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Contesting a Third World development category: Female-headed households in Samoa

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SYNOPSIS

Current global orthodoxy surrounding female headed households (FHHs) in the Third World country context suggests that they are poor, isolated, marginalised, disempowered and lacking in agency. It has also been argued that FHHs in many instances are subject to neglect because of cultural perceptions of single parenting. This position of privation, marginalisation and abuse is firmly cemented within a development discourse whereby poverty alleviation and the achievement of the millennium development goals (MDGs) are the accepted development framework supported by many development institutions, non-government organisations (NGOs) and donors. Thus FHHs make an ideal target for those working to alleviate poverty and achieve the MDGs. This is a concern because acceptance of the new poverty agenda in the Pacific generally and in Samoa in particular, is a means whereby certain categories, labels and other such accompanying orthodoxies, such as FHHs as poor, neglected and marginalised may also gain acceptance and become entrenched, regardless of relevance. In light of the above, this paper explores cultural perceptions of FHHs in Samoa, and by seeking to understand some of the experiences of Samoan FHHs outside of the global rhetoric it is shown that a development approach where the nexus between FHHs and their socio-political economic and cultural context needs to be established before any conclusions about poverty, disempowerment and marginalisation can be claimed.

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Introduction

Deconstruction of the female-headed household and broader cross-cultural awareness (Mencher and Okongwu, cited in Momsen, 2002, p. 149), combined with better data availability, require the demythologizing of our concepts (Momsen, 2002, p. 149).

There is a plethora of development studies literature, both academic and policy oriented, that sees FHHs to be automatically at risk and seeks to problematise them in normative ways. Development discourse articulates FHHs to be lone mothers who are socially isolated, stigmatised, lacking in agency and poor, equated with the 'feminisation of poverty'. Indeed, in positioning them as 'other' this mantra that FHHs are the 'poorest of the poor' rendering them to victim status, has not only become "a virtual orthodoxy" (Chant, 2003, p. 1), but there is also a notable lack of regard for the diverse socio-political and cultural context which within FHHs reside.

Whilst much has been written about female headship in Latin America, Asia, India and Africa, in the Pacific region very little has been written about this. In development policy and planning, Asia and the Pacific are often lumped together (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2005). When references to the Pacific and FHHs are considered at all, the point of reference then becomes Asia. Hooper (2000) argues that to utilise Asia as a point of reference for the Pacific is hugely problematic. It is especially important to distinguish the Pacific region from the larger Asia Pacific conglomerate in which it is often submerged because:

Culture plays a much more significant role in national economies and national life of Pacific countries than it does in most other regions of the world (Hooper, 2000, p. 3).

It is argued time and time again that Pacific peoples generally hold culture and family in high regard, understanding

them to be intrinsically linked to development (Barcham, 2005; Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2005; Pacific Women's Bureau, 2005, pp. 24–25). To understand Samoan FHHs outside of the rhetoric and in relation to culture and family is pertinent if this comprehension is to be at all valid.

The aim of this paper is to therefore contest essentialist conceptions of FHHs by considering what the experiences of some FHHs in Samoa are and what the importance of culture in relation to these experiences might be. In considering the importance of culture this paper will demonstrate how *fa'asamoa* (the Samoan way), inclusive of the *'āiga* (extended family or kin group), *fa'amatai* (customary system of governance), the *feagaiga* (balance within relationships inclusive of the brother/sister relationship) and the practice of *fa'alavelave* (demonstrating love and concern), all support the welfare and wellbeing of FHHs, including any children born of these households. By considering the aforementioned cultural aspects the FHH stereotype will be contested. It will be shown that Samoan FHHs do not fit the normative model of FHHs because they are not lone mothers, who are socially isolated, stigmatised and marginalised, powerless and poor. Rather they have strong familial relationships, where other women and men as father, brothers, uncles, or cousins have daily presence. It will be shown they have support with childcare and household chores. They have property rights, and political say, a certain level of voice and agency, and they have the ability to generate and/or access a cash income. In recognition of *fa'asamoa* which situates these women in terms of their position within their *'āiga*, their natal village and the wider community rather than the fact they are FHHs, this paper argues for a development approach where the nexus between FHHs and their cultural context be established before any assumptions are made and conclusions are drawn.

Outline of the problem

Female-headed households as a normative development category

The 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of women as heads of household to be an indicator of poverty (World Bank, 1989, p. iv). Comparisons between male and female heads of households were drawn and it was strongly, yet uncritically, argued that women who head households were not only greatly disadvantaged but that this disadvantaged household type was proliferating to such an extent that there was undoubtedly a global feminisation of poverty occurring (UNDAW, 1995; UNDP, 1995, p. 36). The notion of a feminisation of poverty quickly took hold in women's development circles, so much so that overcoming women's poverty became one of the key policy goals of the 1995 'Beijing Platform for Action' of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Female headship and the feminisation of poverty had become intrinsically linked to the point of orthodoxy, and female headship had become "proxy for women's poverty" (Chant, 2003, p. 3).

By being represented as lone mothers, marginalised, isolated, oppressed, powerless and poor universal claims have been made about how FHHs are discriminated against and marginalised because of their social, economic and cultural surroundings (Buvinic & Gupta, 1997). FHHs are considered to

be automatically at risk. In assuming all FHHs to be isolated, poor and powerless, FHHs are also understood to be dysfunctional – perpetuating a cycle of deprivation (Datta & McIlwaine, 2000, p. 44). In many instances, single mothers and their children have been identified as the problematic issue (Thomas, 1994).

Through analysing power, knowledge and discourse, scholars who were writing from a critical feminist perspective sought to contest the rather grand claims surrounding female headship (Chant, 1997; Jackson, 1998). By bringing into question the naturalness of concepts such as the household and headship (Varley, 1996), critically debating the statistics that were utilised to support the poorest of the poor and the feminisation of poverty arguments (Evans, 1992; Momsen, 2002), and unpacking the development experiences of FHHs, the diversity of FHHs was also shown. This diversity was observed in the types of FHHs that exist, the reasons why they emerge and their experiences (Chant, 1997).

It was also shown that not all poor women head households and not all households headed by women are poor (Varley, 1996). Whilst there may be a certain relationship between FHHs and poverty in that there are circumstances that may disadvantage FHHs making them more vulnerable to poverty, this is not the experience of all FHHs (Chant, 1999; Datta & McIlwaine, 2000, p. 41). Thus, it was asserted that many FHHs function fairly successfully in not only the economic sense but in the practical and social sense too (Chant, 2003; Momsen, 1991, p. 27).

By explicitly linking FHHs with the poverty alleviation agenda and targeting them with special assistance little is actually being done in terms of explaining and addressing the nature of poverty (Moore, 1996, p. 74), or the wider issues of gender inequity (Baden, 1999, p. 13; Moghadam, 2005, p. 30). Focusing on FHHs does not factor men into the equation, other than to see them as problematic, or to assume that women in a MHH are not as poverty-stricken as their counterparts in a FHH (Grinspun, 2004, p. 2).

Yet despite critiques of the way FHHs have been normalised as problematic, development agencies have shown a preference for utilising their own research and adhering to the generalisations about the poverty of FHHs. Such is the power of hegemonic development concepts such as FHHs continue to be uncritically integrated into development policy and translated into development practice and programmes globally.

Overview of fieldwork process

Fieldwork in Samoa occurred in 2001, 2004 and 2006. In total 17 weeks were spent moving between the urban area of Apia, the capital city, surround peri-urban areas and various rural villages on both the Islands of Upolu and Savaii. Data was collected through the use of in-depth interviews, following a semi-structured outline. The questions posed were opened-ended questions for the purpose of stimulating discussion around the topics of inquiry and for ensuring that the voices of the participants were given the chance to be heard and the data collected was rich. This approach was considered to be the most effective means for making obvious the multiple voices of the research participants and making known their multiple realities. In total 45 in-depth interviews

occurred. Data was also collected through the administration of a survey, with 23 households being surveyed twice with a three week interval. Whilst a number of findings emerged, as stated previously the intention of this paper is to consider what is the significance of culture when attempting to frame the development experiences of FHHs? This paper draws upon data from both the in-depth interviews and the survey.

Samoa geographical location and demographics

Situated in the Pacific Polynesian region, Samoa is a small developing nation, with only four inhabited islands, a land area of 2830 km² and a resident population of approximately 176,000. The two main islands are Upolu where the capital Apia is situated, and Savaii. In contemporary Samoa the people speak one language, and have a cultural tradition which is relatively consistent across the country (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991). Despite previous Western governance, the land, the resources and the political power remains at the village level and in the hands of the *fono* (the village council), *matai* (head of the extended family or kin group) and *'āiga*. Samoan culture and tradition continue to exist, whether it be at a local, national or international level. There appears to be a shared ideology, and a commitment to maintaining kinship and political institutions, which extends across many geographical networks (Franco, 1990, p. 171).

Fa'asamoa defined

Contemporary Samoan society has remained fairly reflective of traditional Samoan society (Holmes, 1957, p. 420; Meleisea, 1992; Ngan-Woo, 1985; O'Meara, 1990, p. 15). Samoa functions according to *fa'asamoa* which is defined as “the manner of the Samoans; according to Samoan customs and tradition” (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996, p. 185). *Fa'asamoa* means that people understand what is expected of them. Just as this excerpt suggests, *o Samoa o le atunu'u ua'uma ona tifi* (Samoa is an already defined society), meaning every member knows their place, the expectations of them and their duties (Lay, Murrow, & Meleisea, 2000, p. 15).

Fa'asamoa is thus the social and organisational system which governs the village and family life. This system of chiefly rule is based on a system of rights and obligations which ensures that family members have rights to family resources (such as land), as well as having the opportunity to be the family *matai* (chief). Family members in using these resources then work to achieve what is best for the family. *Fa'asamoa* is a family system “based on divisions of power, status, labour and expectations – the prime motivational force being to safeguard the family status” (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996, p. 4). As mentioned, because *fa'asamoa* means that everybody understands what is expected of them, they also understand this in relation to the family, and of major importance is the notion of service. “[S]ervice is the way family ties and feelings of identity are nurtured and is the major means for status raising” (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2000, p. 99). “Service to the family is the key driving force in the family based system” (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2000, p. 99). This commitment to all members of the family means that FHHs are not automatically at risk.

Social and political village structures

To understand FHHs in Samoa, an understanding of village social and political structures is required, because it is in the village that women's status is located, including that of FHHs. Traditionally Samoan settlement patterns were decidedly nucleated. Each village was physically well defined, as was the political authority of *fa'amatai* which determined village social structure and governance (Howe, 1984, p. 230). *Fa'amatai* set the appropriate status and roles for Samoans (Government of Western Samoa/United Nations Children's Fund (GoWS/UNICEF) 1996, p. 7).

Fa'amatai determined the status and role of women as widows, wives, sisters and daughters. Under *fa'amatai* there were clearly divided status groups, with an equal distribution of status between men and women and a clear division of tasks amongst the groups, from which the *matai* and the *fono a Matai* (council of chiefs) were served (Cribb, 1999; Schoeffel, 1983; Simi, 1991). Villages were divided into the *o le nu'u o tama'ita'i* (Village of the Ladies) and the *o le nu'u o ali'i* (Village of the Gentlemen) (Saolotoga, 1995, p. 20). Further division then occurred with the *o le nu'u o tama'ita'i* to include:

- *Aualuma*: Daughters of the village
- *Faletua ma tausii*: Wives of the titled men
- *Avā a taulele'a*: Wives of the untitled men (Saolotoga, 1995, pp. 21–24; Schoeffel, 1995, p. 98).

Historically it was the role of the *aualuma* to attend to the ceremonial virgin princess, the *Taupou* (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996, p. 5; Meleisea, 1992, p. 15; pp. 26–27; Saolotoga, 1995, p. 21) who was generally the daughter of the paramount chief of the village. The *aualuma* ranked higher than either their brothers or their brother's wives. In fact, the *aualuma* had a ranking equal to that of titled men (Government of Western Samoa/United Nations Children's Fund (GoWS/UNICEF) 1996, p. 8).

The *faletua ma tausii* and the *avā a taulele' a*, were considered to have the lowest adult ranking in the village and were responsible for the domestic tasks. Amongst the wives however, *faletua ma tausii* had a higher ranking than the *avā a taulele' a*. The *faletua ma tausii* and *avā a taulele' a* were expected to serve their husband's family and his sisters. It was believed that a *nofotane* (wife married into the family) held a subordinate status to her husband and his family because through marriage her husband had conquered not only her sacredness but also her family's esteem, by extension, which she represented (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996, p. 8).

Regardless of *faletua*, this same woman still held status within her own village. Should a woman remain in her village, regardless of marriage, she was still considered to be *aualuma*, a daughter of the village, meaning she maintained her high status. Status is very much about location, and even today it is common for people in Samoa, when speaking about women, to say ‘everybody is a queen somewhere’ (Tui: Business woman, Nov 2004). This not only means that status and identity are fluid but also means that regardless of marriage, as accorded by *fa'asamoa*, what endures and continues to defend women's position in the family and protects their rights is the cognatic or ambilateral system of

decent and inheritance in which family membership and property rights remain intact. The FHH stereotype is often underpinned by undifferentiated understandings of kinship and family systems whereby women's rights are circumscribed and upon marriage they are more likely to be disadvantaged which places widowed, divorced or separated women at risk.

In summary, Samoan women clearly have two distinctly defined and contrasting statuses. As sisters and co-descendants they are entitled to independent status and rank, but as wives their status and rank derive from that of their husbands. In her natal village a woman is somebody with an important role and status but in another village, especially her husband's, her status is less (Grattan, 1948, p. 16; Meleisea, 1992, p. 24; Schoeffel, 1979).

Whilst the status of a Samoan woman is clearly determined by the kind of relationship she is engaged in, when it comes to the brother/sister relationship sisters automatically rank higher than their brothers (Schoeffel, 1979). According to *fa'asamoa* the high status of sisters as daughters of the village and the cognatic or ambilateral system of descent and inheritance which is the foundation of the Samoan *'āiga* means her rights to land are protected and her membership to the family remains even upon marriage. This assured high status, protection of rights and ensuing membership to the *'āiga* means that her welfare, and the wellbeing and security of her children are more or less guaranteed. This holds relevance to FHHs who according to the stereotype often find themselves to be socially and culturally situated where they have low status, few rights, and connections with their natal family have diminished upon marrying. This is particularly relevant for FHHs who are widowed, separated or divorced because it may place them at risk. In the case of Samoa support for FHHs can be further understood by exploring the concept of *feagaiga*.

Feagaiga

The *feagaiga* is the “metaphorical foundation for the ideological structure by which order is maintained in Samoan society” (Schoeffel, 1995, p. 98).¹ *Feagaiga* means agreement, contract or covenant (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991, p. 72), and the relationship between the brother and sister is a *feagaiga* relationship. Whether formalised or not, it involves distinctly ascribed statuses and roles that are quite different, whilst being complementary (Schoeffel, 1979, pp. 19–21). Thus it is considered that women as sisters are the holders and transmitters of sacred power and men are the holders of secular power and authority (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991, p. 72). Hence, the *feagaiga* is a contract whereby the brother holds the authority and the sister is understood to hold the honour of the family. It is a contract because the rights, privileges and obligations that correspond to both are clearly spelt out and understood according to custom (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996, pp. 7–9, 186).

According to Samoan ideology, the *feagaiga* also represents balance within relationships. For the brother/sister relationship this balance is between the political power of the brother and the moral power of the sister (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1991, p. 72). Cribb (1999, p. 4) argues that it is this *feagaiga* bond between the brother and the sister that allows women a complementary amount of power. “The brother/sister relation-

ship is understood to be one of mutual support and formal, mutual respect, in which precedence in certain matters is given to the sororal party” (Schoeffel, 1995, p. 88).ⁱⁱ The notion that secular actions require moral or spiritual support is also essential to the *feagaiga*:

A contrast is drawn between sacred power or moral authority and secular authority and action in which sanctity attributed to one party lends dignity and legitimacy to the action of the other (Schoeffel, 1995, pp. 86–87).

This means that whilst a brother may have the authority to make a decision he also needs his sister's approval – indeed she may have the last say. This complementary power means sisters can assert influence within the family decision-making process, whether it is about controlling money or bestowing *matai* titles, and they can assert influence in the conflict resolution process, or in terms of resource allocation (GoWS/UNICEF, 1996, p. 8). The *feagaiga* relationship also offers a woman protection. As the *auluma* (daughters of the village) sisters are considered to be very important in safeguarding the dignity and standing of the *'āiga*, hence a sister is seen to rank higher in status than her brother. This requires a brother to be of service to her.

This is further supported through the socialisation process of child/adult respect which occurs from a very young age, whereby children learn to obey and serve their parents without question (Maiava, 2001). Meleisea (1992, p. 64) refers to the “iron discipline and conformity” that is a part of Samoan society. This is also reinforced with reference to the scriptures, with 90% of Samoans being Christian. Disobedience is often punished quite severely: “Obedience and love are equated at an early age” (Maiava, 2001, p. 81). Maiava (2001, p. 81) referring to Freeman (1984, pp. 275–276) goes on to write about the ambivalent love/fear, resent/respect type of relationship that many Samoans have with their parents because of this strict approach. Many Samoans, even as adults, continue to be fiercely loyal to their parents, hence they live their lives obeying, serving and giving to their parents (Freeman, 1984, pp. 209–210; Maiava, 2001, p. 82; O'Meara, 1990, p. 78; p. 170). Even when married, a man or a woman may listen to the final say of their parents, as opposed to their spouse. For family members this can transpire to mean that, whether they want to or not, they will provide for and care for each other. According to *fa'asamoa*, in terms of obeying one's parents and maintaining the status of the family, and accorded by the *feagaiga* relationship, the brothers will care and provide for their sisters (including FHHs) should they require it, whether they want to or not.

Under a *feagaiga* relationship, brothers are obliged to serve and protect their sisters as well as any of her offspring for life (Holmes & Holmes, 1992, p. 30; also see Meleisea, 1992, p. 14; p. 26; Ngan-Woo, 1985, pp. 23–24; O'Meara, 1990, pp. 103–109 for reference to the *feagaiga*, brother/sister relationship). Meleisea (1992, p. 14) observes the Samoan proverb *'o le teine o le 'i'oi mata o lona tuagane* – which means a girl is the inner corner of her brother's eye. This means that a sister is likened to the most vulnerable part of the eye, as opposed to the English saying ‘apple of his eye’ (Meleisea, 1992, p. 26; also see Ngan-Woo, 1985, p. 24 for reference to a brother's eye). Therefore, it is a brother's role to protect his

'vulnerable' sister, and as women play an important role in upholding the dignity and the prestige of the 'āiga, which is linked to sexual behaviour, this means their virtue and purity also require protecting (Dunlop, 1999, p. 54). Relationships between young men and women prior to finishing high school are therefore not promoted, and even upon finishing school relationships remain tightly monitored (O'Meara, 1990, pp. 103–109; also see Schoeffel, 1995, p. 8). Premarital sexual relations are "condoned in boys, and forbidden to girls" (Schoeffel, 1995, p. 89).

On one hand this obligation to protect and serve may offer a woman a sense of security, whilst on the other hand it may be problematic should she deviate from the expected norm, for example, getting pregnant outside of marriage. Single mothers constitute a typical scenario of FHH in the international literature, with some reporting that single mothers are negatively stigmatised, discriminated against, and ostracised because of their circumstances. By exploring the general attitude towards sexual relationships and pregnancy outside of marriage, the likelihood of single mothers in Samoa being stigmatised and ostracised will also be considered.

Single mothers

Disrupting the harmony of the family

Single mothers are depicted in the literature as (one of) the most common forms of FHH, thus their status in Samoa needs to be specifically considered. Whilst keeping the family honour seems pertinent, there are certainly mixed messages in the literature about what the appropriate sexual behaviour for Samoan girls might be. It was reported, famously, by Mead (1928) that Samoan girls had considerable sexual freedom. Holmes (1957) conceded, "promiscuity is condemned by the church but winked at by the family" (p. 411). O'Meara (1990, pp. 107–108) disputes this, making reference to the double standards attributed to boys and girls. Young men are encouraged to have affairs, whilst the same activity is forbidden of their sisters: "Most families go to great lengths to guard and restrain their young girls" (O'Meara, 1990, pp. 107–108). Whilst this study did not examine the sexual freedom of girls and women, it did suggest that the *feagaiga* may mean an unwed pregnant woman is not beyond forgiveness. However, before the process of forgiveness is explored I will discuss some of the responses an unwed pregnant woman may be confronted with.

When an unmarried woman's pregnancy becomes known some are treated badly, indeed some are even violently chastised (Naseri, 2001, pp. 135–142). Yet, in any given situation where the family was angry with a young pregnant woman, it seems they were just as angry with the supposed father. O'Meara (1990, p. 105) recounts the story of a young burly man who broke the jaw of another young man who he had caught sitting under the breadfruit tree with his twenty year old sister. O'Meara reports that he thought the response was "a bit hasty and overprotective", however nine months later the sister of the burly young man gave birth to twins (O'Meara, 1990, p. 105; also see Schoeffel, 1995). 'Taking matters into your own hands' to handle sexual indiscretions was seen as a viable option:

If she gets pregnant, well this is very unfortunate. The family would be very cross, her dad and her brothers, her mother

and her sisters, they will all be disappointed in what she has done. I think her brothers will beat him up (Mose: Matai and retired school teacher).

In recounting the discovery of her pregnancy, Leausa recalls how angry and ashamed her family were:

My family was so angry with me. Yes they were so angry, they were so angry with me because I was young at that time. My brothers were so angry with me because my pride was taken away. They were shamed by other boys; their friends laughed, did things like that (Leausa: FHH).

This anger could also be seen in the story of Rika, who went on to marry her partner, and is now separated:

*Rika: Everybody called me names, it hurt so much.
Rochelle: When they were angry with you did they ever hurt you physically?
Rika: No they just said bad words at me, and this was so hard but they never hit me. I think that all families try to act like this (Rika: FHH).*

Whilst being on the receiving end of bad words as opposed to physical abuse may seem that a person has been let off lightly, it is well noted by Macpherson and Macpherson (1987) that words can have an extremely harmful effect. Samoans have a saying *e pala le ma'a 'ae le pala le'upu*, that is, stones may be reduced to sand, but words never decay; similarly, *e sola le fai, 'ae tu'u le foto*, that is, the stingray escapes, but leaves behind its barb (p. 311). Both of these sayings suggest that harmful words can have a long lasting if not permanent effect, especially if it is considered that a person has brought shame to the family. Various proverbs that date back to pre-Christian Samoa, as well as those drawn from the scriptures, reinforce the idea of shame. For example, *fa'ato'ilalo le 'āiga* (causing the family to sink), *toso i lalo le 'āiga* (to bring the family name down), *māasiasi* (guilty for having brought the family into disrepute) (Macpherson & Macpherson, 1987, p. 311). When this is coupled with the idea that what is done is not forgotten, good or bad, then for some young women suicide may seem like a viable option, or lead to ideas about taking the life of the unborn child because they are unable to face family members and the consequences of their actions (Fiti-Sinclair, 2003, pp. 54–55).

Whilst Maia, an unmarried mother, had never considered suicide herself, the shame of her pregnancy had a heart-felt impact. Maia became pregnant with Leilani, a child that was later diagnosed with a disability, after she had a very short-term relationship:

He told me that he loved me, and so I went with him and then he said [later] that the baby wasn't his (Maia: FHH) [my insert].

Maia reported that she felt so devastated and ashamed. Maia was also very worried about what her family would say, because this was not her first pregnancy outside of marriage:

I took some Samoan medicine to try and get rid of the baby, to kill the baby. Then the baby was born and she had a disability. I thought that God was punishing me for trying to

kill the baby, I was so angry at myself; at everyone... all I did was cry. I felt so very bad, so ashamed about what I had done. I hated myself so much. You know for the first month Leilani seemed normal, looked normal and then her face, her look, her features became apparent. I was so sure that God was punishing me and so I believed that I deserved it (Maia: FHH).

Whilst most women have no intention of bringing shame upon their family members O'Meara (1990) notes that crossing forbidden sexual ground is a way that girls can covertly express feelings of anger and hostility that they are generally not able to express. "One young mother told me that she had an affair and became pregnant because, as she said, 'I wanted to do something to hurt my parents'" (O'Meara, 1990, p. 108).

In talking about single mothers and pregnancy, Yvette thought this idea of hurting one's parents was also very probable, but as a general rule people might just want to be together and have a baby anyway and that having a baby when you are not married is not really such a bad thing, but it is just made worse through the gossiping or seems bad because of where you come from:

In Apia we are more progressive in our thinking, we accept things easier. They are really traditional in Savai'i, so maybe what you think depends on where you are from. I think in the villages it gives people something to gossip about (Yvette: Tertiary educated young woman from Apia).

It is commonly said that 'something that has happened on one side of the island in the morning will be well known on the other side by noon'. As observed in Maia's story above, and Teresa's tale below, gossip or bad words can be very harmful to the individual as well as the family's status:

Yes people they gossip, even your family can, and it can be really hurtful. A few years ago my stomach well it was getting bigger and bigger, it looked like I was going to have a baby. But I was sick I had a tumour in my stomach, some of my family came to the hospital with me so they could see the truth, they thought that it was a baby and they didn't believe me that it was a tumour. So when I had the tumour removed, well after that they were very sorry about what they said (Teresa: Young, unmarried village woman, who works in Apia in the public sector).

Yet this rebuke by the family and society for the most part appears short-lived, with a number of strategies available for making amends. These will now be discussed in more detail.

Cultural strategies for making amends

Fa'amagalo: Seeking forgiveness

When an unmarried woman discloses that she is pregnant she can obviously tip the balance and disrupt family harmony, especially as according to the *feagaiga*, a sister holds the dignity of the family with her. Most importantly though, the *feagaiga* means an unwed pregnant woman is not beyond forgiveness. *Fa'asamoa* recognises that harmony or relational

bonds disturbed by deviation can also be restored. "*Fa'asamoa* recognises human fragility and is willing to forgive" (Ngan-Woo, 1985, p. 24; also see Lui, 2003, pp. 2–3). A person can seek *fa'amagalo* (forgiveness) by undergoing the process of *fa'atoesega* (formal apology) or in extreme cases, by the offending person and/or their *'aiga* performing a public act of apology and penance called an *ifoga* (Lui, 2003, p. 2; O'Meara, 1990, p. 121). The couple, or the girl and boy separately, can apologise. For Samoans "this act of humility and self-abasement is profoundly moving" (O'Meara, 1990, p. 122).

Maia, reflecting back to her first pregnancy, recounted:

Maia: Well I was 20 years old when I had my first baby. I took a big apology to my dad for what I did. Because that boyfriend is the boy of my village so my dad knew who he was.

Rochelle: Did anything happen to the boy? Did he have to apologise? Do you know?

Maia: Well he was really afraid so he just hid.

Rochelle: He just hid? *Maia: Yeah, and then afterward he came to me and he said he has to come to me [to take responsibility and ask me to get married]... and I said no. My dad said that I was not allowed to marry him. So I said no and my dad said no too... Dad did not want me to marry him. So I accepted this, so I stayed alone and had that baby.*

Rochelle: So they didn't want you to marry him?

Maia: Yeah that's right

Rochelle: So he went away?

Maia: Yeah he went away (Maia: FHH) [my insert].

Marriage is seldom forced. As seen in Maia's story, families prefer to have an unmarried mother rather than taking into their midst a man they do not particularly like or whom would not make a suitable husband (Holmes, 1957, p. 411).

Fa'ailo ga tama: Accepting the baby

The restoration of harmony can also occur through the *fa'ailo ga tama* (to mark or distinguish a child or young one). According to *fa'asamoa*, the arrival of a new baby warrants the process of *fa'ailo ga tama*.ⁱⁱⁱ This is an official acknowledgement of the newborn baby by the parents of the two *'aiga*'s. This process gives formal recognition to the social and cultural connections that the two *'aigas* have through blood (GoWS/UNICEF, 1996, p. 6; Ngan-Woo, 1985, p. 14), thus consolidating the relationship between the new baby and the father's family.

Ngan-Woo's (1985, p. 14) detailed account of *fa'ailo ga tama* illustrates that the process of *fa'ailo ga tama* involves the preparing and presenting of food and other gifts, such as fine mats, money, or gifts for the baby, from both sides of the family to one another. By presenting gifts, the father's side demonstrates that they are a family that has wealth, status, credibility and prestige. On the mother's side, the presenting of gifts demonstrates that the family understands and practices the values of *fa'asamoa*. In doing this, both families acknowledge that they have a commitment to the newborn, and even in years to come they will honour their obligations. This commitment to family is even extended to the wider family of the baby (Ngan-Woo, 1985, p. 14).

For a child that is born outside of wedlock, once the *fa'ailo ga tama* has been performed then the baby is no longer considered illegitimate. The newborn baby is generally welcomed

unconditionally, without being stigmatised (Holmes, 1957, p. 411). As Ngan-Woo writes:

The process of *fa'ailo ga tama* gives the child a place within the 'āiga of both the father and mother. All support systems will be made available to the child and no attempt will be made to morally condemn the mother or the father because the child has been born out of wedlock (Ngan-Woo, 1985, p. 14).

Fa'ailo ga tama is also a means for achieving reconciliation between the two families. This is a necessary process if the couple are not intending to marry each other (Ngan-Woo, 1985, p. 14).

Caring for children

As mentioned earlier, babies in Samoa are regarded in a positive light – whatever the birth circumstances. Everybody in the family pampers, cuddles and greatly cares for babies especially for the first two years of their lives (Maiava, 2001, p. 80; O'Meara, 1990, p. 77; p. 169). With adult sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, and uncles all living in close proximity, a functioning extended/immediate family not only means that the elderly are taken care of, but also that small children are cared for (Lay et al., 2000, p. 15). A number of authors highlight that the elderly also play a major role in caring for small children (Holmes & Holmes, 1992, p. 97). The care of small children is also delegated to younger children, usually girls of about six to seven years of age. This care may include carrying them around, entertaining them, stopping them from disturbing others, especially adults, and protecting them from other children (Grattan, 1948, p. 165; Holmes, 1957, p. 402). In light of the above, there are obviously many hands around to help with the care of small children, especially babies.

Freely available childcare is a very useful asset to have access to, especially for those FHHs who might require childcare because they are in formal employment. Chant (1997, pp. 45–46) noted the childcare difficulties that FHHs report having. Whether it is not being able to access childcare, afford the cost of childcare, or being forced back into the workforce when they would rather be at home with their children, childcare is often a number one issue for parents (also see Mādje & Neusüss cited in Chant, 1997, p. 40; Oliver, 1996, pp. 52–53). As a general rule however, obtaining childcare so one can attend work, study or generate income does not seem to be an issue for Samoan FHHs.

The restoration of harmony

Regardless of a woman's tumultuous beginnings into motherhood, once people come to terms with a young woman's pregnancy, any negative attitudes tend to settle down. As a general rule, Samoan society does not admonish these women for life. Savalia states:

When the baby is born they will forgive her. The family might be cross – feel ashamed, but they will love the baby (Savalia: Savai'i research assistant).

It is not the habit for the new mother or the family to abandon the baby. Soma, an elderly village pastor and matai, supports this by saying:

Well you know there are a lot of girls who have children with no father and you know we all hate it. It disgraces the

name of our family; it disgraces the name of our mum and our dad. However, this lady who has no husband, who is pregnant, well we will all look after that lady and the child. In my family, while we were never cross, we felt very sad. But the thing is... the baby and her, well we feed them, we look after them, and we do everything especially for the baby. The blood, the bones, and the flesh this is what is most important (Soma: Elderly village pastor and matai).

The restoration of harmony when deviance occurs is fundamental to social functioning. Other accounts from the field also suggest that there were various means available for restoring harmony. Given the power of sisters according to the *feagaiga*, a young woman might go to an older sister or a natal aunt if they found themselves pregnant and unwed because the *feagaiga* may mean these women would wield more power to calm the family. A young girl may also draw on the mediation, strength and advisory skills of her mother:

The couple themselves may seek to marry legally, or start co-habiting as in a common law marriage. These hidden relationships may be seen by some as part of the courtship process that leads up to marriage (O'Meara, 1990, p. 105). The family may also insist that they marry, however if marriage is not considered to be a viable option the family may send the young woman away to live with relatives in another village. Sometimes young couples also elope and will return once the family has calmed down and accepted the marriage (O'Meara, 1990, p. 105).

Embeddedness

Other members of the immediate or extended families may also informally adopt the babies of those women who do not marry. There are various instances where the family pulls together and the mother and the new baby become embedded in the wider family network. These decisions are made by the family as a whole and appear to be made based on what is best for the entire family:

Of course the family will help care for her – sometimes children might go elsewhere. Sometimes a baby goes to other members of the family. A young girl might go to Pago [American Samoa], New Zealand, or Australia. She does what her parents say. Parents decide what is important (Josef: Elderly matai) [my insert].

Adoption may also occur covertly, meaning some women and children became so embedded within the immediate family that it is difficult to tell which women gave birth to what babies as the family would just refer to them as their children. This was reiterated when Diana stated:

Sometimes you don't even know in a family whose baby is whose. They [the family] won't tell you, and they will just say the baby is a cousin or a sister or a brother. But the baby will still be loved (Diana: FHH) [my insert].

This care for children of the extended family is based on the value accorded to children in Samoa: "A Samoan family's greatest resource is its children. The only assurance of support that people have in old age" (O'Meara, 1990, p. 79). Those that

have few or no children usually adopt, whether it is temporarily or permanently from close relatives (O'Meara, 1990, p. 79).

It was consistently restated that regardless of predicament, no-one would be left to fend for themselves and neither would they be rejected for the rest of their lives by society or their family:

Well yes it is better to have a husband. But we know they don't though. I know I have seen pregnant girls. They go to the hospital. You see them getting bigger and bigger and then the baby is born and her mother, and her sister, even her dad will care for this baby (Lea: Village woman, living in husband's village).

This point is also confirmed by Tina in discussing her brother who has a baby to a girl in a neighbouring village:

Boy, when our mother found out she said to him 'you get over there and marry her, care for her and this baby.' She was cross at him, really cross (Tina: Sister to young man who has a child outside of marriage).

Neli a private business woman and spokesperson on gender issues spoke about her own personal experience as an unmarried mother from years ago:

Well in my case I am an example of a woman who had this thing happen. I had a baby that was born out of wedlock... I was alone and with the baby. In the beginning when my father found out that I was pregnant he didn't say anything to me... he wouldn't speak to me. My family has a chiefly title, and for my father it was a very hard thing to accept this kind of thing. We came from the village where the culture is very strong and so I didn't even tell him that I was pregnant, I just left it like that and I led a normal life and when he found out that I gave birth to a baby boy, although he was ashamed about this kind of thing, when the baby was born he was the first one to come to the hospital and he wanted to take the baby with him... So you see the anger and the hatred in the beginning, all of the words like 'we have lost hope in you', well when my family saw my son all of that was gone, gone, gone (Neli: Business woman and gender expert).

Hence women who have babies outside of marriage appear not to be ostracised forever by either society or their family. Thus FHHs embedded in a wider family or living in an extended family situation was common. The extended family could be multi-generational or it could be extended in terms of siblings, brothers/sisters-in-law or even cousins. This embeddedness meant all of the FHHs had men present to some extent, whether it was a father/in-law, brother/in-law, son/in-law, or cousin. The normative view of FHHs is that they are lone women, with children, functioning in a way whereby men are absent. In the Samoan context this was not the case and again highlights how FHHs in Samoa do not fit the stereotypes of FHHs in general.

Fa'alavelave

Critical to understanding how the family functions according to *fa'asamoa* is also the practice of *fa'alavelave*.

Mulitalo-Lauta (1998, 2000) identifies *fa'alavelave* as one of those cultural practices that demonstrates love and concern. But *fa'alavelave* can actually be understood in two ways (Maiava, 2001, p. 92). The first meaning of *fa'alavelave* makes reference to the larger, formal, traditional ceremonies or occasions that occur throughout Samoa, such as weddings, funerals, the bestowing of a *matai* title or perhaps a church dedication. These ceremonies involve the formal exchange of gifts, *fa'alavelave* (Maiava, 2001, p. 92; O'Meara, 1990, pp. 156–162). The second meaning of *fa'alavelave* refers to a problem, a difficulty, a small disturbance in routine, or a domestic crisis. Therefore the term *fa'alavelave* could be used when referring to an argument, getting into trouble or needing help, for example, needing to find money for school fees (Maiava, 2001, p. 92). Both these meanings have relevance to this paper because it is important to try and understand how and why FHHs might be assisted with a problem, a crisis or a difficulty, as well as considering how FHHs might manage the demands of ceremonial *fa'alavelave*. It is also important to consider what these ceremonies might offer in the context of women's daily lives.

In relation to the first definition of *fa'alavelave*, many expectations and demands may be forthcoming. Maiava (2001) notes that many outsiders and urban Samoans speak about how problematic *fa'alavelave* is (p. 94). During the fieldwork periods whilst various issues that surrounded *fa'alavelave* were certainly mentioned, those with the strongest opinions were generally non-Samoans. There is a general perception that people give more than they can, with only one or a few, usually *matai*, standing to benefit. This benefiting was usually understood in terms of financial gains. These same people freely accounted that people took loans and stole, if necessary, to meet the demands of *fa'alavelave*.

Many Samoans also have a love/hate relationship with *fa'alavelave* (Maiava, 2001), and whilst Samoan people also agreed that the practice of *fa'alavelave* has become problematic, this issue of spending more than you have is not specific to Samoa. Whilst many people complained openly about the expectations and demands of the ceremonial *fa'alavelave*, all the while they are also planning for the next *fa'alavelave*. At face value, however, this is also fairly similar to the way Westerners complain about the pressures, expectations and costs of Christmas, all the while planning for the next one.

Managing fa'alavelave

Given the expectations that surround *fa'alavelave*, and the accounts that *fa'alavelave* could potentially be a burden, for example in terms of church donations (see Kerslake, 2006), it is important to consider how FHHs might manage other *fa'alavelave* obligations.

The quotes below give some indication of this:

Rochelle: Do you think that is common for other women, single women, who are by themselves – like a single person whose husband has passed away? Do you still have to provide for *fa'alavelave*?

Tau: Yes you have to. In *fa'asamoa* if you are in the family then you have to provide. But the family should support you if things are difficult. Perhaps you provide with them and you contribute less. You see normally my husband and I will give

something, now it is me with his parents and his sister and husband together rather than being separate. I might even provide something else for the family, maybe not fa'alavelave. You see the pressure is less because he is away... and with the new baby. If my husband were here... then we would have to provide lots. Now I can bring whatever I want to, because I am the only one with the children (Tau: FHH).

Whilst clearly most Samoans believe *fa'alavelave* has an important role, these quotations show there is the need to look at ways to better manage *fa'alavelave*:

I know for example when women's development programmes came one of the problems identified for small businesses was fa'alavelave. But you cannot take fa'alavelave away. The way we should do it, is we should address it, put it as part of the business expenses. Work it into the budget because you cannot take it away. You could talk to just as many people who have fa'alavelave under control. Like they say we only give this much. So if this person dies and they sit here in the family, then this is how much we give. Or if this happens we only give this. They put limits and boundaries around fa'alavelave so they can manage it. If everybody approached fa'alavelave with this attitude, then it wouldn't be an issue. All processes have good and bad points, however everybody tends to focus mistakenly on some of the not so great things or consequences of fa'alavelave, let's also not forget the good things that fa'alavelave does. The fact of the matter is it is here to stay. Fa'alavelave has endured because of the good things it has to offer (Shon: CEO, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development).

The process that occurs for each *fa'alavelave* will generally be different (Maiava, 2001), and is understood intrinsically by those involved. It is clear that this enduring practice had much deeper and meaningful underpinnings than what was being accounted for by those that criticised the practice. Some of these will be explored further now.

The endurance of fa'alavelave

Maiava (2001, p. 94) in support of O'Meara (1990, pp. 214–215) observes that the endurance of *fa'alavelave* can be attributed to a number of reasons. Firstly, *fa'alavelave* is a huge social event. Secondly, villagers are able to exchange subsistence goods for cash and other purchased goods, especially through engaging with urban and overseas family members. In many instances a profit can be made. *Fa'alavelave* has evolved so as to take advantage of the cash economy (O'Meara, 1990, p. 215). This point is pertinent for FHHs who are involved in the informal sector, or for FHHs who have small businesses (noted in the case studies) where they sell traditional products such as fine mats or produce.

The third reason O'Meara (1990) and Maiava (2001) offer for the endurance of *fa'alavelave* is the status and prestige gained from public displays of giving: "It is important to give and to be seen to give because generosity enhances status" (Maiava, 2001, p. 94). "Anyone can have their moment of glory. Those who have moved away from the culture in other ways can instantly atone" (Maiava, 2001, p. 95). Finally, the

fourth reason for the endurance of *fa'alavelave* is that *fa'alavelave* maintains the connections of the larger extended family and reminds people of its security (Maiava, 2001, p. 95).

Values, ideas, beliefs and practices such as, *alofa* (to show love, compassion and concern), *tautua* (to be of service), *osi 'aiga* (to be proactive in support of the family), *fa'akerisiano* (to demonstrate Christian behaviour), and *loto nu'u* (to have a sense of community), that are *fa'asamoa* though, the essence behind why people do give and want to give is clear. Again, *fa'alavelave* needs to be understood in terms of Samoan ideals and values rather than Western ideology. As can be seen in Tau's statement whereby she stated that to *fa'alavelave* is at the very core of what it means to be a Samoan:

Being Samoan has many expectations. It is providing, and supporting. There are obligations, lots of them, like for a wedding. People tell you what to bring, cartons of fish, ie toga (Tau: FHH).

Many saw *fa'alavelave* as an investment in the future:

People in New Zealand spend their money buying houses, Samoans, well we spend our money on fa'alavelave. They are both good investments, they are both about investing in the future and in the next generation... because they see this getting together, this sharing, this networking, they have experienced this and they like it (Savalia: Savai'i research assistant).

Fa'alavelave exchanges are not always about money; they are a way of connecting with each other:

In summary, if *fa'alavelave* is understood in terms of Samoan values, and practices rather than Western values and practices, then its real value will be appreciated. A culturally bound practice cannot be accurately understood if it is critiqued under a Western microscope. *Fa'alavelave* is a lot more than just the occasion; rather it is also about managing a problem, a difficulty, a small disturbance or a domestic crisis. *Fa'alavelave* becomes for many individuals, including FHHs, a cultural protective factor. *Fa'alavelave* is also about the 'aiga's obligation to contribute to or rise to an occasion, a situation or a crisis, demonstrating love, concern and commitment. It is about responding appropriately to the immediate or extended family in times of need. Ongoing ceremonial *fa'alavelave* provides a reminder and reassurance that the social and security roles of the extended 'aiga still function (Maiava, 2001, p. 96). Because of protocols, values and ceremonies, because of the family as a part of Samoan structures and institutions, this practice of *fa'alavelave* will endure.

By understanding the social importance of visibly demonstrating love and concern through giving, especially in times of *fa'alavelave* (crisis), we can understand why FHHs might remain part of the fold and not be isolated as individuals or as a social group, rendering them alone to the category of 'poorest of the poor'. The ceremonial practice of *fa'alavelave* also limits people's chances of becoming socially isolated. How each family manages the financial obligations of *fa'alavelave* is specifically determined. Whether *fa'alavelave* is a burden is context specific, which is no different to how we all manage our financial obligations in diverse ways, some of

us being more successful at this than others. Without a doubt the poverty of some families must make managing *fa'alavelave* obligations difficult, and in some instances it may accentuate their level of hardship (Kerslake, 2006).

Day to day survival of FHHs

Samoan FHHs as not isolated can be known further by looking to understand Samoan household composition. A household might encompass five buildings shared by everyone, or consisted of separate buildings that are not all shared. So even when FHHs identified they lived in their own *fale*, other adult family members generally lived only metres away, meaning disconnection or isolation of even women in their own *fale* was limited. This connectiveness played out through the provision of emotional and financial support.

As shown by the survey the Samoan household is fluid in nature, in that members could and did change. This fluid arrangement worked in favour of FHHs because the household could modify its composition in accordance to the "changing economic circumstances of a wide network of kin-related individuals" (Nieves, 1979, p. 135). Thus, the household had the capacity to absorb relatives because the boundaries of household group were unmarked; household composition was loosely defined and its limits less bounded.

This meant the household changed or new ones emerged in response to childcare needs. The household reduced its members during periods of economic hardship when income coming into the house was less, and expand during times of prosperity, removing the burden from other households that were in hardship. Having other adult members around also meant members who were working, could be more flexible with work schedules and be physically more mobile, because they were able to delegate childcare obligations or domestic responsibilities whilst they worked. Domestic chores were divided up, as opposed to relying on one adult woman—wife or mother. A stereotypical perspective of FHHs is that they are time poor, have a triple workload because they do not have another adult (husband) to assist (see Chant, 1997). In the Samoan context this is not the case and again highlights how FHHs in Samoa do not fit the stereotypes of FHHs in general.

Moreover, in Samoa the household and family are intertwined. The family as a unit, which may or may not be intergenerational, held more relevance to most Samoans than the concept of household. Whilst there has certainly been a shift away from the larger extended family towards smaller family/household units, in this study the family was shown to be a more important functional unit than the household. Therefore, in some cases the family continues to offer a better unit for analysis especially when attempting to understand the situation and status of its members, including that of FHHs.

The Samoan household/family is both a spatial and social unit. Family members may live separately, thus spatially and according to census they form separate households, however from a social perspective the various members in their separate households function as a unified family forming "a single economic establishment holding joint assets and transferring income to meet needs as they arise" (Schwimmer, 2003, p. 1). Schwimmer (2003) goes on to argue that the relevant unit of analysis is not the census household but the domestic network,

which involves collaboration between various kin. Kin could be based in the next village, in Apia, on the other island or overseas in New Zealand, Australia, American Samoa, or in the United States.

Many Samoans whilst living and working abroad are sending remittances home. In this study 94% of FHHs received remittances in some shape or form. Remittances came as cash donations, regularly or intermittently at Christmas time, or for a *fa'alavelave* – either in a time of crisis or in terms of an occasion such as a wedding, a bestowing of a *matai* title or a funeral. Because of the *fa'asamoa*, commitment to family and the need to *fa'alavelave*, family money seemed to move backward and forward as required. Remittances also came in the shape of consumer goods, such as electronic equipment or airline tickets. In one instance, a family had received a shipping container with clothing, bikes, and household furniture from relatives in New Zealand. The family's inter-dependence can be seen by the fact that both case examples below also talk about receiving remittances. De-facto FHHs, that is, women who are managing households and family life whilst their husbands are working in another place, also constitute a typical scenario of FHHs in the international literature. In some cases, de-facto FHHs do not always receive the remittances they need to survive, and neither do they have good support networks. Many are also not in a position whereby they have the authority to make household and family decisions. This was not the case in this study and brings into question the universal applicability of FHH as a development category.

Many of the FHHs were on customary land, under village rule at 72%. The extent that FHHs had access to a plantation was high at 94%. This meant that not only did FHHs have access to subsistence food but could also sell any surplus that they did have in local markets, or through the informal sector.

Most households had a wage(s) coming in at 88%. Just as many FHHs in the household/wider household earned the wage as did men. There was not a marked gender difference. The wage earner, regardless of their age or gender, appeared to contribute their wage income to the household. In various instances FHHs had control over the wages even though they did not earn the wage.

To follow are two case examples of women as the initial instigators of small business ventures, which came about because of financial support from a micro finance organisation. The incomes generated by these women's businesses are supporting family networks, inclusive of elderly widowed women. These examples show that not only are they supporting their elderly widowed mothers, but they are also supporting multiple family members. In both cases the interdependency of the family members is noted, as are the multiple strategies utilised for income generation, such as selling produce at the market. None of the women referred to in these 2 cases, in particular those that might be considered to be vulnerable, such as the widowed mothers, Mary as a single woman, or Poema's husband's younger sister, appears to be in a situation whereby they are more at risk of poverty because they are FHHs.

Small business case example one: Apia, Wednesday 26th April 2006

Mary, a thirty-three year old single woman who has no children, is helping to support her wider family of ten,

including two small children and her elderly widowed mother. Her mother is considered to be the head of the household. In terms of income generation only Mary, her sister who also helps run the stall, and her brother earn a wage. He is employed as a store person. The family lives in Apia in one of the Apia villages. They are on customary land and they have access to a plantation. They also grow bananas and aubergine around their *fales*. There is no family *matai* at the moment. The market stall is considered to be a family business. With a small loan of 500 *tālā*; Mary started up her jewellery business by setting up a stall at the back of the market. The business did well, so Mary took another small loan of 750 *tālā* and expanded the business, which now consists of 3 stalls. They have also expanded their ware from jewellery, to carvings and cloth products. These are purchased from carvers and women who sew in the villages. The cash earned is used for school fees, home improvements, consumer products, and *fa'alavelave* – including church donations. The impetus for this business was that Mary used to work in Pago Pago, American Samoa, but her family needed her to return to Apia, so Mary came home to help and this business just eventuated. Mary's family also has family members in New Zealand who sometimes send remittances.

Small business case example two: Apia, Wednesday 26th April 2006

Poema is a 37 year old woman who is married to a taxi driver. They have six children. Poema and her husband are also supporting her husband's younger sister and Poema's widowed mother, who Poema states is the head of the household. The family lives in Apia, on customary land, according to *matai* governance – the family *matai* is an uncle. They have access to a plantation and they also grow small crops around the *fales*, such as taro and bananas. Poema and a friend share this business, and the stall mainly sells sewing products, such as shirts and dresses. To date, they have had two loans, the first one was to set up the stall, and with the second loan they were able to make the stall bigger. The money that Poema and her friend earn from their small business they use to buy meat, pay for school fees, *fa'alavelaves*, to buy clothing for their families and consumer goods, as well as buying goods for the stall. The goods they sell, they either make personally or they buy from women they know. Poema's family also receives remittances from extended family members in New Zealand.

Poorest of the poor

Given the above-mentioned it seems that many FHHs might be well taken care of or take good care of themselves and indeed many might fare better than their male counterparts and married counterparts. This was partially confirmed in looking at figures in the 'Household and Income Expenditure Survey: Food and Basic Needs' (1997) report which highlighted that FHHs were more likely to have daily food expenditure surplus to requirement, compared with MHHs (Government of Samoa, 1997, p. 15).

In terms of whether a woman without a husband might be economically poor, it was thought that she would only

be poor if her own family was poor, not because she was a FHH:

If she is poor it is because they are poor. You know these people here, next door, they have no one in their family working, no one has money, and they just go to the plantation. They don't send some of their children to school. They are poor, they have an elderly man in their household, his wife is dead and they have a woman, her husband he is dead too (Line: FHH).

Dunlop's (1999, p. 96) study on Samoan women in the informal sector, reported that the responses from those who identified themselves as FHHs did not differ greatly from the larger sample. Therefore, compared to the rest of the women in the study, Dunlop surmised FHHs were not in a position of greater risk or disadvantage because of their circumstances as FHHs (Dunlop, 1999, p. 96). Because of how Samoan society functions it is believed that FHHs should not be the 'poorest of the poor', disadvantaged, or socially isolated.

Maria (Samoan academic) and Tui (businesswoman) both argued that if Samoan society was to change to such an extent that FHHs were no longer captured up in the family network, then it would no longer be Samoan society. The day that the Samoan family is no longer able to meet the needs of its family, then this change will have far reaching consequences not only for FHHs but also for the elderly, small children, the sick, the mentally ill, and those that are physically or intellectually disabled. If this were to occur, Samoa society would no longer be true to *fa'asamoa*. Identity, belonging, security, reciprocity, and *alofa* (love) are all intrinsically linked, and are at the very core of how and why Samoan society functions. Both Maria and Tui, as did many others, believed that the whole family would be reduced to disadvantage before any individual was left destitute. *Fesoasoani i le 'āiga* (helping the family) was a common phrase often spoken by many people. Maiava (2001) supports this:

Belonging, identity, and social security is provided by valuing kinship, social and community relationships. Fraternity, solidarity and participation in society by all its members is valued in the face of external alienation or isolation. *Fa'alavelave* to Samoans meets this need (p. 219).

It is important to keep in mind various possibilities though, especially societal changes that may occur over time, for example, a reduction in inward remittances and what this monetary change might mean for the Samoan household in terms of how it is structured and functions. A number of authors have reported that whilst Samoa is certainly a collective society, families are now becoming more immediate, although not necessarily nuclear (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2005; Maiava, 2001; Shadrake, 1996). However as things currently stand FHHs should not be considered at risk. Whilst in many cultures the social organisation and cultural values may put FHHs at risk, in Samoa they do not.

Importance of culture

In Samoa there are a number of systems, processes and structures that determine how a Samoan person behaves within and outside the *'āiga*, so as to achieve the goals of the

āiga and safeguard the *āiga* status. There are clear expectations outlined by *fa'asamoa* which ensure various members look out for other members, as is especially noted in the *feagaiga* brother/sister relationship. According to *fa'asamoa*, a sense of *tautua* (loyalty and service) to the family is also very strong. *Tautua* (obligations and duty) to the *āiga* are extremely important (Ngan-Woo, 1985, pp. 10–11). In return, all members of the family will share in the resources and successes. By understanding some of these expectations and processes, and the values and beliefs that underpin them, we can begin to understand why the Samoan family functions in the way that it does, and then understand how various experiences or circumstances might be managed or how various members might be treated, for example FHHs. It is clear that Samoan FHHs do not fit general stereotypes of FHHs.

The extent to which FHHs are embedded in their families and wider communities requires exploration, before any assumptions can be made about their situation. This is especially so as no individual lives in isolation under *fa'asamoa*. FHHs need to be situated within the wider socio-economic, political and cultural context in which they live their lives as women, sisters, daughters, mothers, as an employee with a professional qualification and income, as the owner of a business, or in terms of their position as the family income generator within the informal sector. FHHs need to be understood according to the role they are fulfilling or in terms of the many and varied ways they play out their lives, as opposed to the label FHHs. To focus on this category alone would merely place a small part of a person's identity over and above who else they are as a person, and the development potential they hold may get missed or underplayed.

Moreover if poverty is understood to be a multi-dimensional concept so as to also incorporate levels of agency, self-esteem, worth and value in society, inclusion/exclusion in decision-making processes and levels of participation in society, as well as a person's access to resources, FHHs in Samoa are again not the 'poorest of the poor' and neither are they socially isolated individually or as a social group. The overriding importance of the family and components of *fa'asamoa* work as protective factors, ensuring FHHs are not stigmatised, ostracised and discriminated against because of their circumstances:

In utilising a framework of *fa'asamoa* to explore the development situation and experiences of FHHs the importance of culture in framing their development experiences has been made clear. Leaving culture out of the equation may have meant that the importance of the *āiga* may have been underestimated. Without considering culture, the explicit nature of the *feagaiga*, especially the importance of harmony within relationships would not have been clear and the depth of meaning attributed to *fa'alavelave* would be unknown. The commitment that people have towards their family members, regardless of where they are, would also not be acknowledged so fully. Adding culture to the explanation has enabled a greater vision of what is inside and outside of the category FHHs. Drawing upon various aspects of Samoan culture has brought into question the way in which FHHs is used as if carrying a universally agreed upon truth which suggest them to be always disadvantaged or at risk.

Whilst there is certainly data to suggest family systems in Samoa and other areas of the Pacific are becoming weaker especially with an increase in the number of land disputes and misuse of family land, unemployment and conditions of poverty such as overcrowding, poor nutrition, crime, violence against women and children, and a lack of regard for the elderly. Given this weakening of family systems and the fact more marriages seem to be breaking down, more households are being independently headed women (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2005, p. 72). Moreover, there is also some evidence of women with dependents struggling to survive. "The growth of households headed by women is clear in all our countries, and many of these families are living in conditions below the poverty line" (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2005, p. 72). However, the experience of these women needs to be understood at a local level, rather than seeking to understand them from the perspective of the wider FHH literature, or from the directions taken and arguments put forth by global organisations, bilateral or multilateral development agencies who in most instances, attune themselves to global rhetoric on FHHs.

In a number of Pacific development documents it has been suggested that those living outside cultural frameworks, with restricted access to land, limited space for subsistence gardens, and few opportunities for generating a cash income, many of whom live in the urban environment, constitute a vulnerable section of society. Thus ongoing investigations into the situation and position of these population groups, regardless of whether they are FHHs, are required.

Should the Pacific see a rise in poor FHHs, female headship should not automatically be blamed; instead this poverty needs to be seen in light of the breakdown of cultural frameworks, because when cultural frameworks are intact, as I have shown in the case of Samoa, FHHs are not automatically at risk, poor, or disadvantaged. Any development strategy aimed at female headship would be better aimed at strengthening appropriate cultural frameworks, supportive traditional values, and in particular, the family, rather than focusing on FHHs. This is not to say that a blind eye is turned in favour of all that is customary, because it is also important not to romanticise culture (Jolly, 2002, p. 2). These frameworks can also create enormous inequities, especially for women. As argued by Yabaki and Norton (2004) "Cultural practices that do not enhance family and community cohesion should be scrutinised for modification or elimination" (p. 6).

If future development issues are to be addressed in an effective manner, each issue needs to be understood fully in relation to the cultural frameworks out of which it arises, because it is also within the cultural frameworks that solutions can be found. Any action taken to address these issues need to remain cognisant of the desire that Pacific people have for an approach to development that favours cultural identity, traditional values and family systems. Development in this instance needs to build on what works, and change what is not working.

Conclusion

In recounting the experiences of these FHHs this paper has revealed two important points. Firstly, how *fa'asamoa*, in attributing importance and value to all of the family members, has ensured FHHs are not stigmatised or discriminated against

and isolated as individuals or as a social group. Secondly, *fa'asamoa* and in particular the *feagaiga* as in the brother/sister relationship, and the importance of harmony in relationships guarantees the security and wellbeing of FHHs and any children. In considering the findings it would be safe to assume that FHHs in Samoa are not victims of their own economic, patriarchal or cultural circumstances, and that in most instances they are faring well, or at least as well as other members of their families.

This paper has therefore highlighted that culture is at the very core of understanding the experiences of FHHs in Samoa. It has also demonstrated just how important it is to understand any development issue from a local perspective as opposed to just accepting supposedly universal rhetoric about development. Local explanations thus far have illustrated that FHHs, are not an issue in Samoa, or at least not a major priority compared with other concerns. In examining the experience of FHHs in Samoa, this paper has emphasised the significance of specifics and particularities and therefore the importance of discovering what has importance locally. Seeking to understand ideas, experiences or problems as they are locally defined and explained and then adopting local solutions is fundamental to good development. This exploration of FHHs shows not only how important locality is in achieving accuracy in development thinking and planning, it also shows how important local knowledge acquisition is, if development is to be correctly imagined and successfully carried out. Although in saying this, the local does not exist in a vacuum, thus the local also needs to be positioned in relation to the global environment.

Appendix A. List of interviewees^{iv}

1. *Diana: Middle-aged woman with four children separated from her husband, two children reside with her husband (F)
2. Josef: Elderly *matai* (M)
3. *Lea: Housewife, living in husband's village (F)
4. *Leausa: Young separated woman with one child (F)
5. *Line: Older woman, husband located overseas with other family members (F)
6. *Maia: Never married mother with five children to differing fathers. No contact from the fathers (F)
7. Maria K: Samoan academic (F)
8. *Mary: Small business owner, informal sector Apia (F)
9. *Mose: Talking chief, retired school teacher (M)
10. Neli: Business woman and gender expert (F)
11. *Poema: Small business owner, informal sector Apia (F)
12. *Rika: Young woman with four children separated from her husband, with little significant contact (F)
13. Savalia: Savai'i research assistant (F)
14. Shon: CEO, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (F)
15. Soma: Elderly village pastor and *matai* (M)
16. *Tau: Married woman with three children physically separated due to migration (F)
17. Teresa: Young village woman (F)
18. *Tina: Sister to a young man who has a child outside of marriage (F)
19. Tui: Business woman (F)
20. *Yvette: Young, single, tertiary educated woman, who resides in Apia (F)

Endnotes

ⁱ Historically the institutionalised divisions of the *feagaiga* was expressed in many villages as the *o le nu'u o tama'ita'i* (Village of the Ladies) and the *o le nu'u o ali'i* (Village of the Gentlemen). These divisions differentiated the realm of influence of the *auluma* (daughters of the village) and the *ali'i* (chiefs) (Schoeffel, 1995, p. 98).

ⁱⁱ See Schoeffel (1995) for an in-depth account of the *feagaiga*, in particular the historical rights and responsibilities accorded to brothers and sisters in relation to property (p. 92).

ⁱⁱⁱ In the document 'A situational analysis of children and women in Western Samoa' the ritual is referred to as *fa'afaiilegā tama* (nurturing the offspring) (GoWS/UNICEF, 1996, p. 6).

^{iv} Interviewees are listed with regard to their name, and for the capacity by which they were interviewed. (F) denotes female and (M) denotes male. Use of * indicates that a pseudonym has been utilised. Interviewees were given a choice, those speaking in a professional capacity such as Shon: CEO: Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development generally chose to use their own name, whilst 45 interviews in total occurred only those referred to in the courses of this paper have been listed.

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