Kava and Family Violence

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Setting the Scene

• Kava is a Tongan word for the plant “Piper Methysticum”
• Kava is widely used as traditional beverage across the Pacific by Polynesian, Melanesian and Micronesian countries (McDonald & Jowett, 2000)
• The Kava traditional drink is produced by grinding the dry pepper plant into powdery form then mix with water, then consumed by Tongan men for social, cultural, medicinal and traditional purposes.
• Evidence has shown that within the Tongan community in NZ, older men are generally the main consumers of Kava. Similarly, the younger men in Tonga are becoming more involved in Kava drinking (Finau et al., 1982)
• Tongan men (young and old ) consume a lot of Kava in Kava clubs in both Auckland and Tonga (Nosa & Ofanoa, 2009).
• Despite several reasons for consuming Kava by Tongan men, little is known about their live experiences in relation to the social, cultural and health impacts of Kava consumption in Kava clubs in Auckland and Tonga
• A qualitative study was conducted to examine the social, cultural and health impacts of Kava consumption among Tongan men in Kava clubs in Auckland and Tonga in 2017
• The result shows that there is a relationship between “Kava Consumption and Family Violence”.
Methodology

- A qualitative research approach that undertook Pasifika research methodologies including the “Kakala” (Thaman, 2007) and “Talanga” (Ofanoa, 2016) methodologies were employed to obtain and analyse interview narratives from Tongan men in 10 different kava clubs across Tonga and Auckland.

Study Design

- Ten focus group interviews were held with a convenience sample of 104 Tongan men across the 10 Kava clubs in Tonga and Auckland.
- The 104 participants included Tongan men aged 15-75 years from five Kava clubs in Auckland (n=42) and five clubs in Tonga (n=62).
- The key Kava clubs and stakeholders were identified through an intensive community consultation and the use of a “Tongan Grid method”.
- The information collected during the focus group interviews were transcribed and analysed using the general inductive approach at the micro-, meso- and macro- levels.
Findings

- Participants in both countries reported that Kava use is socially sanctioned and easily accessible.
- The frequency and heavy consumption of Kava in Kava clubs in both countries, can affect men's health, and it increases poor family relationships that leads to family violence. Usually, the family violence happens after Kava.
- After a Kava session, men sleep long hours, and they spend a lot of their family income in Kava sessions, and make many excuses which lead to family conflicts.
- Men who consumes Kava heavily in the next day are usually very lazy to work and slow to recover. Some missed their work frequently.
- The wives usually shoulder everything in the family. In many instances, Kava men behave violently and aggressively.
- When such practice happens consistently family violence starts, and many Kava men physically abuse their wives. Some end up at the hospital with serious injuries or both husband and wife appear in court.
- Since men are attending their social Kava clubs all the time, women are tired of staying home and caring for the family. Hence, they are starting to explore other similar social activity for them to attend.

Conclusion

- Although Kava use is viewed as a major part of the Tongan culture but the heavy consumption of it in Kava clubs in both countries can lead to family violence, and other social and health issues.
- Multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach to minimise it’s consumption is recommended.
- Further studies on the association of Kava consumption and liver diseases, as well as a pharmacological study of Kava is highly recommended.