

Development of cultural framework for genetic research into heart disease for Peoples of Fiji.

Pritika Narayan, Litia Racumu, Losalini Tuwere, Sunita Narayan, Sandhaya Bhawan, Iva Vakalalabure, Ravi Reddy.

Background:

Peoples of Fiji in Aotearoa New Zealand experience a disproportionately high burden of coronary artery disease. However, the complex interplay of environmental and genetic factors underlying this risk has not been previously explored. The Fiji Heart Study is the first genetic investigation into premature coronary artery disease among Peoples of Fiji in Aotearoa. Establishing a foundation of community interest, understanding culturally rooted values, and creating community infrastructure for ongoing cultural and ethical oversight were essential to ensure community benefit and protection.

Methods:

This article reports a thematic analysis of transcripts derived from facilitated talanoa sessions conducted across 18 consultations in Aotearoa, Fiji, and online. Participants included community representatives, healthcare consumers, and professionals who identify as Peoples of Fiji. The consultations were co-facilitated alongside local community leaders and representatives to ensure cultural alignment.

Results:

The thematic analysis identified core elements, themes, and values essential for guiding decision-making and ensuring the cultural appropriateness of the genetic study. These findings informed the development of the cultural framework for the study, which is represented by the Na vunimaqo | Aam ped | Mango tree — a culturally significant symbol representing values related to health and wellbeing. The different parts of the mango tree symbolise the core values identified in the study:

- Roots: Building strong relationships and trust.
- Seed: Developing capabilities for future generations.
- Trunk: Ensuring protection and safety.
- Fruit: Promoting community health and wellbeing.
- Leaves: Collaborating to achieve common goals.

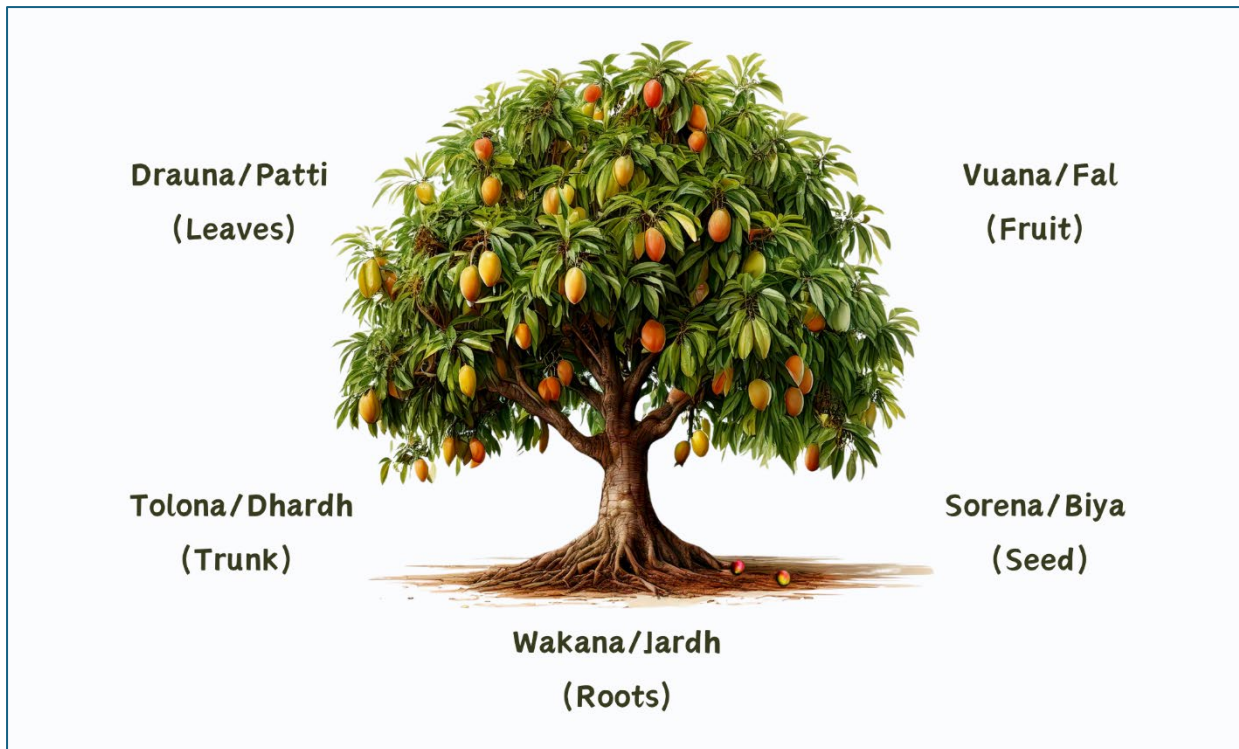


Figure 1. Each part of the tree symbolises key values that can guide decision making for a genetic study of heart disease for Peoples of Fiji

Proverb:

This work was blessed with the following proverb by respected elders from Fiji (Losalini Tuwere and Sunita Narayan). It captures the vision, essence and hope embedded in the combined values captured by the Na vunimaqo | Aam ped framework.

“Ni da cakacaka vata me yaga vei keda kece, ena sega na leqa”

“Saathe milke kaam karese saabke safalta milee”

This translates to:

“When we work together for the benefit of all, there will be thriving”.

Conclusions:

Ensuring the cultural safety and relevance of the proposed genetic study requires the integration of a robust cultural framework and supportive community infrastructure. By grounding the study in culturally appropriate principles and fostering ongoing community engagement, the Fiji Heart Study aims to deliver accessible and meaningful benefits to Peoples of Fiji, advancing both health equity and research inclusivity.