

Inu Pia

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***The place of alcohol in the lives of Tokelauan people living
in Aotearoa New Zealand***

***A report prepared by Sector Analysis, Ministry of Health for
the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand***

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Explanation of Title

Inu pia means beer

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Fakafetai to all the people who took part in the interviews and shared their stories with us. This report has only been possible because of their willingness to take part.

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Tokelauan Border Design

Vaitoa Baker

As a freelance illustrator of mixed ethnic groups, having the opportunity to work on this project that incorporates many designs of the Pacific, I hope I have done justice to each. I also want to give thanks to my partner, Yvette, whose love keeps me going.

Disclaimer

This report was prepared by staff of Sector Analysis, Ministry of Health for the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand. Its purpose is to inform discussion and assist future health promotion strategies. Therefore, the opinions expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand nor the Ministry of Health.

ALAC's Alcohol and Pacific Islands Research Project Reports

This report is one of a series of seven studies published in 1997

- The place of alcohol in the lives of people from Tokelau, Fiji, Niue, Tonga, Cook Islands and Samoa living in New Zealand: an overview
- Inu Pia: The place of alcohol in the lives of Tokelauan people living in Aotearoa New Zealand
- Na tabili kavoro: The place of alcohol in the lives of Fijian people living in Aotearoa New Zealand
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- Kapau tete to ha fu'u siaine he 'ikai tete ma'u ha talo pe koha 'ufi ko e fu'u siaine pe: The place of alcohol in the lives of Tongan people living in Aotearoa New Zealand
- Kaikava me kare Inuinu: The place of alcohol in the lives of Cook Islands people living in Aotearoa New Zealand
- O le a'ano o feiloaiga: The place of alcohol in the lives of Samoan people living in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Inu Pia

Introduction

The Pacific people's alcohol research project was started early in 1996. Commissioned by the Alcohol Advisory Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (ALAC), the project aims to provide up-to-date research information on the views about alcohol held by members of Aotearoa New Zealand's various Pacific cultures.

In this chapter, results are presented from research of Tokelauan people living in Wellington.

How the research was carried out

Two researchers from the Wellington Tokelauan community, Ezra Jennings-Pedro and Terrisa Taupe, were commissioned to interview Tokelauan people living in the Wellington area. Tufaina Taupe translated and transcribed (wrote out) the interviews that were conducted in Tokelauan.

Ezra and Terrisa used contacts with their family, friends and workplace to help recruit people for the research. The researchers tried to have a balance of male and female research participants, as well as a spread of older and younger participants.

When people were invited to take part in the study, they were each given written information about the purposes of the research and were told what would happen if they agreed to take part in the project. Those who agreed to take part were then asked to read and sign a form which showed that they understood the research and agreed to be involved. Participants were told that they were free to withdraw from the project at any time.

Some people were interviewed individually. Others contributed as part of a small group. Individual interviews were usually held in the participant's home. Group interviews were held at Matauāla Hall in Porirua. Discussions were taped, written out and, where necessary, translated into English. Copies of the written interviews were returned to the research participants for them to check and edit.

A total of 32 Tokelauan people (18 men and 14 women) from Wellington, Porirua and the Hutt Valley took part in the research. The group included older people (those over 50 years of age) and younger people. Unfortunately, none of the participants were between 35 to 50 years of age, so there is potentially a gap in the information gathered in this area.

What the interviews asked

Where possible, the interviewers sought to ask open-ended questions around the themes of:

- social or family events where Tokelauan people would drink alcohol
- who Tokelauan people drank with, for example, whether men and women drank together
- what type of drinks Tokelauan people preferred
- the differences between drinking in Tokelau and drinking in Aotearoa New Zealand
- whether there was a Tokelauan style or styles of drinking.

Open-ended questions encourage people to describe or explain their point of view on an issue as much as possible in their own terms. This is in contrast to closed questions, which usually require just *yes* or *no* answers, or other short replies. Open-ended questions commonly start with words like: *How . . .*, *Can you describe . . .*, *What . . .*, *Where . . .*, *Who . . .*, *Why . . .*? Answers to these questions can be as long or short as people want to make them.

Why the interview method was chosen

This interview research method was chosen rather than, say, a written survey, because the researchers wanted to gather as much information as possible on Tokelauan people's experiences with alcohol. In particular, they wanted to draw out from Tokelauan people themselves how they thought alcohol linked in with the other things they did in their lives.

In keeping with this approach, the report includes selected quotations from the people interviewed. This is to give the reader a better chance to view life through the eyes of the research participants.

How the research information was analysed (made sense of)

The written copies of the interviews were analysed by looking carefully for common experiences and themes. During this process the two Tokelauan research team members contributed their experience and knowledge, to clarify points about the culture and the community. In addition, extra background information was obtained from historical and anthropological accounts of Tokelauan society and culture.

While the research team members have tried to represent the views of the participants as accurately as possible, they take full responsibility for the interpretation placed on the information and welcome further discussion with the Tokelauan community on all and any aspects of the report.

Background

Tokelau consists of three small atolls which lie about 480 kilometres north of Western Samoa. Fakaofu is the atoll to the east, Atafu is the atoll to the west, and Nukunonu is the atoll in the middle. The three atolls are divided from each other by about 80 kilometres of open sea.

In 1925, Tokelau came under the jurisdiction of the New Zealand administration of Western Samoa. In time Western Samoa became an independent nation, but to this day Tokelau remains part of Aotearoa New Zealand. As a result, Tokelauan born people are automatically New Zealand citizens.

In the 1960s, the New Zealand government began a Tokelauan resettlement programme. This significantly increased the movement of able-bodied Tokelauan men to New Zealand and elsewhere. Single men (“pioneers”) often migrated first, saving enough money to pay for married kinsmen to join them. These married men, in turn, tried to earn enough money to bring their wives and families to New Zealand. While Taupo, Rotorua and other towns in the central North Island were the first destinations for many of these migrants (as forestry and rural farm workers), many soon moved south to growing communities in Porirua and the Hutt Valley (Wessen 1992).

Today there are approximately 4000 people of Tokelauan birth or Tokelauan descent living in Aotearoa New Zealand. The majority of these live in Wellington.

Different modern-day views on alcohol

Quite early in the study it became obvious to the research team that there is no one, consistent “Tokelauan perspective” on alcohol. Tokelauan people, like many other South Pacific cultures, appear to have a wide range of views about drinking. Some of these views are strongly against the use of alcohol. Others are quite broadminded.

This range is seen most clearly in the answers Tokelauan people gave to the questions asking them what they liked and disliked about alcohol.

What people liked about alcohol

Most of the research participants had at least a few good things to say about drinking. However, the people with the most positive things to say were usually those who still drank or had been drinkers once.

Effect on inner feelings

An older man remembered how drinking had helped him to feel “warmer” and “stronger” when he first left his home atoll to find work. Another man said: “You know when you drink kaleve, your body feels strong and you feel happy”.

Warmth and friendship

These observations were reinforced in the stories given by other Tokelauan men who had migrated to New Zealand in the 1960s and 1970s. They recalled how their workmates first introduced them to the culture of the New Zealand public bar. Regular drinking sessions were part and parcel of getting to know this new homeland:

[When I arrived in Auckland] I did not know whether beer was good or not for me. I did not understand beer. My friends would try and get me to drink the beer. My workmates, we'd go to the pubs in Auckland and they'd try to make me drink. I'd tell them I can't drink because I'm the type of person who finds it difficult to drink. And they'd force me to drink. They would try to mix my drinks to see if I would change my mind. [They would put] whiskey and coke in a glass to make it nice and easy to drink. When I'd finished, they'd say, “C'mon, more!”. . . . Auckland was funny [then]. The pubs closed at 6 pm. So we'd have to drink quickly. Someone would buy 20 jugs and say, “Hurry, drink up”. I'd tell them, “I can't drink”. But they'd say, “Hurry up!”.

In those early days, Tokelauan women were generally not part of these drinking sessions. For men, drinking together and telling stories of their homeland and families helped to draw them together, broke down the competition between atolls and helped lessen feelings of homesickness and isolation. In fact, several of the men in the study recalled the warmth and friendship of these times with considerable affection. One said: “I knew a happiness I never experienced before”. Said another: “Back then we had a lot of love for one another. Before we were like brothers”.

Alcohol and dancing

Other people described the good things they felt alcohol was doing for the modern-day social gatherings. For instance, one older woman noted how the pleasure she got from dancing was enhanced by drinking. As she said, “The joy I felt when I was dancing was different for when I was drunk and when I was sober”. Younger people also mentioned the positive relationship between alcohol and dancing. In fact, some people even said that drinkers were better dancers: “You know, they’re the groovers on the dance floor,” said one younger woman, “They’re the ones with the best moves”.

Na ko lagona he mea ve kua fiafia. Io, I loto lava o na fiafiaga, I na mea foki ienei e takua ko te pati nae mafai ai au ke tomi. I te tulaga na pa au ki ei ko te fiafia lava, ni, ve ko taku lea atu ko au nae he mahani I he mea venei, kae hove pe kua maua hoku 40 tauhaga kae tomi ki he mea ve ko te pia. I Tokelau la, ni! I taku inu, hove ko taku inu nae inu ai au na ko lagona ai te tulaga teia ko te fiafia I na mea tau fatele.

*There was a time I used to drink. I felt light and happy when I attended celebrations and also parties. This is where I tasted [beer]. I was in a situation where I was happy. As I mentioned, I was not always familiar with alcohol, I first tasted it when I was 40 years old. It was perhaps with the drinking that I began to feel like dancing. It is only at special occasions or at parties that I drink that stuff. . . . The joy I felt when I was dancing was different for when I was drunk and when I was sober. It’s the same but there is a different type of happiness that I feel.
(Woman)*

Alcohol and food

Another older woman commented that in her experience a little alcohol increased the enjoyment of eating: “I’ve heard, and people have told me, that if you drink first, eat later, because you’ll enjoy your food better. So when I go to weddings and I know there’s a lot of food, I’ll drink a cup of wine first, then eat. So that I can enjoy my food”.

Becoming more emotional

Some of the younger participants in the study pointed out other more obvious positive effects of alcohol. These included people becoming more emotional, perhaps even crying, “confessing their sins”, or “saying I love you all the time”.

Friendlier, relaxed and happier

Some younger people also noted that in their experience drinking sessions often lead to a positive change in people's mood and the way people interacted with each other socially. One person said:

At dances, those who drink, they're a lot more relaxed and happy. They're more apt to be walking around saying hello to people, chatting . . . [they are] very physical. They can put [their] arms around you. Whereas if they were sober they wouldn't do that. (reference)

On the flip side, non-drinkers in these situations were said to often seem less involved and outgoing. People felt that they tended to want to leave social gatherings early and go home.

Many of the younger people said that they felt Tokelauan social gatherings where alcohol was provided were a positive experience. One of the main reasons for this was because these gatherings were seen to be "safe" places for drinking. This was in contrast to more public drinking venues, such as pubs and nightclubs, where there were many strangers. As one young woman said:

I want to go back to a Toke [Tokelauan] way of drinking. Up Matauala Hall . . . I haven't been among people like that for a long time. I had a really good time. When you're at a dance with your own group you can dance with anybody and it's safe and it's cool . . . [and] if you get drunk you'll always know that you're safe in your own group.

An answer to emotional upset

In general, the younger participants in the study seemed to be more willing to see drinking as an acceptable response to emotional upset or stress. As one younger woman put it:

Sometimes occasionally I might get really, really upset. I might ring up a dear cousin and say, "Let's go out for a drink. I'm feeling really, really rotten. I need some time out. Let's go and have a drink".

Said another:

Maybe because it's more of a comfort thing. It just keeps you away from that yukky side for a little while. You know, you have a drink and forget about it. Just for a little while. They [your sorrows] won't go away. But, you know, it's time out, mainly.

Drinking by yourself

For younger participants, too, drinking also seemed to be something that was alright to do by yourself, rather than necessarily always in a social situation. One young woman noted, “I would go out and buy me a dozen [of beer] if I feel like I deserved it. Or if I’ve had a hard day at work. A dozen. And I keep it in the fridge and it will last me probably a week”.

What people disliked about alcohol

In contrast to the people who identified what they considered to be positive and constructive features of alcohol, there were others who were much less supportive of drinking and linked it to a range of undesirable features and behaviours. In general, the people who expressed these views tended to see themselves as non-drinkers or past drinkers. An older woman said:

In my view, I am not comfortable with alcohol, so I don’t want anyone to drink beer because in my family, I do not allow any alcohol in my house. And my hope is that all Tokelau families ban alcohol from their homes here in New Zealand, and Tokelau because beer is not part of Tokelau culture. It is a Palagi thing. Although I understand that it helps people to be strong, I do not think a peaceful life can come to those who drink . . .

Said another older woman:

My desire is to not see any beer within my family. I also want the drinkers in my family to take drinking away from their lives . . . It [alcohol] probably deceives the minds of Tokelau [people], [so] they think they’re happy this way.

Some older Tokelauan men, especially those who used to drink, were also very critical of drinking and of drinkers. They associated it with self-indulgence and thinking too much of oneself. One man in summing up what he disliked about drinking: “You just follow the desires of your heart”. An older woman felt that Tokelauan people who drink, “show off . . . all [their] show off characteristics surface”. These objections to alcohol seemed to reflect a belief that to drink regularly and heavily was to risk turning a person’s attention away from their important family and community obligations and responsibilities. As one young woman said:

You know, all of a sudden you do stupid things, and it’s stupid and it’s ungodly. It’s unrighteous — sinful.

Drinking and respectfulness

The Tokelauan people had other criticisms of alcohol which repeated the idea that drinking was not good because it encouraged people to be selfish and to “follow the desires of your heart”. Older people, for example, were particularly critical of drinking because it seemed to them to be the main reason for the loss of respect which traditionally young people were expected to show to their elders.

The older people go and join the young people. They probably just think they're all drinkers, so there's no age barrier . . . the old ones go and join the young ones singing, gossiping. (Older woman)

Some people said it was particularly distressing when elders of the community appeared to be openly drunk or hung over and to have “succumbed” to alcohol. While drinking was perhaps more acceptable for young people, for older people to fail to show responsibility and authority was considered a major flaw. In Tokelau, when elders drank too much, especially if they became very drunk, it was seen by some to be a sign that these older men were “weakening in their duties to care for the village and in leading the people”.

In relation to this point, a woman observed:

When men drink, they do not know their limit or when they have had enough. They can't control themselves. My heart is sad when I think about these things.

People also felt that young people who drank and got drunk were much more likely to behave disrespectfully to others who traditionally should be treated with respect and honour. As one older person put it:

That's why young people do not acknowledge their elders, because of their drinking. When an instruction is given, it's ignored. No respect.

One older man even went so far as to offer the following advice to the interview team members:

Fakaaloalo ki te toaina. Respect your elders. When we drink, I always know who the older ones are and I give them respect. But if you go to dances now, young people talk disrespectfully to old people. Before, people got drunk but they still [showed] respect. They knew the culture. But the New Zealand born get drunk and swear. They have forgotten the Tokelau way. When I go to dances and I see someone arguing, I get scared and want to go home.

Alcohol and the expression of sexuality

The criticism that alcohol encouraged people to “follow the desires of their heart” was also reflected in the relationship people felt existed between drinking and sexual availability. In particular, women noted that it was shameful for a woman to drink, especially to drink to the point of drunkardness. This suggested sexual promiscuity (sexually “loose”), unfaithfulness and lack of responsibility to children

and family. One woman spoke of what she had seen in Tokelau:

It's disgusting how the young women nowadays are free. You can tell the women who drink that have children. Their children are the ones roaming around the village while their mothers are dancing at the fateles. . . . They [the children] are left roaming. It's because their mothers have no shame that they are able to go and drink with the men.

In this way, alcohol was also linked with children watching too much television and being exposed to bad influences, such as violent videos.

Younger women also spoke about what they saw as a link between alcohol, following one's personal desires and sexual promiscuity. One of these women had heard about a dance where, "there were a lot of young girls and they were just throwing themselves at the guys. You know, forcing themselves". Such behaviour was seen as unacceptable: "You can drink and get drunk, but don't do that stuff," she added.

Alcohol, anger and aggression

Another major criticism, linked closely to the above themes, was that alcohol encouraged not just disrespect, but outright aggression, both physical and verbal. In general, this was the negative feature of drinking people spoke about most often, in general both drinkers and non-drinkers considering it to be undesirable. In particular, physical abuse of people who could not defend themselves, such as children, was roundly condemned. As one older man put it:

I understand that the parables and stories in the New Testament features vineyards. Wine is instrumental in the new covenant Jesus provides for us all. The conflict arises when over-indulging with alcohol attracts unruly behaviour, which is the total opposite of the fruits that the Holy Spirit would want us to have . . .

Other views on drinking, bad behaviour and aggression

A small number of research participants felt that the link between alcohol and aggression was potentially positive, rather than negative. For them, drinking was an acceptable outlet for their inner feelings, including angry feelings. One older woman said: "Like I drink and [if] I'm not happy with someone, I'd go up to them and stir trouble". Another said:

The beer is able to control us and give us the guts to be angry. Like, if I'm not happy with someone, I can go and drink, then get drunk so that I can confront the object of my anger: parent, siblings, etc.

These remarks suggest that some Tokelauan people may perceive a complex relationship between drinking and showing verbal or physical aggression. These people feel that drinking gives them the freedom to express or take action on problems that are really bothering them.

Responsibility for aggressive and unruly behaviour

In general, the research participants felt that the drinker, and not the alcohol, was responsible for any disrespectful and aggressive behaviours. As one older woman put it: “To me personally it’s not the beer that’s bad, it’s the people that use it”. An older man commented, “There is something on the mind of the person who is stirring trouble”.

However, other research participants implied that other factors apart from or outside the drinker may be making these situations worse. For example, older people lamented what they saw as the lack of fellowship that now exists in Tokelau, as well as amongst Tokelauan people living in Aotearoa New Zealand. People said this was a result of Westernisation and the introduction of new work values which encouraged people to look after themselves and be individuals. Behavioural problems caused by drinking, such as aggression and fights, were said to be linked to, and made worse by, the broader social changes and pressures of unemployment and job and family stress which came with Westernisation.

People noted, too, that, compared to Tokelau, there was more chance in Aotearoa New Zealand for young Tokelauan people to lose touch with their culture. One older Tokelauan man said:

I saw young men go to the aumaga in Tokelau. There’s no such thing as unemployment in Tokelau because there’s a lot of work to do . . . It’s not the case here in New Zealand because people live in different regions. They don’t talk to each other. Travelling is difficult with no money.

Drinking in Tokelau today

In my opinion, the people in Tokelau are out of control. Maybe because there’s no beer, like in New Zealand there’s plenty of beer . . . They also fight over it, the home brew beer and hot stuff, ‘cos there’s hardly any of it, whereas here in New Zealand you can access it from any pub. That’s the difference. In Tokelau, we can see on the videos, at the dances, they don’t drink properly . . . Even though beer is in abundance in New Zealand, we still know how to restrain ourselves. But the videos of Tokelau we view show us that those who get drunk have more power than those who don’t. (Woman)

I sadly observed in the evenings [in Tokelau], men or people would congregate together wherever was convenient and drink. Except that they would be drinking at the time families were set to have their devotional time. As the others have already said, by the time the dances rolled around, they’d all be drunk. They were also not allowed to drink openly which forced them to drink underground. If they were caught they’d be penalised by the village council. You are allowed to drink in your own home, but not with other people. (Woman)

Many of the bad things said about alcohol by people in the study related to things that had happened in Tokelau, rather than in Aotearoa New Zealand. Older people, in particular, linked alcohol abuse with the breakdown of social order in Tokelau. Some said that one of the reasons for this was because alcohol had been introduced with no advice or teaching about how to drink sensibly.

On the other hand, some older men noted that Tokelauan people who had been born or brought up in Aotearoa New Zealand appeared to have a better understanding of the possible effects of alcohol. In their view, the Tokelauan people who had come to Aotearoa New Zealand as young adults were the ones most likely to have drinking problems.

In many respects the younger Tokelauan people in the study shared these views. They, too, thought that Tokelauan people who had grown up in Aotearoa New Zealand rather than in Tokelau were more likely to be careful with their drinking. The reason given for this was that the limited supply of alcohol in Tokelau relied on the arrival of the boat and people tended to drink more because they knew the supply was going to run out soon. Participants said that workers in Tokelau regularly drank before work and during work breaks. One younger woman who had visited Tokelau said: “They drink it like there’s no tomorrow”.

The young people reasoned that people coming from Tokelau brought this drinking pattern with them. Further, they observed that those who had grown up in Aotearoa New Zealand were more educated about alcohol.

By comparison, in Aotearoa New Zealand alcohol was easy to get and there was a wide variety of drinks available. Also, laws were in place which controlled the use of alcohol, such as, the drink-driving laws, the public drinking age and rules about alcohol in the workplace.

This attitude is still prevalent in Tokelau, that if you drink alcohol it is important to get drunk. Alcohol and drunkenness is a strict direct link. This is why the objective of people drinking is to get drunk because they know that is what the alcohol is for. Their understanding is that alcohol is to get you drunk, and the objective is always to get drunk and make sure you get drunk . . . I don't think that's only particular to Tokelau. I think it affects all other people who don't understand. There are a lot of other people who share the same ideas. (Man)

Reasons for the different opinions about the importance of alcohol

The research team looked for further evidence to help to explain why the Tokelauan people in the study had such different ideas about the importance/value of alcohol. This included looking at historical and anthropological studies of Tokelau and the Tokelauan people. These studies showed that, once regular contact

began with Europeans, Tokelauan people were exposed to two opposing sets of attitudes and beliefs towards alcohol. Firstly, there were the drinking styles and values of the traders and seafarers who called in to the islands from time to time to on- and off-load supplies. Secondly, there were the views on alcohol put forward by the Protestant churches which, from the early 19th century onwards, established, through their missionaries, an important and lasting presence on two of Tokelau's three atolls. Inter-woven with both these influences were the expectations of traditional Tokelauan society and culture, which bound the Tokelauan people to a close-knit community structure based on age and gender.

Early experience with alcohol beverages on Tokelau

It is uncertain whether Tokelauan people knew about the link between fermentation and making alcoholic drinks before European contact. Whatever the case, the fermented sap of the palm tree (kalaeve or faamafu) which Tokelauan people, especially males, have made and drunk for at least several generations does not appear to have been an important ceremonial drink (unlike, for example, kava in Tonga, Fiji and Western Samoa).

Even after the Tokelauan people had made contact with Europeans it appears that access to western products like commercially produced alcohol, was severely limited by Tokelau's relative isolation and the need to ship all goods in by boat. Thus, although Tokelauan people were clearly exposed to, and on occasions clearly sought to copy, the heavy drinking styles of visiting traders and adventurers, there was also plenty of opportunity for the Christian churches to introduce different morals. When these new values were blended with the existing Tokelauan beliefs/customs a new set of values was developed which was committed to the acceptance of group authority structures, respect for elders and leaders, and self control. As noted by Wessen (1992):

Christian ethics, of a somewhat fundamentalist tinge, are deeply embedded in Tokelauan culture and run through all aspects of community life. . . . In church as in the meeting house, Tokelauans are instructed to "work together for the welfare of all", to respect their elders, to carry out their duties as women and men, and to have alofa for one another.

In this respect, it is important to recognise that traditionally people from Tokelau were brought up to recognise that men and women have quite different duties. These duties can be seen in the brother/sister relationship, which is a relationship of the highest respect and importance. Even after a Tokelauan man married and went to live with his wife's family, he was expected to continue to provide food and other material for his sister. His sister then prepared and gave out this food to her family (Wessen 1992). Alcohol drinking, and in particular drunkenness and unacceptable behaviour, were seen as incompatible with these expectations and duties.

Historically, these non-drinking values appear to have been supported most widely on the atoll of Atafu. Of the three Tokelau atolls, this is the one which has been influenced most strongly by the Protestant churches. Reports suggest that even today on Atafu the village councils often do not allow people to drink in public and

that drinking must be done only in private homes. Nukunonu, on the other hand, has been influenced by the Catholic Church's generally less restrictive stance towards alcohol. Fakaofu, the third atoll, had a mixture of both Catholic and Protestant churches and stands somewhere in the middle.

From what people say the most acceptable forms of public drinking on Nukunonu and Fakaofu, at least as far as the village elders are concerned, are quite structured and formal. To begin these sessions, practically all the men in a village will sit down in a group. Drinking is then started and controlled by one of the older men of the village (toeina). Everybody drinks from the same cup, which is filled and refilled by a pameni (barman), who himself doesn't drink. People are not allowed to argue or become openly drunk.

What happens in that circle is that the person sits with the teapot and then he's called the "barman" 'pameni'. He pours. He's the one who doesn't get drunk. He pours the cup and maybe it could be full, halfway, or a quarter of the way. But he decides, and everybody gets their portion. And he gives it to the guy next to him. That guy sips until he finishes. Then he passes it back. And then it gets passed to the next guy, and everybody drinks from the same cup, and it keeps going round and round until the pot is finished. (Woman)

There was no beer in Tokelau in the early days. During the years I was living in Tokelau, there was no beer. The alcohol we drank was beer made from the kaleve. They made what was called faamafu. They drank that stuff. Kaleve used to be drunk and eaten. It was good for the body. But then they went and fermented the kaleve, dripping it into bottles to turn it into faamafu. To drink like beer. They still do it today. (Man)

The impact of the New Zealand experience

Previous studies, and comments from older male participants in the current study, suggest that the Tokelauan migration to Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1960s exposed Tokelauan people to a further important influence — the attitudes and beliefs found in the pro-alcohol public bars, working men's clubs and other public and semi-public drinking sports. Most of the Tokelauan migrants worked in factories and on building sites. This meant Tokelauan men were often exposed to the accepted heavy drinking style of their Palagi and Maori co-workers.

Working in Aotearoa New Zealand also meant being a part of a "cash" society. This, and the larger range of goods the Tokelauan people could buy including alcohol, provided migrants with many new opportunities to spend their money. At times, it seems, many migrant Tokelauan men were torn between the need to send money back home to their families in Tokelau and their desire to seek out the comfort and familiarity of their close friends and workmates at the local hotel.

As has been shown in earlier studies, reports from this study suggest that migration to Aotearoa New Zealand generally resulted in people drinking more (Stanhope & Prior 1979). On Tokelau, commercially-produced alcohol was generally expensive and difficult to obtain. This was not the case in Aotearoa New Zealand.

*You know the older generations, with those boys that were born over there and they came here, they kept to themselves a lot you know, people that have turned 40 you know, and I think a lot of them were sensible. When they came here they were still young, they were around the age of 10 or 12. When they came here they didn't learn the way of drinking in Tokelau. They just sort of created their own ways, you know, and by that way, I think without the influence from over there, they are quite sensible drinkers. It sort of carried on through to a lot of our youngsters. The majority of the young generation these days, they are not too bad. They love their beer, their drinks, but I still believe that they are more sensible than the people who come from the islands.
(Man)*

*If I were a drinker, I would not want to drink in a place with a lot of kids or people from a younger generation. I'd want to stay or sit with my own age group, but from my point of view, this is not the case. The older people go and join the young people. They probably just think they're all drinkers so there's no age barrier. The older ones are no longer considering their age and the fact that they (the young people) are their children.
(Woman)*

Different ideas in modern-day Aotearoa New Zealand

Our research suggests that the different opinions on alcohol described above are still very important to the Tokelauan people who live in modern Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, older women, and some older men, are likely to openly criticise alcohol. On the other hand, younger Tokelauan people, especially those who are New Zealand born, are more likely to be open about their interest in drinking and less accepting of traditional social and religious values which state that alcohol should not be drunk at all.

Most of the younger Tokelauan people who drink tend to do so in much the same types of places, and with much the same kinds of people, as other young people in Aotearoa New Zealand who drink. For the young men, drinking alcohol is usually associated with sports clubs, especially rugby and rugby league. They will have a beer together after a run or in the clubrooms. During winter, young men are more likely to drink at the pub or in clubrooms because of sport. Younger women and men also attended nightclubs and sometimes went partying at someone's home afterwards.

I remember when I left the islands, that was the last thing [my father] said to me, not to drink. And then I came over, I started playing rugby. And then I go to the clubrooms. And then I'll be sitting there. All my mates, my rugby mates will be drinking beer and they'd look at me drinking orange juice. They'd say, "How come he's not drinking? Here, here try it. Try it!" That's when it started for me. (Younger man)

Having said this, different opinions about whether alcohol is good or bad still affect young Tokelauan people. In some cases, this results in young people being very unsure, even confused, about whether they should support the use of alcohol or not. This is illustrated in the following extract from a discussion with a young Tokelauan woman:

There's a misconception amongst our community that if you don't drink, [then] you're a really good girl. So for many years . . . I never drank when I went to the do's. And there's only one time I can remember that I actually picked a can up . . . I was really torn over whether I should drink or not, because I was thinking, drink to celebrate and drink with everybody else to be on their same level. Then on the other hand I was thinking, "Oh no, but maybe I'm being a bad [role] model for everybody". But I remember having a can. I suppose I wanted to present a squeaky clean image. (Younger woman)

In the early days, the women and girls didn't drink with us, because it was just the boys. Nowadays, women drink with the men. It's good if women drink with their husbands, but don't drink too much. When a woman gets drunk she can't control herself. The way she dances, and so on. (Man)

The older people who took part in the study tended to be moderate or occasional drinkers and often said they only drank one or two drinks on special occasions or at parties. One woman said that at special events, like weddings, it would be rude to refuse to take a glass of alcohol that had been offered.

Some of the older men who had been heavy drinkers in their younger days noted that they had cut down on their drinking a lot as they became older and took on family responsibilities. With these responsibilities, drinking became too expensive. In the early days, when the men were single and had jobs, they could afford to both drink *and* still send money back to Tokelau.

I feel more young people are drinking now. I notice there are more young people, both males and females, joining clubs — rugby, rugby league, netball. They're more socialised. They're more . . . I think they're more New Zealand, they're more Kiwi than the parents. They mix with just about anyone. In our day we just tended to stick to our little group. (Man)

I'm a bit scared of that. I'm a bit worried they'll [young New Zealand-born Tokelauan people] get too Palagi, that they will lose respect. That they will look down on their parents or the older generation and will probably start thinking, 'Oh, we're not Tokelauan. We're Palagis.' . . . So I feel there is a need to tell the young people to hold on to their roots and, I suppose, their language and culture, because pretty soon they will be lost. (Man)

Preferred types of drinks

Most of the male Tokelauan drinkers who took part in the research drank beer. However, some talked about adding “hot stuff” [spirits] to their beer. Tokelauan women who drank, usually drank spirits, such as rum and coke, or cocktails. Wine did not seem to be so popular with the Tokelauan people — at least those living in Wellington.

Meaning of the word “drinker”

Results from this study suggest that Tokelauan people interpret the terms “drinker” and “non-drinker” differently from mainstream Aotearoa New Zealand. It seems a Tokelauan person is likely to think that anybody who says they are a “drinker” will be a person who regularly consumes large amounts of alcohol, usually to the point of being drunk. The word “non-drinker”, on the other hand, refers to either people who never touch alcohol, or to people who might drink the odd glass or two of alcohol at a social event or with friends. In other words, Tokelauan people do not appear to make a significant distinction between those people who, at least in Palagi terms, are moderate (or social) drinkers and those people who are heavy drinkers.

For this reason, many of the people interviewed who drank only two or three drinks in a session did not feel they were “drinkers”. To them, the word “drinker” implied a style of drinking and drunken behaviour that they considered unpleasant or

offensive. They were much happier simply to be seen as “a non-drinker”.

When I go to a dance and there are people I know drinking, I'll ask them for a cup of wine, or whatever it is they are drinking. I drink, I always remind myself, I am not a regular drinker, I'm also afraid to drink heaps since I never want to get drunk. If I've drunk only one cup, I could feel the heat . . . sort of warmth. And that is because I'm really scared. If I've had one glass then I won't have another one. That's enough for me. (Woman)

Issues for health promotion

This study highlights a number of issues that need to be considered by ALAC when developing alcohol health advertising for and with Tokelauan New Zealanders.

The first issue is that Tokelauan New Zealanders view alcohol in different and in some cases strongly polarised ways. This means that it is difficult to identify a single Tokelauan stance on alcohol. Rather, Tokelauan attitudes and practices are quite variable, sometimes even contradictory. They stretch from those people who are opposed to any use of alcohol, through to those who accept alcohol and think regular drinking and drunkardness is a normal and even an important part of modern living.

The second issue, to some extent linked to the first, is what appears to be a lack of attention or recognition given to concepts of moderate drinking. As we have seen, the evidence obtained from this study suggests that Tokelauan people tend to call themselves either “drinkers” or “non-drinkers”. “Non-drinkers” are both people who don't drink at all as well as people who may drink two or three glasses in a social situation or during special occasions. “Drinkers”, on the other hand, are typically understood to be people who drink to get drunk and experience the full effects of larger amounts of alcohol. Thus, when somebody is called a “drinker”, people assume that they are a regular, heavy drinker. It was rare for the Tokelauan people in this study to identify themselves as moderate drinkers, or to profess to support concepts of moderate drinking. This finding suggests that alcohol health promotion which emphasises the concept of drinking in moderation may not be the best starting point when communicating with Tokelauan people who drink. The concept, in fact, may be quite alien to many.

A third issue relates to how the Tokelauan people in the study, both drinkers and non-drinkers, viewed the dangers of alcohol. The dangers were most often seen as disruptions that alcohol triggered in family and other close relationships; for example physical or verbal aggression, excessive attention-seeking behaviour and showing-off, showing disrespect to elders, and inappropriate sexual contacts. Although some participants realised that it was possible that heavy drinking could cause physical health problems, these problems were given little if any attention. We believe this is an important finding for ALAC, since current mainstream alcohol health promotion tends to focus largely on the physical health effects of heavy drinking. However, this focus seems unlikely to be given high priority by Tokelauan people, who appear to view the dangers of alcohol as being related much more to issues of how drinkers behave towards others than to alcohol's long-term potential for causing serious disease.

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Appendix 1

Interview schedule

Drinking Beliefs and Practices:

*Do you drink alcohol on **special occasions, every week, or not at all?***

Can you tell me about some of the times when you have been drinking in the last couple of weeks?

When

How often do you drink?

(How long have you been drinking? What age did you start drinking?)

What times of the week do you put aside for drinking?

Where

Where do you go to drink?

Who

Who do you drink with?

(Are they usually male/female friends?)

(Are they usually people that you know?)

Differences between male/female

Are there any differences between drinking in an all male/female group or in a mixed group?

Do people behave differently within these drinking groups?

Do you talk about different/same things depending on which group you are in?

Buying

Who buys the drinks?

(Is there an arrangement for buying the drinks?)

Do you buy drinks for others?

Before & After

What things do you/people do before having a drink? for eg. sports, movies ...

What do you do afterwards?

(What sort of activities do you take part in that don't include alcohol?)

Drinking Practices

Type of drink

(a) What is your favourite drink?

(a) What kinds of drink do you drink?

(b) What other types of drink do you like?

(b) Which do you drink most of?

How much

How much do you drink?

Are there times when you want to drink as much as you want/can?
(Why?)

Effects

Are there any changes in your behaviour when you've been drinking?

How you feel after 2-3 drinks?

How you feel after you've had quite a lot to drink?

How do you know when you've had enough to drink?

Drinking Behaviour

Normal Behaviour

From your own experience, can you describe what [insert name of Pacific group] people see as normal drinking behaviour?

Can you describe [insert name of Pacific group] people's behaviour when they've had a lot to drink?

Differences

*What differences have you noticed between those who drink and those who don't?
(Look for words that describe alcohol and alcohol related practices)*

What differences have you noticed between drinking in [insert name of Pacific island] and drinking in New Zealand?

(Why do you think there is or there isn't?)

Is there a [insert name of Pacific group] style of drinking?

Demographics:

Male/Female

Age Group:

under 20 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60+

When did you come to live in Aotearoa New Zealand?

For: "Non-Drinkers"

Do you mix socially or go out with people who drink alcohol?

[If yes ...] How do you fit into that situation?

Who

(Are they friends, family, work mates, etc.)

Are they male/female?

(And are they people you know?)

When

Can you describe any occasions that you go to where alcohol is drunk?

Where

Where would the occasions take place?

Differences between male/female

From your own experience, are there any differences between drinking in all male/female group or in a mixed group?

Do you see people behave differently within these drinking groups?

(Do people behave differently when they drink and when they don't drink?)

Do you/they talk about the same/different things as those who drink? (depending on which group you are in?)

Buying

Who buys/arranges the drinks?

Do you buy drinks for others?

What sort of activities do you take part in that don't include alcohol

As a non-drinker, what made you decide not to drink alcohol?

[If no ...] What social events/activities do you take part in where there is no alcohol?

Are there any occasions that you go to where alcohol is drunk?

Can you describe it?

As a non-drinker, what made you decide not to drink alcohol?

Questions for focus groups

These are the main questions but may need prompt/probe questions.

1. *Can you remember back to the first time you tasted/ tried alcohol? How long ago was that and how did it come about?*
2. *Can you tell us something about the times when you drink alcohol?*
For example, how often do you drink?
Where do you drink? [at home, which pubs? which nightclubs?]
Who do you drink with? [mix of ages, women/men, ethnicity, friends, family, workmates]
3. *When you're drinking with other men, do you behave differently from when you are drinking with women?*
Can you describe/talk about this?
4. *What types of drink do you drink? (which do you drink most of?)*
5. *Who buys the drinks? (What sort of arrangement is there for buying drinks?)*
6. *How much do you drink?*
7. *Are there times when you want to drink as much as you can? What times are they?*
8. *How do you know when you've had enough to drink?*
9. *What differences, if any, have you noticed between drinking in [insert name of Pacific island] and drinking here?*
10. *Do you think there is such a thing as a [insert name of Pacific group] way of drinking?*
If yes, can you explain what that is?
11. *What do you think your community sees as being acceptable drinking behaviour ?*

The Research Team

Lanuola Asiasiga

Lanuola has a background in education and social science research. She is now enjoying working as a health researcher. Lanuola has three children and lives in Porirua.

Ian Hodges

Ian has research training in social anthropology and is an experienced researcher in health. He undertook a PhD in the rituals and customs associated with alcohol consumption amongst New Zealand men. Ian lives in Blockhouse Bay, Auckland.

Ezra Jennings-Pedro

Ezra is a consultant for Education Directions Ltd and is involved with community education and research. In 1995 Ezra spent six months teaching in Tokelau and is currently completing his Masters in Education at Victoria University.

Terrisa Taupe

Terrisa and Tufaina's parents migrated from Tokelau in the early sixties and their children grew up in Porirua. Terrisa works in the Finance section of the Ministry of Health. She is a member of the Mafutaga Tupulaga Tokelau and PIC.

Tufaina Taupe

Tufaina is a teacher at a local school in Porirua. She is currently involved in the Tokelau Bible Translation group, the Porirua Pacific Islands Stop Abuse project which deals with family violence and sexual abuse issues with women and their families, the Atafu Tokelau Association, and is a Sunday School teacher at PIC.