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"It feels real good having my own space" – Young Māori Mothers in the E Hine Study Talk About Housing

"Ki a au nei he mea tino pai te whai whaitua mōku anō" – Ngā Whaea Māori Pūhou i roto i te Rangahau E Hine Kōrero Mō Te Whare Noho

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Abstract

The provision of good quality housing for young families is a key way of supporting health and well-being, and this is especially important for young Māori (Indigenous) mothers and their children, who experience a greater burden of social and health inequities. Low-quality housing can negatively affect health, safety, employment, education, social connectedness and identity. Seeking the views of young Māori mothers is essential for informing initiatives to support access to housing that is responsive to their needs and aspirations for 'home'. The analysis reported here focuses on the housing journeys of the young women during the last year of participation in E Hine, a longitudinal, qualitative, Kaupapa Māori (by Māori, for Māori) study that followed young Māori women (initially aged 13–19 years) from pregnancy or the early antenatal period ($n = 44$). The last interviews with the participants

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were when the young mothers' babies were 2–3 years old (n = 37). Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, with a focus on housing experiences.

With the exception of one young woman and her partner, most of the participants (n = 32) were living with their child(ren) and other adults. Three intersecting themes were developed: (1) 'Seeking spatial autonomy: The importance of finding one's own space to parent' relates to the importance placed, by the young women, on having their own space; (2) 'Relational beings: The tensions of relational autonomy for young parents' attends to the desire of the young women for spatial autonomy while still being embedded within support networks; and (3) 'Material dilemmas: Aspiring to make a "home" during a housing crisis' explores the material challenges faced by the young women.

Keywords: Kaupapa Māori research, young Māori mothers, well-being, housing, home, tenure, relational autonomy, spatial autonomy, qualitative longitudinal research

Whakarāpopotonga

He ara matua te whakarato whare noho he pai te kounga ki ngā whānau pūhou mō te hāpai i te hauora me te toiora. He mea tino hira tēnei ki ngā whaea Māori pūhou me ā rātou tamariki tērā ka tāmia e te taumahatanga nui ake o ngā kore ōritenga pāpori me te hauora. Ka kino ake pea te hauora, te haumaru, te whai mahi, te mātauranga, te tūhonohono ā-pāpori me te tuakiri i ngā whare noho kounga iti. He waiwai te rapu i ngā tirohanga o ngā whaea Māori pūhou mō te whiwhi mōhiotanga mō ngā kōkiri tautoko āheitanga atu ki ngā whare noho e urupare ana ki ō rātou hiahia me ō rātou tūmanako mō tētahi 'kāinga'. E arotahi ana ngā tātaritanga kua pūrongotia i konei ki ngā haerenga ā-whare noho o ngā wāhine pūhou i te tau whakamutunga o te whai wāhi ki E Hine, he rangahau Kaupapa Māori (nā te Māori, mā te Māori) wā roa, ine kounga, tērā i whai i ngā wāhine Māori pūhou (i te tīmatanga 13–19 ō rātou tau) mai i te hapūtanga ki te wā i muri tata mai i te whakawhānautanga (n = 44). I tutuki ngā uiuitanga whakamutunga ki ngā kaiwhaiwāhi i te wā e 2–3 ngā tau o ngā pēpi a ngā whaea (n = 37). He mea tātari ngā raraunga mā te whakamahi i te tātaritanga huritao ā-tāhuhu, me te arotahi ki ngā wheako whare noho.

I tua atu i tētahi wahine pūhou me tōna hoa rangatira, e noho ana te nuinga o ngā kaiwhaiwāhi (n = 32) i te taha o ā rātou tamariki me ētahi atu pakeke. I whakawhanakehia ētahi tāhuhu haukoti e toru: (1) Ka whai pānga 'Te kimi mana motuhake i te whaitua noho: te hira o te kimi whaitua anō hei mahi i ngā mahi a te matua' ki te hira ki te wahine pūhou o te whai whaitua anō māna; (2) 'Te tangata whai hononga: ngā kumenga ka puea ake i te hiahia o te wahine pūhou ki te mana motuhake i te whaitua noho i a ia e noho tāmau tonu ana i ngā kōtuitui tautoko; ā, (3) Ka torotoro 'Ngā matawaenga ā-ao tuturu: te wawata ki te hanga "kāinga" i te wā e tino iti nei ngā whare noho' i ngā wero tūturu kei te aroaro o ngā wāhine pūhou.

Ngā Kupumatua: rangahau Kaupapa Māori, whaea Māori pūhou, toiora, whare noho, kāinga, whai whare noho, mana motuhake ā-pānga, mana motuhake whaitua noho, rangahau wā roa, ine kounga.

Housing stability and access to homes of high quality are important for the health and well-being of young mothers and their babies (Cutts, et al., 2011; Harker, 2006). The link between housing and children's social and emotional well-being, for example, is moderated by the quality of relationships children experience (Dockery et al., 2013). Relationship quality is, in turn, negatively affected when families move frequently or are in financial stress. Likewise, the well-being of young mothers is at increased risk when they live alone with their child(ren) in poor-quality housing, isolated from their family and other supports (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). When this occurs, their child(ren) are more likely to suffer from childhood injuries, respiratory conditions, infectious diseases and developmental delays (Cutts et al., 2011). As Taylor and Edwards (2012) write, "Having a 'home' is a fundamental need of all children" (p. 58).

For Māori (Indigenous) children, this fundamental need has not been catered for as housing policies have failed to address inequities for Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand (Johnson et al., 2018). By 2018, the proportion of Māori who owned their own home or held it in a family trust had declined to 31 per cent, compared with 57.9 per cent of European New Zealanders (Stats NZ, 2020a). A 'housing career' of family formation and moving from rental to owner-occupied housing is fast slipping away from Māori families and has become an unrealisable dream for many young Māori (Morrison, 2008). Given the youthfulness of the Māori population, where the average age is 25.1 years for Māori males and 27.1 years for Māori females (Stats NZ, 2020b), this inaccessibility of home ownership will contribute heavily to the risk of future Māori wealth disparities (Kiro et al., 2019).

With home ownership not an option, Māori rely heavily on private rental accommodation where they are beholden to landlords and property management agents, who may harbour negative (racist) stereotypes of Māori (Houkamau & Sibley, 2015; Saville-Smith & Saville-Smith, 2018). As the quality of private rental dwellings tends to be worse than owner-occupied dwellings and state housing, Māori renters may also be exposed to poor housing stock that lacks insulation and/or adequate heating (Kiro, et al., 2019). In addition to increased health and safety risks (Johnson et al., 2018), such poor housing conditions can also contribute to the "intergenerational transmission of social inequality" (Solari & Mare, 2012, p. 464).

Tenure insecurity within rental accommodation can have devastating consequences for whānau (family) health and well-being (Johnson et al., 2018), including whānau being severely housing deprived (that is, without shelter, in temporary accommodation, or sharing accommodation that is often overcrowded) (Amore et al., 2020). Although there were issues with the New Zealand 2018 Census data (with only 71 per cent of Māori having completed it), Māori are estimated to make up nearly a third (32.3 per cent) of those who are severely housing deprived (at a rate of 165.2 per 10,000 people, a rate four times the European rate). The majority (85.3 per cent) of Māori experiencing housing deprivation were reported to be sharing accommodation (Amore et al., 2020). From the 2013 Census, one in five Māori lived in crowded housing (compared with one in twenty-five New Zealand Europeans), and overcrowding is a known risk factor for infectious diseases and increased hospitalisation (Johnson et al., 2018). Even so, during times of housing precarity, shared accommodation can provide some constancy in an otherwise changing environment (Metge, 1995).

Young Māori are estimated to be disproportionately affected by severe housing deprivation, with nearly two-thirds (of severely housing-deprived Māori) under the age of 24 (Amore et al., 2020). Young Māori parents are some of the least likely to be able to afford housing. This is at odds with care and protection responsibilities towards young whānau, part of which is ensuring that they are adequately housed (Howden-Chapman, 2005).

> Housing is a significant need and sourcing emergency housing in times of trouble is one of the top issues for teen parents. Many teen parents are homeless, living in temporary and precarious situations, couch surfing or in overcrowded homes. They need to figure out what the next best option is for

> themselves and their baby. (E Tipu E Rea Whānau Services, 2019, p. 1)

Poor access to safe housing, food, financial resources and other necessities, alongside social exclusion, including the stigmatisation of teen parenthood, have been reported as significant challenges for young Māori mothers (Douglas & Viles, 2015; Pihema, 2017). However, young Māori mothers are creative and resilient in the ways they resist stigmatisation, "self-articulating themselves as strong, loving, and ambitious" (Adcock et al., 2019, p. 267). Relationships that recognise and affirm their self-articulations are important supports for them (Cram & Cram, 2017).

Ellis-Sloan and Tamplin (2019) argue that social or relational elements, particularly friendships, deserve as much attention as material exclusions. Relational inclusion through being part of a community can help young mothers to develop friendships and be supported by others. For example, the provision of social support services, such as social workers and other supports provided at teen parent units, can mitigate some of the negative outcomes associated with teen parenting through advocacy and trusted support (Dale, 2013; Williamson-Garner, 2019). Young mothers also find great comfort in their friendships with other young mothers (Williamson-Garner, 2019).

Just as this relational inclusion can facilitate access to support and resources, material exclusion and its consequent negative impacts on health and well-being can drive relational exclusion (that is, the absence of relationships or social support) (Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019). Housing churn, for example, can create disruptions in the lives of families, with high mobility defined as more than three moves in the child's lifetime (Taylor & Edwards, 2012). For a young family, moving may mean children shifting schools and all family members having to re-establish community ties. The resulting relational exclusion can undermine young Māori mothers' aspirations for education, employment and the achievement of other goals where the support of formal and informal networks is critical. An Australian study on young mothers and housing mobility found that high mobility can also affect the emotional development of children as it disrupts the social, health care and education relationships of children and young people. This can leave them open to financial vulnerability, and potentially result in a cycle of erratic schooling, high mobility and poor housing conditions (Taylor & Edwards, 2012).

While having a place to call home is recognised as a fundamental need for young children (Taylor & Edwards, 2012), this country fails to fulfil this need for Māori children, especially when Māori mothers are themselves young. A lack of access to secure and affordable housing can then result in both material and relational exclusion and disrupt opportunities for young whānau to live good lives. We do not, however, know much about the housing circumstances of young whānau, nor how their access (or lack of access) to good housing affects their lives and the lives of their children.

The E Hine Study

The E Hine study – longitudinal, qualitative, Kaupapa Māori research on the experiences of young Māori women through their pregnancy, birth and motherhood journeys – shines a light on the lived realities of these young whānau (families). Kaupapa Māori means to do things in a Māori way (Henry & Pene, 2001). Kaupapa Māori Research (KMR) is 'by Māori, for Māori', and KMR health investigations aim to reduce unjust barriers to care, reject deficit constructions of Māori or victim-blaming, and promote structural analyses of inequities (Cram, 2017; Smith, 2012). A KMR methodology privileges a Māori world view (ontology) that is relationships, and, therefore, intellectual traditions and knowledge construction processes (epistemologies), ethical codes (axiologies), and research processes (methodologies and methods) that are relational (Henry & Pene, 2001). E Hine was supported by a Kahui Kaumātua (elders advisory group), a Rōpū Māmā (young mothers advisory group), and a Scientific Advisory Group of Māori and non-

Māori researchers. These advisory groups ensured that the research was carried out in an appropriate way and kept researchers and participants culturally safe. The development of this KMR methodology has been reported previously (Lawton et al., 2013).

E Hine was carried out in two case study sites: Wellington (major urban and smaller urban areas) and Hawke's Bay (smaller urban and rural areas), chosen because of their social, geographical and tribal relevance. Young Māori women were recruited through local health and education providers, including teen parent units, midwives, Well Child/Tamariki Ora services, and primary care practices. The participants were aged between 13 and 20 years (mean age = 17.5 years) when they were recruited, and 14 and 19 years when their baby was born. Purposive sampling resulted in a pre-birth cohort ($n = 22$) who were followed through their pregnancies, and a post-birth cohort ($n = 22$) who provided retrospective information about their pregnancy. Participants were followed until their babies were 2 years old. Each participant was invited to nominate two whānau/support people who were also interviewed. Ethics approval for the two-year interviews was obtained from the Central Health and Disability Ethics Committee (CEN/10/09/036/AM02 November 2013).

The interviewers were female Māori researchers, who interviewed participants face to face at locations chosen by the participants. The aim of the E Hine interviews was to identify barriers and facilitators to health and wellness for young Māori women and their babies, from the perspectives of women and whānau, in order to inform service delivery. The current analysis of the E Hine data explored participants' housing circumstances and experiences when their babies were two years old. The method that follows therefore focuses on this interviewing phase.

Method

Thirty-seven young women in the E Hine study were interviewed when their baby was two years old. At this final two-year interview in 2014, the young women were asked about their experiences since the last interview when their baby was one year old, their current situation, and their aspirations for the future. The young women talked about their living situations and their joys and struggles.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and (for this paper) discussions about accommodation and housing were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, which is a relational process – a dialogue between data, theory and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This was informed by a KMR methodology that privileges Māori ways of being, knowing and doing (Cram, 2017; Smith, 2012) – "a platform from which Māori are striving to articulate their own reality and experience" (Mahuika, 2008, p. 4). Reflexive thematic analysis is compatible with KMR as it acknowledges the subjective, contextual and interpretive work of qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Participant talk was coded inductively, and then the codes were organised and re-organised until final themes were created (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis enabled the authors (three Māori researchers) to highlight the central housing concerns, and tensions within them, of the young women from a strengths-based position that sees being Māori as normal.

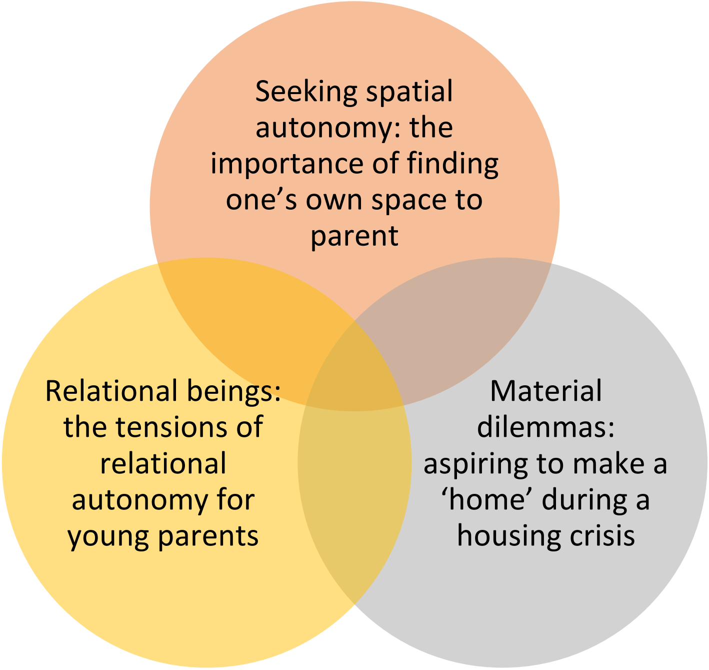
Findings

When their babies were two years old, most of the young women (n = 25) were living with their child(ren) and partner (either as a nuclear unit (n = 14) or with whānau/friends as well (n = 11)). A few (n = 11) were living with their child(ren) but no partner (either alone (n = 4) or with whānau/friends as well (n = 7)). One mother was living with whānau and her child was living with other whānau. In other words, most of the participants (*n* = 32) were living with their child(ren) and other adults (partner and/or whānau/friends) who were able to provide them varying degrees of social and material support. With the exception of one young woman and her partner who had just bought a house, all of the participants were renting (*n* = 24) or boarding/staying for free with whānau/friends (*n* = 12). Of those renting (*n* = 24), they were either renting privately (*n* = 15), through Housing New Zealand (HNZ, a public housing service now called Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities) (*n* = 6), or either (that is, unclear from the data) (*n* = 3). Finding a house that could be a home was often a top priority for the young women, even if that meant frequent moves.

Three intersecting themes were developed. The first, 'Seeking spatial autonomy: The importance of finding one's own space to parent', relates to the importance placed by the young women on having their own space and being able to choose what kind of space it should be. The second theme, 'Relational beings: The tensions of relational autonomy for young parents', attends to the desire of the young women for spatial autonomy while still being embedded within support networks. Finally, the ability to be spatially autonomous and relationally autonomous in their current and future choices about housing was continuously being affected by material issues – a lack of housing availability and affordability, and poor housing quality – as well as relationship tensions exacerbated by these issues. These issues are covered in the third theme, 'Material dilemmas: Aspiring to make a "home" during a housing crisis'.

These themes are described below and illustrated by quotes from the young women. All names are pseudonyms, with the first letter indicating the young woman's age at the time of the birth of their baby (A = 14–15 years; K = 16–18 years; M = 19–20 years).

Figure 1: The three intersecting themes relating to young Māori mothers and housing identified in the E Hine study


Seeking spatial autonomy: the importance of finding one's own space to parent
Relational beings: the tensions of relational autonomy for young parents
Material dilemmas: aspiring to make a 'home' during a housing crisis

Theme 1: Seeking spatial autonomy: The importance of finding one's own space to parent

The young women emphasised the importance of themselves and their child(ren) having their own space. For those who were able to find a home where they could create this space, whether they were living with a partner and/or whānau/friends or not, spatial autonomy was a point of happiness and pride. They were able to make decisions about the kind of home they wanted to raise their child(ren) in. This included being able to make decisions about household organisation, such as housekeeping and cooking.

> It feels real good having my own space.
>
> (Kuini, private rental through whānau, living with partner and child(ren))

The young women were also able to make decisions about the health and well-being of themselves and their child(ren), such as being a violence-free and/or drug-free home and creating warm(er) healthy spaces designated for their child(ren) to sleep and play. As well as providing safe spaces for their child(ren), having enough space for themselves or other adults to have time out when feeling stressed or fed up gave the young women a sense of relief that relationship pressures could be mitigated. Importantly, having their own space meant that the young women were able to exert autonomy in their overall parenting decisions, without being told what to do or criticised by older adults, such as their own parents.

> I've been here going on a year now, I like it. I like having my own house, makes me feel more independent in myself 'cause over there I felt like everything was getting done for me and like my cooking and cleaning… Oh, it's great, I feel much… better to have my own house 'cause I've got my own space then.
>
> (Kere, HNZ rental, living with partner and child(ren))

For the young women who did not feel like they had their own space to make decisions and parent as they aspired to, there was a sense of longing for moving on and finding a more suitable environment. Those living in crowded and/or insecure circumstances, or spaces that were inhospitable (for example, cold or ill-equipped) out of necessity, described feeling frustrated with their living conditions, which in turn affected their sense of autonomy. For instance, sometimes when living with their own parents, the young women felt that their ability to parent their child(ren) was compromised as their parents took over care and dominated the space, making and enforcing the home rules. While adults collectively sharing childrearing responsibilities is a part of Māori culture, the young women wanted to place some boundaries on this so that their own perceived roles as mothers could be expressed.

> Yeah, it's been pretty hard to be honest but it's getting better. Just because we're living together, and I just want to have my own space and she [Marika's mother] tries to take over sometimes. She needs to understand that he's not her baby; he's my baby.

(Marika, boarding with whānau, living with child(ren) and whānau)

The young women in this study either expressed satisfaction with the level of autonomy they had achieved in their home or sought an environment where they would be able to find it. In seeking or appreciating a space to call their own, the young women highlighted the importance of spatial autonomy for young Māori mothers.

Theme 2: Relational beings: The tensions of relational autonomy for young parents

Relationships with whānau, partners and friends, and connectivity with community and services, were generally given significance by the young women in this study. The location of housing – in proximity to their chosen people, transport links, childcare, sites of work and education – was seen as very important. They did not want to be isolated from their support networks and opportunities for educational/employment advancement. When asked what it was that was making her happy, one young woman replied:

> Just my partner, my babies, having my own place and my mum and that still supporting us, helping us heaps, his family helping us. Just everything's going good for us.
>
> (Kiri, private rental, living with partner and child(ren))

Being able to maintain a sense of community was important. The young women talked about wanting to raise their child(ren) in good and safe communities, and in communities where they felt accepted and normal as opposed to stared at or judged (for being young and Māori and mothering). They worried about moving too far from their whānau/friends, who were often their main sources of social and material support. Even though they did not want to be told how to parent their child(ren) by their parents or whānau, they often relied on them for advice, advocacy, financial support and social contact. Living together in multi-generational households or in close proximity had benefits for the young women, but there were also tensions caused by different parenting styles and ideas about household organisation or priorities (as discussed in the previous theme).

> So [baby's] got great-grandparents; yeah, he's very lucky. We get to spend a lot of time with them because they're all down here… My mum has sort of been a little bit overbearing in my life and I felt that I probably stop myself from doing a few things just because of my mum's little voice in my head… I love my mum. She's a very big influence in my life and she has a lot of wisdom to share. Yeah, I'm very lucky to have her. I suppose we're a little bit too similar sometimes.
>
> (Makere, private rental through whānau,living with partner and child(ren))

These kinds of social networks were particularly important for the young women who were mothering alone or who had partners who were not always living in the same area (working away or in prison) or were not always reliable. Even when the young women were living with a partner, this did not always mean that their partner was supporting them financially or actively participating in household or childcare duties. This put added pressure on those mothers, who found themselves parenting alone.

> I'm the one who pretty much brings up our kids and does our kids and gets the house clean and all that. I try my best. I feel like telling him to fuck off and leave me alone… He could be a better dad.
>
> (Mere, HNZ rental, living with partner and child(ren))

Whānau and/or friends were incredibly important for social/emotional and material support but living together was not always viable. The main reason the young women gave for having moved in the past year was because they needed to get out of crowded accommodation where there were tensions. There were some young women who described feeling this way at the time of their interview and wanting to get out and find their own space.

Being able to achieve spatial autonomy sometimes meant that relationships that had previously been tense were improved. It helped the young women to heal relations with their whānau because they were no longer living in cramped or crowded accommodation. The young women were then well-placed to draw on the support and love of their whānau, while at the same time being autonomous in their lifestyle choices for themselves and their child(ren).

> [Relationships in whānau are] way better than before when I used to live with them... now they're like heaps, heaps better… I reckon just having our space and not seeing each other as often as we usually did before. Like before we were always in each other's faces but now they always come around and see me.
>
> (Kahurangi, private rental, living with partner and child(ren))

However, after living separately for a while, some young women had ended up moving back in with their whānau (by choice rather than necessity) because they missed them or wanted to save up money to move into better accommodation.

> Me and [partner] were living together in our own place but I missed my mum, so I was like, no, I have to go home and then he just ended up moving back to where he was living.
>
> (Awhina, boarding with whānau, living with child(ren) and whānau)

The young women, and often their partners as well (if they had them), did not want to move far from their whānau/friends, but preferred some space so they could feel like they were able to be an adult and parent on their own terms. This desire for space can be seen as the desire for (spatial) autonomy, while still being embedded within support networks; that is, interdependence, or relational autonomy.

Theme 3: Material dilemmas: Aspiring to make a 'home' during a housing crisis

In order to find space for themselves, the young women often had to look for their own housing. Few talked about this being easy, although it helped if they received support from whānau/friends or service providers. More often than not, trying to find housing for themselves and their child(ren) was described as frustrating. This included the lack of options or availability of lower-cost HNZ houses. A few young women described not being able to access HNZ until they were absolutely desperate and were put on a priority list due to unacceptable living conditions or giving birth to another child. Some talked about giving up on HNZ and going private, even though that meant the costs would be much higher, because they just could not wait any longer to be housed. Within the private rental market, the young women described instances of encountering stigma, where their youthfulness, brownness and femaleness intersected in various ways that were frowned upon and discriminated against.

> We were only applying for [HNZ] because the house we were living in with his parents was fully overcrowded… They were saying we were only eligible for a one-bedroom house [but] I wanted a two- to three-bedroom house… It was hard as finding a house. We were just lucky that we got this. I was excited to move out 'cause then it's like I'm growing up and moving out of my parents and everything like that… When we were trying to get a house, I think we got a bit unfairly treated just because she saw me and then… cause my partner is a bit of a darkie, she just looked at him and looked the other way… didn't put our application through because of him… It's sad. It's unfair… that's why it was cool when we got to view this house. We had the property manager lady and we got to put our impression of us on her. She liked us from the start and everything, which was cool.
>
> (Kora, private rental, living with partner and child(ren), and has whānau staying temporarily)

The lack of affordable housing available in the areas where they were living was an issue for the young women. Renting through HNZ was generally the cheapest rental option, but as discussed above, these houses were hard to get hold of. A few young women described being currently desperate to find better accommodation for themselves and their child(ren), but that they were waiting for help from HNZ or to be able to afford to move. The other cheap housing option was to board or stay with whānau/friends, and when resorting to the private rental market, the higher costs were often offset by sharing costs with partners and/or whānau/friends.

> I guess 'cause [my aunt is] paying me that monthly thing… and I kind of buy all my nappies and wipes and stuff then, and like we do our shopping monthly and we just get bread and milk during the week, so that's easier...

> I just put a whole lot of clothes on layby each month, and kind of only have to pay them bits in between, so it works out for me, but before that, no, I just wasn't getting paid anything … I wouldn't be able to afford to live there on my own because I couldn't pay for power and all that sort of stuff.
>
> (Adriane, private rental, living with child(ren) and whānau)

Few of the young women described their financial situation as good. These participants were often working and/or their partner was working in more secure employment, so they enjoyed some financial stability.

> I do think it's enough, just because I've got my partner here to help as well. I mean, like if we weren't together and things like that, I would probably be just getting by. But because he gets groceries and I pay for the rent and the power and stuff; it makes it a bit easier.
>
> (Kaia, private rental, living with partner and child(ren))

More of the young women talked about just getting by financially, and then often only because of support they received from whānau/friends – sharing costs or getting loans/financial assistance – or service providers, such as getting their bond money from Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ). However, obtaining assistance from WINZ was sometimes posed as difficult, with the system challenging to navigate and embarrassing to have to rely on. These challenges were made easier for young women who had the support of whānau or other knowledgeable adults to advocate for them or to help them to find out what they were entitled to.

> It is kind of shameful being into WINZ.
>
> (Kiti, unclear whether private or HNZ rental, living with partner and child(ren))

Financial strain was common and was often exacerbated by WINZ welfare benefits that would be cut off or changed (without notice or reason), job insecurity and the unequal division of financial responsibility between the young women and their partners. Some young women assessed their financial situation as dire. Their costs were too high, and they subsequently talked about having to make trade-offs and sacrifices to provide the best care possible for their child(ren). Examples include the young women going without food while ensuring their child(ren) were fed and warm because heating costs were too high, having to apply for food grants, and gas (for cooking and/or hot water) or power being cut off because bills could not be paid after other costs.

> I went in to [WINZ to] go get a food grant... They declined me… and said they can't give me a food grant, but they could book me in for a hardship appointment next week. I was like, "Next week I get paid, so what am I supposed to do from now till then?" They were like, "I don't know, figure it out yourself." That's straight up what the lady at the counter told me.
>
> (Marewa, unclear whether private or HNZ rental, living with child(ren))

The poor general quality of housing available was also frequently discussed, especially in relation to the impact of this on the health and well-being of their child(ren). When in desperate situations, some of the young women had moved into substandard housing (either HNZ or private), and then begrudgingly accepted it or wanted to move on quickly. For example, one young woman said that she and her whānau thought that her private rental was in such bad condition that it was making her child sick because it was so cold, damp, mouldy and draughty. She was depressed and desperate to find new accommodation.

> I hate it… I've gone around with my camera and taken photos of the house, because it's disgustingly mouldy. The roof, the walls, the carpets, it's a mouldy house. All our clothes, the girls' clothes, our sheets, blankets, my shelves. All of my furniture, I'll pretty much have to throw away… it's just that bad…
>
> (Katarina, private rental, lived with partner and child(ren))

Some of the young women were very happy that they had moved away from a housing situation that was negative or unhealthy. They shared success stories of getting out of overcrowded/cramped, cold, ill-equipped (for example, broken walls, floors, or doors; no oven), mouldy or mice-infested housing. Getting out of these environments was seen as such a positive step for the young women that they were often still grateful even if they had moved to a new space that was still cold and/or draughty. When in their own spaces, the young women were creative with how they problem solved ways to make poor living conditions better given their material constraints; for example, by closing up parts of the house to keep heat in, sleeping all together in one bedroom or in the living room (in close proximity to the only heat source), and/or accepting large power bills for the sake of their child(ren)'s health.

> Interviewer: So, if you turn it [the heater] off, it's cold?
>
> Interviewee: It's cold, very, very cold.
>
> Interviewer: So, you keep it going.
>
> Interviewee: Yeah.
>
> (Kahukura, HNZ rental, living with partner and child(ren) and whānau)

These trade-offs were seen as worth it as they had their own spaces and were happy with other aspects of their homes that they felt proud of; for example, having a fenced-off lawn or good-sized section for their child(ren) to play safely, being in a good/safe child-friendly neighbourhood, the house or unit being stand-alone and/or a decent size, it being freshly painted or modernised, having a garage, and/or not having dangerous stairs for toddlers. Despite these positive aspects, the majority of the homes that were described were still cold, especially in winter months.

The young women in this study wanted to exert both spatial autonomy and relational autonomy, but material constraints often affected their ability to do so. They faced a lack of housing availability, affordability and poor-quality housing stock. This often meant making do or making trade-offs in order to survive.

Discussion

A new baby is the embodiment of whakapapa (genealogy), and highlights Māori women's role as te whare tangata (houses of humanity) (Rimene et al., 1998). Young Māori women should therefore be proud to be mothers and be provided with every opportunity to enjoy motherhood and create a good life for their young whānau (Wilson & Huntington, 2005). However, this is made difficult when they are unable to secure housing that fulfils their needs and enables them to have a home. When they were interviewed, the young Māori women in the E Hine study – the oldest of whom were 23 years of age – had a roof over their heads but not necessarily a home.

When they had found their own space within which to express their autonomy, this bolstered their confidence. Having a home is therefore aligned with concept of spatial autonomy – the positive sense of individuality or autonomy that is achieved by exerting agency within spaces (Proshansky & Fabian, 1987). Spatial autonomy enables a greater understanding of the environment and one's role within it and is thus seen as important for the development of a healthy sense of self (Green et al., 2016). Here, it is useful for framing how these young Māori mothers sought space where they felt at home and autonomous in their decision-making, particularly concerning their parenting. Some found this space in the company of others, while for others this space only became available when they had their own accommodation. This desire for spatial autonomy must also be seen within the context of the young women wanting to maintain strong support networks within friendships, partnerships, whānau and communities. This caveat requires acknowledgment of the relational. Hence, relational autonomy – the recognition that people are socially situated within complex social networks, and that these networks, along with wider societal and historical contexts, shape one's ability to exercise autonomy – fits better in this regard than individualistic understandings of autonomy (Bell, 2020; Mackenzie, 2019; Sherwin, 1998). For the young women in this study, being relational was not without tensions, though, as they needed to navigate relationships and expectations with their friends, partners and whānau, and with wider community and support services.

For those who needed their own place, staying close to their relational support network often meant other, often material, things had to be traded off in their rental accommodation so they could retain their autonomy within their own space. Being able to make trade-offs in order to feel that otherwise unacceptable accommodation might be alright as an interim home can be considered an example of 'constructive coping'. According to Hulse et al. (2019), constructive coping strategies are the "positive ways in which people respond to exogenous factors and are shaped by a combination of individual attributes and resources such as education, economic position and social support" (p. 171). Discussion of constructive coping strategies and coping resources highlights the agency renters have within the context of the external factors operating in the rental market, even when these external factors constrain their housing options. Young Māori mothers' constructive coping strategies provided them with a sense that they had rental options, including whether or not they stayed with their parents or other older relations.

They also had the option of rejecting housing that put the health of themselves and their children at risk, as making a trade-off with this accommodation was not seen by many as being worth it. Their concerns about housing causing illness were also well founded given the link between poor-quality housing (especially dampness and mould) and hospitalisation for illnesses such as acute respiratory infection among young children (Ingham et al., 2019). These impacts are harsher on younger and older people as they spend the bulk of their time indoors (Howden-Chapman et al., 2013). Having said this, more inquiry is warranted into whether the housing aspirations of young Māori mothers are deferred or fundamentally reshaped by their context of restricted rental choice. For example, had they lowered their expectations of health and wellness for themselves and their child(ren) by settling on a house in poor but 'acceptable' condition in order to maintain their relational inclusion (Preece et al., 2020).

Apart from extremely unhealthy housing, the young women in the E Hine study considered the need to make spatial, relational or material trade-offs preferable to the social isolation of going it alone, especially when this was compounded by social exclusion brought on by the societal stigma of being Māori, female and a young mother. While these young women had most likely endured the stigma of being Māori and female their entire lives, the responsibilities of young motherhood (or any-age motherhood for that matter) were especially difficult to cope with while socially isolated through physical distance or, in some cases, emotional trauma (Ellis-Sloan & Tamplin, 2019). Just as kinship can be an important reason why older Māori move out of home ownership and into rental accommodation (James et al., 2021), young Māori mothers prioritised interdependence and kinship in their aspirational housing choices. They wanted to live close to, but not necessarily with, their own older relations. Being close enough to provide relational inclusion, but far enough away to shore up their own autonomy and independence was an ideal for many.

The trade-offs they made in their consumption of housing may or may not have allowed the young women in the E Hine study to fulfil their own and others' expectations of them as a daughter/granddaughter/niece, a mother and/or a partner. The perfect mix of spatial autonomy, relational autonomy and material security was hard to find, and so the young Māori mothers in this study experienced a housing aspiration gap between the accommodation they were able to get and what they ideally wanted to have. Aspirations affect the way people negotiate the gap between what they can get and what they hope for, especially as the latter moves further and further beyond their reach. In this way, housing 'choice' is decoupled from housing 'aspiration' in recognition that those with little housing choice still have housing aspirations (Preece et al., 2020). When they were able to obtain accommodation that reduced their housing aspiration gap, the young Māori mothers in the E Hine study looked back at where they came from and felt some comfort that circumstances had improved for their whānau; that they had been able to find a better housing choice. This included young women who had found that time away from their whānau had improved their relationships when they moved back in with them.

When their babies were two years old, the young women in the E Hine study expected to be treated as mature women and good mothers and they sought an autonomous space and relationships that upheld this identity. They were prepared to make trade-offs to gain this space, but probably not trade-offs that impacted too negatively on the health and well-being of their young whānau. Some encountered racism in the rental market, and some encountered ageism. While most had to trade off material aspects of their housing, they retained their housing aspirations. In an ideal world, their status as renters would grant them the freedom to pursue their aspirations (Rankine, 2005). However, in a housing crisis, these aspirations may simply remain moemoea (dreams). The experiences of these young women can inform both policy and practice of state and private housing sectors about the importance and responsibility they have to provide high-quality, affordable housing with secure tenure in appropriate locations to promote the well-being and safety of these whānau.

Conclusion

We can learn from the lived experiences of these 37 young Māori mothers – who were living in major urban, smaller urban and rural areas of Te Ika a Māui (the North Island of Aotearoa) – that young Māori whānau need space where they feel autonomous yet still embedded in relational inclusion; that is, surrounded by the love and support of their social and familial networks, and with good access to support services. While their choices of accommodation were often constrained by material restraints, and sometimes by experiences of discrimination within systems that failed them, the young women employed trade-offs as constructive coping strategies in order to negotiate agency within the spaces they occupied. Being able to secure housing where they felt spatially and relationally autonomous, and where they were at least somewhat satisfied, enabled them to get closer to their aspirations of home.

In the six years since these E Hine interviews, the housing crisis in this country has deepened, with Māori bearing the brunt of poor and limited housing stock, while house prices and rents soar (Johnson et al., 2018). This has a debilitating impact on the ability of young Māori mothers to find their own place and space while retaining their relational autonomy. Too many are now 'stuck' in transitional housing or whānau homes as rents continue to move out of reach and landlords query young Māori mothers' suitability as tenants. The current circumstances of many young whānau are a contravention of Article 21 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007), that they have a right to housing as part of their right "without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions". Most of all, Tiriti o Waitangi-compliant housing policy is needed for these young whanau – policy that respects their need for autonomy, protects their uncompromised sense of agency, and allows them to raise their children in a place they can call home.

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