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Paradise Paradox: Why Life in Hawaii Leads to Early Death

By ALICE PARK Wednesday, September 22, 2010

Most of us think of Hawaii as the perfect escape from our stressed out and fast-paced lives. Island life, after all, seems so idyllic and relaxing.

But appearances may be deceiving. Researchers led by Sela Panapasa at University of Michigan found that native Hawaiians are at greater risk of dying early compared to white Americans throughout their lifetimes. And older Hawaiians over age 65 are dying earlier than African Americans of their same age as well. (**More on Time.com:** [See photos of the pioneer of the Hawaiian shirt](#))

“I wasn’t surprised,” says Panapasa of the findings. “There has been a lot of anecdotal evidence that Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are dying prematurely. But these results confirm that evidence, and is grounded in science.”

The higher death rate only emerged after the U.S. Census separated Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders from the U.S. Asian population, says Panapasa. When Hawaiians were combined with Asians, their unique susceptibility to premature death was masked by the lower mortality of the other Asian groups. (**More on Time.com:** [Health Checkup: How to Live to 100 Years Old](#))

While it’s not clear what is behind the higher Hawaiian mortality, the study authors speculate that high obesity rates and diabetes, as well as mental illness and substance abuse among younger members may be contributing factors. The higher infant mortality may also be traced to lack of good prenatal care among the island’s new mothers. Panapasa hopes that by highlighting the higher mortality risk among native Hawaiians, more resources and targeted health and behavioral programs might be put in place to help Hawaiians to benefit from the **longevity** that more Americans have enjoyed in recent years.

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