

## AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND RESEARCH

## A vision of decolonisation: Midwifery mentoring from the perspective of Māori mentors

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Please note: This article was first published in September 2023 with the incorrect spelling of author Dinah Otukolo's name. The editors apologise for this oversight.

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Mentoring is a valued form of professional and cultural support among midwives in Aotearoa (see glossary for Māori translations). Mentoring occurs both informally and via formal programmes, including Māori mentoring initiatives with taura, new graduate and rural midwives. International studies identify indigenous mentorship as a viable approach to supporting the retention and professional development of indigenous health workers. However, little research exists on the mentoring relationship from the perspective of Māori mentor midwives.

**Objective:** To examine the mentoring relationship from the perspective of Māori mentor midwives.

**Method:** This qualitative research used focus groups of Māori mentors, identified from the Find Your Mentor database, to explore their views of mentoring from a Māori perspective. A semi-structured topic guide used seven simple, open questions to stimulate discussion. Discussions were transcribed and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of inductive thematic analysis.

**Findings:** A vision of decolonisation lies at the heart of the mentoring relationship for Māori mentor midwives. Mentors see their role as supporting mentees to navigate the challenges of a Pākehā health system, and to strengthen their midwifery practice through Te Ao Māori. Mentors describe how they are guided by the principles of tika and pono, and work to create a culturally safe space based on mutuality and trust through sharing kai and incorporating their whānau and that of the mentee into the relationship. Being a Māori mentor also fills the kete of the mentors. Māori mentors are sustained through being part of a midwifery hapū and experience joy and hope in sharing ngā taonga tuku iho with the next generation.

**Conclusion:** The decolonising approach to Māori midwifery mentoring has tangible benefits for Māori mentees and Māori midwifery. Māori mentoring activities evoke different experiences for Māori mentees, as evidenced by mentor behaviours that are unique within Te Ao Māori. Being part of Māori mentoring relationships also nurtures the resilience of the mentors.

**Keywords:** decolonising, Māori, mentors, midwifery, Aotearoa

### INTRODUCTION

Mentoring relationships are a valued form of professional support among midwives in Aotearoa. Historically, midwives supported each other through informal mentoring relationships but, with the commencement of the Midwifery First Year of Practice programme (MFYP) in 2007, midwifery mentoring has become a formalised relationship and has been extended into the rural space with the addition of the Rural Midwifery Mentoring programme (2009). A survey of MFYP participants identified mentors as having a key role in reflection, understanding the wider picture and developing confidence for the mentee. A relationship of trust and a shared philosophy were also key components of the mentoring relationship for mentees, with participants identifying the importance of being able to choose the mentor themselves (Kensington et al., 2016). Extending this concept further suggests the need to provide the

choice for a matching of ethnicity of the mentor and mentee, to incorporate Te Ao Māori. While Aotearoa does not currently have a Kaupapa Māori midwifery mentoring programme, within these existing programmes Māori mentee midwives are matched, where possible, with Māori mentors to provide support that is culturally safe and relevant. More recently, mentoring initiatives with Māori midwifery taura have been established in the midwifery schools to provide cultural support and pastoral care from the first year of study onwards.

The development of Kaupapa Māori midwifery mentoring models and programmes has been identified as a strategic priority for improving workforce sustainability and retention of Māori midwives in Aotearoa (Te Huia, 2020; Tupara & Tahere, 2020). Currently, however, there is little research on Māori midwives' experiences of mentoring, their perspectives on the role of the

mentor and how they practise mentoring as Māori within existing frameworks and programmes. This article reports the findings from focus group interviews with Māori mentor midwives, on their perspectives on the mentoring relationship, how they mentor both within existing programmes and informally, and how mentoring impacts them as midwives. These findings are part of a larger project that examined midwifery mentoring overall in Aotearoa, from the mentors' perspective.

## BACKGROUND

The mentoring consensus statement of Te Kāreti o ngā Kaiwhakawhānau ki Aotearoa | New Zealand College of Midwives' (the College) defines mentoring as a negotiated partnership between two midwives, with the purpose of enabling and developing professional confidence (Gray, 2006). The framework for midwifery mentorship outlined in the statement is "based on midwives supporting their peers in a negotiated partnership and is therefore seen as an equal relationship with no hierarchical principles", marking this model as distinct from similar relationships of preceptorship or professional supervision (Gray, 2006, p. 26). What occurs in the course of the mentoring relationship can be expected to differ in some respects depending on the mentee midwife's professional and personal needs (Gray, 2006). In the existing formal definitions, the mentoring partnership is understood as primarily a one-on-one relationship between two individuals, which focuses on the specific professional needs of the individual being mentored.

International studies identify indigenous mentorship as a viable approach to supporting the retention and professional development of indigenous health workers (Murry et al., 2022). Indigenous mentoring has been found to exhibit unique behavioural themes, such as being mentee centred, having a focus on advocacy, self-advocacy and relationalism, and fostering cultural protocols and indigenous identity (Murry et al., 2022). In Te Ao Māori, the Western concept of a mentoring relationship is most akin to the tuakana-teina relationship. The tuakana-teina relationship was traditionally a kin-based relationship between older relatives or senior branch of the family (tuakana) and younger relatives or junior branch of the family (teina). While tuakana may have greater experience and knowledge, this comes with the responsibility of holding and sharing mātauranga Māori and learning from their relationship with teina how to be tuakana (Winitana, 2012). The tuakana-teina relationship is regarded as of reciprocal benefit, often occurring within a collective or whānau context and motivated by its attending to the wellbeing and enhancement of the whole community (Hook et al., 2007). Currently, there is no formal definition of Māori mentoring in midwifery in Aotearoa.

## METHOD

For this research a qualitative approach was taken in order to gain a more detailed understanding of the experiences of Māori mentor midwives. Qualitative methods address questions concerned with the social contexts and meanings, and the subjective experiences of the participants. The project consisted of a series of focus groups of mentor midwives from a number of different practice and cultural backgrounds from across Aotearoa, including Māori, Pasifika, rural, community and core midwifery perspectives. This article reports on the findings from the focus group with Māori mentor midwives. While the project was conceptualised collectively by the wider research group, the branch of the project examining mentoring from the perspective of Māori mentors was led by Māori researchers, who used a Te Ao Māori approach to planning and undertaking the data collection and the analysis. Findings from other focus groups will be published in subsequent articles.

The participants were regarded as expert informants with unique socially, culturally and topographically grounded midwifery knowledge and mentoring experience. Focus groups were chosen as the preferred format for their ability to gain access to participants' contextually based knowledge and collective understanding based on their shared experiences and to allow participants to contribute to guiding the discussion (Belzile & Öberg, 2012; Kitzinger, 1994; Kook et al., 2019).

The format of the focus groups was semi-structured, using a topic guide of seven simple open-ended questions intended to stimulate discussion on the research topic. This semi-structured and adapted approach allowed for participant-led discussion on midwifery mentoring, while providing enough structure to enable comparison across other focus group findings that were part of the wider research project.

## Recruitment and ethics

The participants were recruited via the College's Find Your Mentor database. The inclusion criteria were Māori mentor midwives who were listed on the database, and who had actively engaged in a mentoring relationship as a mentor in the past three years. Four participants attended the focus group, with a fifth Māori mentor (researcher NP) facilitating. Participants came from a range of midwifery backgrounds and practice settings, including community, rural and hospital midwifery, and midwifery education. They were geographically dispersed across Aotearoa and, collectively, had 37 years of mentoring experience. The focus group was held in early 2020 via Zoom due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and lasted approximately three hours.

Transcripts of the focus group recordings were de-identified, including names of all individuals, maternity units, geographic locations and pepeha to protect the identity of participants, before undergoing analysis by the research team. Ethics approval was granted by the Ara Institute of Canterbury Research Ethics Committee (#1856).

## Data analysis

A thematic analysis, following the six-phase process developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to identify and thematise patterns in the dataset. Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows for both a rich description of the dataset as well as an in-depth interpretation of individual data items (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2016). It also provided an analysis process flexible enough to support the development of four standalone analyses of the different focus group types. The analysis process led by researchers NP and SD was iterative, involving reading and rereading the data to draw out and refine dominant themes in the participants' focus group discussion.

## FINDINGS

Four core themes were identified in the thematic analysis, with each theme containing several subthemes. The themes speak to how participants understood and undertook their role as a Māori mentor midwife, and their perspective on the significance of the mentoring relationship for Māori midwives, the midwifery profession and themselves.

## Decolonising

When asked what a mentor does, Māori mentors began the focus group discussion by speaking about decolonisation. The project of decolonisation was identified by mentors as the underlying purpose of becoming a mentor and continuing to mentor, and this approach was seen to support the growth of the mentee as well as that of the wider profession.

**Table 1. Thematic analysis: Midwifery mentoring from the perspective of Māori mentors**

Theme	Subtheme
Decolonising	Decolonising Te Ao Pākehā
Te Kai a te Rangatira	Creating a safe space Whakawhanaunga
Te Ao Māori	Tika and Pono Whānau
Filling the kete	Hapū Ngā taonga tuku iho

### Decolonising

Mentors identified that the need for colonial institutions (both educational and clinical), and the midwifery culture that may be established through them, to be decolonised was an important motivator for them taking up the role of mentor. As one participant put it, “I think for me, the culture of midwifery needs to be decolonised” (FG7-2), while another elaborated, “[...] they get enough from their lecturers to do the academia side of things, but I don't think there is enough kaupapa Māori, mātauranga Māori being utilised... so that's how I see my mentoring role” (FG7-4).

Mentors also described how they were motivated to become mentors by their own experiences of institutional racism and wanting to help to change that culture.

*I just want to say that what drew me into mentoring was the negative experiences that I had as a student midwife, and I sort of made a pact to myself that I would never mentor the way that I had been shown because that was really negative. And being Māori I think made it even harder, because there was that – now that I know the institutional racism that was going on – that was like, “This is not OK. So, when I'm a mentor I'm going to change the way that I do that for these young midwives that are coming through”.* (FG7-4)

The mentoring relationship was discussed as a site for internal decolonisation for both mentee and mentor, through reconnecting with and reclaiming a Māori approach to midwifery. This involves reflecting on and translating their midwifery experiences and practice through Te Ao Māori.

*I mentored a midwife who was intimately involved in an [incident] that occurred at [a hospital]. The mentee midwife happened to be the only person who was on duty at that time who put her hand up and said “I'm going in that room with that young wahine”. Because nobody else would.... We were able to have a bit of a debrief with our cultural advisor, and that really helped her, me, us together in our mentor/mentee relationship to break that whole perspective down from a Te Ao Māori perspective, looking in at it. It really helped us together to ground that situation and to sort of look at it through a different lens, through a Te Ao Māori lens.* (FG7-4)

Decolonising mentoring also includes redefining what and who is a mentor. Most participants expressed discomfort with the word “mentor”, as expressed in the following interaction: “For me, I struggle with the word “mentoring”. For me, I actually had to go back to my whānau and ask like, ‘Am I a mentor? What does that mean within us?’” (FG7-1); “I guess, like [FG7-1] I don't see myself as a mentor or anything per se” (FG7-3). Further, mentoring was identified as a Pākehā concept that suggests a hierarchical relationship between two individuals.

### Te Ao Pākehā

A key part of the mentors' decolonising approach to mentoring was helping their mentees to decode and navigate Te Ao Pākehā through Te Ao Māori and sharing the tools to work as midwives in a Pākehā health system, in a way that is culturally safe for them.

*For me, it's about making sure she has the tools to be able to walk in this Pākehā system... So for me, mentoring is about highlighting to the mentee that sometimes you don't have to tolerate things that are going on and you can really be a true advocate for your māmā and your whānau. And how can you do that safely, obviously without having your mana trampled on and also your mentee's.* (FG7-4)

A decolonising approach to mentoring is not aimed at adjusting the mentee to a Pākehā system but to support her to walk in that system with her mana intact.

*You know, the first thing I learnt when I was a student was you got to know your systems. You got to know what their policies are, what their guidelines are. Why do you need to know that? So you can understand it, so you can interpret it for yourself and for the women that you support. If you cannot understand the system and why it works the way it works then how can you support women when they are challenged by the system?* (FG7-2)

The quotes above emphasise that such an approach is important not only at the level of the individual mentee, but for māmā and whānau Māori as a whole.

### Te Kai a te Rangatira

Mentors spoke about the importance of creating a culturally safe collective space for mentees, mentors and whānau at the beginning of the mentoring relationship. This is a space in which whakawhanaunga can then occur through the sharing of kōrero and kai.

#### Creating a safe space

Mentors discussed creating a space at the start of the mentoring relationship through bringing taurira or mentees and mentors together in a way that is culturally safe.

*...having safe space for Māori and for students is really important. When we're ready we can take our Pākehā colleagues out to tangi, out to waiata and things like that, but there has to be safe space within Māori, for Māori.* (FG7-3)

A key element of a culturally safe space is that it allows the mentee to be vulnerable and to be able to safely share this vulnerability. One participant explained the importance of vulnerability as follows: “Yes, they need to be vulnerable. For you to be able to, I've just got to say this for myself, you've just got to be courageous and vulnerable, and you can't do that without a safe space” (FG7-1).

At the same time, mentors identified that the mentoring relationship is also one in which they themselves can be vulnerable, and how they ensured that a relationship was also going to be a safe space for them.

*It's not hard thinking when you're actually with Māori. And I tend when I work with Pākehā to actually not go there. It makes my job harder, whereas with Māori it's not hard to do the mahi you need to and to pass that knowledge on.* (FG7-2)

*Ae, and I'll make them come round home first, because how vulnerable is that to have someone come into your whare and meet my whānau? So, always before I sign up to*

*anything I go, "Come around home. Let's get to know each other there." And then that's when I feel and I can figure out whether we're going to partner well or not, whether we are both going to be safe. Because it is, is about both of us. (FG7-1)*

A safe mentoring space is easier for Māori mentors when working with Māori mentees. Strategies such as including whānau in the relationship and finding connections through whakapapa are used by Māori mentors to make the mentoring space one of mutual safety and vulnerability.

### Whakawhanaunga

Once this space is created whakawhanaungatanga can be built. The sharing of kai was identified by mentors as a key aspect of the mentoring relationship in this regard and, as one participant explained, "... we feed our whānau all the way through their training" (FG7-3). Another participant described how kai is integrated into the mentoring of taurira:

*What we've done in our region is we create a little hapū and we'd have a shared kai once a week for our taurira. And we noticed with that, it's amazing, just that shared kai and there'd be some Māori that couldn't speak Māori or didn't know karakia or didn't do those things. And it was just being around their peers and in an environment they were comfortable, you could see that all starting to shine and come through and I just really, I just loved watching that. (FG7-1)*

Sharing kai with mentees is nurturing on a number of levels, and it is a basis for creating a space of equal power balance, mutual trust and connection. 'Te kai a te Rangatira', that is, the food of the chiefs, is language and communication, which also occurs over kai.

### Te Ao Māori

Mentors identified key principles and values from Te Ao Māori that underpin how they mentor Māori midwives and taurira and guide their conduct within the relationship. This discussion centred on the principles of tika and pono and the value of whānau.

#### Tika and pono

Mentors identified the concepts of tika and pono as the cornerstones that guide how they act and support the mentee within the mentoring relationship. While the needs of individual mentees differ and each relationship is unique, the guiding principles of what is right and what is correct stay the same.

*Like we were saying, even if it's just to go for a kai, is it about the food or is it about the whanaungatanga of that whole experience? Which is more important to us as Māori because we operate on what is tika and what is pono, what is right and what is correct. Those things, we'll never let go because they are inherent within us, we always will wear that same korowai, it doesn't matter in which space that we walk. I definitely won't take my korowai off, it doesn't matter where I go, and I'm sure we all feel the same. (FG7-4)*

While tika and pono guide the mentor in supporting her mentee, these core principles also guide her in her role as a midwife supporting whānau Māori.

*I think the other thing about being a mentor – and whether it's students or whether it's being with midwives – is if it's tika and pono, you do it. It has always guided me, even when I've thought, "Oh man, I am going to a place where I don't want to be," is this my journey or is this the woman's journey? And if it's her journey, I just do it. (FG7-2)*

### Whānau

Mentors recognised the importance of whānau in respect to their mentees' practice lives and sustainability as well as to their own. Māori mentors incorporate whānau into the mentoring relationship and saw this as supporting mentees to recognise and balance their responsibilities to the whānau they care for as midwives and to their own whānau.

*It's also about our whānau. So, I think we've missed that in our midwifery, in our teaching, and when Māori come through from the first year they're told to put their whānau to the side really, that our wāhine whānau come first. I can only speak for me and my whānau but that doesn't work for us and it hasn't worked for taurira that I have had for the last 7 years. (FG7-1)*

For some mentors, their own whānau are part of their midwifery practice and mentoring relationships also. Whānau members can play the role of mentor to the mentors themselves and become involved in mentoring the whānau of mentees.

*Part of my whānau, my husband and my tamariki, they all know that midwifery is in this whare, this is how it is, you have to be a part of it. Which is really good because what's happened is my tane has become really good at being a good support person for the taurira tane. (FG7-1)*

### Filling the kete

Kete are used to carry kai, that which sustains us and makes us feel well, whole and healthy. Mentoring nourishes and contributes to the sustainability of Māori midwives through being connected to a collective, and through the satisfaction and reassurance they experience from sharing the taonga of knowledge with another generation of Māori midwives.

#### Hapū

Mentors explained how, by being part of a hapū of Māori midwives, they were able to gain strength from each other to walk through the challenges and frustrations of a colonial system together. For example, "I think the greatest thing is that you end up being with a collective with a common kaupapa so the best thing for me is I sort of navigate people like minded, which fills my kete as well" (FG7-1). This was elaborated by another participant:

*I think there's a, not an anger, but there's a frustration in the system. So, whether it's the tertiary [education] system or the midwifery system, often it's not being heard for the midwives. Or the sense of having to follow the system that can be destructive to their inner being, their mana. But if we walk through it together, particularly with our midwives, then I don't see the frustrations, I see the excitement of the students you know, the breath of fresh air in terms of what they want to practise, how they want to practise as Māori, and it's invigorating to see that. So, it keeps you young. (FG7-3)*

The youthfulness and excitement of taurira and young midwives wanting to practise Māori midwifery was valued by mentors, as it kept them feeling positive and excited about the future of midwifery.

#### Ngā taonga tuku iho

Māori mentors feel a responsibility to pass on their knowledge to other Māori midwives in the profession.

*It's like it's our way of giving back to our profession, because we're not going to be around forever, but our young midwives who are coming up behind us are going to be a bit longer in*

*it than we will be. So we can't hold that knowledge and that mātauranga and not give it to anybody.* (FG7-4)

Mentors also reflected that by taking a decolonising approach to mentoring and supporting Māori midwifery this likely supported their own longevity as midwives.

*All Māori midwives are pioneers in their own right and for me it's a privilege to have a balance on the profession, have a balance on myself, have a balance on who I work with. If we can carry that balance, it balances us to keep going really. It's such a passion and I hear that from my colleagues today, and it doesn't go away. So, we are in it for the longevity and I like the talk of positivity, and change is good.* (FG7-3)

The quotes above highlight that the practice of sharing their knowledge and being part of mentoring relationships is nurturing and sustaining for the mentors as well.

## DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the mentoring relationship from the perspective of Māori mentor midwives. Research on midwifery mentoring in Aotearoa in the past has largely focused on the mentees' experiences of mentoring, with less attention given to the mentoring relationship from the perspective of mentors (Dixon et al., 2015; Kensington, 2006; Pairman et al., 2016). No researchers have explicitly explored the mentoring relationship from the perspective of Māori mentor midwives. Research by Bilous (2018) on midwives' experiences of supporting student midwives found that midwives were motivated to work with students by a desire to sustain the profession and by their own negative experiences as a student. This was also identified as of reciprocal benefit for midwives. One participant who identified themselves as Māori described this as feeling a responsibility to nurture future generations of Māori midwives, also noting the flow-on effect in nurturing generations of whānau (Bilous, 2018). These findings reflect some of the sentiments shared by Māori mentors of their motivation for nurturing new generations of Māori midwives: to counter institutional experiences of racism, to grow the profession, and because this also filled their own kete and sustained them in the profession.

Our findings also affirm those from international research on indigenous mentoring in health. Murry et al. (2022) found that indigenous mentors practise and role model an ontology of relationalism through reciprocity and trust, and are guided by indigenous ethics which include following and fostering traditional protocol and etiquette. This is reflected in our themes of *Te Ao Māori* around the importance of tika and pono, and discussions of creating whanaungatanga and safe cultural spaces in *Te Kai a te Rangatira*. Indigenous mentoring can also be seen as decolonising in that it focuses on affirming and connecting mentees with their indigenous identity and provides a space for deconstructing and navigating colonial institutional structures from an indigenous perspective and as indigenous people (Murry et al., 2022). These latter findings likewise complement our themes of *Filling the Kete* and *Decolonising*.

### A decolonising approach to mentoring

The findings from this analysis suggest that Māori mentors' perspective of the mentoring relationship does not reflect the formal definition of a negotiated partnership between two individuals. Instead, it offers a new perspective on midwifery mentoring and provides important insight into the ways that a Māori approach to midwifery mentoring is unique, and distinct to mentoring approaches adapted from other cultural backgrounds in

Aotearoa. Even when mentoring within existing frameworks and programmes that do not explicitly incorporate a Kaupapa Māori approach, Māori mentors employ an approach to mentoring that is best described as decolonising.

Decolonisation in the context of Aotearoa can be defined as a process which focuses on the restoration of indigenous lands and ways of life (Mercier, 2020). Decolonisation requires that "power imbalances are addressed, that negative effects of colonisation are peeled away and that pre-colonial ways are revived – often starting with language education and social practices of tikanga" (Mercier, 2020, p. 53). Mana wahine theorists argue that the involvement of wāhine Māori is crucial to the success of decolonisation, because their daily lived experience is one of navigating the intersections of colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism (Pihama, 2020; Simmonds, 2017). A decolonising approach to midwifery mentoring is informed by a desire, on the one hand, to challenge the structural inequities embedded in the institutional culture of the current health system and, on the other, to reclaim Te Ao Māori, tikanga and cultural identity as part of midwifery practice.

The thematic analysis illustrates how Māori mentors' approach to mentoring is decolonising on multiple levels. Firstly, the decolonising approach offers a collective response to navigating a Pākehā education and health system both as Māori midwives and as wāhine Māori. Naomi Simmonds advocates for a collective approach to "reclaiming the messages and embodied practices left to us by our ancestors" about pregnancy, birth and afterbirth, as this can facilitate a "decolonised pathway" for future generations to follow (Simmonds, 2017, p. 112). The mentors' kōrero emphasised the mutual support and strength that is gained through being part of a mentoring relationship to walk and work in a Pākehā system, and the important role this relationship can play in protecting the mana of Māori midwives and whānau through this process.

Walking in Te Ao Pākehā is not about adjusting oneself to colonial systems and fitting into Pākehā institutions. Māori mentors and mentees work to consciously ground themselves within Te Ao Māori in order to decode their experiences and reflect on their actions from a Māori standpoint. As such, Māori mentors facilitate mentees' awareness of their own cultural safety and cultural need when entering work settings and situations in which cultural difference is apparent (for example, providing care for a Pākehā family in a hospital setting).

Grounding oneself in Te Ao Māori to work in Te Ao Pākehā can also be akin to a sort of internal decolonisation process for both the mentor and mentee. It is well recognised that decolonisation begins in the mind and is therefore always also an internal process (Mercier, 2020; Smith, 1999; Thiong'o, 1986). Furthermore, Leoni Pihama acknowledges that because of the colonial patriarchal discourses that have been disseminated about wāhine Māori since European colonisation, the need to "decolonise that which we have internalised about ourselves" (2020, pp. 360-361) is a crucial aspect of decolonisation for wāhine Māori in particular.

Another expression of a decolonising approach to mentoring, through a conscious grounding in tikanga and Te Ao Māori, is the definition of the mentor's role and conduct through the principles of tika and pono. These principles refer to what is correct and what is right or true to the values of Māori (Mead, 2006). Tikanga is recognised as central to the process of decolonisation because it is the original value system of Aotearoa (Jackson, 2020). Indeed, Māori mentors emphasised that the principles of tika and pono are not exclusive to the midwifery mentoring relationship but guide their conduct in all relationships and situations as Māori. Mentoring is just one responsibility that comes with the korowai

they wear as wāhine Māori. This may also have a bearing on why Māori midwives become mentors in the first place, because it is tika and pono to do so.

The theme *Te Kai a te Rangatira*, takes its name from the whakatauki “He aha te kai a te rangatira? He kōrero, he kōrero, he kōrero”, which translates as the sustenance of the leader is kōrero, that is, communication and language. Our study’s findings illustrate how the mentoring relationship for Māori mentors regularly revolves around the practice of sharing kai, an activity that is not about the food itself so much as the whanaunga, connections, mutuality and trust that are built through the communication which occurs over kai. While mentoring relationships may occur over a shared meal for non-Māori midwives, the sharing of kai has an additional cultural significance in Te Ao Māori. Historically, the practice of sharing kai required all parties to lay down their weapons to eat, making it a significant act of mutual trust and vulnerability.

Tikanga around kai is an important decolonising practice for Māori mentors, as it enables them to create a space not only for kōrero but, more specifically, for reintroducing te reo and tikanga Māori into the mentoring space. For example, mentors described how mentees and mentors were exposed to kupu Māori through waiata and karakia, and how food created a space and time that was whānau centred. This is similarly noted by Simmonds in relation to creating a space in which birthing tikanga can be practised and “reclaimed”, and who also observed that reclaiming tikanga is a practice of “reclaiming ourselves” (Simmonds, 2017, p. 122). As such, *Te Kai a te Rangatira* is another expression of an approach to mentoring that holds decolonisation at its centre, as mentoring creates the conditions, the space and the time for Māori midwives to reclaim and affirm their cultural identity.

The phrase ‘ngā taonga tuku iho’ in the final theme *Filling the Kete*, translates as ‘the treasures handed down to us by our ancestors’. Māori mentors regard their role as one of both using the gifts that have been handed down to them and sharing these with subsequent generations. These include mātauranga and tikanga Māori, te reo, relationships and the knowledge of how to create that mentoring space to navigate a Pākehā system collectively. Hook et al. (2007) note that a group approach to mentoring is often preferable for Māori because it enhances the influence of whakapapa and tikanga tuku iho in the relationship. This is affirmed in our study by mentors’ descriptions of the mentoring relationship as being part of a hapū.

For the mentors in our study, the mentees are also a gift, which sustains them as midwives by keeping them grounded, passionate and humble. These aspects of the mentors’ experience – a generational collective relationship that involves sharing ancestral knowledge and reciprocal learning and benefit – reflect the characteristics of the tuakana-teina relationship as described earlier. The value placed on mentors, sharing the gift of knowledge and the gifts they receive in return to keep them strong and in the profession, shows an awareness that decolonisation is a collective, intergenerational and ongoing process.

### Thinking decolonisation in midwifery

While the Māori mentors in our study are often providing mentorship through Pākehā-based mentoring programmes, it is clear that how they define and practise mentoring is grounded in a distinctly Māori perspective. Several recent reports have identified Kaupapa Māori mentoring for students and new graduates as ‘critical’ for growing the Māori midwifery workforces (Tupara & Tahere, 2020). This is because Māori midwifery students in midwifery programmes across Aotearoa are known to have a high attrition rate (up to 84% over a 10-year period), while Māori midwives also spend fewer

years in the profession than non-Māori (Tupara & Tahere, 2020). A decolonising approach to the mentoring relationship may be beneficial for improving retention by providing Māori midwives with the hapū, knowledge and safe cultural space and time to foster and affirm their cultural identity as Māori midwives and to navigate a Pākehā system as Māori for Māori.

One benefit of a decolonising approach within midwifery is its ability to create hapū which help to ground Māori midwifery practice within Te Ao Māori and sustain and nurture the resilience of Māori midwives. Mentors’ experiences of practising Māori midwifery suggest that taking a decolonising approach is not always easy. Racism and bullying are reasons given by some Māori midwives for leaving the midwifery profession (Tupara & Tahere, 2020), and practising as a Māori midwife can be met by a lack of understanding and hostility. Moana Jackson (2020) observes that when faced with the implacability of colonial power, decolonisation requires courage and a recognition that it is an ongoing generational process. It is in this context that the collective, reciprocal, nurturing and whānau-centred aspects of the Māori midwifery mentoring relationship, and the possibility it creates for culturally safe spaces for Māori midwives, are not only important for individual mentees and mentors engaged in them, but for the future of the profession.

#### Key points

- This study examines the midwifery mentoring relationship from the perspective of Māori mentor midwives.
- A vision of decolonisation lies at the heart of the mentoring relationship for Māori mentor midwives.
- A decolonising approach to mentoring not only benefits the mentees, but also nurtures the resilience of the mentors and supports Māori midwifery as a whole.

### CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the currently sparse literature on Māori midwifery mentoring through elaborating a definition of the mentor’s role and the mentoring relationship from the perspective of Māori mentors. While we are drawing on results from a small sample of one focus group, the research participants came from across a wide range of midwifery practice settings – community, hospital, rural, midwifery schools – and held almost 40 years of collective mentoring experiences between them. The findings on the decolonising approach to mentoring elaborated in this paper may also be of interest in broader discussions about indigenous mentoring and models of Māori mentoring in Aotearoa used in other professions. They affirm but also move beyond a descriptive analysis of the tuakana-teina relationship and, unequivocally, situate Māori mentoring within a Pākehā system as a decolonising practice.

Approaching mentoring as a process of internal, external and intergenerational decolonisation is about seeking to transform institutional inequities and reclaiming Te Ao Māori for Māori

midwifery. A decolonising approach to Māori mentoring may support the growth and stability of the Māori midwifery workforce, by creating space where Māori midwives do not have to leave their Māori-ness at the door and which, in turn, provides a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction for the mentor midwives. This can have a flow-on effect for māmā and whānau Māori who are then more able to access Kaupapa Māori and midwifery care that is safe and relevant for them.

## GLOSSARY OF KUPU MĀORI

Aotearoa	New Zealand
Hapū	Kinship group, to be pregnant
Kai	Food, meal
Karakia	Prayer, chant
Kaupapa Māori	Māori approach, customary practices
Kete	Basket, kit
(Fills the) Kete	Sustains, nurtures
Kōrero	Speech, conversation
Korowai	Cloak
Kupu	Words, vocabulary
Mahi	Work
Māmā	Mother
Mana	Dignity, spiritual power in people, places, objects
Mana wahine	Māori feminist framework
Māori	Indigenous person of Aotearoa
Mātauranga	Knowledge, wisdom
Ngā taonga tuku iho	Heritage/cultural property
Pākehā	Person of European descent living in Aotearoa
Pepeha	Introduction in a Māori context, including one's ancestry
Pono	To be true, honest
Rangatira	Leader, chief
Tamariki	Children
Tane	Husband, man
Tangi	Funeral ceremony
Taonga	Treasure
Tauira	Student
Te Ao Māori	The Māori world, Māori world view
Te Ao Pākehā	The Pākehā world, Pākehā world view
Te kai a te Rangatira	The sustenance of leaders
Te reo Māori	The Māori language
Teina	Younger relative (and/or junior branch of family)
Tika	To be correct, just
Tikanga	Correct procedure, customary protocol
Tuakana	Older relative (and/or senior branch of family)
Wahine	Woman
Wāhine	Women
Waiata	Song
Whakapapa	Genealogy
Whakatauki	Proverb
Whakawhanaunga/tanga	To have a relationship – process of establishing a relationship
Whānau	Family group, to be born
Whanaunga/tanga	Relationship, sense of connection
Whare	House, dwelling

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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