



Pacific Islander Substance Abuse Fact Sheet
April 26, 2005

I. Historical Notes

- The six Pacific Island jurisdictions are American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Republic of Palau. The populations, history, language and cultures of these island jurisdictions are very diverse.
- The Chamorros, the indigenous people of the Mariana Islands of Guam, Saipan, Rota, and Tinian have inhabited those islands since about 2000 B.C. (Rogers, 1995 in Mokuau, 1998). The Mariana Islands were first contacted by a western European power by Ferdinand Magellan in 1521. The Mariana Islands became a possession of Spain until the Spanish-American War in 1898 when they became U.S. possessions and were later sold to Germany. Prior to and during world War II, Japan controlled the Mariana islands until they became an incorporated territory of the United States after World War II.

Bikini in the Republic of the Marshall Islands was used to test the Atom Bomb in World War II. The radiation from those tests still affects the health of the islanders to this day.

- As unincorporated territories of the U.S., the residents of American Samoa and Guam are U.S. citizens. However, they are not allowed to vote in presidential elections. All six of the jurisdictions have U.S. Postal Service zip codes and mail service.

II. Demographic Characteristics of Pacific Islanders

- The Pacific Islands include American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Republic of Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. American Samoa and Guam are unincorporated U.S. Territories. The Mariana Islands are a commonwealth. The Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau are sovereign nations.
- According to the website of the Office of Insular Affairs, Department of the Interior, the population of the six Pacific Island jurisdictions are as follows:

1. Guam: 154, 805
2. Federated States of Micronesia: 107,000

3. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands: 69,221
 4. American Samoa: 57,291
 5. Republic of the Marshall Islands: 50,840
 6. Republic of Palau: 19,129
- Total 458,286

* Note that this census information came from the Department of Interior's website, <http://www.doi.gov/oia/Firstpginfo/islandfactsheet.htm>

- The residents of the Pacific Islands vary in terms of those who are native to the islands compared to other residents. For example, 90% of the residents of American Samoa are Samoan. By contrast, the indigenous people of Guam, the Chamorros, only represent approximately 50% of the population on that island. Guam is a single island whereas American Samoa consists of several islands.
- The population of selected Pacific Islanders living in Hawaii and the continental U.S. are as follows: Samoans (62,964) and Chamorros and others from the island of Guam (49,345) (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993). Of these Pacific Islanders living in the U.S., 75% live in California and Hawaii with smaller populations in Washington, Oregon, Texas, and Utah.

This information is from Mokuau, Health and Well Being for Pacific Islanders: Status, Barriers and Resolutions in Mokuau (Editor), *Responding to Pacific Islanders: Culturally Competent Perspectives for Substance Abuse Prevention*, 1998.

- The median family income in American Samoa is \$16,000 for an average family of 7.5 individuals (Pacific American foundation, 1994). The wages in Guam are somewhat higher at \$17,000 for one private sector employee (Pacific American Foundation, 1994); public employee salaries range to a high of about \$44,000.

III. Income

- Pacific Islanders have a rate of 17% living below the poverty level compared to the national level of 4%. Samoans had the highest rate of poverty at 26% among Pacific Islanders (Mokuau, 1998).
- The per capita income in Guam is \$9,928 (Pacific American Foundation, 1994 in Mokuau, 1998). In contrast, the per capita income in the Republic of the Marshall Islands is less than \$600 (Smith, 1994 in Mokuau, 1998). About 50% of the male populations in the Federated States of Micronesia are unemployed (Smith, 1994 in Mokuau, 1998).

IV. Substance Abuse Information

- Alcohol and tobacco, primarily American brands, are the most commonly abused substances in the Pacific Islands. For example, American Samoa has an increasing alcohol problem, especially beer such as Budweiser (Mokuau, 1998). Other indigenous substances such as chewing betel nut are also common throughout the region and are a particular problem along with alcohol in Guam (Pinhey, Worman and Borja, 1992 in Mokuau, 1998).
- According to a 1992 World Health Organization report, tobacco use was such a serious problem in American Samoa that it contributed to 55% of all of the deaths (McCuddin, 1995).
- A 1991 study in Guam indicated that Chamorros had the highest percentage of chronic drinking (10%) of beer, wine, and other liquor compared with all other groups in Guam (Rodriguez, 1996).
- Alcohol abuse is a major problem in the Federated States of Micronesia (Hezel, 1992, Oneisom, 1991, and Marshall, 1979 in Mokuau, 1998). It is also a major problem in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (de la Torre, 1994 in Mokuau, 1998).
- Alcohol, Tobacco, marijuana, heroin, and “ice” (crystal methamphetamine) are also serious problems in the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of Palau, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam. Further, excessive use of betel nut and sakau (or kava) has been identified as health problems and also cause family and employment problems (Dobbin; Mason in Mokuau, 1998).
- According to the WestEd AAPI High School Survey in 1995, 46% of Pacific Islander high school students said they had gotten drunk on alcohol once in their lifetime, and 22% said they had gotten drunk in the past month. Further, 21% of these students said they smoked cigarettes on a daily basis. Over 35% had used marijuana in the past month and 54% of these students had tried marijuana at least once in their lifetime.

It is important to note that 36% of Pacific Islander high school students in this California study said they may use or continue to use drugs in the future. Twenty-three percent of these students believed they had been treated unfairly at school because of their racial/ethnic background, 12% said they were disliked by other students because of their racial/ethnic background, and 11% did not feel safe at school.

- According to the 2000 and 2001 SAMHSA National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, about 8% of the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students

(12 years and older) said they used drugs in the past month. This rate was slightly higher than whites, African Americans, and Hispanic youth.

V. Availability of Substance Abuse Services

- Accessibility to culturally competent substance abuse prevention and treatment service in the Pacific Islands is very limited. The lack of health insurance coverage, including Medicaid, as well as the lack of treatment facilities, makes professional treatment services inaccessible for most Pacific Islanders. Often, Pacific Islanders have to travel to Guam or Hawaii for substance abuse treatment services (Mokuau, 1998).
- Substance abuse services for Pacific Islanders are not only very limited, but often they do not approach prevention and treatment services holistically or do not include the patient's family throughout the intervention (Mokuau, 1998).

For further Information, contact the NAPAFASA office at (213) 625-5795, (213) 625-5796 (fax), or napafasa@napafasa.org. You can also visit www.napafasa.org for the latest information on substance abuse and mental health issues in the AAPI community.