



Gandhi Nivas

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Gandhi Nivas: Stakeholder experiences of responding to clients involved in family violence and mental health crises



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGĀ TANGATA

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In partnership with



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Welcome...

This is your whare for the next little while....

Please, make yourself at home....cuppa?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the key stakeholders, professionals and communities of Gandhi Nivas and Sahaayta – thank you for your kindness, commitment and generosity to share your stories, and for your dedication to the creative facilitation of safety at the site of the entwined crises of mental health and family violence. We have been warmly welcomed into your whare to work, learn and think with you, thank you.

Thank you to the families and whānau within the communities of South and West Auckland who welcomed researchers into their homes and to join with them in their journeys to engage in processes of change and living free from violence.

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BEGINNINGS

Gandhi Nivas began in 2014 in Counties Manukau, Tāmaki Makaurau, to provide temporary accommodation and social and safety support to family and whānau living through violence. Three *homes of peace*¹ across South and West Auckland offer temporary accommodation to men who are bound by Police Safety Orders (PSOs) and cannot return to their family home for a period of days (as per their PSO). Police are authorised to bring the men to Gandhi Nivas for a period of rest and reflection, where counsellors, social workers and in-house co-ordinators offer 24/7 social support and counselling services, both within the homes of peace for the men, and within the community and from sister agency Sahaayta Counselling Services for the women, children and extended family.

Previous research from the research partnership between Massey University and Gandhi Nivas demonstrates the collaborative relationships between Police and Gandhi Nivas provide families with a rapid response to family violence crises that are brought to Police attention, and the early and extended intervention demonstrates successes in reducing re-offending and improving non-offending. Nearly 60% of men who are welcomed into Gandhi Nivas do not go on to reoffend (Morgan et al., 2020), and the women supported within the community tell stories of their hopes and aspirations after their family members' residence at Gandhi Nivas (Rogerson et al., 2020).

The research partnership also identified that within New Zealand Police records of 'family harm episodes', '1M: mental health' and '1X: threatens/attempts suicide' are frequently recorded codes (Morgan et al., 2020), and the research team has heard stories from women of "*alcohol and/or drug abuse within their family; isolation and shame; difficulties accessing adequate social and/or mental health services; precarity and poverty*" (Morgan et al., 2020, p. 25). These stories of the entwined crises of mental health and family violence inform the present community psychology ethnographic study - as do the voices heard in *He Ara Oranga – The Governmental Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction* that suggest "*we do not have a continuum of care*" in our mental health system responses, though we do have committed and creative communities who work to create solutions (Patterson et al., 2018, p. 11). As community solutions are preferred by service users for those experiencing both mental health and family violence crises (Boscarato et al., 2014; Patterson et al., 2018; Roguski & Gregory, 2014; Short et al., 2019), this study locates

¹ Gandhi Nivas can be understood to mean 'home of peace'.

organisational members of Gandhi Nivas as experts in responding to *both* crises within the community and commits to hearing how their knowledges inform their responses.

INQUIRY

Since we regard organisational members of Gandhi Nivas as experts in community care, the research process involved a contemporary approach to ethnography (Coombes & Te Hiwi, 2007; Coombes et al., 2016) and drew on community psychology principles and values (Roberston & Masters-Awatere, 2007; Hodgetts et al., 2013; Sonn & Quayle, 2012). To co-construct knowledge *with* Gandhi Nivas within the context of their everyday working lives, a member of the research team spent several months in the *homes of peace, hanging out* (Coombes & Te Hiwi, 2007), *going along* (King, 2019) and working with staff, building reciprocal relationships informing the knowledge produced. Thinking and working with Gandhi Nivas staff in these ways contributed to forming the goals of the present study, understanding the reoccurrence of concerns about mental health in Gandhi Nivas' work in family violence within the context of the precarious conditions of everyday lives (Hodgetts & Stotle, 2017) and an overwhelmed and under-resourced mental health system (Patterson et al., 2018). Facilitating *a receptive social environment* (Campbell et al., 2010) to think together about how to enhance abilities to respond to the entwined crises of mental health and family violence, the commitment to the research became to understand:

How Gandhi Nivas staff experience the intersections of 'family violence' and 'mental health' crisis events for men who come to the Gandhi Nivas residence psychologically distressed, to contribute to a needs identification exercise within the community collaboration.

The research goal was addressed through an ethical commitment to conversational interviewing while *hanging out* (Coombes et al., 2016) through both formal and informal interviews with Gandhi Nivas members during their everyday working lives. The following findings are informed by a narrative analysis of the transcripts of formal interviews, the researcher's reflexive diary written while in the field, and the researcher's memories of informal conversations through ethnographic work with members of Gandhi Nivas.

KEY FINDINGS

Though the kaupapa of Gandhi Nivas is family violence (not mental health), staff understand that these issues are entwined and cannot be separated; they experience responding to the intersection of the two crises “more often than not” in their daily working lives.

As counsellors, social workers and in-house coordinators embedded in community relationships, staff understand that family violence, mental health, and alcohol and drug (AOD) issues are entwining concerns that present alongside each other and cannot be separated. Gandhi Nivas explain that these experiences of distress are not confined to an individual but ripple throughout a family and community, recognising a family's referral to Gandhi Nivas as an opportunity for family to become supported. Staff understand system responses are fragmented, siloed, and emphasise the responsibility of individuals (Hodgetts et al., 2013) who are already experiencing distress and crisis. Becoming welcomed into the Gandhi Nivas whare is becoming welcomed into a *home* with a family to listen and understand how they can support; staff begin their engagements with family-oriented-and-informed needs assessments. The 'assessment' process begins prior to a man's arrival at the whare, during a phone conversation with a referring police officer. This initial conversation between Gandhi Nivas and Police helps empower police officers to make appropriate referrals directly to specialist mental health services if necessary. If the combined expertise of Gandhi Nivas and Police decide that Gandhi Nivas is an appropriate referral for a man, the invitation is extended to welcome him into a Gandhi Nivas whare.

On arrival to the whare, assumptions that men are being *put into a cell* are disrupted by welcoming them with a friendly smile, an offer of a cup of tea, something to eat, a hot shower, dry clothes and a warm bed. These processes of hospitality and care attend to the precarity of everyday lives (Hodgetts & Stotle, 2017) and prioritise ethical relationships among men and Gandhi Nivas. Men are told that once they have settled in there will be an 'assessment' procedure to go through, as the events that have brought them in connection with Gandhi Nivas are not forgotten. In these 'assessment' conversations (often shared over cups of tea and a packet of biscuits), Gandhi Nivas listen to build an understanding of the kinds of supports needed, and understand how a family has been responding to the inequitable conditions of everyday lives prior to a man's arrival at the whare. Beginning with respect for men's dignity and a willingness to hear their stories moves possibilities for engagement beyond categories produced by "*the system*" such as 'perpetrator', 'offender', 'victim' and 'mentally ill' that often contribute to stigmatising experiences. Instead, Gandhi Nivas shift the frame of listening towards hearing families' strengths, skills and potential. These processes of building affirmative

ethical relationships with the men fosters trust, enabling deeper discussions and understandings of the difficulties they are experiencing.

While a man is resident at Gandhi Nivas, staff take the opportunity to visit his family at home in the community, explaining that though the man may be staying in the whare, Gandhi Nivas are there to join and offer support to the whole family on their journey. Building relationships with family also contributes to an ongoing 'needs assessment', as staff listen to understand how they can work alongside families to facilitate safety in their homes and community. At times, these conversations with families during home visits can present vastly different and/or additional information than offered by the men in the whare. Thinking with the families' expertise, and their own, enables Gandhi Nivas professionals to understand when they need to engage support for a family from specialist mental health and addiction services.

If Gandhi Nivas learn that a member of a family struggles with *managing their mental wellbeing*, staff (with permission) connect to community mental health teams, key workers and nurses (who may have previously worked with the family) to invite them to (re)join the family with Gandhi Nivas in support and creation of safety. Speaking with specialist services on families' behalf protects families (as much as possible) from having to repeat their stories of distress, pain and violence to multiple people. As staff at Gandhi Nivas are culturally diverse and speak multiple languages, they also often act as translators for families between response services, and advocate for families' cultural and spiritual needs. These processes of care can increase the connections between families and mental health and addiction services and can empower families to accept specialist support when they otherwise may not. Gandhi Nivas' relational expertise strengthens community connections for supporting the family, and offers a *home* for hosting family meetings and mental health assessments, bringing various agencies from "*the system*" together.

Processes of Gandhi Nivas thinking with various forms of expertise to enable responsive responses for 'mental health' crises include:

- ❖ Phone assessment procedures with police prior to a man's arrival to Gandhi Nivas, so that police can make the appropriate referral to mental health services if required
- ❖ Family-oriented-and-informed needs assessment when welcoming men to Gandhi Nivas to understand which concern is 'on top' at the time of the arrival to the *home of peace*
- ❖ Transparent and honest discussions with men and families about their mental wellness needs and potential avenues for support

- ❖ Liaison with clients' community mental health key workers, nurses and support staff to understand the history and wider context of the presenting concerns
- ❖ Client advocacy and navigation to connect with appropriate mental health services and support



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PROCESSES OF THINKING WITH VARIOUS FORMS OF EXPERTISE TO ENABLE RESPONSIVE RESPONSES TO MENTAL HEALTH CRISES INCLUDES:

Phone assessment procedures with police prior to a man's arrival to Gandhi Nivas to enable police to make appropriate referral to mental health services if necessary



Family-oriented-and-informed needs assessment when welcoming men to Gandhi Nivas to understand which concern is 'on top' at the time of the man's arrival

Honest and transparent discussions with men and their families about their mental wellness needs and potential avenues for support



Liaison with clients' community mental health key workers, nurses and support staff to understand the history and wider context of presenting concerns

Client advocacy and navigation to connect with appropriate mental health services and support



Through relationships built on trust and respect, disclosures of serious mental wellness concerns to staff by men and their families become possible, and staff work to connect families with appropriate mental health services with care.

Gandhi Nivas understand it can take time building relationships of trust and respect to enable further requests for support from families and recognise that a *serious mental wellness concern* may not be apparent or communicated within the immediate aftermath of a crisis. Taking time to be with and listen to men and their families helps Gandhi Nivas to communicate “okay, this is somebody who...they are really there to support me, they are there because they want to help me”. Building relationships to permit attention to ‘mental health’ often means letting men and their families “talk about everything under the sun except what they’re supposed to be talking about”, and sometimes this means “what they are saying actually does not make sense”, but is a way of saying “you know, I like this place”. By prioritising relationships through these conversations, where staff offer to share their expertise with families and vice-versa, men and their families are encouraged to articulate when they need support for a *serious mental wellness concern*. These processes of empowerment focus on respect for autonomy in decision-making that can contribute to careful and effective connections for men and their families to specialist mental health and addiction services.

Gandhi Nivas understand the courage and strength it takes to ask for help and articulate *serious mental wellness concerns*, and recognise the importance of immediate support and response when one does so. However, they also understand that specialist mental health and addiction services are overwhelmed and under-resourced in Aotearoa, and so these services are only able to offer immediate support to some of those most acutely in need (Patterson et al., 2018). Gandhi Nivas offer counselling sessions to anyone in the family who wishes to take them up, providing a responsive response to attend to the ‘in-between’ times of a family articulating a need for specialist mental health and addiction support and becoming connected to that support. At times these are formal counselling sessions, designed as requested by the family to accommodate individuals, couples, children and family therapy. Gandhi Nivas support families with overcoming barriers to accessing these sessions, offering sessions at no charge, as well as support with transportation and childcare requirements. At other times, counselling unfolds with the everyday rhythms of the *home of peace*: during ‘assessments’ with men staying at the whare, home visits to families in the community, anger management group sessions, cooking a meal together with the men, through phone calls from distressed men at their family home who are worried about their potential for harm, and beach walks and community outings with men staying in the whare. Moving with families and attending

to their 'counselling' needs in these ways enables processes of empowerment to continue and supports families to remain connected and engaged to begin relationships with those from specialist mental health and addiction services.

As well as providing counselling to enable a responsive response to families' needs, Gandhi Nivas work with community relationships to produce creative ways of engaging men and their families with mental health and addiction support. These creative processes include relationships with local healthcare providers who make possible same day visits to a general practitioner for initial assessments and ameliorative medication provision, or staff will bring clients to emergency departments and advocate for their immediate mental wellness support needs. Staff will also call for assistance of emergency services if deemed appropriate, and they remain connected to the family and walk alongside them during this response. Becoming alongside families, Gandhi Nivas continue to advocate for clients' cultural and spiritual needs throughout their journeys, as well as offering to support specialist mental health and addiction services to enable culturally safe processes of care and engagement. Joining with families as "*a 'we' who needs support*", Gandhi Nivas empowers both families and services to remain connected and working together through experiences such as mental health compulsory assessment and treatment, detox and addiction support, and ongoing community psychiatric treatment, encouraging safety and provision of support through affirmative, ethical relationships.

In summary, the relational work includes:

- ❖ Careful discussions with client and families about possible referrals to empower client autonomy in decision-making and processes of change
- ❖ Referrals to mental health crisis and specialist services when deemed appropriate by staff expertise and assessment
- ❖ Fast and no-charge 24/7 counselling services for families (including children)
- ❖ Community relationships with general practitioners and health care providers to enable same-day appointments and no charge for initial consultations
- ❖ Accompanying clients to medical appointments and assessments (as requested) for support and advocacy
- ❖ Accompanying clients to emergency rooms when immediate mental health assessment is required
- ❖ Acting as translators and advocates for cultural and spiritual support needs for clients
- ❖ Reconnecting clients with previous mental health key workers and community care teams



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RELATIONAL WORK INCLUDES:

Careful discussions with client and family about possible referrals to specialist mental health services, empowering client autonomy



Referrals and/or reconnection to mental health crisis and specialist services when deemed appropriate by Gandhi Nivas professionals' expertise and assessment

Fast and no-charge 24/7 counselling services for families (including children)



Community relationships with General Practitioners and healthcare providers to enable same day appointments and no-charge initial consultations

Accompanying clients to medical appointments and assessments for support and advocacy (as requested)



Acting as translators and advocates for clients spiritual and cultural support needs



Gandhi Nivas understand that “mental health is on a spectrum” and not all experiences of mental distress require specialist response: understanding mental distress within the context of the social determinants of health enables Gandhi Nivas to respond effectively with care to both families and specialist agencies.

Gandhi Nivas understands experiences of mental distress and violence in families within the context of the social determinants of health (Hodgetts & Stotle, 2017), making sense that mental *distress* is an understandable response to the inequitable conditions of everyday lives, and one that does not necessarily need specialist mental health and addiction support (Walker et al., 2015). By attending to the precarity experienced by families to address their *distress*, Gandhi Nivas support specialist mental health and addiction services to prioritise their work with families who need specialist expertise in responding to *serious mental wellbeing concerns*.

Some of Gandhi Nivas' work in addressing experiences of mental *distress* is done by taking men and/or their families to various social support agencies and advocating (and often translating) for response to needs such as housing, employment and food. Additionally, as experiences of precarity are ongoing and can change at any-time of the day or night, Gandhi Nivas often fill the 'in-between' spaces and pockets created by the fragmentation of the welfare system in Aotearoa New Zealand (Hodgetts et al., 2013) and its limited hours of response. In these situations, Gandhi Nivas work within their community relationships to come up with creative solutions to respond to needs such as housing, clothing, food and social support.

For men bound by PSOs choosing to be welcomed into the whare, staff respond to the precarity of everyday life by ensuring the kitchen cupboards are always stocked with basic (vegetarian) necessities and that a man is fed, warm and dry on arrival. Beginning with respect for men as *men* rather than 'perpetrators of violence' can shift an assumption that the men are being *put in a cell* so they understand they are being welcomed into a *home*. These care processes are also understood as creating possibilities for safety, offering possibilities for the men's engagement with Gandhi Nivas, and becoming in a *home* that does not reproduce the harmful social conditions of everyday lives that enable violence (The Board for the Elimination of Family Violence and Sexual Violence, 2021).

As well as welcoming men bound by PSOs to stay in the whare, Gandhi Nivas host many guests in their *homes of peace*, embedded within residential community areas across South and West Auckland. Connecting to local community rhythms and support structures, these guests may come from local businesses, neighbours, community

support agencies, training and education facilities, government departments, Parliamentary Offices, and includes students, researchers, families, and men who once stayed in the whare and have remained connected. A typical welcome to the whare (whether you are a guest or there for a temporary stay) offers a welcoming smile, a cuppa and a kōrero, as staff prioritise connection and hospitality on your arrival. Alternatively, Gandhi Nivas may come to you. Moving through community takes staff to places such as family homes, temples, marae, doctors' offices, social service agencies, airports, malls, refugee resettlement centres, emergency housing facilities, prisons, supermarkets, bakeries and pharmacies. These movements and connections empower Gandhi Nivas to respond to a multiplicity of needs in supporting families, with empowerment flowing to families as their immediate needs are supported while Gandhi Nivas walk alongside them, enabling connections into (for example) employment, education and long-term housing. Such empowerment, facilitated through relationships of care and dignity, seeks to address the underlying social conditions that enable manifestations of violence and harm within families and community, as recommended by The Board for the Elimination of Family Violence and Sexual Violence (2021).

Creative community solutions include:

- ❖ Basic groceries provided in the *homes of peace* and men encouraged to cook together and with staff, sharing skills
- ❖ Provision of food and delivery of food parcels for families through relationships with Gurdwara, temples, marae, community restaurants and social support agencies
- ❖ Connections to employment opportunities for families through community relationships with (for example) builders, farmers, mechanics, growers and factories
- ❖ CV building with clients to enable employment opportunities
- ❖ Connections to housing opportunities through community relationships with housing providers and through advocacy at social support agencies
- ❖ Collection of community donations of clothing, bedding, toys and food to support families' needs
- ❖ Connection to community-based learning and education facilities to empower clients to upskill or re-enter education



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CREATIVE COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO DISTRESS FROM PRECARITY:

Basic groceries provided in the homes of peace, and men encouraged to cook together with Gandhi Nivas professionals, sharing skills



Provision of food and delivery of food parcels for family through relationships with temples, marae, community restaurants and social support agencies

Connections to employment, study and training opportunities through community relationships, assistance with CV building, applications, interview skills, and support through employment processes



Connections to housing opportunities through community relationships with housing providers and through advocacy at social support services

Collection of community donations of clothing, bedding, toys and food to support families' needs



Gandhi Nivas responds to experiences of mental distress by providing a space to enable rest, respite and reflection for families, and to offer an invitation to engage in processes of change.

Often men begin their visit in the *home of peace* by having something warm to eat and drink and going straight to sleep, or by sitting with the staff who *listen to pain for real* (Brown, 2013) as men cry and reflect on experiences of trauma, grief, injury, illness, violence and suffering in their lives. Providing a home to temporarily care for men in this way enables respite for family at home too and provides more stability for everyday routines such as school and childcare as women and children do not have to flee to refuge.

Understanding that *mental distress* is a normal experience given the inequitable conditions of everyday lives (Walker et al., 2015; Hodgetts & Stotle, 2017), Gandhi Nivas attend to experiences of precarity while also working to open spaces for experiences of joy and connection where families can build on their strengths and expertise. Offering various group activities hosted by Gandhi Nivas, both at the whare and in community, maintains relationships with families once a member is no longer resident in the *home*. Some of these groups are directly focused on skill-building and becoming non-violent, whereas others offer spaces for social, spiritual and community connections to blossom. Staff understand that previous negative experiences with system responses can cause hesitancy and reluctance for families to try again. By offering spaces for affirmative and ethical engagements between families and staff, Gandhi Nivas can empower men and their families to engage with both Gandhi Nivas services (such as counselling and *Ahimsa* anger management) and other services within “*the system*” (such as specialist mental health and addiction services, legal services and social support agencies). Sometimes an offering of a food parcel and a home visit becomes a referral for a specialist mental health assessment, or an agreement to engage in 1:1 counselling at Gandhi Nivas. Other times a ‘mindfulness session’ becomes a peer support group, where men share their thoughts and cry with and alongside each other, guided by trained facilitators. The social connections, enrichments and supports from these creative safety processes empower alternative possibilities and responses to the inequitable conditions of everyday lives than violence in the home.

While the men are resident at Gandhi Nivas, staff provide opportunities to engage processes of change through:

- ❖ Counselling support for individuals, couples, children and families (as required)
- ❖ Anger management groups and 1:1 sessions
- ❖ Yoga and meditation groups
- ❖ A roaming men’s group for peer support sessions, guided by a trained facilitator

- ❖ Women's coffee group through sister agency Sahaayta
- ❖ Opportunities to learn new skills such as arts practice, gardening, home maintenance and cooking
- ❖ Prayer and spiritual support
- ❖ Home visits to the family in the community while the men are resident at Gandhi Nivas
- ❖ Referrals and transport to mental health and AOD services, groups and rehabilitation facilities as required
- ❖ Support navigating legal system responses



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OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE IN PROCESSES OF CHANGE THROUGH:

Fast and no-charge counselling support for individuals, couples, children and families



Anger management group and 1:1 sessions

Yoga and meditation sessions, prayer and spiritual support



Opportunities to learn new skills such as arts practice, gardening, home maintenance, cooking

A roaming men's group for peer support sessions, guided by a trained facilitator



Women's coffee group for social and peer support through sister agency Sahaayta Counselling Services



EMPOWERING POSSIBILITIES TO INCREASE ABILITIES TO ETHICALLY RESPOND

Thinking with the expertise of the Gandhi Nivas community offers creative and empowering possibilities to increase abilities to respond to the entwined crises of mental health and family violence. Understanding mental *distress* as a common feature of the inequitable conditions of everyday lives (Walker et al., 2015), Gandhi Nivas privilege ethical relationships with families and attend to experiences of precarity, isolation, loneliness, grief, trauma, stigma, racism (and, and, and). By addressing the social determinants of health (Hodgetts & Stotle, 2017), staff can determine when a family is experiencing a *serious mental wellness concern* that requires specialist mental health and addiction support, ensuring they are only referring on to specialist services those who are in acute need, respecting the time and capacity of an overburdened and under-resourced mental health system in Aotearoa (Patterson et al., 2018).

Relationships enable possibilities for ethical responses to those experiencing mental health and family violence crises as Gandhi Nivas walk alongside both families and specialist services to *bridge* fractures in the continuity of care within system responses, and to empower possibilities for experiences of joy within communities currently experiencing both crises. Joining a chorus of voices echoing the need to respond to the inequitable conditions of everyday lives in addressing the social determinants of health (e.g., Hodgetts & Stotle, 2017; Patterson et al., 2018; Short et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2015), Gandhi Nivas offer to the *receptive social environment* (Campbell et al., 2010) significant expertise in *how* such ethical responses can occur in the context of community care for both family violence and mental health crises.

Bye for now....

And remember to drop in for a cuppa when you are around next....

Not just when / if you need support again....

You are always welcome to come home.....

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