

More support needed for Pacific youth to address health, social and educational disparities

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Persistent health, social and educational disparities exposed in the latest report on Pacific youth in New Zealand, require urgent attention according to researchers.

This survey was New Zealand's largest and most comprehensive survey of the health and wellbeing of Pacific students living in New Zealand.

Information was provided by 1445 students who identified any Pacific Island ethnicity in 2012 (17.1 percent of the entire national sample).

Some areas of great concern with worsening or no improvement over the 11 years between surveys include; Pacific youth live in poor socio-economic conditions; many are exposed to unhealthy food environments; and Pacific youth reported significant barriers in accessing healthcare and dental care.

The report based on findings from the Youth'12 national youth health and well-being survey, was undertaken by the Adolescent Health Research Group from the University of Auckland, in collaboration with a Pacific Advisory Group.

The survey includes a range of factors that impact on the healthy development of Pacific young people, including family, community, education and social environments.

The survey revealed that almost half of Pacific youth live with household deprivation and attend low and mid decile schools.

"Almost a quarter of Pacific students reported that their parents worry about not having enough food, and 36 percent said that someone at home sleeps in a room not designated for sleeping (e.g., a garage or living room)," says Mrs Jacinta Fa'alili-Fidow the lead writer of the report and a senior Pacific advisor from the University of Auckland.

"Despite living in these challenging environments, Pacific youth have made significant progress and improvements in some areas of health and wellbeing" she says.

Over the past 11 years there have been some major improvements for Pacific youth including; stronger family and school relationships, increased aspirations to achieve in education; higher self-rated health and life satisfaction; lower rates of depressive symptoms; healthier decision making about initiating sexual activity, substance use and risky driving; and decreased experience of personal violence and sexual abuse/coercion.

"Significant improvements in the health and well-being of Pacific youth, both at the individual and societal level given sufficient investment, demonstrate that change is possible," says Mrs Fa'alili-Fidow.

Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath a co-investigator on the study says "These improvements must be maintained and continue to be resourced to ensure that we do not see a reverse in these trends."

The researchers present intra-Pacific differences for Samoan, Tongan and Cook Islands students, and look at the differences between Pacific and New Zealand European students to explore health, education and social disparities. The survey also includes Pacific data from the earlier

surveys conducted in 2001 and 2007 to identify trends over time.

The study found that Pacific students are significantly more likely than New Zealand European students to;

- Experience significant socio-economic deprivation and housing deprivation
- Be overweight or obese and eat / drink unhealthily
- Be less likely to access health and dental care when required
- Have poorer mental health including self-harm and suicide attempts
- Engage in risky health behaviours including smoking, inconsistent contraceptive use and not using seat belts while in a car
- Experience family violence, sexual abuse or coercion and be in a serious physical fight.

"There is increasing evidence that health outcomes for Pacific youth can be improved," says Dr Tiatia-Seath, from Pacific Health at the University of Auckland. "Our young peoples' behaviour is positively influenced by their environment – family, school, churches, communities and wider political environments."

The report recommends that interventions, programmes and services must address these broader contexts as well as building individual skills within a cultural framework to improve outcomes for Pacific students.

"We believe that Pacific communities have the knowledge and skills to create their own solutions—and to ensuring that all Pacific youth can be proud of who they are, can actively participate and contribute their many skills to society," says Dr Tiatia-Seath.

More information: The Health and Wellbeing of New Zealand

Secondary School Students in 2012: Pacific Young People - Findings from the Youth'12 national youth health and wellbeing survey:

[www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/assets ... ulty/ahrg/docs/youth](http://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/assets/.../ahrg/docs/youth)

'12%20pacific%20report.pdf

Provided by University of Auckland

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