

A Case Study of Metabolic Syndrome without Hypertension in a Fijian Coastal Fishing Village

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KEYWORDS Disease Ecology. Obesity. Diabetes. Acculturation. Subsistence. Marine Ecology. Hypertension. Body Image

ABSTRACT We describe a case study involving obesity, health, and body image on the small island of Nayau, in the Lau Group, Fiji. Nayau is a remote island of Fiji where traditional subsistence activities are practiced. They have only recently had exposure to Western media and television. Traditionally, large body sizes are valued as signs of health and happiness. As such, obesity can be considered a culture bound syndrome. The key aims of our study were to 1) to conduct qualitative and quantitative research on eating behaviors, body image, and activity patterns; 2) to measure the body mass indexes (BMI) of study participants, and; 3) to identify differences in health indicators related to obesity among Fijians and Western society. Our main findings were first, that although body image ideals are changing, most adult men and women still are overweight/ obese and tend to value larger body sizes. Second, adult Fijians engage in physical activity nearly 70% of the time during daytime hours, representing more than three times as much activity as the average adult American. Third, while the obesity, diabetes, and hypertension are often seen as linked in the "metabolic syndrome," in Nayau, adults have similar rates of obesity and diabetes as in the U.S., but they have very low rates of hypertension. We examine possible explanations for the pattern of diabetes and hypertension including diet, activity patterns, and stress levels.