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NATIVE
HAWAIIANS
AND
PACIFIC
ISLANDERS

aapi nexus

Lots of Aloha, Little Data:

Data and Research on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders

Shawn Malia Kana'iaupuni

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) people are those tracing their ancestry to any of the original peoples of Hawai'i, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands (Office of Management and Budget [OMB], 1997). These include Native Hawaiians, Chamorro, Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, Palauan, Pohnpeian, Chuukese, Yapese, Kosraen, and others in the Micronesian, Melanesian, and Polynesian Pacific Islander groupings. The largest of these, Native Hawaiians, Samoans, and Chamorro, are indigenous peoples of the state of Hawai'i, the U.S. Territory of American Samoa, and the U.S. Territory of Guam, respectively, and as such, eight of every ten NHPIs are U.S.-born (Waksberg, Levine, and Marker, 2000). The Census 2010 results indicate that 73 percent of the NHPI populations live in the West, predominantly in the states of Hawai'i and California, followed by Washington.

Recent assessments of federal data sets document the egregious lack of coverage of NHPI populations in nearly all data sources, with exception of vital statistics and the U.S. Census. The lack of data limits the ability of federal and state efforts, public and private, to understand issues and trends that inform policy and programs targeting NHPI populations. Also concerning, is the fact that many state and federal entities continue to aggregate NHPI population data with other Asian American groups, despite the widely divergent historical experiences, culture, and social and demographic characteristics of NHPI and Asian American groups. This practice occurs despite well-known inadequacies of aggregated data, which yields misleading information that is challenging to use effectively. The need for disaggregated data is especially urgent in light of recent Census 2010 data recording some of the highest growth rates in the United States among the NHPI population (averaging 40%, compared to 10% across the nation since

2000). According to the U.S. Census 2010, there are about 1,225,000 NHPs in the country. Native Hawaiians comprise about 45 percent of the NHPI census population, numbering about 521,000 alone or in combination (AOIC), followed by Samoan, Chamorro, and other smaller groups. Hawai'i is the native homeland of the Hawaiian people and is where 55 percent still reside (about 289,000 AOIC). As an indigenous group in the United States, this experience differentiates Native Hawaiians significantly from other Pacific Islanders and from Asian Americans.

A limited set of reliable social and economic statistics on NHPs formerly came from the decennial census long form, which was replaced by the American Community Survey (ACS) in 2005. The ACS relies on a smaller sample than the decennial census, which impairs the ability to produce reliable estimates for numerically small populations. National education data sets are another example of the limited information on NHPs. There are 154 Hawaiians reported in the National Center for Education Statistics, 54 in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS), 34 in the ECLS Birth cohort, and even fewer Pacific Islanders in these datasets, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Oversampling techniques typically are required to attain sufficient sample sizes for statistical reliability, yet rarely has this occurred in national data sets.

To compensate for the small sample sizes in most data sets, researchers often aggregate NHPs with other Asian Americans to attain statistically reliable results. This practice masks significant differences between groups and also gives an inaccurate portrait of the NHPI population, which may be more statistically similar to the American Indian and Alaska Native population in terms of indigeneity, educational attainment, and other socioeconomic characteristics than to the Asian American population.

From the available information on NHPs, we know that the population is young and increasing at a higher rate compared to other groups. NHPs experience higher rates of poverty and homelessness, lower-paying jobs, and are more likely to be employed in positions that are eliminated during economic downturns, relative to other groups. Data on health and wellness suggest few improvements and much need. Most NHPI also struggle to maintain their unique languages and cultures. Where education data exist, we find a persistent lack of positive educational experiences that has resulted in substantial gaps in NHPI student outcomes, including

lower student achievement and growth, school engagement, promotion and graduation, and college enrollment and completion. Promisingly, research featured in this volume demonstrates the strengths of cultural approaches, consistent with a growing body of research in education and other areas.

Knowledge is power in social change efforts, and data and diverse approaches are needed to fuel it. Recommendations from this section's experts in the field are united in calling for using the OMB guidelines consistently; disaggregating data collection and reporting on socioeconomic, educational, cultural, youth, and health challenges facing NHPs; improving data estimates by addressing small sample sizes with oversampling methods and targeted surveys; and collaborating with public and private community-based organizations to promote high response rates and/or data partnerships. A great need exists for trend analyses over time on NHPs. These analyses will shed insight on the effects of programs and policies, including longitudinal studies, such as the ECLS and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Consistently, research by these authors highlights the power of culturally relevant approaches and the importance of developing innovative approaches to data, knowledge, and research that embrace indigenous perspectives in program and policy design, particularly in education, health, and science.

Five briefs in this section identify needs for NHPs and provide recommendations on how to support data-collection efforts and services for these communities. First, Sela Panapasa, Kamana'opono Crabbe, and Joseph Keawe'aimoku Kaholokula discuss the rationale for separating NHPs from Asian Americans in federal data by reviewing sixteen federal data sets that comply with OMB standards for data collection. However, only one of these data sets is fully compliant with OMB standards for reporting disaggregated information on NHPs. The authors provide recommendations on how to improve reliable data for NHPs and how to obtain robust samples of these communities.

Subsequently, I, along with my colleagues Brandon Ledward and Ku'ulani Keohokalole, share the results of a quantitative research study examining the impact of culture-based education on student achievement and socio-emotional development for NHP students. The results of the study emphasized the correlation between culturally relevant education and better school performance. To close the achievement gap for many of these students,

the policy brief argues for greater advocacy, funding, and policies that promote community-based, culturally relevant education, which would benefit all children.

Karen Umemoto and Earl S. Hishinuma's paper discusses policy recommendations for programs that support youth substance-abuse prevention, also through culture-based programming and strategies. NHPI adolescents are at a much greater risk than Asian Americans for several health-related indicators, including violence, alcohol, and drug use throughout the past decade. In order to form effective strength-based interventions, the authors recommend the application of a socio-ecological approach that incorporates family relations, friends, schools, and community organizations in reducing negative youth behaviors.

The Hi'iaka Working Group article calls for bringing together indigenous and cultural perspectives and knowledge systems to inform geographic information systems (GIS) and the process of creating a set of guiding principles for creating an indigenous GIS. GIS is limited to a Western philosophical understanding of the world, and the authors advocate for new technologies that integrate indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, which also benefits cultural heritage and survival.

This section ends with a piece by Maile Taualii, Joey Quenga, Raynald Samoa, Salim Samanani, and Doug Dover. These authors discuss the limitations of data and the mortality of NHPs in California and Hawai'i, which they use as a starting place for policy recommendations. As with other briefs, Taualii and colleagues advocate for all states to comply with OMB standards for racial reporting of deaths. Until compliance is achieved, it remains difficult to analyze health data for and address disparities experienced by NHPs.

Note

Most reports and the public use microdata products released by the Census using ACS data are limited also in that they report on single race/ethnic groups, combining all individuals with two or more races into a single category. This reporting is a major concern for multiracial NHPs, of whom 55% report more than one race. E.g., about two of every three Native Hawaiians report two or more races on the Census and ACS surveys. Thus, two-thirds of the entire population are lumped into the nationwide "two or more races" category; a category that is very difficult to decipher or use effectively.

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