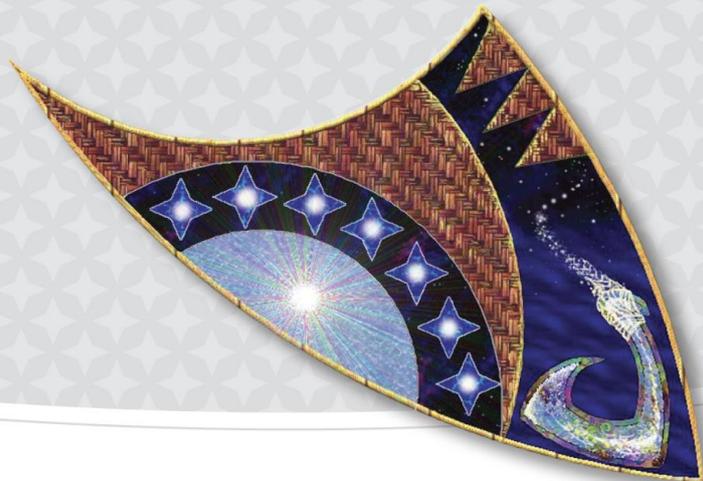




# Vuvale Doka Sautu

A Cultural Framework for  
addressing violence in Fijian  
families in New Zealand



March 2012

## Guide on the use of Fijian Conceptual Framework

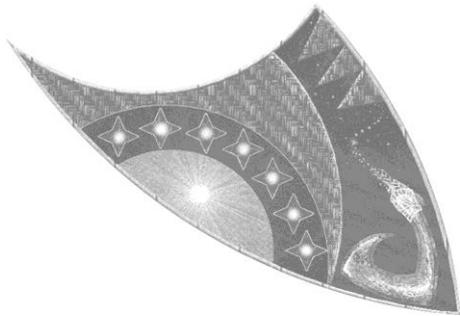
This document was developed by the Fijian Working Group to assist with the development of a training programme for Fijian practitioners and service providers working with victims, perpetrators, and families from our communities who have been affected by family violence.

The information in this document can be used for research purposes\*, educational activities and programmes which promote the wellbeing of our families and communities. The Working Group request that in using this material, that the integrity of the concepts and the work is maintained.

These must not be interpreted in such a way as to cause any form of harm, or violate relationships between people. Nor should the meanings of these concepts, values, and principles be compromised or subsumed under the definitions of meanings that belong to other cultures and beliefs.

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\* <[http://by167w.bay167.mail.live.com/mail/RteFrame\\_16.2.4514.0219.html?dl=dl#\\_ftnref1](http://by167w.bay167.mail.live.com/mail/RteFrame_16.2.4514.0219.html?dl=dl#_ftnref1)> It is recommended that any research generated from this document is guided by Pacific research guidelines such as, **Guidelines** on Pacific Health Research (2005).  
Health Research Council of New Zealand



### La Tapu (Sacred Sail)

The basic shape is that of a Pacific canoe sail. This represents the vaka/canoe which is important in traditional Pacific navigation and exploring new horizons.

The fishhook represents sustainability as well as traditional knowledge. The fishhook colour shows the colours of the paua shell, which represents our migration to New Zealand and adapting to a new way of life while maintaining our traditions. The fishhook is linked to a spiritual cord which disappears up to the heavens. This represents our link as Pacific Islanders with our creator and the importance of our traditional and contemporary belief system. The background of the fish hook represents the sea which merges into a star filled night sky. These natural elements were the navigator's pathways to new horizons.

The triangular patterns above the fishhook is a common design motif found in all Pacific cultures. I used this pattern to represent a common thread found between the Pacific Islands.

The woven pattern represents the Kaiga (family), as a close knit unit. Each member in the Kaiga has a role and purpose in the same way each strand supports one another.

The seven stars represent the seven Pacific Island nations/groups of; Cook Islands, Niue, Sāmoa, Fiji, Tuvalu, Tonga and Tokelau. Together, they represent a collective star formation which provides support and guidance to the vulnerable. To the left of the arched 7 stars is a lagoon with a radiating light emanating outwards. The lagoon represents a safe and protected environment. The radiating light represents a new life nurtured within this safe environment while surrounded and supported by family, cultural knowledge, belief, and alofa (love).

Tiaki Fati Kirifi – Tokelau.

## **The Fijian Working Group**

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# Vuvale Doka Sautu

Na Vakabibitaki  
ni  
i Tovo Vakaviti  
ena kena sagai me  
Wali nai Valavala Kaukauwa  
ni  
Veivakasaurarataki  
ena  
Loma ni Vuvale  
Vakaviti  
e  
Niu Siladi

A Cultural Framework  
for  
addressing violence  
in  
Fijian families  
in  
New Zealand

# Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Fijian cultural concepts and values .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Fijian world view.....	6
Sautu (family wellbeing) .....	6
Kawa.....	7
Mana.....	7
Tabu .....	7
Vakarokoroko.....	7
<b>Cultural practices .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Veitokoni.....	8
Veirogorogoci.....	8
Veivakaliuci.....	8
Veivakabekabei.....	8
<b>Key influences that impact on Fijian culture .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Lotu.....	8
Colonisation and multiculturalism.....	9
<b>Fijian family in New Zealand.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Family violence continuum.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Fijian definition of violence.....</b>	<b>10</b>
Na gaunisala me vakamuri (Measures to address violence in Fijian families) .....	10
<b>Vuvale Doka Sautu: a Fijian Cultural Framework for violence in Fijian families.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>13</b>

It is recommended that this document is read in conjunction with '*Falevitu: A literature review on culture and family violence in seven Pacific communities in New Zealand*' and '*Nga vaka o kāiga tapu: A Pacific Conceptual Framework to address family violence in New Zealand.*'

# Introduction

The Fijian term “**Sautu**” denotes the existence and maintenance of a strong and vibrant Fijian *Vuvale* (family). It represents the pinnacle and optimal state where the family is operating at its best and have secured a stable, harmonious and mutually sustaining status. It is a situation where relationships are thriving because the key Fijian values and concepts of **Veivakarokoroko**, **Veidokai**, **Veirogorogoci**, **Veivakatavulici**, **Veinanumi**, **Veikauwaitaki**, and **Veilomani** are observed and promoted. It is a situation akin to reaching the final stage in the building of a Fijian house when the **Doka ni Vale** is in place as the top most and crowning glory of the house. It is the result of painstaking co-operation where different family members have played their part in building different parts following set rituals, protocols and processes. The **I Doka ni Vale** is also the desired picture the family wishes to portray outwards about its wellbeing.

**Na i valavala kaukauwa ni veivakasaaurataki** (violence) represents a fractioning in the family as it shatters and tears down all that holds the family together. In pre-Christian Fijian culture, violence was sustained by the practice of exacting revenge on perpetrators. Nowadays much more enlightened approaches can be found to better understand violence in Fijian families and how to address it. These approaches can incorporate positive elements of Fijian culture that have served Fijian families well for generations.

Violence in Fijian families in New Zealand remains a largely untalked-about activity. Its causes are multidimensional and the impacts on victims and perpetrators have direct effects on the families themselves. That is why discussions on how to address violence in Fijian families have to involve and incorporate Fijian concepts, values and principles that operate within, and govern, family relationships and dynamics.

This document sets out the Fijian Cultural Framework as developed by the Fijian Working Group following a number of meetings. It is the result of discussions and deliberations commencing back in 2010 at the “Champions of Change” fono, a national gathering of Pacific peoples to discuss ways to address violence in Pacific families. A key focus of that fono was the need to explore how culture could be incorporated in new programme approaches. It was emphasised that unless this was done, efforts at addressing violence in Pacific families would be futile.

## Fijian cultural concepts and values

This section outlines and briefly discusses a number of key Fijian cultural values and concepts relating to the *vuvale* (family) using the metaphor of a house and its construction.

### Fijian world view

Understanding Fijian culture and therefore Fijian families, requires an understanding of the Fijian world view. This world view is shaped by the traditional Fijian social structures where roles are clearly prescribed according to a family’s membership of each level of the traditional hierarchy. Chiefs occupy the top echelon, followed downwards by others based on their roles in the community. In turn, the traditional roles define the nature of relationships among and between the different levels. Order is maintained and promoted when members know their place in the social hierarchy and work hard not to transgress it. Stiff sanctions follow the wilful breaking of protocols and rituals that govern how members behave with each other. In pre-Christian times, penalties can result in extreme violence.

### Sautu (family wellbeing)

Like others, Fijian families aspire to achieve a certain level of harmony, prosperity and stability – a situation where relationships are mutually reinforcing and respected, order is observed and maintained, through the observance and promotion of protocols and rituals. Sautu denotes such a state of being. Sau – reflects being imbued with Mana arising from one’s position or performance of role. Tu – is to rise following the successful discharge of one’s duty. Together, Sautu represents

an outcome of positive achievement for a family. It is akin to the top most part of a house *Doka ni Vale* serving as the crowning glory in the building process. In a village setting, *Sautu* is achieved when members adhere to their roles as defined according to their positions in the traditional social hierarchy.

**Sautu** is therefore about family wellbeing that is self-sustaining and is equipped to deal with issues that are designed to fracture its core. It is about good health as epitomised in the Fijian greeting *Bula Vinaka* (*Good Health*). *Sautu* is what Fijian families aspire to and necessarily should be the desired outcome in dealing with issues of violence in Fijian families.

## **Kawa**

Fijians place great importance on the family lineage and history of which they are a part and which they represent. Having a good **Kawa** speaks volume about who your ancestors are. It bestows on you an obligation and a duty to uphold their legacy in terms of achievement, behaviour and ongoing interactions. To be labelled as **Kawa Ca** is a grave insult to you and a slur on your ancestors, and your descendants that can often result in retribution. For families, striving to achieve their best and displaying the highest form of good behaviour reflect good breeding and **kawa**. The concept of **Kawa** places boundaries around personal behaviour and family interactions, as what you do reflects on your family's status.

## **Mana**

The concept of *mana* implies having supernatural powers arising from one's position at birth or connection to the spiritual world. Tuwera (2002) suggests that, in essence, *mana* has to do "with life and the power of life that is provided by the gods." In turn gods relate to a place that is treated as *tabu* (sacred). In traditional Fijian presentations, a shout of "*mana e dina*" at the conclusion signifies an appeal for a miracle from the gods. In modern Fijian society the link to the supernatural is now merged with that of Christian teachings and rituals around blessings. "Amen" now takes the place of a shout of *mana* in the appeal to the Christian god.

For Fijian families, *mana* reflects a state of reverence and regard for each other that is sacred in terms of relationships, especially very close familial relationships that are often *tabu*. Great care is taken to ensure no offence that would transgress relationships and reduce *mana* within the family. It is said that *Mana* wanes when traditional structures, protocols or rituals are not observed or respected, and hence *mana* loses its power and mystical status.

## **Tabu**

*Tabu* (verb = **Veitabui**) is well established in Fijian culture. It is closely associated with *mana* and designates forbidden access to, or limits the practice of, certain forms of activity or behaviour. This is to reflect the sacredness of the subject, relationship or event. For instance, a chief is said to be *tabu* owing to their having *mana*. Being sacred, a chief is often avoided, or approached with deference and respect. When applied in a family, *tabu* is often observed between brothers and sister where contacts are restricted.

In practice, *Veitabui*, establishes boundaries that regulate behaviour, guarding against it becoming abusive or violent. It must, however, be noted that **tabu** can also apply in a family context by restricting disclosures of certain acts within the family. The observance of *tabu* in this context is done out of fear that a full disclosure of the deed will drag the family reputation down.

## **Vakarokoroko**

The term *vakarokoroko* (respect) is critical for the harmonious existence of a Fijian family and by extension a village. It marks adherence to forms of behaviour where position in a traditional hierarchy is acknowledged in order to preserve kin relationships. The closer the relationship like that between brother and sister, the stricter the observance of the practice. This behaviour is often expressed by acts of courteousness and even avoidance among close family members or by referring to each other in the third person. It is a way of guarding against possible transgression and is highly valued and aspired to. A person who regularly displays respect will be regarded as being *vakaturaga* (of a chiefly manner). **Veidokai** (respect or honour) has the same meaning as *vakarokoroko* and they are often applied interchangeably.

# Cultural practices

The following terms could be regarded as cultural practices that operationalise the cultural concepts and values discussed on the previous pages.

## Veitokoni

Family have each other for support in good and bad times because of intimate and familial ties. *Veitokoni* denotes mutual support (partnership) built around a dependent relationship. Fijians are communitarian in outlook and practice. Individualism within the family can work against the common good and is often frowned upon. In a Fijian house, *Na i Sa* demonstrates this paired up relationship between family members. If this partnership fails the roof and *Doka* of the house will collapse. It is a reciprocal relationship among family members that in essence determines whether or not the family functions as a unit and remains upstanding. Parents in particular are expected to actively practise *veitokoni* in a Fijian family.

## Veirogorogoci

For family members to work co-operatively there has to be *Veirogorogoci*, (in short *veirogoci*) a practice of ongoing communication with, sharing with, and listening to each other. Although mediated by the observance of *tabu* as a mark of respect among close family members, *veirogorogoci* reflects obedience and observance of the family order, ritual and processes. It ensures ongoing engagement and interaction among family members, thereby sustaining relationships. Again it is parents who are expected to be actively practise *veirogoci* via ongoing communication and sharing.

## Veivakaliuci

Regarding others as higher in status than oneself is part of Fijians showing respect and deference, especially to those who are higher up the social hierarchy. It is good manners not to put oneself first but allow others to come before you. It is a form of submission to those in authority and a way of valuing links and relationships. *Veivakaliuci* is also displayed through *veiqaravi* (act of serving others rather than being served).

## Veivakabekabei

The term *veivakabekabei* (praising) denotes the importance of “valuing and nurturing” in Fijian society. It is a way of maintaining relationships via positive reinforcement and generating unity. It is not about boasting or grandstanding as this runs counter to Fijian values of *vakarokoroko* and *veidokai* – being self-effacing and showing deference.

# Key influences that impact on Fijian culture

For Fijian families, three key factors have impacted significantly on their cultures over time namely:

- Christianity (Lotu)
- Colonisation
- Multiculturalism

## Lotu

The arrival of the Lotu (Christianity) in 1835 had a significant impact on the Fijian culture. Much of the Christian faith practices were comparable with and could be aligned with Fijian cultural practices and values making it easy to convert Fijians. This convergence is reflected in the Fiji Government coat of arms

“*Rerevaka na Kalou ka Doka na Tui*” (Fear God and Honour the King). In some ways, the Lotu has helped the Fijian people and their land find their identity and selfhood from being bent over Lo to being upstanding Tu. Such has been the influence of Christianity on Fijians and their culture.

The creation of the Fijian Bible by the Lotu also unified Fijians around a common dialect i.e. the Bauan dialect as the means of communication across the many different parts and traditional allegiances. Discipline and order were also introduced through Lotu teachings (*veivakatavulici*).

The *Lotu* has also been accused of cultural violence against Fijian people through its banning of some of the traditional and ceremonial practices that did not align with Christian values and teachings. But overall its influence has been progressive and stabilising, and in consonance with Fijian culture. This is evidenced by the inclusion of *Lotu* practices (brief sermons and prayers) in traditional practices such as the installation of chiefs, and the high status accorded to *Lotu* ministers in Fijian settings.

## Colonisation and multiculturalism

The ongoing influence of new cultures and forms of governance have also had an impact on Fijian culture. Colonisation following the Cession to Great Britain in 1874 saw the introduction of new forms of governance that were first grafted on to traditional forms of leadership. Chiefs were pivotal in ensuring the acceptance of new modes of collective responsibility and compliance with the new laws. Communitarianism was preserved through the maintenance of traditional Fijian structures in villages and provinces. In modern-day Fiji, institutions set up specifically for Fijians can be seen operating alongside those serving other races. An enduring legacy of the colonial period was the close adherence to traditional Fijian practices and leadership as a result of the prominent role given to chiefs who in turn instilled order and discipline among their people.

Violence in such an environment was contained within the traditional Fijian settings following traditional protocols and rituals as long as they abided by standards tolerated by the colonial masters. For instance, adult males were often publicly caned in villages by chiefs for transgressing village rules or traditional customs.

Following independence in 1970, a delicate balance was required to preserve the Fijian way of life and the introduction of new systems of state administration that had to cater for other new migrant groups in Fiji. This often led to charges of discrimination and has been a pretext for a number of the political upheavals since the first coup in 1987. Inter-ethnic violence has become common following the political coups, and recently, violence among the same ethnic groups e.g. Fijian – Fijian has taken place between political opponents.

## Fijian family in New Zealand

Like other migrant groups, Fijian families face ongoing challenges on their culture in New Zealand. With advances in modern living and technology and a progressive and open learning environment, aspects of Fijian culture will slowly be eroded unless there is ongoing interaction with the home country or programmes put in place to promote Fijian culture. In this regard, the setting up of Fijian language and culture nests, is welcome and needs to be encouraged.

It is the family that must play the pivotal role in instilling cultural values in, and promoting relevant and applicable practices to, its members, especially young ones. Although opportunities for those values and concepts to be practised and applied may diminish in New Zealand, there are still benefits in teaching families about them. There is power and wisdom in just knowing, as it may well be the case that although practices have changed in New Zealand, the values underpinning them remain the same and therefore credible and relevant.

Fijian family values will also be subject to change and modifications as a result of being in a new country. The key will be to identify and promote positive aspects of those values in dealing with issues such as family violence. For instance, while the observance of *tabu* between brothers and sisters may diminish, open sharing among family members via the observance of *veidokadokai* (respect) and *veirogorogoci*

(listening to each other) can contribute to harmonious and mutually sustaining family relationships. Young suicide victims have often not been helped when they were unable to share their troubles with other family members.

Economic, political and legal realities in New Zealand will have ongoing impacts on how Fijian values are expressed. The pressure on male family members to perform their role as providers may not always be met in economic downturns, thus impacting on their status among family members. But the practice of *veitokoni* and *veidokai* can ensure that family support and solidarity are maintained and upheld. Unrealistic expectation among family members can also be managed by ensuring there is *veirogorogoci* among members and sharing of burdens.

## Family violence continuum

The Fijian perspective on violence takes place on a continuum ranging from a light discipline to extreme violence. Fijian culture has a way of recognising this continuum and can be applied to protect against violence as defined in New Zealand law. Disciplining young family members is part of upholding family order, and instilling a sense of responsibility or *bibi ni tavi*, and is part of *veivakatavulici* (teaching) but has to be done with a non-physical approach in order to avoid inflicting injury.

The perspective is not one that condones violence in the family as it runs counter to the values upon which families are built and sustained. In fact violence represents a fracturing and breakdown of family values and unity, thus making it difficult to achieve all that the family aspires to – SAUTU: a strong and vibrant *Vuvale*.

The existence of legal definitions and sanctions for violence in New Zealand is a given. Fijian family values have to be aligned with that reality and in a way that still upholds and reinforces both. A family that practises *veirogorogoci*, *veidokadokai*, *veilomani* and *veivakaliuci* is able to comply with the law by being respectful, supportive, loving and accepting of authority.

Fijian culture has both positives and negatives. Throughout history it has adapted to the times and situations in which it has found itself. As we move into the future, it is important that we retain our culture as it defines our identity as a people. Fijians want to progress into the future with the positives of their culture.

## Fijian definition of violence

The following descriptions attempt to capture the term violence in Fijian.

*Na i tovo kaukauwa ni veivakasaaurarataki se veivakatotogani* – the use of force that is applied against the will or to scare and undermine (Violence)

*Na i tovo kaukauwa ni veivakasaaurarataki ena loma ni vuvale* – the use of force that is applied against the will, to scare and undermine family members (Violence in the family)

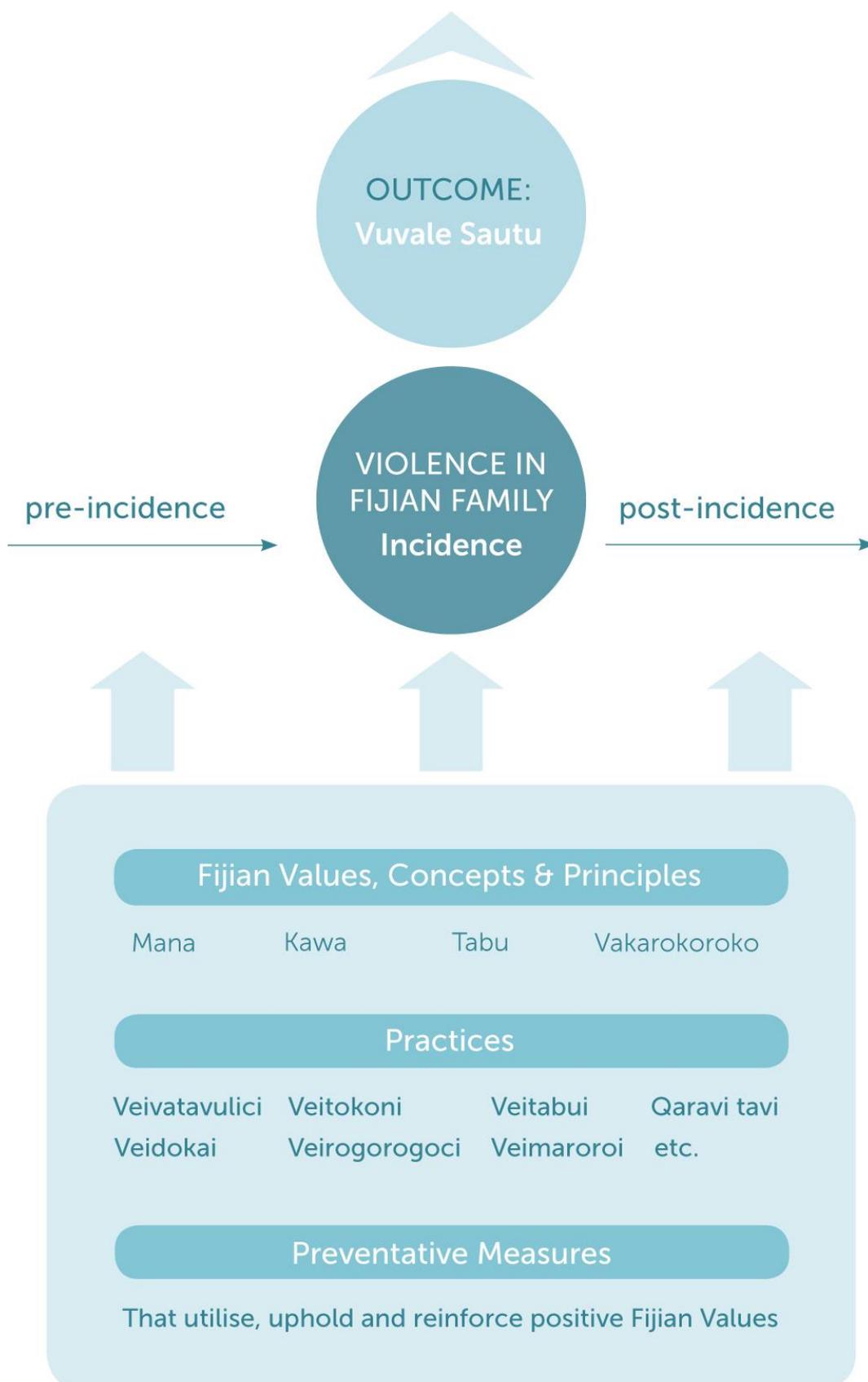
### Na gaunisala me vakamuri (Measures to address violence in Fijian families)

While preventative measures must be targeted at all the phases in the continuum, the emphasis must be on preventing violence in families occurring in the first place. These measures need to be designed and implemented utilising the Fijian values, concepts and practices identified in this document. In designing programmes to address violence in Fijian families, the following key elements need to be considered:

<b>Outcome sought</b>	Vuvale Sautu (Strong & Vibrant Family).
<b>Impact of violence</b>	Threatens wellbeing of Vuvale (Family Well being) because it is contrary to the values, principles and practices that are at the

	core of Vuvale.
<b><i>Value-based approach</i></b>	Apply Fijian values and concepts in diagnosing and understanding cause and effect links to violence. Need to consider positives and negatives in how values are operating in practice.
<b><i>Continuum outlook</i></b>	Target measures based on Fijian values and concepts at the different phases of violence, with emphasis on pre-incidence.
<b><i>Family and Community</i></b>	Apply Fijian cultural concepts and practices to understand, shape and influence the external environment in which violence occurs. Using the family entails valuing and nurturing all its members and the principles and practices by which they live. Family has to take ownership of violence in the family for a family approach to be effective. Understand linkages of family to wider community (church, clubs etc.) as forms of support.

# Vuvale Doka Sautu: a Fijian Cultural Framework for violence in Fijian families



## Conclusion

*Na i valavala kaukauwa ni veivakasaaurarataki* (violence) represents a fractioning in the Fijian family, as it shatters and tears down all that holds the family together. Violence threatens family stability and renders it difficult to achieve a status of **Sautu** (strong and vibrant family). It runs counter to all that a Fijian family is based on and aspires to.

Initiatives to address violence in Fijian families need to have regard to key concepts and values relating to Fijian cultures. These need to be incorporated into and inform preventative measures that are designed at the programme level.

The development of a Fijian Cultural Framework, as set out in this document, acknowledges the importance of Fijian culture in dealing with violence in families. The Framework identifies a number of key cultural values and concepts that shape Fijian thinking and behaviour and how these function within families. It also describes a number of Fijian cultural practices that operationalise the values and cultural concepts relating to family and violence. While the list may or may not be inexhaustive, it would greatly benefit from ongoing discussion and dialogue with the Fijian community to ensure its relevance and applicability in the New Zealand setting.

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