Genograms

Vivienne Kennedy

Abstract: Genograms are a visual representation of whakapapa (genealogy) similar to that of a family tree. Constructed of various shaped symbols, and colour-coded lines, genograms can depict a variety of information such as gender, age, ethnic origin, health status, education achievements, as well as different types of relationship such as family, social and emotional relationships. Health therapists, clinicians, social workers and others in various fields use genograms to track family history and to look for recurring patterns of illness and behaviour that interrupt relationships. Development of genograms in terms of researching with Māori collectives involves storytelling from multiple perspectives through collaboration with whānau, drawing on the principles of whakamana – privileging our voices – and tino rangatiratanga – self-determination – within a framework of whakapapa. This article seeks to enable the reader to understand what a genogram is and to outline the potential value of genograms as a tool: (a) to depict the connectedness of whānau, no matter the context; (b) to assist to inform policy about whānau more accurately than through the aggregation of individual data; (c) that is compatible with a Kaupapa Māori approach to research with whānau; and (d) that can be used by providers, agencies, researchers, individuals, communities and whānau to support whānau ora (wellness).

Keywords: genograms; whakapapa framework; whānau collectives research

Introduction

A genogram is a tool for tracking family history and relationships. It provides a detailed pictorial display of a family or group that goes beyond a family tree in that it contains information about genealogy and different types of relationships – familial and not. A genogram depicts inter-generational family maps to provide a picture of what is occurring across families and across generations, providing a broad framework with which to view family, emotional and social relationships.

Monica McGoldrick, a family therapist, together with colleagues at the Multicultural Family Institute (2008) of New Jersey created the genogram as a diagnostic tool, and as a method for helping families recognise patterns in their past and present. Genograms were popularised by Monica McGoldrick and Randy Gerson with the publication of their first book in 1985, Genograms in Family Assessment. Leading up to publication, the North American Primary Care Research Group in collaboration with leading family therapists had agreed on symbols and a standardised format. Prior to this there had been no generally agreed upon format (Smith 1997, cited in McGoldrick, Gerson, & Petry, 2008, p. 31). McGoldrick and her colleagues realised that the tool was becoming more widely used and that the book would provide a practical guide on the use of genograms, showing the growing diversity of family forms and patterns and the application of genograms in clinical practice.

Genograms have been used for the last four decades as a tool for mapping family patterns and the psychological factors that interrupt relationships. They allow a practitioner to identify and understand repetitive patterns of behaviour and to recognise hereditary tendencies; hence genograms are popular with healthcare professionals in areas such as social work, psychology, psychiatry, genealogy, genetic research, education and many more fields. Other information may be contained in a genogram depending on what people want to know; for example, if the purpose of a genogram is to map the medical history of a family the genogram

might include information such as hereditary patterns, genetics and psychological patterns Clinical uses of genograms include gaining insight into clients' psyche (Watchel, 1982); as a data gathering device on individuals and families (Hartman, 1977; Jolly, Froom & Rosen, 1980; Kramer, 1985; Milhorn, 1981; Rogers & Durkin, 1984; Sproul & Gallagher, 1982) as an assessment tool (Hartman, 1977; Kramer, 1985; McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985) and as a training tool (Bahr, 1990).

As a clinical record genograms provide an effective overview that allows a person who is not familiar with the family to attain a lot of information about them in a very short time, thus enabling the clinician to scan for potential problems and resources. This information can be updated to provide a chronological record of key developments (McGoldrick, et al., 2008).

Since the publication of McGoldrick and Gerson's first book in 1985, the genogram and symbols have been expanded and modified based on feedback and developments in the field, reflecting the growing and widespread use of genograms. Two further editions of the book have been published to reflect these modifications. McGoldrick et al. (2008) point out that genograms are a work in progress, particularly as thinking about family context evolves. Technology is also evolving; for example, computerised programs are able to represent very complex genogram formats. The development of various types of genogram such as cultural, socio-economic, ethical and career/work genograms is further evidence of the development and broader use of the tool over time.

Of particular interest for this study will be approaches that enable us to expand our understanding of how we can carry out research with whānau (families) that capture the fullness and connectedness that exists with whānau, whether they be contained within a household or a community, no matter the context. The genogram is an instrument that assists us to look at the whakapapa (family tree) of whānau according to their realities. If used in tandem with eco-maps, which provide an aerial view of the external influences on whānau, some context is provided as to the picture we are viewing.

In terms of theoretical understandings, the method is widely used as a framework for understanding family patterns by tracking family history and relationships. In whānau ora, wellness for an individual is not created in isolation; hence the relevance of the genogram which provides a holistic view of individuals as part of a community or collective of people. This view is supported by McGoldrick et al. (2008) who view families as "inextricably intertwined in their lives and in death, and views all members of society as ultimately connected". Moreover, Freire argues that "No one goes anywhere alone, even those who arrive physically alone…We carry with us the memory of many fabrics, a self soaked in our history and our culture" (cited in McGoldrick et al., 2008, p. 14). Similarly Rigazio-DiGilio, Ivey, Kunkler-Peck and Grady (2004, p. 5) contend that "the individual develops within a family, within a community setting, and within a societal and cultural milieu."

Application

Genograms are created through the gathering of information, which is essentially family members telling their story. The drawing of the genogram conforms to a set of rules in order that users all have the same understanding and, therefore, attain a similar interpretation of the genogram. A clinician can gain multiple views by interviewing multiple family members, and they should be scanning for patterns that are repeated, thereby helping families to avoid repeating unfortunate patterns or transmitting them into the future (McGoldrick et al., 2008b).

The genogram is constructed of symbols, squares for males, and circles for females that are tailored to include information such as name, date of birth (and date of death if applicable). Colour-coded lines and various symbol shapes define different types of relationship such as

family relationships, emotional relationships and social relationships, allowing the illustration of complex situations. These are illustrated in Figure 1 and then discussed.
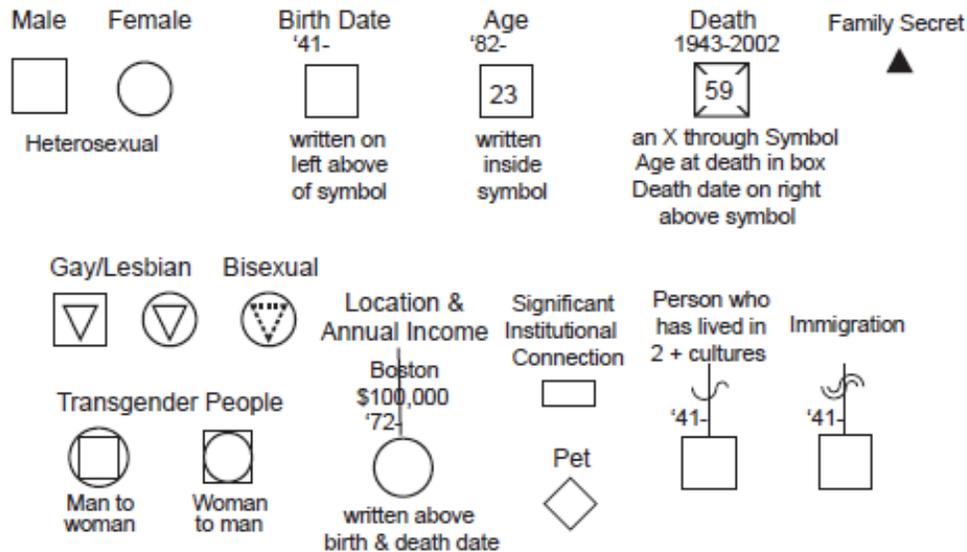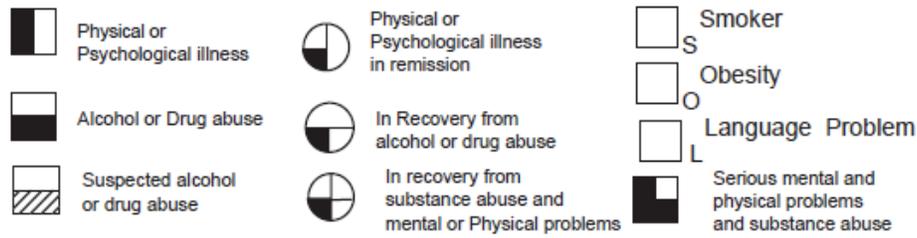

Figure 1. Standard symbols for genograms
From Explaining Genogram Symbols (E-booklet) by the Multicultural Family Institute. Downloaded from www.multiculturalfamily.org on 08 July 2009. Reproduced with permission.

The symbols above are some examples of information we can become immediately aware of information about individuals through a glance at a genogram – gender, age, death, sexual orientation, income and ethnic origin(s).

A genogram using the medical symbols in Figure 2 can be useful in therapy to record patterns of illness or addiction in individuals and between family members, from which a family therapist can can make an assessment as to interventions to assist the family.

The symbols in the lower diagram of Figure 2 denoting interactional patterns provide a view of how individuals relate emotionally to one another.

Symbols Denoting Addiction, and Physical or Mental Illness

Physical or Psychological illness

Physical or Psychological illness in remission

Smoker
S

Obesity
O

Alcohol or Drug abuse

In Recovery from alcohol or drug abuse

Language Problem
L

Suspected alcohol or drug abuse

In recovery from substance abuse and mental or Physical problems

Serious mental and physical problems and substance abuse

Symbols Denoting Interactional Patterns between People

"spiritual" connection

Close

Distant

Close-Hostile

Focused On

Fused

Hostile

Fused-Hostile

Cutoff

Cutoff Repaired

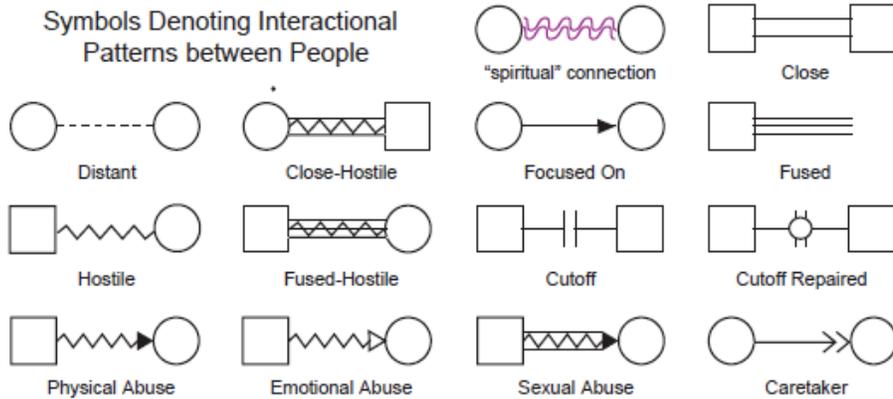Physical Abuse

Emotional Abuse

Sexual Abuse

Caretaker

Figure 2. Standard genogram symbols for issues, and interaction between people
From "Explaining Genogram Symbols" (E-booklet) by the Multicultural Family Institute downloaded from www.multiculturalfamily.org on 08 July 2009. Reproduced with permission.
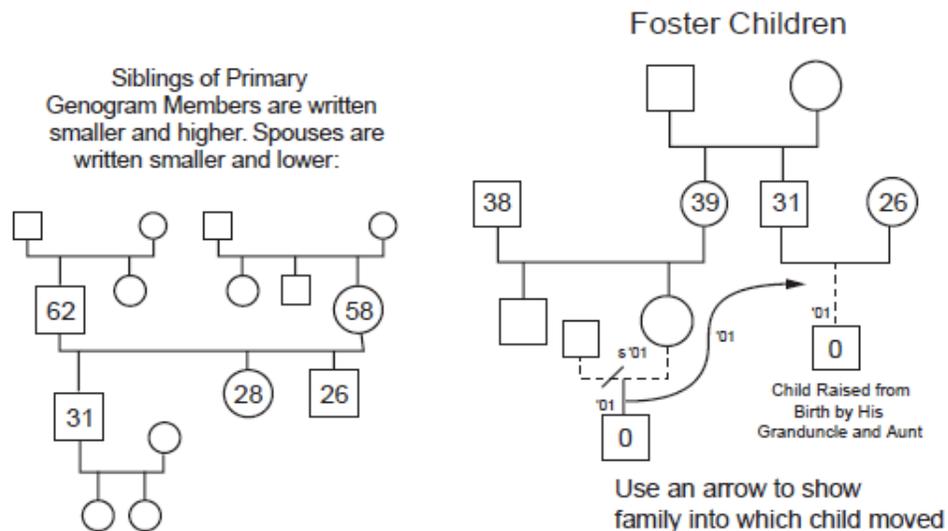
Foster Children

Siblings of Primary Genogram Members are written smaller and higher. Spouses are written smaller and lower:

62

58

38

39

31

26

31

28

26

'01

'01

0

s '01

'01

Child Raised from Birth by His Granduncle and Aunt

0

Use an arrow to show family into which child moved

Figure 3. Examples of genograms for family units
From Explaining Genogram Symbols (E-booklet) by the Multicultural Family Institute downloaded from www.multiculturalfamily.org on 08 July 2009. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 3 provides two examples of family genograms; both genograms depict three generations; the second genogram depicts the separation of a couple in 2001, with the child of that union being fostered by his grandaunt and uncle in the same year, being the year the child was born.

Genograms commence with the index person(s) or identified patient(s) (IP) – the person central to the genogram, who is usually identified by a double line. People are connected according to their relationship and/or connection to the IP as shown in the examples above. Other data that may be included are education, occupation, major life events, chronic illnesses, social behaviours and the nature of family relationships, emotional relationships and social relationships. Professionals in healthcare may include information on disorders running in the family such as alcoholism, depression, diseases, alliances, and living situations. Genograms can vary significantly because there is no limitation as to what type of data can be included (GenoPro, 2009). The nature of the tool is such that genograms can be used in any arena to map the following:

Family relationships

Family relationships are depicted through lineage; that is, how family members are related to one another within and across generations. Genograms can illustrate whether people are married, divorced, engaged, cohabiting, have same sex partners, etc. If a medical context is required then health matters such as chronic illnesses, diseases and disorders are also recorded so that familial linkages can be explored.

Social relationships

Social relationships link individuals who are not related to one another, such as neighbours, educators or social workers. Information such as alliances, living situations, demographics, education, occupations and major life events portray the extent of their social relationships.

Emotional relationships

Emotional bonds between the individuals who make up a family or social unit can also be depicted in genograms. This information is useful to social workers and family therapists to assess the level of influence, cohesiveness and/or conflict within a family or a group and to evaluate what interventions might help reduce dysfunction or problems within families.

Genogram examples

An example genogram from the GenoPro website (http://www.genopro.com/genogram/examples/) is a fictional breast cancer study involving six families. In this example a three-generational genogram was created for the family of six women born in the early 1900s, all of whom were diagnosed with breast cancer before the age of 50. The genogram illustrates the incidence of breast cancer and ovarian cancer in the descendants of these women through the use of medical symbols tagged to the genealogical depiction. Researchers can add important details, such as the age of diagnosis, the age at death, the type of cancer, the location of the cancer (left, right, bilateral), et cetera, and display them on the genogram to facilitate the interpretation of this information.

Another example provided by GenoPro (refer to http://www.genopro.com/genogram) depicts emotional relationships:

- André was physically abused by his father. This violent behaviour was passed on, and André later emotionally abused his own son Daniel. Daniel had a fused relationship with his mother. He now has a close relationship (friendship) with Jean and his younger brother Jean-Claude.
- Hélène was very close (intimacy) to her mother in-law.

- Lisa and her first husband are estranged (cut off). Lisa neglected her son Mike, and now Mike is violent towards his girlfriend.
- Anne is focused (obsessed) on her younger brother Benoit.
- Jean-Claude is indifferent (apathetic) to his half-brother Mike.

The benefit of this tool is to provide a visual illustration – an immediate overview of relationships, patterns and influences of family collectives not only within households, but also within generations or communities or collectives of family members.

A drawback to use of the genogram may depend on the size and complexity of the relationships to be portrayed, and/or the nature of the contexts; the graphic could be complex, requiring some advanced knowledge or explanation of the symbols by those creating the genogram, and those needing to understand the information displayed. Resources may be required for training to ensure quality and consistency if there is to be continued and extensive use of the tool, in the development of the tool, its application and use and analysis of information.

Genograms can be drawn by hand, by using Microsoft Word or by using software. Software allows the user to organise and display vast amounts of information; some software facilitates the creation of reports containing analyses of the stored information. Links to sites that provide software located through the Google search engine are:

- www.genopro.com/genogram
- www.SmartDraw.com
- www.genogram.org
- www.interpersonaluniverse.net

Kaupapa Māori analysis

The advantage of genograms is that they are suitable for application in a multiplicity of areas and arenas other than in healthcare. They can be utilised with various groups of people including indigenous, minority and/or marginalised groups in sectors such as justice, education and in community/whānau/hapū/iwi development, as a tool to provide a view of the relationships and connectedness of individuals within whānau no matter the kaupapa. Like any tool, genograms have been adapted over time for use for various purposes.

The genogram is an instrument to depict whakapapa (genealogy), but a genogram is more than just a family tree; whakapapa tracks Māori connections back to Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother, the core or the centre of life for Māori through unwrapping the generational layers of bloodlines from the present. In a research context, whakapapa can be used to track bloodlines, history, trends and influences. Whakapapa can be seen as a way of understanding relationships and making connections, and this is why establishing the links are so important when working with Māori. Not only do connections relate to bloodlines, but furthermore, whakapapa stems right back to the beginning of life when there was the Nothingness – Te Kore; then Rangi – the Sky Father – and Papa – the Earth Mother – were separated by their son Tāne Mahuta, who then breathed life into clay moulded to the form of a woman and thus humankind was created and henceforth was Māori's connection to the land. Thus whakapapa connects Māori to all that exists from the ancient beginnings associated with the spirit world to the connection with the land, sea and air and, therefore, Māori cannot be considered in isolation from any parts of its components, Consequently Māori view their world as holistic – relating to all that is. As Cram asserts, "Whakapapa is the very foundation of being Māori, it is the ultimate and indisputable test of heritage" (Cram et al., 2000, pp. 4–5).

Genograms are a tool that can be utilised to map Māori collectives facilitating a visual display of relationships within collectives beyond the household. They are instruments that can assist in capturing the relationships, connectedness and perhaps complexities of interconnections within collectives, thereby providing a better understanding of the realities of whānau. Thus the value in genograms is that they provide a whakapapa of Māori connectedness, hence genograms' alignment with Kaupapa Māori principles and practice. It is felt that genograms will allow Māori to tell the story of their connectedness, and in peeling away the layers of whakapapa, whānau will be able to see how it was they came to be in the present moment.

The process of developing a genogram is that individuals or whānau tell their story, which is then translated into the genogram diagram, providing the whānau and researcher with a visual perspective of the whānau realities and patterns that lie within. Māori have a history of story-telling; before the missionaries brought the written word to Aotearoa New Zealand, whakapapa was passed from generation to generation orally. Story-telling relates to the principle of whakamana – privileging our voices, enhancing our esteem through telling our stories as we want them to be told; and tino rangatiratanga – self-determination – we are guided by our tīpuna (ancestors), those who have gone before us, as we are also guided by those who are with us in the present day and those for whom we wish to ensure a brighter future. The process of genogram development and ensuing discussion further supports Kaupapa Māori principles of whaikoha – treating everyone with due respect; and whakawhiti whakaaro – encouraging debate/discussion from which arises validation and affirmation of what has been shared. These are just some examples of effecting Kaupapa Māori principles within a framework of whakapapa (Kennedy, Paipa & Pipi, 2009).

Through the process of preparing and presenting the findings of a genogram awareness and insight are developed for those leading the process, and for those receiving the intervention, leading eventually to healing and ultimately to whānau wellness. The cultural genogram, a tool for promoting cultural sensitivity and awareness also follows a similar process.

The ensuing discussion shows how the process of genogram development aligns with Kaupapa Māori practice. Smith, Fitzsimons and Roderick (1998, p. 14) argue that Kaupapa Māori is regarded as a theory of social change that is potentially the most effective instrument developed to date because:

- It has the capacity to address Māori social, economic and educational crises;
- It is derived, in part, from other intervention mechanisms but transcends them in its ability to identify particular structures and processes important for success;
- The notion of whānau is a core feature of Kaupapa theory;
- Kaupapa Māori theory explains the social change or intervention elements that are common across many different sites of Māori cultural struggle including within the educational sites of te kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa māori;
- The notion of whānau is central to Kaupapa Māori knowledge, pedagogy, discipline and curriculum;
- Its rationale is derived from the Treaty of Waitangi.

The genogram is being examined as a possible tool to capture the fullness and interconnectedness of Māori. As such it would subscribe to all but the last of the bullet notes above.

Table 1. Elements of Kaupapa Māori (Smith 1997, cited in Smith et al., 1998, p. 31)

Kaupapa Māori principle	Matrix element
Tino Rangatiratanga	Ownership
Taonga Tuku Iho	Aspirations
Ako Māori	Pedagogy
Kia Piki ake i ngā Raruru o te Kainga	Mediation
Whānau	Family
Kaupapa	Vision

The list of Kaupapa Māori principles at Table 1 are in keeping with the processes that the genogram allows – Māori take ownership of the process through privileging their voices – ensuring their story is told their way. As McGoldrick et al. (2008, p. 66) point out, "We always need to conduct interviews in ways that are sufficiently congruent with the family's beliefs [so] that they can connect with the recommended interventions."

Ako Māori is the principle that culturally preferred pedagogy will have a place in terms of Māori connectedness to culture and methods of teaching and learning that are inherently Māori or preferred by Māori. Methods should be in a preferred style of learning in order to connect and engage with Māori.

Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kainga is the principle of socio-economic mediation (Rangahau, 2009) and asserts the need to mediate and assist in the alleviation of negative pressures and disadvantages experienced by Māori communities. This principle asserts a need for Kaupapa Māori research to be of positive benefit to Māori communities, which is the purpose of the method; whānau is central to this kaupapa as it is a core element of Kaupapa Māori. The development of information from story-telling into a visual display is a likely method of engagement with Māori. The outcome from use of the method is to provide a vision of what whānau can achieve – whānau ora.

The genogram as a method aligns with Kaupapa Māori principles and practices by taking a collective approach to looking at whānau, which goes beyond the narrow approach utilised thus far – that of deriving populations from the aggregation of individual data. Viewing whānau as a collective as determined or depicted by whānau will be the value of this method, which in turn will inform policy more accurately than through the aggregation of individual data. The method allows for tracking (Olsen, Dudley-Brown, & McMullen, 2004) of whānau as collectives rather than as household lots of individuals. This method is compatible with a Kaupapa Māori approach to research whānau.

An analysis of the method's potential to inform policy
A quote by Ogbonnaya (cited in Rigazio-DiGilio et al., 2004, p. xi) promotes the African worldview regarding the holistic connection of an individual to their community, maintaining that "the sickness of the individual [or family] is symptomatic of a deeper communal malaise". This being the case the advantage of the genogram is its ability to show the bigger picture in one glance that maps the reality of whānau and their connectedness across households and communities. It is a tool that depicts a holistic view of whānau, hence its appropriateness and usefulness to inform policy. The genogram is a whakapapa framework that enables policy-makers to see the bigger picture – the extent to which support networks are in place for whānau, and what components are still required to assist or ensure whānau have the increased ability to achieve wellbeing for themselves. Utilising the whakapapa

framework as an analytical tool, and by asking the right questions to ensure the fullness or complexities of their stories is shared, will assist policy-makers to make improved decisions for effective policy for whānau.

Pre-testing with whānau

The research team decided upon the subject matter of gardens as a topic for pre-testing with whānau that was meaningful and relevant to many whānau and was not a contentious issue. The researcher raised the topic with her father, whom she knew to be an avid gardener of rīwai Māori (Māori potatoes). As they were travelling together in the car for some distance with other members of the whānau the researcher asked the kaumātua (elder) about his process for growing rīwai; about his methods, tools, what preparation he did to ready the soil for planting, how he knew when to plant, the methods of care and tending to his crops, and harvesting and storage. The researcher, being a close family member also knew the personal circumstances of the kaumātua, which enabled her to provide context to the genograms and ecomaps, which were subsequently developed. Ecomaps are graphic depictions that provide an aerial view of the relationships and influences between individuals, families or collectives, and their ecological environment, including their social and support networks. (Refer to the Ecomaps article in this issue (Kennedy, 2010)). The opportunity to incorporate an ecomap into the whānau pre-testing stage of the genogram tool was serendipitous.

Rīwai Māori

The kaumātua's māra rīwai (potato gardens) are his passion. Since retiring well over two decades ago the garden has been a principal focus, requiring his attention at the critical times of the year. He lives in urban Auckland; he and his wife planted and tended beautiful flower gardens when they first settled in Auckland many decades ago. There is very little lawn, as what land that was not used for flowerbeds has mostly been set aside for planting rīwai. The kaumātua's diary entries convey his single-minded focus and hours of effort he puts into the preparation of the soil as soon as winter has passed, and his frustration if sometimes the weather prevents progress. The gardening is a form of exercise for him as well as a form of pleasure – it nurtures his reconnection with the soil, with Papatūānuku, and also with those who have passed – his values, beliefs and rituals are those that he learned from watching and working with his parents and grandparents. In the old days vegetable gardens provided one of the main forms of sustenance – whānau grew all their vegetables, enough to last them the year, and only purchased the bare necessities such as flour and sugar. Gardening is the kaumātua's labour of love, and the fruits of his efforts (the rīwai Māori) are what he provides to his whānau and others, such as friends and service providers, as his way of showing his love and appreciation for them – aroha me manaaki tangata. The rīwai provide him with sustenance through the year, but the real joy he gets is from sharing his produce; most of those who are in receipt of his produce are aware that they have received a prized gift because rīwai Māori are not readily available in the shops. Those who know him really well are aware of the effort that has gone into producing rīwai and therefore they are very appreciative of that also.

All this information has been included here to provide context to the development of the genogram and ecomap. The diagrams are built around a central figure; however, the diagrams depict the influence and networks that emanate to and from this person; a view is provided of the wider whānau and other networks, which is the reality of working with whānau. This person's health and wellbeing is his individual responsibility when viewed in terms of maintaining his independence, but his wellbeing is also an interest shared by his whānau, near and far, who reciprocate the whanaungatanga (sense of family connection and kinship obligations), and manaakitanga (hospitality, congeniality) in different ways in varying degrees. The kaumātua's purposefulness is intertwined with the lives of others, so a holistic view that includes his wider environment portrays what influences his health and wellbeing; it

is not just one or two things – it is a whole bevy of things. Of note, the genogram developed for this pre-testing stage depicts that the energy does not just flow one way from the kaumātua to others; the energy flow is reciprocated although the corresponding benefits may not be immediately evident.

Genogram

The researcher then utilised this information and what she knew of the whānau, social and professional relationships the kaumātua had with others in terms of his rīwai Māori, to draw a genogram. The genogram depicted the kaumātua's close familial relationships; it noted the year his wife had passed away; that he has three daughters – two of whom have offspring and that the daughters and their children reside nearby. These two daughters are his immediate and closest support system. The third daughter lives a long way away, but is in regular contact and sometimes comes to stay. These people are regular recipients of the produce from the kaumātua's garden.

Ecomap

The researcher then developed an ecomap that circumvents the genogram to show other people who are recipients of the kaumātua's rīwai and therefore his appreciation, affection and/ or gratitude. These people are part of the kaumātua's extended whānau, and social and professional network systems, who provide an exchange of energy in various ways. For example, whānau who maintain their familial connections; friends, acquaintances and neighbours who provide companionship and keep an eye out for the kaumātua; and the various health professionals who provide an array of services – all receive a koha of rīwai at some stage. The ecomap also depicts other influences such as wairua – the spiritual nurturing which comes from traditional rituals and prayers, the spiritual connection to Papatūānuku, as well as the spiritual connection to tūpuna – those who have passed who loved, nurtured and supported the kaumātua in his life's journey, as well as kaitiaki (guardians/ trustees of knowledge and wisdom), not to mention the religious aspect of spirituality. Other influences, both positive and negative, are the weather – wet weather may prevent work in the garden, but the rain nurtures the plants and soil; the sunshine provides energy to plants and also facilitates suitable working conditions. Recreation is also depicted in the ecomap – the kaumātua likes to play golf; if he is unable to golf due to inclement weather then he maintains his fitness by either walking or biking. These activities ensure he maintains a level of fitness and wellbeing, which in turn ensures he is mentally and physically fit to carry out the arduous routine of tilling the soil, digging and weeding in the garden. This work he does for hours at a time, often the length of the day – modelling a work ethic to those of the younger generations (consciously or not) modelled to him in his younger days by his elders.

Benefits of the genogram and ecomap development for whānau

The process of gathering information for the genogram/ecomap was satisfying in that various whānau were present during the interview process including the kaumātua's daughters and granddaughters, so his responses provided those present with further knowledge of that involved in the planting of rīwai, and an appreciation for the work, care and effort required of their father and grandfather; it was a good sharing time.

The contents of genogram and ecomap were easily recognisable and some suggestions were made for amendment and addition to the ecomap. This process too was appreciated for discussing the ways and things that are an influence in the lives of this family and the consideration and awareness of the contribution of others in various ways. It was also a process that provided affirmation of the things that the kaumātua is doing well, and in conducting that process his immediate whānau recognises that all is well with their father and grandfather. The diagrams are easy to read and understand. In this case there was no earth-shattering information to be divulged so the process and resulting outcomes were agreeable. It is thought that the process could easily be used with and by other whānau.

Summary and discussion

The genogram is valuable for depicting the nature of relationships within and between whānau. Pre-testing of methods went a bit further than required in this instance by utilising not only the genogram, but also the ecomap. Using the ecomap in tandem with the genogram provided a holistic view of the life and influences of whānau. The tools enable a picture of whānau to be painted that encompass a broad spectrum of whānau; they provide a picture of realities for whānau, and that was the aim of the tools.

Although the genogram symbols have been standardised to assist uniformity of use and understanding (Smith cited in McGoldrick et al., 2008) there is no reason why whānau cannot develop symbols that are more meaningful to them, which ensures that genograms are even more personal and have more significance to whānau.

Of note, but not necessarily a restriction is that the researcher had a very close connection to this whānau so she was able to include some information that would have taken someone else a lot longer to uncover; and a perspective that may never have come to light. It was not that the information was contentious or off limits, but it was more about the intimate knowledge the researcher possessed of the whānau that enabled the fullness of that detail to be articulated – it is information that is not normally volunteered; certainly it is not how the kaumātua would describe what it is he does; it is the view of someone else who knows him well and has an appreciation for what he does. The lesson therefore is to talk to many people and to ensure it is the right people in order to gain the context and an accurate picture.

Risks noted are the ethics of sharing information about a whānau such as what information, how much information, should consent be obtained and from whom, who owns the information, who can use the information, and for what purpose? All those and many more are ethical considerations for working with whānau. Ethical use of research tools with whānau is discussed in the paper in this issue entitled Ethics of Researching With Whānau Collectives (Kennedy and Cram, 2010).

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Author Notes

Vivienne Kennedy (Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Hine) has been an independent researcher/evaluator since 2001 with a focus primarily on Māori. Her research and programme evaluation experience has been in a diversity of areas including health, education, youth, community/iwi/whānau development, and workforce development.

E-mail: vppk@snap.net.nz