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Youth Knowledge and Practices towards Noncommunicable Disease Risk Factors in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia

By

Anupama Mathur

MPH

Global Health

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**Abstract**

Youth Knowledge and Practices towards Noncommunicable Disease Risk Factors in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia

By Anupama Mathur

**Background**: The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) is a lower middle income country in the Western Pacific Region that suffers from a high burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCD). Pohnpei state has a high prevalence of diabetes among its adult population. NCDs such as Type 2 diabetes occur in children and appear to have their origins in early life. Limited data is available on youth knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding modifiable risk factors for NCDs in the FSM.

**Objective:** To identify gender differences among Pohnpeian youth ages 10-24 years in knowledge and practices relating to two modifiable NCD risk factors, namely physical inactivity and poor nutritional intake.

**Methods:** A seven-page survey consisting of 19 NCD risk factor questions was pilot tested and conducted among a convenience sample over the course of five weeks. Data were analyzed using SAS statistical software version 9.2.

**Results:** High proportions of both males and females practiced traditional physical activity, physical activity in their leisure time, and participated in at least one school sponsored physical activity in the previous school year. However, the percentages of daily vigorous physical activity, a component of total daily physical activity, were low for both males and females. Low proportions of males and females reported daily intakes of fruits and vegetables with significantly less females reporting daily vegetable intake than males. A majority of youth attained their knowledge of physical activity and health practices from school.

**Discussion:** Two studies in the last decade reported on youth health behaviors in Pohnpei. This study contributes to the literature by providing knowledge on youth practices, including various types of physical activity, towards two NCD risk factors with a focus on gender. No significant gender differences were found in leisure time and school-sponsored physical activity practices. Significantly more males than females practiced traditional physical activity. Female health practices put females at increased risk for NCDs more so than males since significantly fewer females consumed vegetables daily than males and, although not significant, fewer females met vigorous physical activity recommendations than males. Results suggest that a majority of youth are physically inactive and have poor nutritional intakes.

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