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Risk and Protective Factors of Micronesian Youth in Hawai'i: An Exploratory Study

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This exploratory, qualitative study examined the risk and protective factors of Micronesian middle and high school students in Hawai'i. Forty one Micronesian youth participated in 9 focus groups that explored their experiences within their schools, families, and communities. The findings describe youths' experiences of ecological stress beginning with their migration to Hawai'i, and the potential outcomes of this stress (e.g., fighting, gangs, and drug use). Cultural buffers, such as traditional practices and culturally specific prevention programs, were described as aspects that prevented adverse outcomes. Implications for prevention practice are discussed.

Key words: *Micronesian, youth, risk, protection, culture*

An Exploratory Study

Youth in many Pacific Island societies suffer from disproportionately high rates of adverse social and behavioral outcomes, such as suicide (Hezel, 1987), drug use (Storr, Arria, Workman, & Anthony, 2004; Wong, Klinge, & Price, 2004), and delinquency (Mayeda, Okamoto, & Mark, 2005). One approach to understanding these phenomena is to examine the individual and environmental factors of Pacific Islander youth that might account for these findings. The purpose of this study was to examine the operative risk and protective factors influencing adverse social and behavioral outcomes of Micronesian youth in Hawai'i. Because these youth have migrated to Hawai'i more recently compared to other Pacific Island groups (e.g., Samoans, Tongans), this study examined the impact of psychosocial and environmental factors at an earlier developmental stage compared to other Pacific Island groups in Hawai'i. Utilizing qualitative methods, this study focused on the impact of cultural context on social and behavioral outcomes among Micronesian youth as reflected through their narratives.

Literature Review

Sociohistorical Context of Micronesia

Micronesia is comprised of a number of states and countries. The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) consists of four states—Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap. The Marshall Islands, Palau, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are also independent countries within Micronesia. Until recently, most of Micronesia had been under the colonial administration of four countries: Spain from 1885-1898, Germany from 1899-1914, Japan from 1914-1945, and, after World War II, the United States from 1945-1986 (Alkire, 1977). The effect of these multiple administrations was extremely destructive to Micronesia. Many Micronesians suffered from brutal treatment by the occupying Japanese forces, and all were under continual bombardment from American forces, which at the same time imposed blockades that cut islanders off from needed food, supplies and outside contact

(Poyer, Falgout & Carucci, 2004). While the Japanese occupation of Micronesia had been characterized by economic as well as strategic interests, the U.S. initially only had strategic and military interests in mind and did not do much in the way of rebuilding a viable economy. As a consequence, in the eyes of some of those who experienced both Japanese and American administrations, the standard of living under the U.S. from the end of the war to the present has not equaled the economic success made possible under the Japanese (Poyer et al., 2004). These effects linger on today.

In 1986, the Federated States of Micronesia entered into a Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the United States, ending over a hundred years of colonial rule (FSM Division of Statistics, 2002). A provision of COFA is that persons from the FSM, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Republic of Palau (ROP) can enter, live and work in the United States without needing either a visa or a green card (Heine, 2002). Since COFA went into effect in 1986, Micronesian emigration from FSM to Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI), and later, Hawai'i, has increased dramatically, mainly due to economic reasons (e.g., the unavailability of work at home). Most Micronesians who move outside of their home island are those who are under-educated. Educated Micronesians tend to return home and get the best jobs, leaving nothing at home for those with less education (Hezel, 2001). Moreover, over the last ten years or so, the economic situations in FSM and RMI have regressed, necessitating the need to find work elsewhere (Heine, 2002). Other reasons given for migration are better education for children, for medical purposes, and the need to experience progress one might not otherwise get at home (Hezel, 2001).

Micronesian Cultural Norms and Context

Similar to many non-Western cultures, Micronesians tend to value collectivism and interdependence. Micronesians work towards establishing social patterns of interdependence, cooperation, and harmony (Sadao, 2000). Because cooperation and group consensus are valued, community acceptance is an integral characteristic of the Micronesian culture (Sadao, 2000). Confrontation, disagreements, and competition tend

to be avoided. Conflict is associated with negativity, therefore controversial issues are minimized and not openly discussed. For youth, romantic relationships are forbidden by parents because they are viewed as a distraction from school. With romantic interests, youth either obey parents and do not date or disobey parents and date in secret for as long as the relationship remains undiscovered.

A hierarchy of roles exists in each family. Status correlates with one's age, gender, and family name. For example, the eldest male in the household expects to receive the highest respect from all others in the family. These roles are defined culturally and passed down from one generation to the next through integration and participation. Families face life changes upon migrating to Hawai'i. It is common for families to send one or two members at a time over to stay with relatives while parents or grandparents remain in the homeland for various reasons.

Family ties are an important aspect of a collectivist society. Responsibilities are shared through mutual assistance and care for members of society that are less likely to care for themselves. Extended family and community orientation allows children, elderly, and persons with physical and mental disabilities to be cared for by the collective (Sadao, 2000).

Micronesian Youth in Hawai'i

Micronesian youth migrating to Hawai'i face cultural conflict with the Western belief in individualism. Sadao (2000) states that "promoting the inalienable rights of the individual is in direct contrast with the collectivist group orientation found in Micronesian culture" (pp. 23-24). One of the reasons why families migrate to Hawai'i is the desire for the best education and future for their children. Parents move with the assumption that the American way is the most acceptable option for developing individual potential and providing services to children who were segregated and left out of the mainstream of society (Sadao, 2000). Families sacrifice for each other by leaving their home country to pursue the American dream.

Initially, Micronesian students encounter challenges such as language barriers upon migrating to Hawai'i. With their primary language being Chuukese or Marshallese, students

endure years of 'catching up' to learn proper English. As described by Kawakami (1994), language barriers place these youth at risk for substance abuse and dropout in Hawai'i, and they may be at more risk for abuse and neglect.

Micronesian Risk and Protective Factors

This study applies an ecological risk and protective factors model to Micronesian youth. Matsen and Coatsworth (1998) identify two categories of risk factors: (1) challenging life circumstances (e.g., parental drug use, financial stress in the family), and (2) trauma (e.g., death of a parent, family or community violence). Conversely, protective factors are individual or environmental characteristics that enhance a youth's ability to resist stressful life events and promote adaptation and competence (Bogenschneider, 1996). Individual protective factors include problem solving skills, high intelligence, and a strong positive ethnic identity, while environmental protective factors include a sense of community and supportive friends or neighbors (Waller, 2001). The present study utilized focus groups to examine the influence of these factors on Micronesian youth in Hawai'i.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Nine different focus groups were held, consisting of 41 youth (13 boys and 28 girls). Two of these groups were comprised of only female participants, one was comprised of only male participants, and six of the groups were comprised of both boys and girls. The average group size across schools was 4.6 participants. Smaller focus groups were conducted for several reasons. First, the availability of students during the times of data collection was not consistent or predictable (e.g., after school). Second, based on similar focus group research focused on risk and protection (Waller, Okamoto, Miles, & Hurdle, 2002), smaller focus groups appeared to be more appropriate for the sensitive nature of the research. Finally, smaller groups were more consistent with the cultural norms against individualistic assertion within group settings. Youth participants in the study were sampled from two middle schools (5 groups,

$n=17$) and two high schools (4 groups, $n=24$) on the island of Oahu. These schools were located in urban, low income areas. In the 2005-2006 school year, the percentage of students receiving free or reduced cost lunch in the sampled schools ranged from 43.6 to 75.1, while the percentage of students with limited English proficiency ranged from 11.5 to 22.7 (State of Hawai'i Department of Education, 2006). The majority of the youth participating in the study were Chuukese ($n=24$), followed by Marshallese ($n=15$), and Pohnpeian ($n=2$). All groups were of mixed Micronesian ethnicity, except for one group which consisted of only Chuukese students.

This study used a focus group methodology guided by a semi-structured interview schedule. Questions focused on three major areas (school, family, and culture) and two minor areas (violence and substance use). Sample questions in each of these areas are outlined in Table 1. Focus groups were selected, as they are thought to promote a safe environment in which respondents can share ideas, beliefs, and attitudes in the company of peers from the same socioeconomic, ethnic, and gender backgrounds (Madriz, 2000). In each of the schools, a designated school staff member, such as a school counselor or resource teacher, assisted the research staff in recruiting participants and obtaining active parental permission for youth participation in the study. Prior to beginning data collection, the researchers provided an orientation session within each school in order to (1) establish rapport with the participants, (2) explain the purpose of the study and confidentiality procedures, and (3) respond to questions and concerns from the participants. Focus groups occurred during class or after school, and ranged from 60-120 minutes in length. Group facilitators were university-affiliated researchers who were of Asian, Samoan, and Micronesian descent. Participating youth received an incentive of school supplies, which included a 3-ring binder, note pads, and pens. All research procedures were approved by the Committee on Human Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

Analysis

All focus groups were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. In order to increase rigor, the Principal Investigator (D.M.),

Table 1. Selected Focus Group Questions

<i>School</i>	
1.	What do you like least/best about school?
2.	Is it easy for you or other Micronesian students to get help in school, if needed?
<i>Family</i>	
1.	Do you (or other Micronesian youth) feel comfortable talking with your parents about your personal issues? Why or why not?
2.	Do Micronesian families move residences a lot? How does this affect youth?
<i>Culture</i>	
1.	Are you able to practice your cultural values?
2.	Are Micronesian youth proud of being Micronesian? Why or why not?
<i>Violence</i>	
1.	Are youth gangs becoming an issue in Micronesian communities? If so, why are youth joining gangs and how do they affect the community?
2.	Do Micronesian youth from different backgrounds get into fights with each other?
<i>Substance Use</i>	
1.	Is drug/alcohol use a big issue among Micronesian youth? If so, why?

Co-Principal Investigator (S.O.), and an MSW-level graduate research assistant (M.U.) individually coded the data using the guidelines described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Then, common themes were combined, redundant themes were reduced, and interrelationships between codes were proposed. These interrelationships between codes were then compared with existing theories relevant to culture, risk, and protection.

Results

Migration

The participants in the study indicated that they recently migrated to Hawai'i predominantly from Chuuk or the Marshall Islands, and a few participants had moved to Hawai'i from Pohnpei. The primary reason that they had for migrating to Hawai'i was for a better education. One Chuukese

participant described the educational system in Chuuk, "The private schools are kind of like good education (sic), but the public schools...they're not good. The students, they don't learn as well."

In other focus groups, participants reiterated that the primary reason for moving to Hawai'i was to attain a better education. However, a number of participants also expressed that their family moved to Hawai'i to attain better health care. This was stated most frequently by Marshallese students, and occasionally by Chuukese students.

D.R.: So first we're just [going to] go over some background stuff. Some of you already said when you came here but do you know why you came here?

Marshallese Female (MF): Better education.

Chuukese Female (CF): Well, I had to come 'cause my brother was sick, right?

D.R.: Okay, so you came for medical reasons?

CF: And then we stayed. So yeah.

Participants also recognized that the Micronesian population in Hawai'i was growing as families moved from different parts of Micronesia for better education, employment, and health care.

MF: The population is increasing every year.

O.O.: Any particular reason?

Marshallese Male (MM): Overcrowded.

MF: I think it's to get better jobs, better lives and...like health.

MF: There's a lot more in the states I never knew. But now finding out that there's a lot more Marshallese around, I'm like "whoah."

Another participant explained that even entry-level jobs in Hawai'i could appear attractive to families in different parts of Micronesia due to imbalances in minimum wage:

MF: 'Cause back home families like—even if you're a doctor you get paid minimum wage. My uncle he's a police officer and he gets 2 dollars an hour. I told him

you can come over here and work at McDonalds for 7 dollars.

The participants' length of stay in Hawai'i ranged from 4 months to 9 years. However, one participant was born in California and had spent time in other parts of the Continental United States and Chuuk before settling in Hawai'i, and another student was born in Oregon, but then moved to the Marshall Islands before moving to Hawai'i. All of them had families that lived in various countries of Micronesia (particularly Chuuk or the Marshall Islands), and some of them were living apart from their parents. Participants who lived apart from their parents lived with extended family members, such as aunties, uncles, or cousins.

Ecological Stressors

Housing Conditions. Almost every participant interviewed lived in a low-income housing community and lived in crowded conditions. For example, one participant indicated that she lived with 7 people in an apartment, while another indicated that she lived with "twelve or thirteen" relatives in her apartment. Living with a large number of relatives in small apartments was an extremely common condition among focus group participants. Despite these conditions, participants generally indicated that they enjoyed living with many family members. Several participants even stated they had "fun" living with so many family members.

D.M.: So how you guys like that, living—like for you guys there are eleven people in your house, some of you have twelve. Is that okay or is that normal for you or...

CF: It's okay. It's kind of fun cause we have...plenty people to play with and all that.

However, some participants expressed that living in such conditions was difficult because it was "squishy," and that they lacked privacy.

After moving to Hawai'i, some participants described moving frequently to different communities. One participant described how she moved three times in the course of six years

in Hawai'i, in one case because the housing conditions in which she lived were unacceptable.

D.R.: Three times? Do you know why you moved, or for a better school, or...

CF: Like, I don't know my—the owner's like—they just told us we have to move 'cause they had to rebuild the holes, 'cause it's kind of old, so they had to rebuild it.

Other students stated that moving between different low-income housing communities in Hawai'i came as a result of over-crowding. The apartments in which their families were living were too small for those who were staying there.

Chuukese Male (CM): I lived at KPT (KPT stands for Kuhio Park Terrace, which is a low-income community on the island of Oahu).

D.M.: How come you guys moved to Palolo?

CM: 'Cause the houses over there was small.

D.M.: The houses were too small. How about you? How come you moved from KPT?

MM: We had to move 'cause there was too many people in the house.

D.M.: Too many people in the house?

MM: My aunty and the husband, her kids and—plus us—my mom, and we had to move here.

Some students said moving within Hawai'i was exciting when they were moving to more spacious conditions. However, other students mentioned that moving was sad because they lost friends. Another participant expressed being sad because moving residences within Hawai'i meant moving away from family members. Thus, moving residences within Hawai'i resulted in both positive and negative outcomes for participants. However, more students who changed Hawai'i residences stated that moving was a stressful experience.

Community Conditions. Not only did participants talk about moving and living in crowded, sometimes run-down apartments, they also talked more broadly about the neighborhoods in which they lived. As mentioned previously, virtually every participant stated that he or she lived in a low-income housing

community. In describing these communities, participants expressed a wide range of concerns, some of which will be described more extensively in other sections (e.g., fighting and substance use).

Many youth noted that their neighborhoods were dirty, littered with trash, and smelled bad. A number of Chuukese participants expressed these sentiments.

CM: It's kind of messed up on the outside but when you go inside...

CF: There's garbage, my God.

CF: Yeah, there's garbage all around.

CF: It stinks.

CF: Yeah, it stinks too. When you walk on the road, oh my God.

D.R.: What is it?

CF: The garbage.

D.R.: What does it stink of?

CF: The garbage. Yeah they put it on the road, that's why.

Other participants stated that it was common for dirty baby diapers to be on the road, and that trash pick-up was far too infrequent given the amount of trash that was cluttering the community.

Some participants were aware that the amount of trash littering their community was indicative of the fact that some residents lacked respect for the community. In turn, some participants also noted how common it was for young children in the community to act in ways that reflected this lack of community respect. One Chuukese female participant made the following comment: "The little kids, they cuss a lot. I think it's scary. Like, they don't have respect." Many youth also stated that graffiti was very common in their communities.

Racism. In some focus group sessions, Micronesian participants had a great deal to say about the racism they dealt with, especially in school. Youth said that students from other ethnic backgrounds made fun of them simply because they were Micronesian. The following exchange between focus group participants exemplifies some of the ways non-Micronesian youth discriminate against Micronesian youth by way of race:

CF: Oh yeah, they tease. Some people they tease Micronesians.

CF: Yeah, especially Samoans.

D.M.: Okay, so what are some things that people say?

CF: They say "microscope."

CF: Or they go, "Microsoft."

CF: Yeah, you know how irritating that is.

Respondents claimed that much of the racism directed toward Micronesian students was the result of cultural differences, such as mannerisms, language, and appearance.

D.R.: What else do they do to tease you guys or put you down?

CM: The way we talk, as Micronesians.

D.R.: Hm?

CF: Yeah. The way we talk.

D.R.: And you said racist? Can you expand on that? Like how, I know you said something earlier but—with the other students...

CF: It's just the way that students react to us. Look at Micronesians.

MF: They look down on us.

D.R.: How do they do that?

MF: Say I see something and I pronounce it wrong and they still tease Micronesians for it. Whatever.

MF: Or by the way we dress.

MF: I can be so "Micro."

MM: Yeah, and when we try to talk to each other people just come around and [say] "Hey, speak English. Speak properly."

Respondents also described how teachers' expectations of Micronesian students were also influenced by racist stereotypes, and how these expectations affected their treatment of these students.

CF: Like, when [teachers] ask you a question, you have to answer it, you cannot say you do not know.

S.O.: Really?

CF: They say it's third grade English.

With this description, she suggests that some teachers embarrass their Micronesian students by pointing out the simplicity of the class material (e.g., third grade level English) if these students are uncomfortable participating in class. When asked why some teachers treat them so poorly, one student stated “maybe it’s because they don’t know how to deal with us. They don’t know what we do and stuff like that.”

Fighting

Participants described the prevalence of fighting not only among themselves, but between other ethnic groups in their schools. For example, two Chuukese students (one male and one female) described fighting between Micronesian and Samoan youth in their school.

D.M.: What kind of things do Micronesian [youth] need help with sometimes?

CM: Students fight a lot.

D.M.: Like, who are the fights between?

CM: Micronesians and Samoans.

D.M.: Why is that? How come?

CF: ‘Cause people tease their background.

D.M.: How do they tease their background? What do people say?

CM: Like they hate the Micronesians [because they] talk badly, and that [Micronesians] hate the Samoans, and [Samoans] argue and fight.

Within a different school, participants described similar incidents between Micronesian and Samoan youth.

S.O.: What else do you like least about this school?

MF: Fighting.

S.O.: Tell me about the fighting.

MF: There’s a lot, it’s seriously bad fighting.

S.O.: Who’s doing the fighting?

MF: Mostly the Polynesians.

S.O.: Specifically...

MF: Samoans.

S.O.: Do the Samoan kids pick on the Micronesian kids?

MF: Not all. Only like some, they tease us and stuff.

Some of the participants in the study claimed that they “felt bad” or were “embarrassed” by the fighting, and one participant suggested that “learning more about Micronesian culture” might decrease fighting for these youth.

Participants also mentioned that clashes between Chuukese and Marshallese youth against Samoan youth were somewhat common outside of school. Moreover, it was stated that fighting frequently transpired when youth who had resided in Hawai'i for a longer time period would pick on youth who had just immigrated here. Thus, fighting was not only based on ethnic conflicts, but it could also be based on immigration or acculturation status. Participants also indicated that gangs were a problem for some Micronesian youth. These gangs were either multiracial, having to do more with a claimed affiliation, or comprised solely of Micronesian youth.

D.M.: What about gangs?

CM: [We] have these gangs in the valley. [They're] called TBK, PVB, ASB, get all kinds.

D.M.: Do you know that those stand for?

CM: Yeah. TBK is True Born Kriminals, that the one walking around smoking weed. PVB [stands for] Palolo Valley Boys, ASB [stands for] A Street Boys, [and] LMC [stands for] Little Micronesians Crew.

D.M.: Little Micronesians Crew?

CM: That's the one.

Substance Use

Participants described the prevalence of drugs within their communities. They claimed that alcohol use was fairly prevalent among Micronesian youth. Participants commonly stated that Micronesian students in middle school who drank alcohol did so because they were emulating older teens and hoping that their consumption of alcohol (or other gateway drugs) would lead to being accepted by the other adolescents.

D.M.: Do your parents talk to you guys about things like drugs and gangs?

CM: Yeah. They told us not to take drugs, but some of the Chuukese people [use them].

D.R.: Do you see a lot of that in [your] neighborhood?

CM: Yeah.

D.R.: What do you see?

CM: Like, people walking around...

CF: Drinking.

CM: Drinking [and] smoking.

D.M.: Like, [at] what age?

CM: Like my age and up. Sixth grade and up.

Respondents also described how Micronesian youth in Hawai'i are at risk for experimentation with a variety of different drugs at an early age.

CF: For Chuukese, I think it's drinking.

CF: And tobacco.

D.R.: Smoking cigarettes and weed. What else?

CF: Copenhagen.

D.R.: Chewing tobacco.

CF: Yeah.

D.M.: Is it mostly adults or mostly...

CF: Even young kids. Mostly young.

D.R.: Like how old are they?

CF: Intermediate.

CF: Between thirteen and...

CF: Even, I think in elementary yeah, sixth grade.

D.M.: Why are they doing drugs that early?

CF: They think it's cool.

CF: They're getting it from their cousins.

Youth participants went on to say that substance use affected their community in very negative ways.

D.R.: So how does that [alcohol] affect your community? Where you live, is that a big problem? You know, alcohol?

CF: It is to my parents. My parents get scared but I don't 'cause I know the people.

MF: In my neighborhood, one time we were sleeping, and they just like, throw rocks at our windows. My dad he was not scared so he was ready to—he was gonna start something. My mom was like "oh just leave it, call the police." And I was watching TV and I was sleeping in the living room, and that's where they threw the

rocks. I was screaming! That's why I don't like that neighborhood.

When asked about what should be done about drug use with these youth, participants did not seem to have many clear or feasible recommendations. One Chuukese male stated that his community needed "to keep the drug people away" but did not know how to go about doing this. Many youth expressed the desire for greater police enforcement. However, youth had difficulty coming up with suggestions for prevention.

Cultural Buffers

Traditional Practices. Participants described how they continued to engage in traditional Micronesian cultural activities while in Hawai'i. These activities functioned to provide a sense of community and cultural pride for Micronesian youth. Participants in one school described how these activities occurred during holidays and special events.

S.O.: So let's talk about Micronesian culture. Do you still practice Micronesian culture here in Hawai'i?

MF: Yes. [At] Christmas we do this...I don't know what they call it in English, but you get into a group of people and you do this dancing. Some kind of dancing.

S.O.: Is that what the rest of you guys do too?

CM: Yeah.

S.O.: What else do you do here that is traditionally Micronesian?

CF: Chuukese funeral. And New Years.

S.O.: So it sounds like holidays and special events are basically times when your culture comes out. Are these things important [to you]?

CF: Yes.

Members within other groups discussed attending church services and singing religious songs as ways of celebrating Micronesian culture. Another group of students described how they celebrated events occurring in Micronesia while living in Hawai'i.

D.M.: Do you guys have gatherings where you do cultural stuff?

CF: Yeah.

CM: Yeah.

D.M.: When does that happen?

CF: When you have [a] new...

CM: When [we] get a new government.

CF: Yeah, in Chuuk.

CM: So, we go celebrate in KPT.

D.M.: So, you celebrate in KPT? Oh, so when something happens back in Chuuk, you celebrate it here?

CM: Yeah.

Culturally Specific Prevention Programs. One of the high schools in our study attempted to build upon the social networks of Micronesian students by providing them with an after school drug and violence primary prevention program. The program provided a setting in which these students could get together and share experiences, meet one another and formulate friendships. One student stated that “[the club] really helps us” by teaching communication and socialization skills. The program was a way to bring familiar customs, traditions, language and culture to one another while being away from their home, and provided opportunities for older Micronesian students to mentor younger ones within the school setting. Regarding mentorship, one Chuukese female participant indicated that the program should utilize older, more acculturated Micronesian students to provide assistance, such as language translation or expectations related to acculturation, to newly migrated or younger Micronesian students. She suggested that this would help to facilitate their successful transition to school.

Discussion

This study used a focus group methodology to examine the unique risk and protective factors of Micronesian youth in Hawai‘i. Using Micronesian youth as experts, we sought their perspectives related to the challenges and issues that they face in their families, schools, and communities. Based on our findings, much of the risk appeared to originate from their recent migration status to Hawai‘i. This event placed ecological stress on Micronesian families, as they dealt with issues such as

language barriers and poverty. These familial stresses placed Micronesian youth at risk of adverse health consequences, such as school violence and alcohol and drug use. Facing these risks, Micronesian youth indicated that their knowledge and practice of their culture, and participation in programs intended to promote this knowledge, is one way to prevent adverse health outcomes.

Implications for Prevention

The findings from this study suggest several approaches to prevention practice. Since their recent migration status is proposed as the origin of their adverse health outcomes, social agencies and schools should attempt to identify recently migrated Micronesian families and front-load services to these families in order to prevent future family and youth issues. Some of these services might include financial assistance, vocational training, job placement for parents, and culturally specific, school-based drug and violence prevention programs for youth. Regarding the latter programs, they should focus on ethnic pride and cultural practices of Micronesian youth, in order to make them relevant to their beliefs and values. School-based prevention efforts such as those described by the respondents are examples of ways in which Hawai'i public schools have attempted to meet the unique needs of Micronesian youth, rather than merely expecting these youth to conform to the social norms of their non-Micronesian peers. These programs function as an important transitioning agent for these youth as they adjust to the norms and expectations of Hawai'i public schools.

Addressing issues like poverty and community disorganization is a major systemic task that requires greater state and even federal commitment. Micronesian families living in low-income housing communities and acculturating to local norms (and often times coping with severe health problems) cannot be expected to take the lead on community mobilizing efforts. Leaders within Micronesian communities should be sought out by public officials and local, more established community leaders in order to make these low-income communities more acceptable places for youth to grow and mature.

Finally, schools and community based agencies may need to provide education to teachers, students, and the broader community as to why so many Micronesian youth are now migrating to Hawai'i. Many Micronesian families are moving to Hawai'i for the same reasons that other ethnic groups have settled here—improved education and better employment opportunities. But Micronesian families are also moving here because they need advanced health care that can better assist them in coping with the long-term ramifications of American nuclear testing during the post-World War II era. Our data suggest that students in general are in need of interventions that subdue racial stereotyping so that the burden of dealing with such racism is not placed solely on Micronesian youth.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in its generalizability to the Micronesian youth population and language barriers during data collection. This study was comprised primarily of youth from Chuuk and the Marshall Islands (and a few students from Pohnpei), and because of this, its findings may not be generalizable to youth from other states in the Federated States of Micronesia, or Palau. Poyer et al. (2001) describe the diversity in Micronesian experiences, including the sociocultural, linguistic, and historical diversity of these island groups. Further, respondents in the study described the variability within each island cluster (e.g., Chuuk). These differences contribute to the cultural complexity of the region, and subsequent variability of experiences of the youth who have migrated to Hawai'i. Language barriers between interviewers and participants were also a limitation of this study. Several participants had limited comprehension of the English language, and therefore needed to rely on other group members to translate their responses. This process may have affected the validity of some of the findings.

Conclusions

This study illustrates the modern day effects of historical colonization, and the sacrifices and struggles of a newly

migrated population in the Pacific. Micronesian youth in this study described how their families envisioned a better educational and health care system in Hawai'i, but did not anticipate many of the ecological stressors associated with their migration. Culturally specific prevention programs focused on fostering a sense of community among Micronesian youth may function as buffers toward antisocial behaviors, promoting effective acculturation to Western norms and values for these youth. Community education about the Micronesian population in Hawai'i may also be a way of addressing racism at a societal level, and may also promote awareness of the unique social needs of this population.

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