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SCHOLARSHIP EXEMPLAR

Tihei Mauri Ora:

The search for Spiritual Wellbeing in Aotearoa

Who am I? If I asked myself this question a few years ago I wouldn't have an answer. It was a question that punctuated my thoughts and even kept me up at night. There was no magic and spontaneous way that I came to know myself; but no longer having the haunting feeling of being an outsider in my own life felt like a breath of fresh air. Things began to look up for me from there, I had a clear direction and purpose in life. I knew my values and strengths and felt like I belonged— well, as much as a teenager can in this world. One of the things I discovered was that nothing brings me more joy in the world than helping others. I had a friend who was struggling with their mental health, and at first I didn't know how to help them. They were having a similar experience to the one I had a few years ago, and this was impacting them in many different ways. It was perplexing that their mental health problems weren't elicited by the typical triggers. And then it hit me.

I was immediately transported back to Year 9 health class, where we were learning about Te Whare Tapa Whā¹. Back then it never occurred to me that it would have any relevance to my life. Sure, your Hauora is all connected, but that held no meaning to me at the time. Looking back, I find that Taha Wairua (Spiritual health) was majorly overlooked. I believe this is mainly attributed to the fact that Spiritual health is the most abstract portion of Hauora. While taha tinana has measurable, observed outcomes and taha whānau and taha hinengaro have fairly concrete examples of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy'; taha wairua is very unique and intrinsic to each individual. Because of its perceived complexity, the importance of spiritual health and its clear connection to the other aspects of hauora was not addressed.

I examined my life using the principles of Hauora and immediately saw all of the connections that we were taught about so long ago. Importantly, I saw how my good spiritual health had

¹ (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.)

improved my life and in particular, my mental health. My friend's problem became crystal clear, they had poor spiritual health. They didn't know who they were, making it impossible to understand their feelings which led to an intense confusion of emotion. Once they figured out who they were, they could have a sense of self-worth and actually believe in themselves.

Since my epiphany, I have acted with my spiritual health at the forefront. Being aware of it has made me realise that so many of my peers are not. The all too famous teen identity crisis is no mystery when you examine the absence of spiritual health in peoples' lives. The horrifying UN statistic springs to mind here: *"New Zealand's youth suicide rate is the second worst in the developed world at 14.9 deaths per 100,000 adolescents. This rate is more than twice the average among the 41 OECD countries surveyed"*². Is there any possibility this has any correlation with the feelings of hopelessness often felt with an identity crisis? It is not the fault of teenagers however, but in fact due to the absence of Spiritual health and its lack of normalisation in our society.

The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy is a Government document with a vision and action plan to ensure Aotearoa *"is the best place in the world for children & young people"*³

While one of the values of the document is that *"Wellbeing needs holistic and comprehensive approaches,"*⁴ the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy doesn't even mention spiritual health in their framework. It is talked 'around' in the *Accepted Respected and Connected* and *Involved and Empowered* outcomes, but never directly addressed like the other aspects of Durie's Te Whare Tapa Whā. This has made me wonder:

- What is Spiritual Health and how is it modelled?
- How important is culture to Spiritual Health?
- Why do teenagers suffer more from identity crisis/spiritual health related issues?

² Unicef NZ. (2020, September 3). *New report card shows that New Zealand is failing its children.*

³ *The strategy framework.* (n.d.). Child and Youth Wellbeing.

⁴ *The strategy framework.* (n.d.). Child and Youth Wellbeing.

- Why should we understand spiritual health?
- How do we promote spiritual health?

This report will critically evaluate the severely lacking spiritual health both in the Child and Youth and Wellbeing Strategy and the wider health system and will look to synthesise a way to better promote and foster a sense of Spiritual wellness in New Zealand.

1. Defining Spiritual Health

One of the reasons that Spiritual Health is so absent from our society is associated with its difficulty to define it. I seek to find a definition that is relevant to New Zealanders and is an easy concept to understand. Immediately a challenge arises when I begin my research. Phrases such as “*There is no right or wrong way to think of or experience Wairua*”⁵ and “*researchers have studied spiritual health from different angles... but have failed to propose a comprehensive definition for the term.*”⁶ makes it difficult to find a set definition. Some sources take a more philosophical approach, while others tend more toward religious ideologies. The term “*Spirituality*” also appears frequently in my search.

The University of New Hampshire defines spiritual wellness as “*connecting to inner and outer worlds to support you in living your values and purpose.*”⁷ This approach interprets the source of spiritual well being as coming from both intrinsic and external factors. It takes into consideration the surrounding environment and the people in it, alongside personal thoughts and feelings. Values and purpose is a very broad term which allows for many interpretations such as religious, cultural and philosophical beliefs. Although all encompassing, I believe this definition is too broad for use. There is not a clear definition of what “*living your purpose*” looks like, which circles right back to the issue of vagueness and abstract concepts that can

⁵ (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.)

⁶ Ghaderi et al. (2018)

⁷ (*Spiritual Wellness*, 2022)

be difficult to understand. This would not be suited to use in the Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy or as a general definition to further promote spiritual health in New Zealand.

Wespath, who are a general agency of the Methodist church, see spiritual health as achieving an inner peace. “*Spirit is what can not be defined as part of the body or as part of the mind. Body, mind, and spirit all have an effect on one and other.*”⁸ In this ideology, it is believed that having an inner piece can help the physical body in healing. Interestingly, the connection drawn between mind, body and spirit is similar to that of Durie’s Te Whare Tapa Whā model⁹. The spirit is also known as *Mauri* or life force in Māori culture. Wespath also makes mention of spirituality and states how this can be used to help cope with difficult situations. Spirituality is another difficult term to define, which is often paired with Spiritual health. Spirituality usually is associated with connection to religion, a belief in the afterlife or a wider spiritual connection to the universe. For the case of Wespath, as a religious organisation, this refers to Christianity. New Zealand has a secular government, and recent Census data has shown that 51.6% of New Zealanders have no religion¹⁰ so this definition would not be suited for a New Zealand context.

The Mental Health Foundation and the Youth Service (branch of The Ministry for Social Development) provide contrasting ideas about spiritual health. While the University of New Hampshire identified both external and intrinsic factors, these sources only focus on only one respectively. The Mental Health Foundation states that “*Taha Wairua explores your relationship with the environment, people and heritage in the past, present, and future.*”¹¹ They also mention having religious belief or belief in a higher power and having connection to the universe. This all falls under the “Spirituality” category of Spiritual health. This definition is all about connecting to external factors. The mention of heritage and the environment is

⁸ (*The Basics: What Is Spiritual Health? | Wespath Benefits & Investments*, n.d.)

⁹ (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.)

¹⁰ Campbell, G. (2024, October 3). Census data NZ: More than half of the population has no religion. *NZ Herald*.

¹¹ (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.)

notable as this is suited well to a New Zealand context with our native flora and fauna and our Māori heritage. Comparatively, the youth service states that “*Taha Wairua is about the things that give you meaning*”¹². This involves who you are, your beliefs, your life direction, and where you fit in and belong in society. The youth service puts emphasis on knowing yourself and celebrating this. Both organisations provide a specific and New Zealand-relevant definition of spiritual health. Used in conjunction, it provides a definition that would be suited for the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy as it is easy to understand and has clear cut targets to achieve spiritual wellness.

With the blurred meaning of spiritual health, a comprehensive qualitative study was conducted in Iran to find a proper definition.¹³ 22 Spiritual Health experts were extensively interviewed about their thoughts on spiritual health and a conclusion has been drawn. The study showed that there are 3 different types of spiritual health; Religious, Individualistic and Material World-Oriented. As this was conducted in Iran, religion plays a large role in spiritual wellness as around 90% of the population are Muslims who follow Islam¹⁴. All 3 types identified have been addressed in previous sources. Conclusions were also drawn that your spiritual health affects other areas of your life, and that there can be many different approaches to spiritual health. This study also looked to differentiate between spirituality and spiritual health. While the two concepts are similar, good spiritual health is in fact the *manifestation* of spirituality. Hence, to have spirituality/be spiritual is to have good spiritual health. This study has the most comprehensive definition of spiritual health. It supplements the other sources that I have found. While some of the concepts are well-suited to New Zealand contexts, because the study comes from the Middle East, religion is emphasised far more. This section could be disregarded somewhat, however, the joint Mental health Foundation and Youth Service sources integrate it into their definition to better fit the New Zealand context.

¹² *taha wairua: spiritual wellbeing* | Youth Service - ratonga taiohi. (n.d.)

¹³ Ghaderi et al. (2018)

¹⁴ (Iran - United States Department of State, 2023)

Clinical Psychologist, Julie Wharewera-Mika provides a strong definition of what spirituality means for New Zealanders. She notes how spirituality has different connotations in each country. “...over time, I think our understanding [of spirituality] has deepened to think more about our identity, values and beliefs and connection to te taiao”¹⁵. This statement succinctly but fully sums up what is required for good spiritual health. Identity, values, beliefs and connection to the environment are four definitive indicators that are broad enough to appeal to each and every individual. Values and beliefs can be religious or cultural, and can apply to both an individual or groups and organisations. Identity is what makes a person who they are, which aligns with Youth Service’s definition of Taha Wairua.

Overall, a simple definition of Spiritual Health for a New Zealand context that I have synthesised is “A sense of identity, purpose, and belonging fostered by values, beliefs, and a connection to the wider world.” This is a definition that is inclusive to all New Zealanders and has listed clear indicators of good spiritual health. The openness of the definition shows how spiritual health can be affected by socio-ecological factors. Values and beliefs can be interpreted as individual, interpersonal or societal and the wider world represents a surrounding environment. This suggests that if there are negative things occurring in one’s environment (e.g. poverty or racism) it can have an impact on Spiritual health. It incorporates the aspects of spirituality that Wharewera-Mika discusses and blends the definitions of the many sources I have examined. This definition will be used moving forward when evaluating health models, and promoting spiritual health. The Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy only makes mention of a few things within this definition. There is mention of cultural identity in the *Accepted, Respected and Connected* outcome and some of its indicators are “an ability to be themselves” and “sense of belonging”¹⁶. There is no mention of values or beliefs which are one of the foundations to your identity and having strong spiritual health.

¹⁵ (*Taha Wairua: Why We Need to Focus on Our Spiritual Wellbeing*, 2023)

¹⁶ *The strategy framework*. (n.d.). Child and Youth Wellbeing.

2. Modelling Spiritual Health

Our health system still predominantly operates under western medicine practices, in which only a specific disease is treated. This narrow view only observes physical symptoms and does not look to treat a person as a whole or look to support them beyond their physical health.¹⁷ There have been many models of health in Aotearoa that display a more holistic view of health. Each of these contain some form of spiritual health, which are all modelled slightly differently. If the Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy wants to achieve holistic wellbeing for young people, then these models need to be further adopted in our health system.

2.1. Te Whare Tapa Whā

The most well-known health model is Dr Mason Durie's *Te Whare Tapa Whā*. There are 4 dimensions of health that represent the 4 walls of a wharenuī, as seen in Figure 1.¹⁸ This was the first indigenous health model in New Zealand that acknowledged a holistic view of health. If one of the areas of health is impacted, it can affect all of the other areas. Taha Wairua (Spiritual health) is one of the 4 dimensions of hauora. Durie noted that taha wairua was the most important dimension for



Figure 1: Te Whare Tapa Whā

Māori.¹⁹ As taha wairua can also be a spiritual connection to the land, Whenua has become a more recent addition to this model. Whenua has multiple meanings. Not only does it represent that land, but also the placenta, which connects mother and child. This holds a lot of cultural value for māori and is a positive influence on taha wairua, and therefore overall wellbeing. As the origin of holistic wellbeing, Te Whare Tapa Whā has clear influence over the

¹⁷ Gai, & Gai. (2024, August 1). Explained: Holistic vs Modern Western Medicine - Global Autoimmune Institute.

¹⁸ (Mental Health Foundation, n.d.)

¹⁹ (*Hei Whakaarotanga: Engaging With Models of Health and Wellbeing That Draw on Mātauranga Māori* | New Zealand Council for Educational Research, n.d.)

Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy. The strategy ensures not only physical healthiness and safety, but also mental support and positive social action. In the “*Involved and Empowered*” outcome, the framework even looks to promote a care for the environment. However, there are large parts of taha wairua still missing.

2.2. Te Wheke

Rose Pere developed Te Wheke through knowledge passed down by her ancestors. It is a model of Māori family health, represented by the tentacles of an octopus (see figure 2²⁰). The octopus itself connected to Papatūānuku, Ranginui, and Tangaroa (earth, sky, and sea gods).²¹ Spiritual health is modelled across 3 of the tentacles of the octopus. *Mauri* is the dimension which is “*the life force in people and objects*”²². This refers to the actual “spirit” in spiritual health. *Mana Ake* is the “*unique identity of individuals and families*”²³. This refers to both the unique cultural identity of Māori and the personal things that make each and every person different. *Wairuatanga* is the dimension of



Figure 2: Te Wheke

Spirituality. The practice of Wairuatanga in this model would be to look after your Mauri and celebrate your Mana Ake. The Te Wheke model places a lot of emphasis on spiritual health and it is modelled differently to other systems. This would be a good model to use in the Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy due to its focus on both families and individuals.

2.3. Fonofale Model

The Fonofale Model is a Pacific model of health created by Fuimaono Karl to be used in a New Zealand context. When the model was being created and Pacific people were consulted

²⁰ Ministry of Health. (2023, December). *Te Wheke model of Māori health*

²¹ (*Hei Whakaarotanga: Engaging With Models of Health and Wellbeing That Draw on Mātauranga Māori* | New Zealand Council for Educational Research, n.d.)

²² Ministry of Health. (2023, December). *Te Wheke model of Māori health*

²³ Ministry of Health. (2023, December). *Te Wheke model of Māori health*

with, they said that family, spirituality and culture were the most important things to them.²⁴

Like Te Whare Tapa Whā, the fonofale uses a house as a motif (see Figure 3²⁵). The

foundation of the fale is family, both immediate and extended family. This is also where



Figure 3: Fonofale Model

genealogy and family heritage is held. Culture forms the roof of the fale, representing cultural values and beliefs that protect a person's wellbeing and family. There are 4 pou of the fale (similar to the whare except taha whānau is replaced by 'other').

The spiritual pou is focussed on belief systems like Christianity and other forms of spirituality. This is less inclusive than taha

wairua, however when combined with Family and Culture, the Fonofale does contain the same aspects of spiritual health that I have defined. The 'other' pou represents other variables that can affect health such as gender, age, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status.²⁶ Additionally, this model places the fale in the surrounding environment, context and time. It takes into account that certain events and situations can affect the wellbeing of people. For example, during the dawn raids²⁷, the wellbeing of Pacific peoples was negatively affected. The Fonofale is a good model of health that takes into consideration many socio-ecological factors. It has influenced the Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy, as one of the document values is that "*Children and young people's wellbeing is interwoven with family and whānau wellbeing*"²⁸. The breakdown of spiritual health across many dimensions shows how it impacts all areas of a person's life and can serve as both a foundation and protection over their life.

2.4. Meihana Model

The Meihana Model was developed as a clinical assessment tool with the aim to create more

²⁴ (Fonofale Model of Health, 2001)

²⁵ Trust, S. (2020, May 27). A resilient home: The Fonofale Model of Health.

²⁶ (Fonofale Model of Health, 2001)

²⁷ (The Dawn Raids: Causes, Impacts and Legacy, 2023)

²⁸ The strategy framework. (n.d.). Child and Youth Wellbeing.

equitable outcomes for Māori.²⁹ It was first used in mental health services, but has begun to expand to general practice. The Meihana model uses a *waka hourua* (double-hulled canoe) that navigates through the four winds as a symbol for holistic wellbeing (see figure 4³⁰). The waka uses the same dimensions as Te Whare Tapa Whā, but includes two additional elements; *Iwi Katoa* (societal context) and *Taiao* (physical environment)³¹. This is similar to how the Fonofale incorporates wider context into its model. A standout feature of the Meihana Model is *Ngā Hau e Whā* (the four winds). These acknowledge the



Figure 4: The Meihana Model

experiences Māori have faced that have led to disparity in the health system. By including this in clinical assessment, it helps to create more equitable outcomes. The four winds impact each aspect of the waka, especially spiritual health. Colonisation, marginalisation, racism, and migration can lead to the loss of cultural identity through assimilation and discrimination. It would be recommended that the Meihana Model is further integrated into our health system, as it looks to provide a holistic assessment of a person that is inclusive of culture and whānau. This would help to further improve the *Happy and Healthy* and *Accepted, Respected and Connected* outcomes and by welcoming cultural identity; improve wairua overall.

2.5. The Medicine Wheel

A holistic approach to indigenous health is not unique to New Zealand. In fact, the idea dates



Figure 5: The Medicine Wheel

back to around 4000 BC with Native American and First Nation tribes.³²

The Medicine Wheel is not only used to represent dimensions of health but stages of life, the 4 seasons, sacred plants and animals, and lessons to be learned. Each community interprets the wheel differently, and places the dimensions into different quadrants that hold significance to

²⁹ The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners. (2021, April). *The Meihana Model*

³⁰ The Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners. (2021, April). *The Meihana Model*

³¹ (*Hei Whakaarotanga: Engaging With Models of Health and Wellbeing That Draw on Mātauranga Māori | New Zealand Council for Educational Research, n.d.*)

³² Joseph, B. (2024, April 2). What is an Indigenous medicine wheel?

them (see figure 5³³). The medicine wheel comes from a very spiritual culture. There is a strong belief that each person has a spirit that exists before they are born and after they die. Many rituals are done to conjure spirits and be closer to ancestors. Often, the Spiritual dimension is placed at the North of the wheel alongside the winter season and elder stage of life. Elders are held in high regard as they pass down knowledge and traditions and lead tribal rituals. In contrast, the South of the wheel represents summer and youth. Some tribes will put the Mental dimension of health in this quadrant also. The lesson taught in this life stage is about discovering your identity and nurturing your spirit so that it can guide you.³⁴ All of the quadrants of the medicine wheel contain components of spiritual health. For the New Zealand context, the mental health quadrant of the wheel is more similar to what we would consider spiritual health. The medicine wheel teaches us that holistic health has been around for centuries, and that spiritual health has an important role to play in everything that we do.

3. Cultural Significance

“When the language dies, a culture dies, when culture dies, our stories die, when our stories die, our connections die, when our connections die, our identities die, when our identities die, we will truly be lost people.”-- Ministry for Pacific Peoples, Lalanga Fou³⁵

Each and every indigenous health model above places an importance on culture or cultural identity. One of the reasons that there is inequity in the health system— and the reason these health models are needed— is due to the lack of culturally responsive healthcare. It has been identified that to have good spiritual health, and good wellbeing overall, cultural needs must be met. The continuation of mātāwhiri/knowledge from ancestors is another area identified as an aspect of spiritual health. One of the tentacles of Te Wheke is *Hā a koro mā, a kui mā* (the breath of life from forebears)³⁶. Due to the colonisation and urbanisation of Māori and

³³ Wikipedia contributors. (2024, October 28). *Medicine wheel (symbol)*

³⁴ Manitowabi, S. (n.d.). *The Medicine Wheel Teachings*.

³⁵ Ministry of Pacific Peoples. (2022). *Pacific Aotearoa Lalanga Fou*

³⁶ Ministry of Health. (2023, December). *Te Wheke model of Māori health*

Pacific peoples, a lot of knowledge and therefore cultural identity was lost. My great grandmother was punished at school for speaking Te Reo Māori and as a result, the taonga of our language was not passed down in my family. This loss of cultural identity has affected many people as approximately only one quarter of the Māori population is able to speak Te Reo Māori according to 2023 Census statistics.³⁷

The Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy can be credited for taking many actions to revitalise Māori and Pacific languages in New Zealand. An example of this is the implementation of the Maihi Karauna, the Crown's strategy for Māori language revitalisation.^(footnote) The strategy has the ambitious goals that by 2040; 1 million New Zealander's will be able to confidently talk about basic things in Te Reo, and 150,000 people over the age of 15 will be using Te Reo as much as they use English.³⁸ Something as simple as having your doctor speak to you in your own language can majorly affect the quality of your health service. It also decreases marginalisation as a sense of belonging is felt. The revitalisation of Te Reo fits in with the Meihana model as it eases the 4 winds and nurtures cultural identity. Another example is the Action Plan for Pacific Aotearoa Lalanga Fou.³⁹ The Lalanga Fou is a report that outlines the goals of Pacific communities in order for them to succeed in New Zealand. One of these goals is to have a thriving language, culture and identity. This is built on the foundation of family values, just like the Fonofale. Over 50% of the Pacific population are under 25 and they have their very own goal in the Lalang Fou as a result. One of the specific outcomes of this is that "*Pacific young people are confident in their identities.*"⁴⁰ The inclusion of these two strategies in the Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy is a positive step in improving the spiritual health of Māori and Pacific young people.

³⁷ *Census results reflect Aotearoa New Zealand's diversity* | Stats NZ. (n.d.)

³⁸ *Maihi Karauna*. (n.d.)

³⁹ Ministry of Pacific Peoples. (2022). *Pacific Aotearoa Lalanga Fou*

⁴⁰ Ministry of Pacific Peoples. (2022). *Pacific Aotearoa Lalanga Fou*

However, New Zealand is a multicultural society. 1.4 million people living in New Zealand were born overseas, from over 200 different places.⁴¹ While the strategy looks to improve the cultural identity of Māori and Pacific people, it does not look to address other cultures. 5.8% of our population is Indian and 5.6% is Chinese.⁴² For young people that have migrated from overseas, it can be tough to fit into a new country with a new culture, especially if you don't speak the language. Cultural assimilation takes place, as people look to adopt the values of the predominant culture, forcing them to leave their own values behind. This stops the inheritance of important knowledge and traditions, which is identified as a clear area of importance in the Te Wheke model. People may also experience isolation, racism, and have difficulty finding employment. Currently, some local councils have a multicultural strategy to address this. The Napier City Council is developing a multicultural strategy and is working alongside the Napier Youth Council (of which I am a member) to ensure that youth voices are heard. Only some councils have developed this, however. A value of the Child and Youth Wellbeing document is that "*All children and young people deserve to live a good life*"⁴³. In order for this to be true and for the spiritual health of all young people to improve, an action to implement a multicultural strategy needs to be added. The Ministry for Ethnic Communities has a strategy to make ethnic groups feel at home in New Zealand, and promote how valuable they are ⁴⁴. Its addition to the action plan would make the Child and Youth Wellbeing strategy more inclusive and foster a greater sense of belonging in Aotearoa. Every single young person should be able to feel comfortable and proud expressing their cultural identity, no matter where they come from.

4. Youth and Identity Crisis

Many coming-of-age films depict teenagers who are struggling with the transition between childhood and adulthood. Typically, the protagonist will drastically change their appearance or

⁴¹ *Census results reflect Aotearoa New Zealand's diversity* | Stats NZ. (n.d.)

⁴² *Census results reflect Aotearoa New Zealand's diversity* | Stats NZ. (n.d.)

⁴³ *The strategy framework*. (n.d.). Child and Youth Wellbeing.

⁴⁴ *About us* | Ministry for Ethnic Communities. (2024, October 8)

behaviour to fit in with the 'cool kids' and ultimately realise at the end of the film that it's okay to just be yourself. These films are almost predictable in plot, and they all share the same theme. Each of these characters questions their values, beliefs and who they are. This is essentially a depiction of poor spiritual health and an identity crisis. The fictitious stories told on screen reflect a very real issue amongst teenagers. But why are young people most commonly affected by identity crises? Developmental Psychologist, Erik Erikson, theorised that an identity crisis is actually a key part of creating your personality and conscious sense of self. This section of my report looks at how the development of identity and the breakdown of spiritual health is inevitable, and how young people can be supported in this.

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development states that at each stage of life, from birth to death, there is a conflict that a person must overcome. He breaks this down into 8 stages. Those who are triumphant in overcoming a conflict will gain a sense of competence and gain a virtue. Those who fail are left with a feeling of inadequacy and cannot face the next stage. Erikson believed that each step required the skills gained from the previous stages⁴⁵. The 5th stage of development, which occurs during adolescence, is Identity v.s Role confusion. As they look to the future, teens will ask themselves, "*Who Am I?*" And "*Who do I want to become?*"⁴⁶ This is often a tough time as they try to find their place in the world according to what their parents, peers and teachers think they should become. Finding a balance between who you want to become and what others want you to become is what makes this one of the hardest stages to overcome. Completing this stage gives you a strong sense of self and purpose that will help you to succeed in life. Interestingly, the teachings of the medicine wheel share the same knowledge. Youth is a time in which your spirit is lost, and you must ask yourself these questions to help find your spirit again so that it can guide you through life. It is fascinating that ancient indigenous knowledge and 20th century Western psychology can

⁴⁵ Baba, M. S. (2016). Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development.

⁴⁶ K. C. (2023, December 4). *Identity vs. Role Confusion in Psychosocial Development*.

draw the same conclusions about the development of young people. Discovering your identity is a part of having spirituality. In doing so, your spiritual health will improve.

Erikson's theory shows how socio-ecological factors have a large impact on spiritual health. Interpersonal relationships with friends and family can influence and shape your values system, changing the way your identity forms. Societal pressures can force stereotypes on people, leading to the adoption of social norms. An example of this is women going into stereotypically 'feminine' roles of work due to the patriarchal values system, instead of choosing the career path they actually want. Another example is the cultural assimilation expected from migrants and ethnic groups when they move to New Zealand. Adopting an identity that doesn't match your true self is the role confusion portion of the Identity v.s. Role confusion stage. This can lead to *"Feeling disappointed and confused about your place in life"*⁴⁷. This has a negative effect on Spiritual health. As a result, the rest of wellbeing can also be affected. Erikson's 6th stage of development is Intimacy v.s Isolation which is all about building long lasting relationships in early adulthood. If the previous crisis of identity isn't resolved, it is impossible to commit to and nurture intimate relationships. Therefore, Taha whānau is also affected by an identity crisis.

To make the identity crisis experience as smooth as possible, the prior stages need to be overcome. The two most important ones that relate to spiritual health are Stage 3: *Initiative v.s. Guilt* and Stage 4: *Industry v.s. Inferiority*.⁴⁸ The 3rd stage occurs between the ages of 3-6. This is where children learn to find the balance between independence and reliance on their parents. If parents are too controlling, a child will feel guilty about wanting to express themselves. Oppositely, if parents give a child too much initiative, they will feel guilty about asking for help. This is a stage of life that is all about learning from mistakes and using imagination. The virtue gained from this stage is a sense of purpose, which is vital for spiritual

⁴⁷ K. C. (2023, December 4). *Identity vs. Role Confusion in Psychosocial Development*.

⁴⁸ Simply Psychology. (2024, January 25). *Erikson's Stages of Development*.

health and discovering your identity. The 4th stage occurs between the ages of 7-11. If children are encouraged by their parents and peers, they will gain a sense of competence in themselves. Not enough encouragement leads to a feeling of inferiority, that you aren't good enough or good at anything. This leads to comparing oneself to others and a lack of confidence. Constant comparison during an identity crisis can lead to choosing an identity that lets you fit in with everyone else, instead of choosing your own identity. It is vital that a child has a positive upbringing so that their spirit is nurtured.

The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy has identified this successfully. In the *Loved, Nurtured and Safe* outcome there are objectives such as “*they have family, whānau and homes that are loving, safe and nurturing*” and “*They are able to spend quality time with their parents, family, and whānau*”⁴⁹. These 2 objectives ensure that a child is looked after and nurtured in a way that gives them a sense of competency and purpose. To expand further on this, the *Happy and Healthy* outcome has the objective that children can express themselves creatively and build resilience. The strategy even takes into consideration the 6th stage with actions to expand their healthy relationships programme in schools. However, there is no mention in the strategy that directly addresses the teen identity crisis. Identity v.s. Role confusion has the largest impact on spiritual health compared to other stages and is known to be inevitable, but there is still no support for young people throughout this stage.

5. Understanding Spiritual Health

To fully understand the importance of spiritual health, let us picture an Aotearoa in which everyone has good spiritual health. A society in which every person has a values and beliefs system and feels like they belong and are proud to express their identity. Of course, this is an optimistic prediction used to show the best case scenario. While poverty, racism, sexism and other societal issues will still exist, attitudes towards these issues will improve.

⁴⁹ *The strategy framework*. (n.d.). Child and Youth Wellbeing.

If spiritual health was strong, everyone would have a strong moral compass and exercise ethical behaviour. This is because people would act in accordance with their values system. A sense of purpose often comes with a desire to help others (as it did with me) so empathy and kindness for others will increase. When people are willing to help, acts of altruism will increase and citizens will naturally want to improve and participate in society. There will be a greater care for the environment, which also further improves spiritual health. This creates a reciprocal relationship as when the environment is healthy, the health of people will improve too. *Taiao Ora, Tangata Ora*⁵⁰. Biophysical factors like water quality, air pollution, and soil quality will all improve leading to better health and wellbeing of people. People will have a strong sense of cultural identity and will feel comfortable expressing their culture and learning about others. The sharing of culture and values will improve cultural awareness and lead to less unconscious racism and discrimination. New Zealand will be a vibrant and flourishing multicultural society.

When Taha Wairua is better, other aspects of Hauora will improve. If people value their health, they will make better decisions. People will choose to eat healthier and exercise more so peoples' Taha Tinana will improve. When everyone has a sense of purpose and belonging, feelings of depression and isolation will decrease leading to improvement in Taha Hinengaro. The Intimacy v.s. Isolation stage from Erikson's theory will be easier to overcome, so people will be able to form strong relationships with others and Taha whānau will improve. This will be further improved by the acknowledgement of spiritual health in clinical practice. If patients are being treated holistically, more than just their physical health will improve. For Māori and Pacific peoples, who have lower life expectancy than Pākeha by about 7 years⁵¹ will receive equitable, culturally responsive healthcare and this gap will begin to decrease.

⁵⁰ *Our way forward*. (n.d.). Fit For a Better World.

⁵¹ Health New Zealand. (2023). *Health Status Report 2023*.

When the government acts with ethical decision making and cultural values in mind, they will make more compassionate decisions with greater efficacy. People will respond better to government decisions as they will feel like their voices are heard. This also further increases the sense of belonging felt because everyone feels as if they are included in decision making. An example of this would be letting Pacific communities lead solutions with a family based approach or taking into consideration the religious beliefs of ethnic communities. A greater participation in democracy would take place from groups that are currently underrepresented at the voting booth.

Spiritual Health is everything that you believe in and everything that you do. Without it, there is nothing to stand on. It is important to understand spiritual health as it is the key to unlocking a happier and healthier society.

6. Promoting Spiritual Health

From my findings so far, I have discovered a few issues with spiritual health in Aotearoa. I will now propose some solutions based on what I have learnt about spiritual health. These solutions are guided by Dr Mason Durie's *Te Pae Mahutonga*⁵² model of health promotion.

6.1. Issue 1: Spiritual Health is Overlooked and Difficult to Understand

As I mentioned in my introduction, Spiritual Health is more abstract than the other dimensions of health, making it more difficult to understand. If nobody knows what spiritual health actually is, then it is impossible to promote it. Because of how glossed over Spiritual health is at school, many people believe it doesn't even apply to them. I remember we learnt about spiritual health and I thought "*I'm not religious, so I don't have any spiritual health*". There is also a lot of stigma around terms like "Spirituality". As I discovered, there are many different definitions of this word. It has religious connotations, but also connotations of naturalism or natural medicine which according to our Western medical values, is not scientifically proven

⁵² Durie, M. (1999). *Te Pae Māhutonga: A Model for Māori Health Promotion*.

to be healthy. For this reason, “spiritual healing” and spiritual health are disregarded in our health system entirely. This has the largest impact on Māori and Pacific peoples whose cultural needs and identity are not fulfilled. Durie says that cultural identity is a critical prerequisite for good health in indigenous groups.⁵³

6.2. Issue 2: Young People Naturally Struggle with Spiritual Health

The other main issue I have identified is that it is normal for young people to experience poor spiritual health throughout an identity crisis, yet there is not much support available to them.

Both the Medicine Wheel teachings and Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development show that young people question their values and beliefs in order to develop their identity.

Teenagers are not made aware that this is the case, so are often left feeling isolated and alienated throughout the surprisingly normal experience. This also has implications for other aspects of their health. Mental health is the main aspect affected, which may be why our teen suicide rates are so high amongst OECD countries. Māori and LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented in the statistics with 1.6x⁵⁴ and 5x⁵⁵ higher suicide rates respectively. This could be due to extra difficult experiences with identity crises from a loss of cultural identity or role confusion experienced from hiding your true identity. Relationships and social health are also negatively affected since it is difficult to form long-term intimate relationships in Erikson’s 6th stage if you have been unable to overcome the identity crisis stage. Another related issue is that social media creates a comparison culture in which people try to emulate what they see online, instead of being their true selves. When I surveyed teenagers for the Napier City Council Youth Strategy review one of the issues people brought up was comparing yourself to others and problems with body image. Struggling with your appearance can be directly linked to struggling with your identity.

⁵³ Durie, M. (1999). *Te Pae Māhutonga: A Model for Māori Health Promotion*.

⁵⁴ *Suicide web tool - Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora*. (n.d.).

⁵⁵ Harris, S. (2022, September 30). Break The Silence: Rainbow suicide rate five times higher than mainstream. *NZ Herald*.

Therefore, physical health is also impacted by the lack of knowledge about spiritual health and identity crises.

6.3. Solution 1: Education in Schools

The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy has an action to promote wellbeing in primary and intermediate schools⁵⁶. The entire way that spiritual and Te Whare Tapa Whā is taught needs to be changed, if this is to be the case. I propose that it is broken down into parts that suit the age group being taught. At primary school, a brief introduction to wellbeing can be taught in which each dimension is introduced. When it comes to spiritual health, kids can be prompted with questions like *What are the things that make me really happy in life?* And *What makes me special and unique?* This should also be integrated with the sustainability curriculum, so that children begin to value and connect with the environment at a young age. A culturally responsive pedagogy should also be considered here, so that cultural identity can be nurtured from a young age. At intermediate, the connections between each dimension should begin to be taught. Instead of glossing over spiritual health, it can be explained how it can affect all other areas of health and conversely, how other health dimensions affect spiritual health. At high school, when an identity crisis is most likely to be experienced, is when the questions like “*Who am I ?*” and “*Who do I want to become?*” can be tackled. If this is taught at school, it will reduce the amount of stress an identity crisis can cause. This would be a perfect opportunity to also add the careers curriculum so that teens can think about what career paths might align with their values. This decreases the chances of experiencing role confusion later in life, if your chosen career path goes against your values or doesn’t fulfil your life purpose.

This proposed education outline solves both issues. It will help demystify what spiritual health is and it will support young people through their identity crises. This is a good form of health promotion as many pillars of Te Pae Mahutonga are addressed. Mauri Ora (access to Te Ao

⁵⁶ *The strategy framework*. (n.d.). Child and Youth Wellbeing.

Māori) is fulfilled due the culturally responsive pedagogy approach. The integration of the sustainability and careers curricula mean that there will also be Wai Ora (environmental protection) and Te Oranga (participation in society). This will allow students to grow and gain Te Mana Whakahaere (autonomy).⁵⁷

6.4. Solution 2: Integration into Health System

A better integration of spiritual health into the health system will bring it to the forefront of health issues in New Zealand. Using the Meihana Model as a guide, clinical assessment must look to incorporate all aspects of Hauora. In particular, a patient's values need to be observed. Instead of just treating a person for their knee injury, you are treating them so that they can play at the park with their grandkids and kneel to pray in church. By doing this, it gives meaning to the treatment and brings the meaning back into their lives. By working alongside marae and other community groups, cultural revitalization in the health system can take place. One of the major issues identified throughout this report is that the health system does not meet the cultural needs of people. When you don't consider the cultural values and practices of a person, you hurt their cultural identity, which can counteract the healing you are trying to achieve. A study conducted by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health into integrating spiritual health into the treatment of patients drew a similar conclusion. *"Integrating spirituality into care can help each person have a better chance of reaching complete well-being and their highest attainable standard of health."*⁵⁸

This solution helps to solve the first issue of Spiritual health being overlooked. A better acknowledgment of cultural identity means that Mauri Ora is being serviced. This empowerment will lead to a greater participation in society alongside increased leadership (Ngā Manukura). When communities are consulted and are allowed to lead

⁵⁷ Durie, M. (1999). *Te Pae Māhutonga: A Model for Māori Health Promotion*.

⁵⁸ *Spirituality linked with better health outcomes, patient care*. (2024, April 12).

the revitalization of their culture in the health system, they will feel a sense of purpose, pride and empowerment and spiritual health will improve.

6.5. Solution 3: Awareness Campaign

Finally, a Ministry of Health awareness campaign on spiritual health targeted at youth and their families will fully cement spiritual health as a focus in our country. As social media is one of the areas that can cause issues with spiritual health, this would be a great place to start campaigning. It would encourage teens to use social media in a positive way to express themselves and identity, instead of hiding their true identity and pretending to be someone else. A campaign directed at parents would make them aware of Psychosocial development and the challenges a young person faces with an identity crisis, so that they can successfully guide their child through this time. It would also make them aware of the previous stages, and how they can best nurture their child to grow and flourish their identity. The Ministry of Health could partner with the Ministries of Māori Development, Pacific Peoples, and Ethnic communities to encourage an expression of cultural identity. Families would be encouraged to share their culture with their kids and pass down values and traditions. A greater sense of community would be created.

A health campaign like this would solve both issues as it increases the awareness of spiritual health to everyone and looks to target helping young people. Similar to the other two solutions it increases access to Te Ao Māori and other cultures, increases participation in society by giving communities leadership opportunities. Autonomy would be given to the children who are now being properly spiritually nurtured. An addition to the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy would be beneficial as it looks to directly target spiritual health related issues among children and families.

Conclusion

Overall, Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy gets a mixed review for its actions on Spiritual health. At the start of my report I stated that there was not even a mention of spiritual health in the strategy document. While this is true, there are some positive actions that are being taken to improve cultural identity, belonging and the positive psychosocial development of children. The main issue I have with the report is that it never explicitly mentions spiritual health, unlike other aspects of Durie's Te Whare Tapa Whā. I believe this is because of how difficult it is to define. With the definition that I synthesised and other actions that I have proposed, the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy has the potential to make each and every child spiritually and holistically healthy.

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Figure 1: Mental Health Foundation. (n.d.). *Te whare tapa whā*.

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Figure 2: Ministry of Health. (2023, December). *Te Wheke model of Māori health*.

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Scholarship

Subject: Health and Physical Education

Standard: 93501

Total score: 14

Item	Score	Marker commentary
1	05	<p>Application of knowledge</p> <p>The report starts with the candidate drawing on their own learning experiences around spiritual wellbeing in school. Their personal experience is evident throughout the report.</p> <p>The candidate has integrated a number of wellbeing models that are relevant to Aotearoa New Zealand, including Te Whare Tapa Whā, Te Wheke, Fonofale, the Meihana model, and the Medicine wheel. These models are evaluated for their inclusion of spiritual wellbeing, and whether the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (CYWB) would benefit from including them. These models are integrated throughout the report, rather than just being referred to once. At times, this integration could have been explained in more depth.</p> <p>The candidate has drawn on Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial development and integrated this with issues experienced by teenagers, while evaluating how well the CYWB accounted for each stage of development.</p> <p>The underlying concepts of socio-ecological perspective, and attitudes and values are implicit within the report. At times, the discussion around socio-ecological perspective could have been developed with more detail and critical evaluation in order to strengthen their knowledge demonstrated around the underlying concepts. Hauora was evident throughout the report, as the topic was based around taha wairua.</p> <p>The candidate has made three detailed future suggestions that connect back to issues discussed earlier in the report.</p>
2	04	<p>Critical thinking</p> <p>The CYWB strategy is continually referred to throughout the report, but the critical evaluation of it is not sustained throughout the report. The candidate does identify some strengths of the strategy, and some areas within the strategy that are missing or need developing to be more effective in supporting young people to improve their spiritual wellbeing.</p> <p>The candidate evaluates different definitions of spiritual wellbeing to create a definition that they believe is suitable for an Aotearoa New Zealand context. Their critical evaluation could have been strengthened by using this definition throughout the main body of the report.</p> <p>The issue of poor youth wellbeing and spiritual wellbeing was examined with some insight, but more depth was needed to make this a more critical response.</p>

3	05	<p>Communication</p> <p>The report is structured, with clear use of headings and subheadings. The evaluation is firmly situated within an Aotearoa New Zealand context. The argument for the importance of spiritual wellbeing in overall youth wellbeing is coherent and convincing; however, it could have been more effectively framed as an evaluation from the outset. While the report uses clear and plain language, some areas lack the sophistication and depth needed to strengthen its overall persuasiveness. There are some referencing inconsistencies, and the use of both footnoting and a bibliography is redundant.</p>
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