

Tongan women: attitudes to contraception



Tongan women and contraceptive use

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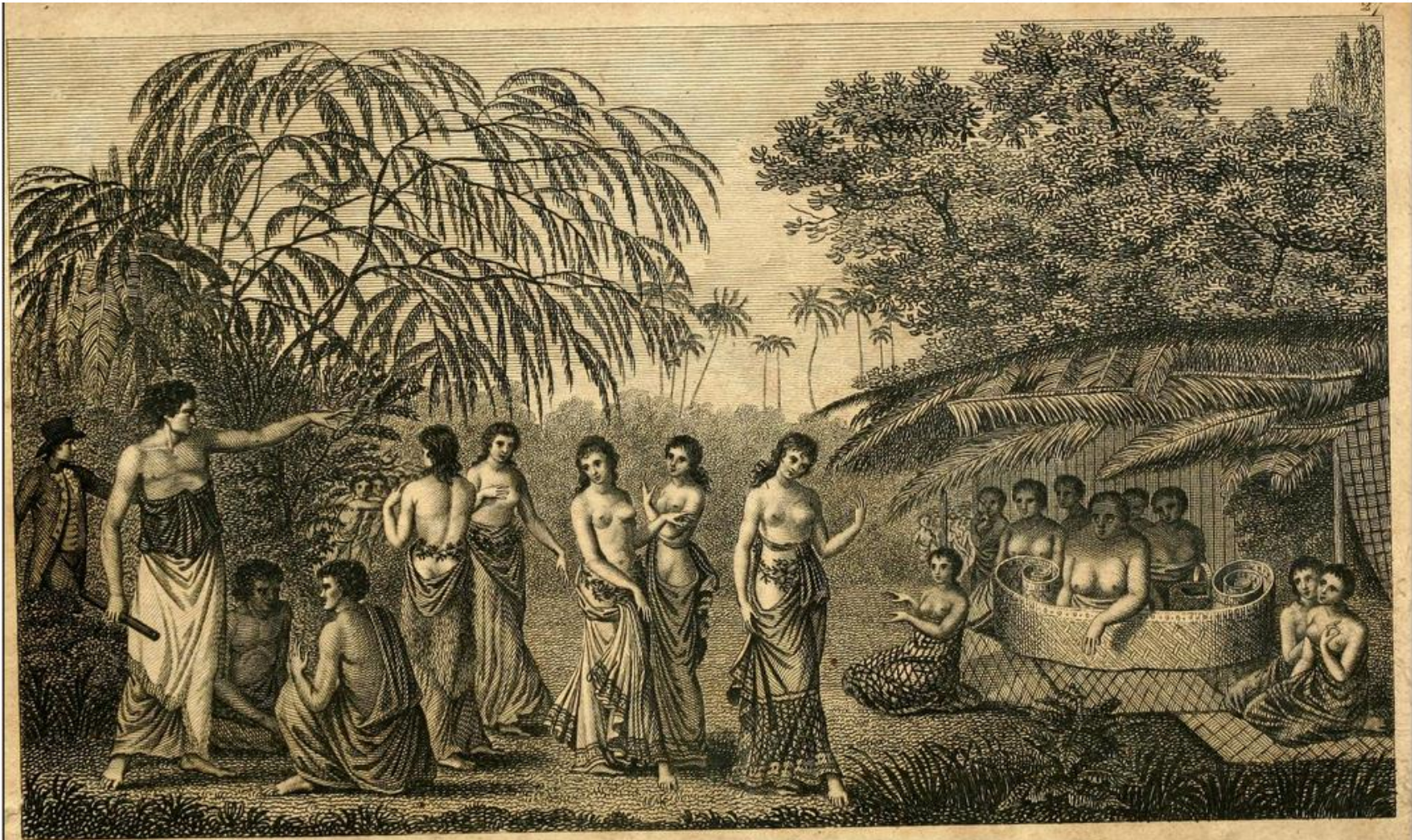
Background

- o Fertility rate for Pacific women – 2.95 per woman vs 2.05 per woman for the NZ population
- o Tongan women has highest fertility rate among Pacific groups
- o Tongans highest religious affiliation of any NZ ethnic group (Statistics NZ, 2013)

Tongans in Tonga

- Population of approx 103,000 scattered over 52 islands
- Highly religious – Sabbath is taboo
- Sex education in schools – almost non-existent
- Birth rate (2011) was 3.9. Decreased from 4.1 in 2006

Tongan women - 1793



Dance of the Friendly Islands, in presence of the Queen, Tiné.

Missionaries' observations - 1797

- o Women were treated with respect by their Tongan men
- o Women's power in society equal to that of men
- o Women had high economic power

Missionaries' observations

- Sexuality – open, no shame about sexual lives
- Contraception - seclusion after child birth for 1 month. Refrained from sexual intercourse to prevent conception
- Marriage – not Christian way

Changes introduced by missionaries:

- Western standards were imposed on women
- Roles were redefined emphasising men's authority over women
- Women's control over their sexuality were demonised (heathen customs)
- New moral codes of behaviour were enforced
- Diminishing powersex was taboo to be talked about in public

Aim of study

- Explore the contraceptive behaviour of a group of Tongan women in Auckland aged bet 20 – 55 yrs old
- Identify facilitators and barriers that this group face in using contraception

Literature review

- A decline in fertility is associated with an improvement in women's health and earnings (Canning & Schultz, 2012c).
- Well educated women more likely to have positive attitudes and behaviour towards contraceptive use (Grosse & Auffrey, 1989; I. S. Kickbusch, 2001)
- Women with poor basic health skills including health literacy are more likely to have children at an early age and have more children (Scottish Executive, 2001). Less likely to use contraception, have multiple births and unwanted pregnancies (Cleland et al., 2006a)
- Little published research on contraceptive use of Tongan women/Pacific in NZ

Literature review – Pacific women

- Pregnancy rates for Pacific teenage women - 75% greater than the national average (Tukuitonga, 2012).
- Sexually active Pacific high school students - only 66% reported using condoms or other contraception, compared to 87% of European students (Mila-Schaaf et al., 2008)
- 2000 study of pregnancy planning by mothers of Pacific babies that were delivered at Middlemore hospital - 60% did not plan their pregnancy, 71% were not using contraception (Paterson et al., 2004)

Study methodology

- o Mixed method approach
- o Survey – quantitative data
- o One-on-one semi structured interviews
– qualitative data
- o Study locality - GP clinic
- o Participants - 56 women

Study findings

○ Age group

- 73% were aged 31 - 55yrs
- 27% aged 21 – 30yrs
- 0% below aged 21

○ Marital status

- 70% were married

○ Place of birth

- 72% were born in Tonga

Study findings

○ Number of years living in NZ

- 62% - > 10 years

○ Education

- 60% had a tertiary qualification
- 68% spoke English at home

Attitudes to getting pregnant

- Do not want to have more children (n=20)
- Want to have control over when to have children (n=18)
- Do not want to get pregnant at all (n=5)
- Want to but in future (n=2)
- Want to be pregnant now (n=6)

Proportion who used contraception

054 respondents

046% used contraception

054% did not use contraception

Reasons for non-use

Top 5 reasons:

- wanting to get pregnant
- can't be bothered
- Side-effects
- Religion
- Others (did not specify)

Contraceptive type ever used?

- Depo Provera (23%)
- Condoms (23%)
- Withdrawal (18%)
- Natural family planning (18%)
- Tubal ligation (14.5%)
- Oral (12.7%)
- IUCD (7%)

Contraceptive information

- o Most got info from GP (58%)
- o Family Planning clinics (35%)
- o Other sources (internet, friends etc)

- o Preferred source of information:
 - o- GP
 - o- FPA

Barriers to using contraception

○ Cultural expectations

Having many children is beneficial to the family – looking after parents when old, make contributions to the family activities, church & community

○ Religious expectations

Tongans believe that children are *blessings (tapuaki)* from God and *tofi'a* or inheritance to look after.

○ Hardly any participant talked about economic benefit of contraception

Conclusion

- Participants' attitudes to contraceptive use were contradictory - majority did not want any more children or wished to delay having more children yet they did not use contraception.
- Cultural and religious beliefs were two main barriers - discouraged women from using contraception but encouraged them to have many children.
- Need to increase awareness of health and economic benefits of contraceptive use.

Recommendations

- o More education to focus on health and economic benefits
- o Role model/Promote by educated and well respected Tongan women
- o Tongan women to challenge cultural demands
- o Improve access to LARC

Limitation of this study

- Recruitment process
- Small sample
- Older women
- Married participants
- Not statistically representative

Further research

- o Employ different recruitment strategies to capture a broader range of women and increase the sample size.
- o Tongan men's perspectives on contraceptive use is also worth being studied on its own

Thank you

