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Comparing and contrasting Tongan youth and service users' interpretations of mental distress

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Research output: Contribution to journal > Article > peer-review

**Overview**

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Abstract

Background: In Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ), Pacific people have a higher prevalence of mental illness compared with the general population. Tongan people have high rates of mental illness and tend to not use mental health services. The risk for mental illnesses also differs between those born in Tonga and those born in NZ. **Aim:** This study presented the views of New Zealand-dwelling Tongan youth and mental health service users regarding the meaning of mental distress. **Methods:** A Tongan cultural framework “talanoa” was used to inform the approach to the research. The youth talanoa group had seven participants and the service users talanoa group had twelve participants. Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. **Results:** Tongan youth and service users constructed mental distress from biopsychosocial perspectives and challenged traditional Tongan perspectives around being possessed by spirits, cursed and disruptions to social and spiritual relationships. **Conclusions:** The youth and service users construct mental distress from a biopsychosocial angle and there is a need for further information about Tongan perspectives of mental distress. This suggests that a biopsychosocial perspective is needed to ensure engagement by Tongan youth and service users in promoting mental health and alleviating distress.



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UN SDGs

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