland, and Professor Robin Kearns. Thanks also to the Massey Academic Services for your Learning and Teaching consultations which provided much valuable feedback at a pinnacle point of the research process; thank you Dr. Julia Tanner and Dr. Lilia Sevillano for your helpful feedback and practical advice.

I would love to thank my friends and fellow/past PhD candidates who rode the journey with me, and role-modelled success. The Massey Retreat crew especially Dr. Analosa Ulugia-Veukiso, Dr. Siautu Alefaio, Dr. Fiva Fa'alau, Dr. Lily George, Dr. Vai Olikoni, and Dr. Sione Vaka. Thanks to my friends who put up with endless absences and missed catch ups: the Baradene girls, the Uni Crew, the GRx crew, and all the people who's paths we've crossed especially Nicole Simson, Alex Gladding, Natalie Dowdall, Lesley Donald, Chrissy Fastier, Karthika Kanasha, Jenny Davy, Maria Sevaio and Avalua Aluni. Thank you to St. Anne's Catholic Church in Manurewa and the Every Nation Brisbane Church who provided spiritual covering and guidance.

Thank you especially to my dad and mum, John and Adelynne Tava'e. I've never appreciated your love, sacrifice and devotion as parents until I became a parent myself, and I don't think I will truly grasp the extent of your love. Thanks for your selfless and tireless work, and your continued love for my own little, growing family and me. Thanks also to my siblings, John-Henry and Grace, who have grown with me, laughed, cried and fought with me. I want the best for you both and hope you see how amazing you both are, because God made you both especially for a special purpose. I look forward to watching and walking with you both on that journey.

Fa'afetai tele lava, fakaaue lahi, malo aupito goes out to my extended family who have cheered me on through life beyond the PhD. Thank you for contributing to the woman I am and for your never ending love and encouragement for me, and for my decisions in life, even if they contrast your beliefs. Thank you to the following families: the Tava'e, Fa'avale, Bourke, Graydon, Bates, Rogers, Johansson, and Griffin families.

My eternal gratitude goes to the four people who enrich my life and have helped me be a better version of myself everyday; the most special people in my life, Andrew, Auro, Felani and Selemaea. You example God's abundant love and amazing grace, and I am so blessed to do life with you four. Thank you for riding this journey with me; for your patience, perseverance, your love, and unconditional support and encouragement. Thanks babe for the sacrifice and hard work you did to make this PhD happen. Thanks for dreaming big for our family and providing the environment for us to flourish and reflect God's bigness. Auro, Felani and Selemaea, our three gifts; you gave mummy the motivation to complete this journey, while making the experience fun and enriching along the way. I am so proud of you three; you inspire me to be all that God created me to be.



I am indebted to the inspiring men and women of this research who shared with me their hearts, their experiences, their perceptions, their ideas and visions. Most of all they shared their love for their children, and expressed their gratitude for their own parents and the generations before. I think all the participating children and parents are blessed to have such devoted and loving parents. I am so proud to be Samoan.

I am so blessed to stand on the shoulders of many who have gone before me, many of whom I have referenced or shared their ideas. I stand on the shoulders of mine, and others' ancestors who have toiled on, and fought for, the lands on which we call home.

Fa'afetai tele lava. Fa'avae i le Atua

# Glossary

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'aiga	Family
Alofa	Love
Aoga Amata	Samoa bilingual language nest/early childhood education (ECE)
Ava	Respect
Fa'alavelave	An event or occasion that is a not part of everyday normal activities.
Fa'aloalo	Respect/Reverence
Fa'amagalo	Forgiveness
Fa'aSamoa	Samoa way of life. This encapsulates Samoa values, beliefs and
Fagogo	Traditional story telling
Fanua	'Land' as well as 'placenta'
Feagaiga	A sacred covenant between brother and sister, or between minister
Feau	Chores
Fonofale	Traditional Samoa meeting house
Lotonu'u	Maintaining/restoring pride
Lotu	Church
Malaga	Movement
Mama	Food masticated by the mother and passed to the baby as a means of
Matai	Chief/Chiefly system
Meaalofa	Gift/Present
Nu'u	Village
Pakeha	Maori term for a person of European descent
Palagi	Samoa term for a person of European descent
Pito nu'u	Part of the village
Tagaloa	Indigenous Samoa God of all living things on earth
Tapu	Sacred

Tautua	Service
Teu le va	To nurture or make amends – the sacred relationship between
Tofi	Inheritance
Toona’i	An important gathering or feast
Tua’oi	Dual meaning: ‘boundary’ and also ‘neighbour’
Usita’i	Discipline
Va	Sacred space that connects separate entities (people and things).

Samoa glossary derived from the following literature: (Lauta-Mulitalo, 1998); (Cowley-Malcolm, 2013); (Ng Shiu, 2011).

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