HE TĀTAI WHETU KI TE RANGI, HE RANGATAHI KI TE KĀINGA

Rangatahi Māori pathways to safe, secure and affordable homes

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Abstract

Amid Aotearoa New Zealand's housing crisis, rangatahi Māori face unique challenges in accessing not just houses but kāinga—places that nurture whānau and cultural identity. Using Kaupapa Māori research, He Tātai Whetu ki te Rangi, he Rangatahi ki te Kāinga (2020–2024) explored rangatahi realities and aspirations for kāinga in Tāmaki Mākaurau. Findings reveal that rangatahi struggle to secure appropriate housing while navigating discrimination, intergenerational impacts of land alienation, and invisibility in housing policy. These systemic barriers cascade into effects on mental health, cultural identity and whānau formation. Despite these negative impacts on rangatahi well-being, research participants envisioned transformative futures in which safe, secure and affordable housing enables them to thrive. This research challenges policymakers to move beyond treating Māori housing as a subcategory of general provision. We argue for targeted housing support and resources to improve access to long-term, secure housing for rangatahi Māori and their whānau.

Keywords

Māori homeownership, Māori housing, Māori well-being Māori youth, rangatahi-led research, rangatahi Māori

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Introduction

Rangatahi Māori are a strong and vibrant part of the youth that make up the diverse population of Tāmaki Mākaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand. According to Auckland Council (2020), the median age for the Māori population in Tāmaki Mākaurau is 24.9 years, indicating that the Māori population is young compared with the total population, which has a median age of 34.7 years. This article is about rangatahi Māori and our aspirations to live in our ancestral homeland of Aotearoa as Indigenous youth. Based on a four-year research project titled He Tātai Whetu ki te Rangi, he Rangatahi ki te Kāinga: Rangatahi Pathways to Safe, Secure and Affordable Homes, we explore the realities of rangatahi Māori and the aspirations they have for kāinga in Tāmaki Mākaurau, Aotearoa. Hence, the phrase "He tātai whetu ki te rangi, he rangatahi ki te kāinga" encompasses the idea of rangatahi Māori looking upwards to the stars in pursuit of their aspirations while still being grounded in their kāinga. This concept acknowledges that despite the challenges they face, rangatahi have real aspirations and need support, guidance and pathways to achieve them. Despite the cultural aspirations we hold for rangatahi Māori, the current housing outlook is bleak.

Today, rangatahi Māori residing in Tāmaki Mākaurau are being priced out of home ownership, living longer in private rentals, ending up on extensive public housing waitlists, and experiencing concerning levels of housing deprivation and homelessness, leaving many unable to access adequate housing that meets their needs (Paul, 2022, 2023; Paul & Ratana, 2022; Stats NZ, 2020). Despite these trends, there has been little research surrounding rangatahi Māori and housing in Aotearoa. It remains unclear why rangatahi Māori are disproportionately affected by the housing crisis in Tāmaki Mākaurau and how their diverse, unique experiences, needs and aspirations shape their navigation of this challenging housing landscape. Research has not yet explored the various factors contributing to housing inequities for this population, nor has it sufficiently captured the voices and perspectives of rangatahi Māori themselves in understanding the complex issue.

This study examined the critical housing issues affecting the livelihoods of rangatahi Māori in Tāmaki Mākaurau and explored the hopes, dreams and visions for their futures. We define rangatahi Māori here as Māori aged between 17 and 35, encompassing late teenage years through early adulthood, a time that can include significant life transitions.

The overarching research question that frames this study is "What are the realities and aspirations of rangatahi Māori for kāinga, and how can rangatahi Māori be best supported to navigate pathways towards an affordable, safe and secure home in Tāmaki Mākaurau?" To explore this topic, we interviewed rangatahi Māori through a series of interviews and wānanga. This article provides an overview of this study, with a focus on six key themes that emerged from interviews. These are (a) rangatahi understanding of kāinga, (b) perceptions of rangatahi and housing, (c) housing support, (d) challenges and barriers, (e) housing and kāinga impact on rangatahi well-being, and (f) rangatahi aspirations for kāinga. The discussion section situates these findings within the broader context of existing literature and highlights the study's contributions and limitations.

Background

Aotearoa is grappling with a severe housing crisis that is disproportionately affecting rangatahi Māori, as evidenced by alarming rates of homelessness and rapidly declining homeownership among this demographic. This is particularly the case in Tāmaki Mākaurau. In this section, we briefly highlight the concerning trends to shed light on the severity of the housing crisis for rangatahi Māori.

Rangatahi homelessness

Rangatahi homelessness is a major concern, and growing in Aotearoa. The statistics on severe housing deprivation in Aotearoa reveal a deeply concerning pattern that disproportionately affects rangatahi, particularly those from Pacific and Māori communities (Amore et al., 2021). Nearly half of all individuals experiencing severe housing deprivation are under the age of 25, highlighting the urgent need to address this crisis and its effects on the younger generation. In a report prepared specifically for Manaaki Rangatahi ki Tāmaki Mākaurau Youth Homelessness Collective (Paul & Ratana, 2022), a scoping study about youth homelessness in Tāmaki Mākaurau, the ongoing legacy of this systemic destabilisation is evident in the disproportionate housing deprivation experienced by Māori young people and children, who are among the most severely affected by homelessness in Aotearoa. Māori homelessness is neither new nor an individual issue, but a result of deep-seated structural inequities that are rooted in the impacts of colonisation and historical events that devastated and disrupted traditional Māori

social structures, kinship networks and systems of support.

Rangatahi homelessness is a breach of te Tiriti o Waitangi. In May 2023, the Waitangi Tribunal released its report *Kāinga Kore: The Stage One Report of the Housing Policy and Services Kaupapa Inquiry on Māori Homelessness* (Waitangi Tribunal, 2023). The Waitangi Tribunal is a commission of inquiry that makes recommendations on claims brought by Māori concerning Crown actions that breach te Tiriti o Waitangi. The tribunal found major shortcomings in the Crown's response to the housing crisis facing rangatahi Māori; in particular, forcing rangatahi experiencing homelessness into adult systems, such as placing them alone in motels, often does more harm than good. The tribunal recognised the complete lack of data on the true extent of rangatahi homelessness. By failing to protect this group of rangatahi experiencing homelessness and collecting proper data to inform policies, the Crown has breached Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The tribunal clearly states:

> With specific regard to rangatahi homelessness, we find that the Crown has breached the principle of active protection in its failure to take vigorous action to protect such a vulnerable group. We also find that the Crown has breached the principle of good government through its failure to obtain adequate data on rangatahi homelessness. (Waitangi Tribunal, 2023, p. 195)

Overall, the tribunal's analysis shows the Crown's response has been deficient, requiring urgent and dedicated action tailored to rangatahi needs. The tribunal concluded the Crown must significantly improve its efforts to support rangatahi Māori experiencing homelessness.

Declining Māori homeownership

Along with the increase in Māori homelessness, Māori homeownership has significantly declined over the 20th and 21st centuries (Boulton et al., 2021; Cram & Munro, 2020; Ratana, 2023; Rout et al., 2021; Whitehead & Walker, 2021). Research by Thorns (1995) showed that in the early 1900s, Māori had relatively high homeownership rates, especially in urban areas. The 1936 census recorded that over 70% of Māori dwellings were occupied and owned by the residents, who mainly lived in rural areas. The proportion of Māori who owned their homes declined significantly over the following decade, dropping to 54.8% by 1945 (Goodyear, 2017). This correlates with the migration of Māori from rural areas to cities in search of work and education. Between 1945 and 1986, the population of Māori living in urban centres grew from 26% to nearly 80% (Meredith, 2015), causing a massive shift in social, economic and cultural structures for Māori (Ratana, 2023). During this period, Māori homeownership continued to drop as Māori moved to the cities, and many lived in slum-like conditions in inner city suburbs (Rout et al., 2021). By 1961, the rate of Māori homeownership had fallen below 50%, and by 1981 only 45.3% of dwellings classified as Māori were occupied and owned by the residents themselves (Goodyear, 2017). While there was a slight increase in homeownership during the mid-1980s due to the establishment of the Department of Māori Affairs loan scheme, which gave Māori access to cheaper, state-provided mortgages, the neoliberal reforms introduced by the government in the early 1990s caused a dramatic decline in homeownership across the entire New Zealand population and a steady increase in house prices (Ratana, 2023; Rout et al., 2021).

Declining rangatahi Māori homeownership

Today, rangatahi Māori homeownership rates in Tāmaki Mākaurau continue to decline (Whitehead, 2023). In 2006, 10% of rangatahi Māori aged between 17 and 35 owned their own home. By 2013, this rate had dropped to 8%; in 2018, it was just 4%. This level of homeownership is even more concerning when contrasted with rates for young Pākehā in the same age group over the same period. In 2006, homeownership rates for young Pākehā (15–34 years) in Tāmaki Mākaurau were higher than for rangatahi Māori at 18%. By 2013, the European rate dropped to 15%; by 2018, it was 10%. While there was still a significant decline in homeownership for European young people over this time, the disproportionate rates are concerning and indicate significant barriers to homeownership attainment for rangatahi Māori.

Homeownership is often seen as a step towards financial security, household wealth building, better life prospects for whānau and well-being outcomes (Eaqub & Eaqub, 2015; Herbert et al., 2013; Ratana, 2023). This inequality compounds with each passing year that rangatahi Māori continue to face disproportionate challenges and barriers to accessing housing and social benefits. Thus, urgent and meaningful policy responses and interventions are critical to close this gap between rangatahi Māori and young Pākehā (Paul, 2023). Understanding the specific challenges for rangatahi Māori and improving access to homeownership

should be seen as a priority area if Aotearoa is committed to honouring te Tiriti o Waitangi and equitable outcomes.

Methodology and methods

We adopted a Kaupapa Māori approach for this study emphasising a "by, for and with Māori" perspective (Henry & Pene, 2001; Pihama et al., 2002; G. H. Smith, 1997, 2003; L. T. Smith, 2012; Te One, 2018). The study aligns with key principles of Kaupapa Māori theory, including tino rangatiratanga, which promotes Māori autonomy and decision-making power to ensure Māori have control over their culture and aspirations (Bishop, 1999; G. H. Smith, 1997). Additionally, it incorporates "kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kāinga" (the principle of socio-economic mediation), aiming to address the disadvantages faced by Māori and support rangatahi to improve their social conditions, and ako Māori, which recognises the unique knowledge and teaching and learning practices of Māori (G. H. Smith, 1997).

This study is not only about rangatahi Māori but is also carried out by, for and with rangatahi Māori, allowing rangatahi to be the subjects, the researchers and the participants, and ensuring rangatahi Māori have control and autonomy over this research. We refer to this approach as "Kaupapa Rangatahi" because the study was undertaken by four rangatahi Māori researchers who themselves were experiencing the impacts of a lack of affordable and appropriate housing in Tāmaki Mākaurau and are navigating opportunities for better housing solutions not only for themselves but for their peers and respective communities.

Kaupapa rangatahi is a crucial aspect of this study's methodology, as it ensures that the research is not only relevant to rangatahi Māori but also empowers and enables them to take control of the research design, process and outcomes. In a study by Groot et al. (2017), the researchers built strong relationships with their participants, leading to more authentic and insightful data collection and analysis. In their research, they provide verbatim narratives from rangatahi Māori experiencing homelessness, who powerfully illustrate their lived experiences of precarity. Our study took this approach a step further by having rangatahi Māori researchers, who themselves are navigating housing challenges, conduct the research. This unique perspective allows for a deeper understanding of the issues faced by rangatahi Māori and fosters a collaborative and empowering Kaupapa Māori research environment. We argue that Kaupapa Rangatahi is important because of the unique space that rangatahi create to relate with one another, in this case, in Kaupapa Māori research.

This study employed a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis; the primary data collection methods were pūrākau (Lee, 2009) through individual kanohi ki te kanohi interviews (O'Carroll, 2013) and wānanga (Mahuika & Mahuika, 2020). This article presents the results from interviews (n = 12) and four wānanga (n = 23) undertaken with rangatahi Māori living in Tāmaki Makaurau, recruited through a whanaungatanga approach (Rewi, 2014). All participants self-identified as Māori and were aged between 17 and 35.

A collective thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Joffe, 2012) was employed to analyse the qualitative data, aligning with Kaupapa Māori principles. The research team, consisting of four Māori women, all identifying as rangatahi, are experienced in Kaupapa Māori research practices and approached the analysis through several wānanga to identify key themes from the collated data provided by rangatahi.

Pūrākau

This study employed pūrākau as one of the primary methods of gathering in-depth qualitative data through kōrero with rangatahi Māori participants. Pūrākau was adapted by Lee (2009) to build on the methods used within Kaupapa Māori research as a decolonising research practice to assist in the intergenerational transmission of histories, kōrero, events and tikanga Māori. Lee (2009) describes pūrākau as a narrative research method "to be constructed in various forms, contexts and media to better understand the experiences of our lives as Māori—including the research context" (p. 1). Similarly, Elkington (2011) describes how "*Pūrākau* allows practitioners to keep themselves nurtured in things *Māori* by using *Pūrākau* concepts to ensure a more aligned practice to *tikanga*" (p. 31). Aligned to a Kaupapa Rangatahi approach, a pūrākau method also ensures those who are the subject of research have a voice and agency over their stories (Elkington, 2011; Lee, 2005, 2009). Using this method of storytelling, one-on-one semi-structured interviews were undertaken to understand the housing experiences, needs and aspirations of rangatahi Māori. Interviews were conducted in a manner that prioritised whanaungatanga and tikanga Māori and ensured that they felt safe, seen, heard and valued. A koha was also

provided to reciprocate the knowledge shared and their contribution to the study.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted using open-ended questions, which enabled participants to expand on their pūrākau if desired. Each of the 12 individual interviews was approximately 60 minutes and was audio recorded and transcribed.

Wānanga

Wānanga were an important part of the methodological process and were specifically employed to gather in-depth qualitative data through kōrero from rangatahi participants. Mahuika and Mahuika (2020) describe wānanga as a Māori concept encompassing various aspects of knowledge sharing and education.

To explore the housing experiences and aspirations of rangatahi Māori in Tāmaki Mākaurau, four wānanga were conducted in August 2022. Each wānanga was 3 hours in length and was hosted at the Ngā Wai a te Tūī office in Tāmaki Mākaurau at Unitec (also known as Te Pūkenga). There were 23 rangatahi Māori participants in total: nine aged between 17 and 23, six between 24 and 29, and eight between 30 and 35. The rangatahi participants lived in diverse housing situations, including renting, boarding and home ownership. Of the 23 rangatahi participants, six were parents. The predominant method of recruitment was through social media; however, one wānanga was set aside specifically for those rangatahi who had experience with housing deprivation or homelessness and these rangatahi were recruited through an existing relationship with Manaaki Rangatahi. Most of this group identified as aged between 17 and 23.

The audio recordings from four wānanga sessions were transcribed. The team collectively engaged in an initial wānanga to discuss the data, share observations, and identify codes and overarching themes from the kōrero. Each member coded the full transcript dataset using a deductive approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reconvening in a second wānanga, the team collectively reviewed the coded data, discussed interpretations, and conducted further analysis to refine and define the overarching themes. An iterative process ensured the final themes represented rangatahi perspectives and experiences, encompassing areas such as whānau and community, belonging and identity, stability and security, home ownership and pride, as well as housing memories and emotional impacts. This collaborative approach to coding, discussion and refinement through wānanga allowed for Kaupapa Māori analysis adhering to Kaupapa Māori principles while applying robust thematic techniques.

Findings

The findings have been grouped across six key themes: exploring definitions of house, home and kāinga; negative stereotypes of rangatahi in housing; lack of awareness of existing housing support; systemic challenges and barriers; and impacts of housing on rangatahi well-being and future aspirations for kāinga.

Exploring definitions of house, home and kāinga

Rangatahi participants were asked to describe their understanding of a house, a home and a kāinga. Their responses showed they perceived distinct differences between these concepts. Almost all of the rangatahi agreed that a house is more physically oriented, a home is more emotionally oriented and a kāinga incorporates both, along with a specifically Māori worldview centred on whakapapa, whenua and tikanga. Furthermore, the concept of kāinga was also described as facilitating intergenerational knowledge transfer and providing a secure base for identity, offering stability and emotional security. One rangatahi captured this sentiment, stating

> Kāinga would be my roots for me. For me it's maybe being back home sort of thing. I would love to be able to go home one day, if I could uplift my work and take it up there, I'd be home tomorrow. (Tane, 31)

Kāinga were seen as places that create a sense of whānau, hapori and intergenerational connection, whereas a house was perceived as a structure or property that merely provides a roof or shelter. Houses were viewed as temporary, something occupants and tenants pass through without the ability to put down long-term roots, with little or no connection to identity. Generally, the rangatahi agreed that many houses lack a communal atmosphere or arrangements and instead promote individualism. In contrast, kāinga represented a sense of belonging, collective living, cultural roots and identity, especially for Māori relating to whenua Māori and ancestral lands.

Expanding on these distinctions, rangatahi participants argued that owning a home, compared with renting a house, instils greater pride, investment and the ability to actively shape the space

to reflect their Māori identity. These factors contributed to a preference for homeownership among rangatahi, reinforcing the notion that homes provide the space to create memories and emotional meaning over time through lived experiences shared with loved ones in the space. This is also due to the security that homeownership ensures, which allows young people to put down roots and create spaces that they connect to without the risk of having to move out. In contrast, because living in houses tends to be short term, they do not accrue this same sentimental value or security. In sum, the emerging central themes highlight that rangatahi see houses as structures and shelters, while kāinga cultivate socio-emotional ties, security, stability, pride and cultural identity through being with whānau, creating memories and lived experiences over time.

Negative stereotypes of rangatahi in housing

The overwhelming response from rangatahi is that they felt that they are negatively stereotyped in the housing sector. When participants were asked about how they think rangatahi Māori are perceived in the housing sector, it was evident that they were aware of and had many experiences of racism and discrimination when trying to access housing. The rangatahi described experiences of stereotyping, stigma and bias, negative narratives, being judged and undervalued, and being given conditional housing support as rangatahi. The pervasiveness of misconceptions and biases among housing service providers reveals the deeply entrenched barriers that rangatahi Māori face in accessing support. This observation resonates with our research team's firsthand experiences, underscoring the urgency of addressing these systemic inequities. There were several accounts from rangatahi describing their experience of discrimination during housing searches because they were Māori and young, making it a much harder challenge to access housing. One rangatahi participant noted:

> I'd make an inquiry online, or I'd speak to someone on the phone, in my phone voice, and I thought it was going really, really well, and then I'd meet them, and it would all change. Part of me felt like it was because I've got a white name, and I had a white voice, and then they'd meet me, and I was in a hoodie and jeans and was brown with my brown baby attached to my hip. I definitely felt like there were assumptions and stereotypes and stuff like that. (Wahine, 29)

This rangatahi experience of a positive initial phone interaction, followed by a dramatic change in attitude upon meeting in person, highlights the biases rangatahi face based on race, age and parental status. This rangatahi observed that her "white name" and "white voice" initially worked in her favour, underscoring the ingrained nature of these prejudices. It was evident that even when rangatahi participants had secure jobs, were financially stable and had whānau support, they still felt that being young and Māori negatively affected their experiences with real estate agents, landlords, bank employees and government agencies due to racist and ageist presumptions. The consistency of these accounts across rangatahi participants, who represented all tenure types, highlights the systemic nature of the problem and the urgent need for housing providers and support services to address and eliminate these biases.

Lack of awareness of existing housing support

While there could be more housing schemes and support that meet the diverse needs of rangatahi, a range of existing support systems, both formal and informal, are available. Several government agencies and housing organisations such as Kāinga Ora, Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry of Social Development, the New Zealand Housing Foundation (NZHF) and various iwi, hapū or marae support services offer assistance through emergency housing, transitional housing, homeownership schemes and grants. However, when we asked about the types of housing services and support rangatahi know of or access, we found a lack of awareness about what already exists for rangatahi trying to access housing in Tāmaki Mākaurau. One of the rangatahi knew only of Work and Income NZ (WINZ). Another participant was clear that there is not enough information available for rangatahi, stating:

> Hell no, not at all [not enough info]. I think that there needs to be more though, for people our age. When you go out, you don't really know where you are going. All you know is that you have to take a quote to WINZ and that's it. (Wahine, 19)

One participant who accessed the NZHF's shared equity scheme when buying her home said that "without the support of the Housing Foundation, or the Māori Trustee, we would never be able to purchase a house and have a mortgage, and especially for the price that we pay for our mortgage currently" (Wahine, 32). However, she

also noted that she only knew about the scheme because her sibling had bought a house through the NZHF in a previous development. Several rangatahi pointed out a need for more visibility of and education about organisations such as the NZHF that can help with the homeownership process.

Informal community and whānau networks are crucial sources of support. Friends, neighbours, church groups and extended whānau provide temporary accommodation, shared living arrangements and guidance in navigating the housing system. Additionally, financial literacy and positive role models who can pass on knowledge about homeownership, budgeting and the housing market were emphasised as essential factors. Rangatahi who have successfully obtained housing, be that rental, homeownership or otherwise, often had guidance from personal support, such as whānau members, mortgage brokers or dedicated WINZ staff who helped navigate the complicated application process. As one participant shared,

> Once we had learnt to go through a mortgage broker, we started to sort of learn things, and they sort of helped us along the way. Stuff that we were unsure about they were able to sort of clear up with us. That made the process so much easier having a mortgage broker for sure. (Tane, 31)

Having someone guide you through the complicated application processes makes housing access more achievable than trying to do so on your own. It was also evident that being guided by someone who was Māori helped them trust the system more, as one participant explained:

> The bonus was that the lady who was helping us from the Housing Foundation was Māori … having that kind of guidance is massive because it takes some stress out of it … there is all the discrimination stuff that comes with it, so when you have got someone Māori who is advocating for you in that space, it's huge. (Wahine, 32).

Systemic challenges and barriers

Systemic barriers and a lack of affordable housing options create significant challenges for rangatahi in securing stable and appropriate housing in Tāmaki Mākaurau. Participants indicated clearly that existing policies, processes and eligibility criteria have not been designed with Māori worldviews in mind and fail to accommodate the realities of rangatahi lives. This, combined with intergenerational poverty and economic exclusion stemming from colonisation, positions many

rangatahi at a disadvantage from the beginning. The housing process is described by rangatahi as difficult, and many expressed that safe, secure and affordable housing would not be possible without third-party assistance.

Rangatahi who are living in emergency and transitional housing, such as lodges, are in dire need of targeted support as most have little to no autonomy, which hinders their ability to feel safe and secure. One rangatahi shared her experience of living in a lodge, saying, "In a lodge, you have a visiting hour, you are not allowed any sleepovers, you are not allowed any visitors past 7, that's how bad it is" (Wahine, 19). She went on to describe the conditions in the lodge she is living in:

> I stay in a lodge full of adults who go through drugs, and who go through addiction … We have to share toilets; females and males share toilets in this lodge. We've tried to ask them if they could separate it for female and males, but they share toilets, so it's hard for me and my twin as young girls to be walking out of the lodges to go to the toilet at nighttime, or to go for a shower … People will keep us awake from night, all the way through morning 'cause you have people who do crack, you have people who drink overnight, and it's just not enough space for us, and it's not safe either. (Wahine, 19)

Her experience depicts how inappropriate and unsafe the majority of transitional housing options are for families, single parents and especially rangatahi, who are left vulnerable among older residents who are engaging in risky and sometimes dangerous activities. The challenges and barriers rangatahi experiencing housing insecurity face include, but are not limited to, inadequate access to appropriate housing, a lack of privacy and autonomy, and minimal connection to support networks, including whānau. Lodges such as the one described can have a severe impact on their sense of security, safety and future prospects.

Low incomes tied to precarious employment circumstances make covering housing costs difficult for some rangatahi. Unaffordable rents and bonds prevent access to rental properties, while challenges in saving for a deposit or securing a mortgage obstruct homeownership. Balancing the high cost of living in Tāmaki Mākaurau with other expenses such as childcare compounds housing insecurity. Many of the rangatahi spoke about the high cost of living, such as in this quote:

> Different stresses now, eh, with the cost of living. The cost of living is so bad, inflation, so bad. All the

misinformation that is out there as well is causing a lot of people to not get the right supports that they need. (Wahine, 30)

Gaps in financial literacy and planning capability also play a role. One rangatahi noted, "I didn't really know where to start, I didn't know about having a 10% deposit and using your KiwiSaver and all that kind of stuff, like all those little things, but they are big things" (Tane, 31). Rangatahi grapple with complex housing application processes, a lack of culturally appropriate housing options and unrealistic expectations that further complicate their housing search.

Urbanisation, as a result and part of the processes of colonisation, has also displaced many Māori from ancestral land connections and housing practices. Consequently, existing housing systems fail to accommodate rangatahi Māori cultural needs and realities. This disconnection drives distrust in systems and expertise that do not reflect lived experiences. One rangatahi shared:

I also know that it's so hard, it's so hard when you're stuck in the renting cycle, it's degrading. It was almost demoralising when you would go to house viewings so many times. On paper, you are like, "I am literally the perfect candidate, I will look after your house, it will be clean", and then time after time, they'd decline you, just for simple things. (Wahine, 32)

Ongoing racism, ageism and stereotyping from landlords, property managers, real estate agents and neighbours directly discourage rangatahi housing applications. Rangatahi participants reiterated that the stigmatisation they experience for being young and Māori often overrides qualifications or housing history. Relatedly, the lack of Māori in crucial decision-making positions further limits advocacy and cultural understanding.

The intimidating nature of navigating fragmented and disjointed systems may contribute to internalised self-doubt and whakamā for many rangatahi, eroding their self-confidence in communicating needs or challenging norms when facing discrimination. On the topic of government support, one participant said, "Work and Income make me feel like I have to grab what I can get" (Wahine, 24). Collectively, systemic exclusion, economic limitations, cultural gaps, racism and confidence barriers converge to deny rangatahi housing justice.

Impacts on rangatahi well-being

Having access to a safe, warm, secure kāinga provides rangatahi Māori with a stable home base that grounds their developing identity and creates a sense of belonging. Quality housing allows them to safely explore autonomy and independence, serving as a gateway to maturity and adulthood, when they can learn new skills and responsibilities. It also enables rangatahi to connect with whānau across generations and uphold central Māori values such as manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga. As one rangatahi shared at a wānanga through a group activity, "Our housing circumstances impact our ability to exercise our values around manaakitanga. Not having a lounge meant we couldn't host or look after our manuhiri" (Wānanga participant).

Secure and stable housing can support rangatahi well-being across spiritual, physical, mental and relational domains. During the wānanga, in particular, rangatahi discussed the need for well-designed homes and kāinga that promote health through adequate space, light, heating and access to our natural environment. They also spoke of how homelessness and insecure, low-quality housing can negatively impact mental health, intensify socio-economic hardship and inhibit positive development: "The issues I'm having is overcrowding, cluttered spaces, different people means different rules" (Wānanga participant). Overcrowding contributes to the spread of illness, while lengthy commutes can limit employment, recreational and educational opportunities. The financial stress of unaffordable rent and inadequate transport access also takes a toll. Rangatahi cannot fully activate their potential and talents without housing that supports their needs, values and well-being.

Future aspirations for kāinga

Rangatahi Māori have a strong desire for secure, affordable housing that allows them to live according to their Māori cultural values and practices. Homeownership, particularly on ancestral lands, is seen as a pathway to achieving this aspiration, as expressed in this quote: "I would want to have a house, own my own home, my own land" (Wahine, 19). Generally, there was a strong desire to establish papakāinga that fosters intergenerational living, a connection to whakapapa and the revitalisation of tikanga in everyday life. As one rangatahi from the wānanga stated, "More papakāinga. Bring back traditional ways of living, intergenerationally, increase in youth homeowners" (Wānanga participant).

Furthermore, kāinga aspirations encompass the creation of sustainable, self-sufficient living environments that reflect Māori philosophies and needs. This includes incorporating elements such as māra kai, rongoā, green spaces and facilities that accommodate whānau gatherings. As one rangatahi articulated, "I think the most important thing would be whānau and making sure our whānau feel welcome and comfortable in our whare, and having enough space for everyone, having enough food, and that's why I thought about gardens and stuff" (Wahine, 21). There is also a strong desire for housing solutions that promote financial literacy, collaborative communities and innovative pathways to home ownership, such as "rent-to-own schemes" (Tane, 30). Overall, these aspirations reflect a pursuit of mana motuhake and the ability to shape living environments that nurture Māori cultural identity, sustainable practices, and whānau and collective well-being.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that rangatahi Māori have a deep understanding of kāinga, which extends beyond physical structures to encompass emotional connections, intergenerational relationships, and cultural ties to whenua and tikanga. These findings have significant implications for addressing the housing challenges faced by rangatahi Māori in Tāmaki Mākaurau and highlight the urgent need for systemic change to dismantle the deeply entrenched challenges and barriers they encounter. The conceptualisations of kāinga by rangatahi align with the descriptions provided by Tapsell (2022) and Lee-Morgan et al. (2021), who emphasise the deep connections Māori have to their ancestral homelands, the importance of living spaces that support cultural ways of living, and the intergenerational and communal aspects associated with traditional Māori settlement patterns and papakāinga. These findings contribute to answering the question posed in the introduction regarding rangatahi Māori understandings of kāinga and its significance in their lives. Furthermore, the pūrākau from rangatahi participants provide evidence of the discrimination, stereotyping and bias they face when seeking warm, safe and secure housing. These findings shed light on the systemic barriers that perpetuate housing inequalities for rangatahi Māori and underscore the need for comprehensive strategies to address these challenges.

Additionally, the broader findings suggest that rangatahi Māori navigate complex systems without adequate cultural support or guidance from banks, real estate professionals and other commercial housing stakeholders. These financial literacy challenges, compounded by systemic discrimination, create additional barriers that prevent rangatahi from accessing homeownership and secure rentals. The disconnection between mainstream financial processes and te ao Māori approaches to collective wealth and whānau-centred decision-making further exacerbates these challenges, thereby highlighting the need for dedicated housing navigators. Navigators can bridge the financial and cultural gaps while advocating for and supporting rangatahi within commercial systems.

However, the limitations of this study leave some of the big questions unanswered. While the findings provide valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of rangatahi Māori, further research is needed to fully understand the scale and ramifications of the housing challenges and barriers they face. Future studies should aim to quantify the prevalence of these issues, further explore their far-reaching impacts on the lives of rangatahi Māori and identify evidence-based Kaupapa Māori interventions and solutions that can be implemented at a structural level. Extensions of this study's results could include longitudinal research to track the long-term outcomes of rangatahi who face housing challenges, as well as Kaupapa Māori evaluations of existing housing policies and programmes to assess their effectiveness in addressing the needs of rangatahi Māori specifically.

Additionally, future research could explore rangatahi-led innovative housing models (building on the scoping study by Paul & Ratana, 2022) incorporating Māori values and cultural practices, such as papakāinga, to provide culturally responsive solutions to the housing crisis. In essence, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on housing challenges faced by rangatahi Māori and highlights the importance of understanding and addressing these issues within a Kaupapa Māori theoretical framework and through a te ao Māori lens. By prioritising the voices and experiences of rangatahi Māori, this research lays the foundation for future work that can inform policy and practice to ensure that all rangatahi Māori have access to warm, safe and secure kāinga across Aotearoa.

Conclusion

This study's findings reveal harsh realities for rangatahi Māori seeking safe, affordable, secure housing in Tāmaki Mākaurau. Systemic barriers, a lack of accessible housing support and intergenerational

disadvantage all pose substantial obstacles to kāinga stability and ownership. However, rangatahi Māori maintain strong aspirations to establish safe and secure homes for themselves, their whānau and future generations.

This study underscores the urgent need for dedicated housing navigators and support programmes explicitly tailored to rangatahi Māori in the Tāmaki Mākaurau housing market. Targeted policy and community action must confront systemic disadvantages around access to credit, home loans and wealth transfers. We call for government, Māori, iwi, housing organisations and whānau to actively collaborate in establishing and funding pathways and programmes focused on realising rangatahi Māori housing aspirations in Tāmaki Mākaurau and nationwide. Intergenerational collaboration on closing wealth gaps underpinning housing barriers is foundational. Rangatahi Māori deserve focused efforts to fulfil their kāinga dreams and form stability for their whānau. The time for incremental measures has passed—assertive and transformative change led by, for and with Māori is critical to enabling housing stability and security for current and future generations.

Acknowledgements

Glossary

ako	to learn, study, instruct, teach, advise
Aotearoa	New Zealand
hapori	community
hapū	subtribe
iwi	tribal kin group
kāinga	homes, housing
kaitiakitanga	guardianship; cultural and financial guardianship; accountability
kanohi ki te kanohi	face-to-face
Kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, Māori principles, Māori customary practice
koha	gift, token
kōrero	discussion, conversation, narrative, story, statement
mana motuhake	sovereignty
manaakitanga	hospitality, kindness, generosity, support
manuhiri	visitor, guest
māra kai	food garden, cultivation
marae	tribal meeting grounds
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
papakāinga	traditional Māori communal land and housing, communal living arrangements
pūrākau	myth, ancient legend, story
rangatahi Māori	Māori youth, young Māori
rongoā	traditional healing plants
Tāmaki Mākaurau	Auckland
tane	man
te ao	the world
te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi
tikanga	correct procedure, custom, cultural protocol
tino rangatiratanga	leadership, sovereignty
wahine	woman
wānanga	forum, seminar, conference, cultural gathering
whakamā	shame
whakapapa	genealogy, lineage, descent
whānau	extended family, family group
whanaungatanga	relationship, kinship, sense of family connection, networks and relationships
whare	house
whenua	land, homeland, placenta

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