KAVA AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

Malakai Ofanoa¹, Vili Nosa¹

University of Auckland¹

Among Tongans, kava drinking has become an intrinsic part of the Pasifika culture, involving regular participation in kava clubs. Reasons for, and perceived effects of, this kava consumption are yet to be fully understood. Therefore, this study explored these issues with Tongan kava drinkers, using the culturally safe, Pasifika qualitative research approaches of Kakala and Talanga. Group interviews were held with a convenience sample of 104 Tongan men across 10 kava clubs in Tonga and Auckland, New Zealand. Analysis of the interviews involved a general inductive approach.

Participants in both countries reported that kava use is socially sanctioned and easily accessible. They reported that kava presents concerning health issues, and it increases poor family relationships that leads to family violence. Usually the family violence happens after kava. The Kava men sleep long hours; they spent a lot of their family income in Kava sessions and makes many excuses. In the next day, they are usually very lazy to work, and slow to recover. The poor wives usually shoulder everything in the family. In many instances, some of them behave violently and aggressively. When such practice happens consistently, family violence starts and many husbands physically abuse their wives. Either one end up in the hospital with serious injuries or both husband and wife appear in court. The study concludes that there is a tremendous need for multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary engagement with kava club members and Tongan society to minimize the risks and optimize the benefits of kava use.