

Research Project Impact Case Study

Project Title

The Risk Perception of Infectious Diseases Among Pacific Youth and the Role of Social Media in Effective Communication in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Short Research Title

"Pacific Youth, Infectious Disease Risk, and Social Media in Aotearoa"

Key researchers

The Research Team for this study consists predominantly of Pacific clinicians and researchers

Name	Role	Department or Division Name, Organisation/Affiliation, City, Country
Professor Sir Collin Tukuitonga	Principal Investigator	Associate Dean Pacific - Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Associate Professor - Population Health, Co-Director of Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa, Leading Public Health physician, leader and researcher (Pacific Health) Auckland, New Zealand
Professor Judith McCool	Co-Investigator	Co-Director of Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa, Head of the School of Population and Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, the University of Auckland (Expertise includes Global Health Systems and Governance, Pacific Health Research Methodologies, Capacity building and Disease Prevention) Auckland, New Zealand.
Dr Roannie Ng Shiu	Co-Investigator	Co-Director of Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa and Senior Research Fellow Pacific Health (Pacific Health) Auckland, New Zealand.
Dr Jason Tautasi	Project Manager	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.
Ms Luisa Taufu	Research Assistant	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.

Te Niwha Research Project - Impact Case Study

Ms Lisi-Malia Pereira	Research Assistant	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.
Mr Raymond Taufa	Research Assistant	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.
Mr Jay Chu Ling	Research Assistant	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.
Mr Shunsuke Moritsuka	Research Assistant	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.
Ms Nalei Taufa	Research Operations Manager	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.
Ms Lois Chu Ling	Senior Research Operations Coordinator	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.
Dr John Sluyter	Biostatistician	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.
Dr Tamasin Taylor	Senior Research Fellow	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, Te Poutoko Ora a Kiwa - Centre for Pacific and Global Health at Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland. Auckland, New Zealand.

Introduction

This study focuses on Rheumatic Fever (RF), Acute Respiratory Illnesses, and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), which were highlighted during preliminary discussions with Pacific Youth to co-design this project. Further, as shown in the evidence and statistics by ESR – Pacific experience inequitable outcomes and risk factors to these conditions.

According to Cure Kids (2023), Pasifika children are significantly more likely to be hospitalised with acute rheumatic fever and respiratory conditions compared to their European counterparts. These health disparities are driven by complex factors, including socioeconomic deprivation and crowded housing conditions. Additionally, Māori and Pacific youth are impacted by STIs at much greater rates than other groups. Limited information exists about social media, networks, and health information sharing of infectious diseases among Pacific youth. This study aims to understand how Pacific youth perceive and manage the risks associated with infectious diseases and how social media can effectively support health communication within Pacific communities.

This study will employ a mixed methods approach of 20 focus groups and 600 online surveys. The inclusion criteria target Pacific youth aged 16 to 35 for focus groups and 16 to 24 for surveys. The focus groups will be transcribed and thematically analysed, while a Biostatistician will analyse the survey data. The findings will inform health policy, messaging, and recommendations.

Study Aims and Objectives:

1. Examine Risk Perceptions and Management Approaches:

- Gain insights into how diverse groups of Pacific youth perceive and manage the risks associated with infectious diseases, including COVID-19.
- Explore their access to and use of health promotion, prevention, and clinical services, as well as their attitudes toward vaccination.

2. Identify Barriers and Enablers in Health Service Access:

- Explore the social and systemic factors that either facilitate or hinder Pacific youth's access to health services.
- Focus on how social networks and social media shape their perceptions and engagement with infectious disease prevention and care.

3. Inform Policy for Improved Health Outcomes:

- Develop actionable recommendations to guide health policy improvements in infectious disease surveillance, prevention, and control, specifically tailored to meet the needs of Pacific youth.

¹ Tustin, K., & Fleming, J. (2024). State of child health in Aotearoa New Zealand 2023. Cure Kids. <https://www.curekids.org.nz>

Results

The results are yet to be analysed and reported. However, subsequent to fieldwork, analysis, and write-up – the results will be reported, comprehensively.

By addressing the current paucity of literature on Pacific youth's risk perceptions and engagement with infectious disease prevention, this research will fill critical knowledge gaps. The findings will contribute to evidence-based policy, resource development, and culturally responsive health interventions that improve access to services and health outcomes. In doing so, this study not only informs infectious disease management in Aotearoa but also has wider applications across the Pacific region.

Impact

Improved Health Outcomes: The study's findings will lead to the development of culturally appropriate health communication strategies that resonate with Pacific youth. These strategies will improve awareness and understanding of infectious diseases, leading to better health outcomes and reduced disparities.

Policy and Service Improvements: The research will inform public health policy and practice by providing evidence-based recommendations for improving health services and resource allocation. This will ensure that health services are more accessible and effective for Pacific youth, addressing the unique challenges they face.

Community Engagement and Capacity Building: Guided by Pacific health research principles and the ethos of *"Nothing about us, without us,"* this study prioritises meaningful engagement with Pacific youth through a Youth Advisory Group, focus groups, and surveys. By embedding data sovereignty principles and co-design approaches, the research will build community capacity, ensuring that Pacific voices drive solutions for infectious disease prevention and management.

Workforce Development and Research Capacity: This study will contribute to building research capacity among Pacific youth and emerging Pacific health researchers by embedding mentorship, training, and leadership opportunities. Through participation in the Youth Advisory Group and research activities, Pacific youth will develop critical skills in health research, advocacy, and policy engagement, fostering the next generation of Pacific health leaders. Further, the pipeline for this project stems from early career Pacific Research Assistants from Undergraduate studies to Pacific Senior Research Fellows and Professors.

Enhanced Public Health Strategies: By leveraging social media as a tool for health communication, the study will develop effective methods to shift social norms around infectious disease prevention. This will create sustainable pathways for reliable, cost-effective health communications that can be applied across different contexts and regions.

Long-Term Policy and Funding Impact: The findings will provide a strong evidence base to advocate for sustained investment in Pacific-led health initiatives, influencing long-term funding priorities and policy decisions. By demonstrating the effectiveness of co-designed, culturally responsive interventions, the research will support future funding for Pacific health programmes, ensuring ongoing improvements in infectious disease prevention and health equity. Further, it is imminent that another pandemic or infectious disease outbreak will occur in the next few months or years. Often ignored in policymaking are the voices of Pacific Youth, despite the disproportionate outcomes they experience.

Conclusion: The risk perception of infectious diseases among Pacific youth in Aotearoa is shaped by a range of socio-cultural and structural factors. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that includes culturally responsive healthcare services, community-led education programs, and digital health interventions tailored to the needs of Pacific youth. By implementing these strategies, policymakers and health professionals can enhance public health outcomes and reduce disparities in infectious disease prevalence within Pacific communities