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What's God got to do with Sex?
Exploring the Relationship Between
Patterns of Spiritual Engagement and the
Sexual Health Activities of Samoan Youth

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ABSTRACT

What's God got to do with Sex? Exploring the relationship between Spiritual engagement and the sexual health activities of Samoan youth

Improving the health and social wellbeing of Pacific youth is a key priority for the New Zealand Government. When the Pacific youth population's sexual health is compared with that of other ethnic groups in New Zealand there are clear disparities. At the same time, spiritual engagement is frequently noted as protecting young people from engaging in health-risk taking behaviours.

Objectives:

This study determines whether a relationship exists between patterns of spiritual engagement and the sexual health activities of Samoan attending secondary schools in New Zealand. Does going to church or rating spiritual beliefs as important influence the sexual health activities of Samoan youth?

Method:

This research analyses data from 'Youth 2000', a youth health and wellbeing survey conducted in 2001. The survey was conducted with approximately 10,000 New Zealand secondary school students which included 646 Samoan and 5219 New Zealand Europeans. Nine sexual health activities were explored. Data relating to spiritual engagement and the sexual health activities of Samoan and New Zealand European students were extracted from the survey, measured and compared.

Results:

A significant proportion of Samoan youth have not had sexual intercourse. Just under a third of Samoan students (32.1%) have had sexual intercourse, with the average age of first sexual intercourse around 14 years. Findings reveal that the spiritual engagement variables: church attendance and the importance of spiritual beliefs have mixed influences on the different sexual health activities of Samoan youth.

Conclusions:

This study reinforces the central importance of spiritual engagement in the lives of many Samoan secondary school students. Government policies and interventions require an understanding of key health behaviours and their related risk and protective factors specific to New Zealand youth.

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