

The Influence of Cultural and Environmental Factors on Patterns of Alcohol Consumption Amongst Tongan Males Enrolled at the University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

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Abstract

Hazardous drinking behaviours have manifested among Pacific male populations, but the available literature is scarce. This study explored the cultural and environmental influences on alcohol consumption amongst Tongan males aged between 18–24 years, enrolled at the University of Auckland. This explored risk and protective factors and recommendations to address hazardous drinking behaviours among Tongan males and among university students. This qualitative research carried out 12 face-to-face, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with Tongan male students from the university. The interviews were analysed thematically adopting the Kakala model of teu (to prepare), toli (to pick), tui (to weave), and luva (to gift) to ensure processes were culturally meaningful. This study found males expressed their desire to fakafeohi (socialise) drove their alcohol consumption. Traditional values including anga fakatonga (the Tongan way of life), and the role of the fahu (eldest paternal aunt) and the faifekau (church minister) were cultural factors that steered them away from alcohol consumption. The influence of kava was twofold, both driving alcohol consumption and serving as a culturally appropriate alternative. The facilitation of family-centred strategies can also strengthen support systems and encourage abstinence through high-ranking family members within a Tongan context. The Tongan males acknowledged they were exposed to “alcogenic environments” at the university, with peer pressure and parental drinking habits supporting hazardous drinking behaviours. This study highlights the need to reshape hazardous behaviours among Tongan male students to promote healthier alternatives, develop cultural competence, establish support systems, and foster environmental resilience within the university environment and student experiences.

Keywords

Alcohol consumption; Pacific; Men’s health; Tongan culture; Environmental factors; Tertiary/university students; New Zealand.

Introduction

In New Zealand, the prevalence of alcohol consumption sat at 76.3% of those aged 15 years and over in 2023/24, with one in six drinking hazardously (Ministry of Health [MOH], 2024). Harmful alcohol use costs New Zealand approximately \$9.1 billion annually (MOH, 2010; New Zealand Institute of Economic Research [NZIER], 2024). Pacific and Māori populations maintained high prevalence rates according to 2021/22 data (33.4% and 21.5%, respectively), followed by European/Other (20%) and Asian (6.2%) populations with the lowest prevalence (MOH, 2022). The differences in prevalence across ethnic groups suggests there may be ethnic-specific factors influencing drinking behaviours amongst different groups.

In 2023, there were 97,824 Tongan people in New Zealand; 74.1% of these lived in Auckland (Brunsdon, 2024). The 2015/16 New Zealand Health Survey reported 43% of Tongan adults aged 15 years and over were past-year drinkers and a further 32.7% were hazardous drinkers (Ataera-Minster et al., 2020). The Youth19 report indicated half of Tongan secondary school students in New Zealand had previously consumed alcohol (Ball et al., 2023). A third of these students were current drinkers and 22.4% had consumed alcohol in the past month. Almost 9% of Tongan

students drank at least weekly and 55.6% were past-month binge drinkers (Ball et al., 2023). Of the current drinkers, almost 40% recorded drinking 10 or more drinks on a single occasion (Ball et al., 2023). These hazardous drinking behaviours informed the development of this research.

The Youth19 report found 55.6% of 351 participating Tongan secondary school students were current drinkers that had been binge drinking in the past month (Ball et al., 2023). Pacific youth exhibit similar trends in alcohol consumption patterns to Pacific adults with significantly less past-year drinkers compared to non-Pacific youth (Ataera-Minster et al., 2020). Evidence regarding Pacific youth and Pacific men suggests that being drunk has become more acceptable among these groups (Ataera-Minster et al., 2020). The Attitudes and Behaviour towards Alcohol Survey (ABAS) found Pacific people between 15 and 24 years old reported consuming more drinks than any other age group (Health Promotion Agency, 2017). The average number of drinks consumed by Pacific youth aged from 15 to 24 years was 12, which is more than double the threshold considered for binge drinking (Ataera-Minster et al., 2020). Excessive alcohol consumption has led to various alcohol-related harms including health complications, intentional and unintentional injuries, and wider social problems such as drink-driving and criminal behaviour. It has also led to negative consequences for student education and academic performance (Ball et al., 2023; Johansson-Fua, 2001).

Previous literature has alluded to cultural notions regarding binge drinking among Pacific people. A report detailed the most frequent drinking places for Pacific youth included parks, streets, other homes, and bars or nightclubs (Teevale et al., 2012). While some Pacific people have accepted that binge drinking has become normalised within a New Zealand context, this pattern of alcohol consumption is culturally unacceptable in the Pacific culture (Fehoko, 2014). A literature review in 2009 reported that Pacific students tended to drink alcohol outside the home and were less likely to drink with their own families (Cagney & Alliston, 2009). The cultural values within Pacific populations deter young people from drinking at home, hence the most preferred places of consumption are outside the home. Similarly, Pacific adults often drank in places outside the home away from women and children due to these same values (Cagney & Alliston, 2009). The current literature, however, is outdated and ethnic-specific research, especially qualitative research, is required to understand the complexities of alcohol consumption among Pacific populations.

The most recent exploratory study among Samoan adult males aged from 46 to 68 years old in Auckland, New Zealand provided perspectives on responsible alcohol use and abstinence, and found all participants experienced serious harm from problematic alcohol use (Aloaina et al., 2025). Although literature on Tongan male students is scarce, available research indicates hazardous drinking behaviours and binge drinking in higher volumes leading to greater alcohol-related harms (Ball et al., 2023). This warrants further investigations into the factors that influence such behaviours, especially given there are no current interventions targeting alcohol consumption for this group. This research aims to explore the cultural and environmental influences of alcohol consumption among Tongan males between 18–24 years old who are enrolled at the University of Auckland.

Method

Ethics approval was granted by the Auckland Health Research Ethics Committee (Ref: AH26608). The recruitment criteria included: male, aged 18–24 years, of Tongan descent, consumed alcohol in the past six months, and enrolled as a student at the University of Auckland in 2023–2024. Participation was a one-on-one semi-structured interview that was audio recorded, and participants were presented with a \$40 gift voucher. The transcripts were analysed thematically to yield themes, guided by the *Kakala* framework of *teu* (to prepare), *toli* (to pick), *tui* (to weave), and *luva* (to gift) to ensure processes were culturally meaningful.

Results

Participant demographic and alcohol consumption summary

There were 12 participants aged 19–24 years old, enrolled as undergraduate (n=10) and postgraduate (n=2) students. Most resided in South (n=5), West (n=2), East (n=2), and Central (n=1) Auckland, New Zealand. Most students were from Arts (n=4), Science (n=3), Medical and Health Sciences (n=2), and Education and Social work (n=2), and identified as Christians (n=10). All students were current drinkers, with onset from 7–17 years old. The average consumption per sitting ranged from 4 to 24 standard drinks. The most frequent time spent drinking per sitting ranged from 2–12 hours, with most drinking on a Friday or Saturday. Most participants drank 2–4 times a month (n=9) in the last six months and some less than once a month (n=2), with most stating their drinking was a problem at some point (n=9).

Results

Theme 1: Cultural influences

Drinking as a means of socialising

All participants saw drinking as a means of meeting people and socialising:

We've spent a lot of time together over alcohol and [it] gives us a reason to hang out and nothing bad has come out of it. It's something we all have in common. (P3)

Consuming alcohol gave them the confidence to do things they would not normally do sober. Some participants identified drinking made them feel like they could more freely express themselves.

Some participants identified *fakafeohi*, or *feohi*, which is a concept embedded in the Tongan culture and a key principle in *anga fakatonga*, or the Tongan way of life. It focuses on meaningful relationships and trust. Most participants highlighted *feohi* drove their consumption, with strangers, friends, and families growing closer:

Feohi, hits different and it's more meaningful in Tongan. Like when you say aunty or you know like that's my mehikitanga, it's deeper. That's what I mean with the drinking, like feohi. It's building those relationships and trusting people. (P9)

Some participants noted alcohol would bring people together, so socialising became the incentive:

Drinking brings them together. Not so much the "oh we're drinking, we're a big happy family" kind of vibes. Just the "oh we'll go there and drink". (P6)

Faka'apa'apa deters my drinking

Faka'apa'apa, or respect, is a core Tongan value and influences Tongan society as a Tongan way of life. Two participants highlighted the importance of respect for Tongan people, even when drinking.

It is intertwined in every aspect of Tongan culture and without respect, it is likely you will not be welcomed back:

Faka'apa'apa is of utmost importance in Tongan society and a lot of people do follow those values and it's like integrated in every part of society, in the family, and in the community. (P8)

That's [faka'apa'apa] way important for us Tongans. The respect between us and whoever we're drinking with. Respect always has to be around when we're drinking. If respect is not there, then there's a chance of you getting kicked out and not welcome back. (P10)

Some participants stated *faka'apa'apa* influenced their drinking when they were around sisters or female cousins; traditionally, males and females are separated due to females holding a higher status in Tongan society. Hence, when the participants drank with their sisters or female cousins, they moderated their drinking out of respect. For some participants, this meant not drinking at all around females:

Like some people drink with their sisters and that and that's acceptable. But with me, I can't drink with my sisters and my girl cousins ... we can't do that 'cause you know coming from Tonga, seeing the life there. (P9)

High-ranking family members

Five participants described *faka'apa'apa* when someone of a higher social standing was present, specifically noting their *fahu* (father's oldest sister). The *fahu* is one of the most highly respected people in the family hierarchy. One participant mentioned being wary of his drinking when his *fahu* or his *fahu*'s children were present:

I think it [faka'apa'apa] deters it [drinking] ... especially around my fahu's kids whereas here I don't have that in Auckland. I'm on the other side of that. So, most cousins here I'm the fahu's kid so if there's anything they're kinda wary around it's me. (P2)

Another participant described the influence his uncle had, as a *faifekau*, or a church minister, on his drinking. This links back to the significance of religion in the Tongan culture as a *faifekau* is afforded utmost respect:

My mum's family is more reserved because one of my uncles is a faifekau so that influence is big. But my dad's side of the family, the drinking culture is huge and that's where I started drinking and experiencing drugs. It's like everyone in my dad's family drinks. (P2)

Alcohol is not part of anga fakatonga

The notion of *anga fakatonga* (Tongan way) was present in interviews. One participant referred to lectures he would receive from his grandmother explaining how his behaviours associated with drinking were “embarrassing” and went against the *anga fakatonga* or traditional practices:

Growing up with my grandma at home, she's always like, “that's embarrassing because we never did that back in Tonga”. So, every time I go and drink, I know I'm going to come home to a lecture from my grandma and it's her telling me, “this is not the right way to do things, and Tongan boys don't do this”. Especially when you drink on a Saturday and Sunday is the next day. (P2)

The consequences of drinking are problematic and go against *anga fakatonga*. Another participant talked about a time when he recorded himself, unaware his friends from church were in the background, which led to serious repercussions within the church:

So, this one time in Tonga, I was filming my cousin dancing, and I posted it on my Instagram. But I didn't know it was linked to my Facebook, and my cousin's parents saw it and they messaged me saying to take it down, she's an embarrassment to our family. (P8)

A key part of *anga fakatonga* is the *fatongia*, or the duties and obligations a person has. One participant exemplified this as a leader, refraining from drinking in front of the wider community, knowing it went against *anga fakatonga*:

I have roles, like leadership roles, so I tend not to drink in front of them [the community]. (P4)

Another refrained from drinking in front of his parents because of his duties as the eldest sibling:

I feel like [my parents'] view of me would change 'cause I'm the oldest. When it's your duty to uphold certain obligations and they know you're doing things they won't like or approve of, they would growl you off. (P9)

Being a good host

Nearly all participants related alcohol availability as an indicator of a “good” host. Four participants noted bar tabs at social functions make a “good” host in the Tongan culture as the responsibility to moderate guests' drinking primarily falls on the consumer rather than the host:

I think putting on [bar] tabs makes them a good host because it shouldn't fall on the host, it falls on the people. It's up to them if they want to drink or not but the option to drink should be there. (P8)

Another four participants highlighted the importance attributed to availability and quantity of alcohol. They believed guests should have enough to eat and drink until they are satisfied before they leave:

Ensure there's always enough to go around and people are satisfied. It's like food, you'd rather have more than less so guests can leave happy. Like even if we don't agree with drinking, but our guests are drinkers, we'd provide. (P3)

Alcohol and kava

Ten participants reported drinking kava, some drinking more frequently than others, with three participants drinking "occasionally". Four participants mentioned kava as an alternative to alcohol, reducing their alcohol consumption:

It [kava] doesn't really affect my drinking. It's more replaced my drinking if anything. It's brought it down. (P7)

Drinking alcohol after kava, or "wash-down", was not common practice amongst the cohort, with seven participants refraining from alcohol after kava:

Never, because we also keep in mind that kava is traditional, so we always try and keep that respect and honour. (P11)

Three participants noted engaging in wash-down, with two having high consumption averaging 15 standard drinks and the other 24 standard drinks on a single occasion. They all had different reasons for drinking alcohol after kava:

It [wash-down] kind of sobers you up a bit ... but it's not a lot. You just have like one or two drinks. (P4)

Theme 2: Environmental influences

What is an alcogenic environment?

All participants admitted it was their first time hearing of an "alcogenic environment". Most participants agreed university was an alcogenic environment after the interviewer defined the term. Half of the participants noted close and easily accessible bars drove alcohol consumption:

This is a money-making ground for them. Shads [bar] and even AUT have their own [bar]. Nowadays I'm not bothered but then just that accessibility especially while I was living here. (P6)

Four participants noticed the high density of liquor stores around university, with three participants living in university halls of residence:

I know there's one by the hostel and when you turn around the corner there's a liquor store and then 10 metres further is another liquor store. I remember when I used to stay in halls up at Grafton, I knew where all the spots were. (P11)

The student culture is real

Most participants were aware of social events permitted by the university and student organisations centred around alcohol. Many other events sanctioned by the university are hosted by various student groups, including fundraisers or parties to draw students in. Many participants mentioned attending events to drink with their friends and to support the hosts:

My drinking comes from the socials that we have for [a university student association] So, you feel like you want to support them, so you have a drink ... the current student culture has influenced me to drink a lot more than I thought ... the social events we have we just go to support. (P2)

Four participants reported drinking on student nights and explained these were nights with cheaper drinks. The other participants responded with similar ideas saying that they would usually drink on a Wednesday night with their friends, knowing it was student night at the university:

I remember it was first-year uni. It was a new culture, new environment, more freedom, and I followed my peers around the class, and I realised it was a typical lifestyle to drink Fridays or Wednesdays. (P11)

I am easily peer pressured

Half of the cohort felt more compelled to drink when peer pressure, through verbal incitement, was directed at them. Some participants noted they were easily swayed by their peers and this form of peer pressure could feel like social “blackmailing”. This was more prominent when experienced with close friends:

I just turned 23 and I drank 23 Coronas, so pressure in the moment not wanting to disappoint the boys. (P9)

Peer pressure was also related to development of behaviour. Some participants claimed their drinking habits were like their peers, and they imitated these habits despite knowing their unhealthy nature. This included their desire to fit in or have “common ground”:

I think the people I hang out with every day, there's certain people I notice “abuse alcohol” and seeing that kind of makes you feel sad for your peers. But also, it makes you realise the drinking habits that you catch on to. (P2)

Several participants outlined enhanced social benefits of drinking including a means of socialising and having fun, which generated their perception of positive social experiences and alcohol:

It's enhanced my relationships because we use [alcohol] to bond and get to know each other. So, we've spent a lot of time together over alcohol and it gives us a reason to hang out with each other. (P3)

Binge drinking is normal

Most participants stated binge drinking was a standard practice and that they were not aware of the definition of binge drinking. Their drinking habits were characterised by drinking more than 5 standard drinks in a short period of time, which is its recognised definition. This pattern of consumption was common amongst the participants. The misunderstanding of binge drinking is reflected in the high rates observed in this cohort:

Like drinking a whole box or two boxes in one sitting. That's normal, drinking a box is normal. (P3)

Some participants expressed their perception of binge drinking was the frequency of consumption as opposed to the volume. The perception of binge drinking as repeated drinking occasions may contribute to the normalisation of binge drinking, which may also have contributed to most participants not seeing their consumption as a problem:

*It's like a bender, you know If there's a main event and you got a couple of days leading up to the event and you're just drinking before then. [*interviewer defines binge drinking] Oh, so that's every time we drink. (P10)*

*Like drinking consecutively over x number of days. [*interviewer defines binge drinking] Yeah that's normal. (P12)*

Parental drinking habits

Nine participants spoke about their experiences with their fathers' drinking habits and unhealthy drinking behaviours:

He [dad] rarely drinks. Like only for celebrations. So maybe like four times a year. But I do remember when I was little, my dad was a heavy drinker. (P4)

One described his father going “overboard”, another said his father had “bad habits”, and another’s father had a “drinking problem”.

Parental attitudes towards drinking were evident when participants were asked their age at their first drink and by whom it was given. Some participants said their fathers gave them their first drink at ages 12, 14, and 16 years, respectively and only their fathers knew about their drinking:

I was 12 [when I first had alcohol] ... my dad [supplied it] ... my mum [wasn't aware of my drinking]. So, my mum was more like, “wait till you're 18”. My dad blurred those lines. (P2)

Examining the participants' maternal influences, four participants said their mothers did not drink. These participants were relatively older when they had their first drink, compared to the rest of the cohort. Six participants said their mothers rarely drank or only for a “special occasion”:

My mum she's more of a responsible drinker. She's tried to instil that in us. If in any way I am responsible, it's because of what she tries to put on us. (P2)

Theme 3: A way forward

The final theme explored addressing hazardous drinking behaviours and perceived strategies to minimise cultural and environmental factors influencing alcohol consumption.

Cultural intervention

A few participants recommended drinking kava as an alternative to alcohol. In their experiences, kava provided an opportunity for Tongan males to be vulnerable and talk about everyday problems. Thus, kava was deemed a culturally appropriate alternative to alcohol as a part of *anga fakatonga*, with one participant mentioning keeping kava as a “traditional” practice as opposed to a “commercial” activity:

You know with kava it's like about social interaction. When it comes to alcohol you act different in a way that makes you do dumb stuff. (P9)

Three participants felt addressing hazardous drinking should begin in the home. They noted cultural taboos and *anga fakatonga* often restrict young Tongan males from sharing about sensitive topics. For example, alcohol consumption is not openly discussed in a family setting, which leaves most young males finding alternative places to deal with their alcohol consumption outside the home:

Like my mum and dad, they're open about stuff saying like focus on school but other stuff like sex, religion, alcohol, drugs, they don't really talk about it. They only talk about it

when it becomes a problem. So maybe trying to have more transparent conversations before its problematic. (P11)

A recommended solution was reshaping interventions to address cultural taboos by implementing activities and workshops promoting openness within the family. Some participants proposed educating people in the Tongan community, such as parents, elders, and the *fahu*. The *fahu* was described as a distinguished position within the Tongan cultural hierarchy of the family unit as a role model afforded the upmost respect by all family members. The *fahu* was held in high regard as they diminished drinking habits. Some participants felt contemporary New Zealand has displaced this traditional Tongan practice:

I think the difficult thing about the culture in New Zealand, away from Tonga, is it's lost touch with what it's supposed to be. But if we're basing it on a fahu, then I think people will listen. But me personally, maybe not. I think it depends on your relation to your fahu, like how you feel about that person. (P2)

Environmental intervention

Some participants recommended educational workshops through university as they understood drinking was not likely to stop within a university setting without support. This focused on minimising consequences of drinking through a series of workshops and educational activities. One participant suggested a dedicated student organisation targeting Tongan males to learn these lessons:

I think at university, it'd be cool to have an organisation that specifically targets Tongan males learning the short- and long-term effects of drinking because like people are not very aware of it and I think it's important to know its consequences. (P8)

The accessibility and marketing of alcohol in and around the university was a key issue and driver of drinking culture and some males felt something should be done to address the alcogenic environment at university:

Maybe tap into that environmental side because if I wasn't living in a dorm, I'd drink less 'cause my parents are a big factor 'cause they're fine with me drinking but maybe not as often as I do it here. (P5)

Discussion

Tongan males saw alcohol consumption as an effective tool to *fakafeohi*, or *feohi*, with others. *Feohi* refers to the fellowship between people and is rooted in the Tongan cultural values of respect, reciprocity, and community (Frengley-Vaipuna et al., 2011; Lino, 2015). Alcohol use was seen to enable relationship building and its value resonated with participants. The concept of *feohi* was previously noted in kava literature where Fehoko (2014) explained this idea underpinned kava

processes. The wider literature describes alcohol as a commodity with similar value to food and suggests the availability of alcohol draws people in and gives them a sense of community (Ataera-Minster et al., 2020; Huakau et al., 2005).

Most participants explained their reluctance to drink with sisters or female cousins, reflecting *faka'apa'apa* between a brother and sister, with our study adding a Tongan male's perspective to previously reported female experiences. Traditionally, brothers and sisters do not drink together to preserve *tapu* (sacred) and participants described feeling uncomfortable and stopping drinking (Alcoholic Liquor Advisory Council [ALAC] et al., 1997; James, 1992; Manuopangai, 2012). Participants also noted drinking with those of higher status meant alcohol offerings could not be refused because of *toka'i*. *Toka'i* takes social standing into account and where an invitation is extended, an acceptance is expected. Thus, declining an offer is insulting or offensive (Samu et al., 2009; Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2012). This duality of respect in the Tongan culture is both beneficial and detrimental in the context of alcohol. The *fahu* was also highly influential on participants' own drinking. The *fahu* is unique to the Tongan culture, dictating the '*eiki-tu'a* relationship, where a person of higher social status is '*eiki*, over a lower-ranked individual, who is *tu'a* (Filihia, 2001). These relationships are guided by a set of cultural taboos and *fahu* are afforded the ultimate respect and acquiescence (Douaire-Marsaudon, 1996; Toren & Pauwels, 2015). The *mehikitanga*, or the eldest paternal aunt, generally occupies the *fahu* role, becoming the family matriarch. This *fahu* system hindered alcohol consumption for the Tongan males because of their duty to uphold respect. Traditionally, *fahu* had the ability to keep the family accountable if certain processes did not meet standards (Douaire-Marsaudon, 2015). Another study among Tongan female smokers found that smoking was a social vector, like alcohol, which marked independence and maintained friendships (Palavi & Nosa, 2021). The study also showed the *mehikitanga* (paternal aunt) can be utilised to encourage non-smoking among familial female generations (Palavi & Nosa, 2021).

The participants expressed the impact a *faifekau*, a high-ranking position, had on their alcohol consumption. The available literature describes the authority church ministers have in Pacific communities. They are seen as a source of influence and support for Pacific people and have been central figures in delivering positive health messages to the community (Ataera-Minster et al., 2020; Samu et al., 2009; Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2012; Warren et al., 2006). Alcohol consumption is socially and culturally unacceptable in *anga fakatonga* (Fehoko, 2014). The excessive consumption of alcohol is likely to induce other risky behaviours against *anga fakatonga*, bringing shame upon oneself, family, church, and wider community (Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2012). The fear of embarrassment was a dissuading factor for the Tongan males in this study as some experienced these repercussions, stemming from excessive drinking. Notably, social media exacerbated the consequences, widening audiences. These feelings are present in the current literature where past participants have indicated concerns around behaviours against *anga fakatonga* (Samu et al., 2009; Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2012). The closeness of the Tongan community means the reputation of families is at stake when drinking leads to risky behaviours (ALAC et al., 1997; Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2012).

The accessibility, availability, affordability, and marketing of alcohol contributed to the established alcogenic environment to which these students were subjected at the university. The student culture at university is often associated with alcohol, with most university-sanctioned events promoting or centred around alcohol consumption. The current literature explains that alcohol is central to being a teenager in a contemporary society. Universities are sites of increased student alcohol consumption where established social norms perceive abstainers as "outsiders" (Hutton, 2016). Alcohol is often the centrepiece of fundraisers and social events sanctioned by the university, knowing this is the common ground for most students. The authorisation to use alcohol for these purposes contributes to the normality of alcohol at university (Kypri et al., 2002). The participants

noted a key component of the student culture was the university bar, Shadows, and “Wednesday night”, which were nights specifically catering to students with discounted bar and club entry and drink specials. Robertson and Tustin (2018) described a university environment where alcohol was an established social norm, with heavier drinkers labelled as more sociable and likeable and abstainers assigned derogatory terms and often excluded.

Limitations

This study explores drinking among Tongan male students at tertiary level adding to the gap in literature, yet the nature of questions means data may be subject to reporting and recall bias. This research, grounded in the *Kakala* model and led by a Tongan male researcher, adds value to a Tongan-specific male approach to alcohol consumption among this high-risk group of university students. Although the findings are not representative of all Tongan male students studying at the University of Auckland, the exploration of culture and environment as risk and protective factors adds to previous explorations of alcohol consumption.

Conclusion

Hazardous drinking behaviours have materialised in Tongan males studying at the University of Auckland, driven by a combination of cultural and environmental factors. Cultural factors within the Tongan culture such as *fakafeohi* drove alcohol consumption among the Tongan males. Some also believed kava encouraged alcohol consumption, while others saw it as a culturally appropriate alternative to alcohol and perceived *faka'apa'apa* as having a distinct role in deterring alcohol consumption. All the Tongan males were unaware of alcogenic environments that contributed to the drinking culture among university students. Their experiences, detailed within the findings, necessitate the need to reshape hazardous behaviours among Tongan male students and to promote healthier alternatives, develop cultural competence, establish support systems, and foster environmental resilience within the university environment and student experiences.

Recommendations

This study recommends utilising Tongan *faikava* (a gathering to do kava) and engaging with high-ranking family members such as the *fahu* or a *faifekau* to aid in safe and appropriate alcohol consumption. The findings also include potential action to be taken by the university to change the narrative of current student culture centred around alcohol consumption. Potential solutions include less frequent drinking functions, alcohol-free extracurricular activities, and, importantly, educational workshops surrounding alcohol consumption. It was noted that external providers may not communicate these messages as effectively as university-approved providers. It is essential to integrate the Tongan culture and other Pacific values within these spaces to ensure activities or workshops remain culturally appropriate and relevant to the target audience. There is a clear gap in targeted advocacy around a dedicated university-approved association to facilitate these educational workshops and recreational activities. While drinking amongst the Tongan population remains a challenge, this could give rise to imminent change for future generations to come.

Declaration of interests

DT, VN developed, implemented, analysed research; VN, LP edited and wrote up the manuscript.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Tongan male University of Auckland students who participated in this research. We would also like to thank the Health Promotion Directorate, Health New Zealand, Te Whatu Ora for funding this research. The views expressed in this article are solely those of the

authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Health Promotion Directorate, Health New Zealand, Te Whatu Ora.

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Please cite this paper as:

Toutai, D., Palavi, L., & Nosa, V. (2025). The influence of cultural and environmental factors on patterns of alcohol consumption amongst Tongan males enrolled at the University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand. *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 33(2), 161–176. <https://doi.org/10.30688/janzssa.2025-2-08>



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