



Health Disparities Among Elders in Hawai'i

Kathryn L. Braun, DrPH¹, Colette Browne, PhD², Noreen Mokuau, DSW², and Paula Higuchi, MSW²

(1) Office of Public Health Studies, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, HI
 (2) Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work, University of Hawai'i, Honolulu, HI
Hā Kūpuna: National Resource Center for Native Hawaiian Elders



Abstract

Life expectancy in Hawai'i is the longest of any US state. However, in this multi-ethnic state (24% Hawaiians, 24% Caucasians, 18% Japanese, 16% Filipinos, 7% Chinese), a 10-year difference is seen between our longest-living (Japanese and Chinese) and shortest-living (Native Hawaiian) groups. This poster examines reasons for continued differences and outlines work of Hā Kūpuna: National Resource Center for Native Hawaiian Elders to address disparities faced by Native Hawaiians, the state's indigenous people.

Data from the US Census, death records, BRFSS, and the Hawai'i Health Survey were compiled to examine socio-economic variables, years of productive life lost, behavioral risk, and disease prevalence data for the state's major ethnic groups. Disparities in life expectancy and years of productive life lost are mirrored by disparities in the groups' socio-economic status, lifestyle behaviors, and chronic disease prevalence. Native Hawaiian kūpuna (elders) have a higher prevalence of chronic disease and disability, and are lowest in socio-economic status. Disparities also may be linked to different experiences throughout the life course for elders of different ethnicities. For example, focus group research suggests that many Native Hawaiians elders have residual effects of discrimination experienced by their families during the colonization of Hawai'i by Western nations and the subsequent loss of land, power, and culture. Taken together, data suggest that the disparate ethnic profiles seen among the elderly in Hawai'i result from very different life courses of these groups.

Hā Kūpuna is using data to propose strategies to address disparities experienced by Native Hawaiian elders.

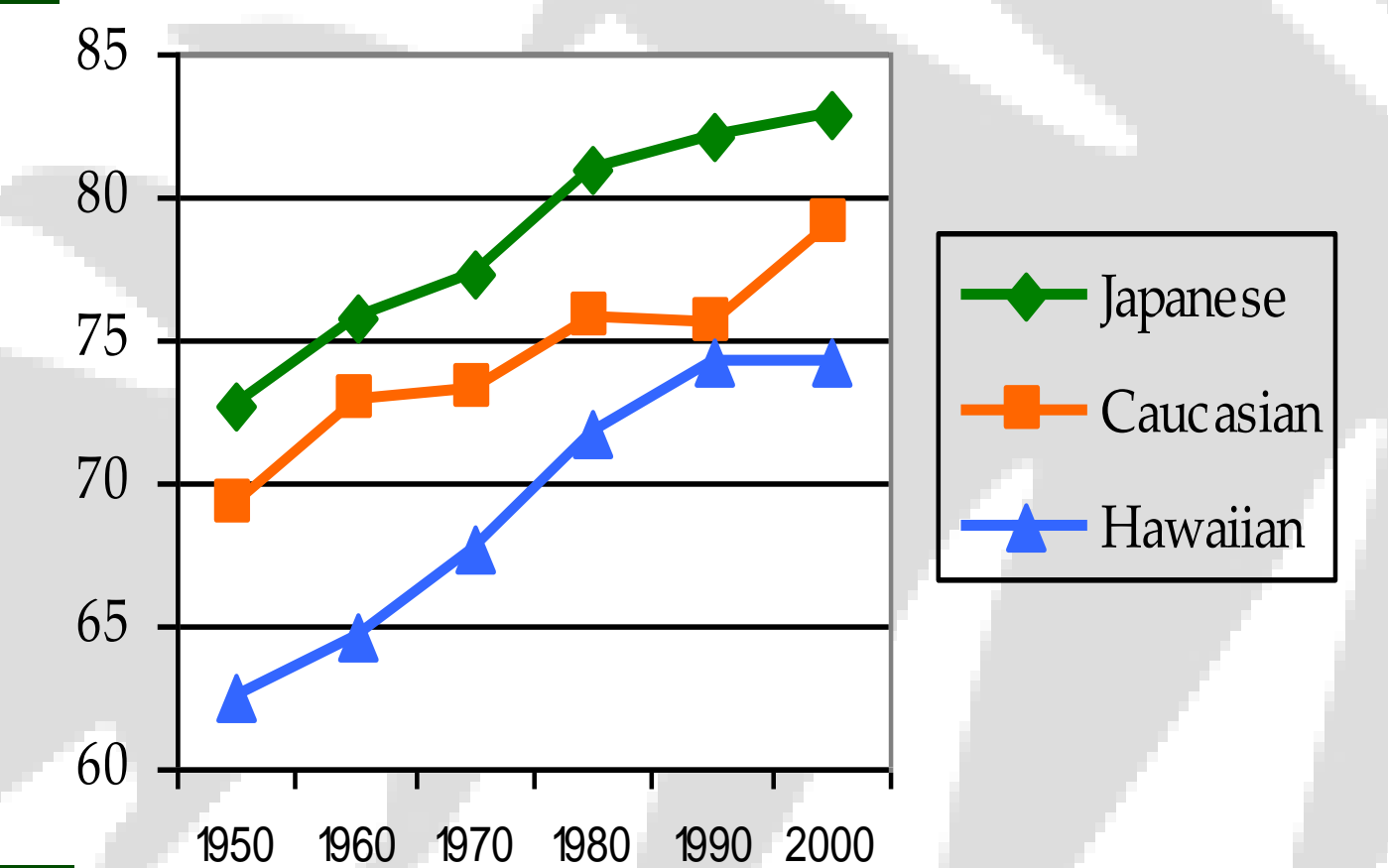


Hā Kūpuna: National Resource Center for Native Hawaiian Elders

Our goal is to “assure the transmission of *hā* (breathe of life; wisdom) from older to younger generations by improving access to and delivery of services to Native Hawaiian elders and their caregivers through the development and dissemination of knowledge around health and long-term care patterns and preferences.”

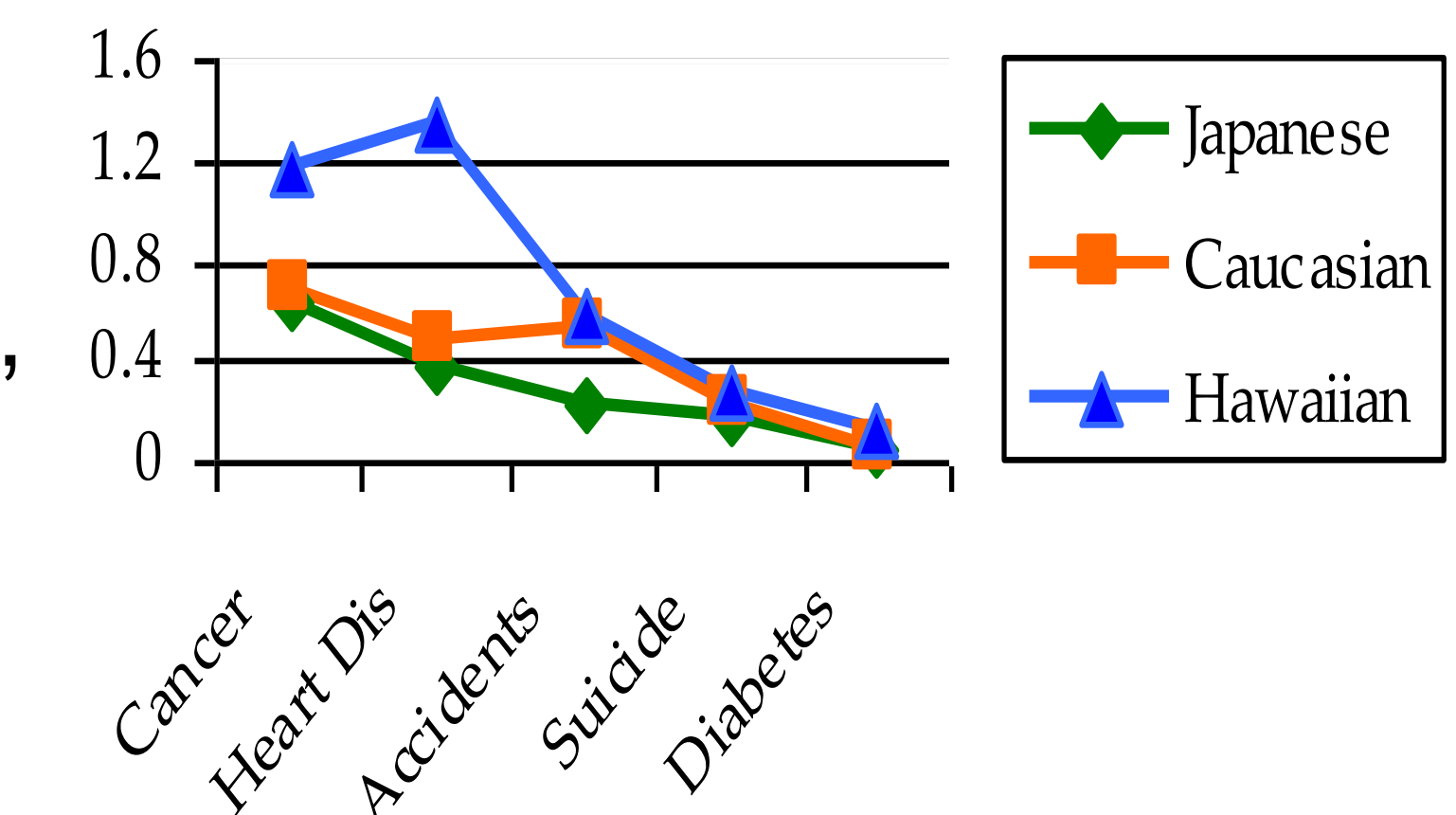
Life Expectancy

- Native Hawaiians have the shortest life expectancies among to the 3 largest ethnic groups.
- Life expectancies for all ethnic groups, including Hawaiians, have increased since 1950.
- The longest living groups (Chinese and Japanese) continue to live 10 years longer than Native Hawaiians.



Total Years of Potential Life Lost (TPLL*)

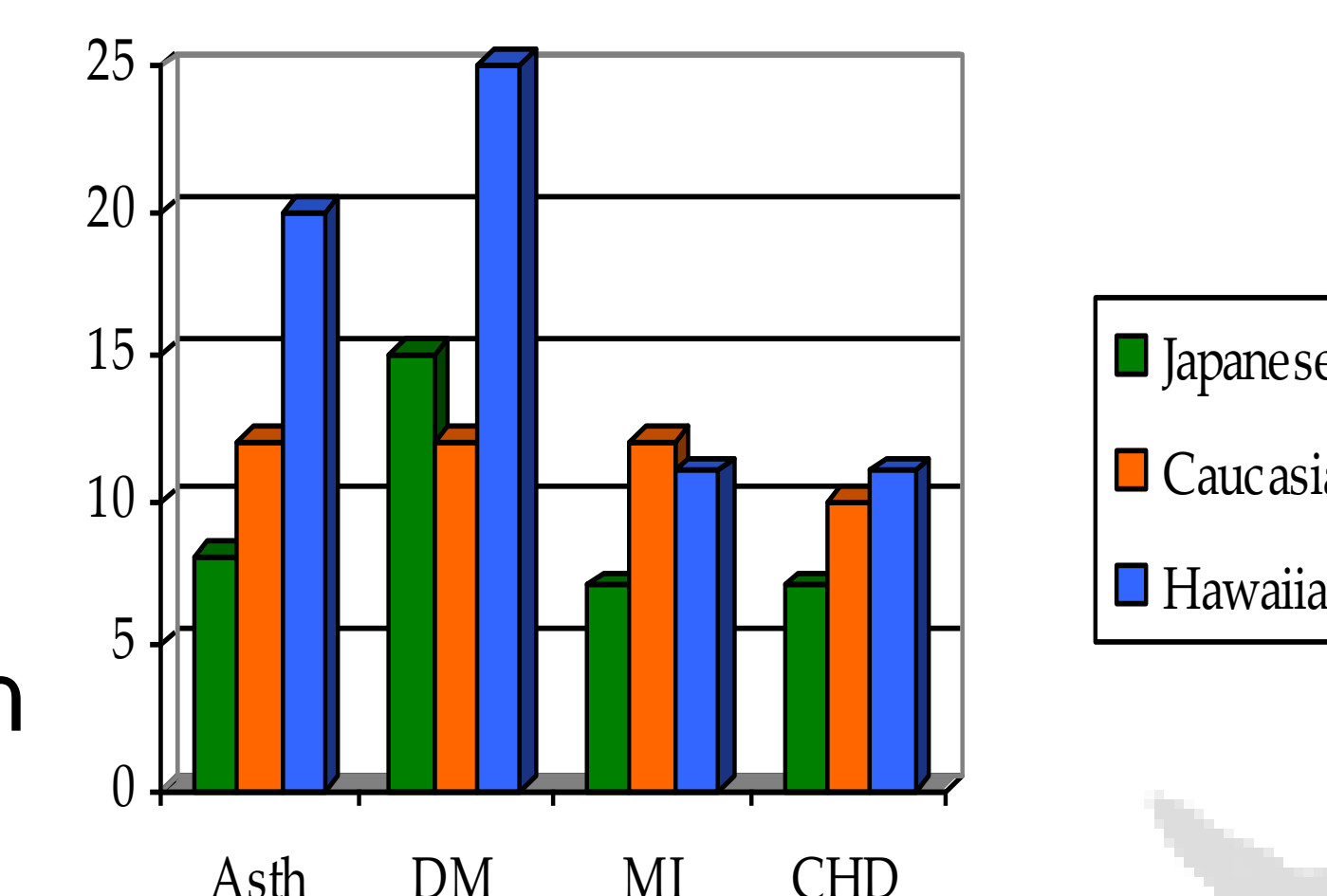
- Native Hawaiians lose an average of 5.3 years of potential life, compared to 3.4 for Caucasians and 2.6 years for Japanese.
- Native Hawaiians lose the most years of life to heart disease, cancer, accidents, suicide, and diabetes.



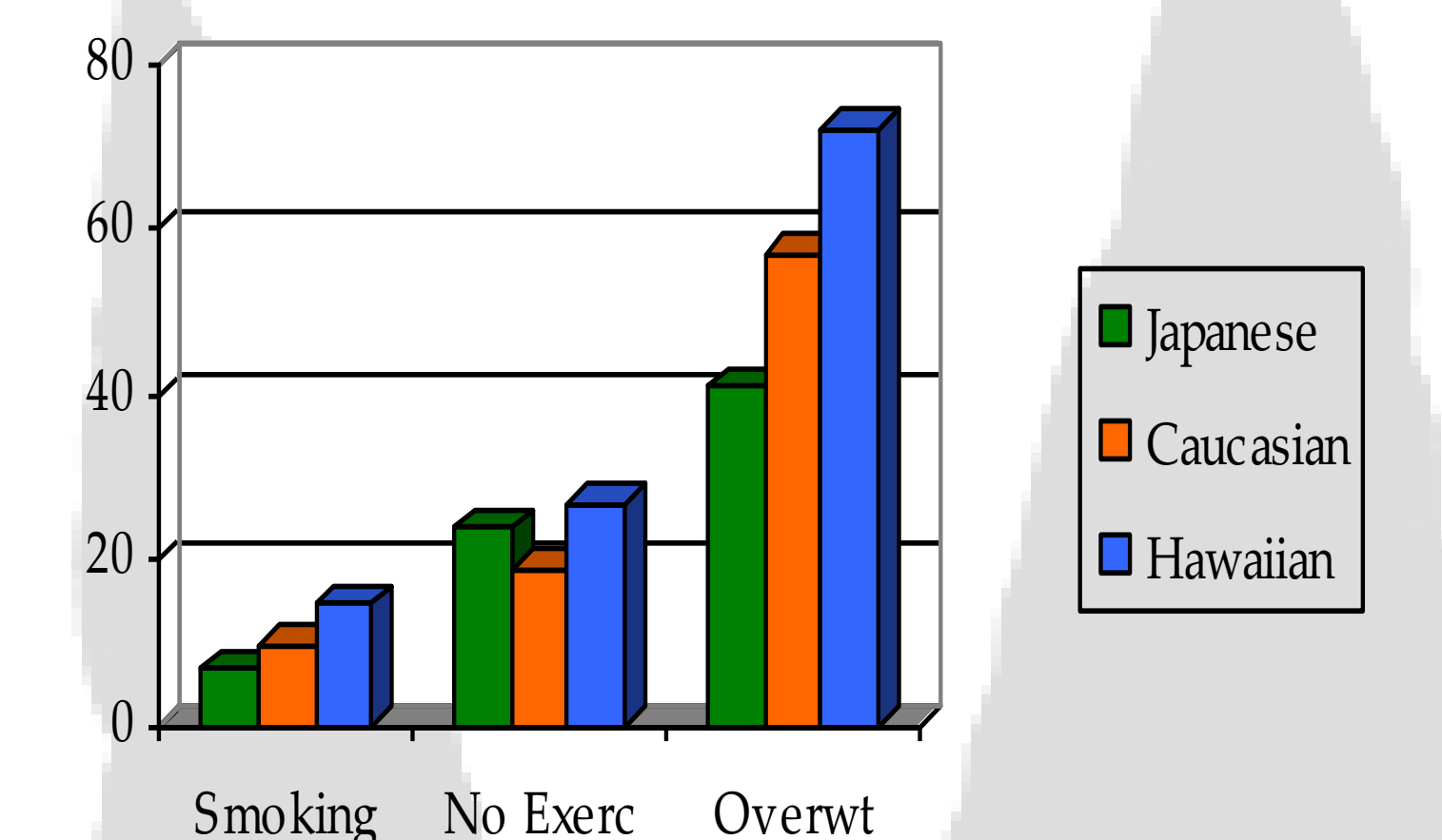
* TPLL is an estimate of the total years of potential life lost, assuming that everyone should live until age 70. TPLL can be compared across ethnic groups, and number of years lost can be estimated overall and by causes of death.

Chronic Conditions

- Native Hawaiian elders experience a higher prevalence of asthma, diabetes, and congestive heart failure than Japanese and Caucasian elders.



- Greater percentages of Native Hawaiian elders smoke cigarettes, do not exercise, and are overweight or obese.



Historical & Cultural Markers in the Lives of Nā Kūpuna

Dates	Events	Born 1905-15	Born 1915-24	Born 1925-34	Born 1935-44	Born 1945-54	Born 1955-64
Prior to 1915	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illness and death from foreign diseases Great Mahele Overthrow of Hawaiian Queen Liliu'okalani Labor imports Ali'i Trusts 	Age 0-10					
1915-1924	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World War I Dept of Hawaiian Homelands 	Age 10-20	Age 0-10				
1925-1934	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depression 	Age 20-30	Age 10-20	Age 0-10			
1935-1944	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World War II Martial law 	Age 30-40	Age 20-30	Age 10-20	Age 0-10		
1945-1954	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GI Bill 	Age 40-50	Age 30-40	Age 20-30	Age 10-20	Age 0-10	
1955-1964	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statehood Land development Mass tourism 	Age 50-60	Age 40-50	Age 30-40	Age 20-30	Age 10-20	Age 0-10
1965-1974	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land development Mass tourism 	Age 60-70	Age 50-60	Age 40-50	Age 30-40	Age 20-30	Age 10-20
1975-1984	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Renaissance (hula, language, spiritual practices) Constitutional Convention 	Age 70-80	Age 60-70	Age 50-60	Age 40-50	Age 30-40	Age 20-30
1985-1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing price boom Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act Apology Bill of 1993 	Age 80-90	Age 70-80	Age 60-70	Age 50-60	Age 40-50	Age 30-40
1995-2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foreclosures Outmigration of Hawaiians Akaka Bills 	Age 90-100	Age 80-90	Age 70-80	Age 60-70	Age 50-60	Age 40-50

Figure 1. Cohort and cultural/historical markers in the lives of Native Hawaiian elders. Shaded areas denote middle and older adulthood.

Discussion

- Reasons for these findings include: impact of historical cultural trauma, poverty, inadequate access to culturally responsive care, institutional and internalized racism, and discrimination.
- Different ethnicities experience different levels of advantage and adversity over the life courses.
- More research is needed to understand differential outcomes seen in Hawai'i's elders.
- Programs and policies are needed to support efforts to extend quality life expectancy for Native Hawaiians.