Review of Areca (Betel) Nut and Tobacco Use in the Pacific
A Technical Report
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Executive summary

There is evidence to show that the frequency of betel nut use is increasing in the Western Pacific Region and that its use is more frequently associated with the chewing of tobacco. Betel nut chewing induces oral precancerous lesions that have a high propensity to progress. Betel nut itself has been classified as a Group 1 carcinogen (carcinogenic to humans) by the International Agency for Cancer Research (IARC). While it is clear that the use of betel nut alone is a threat to health, its combination with tobacco greatly increases an individual’s risk of premature illness and death. In countries in the Western Pacific Region where this is observed, betel nut and tobacco chewing has become a significant public health problem.

With the entry into force of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), there has been increasing concern about the promotion of smokeless tobacco use. The groundwork for this report began in 2006 when the Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), the Western Pacific Regional Office, commissioned the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) to review the use of betel (areca) nut and tobacco in the Western Pacific Region. This was followed in August 2010 by a meeting of national focal points in tobacco control from the countries that report high use of betel nut and tobacco. Proposed actions have been mapped and linked to the Regional Action Plan for the TFI in the Western Pacific Region (2010-2014). This document is envisioned as a supplement for countries that wish to highlight specific tobacco control indicators and actions related to reduction of smokeless tobacco use.

A major effort needs to be made to provide decision-makers with evidence of the serious harm caused by betel nut chewing, with and without tobacco. Community-based strategies are also needed to overcome cultural beliefs and practices that are barriers to sound public health measures that can save lives and prevent unnecessary suffering from oral cancer and other diseases.
Use of tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death globally, killing up to one half of the people who consume it. The health, social and economic burdens of tobacco use -- in all of its forms -- are devastating. The increasing use of tobacco with areca nut, commonly referred to as betel nut throughout the Western Pacific, has played a significant role in the increased incidence of adverse health effects in many countries of the Western Pacific Region. In particular, studies have linked the high incidence of oral cancer in some western Pacific island countries to the concurrent use of betel nut and tobacco. This high incidence of oral cancer is associated with significant morbidity and mortality rates in some countries in the Region. The average worldwide mortality rate from oral cancer, based on a five-year cumulative mortality rate, is less than 50%; however, mortality rates as high as 67% and 80% have been reported for some countries in the Western Pacific Region.¹

It is now well-established that the habitual use of betel nut alone can lead to serious adverse health effects.² The use of betel nut with tobacco is increasing in many countries because of the aggressive marketing of tobacco products in combination with or alongside betel nut. Strong social norms also encourage the combination of betel nut and tobacco. Of particular concern is evidence that the use of betel nut and tobacco in some countries is increasing among youth and in some cases among women.³

In response to this growing health threat, the TFI commissioned the SPC to undertake a review of the use of betel nut and tobacco in the Western Pacific Region in 2006 and used the results to formulate the Regional Action Plan. In August 2010, the TFI convened in Manila, Philippines, bringing together international experts in tobacco control and focal points for tobacco from the countries in the Western Pacific Region that are known to have high prevalence rates of betel nut and tobacco use. The meeting provided participants with an opportunity to comment on and update the information contained in the review conducted by the SPC and to formulate recommendations to reduce the negative health consequences of betel nut and tobacco in the Region.

Those recommendations are presented in this addendum to the Regional Action Plan for the TFI in the Western Pacific Region (2010-2014). The full review, including current trends in betel nut and tobacco use in the Western Pacific Region, and a review of the current literature on the impact of betel nut and tobacco use on health, are included as appendices to this report.

The Regional Action Plan calls on Member States to formulate and strengthen national coordinating mechanisms and national action plans towards complete implementation of the WHO FCTC and sets targets and indicators for different levels of intervention. It contains both qualitative and quantitative indicators that are recommended to strengthen implementation of tobacco control strategies at the regional and country levels. These indicators have been used to map the specific action objectives in a Platform for Action Towards the Control of Betel Nut and Tobacco Use.

¹ (Barton et al. 2001; Parkin et al. 2005; Carpenter et al. 2005)
² IARC STRENGTHENS ITS FINDINGS ON SEVERAL CARCINOGENIC PERSONAL HABITS AND HOUSEHOLD EXPOSURES, International Agency for Research on Cancer, World Health Organization, Lyon France; Press Release No. 196; November 2009,
The prevention and control of tobacco-chewing with betel nut poses some unique challenges since the production and sale of betel nut are not regulated in most countries. Production of betel nut is encouraged in some countries as a commodity for both local consumption and for export and has become a significant source of income in some Pacific island countries. Therefore, addressing supply-side issues for betel nut control will require multisectoral collaboration among ministries of health and other sectors of government and community stakeholders.

This highlights the need for clear messages for both policy-makers and the public regarding the dangers of betel nut and tobacco use. Meeting these challenges requires recognition of the magnitude of the problem in each country and a mobilization of different sectors to take action. Participants at the August 2010 meeting on betel nut and tobacco use have recommended the following set of Key Messages to communicate the dangers of betel nut and tobacco use and to stimulate action for effective measures to address this serious public health issue:

**Key Messages for Prevention and Control of Betel Nut and Tobacco Use**

- Chewing betel nut causes oral cancer.
- Adding tobacco to betel nut-chewing greatly increases the risk of oral cancer.
- Measures need to be taken to discourage the use of betel nut with or without tobacco.
- A set of effective measures to discourage betel nut and tobacco use may include:
  - Policies and legislation
  - Education and advocacy
  - Strategies to promote behavioural change
  - Clinical services
  - Surveillance and research
  - Partnerships and alliances.

**A Platform for Action**

A clear framework for action that addresses both supply and demand for betel nut and tobacco products is needed in order to reduce the current trends towards increased use of betel nut and tobacco in the Western Pacific Region. The Platform for Action for the Control of Betel Nut and Tobacco Use, shown in Box 1, maps specific actions on six key Regional Action Plan indicators across four domains that include Social Determinants, Behavioural Risk Factors, Intermediate Conditions and End-stage Disease. Specific strategies from this list should be adopted based on each country’s available resources and priorities. They should be included in National Action Plans for Tobacco Control and, as appropriate, in other national strategic plans such as those for non-communicable disease prevention and control, oral health care and health surveillance.
### Box 1. Platform for Action for the Control of Betel Nut and Tobacco Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Social Determinants (Environmental, economic and sociocultural)</th>
<th>Risk Factors (Chewing betel nut alone; chewing betel nut with tobacco or other substances)</th>
<th>Intermediate Conditions (Oral leukoplakia and submucous fibrosis)</th>
<th>End Disease (Oral cancer, other tobacco-related cancers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Legislation and policies    | • Regulate the sale of betel nut (e.g. laws restricting sales to minors)  
• Establish import and export trade policies  
• Establish laws and policies restricting betel nut use on school property, at health care facilities, etc. | • Implement relevant supply and demand reduction provisions of the WHO FCTC  
• Mandate funding for oral screening and cessation services  
• Establish guidelines for screening for precancerous conditions by oral health care providers | • Pass legislation to support cancer registries, including mandatory reporting of oral and other cancers |
| Governance and local enforcement | • Enforce laws restricting sales of betel nut and tobacco products to minors  
• Enforce anti-smuggling policies  | • Include betel nut and tobacco control strategies within national and local action plans for tobacco control and establish targets to reduce prevalence  
• Implement oral screening at all levels of the health care system | • Ensure accurate reporting from health care providers |
| Public awareness, education, communication and advocacy | • Strengthen communication and advocacy activities in relation to changing social norms  
• Use role models  
• Support education and information campaigns that target youth and children  
• Encourage citizens to monitor and report violations of bans on sales to minors | • Formulate and implement effective mass communication education regarding the dangers of betel nut and tobacco use, particularly the link to cancer  
• Inform the public about where to get cessation services  
• Educate the public about the early signs of these conditions and the importance of oral health exams for early detection | • Inform policy-makers that betel nut chewing causes oral cancer |
| Alliance and partnerships   | • Support multisectoral strategies to control betel nut production and the marketing of betel nut, especially in combination with tobacco products | • Actively share information with stakeholders about the health risks of betel nut use, with and without tobacco  
• Mobilize dental associations to advocate for and expand training of providers to increase screening | • Mobilize cancer control advocates to support cancer registries and disseminate findings, lobby legislators and testify at hearings |
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<table>
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<th>End Disease (Oral cancer, other tobacco-related cancers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco dependence treatment</td>
<td>• Work to ensure that appropriate cessation services are created and are promoted towards those who may wish to quit using betel nut and tobacco</td>
<td>• Ask about betel nut and tobacco use at every encounter with health workers</td>
<td>• Create effective referral systems for cessation services and treatment</td>
<td>• Use testimonials from individuals whose betel nut use led to oral cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveillance and knowledge management</td>
<td>• Map social and economic determinants of betel nut use with tobacco</td>
<td>• Integrate questions about betel nut use into Global Tobacco Surveillance System and other national health risk behaviour surveys</td>
<td>• Support research to work out cost-effective techniques for screening and early detection</td>
<td>• Monitor and report morbidity and mortality from oral cancers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use the data for national health plans and noncommunicable disease prevention and control</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The Regional Action Plan encourages countries to formulate legislation and related policies, regulations, ordinances, administrative issuances and other measures to ensure timely compliance with all provisions of the WHO FCTC. As a broad strategy, the WHO FCTC addresses both supply and demand reduction measures for tobacco products, and some of these measures also may be considered for the prevention and control of betel nut use.

Betel nut is commonly used in the Pacific island countries. Its regulation there has been almost exclusively limited to legislation or policies that ban spitting in public places, most notably in health care facilities and schools. The legislature in the Marshall Islands passed a law in 2010 banning the importation of betel nut and making it a crime to import, distribute or sell betel nut, backed by a fine of up to US$ 100 and 30 days in jail. But the main reason cited by legislators for passing the law was that spitting from betel chewers was unsightly and might lead to the spread of disease.

Using the Key Messages contained in this report, tobacco control and other public health advocates actively should disseminate information to policy-makers about the serious threat that betel nut and tobacco use poses to public health. In terms of supply issues, policy-makers in the agricultural and economic development sectors of some western Pacific island countries have promoted the expansion of betel nut production as a viable commodity for both local and export markets. Tobacco control and public health advocates need to be proactive in communicating to planners and policy-makers that increased production of betel nut negatively impacts on the health and well-being of island populations and measures must be taken to identify economically viable alternative crops to betel nut.

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4 Pacific Islands Report, Honolulu, March, 2010

There are some unique challenges in attempting to apply many of the WHO FCTC demand reduction measures to the control of betel nut use. Despite its classification as a Group 1 carcinogen by the IARC, betel nut in most countries is sold as an unregulated agricultural product. There is no packaging with labels to warn consumers about potential hazards to health and no taxation or pricing structure as commonly applied to substances known to be harmful to health. It is often sold in proximity to tobacco products, and in several countries tobacco products are sold in such a way as to accommodate their use in combination with betel nut (e.g. sales of single cigarettes). The lack of regulation of betel nut reinforces its acceptability and creates an environment that enables individuals to use it habitually.

In many areas, the high degree of social acceptability of betel nut use is likely to be the greatest challenge to implementing policies intended to reduce demand. Efforts to formulate demand reduction policies may need to be preceded by public education and awareness activities intended to convince people of the harmful effects of betel nut and tobacco use and then to mobilize support for demand reduction legislation and policies.

**Governance and local enforcement**

The Regional Action Plan calls for the implementation and enforcement of laws and policies through national coordinating mechanisms or their equivalent. Currently, such mechanisms may not be well-developed in many of the countries where betel nut and tobacco use are a major concern. Therefore, the formulation and implementation of national action plans should reflect specific measures to prevent and reduce the use of smokeless tobacco such as with betel nut.

In many Pacific island countries, governance for tobacco prevention and control activities may be folded into larger strategic plans for noncommunicable disease (NCD) prevention and control. Based on the large body of evidence linking betel nut use to the increased risk for many NCDs (Appendix B), enforcement measures for legislation and policies for prevention and control of betel nut use should be identified clearly in national action plans for tobacco and/or NCD control in all countries where betel nut use is common.

Countries should also formulate and enforce measures that will protect public health policies from commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry. This is in accordance with WHO FCTC Article 5.3., which calls for full public disclosure by political leaders and policy-makers on any interaction with the tobacco industry. It is recommended that this be extended to include reporting of personal income gained from the sales and profit from betel nut in order to achieve transparency and accountability.

Two additional areas of governance include the formulation of clinical practice guidelines for screening for precancerous conditions by oral health care providers and establishing policies that will ensure accurate and timely reporting of oral cancer cases by health care providers.

There is some evidence that early detection of precancerous conditions (oral leukoplakia and submucousous fibrosis) can lead to early treatment and prevention of oral cancer in many cases.\(^6\) The establishment of clinical practice guidelines for oral screening and support to apply them to appropriate settings will help to speed the broad implementation of such programmes in areas where they can be of benefit.

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\(^6\) Sankaranarayanan, R. 1997 ‘Health care auxiliaries in the detection and prevention of oral cancer’, Oral Oncology, Vol.33, No.3 pp.149-154
In most of the countries where betel nut and tobacco use is prevalent, accurate data on cancer is limited and there is a need for improved data to monitor the incidence of oral and other cancers. Very few countries in the Pacific have well-established cancer registries, although there has been significant collaborative work done in recent years to establish support for regional cancer registries which can serve smaller Pacific island nations. Establishing reporting requirements in statute is the best way to ensure consistent reporting by physicians to local or regional cancer registries.

**Public awareness, education, communication and advocacy**

Well-designed communication programmes can inform a variety of different audiences about the hazards of betel nut and tobacco use and interventions. The Regional Action Plan calls for the implementation of communication and advocacy activities in relation to changing social norms. This may be accomplished by using role models, supporting education and information campaigns that target youth and children and encouraging citizens to monitor and report violations of bans on sales to minors.

Successful health communication programmes involve more than the production of messages and materials. Ideally, they should use formative research to shape the development of key messages and determine the best channels that will deliver those messages to the right audiences.

On its own, a well-designed health communication strategy can increase the intended audience knowledge and awareness of a health issue and problem and increase the likelihood that the target audience will take action. It may also help to strengthen organizational relationships.

When combined with the other strategies contained in this document, health communication can lead to a sustained change in which an individual adopts and maintains a new health behaviour or an organization adopts and maintains a new policy direction.

Target audiences may include individuals, groups, organizations or whole communities, and communication strategies may use a wide range of strategies to design programmes to fit specific circumstances. The Platform for Action in Figure 1 shows a range of topics for public awareness, education, communication and advocacy as they relate to social determinants (e.g. changing social norms), understanding the health risks of betel nut and tobacco use, knowledge about the importance of early screening and detection and clearly communicating health data to policy-makers.

Regardless of the topic, certain attributes can make health communication campaigns more effective. The guidelines shown in Box 2 can be helpful in planning effective health communication campaigns and strategies.

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7 http://pacificcancer.org/Cancer/CaResources/PRCCR/
Box 2. Characteristics of Effective Health Communications Campaigns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Define the communication campaign goal effectively:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Identify the larger goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Determine which part of the larger goal could be met by a communication campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe the specific objectives of the campaign; integrate these into a campaign plan</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Define the intended audience effectively:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Identify the audience to whom you want to communicate your message</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Consider identifying subgroups to which you could tailor your message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn as much as possible about the intended audience; add information about beliefs, current actions and the social and physical environment to demographic information</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Create messages effectively:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Brainstorm messages that fit with the communication campaign goal and the intended audience(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identify channels and sources that are considered credible and influential by the intended audience(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consider the best times to reach the audience(s) and prepare messages accordingly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Select a few messages and plan to pretest them</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pretest and revise messages and materials effectively:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Select pretesting methods that fit the campaign’s budget and timeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pretest messages and materials with people who share the attributes of the intended audience(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take the time to revise messages and materials based upon pretesting findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Implement the campaign effectively:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Follow the plans formulated at the beginning of the campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communicate with partners and the media as necessary to ensure the campaign runs smoothly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Begin evaluating the campaign plan and processes as soon as the campaign is implemented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from “Making Health Communications Programs Work”, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute*
Alliance and partnerships

Working with relevant stakeholders is recognized as one of the keys to achieving comprehensive and sustainable tobacco prevention and control. In the countries where betel nut and tobacco are commonly used, alone or in combination, tobacco control advocates should forge strong alliances that can advocate for a range of prevention and control strategies.

Partnerships should be forged among policy-makers, enforcement agencies, nongovernmental groups and professional organizations to address the need for stronger controls on the marketing and sale of betel nut in combination with tobacco products, especially to minors. In particular, tobacco control advocates should remind all partners that the WHO FCTC requires parties to adopt and implement a range of effective measures to prohibit the sale of tobacco products to minors and that this extends to the prohibition of the sale of cigarettes individually or in small packets, which increase the affordability of tobacco products to minors. These should include multisectoral partnerships with governmental agencies and community groups to explore viable alternative crops to betel nut.

Tobacco control advocates also should form and strengthen alliances and partnerships with professional organizations, particularly regional and national medical and dental associations that can serve as advocates for policies, programmes and practises to prevent and control betel nut and tobacco use. For example, the Papua New Guinea Medical Society began advocating in 2009 for the regulation of chewing and selling betel nut. These groups can also help in advocating for training of oral health care providers to increase screening and for improved data collection and reporting on the impact of betel nut and tobacco use.

Tobacco dependence treatment

Individuals who use tobacco products should be offered assistance to quit, and this assistance should be extended to those who chew betel nut with or without tobacco. The Regional Action Plan recommends that treatment of tobacco dependence be integrated into the health care system, with particular emphasis on primary health care. This includes asking every patient about tobacco use, providing brief advice about the dangers of betel nut and tobacco use and offering help to quit at every patient encounter. This should include dental care and, where appropriate, may be conducted in other community settings.

This may require training for primary health care workers and other stakeholders to provide brief cessation advice and working to secure appropriate health care financing for tobacco dependence treatment services. The Guidelines for the Implementation of Article 14 of the WHO FCTC (Demand Reduction Measures Concerning Tobacco Dependence and Cessation) will be a helpful reference for formulating cessation treatment services.

Whenever possible, patients who are interested in quitting should be referred to more intensive counseling services that can increase their likelihood of quitting successfully. Appropriate mass media and educational materials should be designed to target both betel nut and tobacco users so as to ensure they know about available cessation services. An effective way to do this is to include testimonials from role models in the community who have successfully quit using betel nut or betel nut with tobacco.

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9 Parties are directed to the WHO FCTC web site (http://www.int/fctc/) where further sources of information on topics covered by these guidelines are maintained.
The accumulation of reliable adult and youth tobacco use data by 2014 is one of the overall indicators contained in the Regional Action Plan. Given the close association between betel nut and tobacco use in some countries of the Western Pacific Region, it is strongly recommended that these countries continue to gather reliable data on the use of betel nut among adults and youth and by gender. While many countries collect information on betel nut use through national surveys, there is no standardization of data collected on betel nut use, making comparisons among countries difficult. Through its technical support to countries to implement the Global Tobacco Surveillance System, the TFI can work with countries to formulate appropriate standardized questions about betel nut use with and without tobacco.

Countries also should use a variety of mechanisms to collect data that will help in mapping social and economic determinants of betel nut use with and without tobacco and ensure that data is linked to programmes, policies and health outcomes.
Betel Nut and Tobacco Use: Origin, History and Current Trends

Betel (areca) nut

The use of psychoactive substances is an integral part of life in many societies (McDonald 1998). Psychoactive substances can be defined as those that change the way we think or feel (McDonald 1998). Pacific island communities traditionally have used substances such as tobacco, betel nut, coffee and kava as part of the social fabric of their societies. It has been estimated that 10%-20% of the world’s population, or about 600 million people, use betel nut in some form (Gupta & Warnakulasuriya 2002). The habit of chewing betel nut is thought to have originated in South East Asia, most probably in Malaysia (Norton1998).

While there are several varieties of Areca palm, the betel nut collected for chewing comes from the family known botanically as Areca catechu (Artero & Santos 2000). The cultivated Areca species is thought to have originated in the Philippines (Gowda 1951). It is probable that the Areca palm and the habit of using betel nut subsequently was spread to the southwestern Pacific by the makers and traders of Lapita pottery, about 3600 years ago (Lebot et al. 1992).

The Areca palm is a tall, slender tree which grows from 12-30 metres high. It can grow in a variety of soils, but grows and fruits poorly at altitudes above 1200 metres (Jamrozik 1985). The type of betel nut grown varies among regions. The nuts differ not only in appearance but also in flavour and strength. For example, the betel nuts from Guam and Saipan have a pink interior and are nonfibrous whereas nuts from Palau and Yap have a very fibrous coat and have a red interior. New palms start producing nuts after four to seven years, and the nuts can take between six and eight months to ripen (Artero & Santos 2000).

The raw cultivated nuts are used as a mild stimulant at all stages of ripening -- from young, green nut to old, dry and germinating nut (Thomas & MacLennan 1992). There is significant geographical variation in preferred usage, both within and among countries. Commonly, betel nut is chewed in combination with the leaf or fruit of a pepper plant (Piper betle) and lime powder. The common name “betel nut” originated from the association of chewing betel nut with the P. betle leaf. The term “betel quid” refers to the mixture of the betel nut, part of the betel pepper vine and lime. Other ingredients -- spices such as cardamom and cloves or tobacco -- may be added to the betel-quid to enhance the flavor or physiological effects. The quid, consisting of the betel nut, lime and other ingredients, may be wrapped in P. betle leaf or left unwrapped with the ingredients being added separately to the mouth.

While the Areca palm and P. betle vine grow in more southern regions, the Solomon Islands and the northern islands of Vanuatu is the southernmost extension of the betel nut chewing habit.

Prevalence of betel nut chewing

The use of betel nut has been well-documented throughout history within many societies in the Western Pacific Region. There is evidence that betel nut has been chewed in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands for at least 2000 years (Pietrusewsky 2005) and in Solomon Islands for at least 1000 years (Alependava 1992). Evidence exists of a centuries-old tradition of chewing tobacco with betel nut in Cambodia (Reichart 1996).

Historically significant variations in the prevalence of betel nut chewing have been demonstrated within the Western Pacific Region. Betel nut traditionally has not been grown in the Marshall Islands and Kiribati and betel growth in Vanuatu is restricted to the Northern Province. The use of betel nut in these countries has not been traditional.
The tobacco industry has targeted the Pacific region to increase sales as smoking prevalence decreases in higher income countries. Consumption of tobacco in the Pacific region increased by 15% between 1988 and 1992 (Leung 1995). This occurred despite the adverse health effects of tobacco consumption being well-known throughout the Pacific (Marshall 1991). The tobacco grown in the Pacific is not sufficient to meet this increased demand and a significant amount of the tobacco used in the Region is imported either as manufactured cigarettes or twist tobacco (Brott 1981).

Current trends in usage of betel nut with tobacco

Within the Western Pacific Region, the frequency and method of betel nut use shows distinct geographical variation, both within and among countries. However, the major ingredients -- the betel nut, P. betle leaf and lime -- are relatively constant. The ingredients may be wrapped together and placed in the mouth as a whole or may be added individually (unwrapped quid). In Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, unwrapped quid is universal whereas wrapped quids are more common in the Federated States of Micronesia and Cambodia.

The betel nut provides the mild stimulant effect of the quid. The nuts are ovoid in shape with a pointed apex usually 3-5 cm in length and 2-4 cm long (IARC Monograph 2004). The outer fibrous shell is removed and the kernel is either chewed whole or split into smaller pieces before chewing (IARC Monograph Vol.85 2004). The shell of the nut may be chewed or used for cleaning teeth. It is reported to have a sweet taste and a mild stimulant effect and is used more commonly by women and children (Wilson et al. 1983).

The betel nut contains nine known alkaloids which are released on mastication (Farnworth 1976). Arecoline is the most abundant alkaloid with arecaidine, guvacine and guvacoline occurring to a lesser degree. Other constituents include protein, carbohydrates and copper. A comprehensive list of constituents can be found in the IARC Monograph (IARC Monograph Vol. 85, pp. 48).

The fine, white lime powder used in betel nut chewing is usually obtained from locally available sources. Commonly, it is produced by burning coral rock, sea coral or shells (Wilson et al. 1983). The product that remains after the burning and cooling process is used for the lime powder (calcium oxide or quicklime). Water then may be added to produce slaked lime (calcium hydroxide). The lime is hygroscopic and must be kept in sealed containers. The type of lime and the specific techniques used to reduce the source material show regional variation. Commercially produced builders lime also may be used in the betel quid (MacLennan et al. 1985).

In Papua New Guinea, the betel nut is placed in the mouth first. After it has been chewed for a few seconds, the lime is added to the mouth using a spatula or the betel pepper inflorescence. In other areas, the betel nut is cracked, covered with a thick layer of lime powder or paste and wrapped in betel leaf before chewing (Gupta & Ray 2004).

The lime powder is used to enhance the stimulant effect of the betel nut. This occurs as it hydrolyses the arecoline from the nut to produce the central nervous stimulant, arecaidine (Norton 1998).

Parts of the P. betle vine are added to the quid to enhance its flavour. The betel vine has edible leaves, stems and inflorescence that contain phenols which produce a spicy flavor (IARC Monograph Vol. 85 2004). Most commonly, the fresh green leaves of the vine are used in the betel quid. However, the dried leaves or part of the vine stem are used when the green leaves are unavailable. Conversely, in Papua New Guinea, the inflorescence of the female plant is the most frequently used part of the P. betle vine (Wilson et al. 1983).

When betel nut, lime and P. betle leaves are chewed together in the quid, the resultant chew turns bright red. During mastication, reddened fragments and saliva are either swallowed or spat out. The residual chew is usually spit out.
While betel nut use has been demonstrated for a long time in Guam among the Chamorro people, the usage patterns have changed. Before the 1800s, betel nut commonly was chewed as part of a "quid," including the *P. betle* leaf. However, change occurred in the 1900s when chewing hard, ripe nut became the norm (Paulino 2009).

In Papua New Guinea, the use of unwrapped betel quid has been common in the coastal areas since that is where the Areca palm grows (McDonald 1998). Unwrapped quids without tobacco also are universal in Solomon Islands. Wilson et al. (1983) reported that betel nut and tobacco use in Solomon Islands was common at all levels of society, with most islanders having chewed betel nut at some time in their life. They estimated that more than 50% of adults chewed at least once a week. Both women and men were as likely to chew betel. But men had a lower age of initiation and were heavier users. Young children commonly chew the betel nut husk then progress to chewing betel nut. The regular chewing of betel quid was not commonly observed before puberty. The use of lime is common but not universal (Wilson et al. 1983).

The betel nut chewing habit was introduced to the Northern Province of Vanuatu in the 1950s during the evangelization of the region by elders of the Anglican Church, who previously were based in Solomon Islands (Jean-Jacques Rory, pers. comm.).

Commenting on the role of betel nut in traditional societies in the Pacific, Marshall (1987) states that "betel is used in informal interpersonal exchanges, in formal presentations, in ceremonials and rituals, in decorations and ornamentation, in trade and commerce, in magic and sorcery, and in medicinal preparations" (Marshall 1987, pg. 21). Yap elder statesman John Mangafel, commenting on the role of betel nut in consensus politics, said, "Stopping and chewing betel nut, means to consider and think how to reach consensus so there’s no ill-feeling". This is his interpretation of the old Yapese phrase, "Wisdom comes out of the betel nut basket". (Cited, Johnson Feb. 2005).

Currently, the use of betel nut is widespread in parts of Melanesia, principally Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, the Northern Province of Vanuatu and in the Federated States of Micronesia, particularly in Guam, Palau, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Marshall Islands. Melanesia is a region that includes most of the islands north and northeast of Australia. In Cambodia, the betel nut is predominantly used in rural regions.

**Introduction of tobacco**

Tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*) was not known in Pacific island communities before European contact (Marshall 1991). Evidence suggests that tobacco first was cultivated in the Philippines in 1600 by the Spanish (Gilmour 1931) and both the Dutch and Portuguese introduced tobacco to Java in 1601 (Gilmour 1931; Haddon 1947). Tobacco was introduced to Papua New Guinea by Malay traders (Brady 2001; Hays 2003; Marshall 1987). Once introduced there, it was swiftly distributed via trade channels and became a major medium of exchange (Marshall 1987).

Tobacco subsequently spread throughout the Pacific along with European contact. It was transported from Manila to Guam by the Spanish colonizers of what is now the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in the late 17th century (Marshall 2005). From Guam, tobacco plants and the methods used for smoking it were distributed widely to other parts of what today is the Federated States of Micronesia (Marshall 2005).

The tobacco plant thrived in many regions of the Pacific with its warm climate and fertile soils, for example, on Chuuk’s high volcanic islands and in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. By the end of the 19th century, techniques for growing and smoking tobacco were well established and it was traded whenever the opportunity arose (Marshall 1987, p. 32). Tobacco is frequently shared or exchanged as a way to demonstrate generosity and cement friendship and kinship ties (Kooijman 1962; Weiner 1976; Marshall 1987). As tobacco became integrated into Pacific island cultures, its manufacture and consumption increased.
Betel nut used in combination with tobacco

Tobacco is used with betel nut in one of two ways. It is either added to the betel quid or a smoking habit coexists with the betel nut chewing habit. In Melanesia, tobacco is not added to the betel quid. However, betel nut chewers may smoke tobacco, often at the same time as chewing the nut. In parts of the Federated States of Micronesia and Cambodia, tobacco is commonly added to the betel quid.

The tobacco added to the betel nut chew may be either loose tobacco or a section of cigarette inserted into the cracked nut before it is coated in lime and wrapped in the leaf. The use of lime lowers the intraoral pH, thereby enhancing the stimulant effect of the nicotine in the tobacco (Cawte 1985).

Social importance of betel nut

The long-established habit of betel nut use is integral to community life in many Western Pacific Region countries. It is a socially approved habit that is incorporated into both ceremonial situations and routine aspects of daily life. In addition, the reciprocal gifts of the ingredients contribute to the reinforcement of community links (MacLennan 1991). “In practical terms it is an affordable activity that meets the needs of its users at various levels, and has therefore maintained its status in the village despite negative external reactions to it” (Anne Ring, cited in MacLennan 1991, p.10).

Initially, the use of betel nut and tobacco was controlled by social norms. These norms governed the people who could use betel, the situations in which it was used and the ingredients that were added to the quid. Use was frequently restricted to elders and high-ranking members of society. In Papua New Guinea, there were various restrictions on the use of betel. For example, premenopausal women and young men of Gnau (Southern Madang Province) were not permitted to use lime with betel nut while Garia women were not permitted to chew betel nut until the 1960s. (Brunton 1989) Recent studies and observations suggest these social restrictions are no longer strictly observed.

The Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC) conducted Key Informant interviews in 2005 in several Pacific island countries where betel nut and tobacco are commonly used, including the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Marshall Islands and Solomon Islands. Those surveyed predominantly worked in the health sector, although employees of other sectors such as youth affairs and cultural affairs also were included in the interviews.

The social importance of betel nut use was examined through questions about the importance of betel nut use to the country and the changes observed in betel nut use within the last 10 years.

Of the respondents, 68% (15 of 22 people) replied that betel nut was culturally significant in their country. Several respondents replied that they considered that betel nut was not culturally significant because it no longer was used in traditional ways. One respondent considered that it was just a recreational habit that had been adopted from other cultures.

The changes observed by respondents over the last 10 years included an increase in the number of people using betel nut (81% agreed or strongly agreed) and an increase in the use of betel nut by young people (76% agreed or strongly agreed). Other indicators suggested an increase in the overall use of betel nut. For example, responses such as “it is more common to see red saliva patches on the street” (95% agreed or strongly agreed) and “betel nut is more readily available in the market” (all respondents agreed or strongly agreed).

In response to the question about whether people are now more likely to chew betel nut with tobacco, 48% agreed or strongly agreed. This result may not accurately reflect the current use of tobacco with betel nut in Melanesia since it is more common to smoke while chewing betel nut. Two respondents did agree with this statement, adding that they have observed an increase in smoking rather than chewing tobacco with the betel quid.
Studies and Observations

Cambodia

Significant sex and regional variation in tobacco use was reported in a recent study aimed at identifying the demographic characteristics of current tobacco users in Cambodia (Singh et al. 2009). Generally, cigarette smoking was more commonly reported in men (48.0%) as opposed to women (3.6%). However, women were much more likely to use chewing tobacco. It was estimated that 560,482 women (95% confidence interval, CI) currently chewed tobacco, typically as a component of betel quid. The prevalence of chewing tobacco more than doubles with each decade of adulthood up to the point that about half of all older women chew tobacco.

Both men and women cited the influence of older relatives as their main reason for starting to use tobacco. About one out of five rural women who used chewing tobacco started their habit for relief from morning sickness. The highest prevalence of chewing tobacco among women was seen among traditional birth attendants (67.9%) and traditional healers (47.2%). High rates (66.8%) of cigarette and pipe tobacco use occurred among ethnic minorities who represent hill tribes found throughout South East Asia.

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

The variety of Areca grown in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands has a soft nonfibrous coat, so it is easier to chew alone than other varieties of Areca. However, Lee (1990) reported it was becoming common to add tobacco to betel quid containing P. betle leaf and lime. Other ingredients added to the chew to make it more palatable, including condensed milk (Joanne Ogo pers. comm.).

A recent unpublished study revealed that 90% of survey participants chewed betel nut in association with tobacco (Cabrera, in prep). Nearly all survey participants were initiated into betel nut use at about 12 years old. Initial use of betel nut was without tobacco, although tobacco was usually added to the chew about two years later. The onset of dependence on betel nut with tobacco was reported by many respondents (mean age of 15.6 years).

The 2000 Commonwealth Youth Tobacco Survey (CYTS) reported nearly 55% of middle school students and 85% of high school students had tried cigarettes, with nearly 10% of middle school students and 30% of high school students being regular smokers. In the previous 30 days, one third of the students reported to have chewed betel nut with tobacco (33.9% of high school and 34.7% of middle school students), with 30.0% of high school and 11.4% of middle school students chewing betel nut with tobacco during at least 20 of the past 30 days (CYTS 2000).

The Federated States of Micronesia

The Federated States of Micronesia (Pohnpei) Noncommunicable Diseases (NCD) Risk Factors STEPS (2008) reported on betel nut chewing among adults. About 29.9% of the total population reported chewing betel nut, with significantly more men (43.5% ±5.9) than women (16.0% ±3.0) currently chewing betel nut. For both genders, the highest proportions of betel nut chewers were in the youngest age group, 25-34 years (men: 67.0%; women: 28.0%), declining thereafter with increasing age (the Federated States of Micronesia NCD 2008).

Overall, 26.9% of the population used betel nut daily. The highest proportion of daily betel nut chewers were in the 25-34-year age group (44.0%). Men reported a significantly higher proportion of daily betel nut chewing than women, 39.2 % (±5.9) and 14.4% (±3.1), respectively.

\[1\] 95% Confidence Interval
Among the current betel nut chewers, the mean number of nuts chewed at any one time was 1.3, with no significant difference between men and women. On average, adults chewed betel nut 14 times per day, with no significant gender difference between men and women (men 15.2 ±2.1 times and women 10.7 ±2.5 times, respectively).

The Federated States of Micronesia 2007 Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) of 2670 school students in grades 7-11 reported nearly half of the students currently use some form of tobacco 47.3% product (male 54.6%, female 38.7%) with one third of students currently smoking cigarettes (29.6% male, 37.1%, female 21.0%). Most students (86%) who currently smoked reported they wanted to stop (the Federated States of Micronesia GYTS 2007).

A study conducted on Ulithi Atoll in Yap into the health issues facing the isolated outer islands of the Federated States of Micronesia reported that 81% of people over 15 years old chewed betel nut there (Hancock et al. 2007). Only 24% of those using betel nut used the traditional mixture of betel nut, lime and pepper leaf, while 76% percent added tobacco to their betel nut. Most of those that added tobacco (71%) soak it in alcohol first, and this was more common on Mogmog (Hancock et al. 2007).

**Guam**

Recent data from the 2007 Guam Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) identified two types of betel nut chewing behaviours: Chamorros who chewed the ripe, red nut and subsequently swallowed the nut and other Micronesians who chewed the unripe nut with lime and tobacco and did not swallow the betel nut (Paulino 2009).

The way betel nut is used appears to be changing among Guamians. A summary of the Youth Risk Behavioral Surveys (YRBS) between 1999 and 2003 showed that a significant percentage of school students chewed tobacco with betel nut. Chewing tobacco is highest among Micronesians (21.7% of high school and 31.7% of middle school students in 2003), and usage is increasing among Chamorro high school students (from 3.7% in 1999 to 6.8% in 2003). Recent qualitative studies on Guam revealed that while migrants from Chuuk had no tradition of betel use, this habit was adopted from other Micronesian students when they left home for schooling (Paulino 2009).

The YRBS in 2003 reported on smoking prevalence among high school students: 75.6% had tried smoking and 31.6% had smoked in the last 30 days. This mirrors the high rate of smoking among Guamanian adults, which is reported to be the highest among all U.S. states and territories (Guam’s Epidemiological Workgroup, 2006).

**Kiribati**

In the 2009 Kiribati GYTS, 1461 school students aged 13-15 years were interviewed. Significant numbers of students reported currently using tobacco in some form, i.e. 19.8% of students were current cigarette smokers and 31.2% of students currently use other forms of tobacco (Kiribati GYTS 2009). A significant percentage of school students (68.3%) were exposed to tobacco smoke at home. Most students (92.3%) stated that cigarette smoking was probably or definitely harmful to health (Kiribati GYTS 2009).

A recent change in the use of chewing tobacco has been identified among the youth of Kiribati: that of chewing tobacco with immature green coconuts (Kireata Ruteru, pers. comm.).

**Papua New Guinea**

Some dramatic changes have occurred in Papua New Guinea in the use of betel nut and tobacco. Areca palms only grow and fruit well below 1200 metres and therefore betel nut chewing was not a traditional feature of highland societies. Before road links, planes were chartered to transport betel nut from the Sepik River plantations to the highlands. Trade in betel nut significantly increased with the improvement of the road system linking highland and coastal areas (Freeman 2001).
In a recent study into the impact of drug use in three provinces in Papua New Guinea, (National Capital District, Western Highlands Province and East Sepik Province), Baldwin et al. (2007) reported 89.6% of respondents had tried betel nut, with 11.7 years old being the average age of their first try. No difference was reported between men and women in betel nut usage. Common reasons for using betel nut were “people reported wanting to have a red-coloured mouth” and that “everyone else was doing it” (Baldwin et al. 2007).

The WHO STEPS survey conducted by HOPE worldwide (Papua New Guinea) during the period March 2007 to March 2008 in five regions in Papua New Guinea (National Capital District, Manus, Gulf, Madang and Simbu) surveyed adults about various risk factors for chronic disease and reported 79% (95% CI 77.8%-80.3%) of respondents were current betel nut users, with the mean number of times betel nut was chewed during a day being 5.5 (95% CI 4.9%-6.2%). The results were similar for both males and females. Betel nut was most commonly used with lime and mustard (78.3% of all betel nut users). While 44% of all respondents reported being current tobacco users, significantly more men (60.3%) than women (27.0%) reported using tobacco. The mean age of initiation of smoking was also younger in men, i.e. 17.9 years as opposed to 19 years for women (HOPE worldwide (Papua New Guinea, 2010).

**Palau**

Ysaol et al. (1996) surveyed 1110 Palauans and reported 55% of those aged 5-14 years and 86% of those aged 35-44 years chewed betel nut. Cigarettes were added to the betel nut by 80% of users and 24% added other tobacco.

Chewing was more prevalent with increasing age and educational status. Women were more likely to add tobacco to the quid (84% as opposed to 81% of men); the use of lime was universal. No significant difference was demonstrated in tobacco usage in the chew among age groups, with the youngest age group interviewed (5-14 years) reporting 87% usage of tobacco. They concluded that each year more than 1.21 million packs of cigarettes were consumed in association with betel nut chewing (Ysaol et al. 1996).

The use of piper leaf was less common among young people, probably to avoid red discoloration of the saliva and thereby disguise their betel nut use or because it was more cosmetically acceptable (Ysaol et al. 1996).

More recent Palau Youth Tobacco Surveys (PYTS) from 2001, 2005 and 2009 measured betel nut and tobacco use in school students. Although less than previous years, very high usage of betel nut was demonstrated in 2009, with 62.9% of middle school students (82% in PYTS 2005) and 74.8% of high school students (78.1% in PYTS 2005) having ever tried betel nut. Use was significantly higher among students of Palauan origin than other students (PYTS, 2009).

The 2009 survey reported 52.2% of high school students usually added tobacco to the chew (down from 61.1% in 2005), with the vast majority of students using cigarettes as the source of tobacco (PYTS 2009). Over one third of students using tobacco with betel nut had experienced cravings within three hours of their last chew.

These studies support the findings of the report questionnaire in which respondents from Palau considered that betel nut was no longer used in the traditional cultural context.

**The Marshall Islands**

In the Marshall Islands, the habit of betel nut use has grown recently after initially being introduced by betel nut users migrating from other Micronesian islands. The Areca nut palm is not widely grown in the Marshall Islands (although some palms exist) and betel nut is principally imported. With the rapid adoption of the betel nut habit, the social controls evident in traditional use do not seem to have been
adopted (Emi Chutaro pers. comm.). Commonly, the betel nut is chewed as part of the betel quid, with the habit being increasingly accessorized, i.e. users have special implements and bags for using and transporting the quid.

According to the 2007 Marshall Islands NCD Risk Factors STEPS Report, 4.5% of the total population use betel nut daily, with the highest proportion of users in the 25-34 age group (9.3 % ± 3.8). Overall, 8.1% (±3.6) of male respondents were daily chewers, but the majority (90.2% ±3.5) were non-betel users. The highest proportion of daily betel chewers (17.0% ±6.6) was reported in the 25-34 age group. Females were less likely to chew betel nut, with 97.9 being non-betel users (the Marshall Islands NCD 2007).

**Solomon Islands**

The Solomon Islands NCD Risk Factor STEPS 2010 reported 62.6% (± 8.0) of respondents had chewed betel nut in the past 12 months, with the largest proportion of chewers (69.2% ±7.9) in the 25-34 age group. Rates of betel use remained relatively constant in the age groups 35-44 and 45-54, but declined in the 55-64 age groups. Significantly, more men (67.8%) than women (57.3%) had chewed betel nut in the past 12 months.

Overall, 30.0 % (± 5.1).of the population were daily chewers, with the highest proportion of daily betel chewers (32.5% ± 5.3) being in the 25-34 age group. Among current daily betel chewers, the mean age of starting betel use was younger in men (20.4 ±1.1 years) than women (21.5 ±0.7 years). This was reflected in the mean number of years of betel nut use being slightly longer in men (17.5 ±1.3 years) than women (16.4 ±1.2 years). However, women in the 55-64 age group reported starting at a younger age than men.

A higher percentage of youth aged 15-24 years reported betel nut use, with 77.5% (±8.3) of men being current betel nut chewers compared with 66.3% (±5.9) of women. Both genders reported starting betel use at a younger age than all other age groups (15.2 ±0.7 years) and having used betel nut for a mean of 5.3 (±0.6 years). A significant percentage of youth were daily betel nut chewers, (34% ±8.9 of men and 20.9% ±5.9 of women), (Solomon Islands NCDRF 2010).

**Vanuatu**

Habitual use of betel nut is mainly restricted to the Northern Province of Vanuatu with people from Malaita, Makira, Guadalcanal and Temotu being cited as the heaviest users. The Vanuatu GYTS (2007) school-based survey of 1900 students in grades 7-9 reported over one fourth of students currently use tobacco in some form, with 18.5% of the students smoking cigarettes and 14.3% using some other form of tobacco (male = 14.8%, female = 12.0%). Three fourths (74.4%) of the current smokers reported wanting to quit smoking. A high percentage of students (65.1%) reported being offered a free cigarette by a tobacco company representative.

Various studies have been conducted in the Western Pacific Region to measure the prevalence of betel nut use and tobacco use. The results of these studies are summarized in Table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Study &amp; Year</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Surveyed Group</th>
<th>Betel nut (% using)</th>
<th>Tobacco (% using)</th>
<th>Additional information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Singh et al. 2009</td>
<td>13 988</td>
<td>Adults 18 years and older</td>
<td>Current using tobacco, women 49% (cigarette 3.6%, chewing 17%)</td>
<td>men 49% (cigarette 48%, chewing 1%)</td>
<td>Marked sex and regional variation of chewing tobacco, 43.4%, women over 48 years old and 48% of rural women. Highest users were rural Traditional birth attendants, 67.9%</td>
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<td>GYTS, 2003</td>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Youth aged 13-15 years</td>
<td>8.8% currently use any tobacco product (male 11.4%, female 3.2%)</td>
<td>5.5% currently smoke cigarettes (male 7.9%, female 1.0%)</td>
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<td>4.2% currently use other tobacco products (male 4.8%, female 2.5%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>National Institute of</td>
<td>3600</td>
<td></td>
<td>30% of men over 15 years old smoke daily</td>
<td>Higher smoking prevalence in rural areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institute</td>
<td>Statistics. Cambodian</td>
<td>households</td>
<td></td>
<td>20% of rural population smokes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey, 2007</td>
<td>Socioeconomic Survey</td>
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<td>5% of Phnom Penh population smokes</td>
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<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>National Institute of</td>
<td>15 000</td>
<td>over 14 years</td>
<td>40% Cambodian men over 14 years smoke</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institute</td>
<td>Statistics. Cambodian</td>
<td>households</td>
<td></td>
<td>4% women smoke</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey, 2004</td>
<td>Socioeconomic Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>National Institute of</td>
<td>6000</td>
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<td>4.5% were regular smokers, male 8.1%, female 1.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institute</td>
<td>Statistics. Cambodian</td>
<td>households</td>
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<td>Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands</td>
<td>YRBS 2007</td>
<td>2292</td>
<td>High school students</td>
<td>63.4% regular users of betel nut</td>
<td>31.1% currently smoked cigarettes 78.1% have ever smoked cigarettes</td>
<td>5.9% smoked more than 10 cigarettes a day, 74% of whom had tried to quit smoking. Many risk factors surveyed, including use of alcohol and drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oakley, Demaine et al. 2005</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>Cross-sectional study of school children</td>
<td>Participants selected as they used betel nut</td>
<td>24.9% smoked tobacco 17.5% chewed tobacco</td>
<td>Oral lesions present</td>
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<tr>
<td>Factors Associated with Nut Use – study conducted 2005, Cabrera, unpublished</td>
<td>41 nut chewers</td>
<td>Adults recruited from public health clinic</td>
<td></td>
<td>90% chew tobacco with nut, 16% of whom also smoke</td>
<td>Mean age of initiation - betel nut 12.2 years, and with tobacco 14.5 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Tobacco Survey 2000</td>
<td>2809</td>
<td>Middle (MS) and high school (HS) students</td>
<td>Participants selected as they used betel nut</td>
<td>39.2% currently smoke 52.7% currently using other tobacco products</td>
<td>Environmental smoke exposure. Means of obtaining cigarettes and age at first trying smoking, chewing tobacco and chewing betel nut</td>
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<tr>
<td>YRBS 1993</td>
<td>School students from grades 7–12</td>
<td>52% of grade 12 students smoked</td>
<td>Ethnic variation also cited – 27% of Carolinian youth and 42% of Chamorro youth smoked.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands household survey 1981</td>
<td>150 households</td>
<td>81% Carolinians and 29% of Chamorros chewed betel nut</td>
<td>62% Carolinian adults smoke cigarettes</td>
<td>Ethnic variation in chewing patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Study &amp; Year</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Federated States of Micronesia</strong></td>
<td>GYTS, 2007</td>
<td>2670</td>
<td>School children grades 7-11</td>
<td>29.9% currently chew betel nut (men: 43.5%, women: 16.0%, both sexes: 29.9%)</td>
<td>31.6% Current Smoker (men: 42.0%, women: 21.0%)</td>
<td>Ever smoked 46.4% (male 55.7%, female 36.0%) 47.3% current users, any tobacco male, 54.6%, female 38.7% 29.6% currently smoke cigarettes, male 37.1%, female 21.0% Currently use other tobacco products, 37.5%; male 44.2%, female 30.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Federated States of Micronesia (Pohnpei)</td>
<td>NCD STEPS Survey, 2002</td>
<td>1638</td>
<td>Adults aged 25-64 years</td>
<td>29.9% currently chew betel nut (men: 43.5%, women: 16.0%, both sexes: 29.9%)</td>
<td>31.6% Current Smoker (men: 42.0%, women: 21.0%)</td>
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<td>25.5% daily smokers (men: 34.8%, women: 16.1%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pohnpei Youth Health Behaviour and Lifestyle Survey Phongsavan et al. 2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>507</td>
<td>Students aged 13-15 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>19.6% boys and 17.3% girls smoked cigarettes at least weekly</td>
<td>Use of kava, methylated spirits and marijuana</td>
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<td>Pohnpei Nutritional survey, Corsi 2004</td>
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<td>36.8% used betel nut during the previous week</td>
<td>34.7% used tobacco during previous week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ulithi Atoll, Yap Health Assessment, Hancock, et al. 2007</td>
<td></td>
<td>301</td>
<td></td>
<td>81% use betel nut; of chewers, 76% added tobacco</td>
<td>55% of respondents over 18 years smoked, 2% of those under 18 years smoked</td>
<td>71% of betel nut chewers who used tobacco, dipped chew in alcohol before chewing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Study &amp; Year</td>
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<td>Betel nut (% using)</td>
<td>Tobacco (% using)</td>
<td>Additional information</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPC/Chuuk Dept of Health 2002</td>
<td></td>
<td>444</td>
<td>Nutritional Survey</td>
<td>31% used betel nut or snuff</td>
<td>18.7% smoked tobacco</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF Health Behaviour and Lifestyle of Pacific Youth (HBLPY) Report, Ponhpei 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td>1516 youth</td>
<td>Health Behaviour and Lifestyle of Pacific Youth</td>
<td>47.9% students used betel nut daily</td>
<td>One third chewed tobacco</td>
<td>Betel nut most common substance used</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guam</td>
<td>Paulino, 2009</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>79% of smokers and 36% of betel nut chewers consumed alcohol</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>QMark report on substance use 2008</td>
<td>Youth 10-17 years</td>
<td>6% had chewed betel nut in last 30 days. Of betel nut chewers, 52% chewed betel only,</td>
<td>Current betel nut chewers 12% (Chamorro 24%, non-Chamorro 24%, Micronesian 24%, non-Micronesian 0.3%)</td>
<td>Current smokers 31% (Chamorro, 44% non-Chamorro, 16%, Micronesian 41%, non-Micronesian 21%)</td>
<td>Age of initiation of tobacco and betel nut 25% 13 or 14 years, 50% at 15-16 years and 25% at 17 years+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>QMark report on substance use 2008</td>
<td>Adults aged 18 years and older</td>
<td>17% had chewed betel nut chewers in last 30 days, of whom 69% chewed betel nut by itself.</td>
<td>Of betel nut chewers, 28% chewed with tobacco</td>
<td>Of betel nut chewers, 29% chewed it with tobacco</td>
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<td></td>
<td>YRBS 2007</td>
<td>1716</td>
<td>High school students</td>
<td>20.4% girls and 25.4% boys are current cigarette smokers. 6.3% use of non smoking tobacco (5.6% girls and 6.9% boys)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Many risk factors surveyed, including use of alcohol and drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YRBS 2003</td>
<td>1722</td>
<td>Middle and high school students</td>
<td>31.6% of high school students smoked in last 30 days</td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk prevalence by ethnicity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>YRBS 2001</td>
<td>3059</td>
<td>Middle and high school students</td>
<td>62% said their friends smoked</td>
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**Note:** Additional information includes risk factors surveyed, including use of alcohol and drugs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Study &amp; Year</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
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<th>Betel nut (% using)</th>
<th>Tobacco (% using)</th>
<th>Additional information</th>
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<tr>
<td>Behavioral Risk</td>
<td>Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>80% Pacific islanders smoking or had smoked</td>
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<td>Risk factor by ethnicity Pacific islanders, Asian, non-Asian Pacific islanders</td>
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<td>Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) 1999</td>
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<tr>
<td>YRBS 1999</td>
<td>Middle and High school students</td>
<td>1211</td>
<td>38% all high school students (44% Pacific islanders)</td>
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<td>Risk prevalence by ethnicity</td>
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<td>BRFSS 1995</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>75% Pacific islanders had smoked or are current smokers</td>
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<td>Risk factor by ethnicity Pacific islanders, Asian, non-Asian Pacific islanders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jarvis et al., Health</td>
<td>Adult betel nut use by ethnicity</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>48% Chamorros, 37.5% Micronesian, 18.6% whites chew betel nut</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk factor by ethnicity Pacific islanders, Asian, non-Asian Pacific islanders</td>
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<td>Risk Factor Study, 1993</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRFSS Pinhey et al. 1992</td>
<td>Chamorro and Philippine women</td>
<td>175 women</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Risk factors for oral lesions</td>
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<td>BRFSS Pinhey et al. 1992</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haddock et al. 1981</td>
<td>screening project in senior citizens</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>24.65% used betel nut. 8.4% chewed betel nut and smoked</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.49% smoked cigarettes</td>
<td>Risk factors for oral lesions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>GYTS 2009</td>
<td>1461</td>
<td>Students aged 13-15 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Current cigarette smoker 19.8% Current user of other tobacco 31.2% Exposed to cigarette smoke at home, 68.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New</td>
<td>HOPE worldwide and WHO STEPS 2010</td>
<td>2944</td>
<td>Adults 15-64 years from five regions (NCD, Manus, Gulf, Madang and Simbu)</td>
<td>79% currently use betel nut, of whom 78.3% use it with mustard and lime Mean number of times betel nut is chewed daily, 5.5</td>
<td>44% currently smoke tobacco (men 60.3%, women 27.0%), of whom 72.0% smoke manufactured cigarettes. 43.7% were daily tobacco smokers</td>
<td>Alcohol consumption – 7.1% current drinkers. Other NCD risk factors reported on included consumption of fruit and vegetables, body mass index (BMI), fasting blood glucose levels and levels of physical activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
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<td>Country</td>
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<td>Tobacco (% using)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baldwin et al. 2007</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>Age range 10-50 years from three provinces, Port Moresby, Mount Hagen, East Sepik</td>
<td>89.6% had tried betel nut. 85% had used betel nut in last two weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td>Within the last two weeks 56.9% had used alcohol, 26.7% had used home brew and 35.7% had used cannabis.</td>
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<td>GYTS 2007</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>School children grades 6-9</td>
<td></td>
<td>61.6% of students had ever smoked (males 69%, females 52.8%)</td>
<td>53.7% were current users of tobacco (males 59.7%, females 46.1%)</td>
<td>49% were current smokers (males 55.8%, females 40.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smoking prevalence</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>Students from National Capital District (NCD) and Manus</td>
<td></td>
<td>In NCD 12% males and 8% females smoked cigarettes</td>
<td></td>
<td>In NCD 10% males and 37% females did not smoke cigarettes, marijuana or mutrus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson 1998</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>Urban demand for food, beverages, betel nut and tobacco</td>
<td>Used by 75% of urban households</td>
<td>Used by 70.6% of urban households</td>
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<td>Tobacco use survey</td>
<td>1285</td>
<td>Coastal and Highlands provinces adults</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coastal men 58% and 17% women. Highlands women 38% used tobacco</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional variation in prevalence</td>
</tr>
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<td>Thomas 1992, prevalence of</td>
<td>1678</td>
<td>adults in New Ireland Province</td>
<td>94% chewed betel nut</td>
<td>75% of men and 27% of women smoked</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prevalence of oral leukoplakia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Study &amp; Year</td>
<td>Sample-size</td>
<td>Surveyed Group</td>
<td>Tobacco (% using)</td>
<td>Betel nut (% using)</td>
<td>Reduction in smoking, especially in young adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>Vallace et al, 1987</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>Rural Highlands community, 1970 and 1984</td>
<td>58.6% HS students and 47.6% MS students used betel nut</td>
<td>53.3% HS students and 36.3% MS students used betel nut with tobacco</td>
<td>Smoking habits of adults in a rural Highlands community, 1970 and 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YRBS 2007</td>
<td>125 h</td>
<td>High school students</td>
<td>52.9% HS students and 41.6% MS students used any form of tobacco</td>
<td>30.6% girls and 44.4% boys currently smoke</td>
<td>Smoking habits of adults in a rural Highlands community, 1970 and 1984</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>PYTS 2005</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>High school and middle school students</td>
<td>48.1% HS students and 61.1% MS students currently chew betel nut with tobacco</td>
<td>50% smoked</td>
<td>Smoking habits of adults in a rural Highlands community, 1970 and 1984</td>
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<td>PYTS 2001</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>High school and middle school students</td>
<td>43.1% HS students and 61.1% MS students currently chew betel nut with tobacco</td>
<td>50% smoked</td>
<td>Smoking habits of adults in a rural Highlands community, 1970 and 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ministry of Health, 2001</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>Ministry of Health staff and Oral Health Division staff</td>
<td>70% of adults chewed betel nut</td>
<td>80% of chewers added cigarette</td>
<td>Smoking habits of adults in a rural Highlands community, 1970 and 1984</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ministry of Health, 2001</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>Oral Health Division staff</td>
<td>70% of adults chewed betel nut</td>
<td>80% of chewers added cigarette</td>
<td>Smoking habits of adults in a rural Highlands community, 1970 and 1984</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Ysaol et al, 1996</td>
<td>1110</td>
<td>From age 5 years</td>
<td>55% those aged 5-14 chewed betel nut</td>
<td>80% of chewers added cigarette</td>
<td>Smoking habits of adults in a rural Highlands community, 1970 and 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Marshall Islands</strong></td>
<td>2007 YRBS</td>
<td>1522</td>
<td>High school students</td>
<td>Currently chew betel nut (men: 9.8% women: 2.1% both sexes: 6.1%)</td>
<td>Current smoker men: 38.8 Women: 7.0% Both sexes: 23.4%</td>
<td>Many risk factors surveyed, including use of alcohol and drugs.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>The Marshall Islands NCD STEPS Survey, 2002</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Random cluster sample of adults aged 25-64 years</td>
<td>Daily betel nut chewer Men: 8.1 Women: 0.8 Both sexes: 4.5</td>
<td>Daily smoker (men: 35.3% women: 5.4% both sexes: 20.8%)</td>
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<td>Chen T-H, et al. 2004</td>
<td>3294</td>
<td>Students aged 9–20 years</td>
<td>Betel nut chewing rate currently not available</td>
<td>10.6% smoking rate overall, 33.5% those aged 18 years or more</td>
<td>Risk factors for smoking</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Solomon Islands</strong></td>
<td>NCD STEPS Survey, 2005</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Random cluster sampling of adults aged 25-64 years</td>
<td>62.6% currently chew betel nut (men: 67.8% women: 57.3%)</td>
<td>39.8% current smoker (men: 54.1% women: 25.0%)</td>
<td>Mean age started smoking (men: 20.3 women: 23.1 both sexes: 21.0)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>30.0% daily betel nut chewer (men: 35.8% women: 24.0%)</td>
<td>30.6% daily smoker (men: 43.9% women: 16.9%)</td>
<td>Mean age started chewing (men: 20.4 women: 21.5 both sexes: 20.8)</td>
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<td>Mean duration of betel nut habit (men: 17.5% women: 16.4% both sexes: 17.1%)</td>
<td>Mean duration of smoking (men: 17.2 women: 15.0 both sexes: 16.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Study &amp; Year</td>
<td>Sample size</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Retrospective study between 1994 and 1997 and 1999 of oral cancer patients at National Referral Hospital</td>
<td>90% of oral cancer patients chewed betel nut and smoked</td>
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<td>Site of cancer. Statistical risk of smoking and chewing nut on oral cancer</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>48 cases</td>
<td>Retrospective study between 1994 and 1997 and 1999 of oral cancer patients at National Referral Hospital</td>
<td>90% of oral cancer patients chewed betel nut and smoked</td>
<td></td>
<td>Site of cancer. Statistical risk of smoking and chewing nut on oral cancer</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>1995 YRBS</td>
<td>High school students</td>
<td>23.8% current users</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1900 School children grades 7-9</td>
<td>28.0% of students had ever smoked cigarettes (male 27.0%, female 29.9%)</td>
<td>26.3% currently use any tobacco product (male 26.4%, female 25.3%)</td>
<td>18.5% currently smoke cigarettes (male 18.1%, female 19.8%)</td>
<td>14.3% currently use other tobacco products (male 14.8%, female 12.0%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Smoking in Port Vila; 1988 Vanuatu Youth People’s Project, 1998</td>
<td>1000 Youth</td>
<td>58.20% males 17.7% females</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reported in Western Pacific Regional Office Country Profiles, Tobacco or Health, 2000. URL: <a href="http://www.wpro.who.int">http://www.wpro.who.int</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>National Non-communicable Diseases Survey, 1998</td>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>49.0% males 5% females</td>
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</table>
Migration

Several studies have linked the use of betel nut to migrant status (Pinhey et al. 1992). Migration has a dual impact on the use of betel nut. Firstly, the continued use of betel nut helps migrants reinforce their cultural identity in the new country. Pinhey et al. (1992) reported the use of betel nut was significantly related to migrant status for younger Philippine women on Guam. In addition, the broader effects of migrants introducing a new habit to a community, or a new way of using a substance, are important. For example, Micronesian immigrants have introduced betel nut chewing to the Marshall Islands and immigrants from the Federated States of Micronesia to Hawaii and the mainland of the United States of America have created a demand and, subsequently, a trade market for betel nut there.

Multiple drug use

Concern has been expressed as to whether the habitual use of betel nut provides a gateway to other, potentially more harmful drugs. Pacific prevalence studies seem to suggest the combination of tobacco and betel nut is alarmingly common, particularly among young people (Ysaol et al. 1996, PYTS 2001, 2005, 2009). In communities where tobacco is commonly added to the betel quid, initiation occurs with betel nut alone, especially in the youngest groups. There is a subsequent graduation to the use of lime and tobacco.

While there are studies that link tobacco and betel nut use, few studies exist which explore the link to abuse of other substances, particularly alcohol and marijuana, which are widely available in the Western Pacific Region. Betel nut is a readily available and cheap alternative to other mood-enhancing drugs. Sales to minors are not restricted, as may be the case for alcohol and tobacco.

Pinhey et al. (1992) reported several variables were related to the use of betel nut, tobacco and alcohol among Chamorro and Philippine women in Guam. There was a limited relationship between socioeconomic factors and betel nut use. Education levels were negatively associated with tobacco use for both Philippine and Chamorro women (Pinhey et al. 1992).

The McDonald survey of substance use in Papua New Guinea reported a significant percentage of drug users used or had used a combination of different drugs. Of particular interest, 91% reported use of betelnut, 87% of tobacco and 82% of alcohol (McDonald 1998).

A more recent study in Papua New Guinea reporting on the use of alcohol, home brew, cannabis and betel nut showed the age of first trying betel nut was significantly lower (11.7 years) than for other drugs (alcohol 16.53 years, home brew 18.5 years and cannabis 18.02 years). A significant finding to emerge from the study was a strong culture of intoxication in Papua New Guinea (Baldwin 2007).

Socioeconomic aspects of betel nut

Apart from the traditional use of betel nut in intergroup exchange, the use of the betel nut as a commercial product is a relatively recent phenomenon in the Pacific (Watson 1987). The market for betel nut has grown along with the growth of urban centres and has increased along with the number of waged employees. Demand also has increased with improved communication routes. This has been especially significant with better road access to the highland provinces of Papua New Guinea.

The growth of interisland trade and export of betel nut has been enhanced by different regional growing seasons and regional migrants wanting to access products from their homelands. There is evidence of demand for particular varieties of betel nut. For example, betel nut from Yap is reported to be stronger than other varieties (Ben Yoromad, cited Radway 2004).

Betel nut products are now increasingly available in Pacific countries that have no previous history of usage – the mainland of the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand. An extensive array of betel nut products is available through the Internet.

The socioeconomic effects of betel nut include income expenditure and generation as well as environmental impacts.
**Income generation**

For growers and distributors, betel nut provides an essential source of income for the family. School fees, food, medicine and other household items are bought with the income generated from betel nut (Vele 1982). This is also true for suppliers of other quid ingredients -- tobacco, lime and *P. betle* leaves.

In the Chris Owen documentary “Betelnut Bisnis”, filmed in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea, comments made by interviewees reflect the social and economic importance of betel nut to the community. Betel nut is referred to as “green gold” and called “the life blood of Papua New Guinea” (Betelnut Bisnis 2004).

Baldwin also reported the sale of betel nut is a very important source of income for many people in certain provinces of Papua New Guinea, especially those who are outside the formal economy. Betel nut sales ranged from small-scale opportunistic exchanges to well-planned business ventures (Baldwin 2007).

The 1996 Mapping Agricultural System estimated 1,227,234 people received income from betel nut in Papua New Guinea and the total income from betel nut was USD 7,094,993, or 9.5% of the total income from agricultural products (Caven & McKillop 2000).

Figures from the Solomon Islands 2010 STEPS survey reported a betel nut seller could earn up to USD 63.49 per day (Solomon Islands NCD 2010).

Yap is the leading supplier of betel nut to the region. Betel nut from Yap is primarily sent to Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, with smaller amounts to Chuuk, Palau and the Marshall Islands (Radway, 2006). The Yap Department of Agriculture reported during the financial year March 2003-February 2004 that 211 tonnes of betel nut and 16.3 tonnes of pepper leaf were exported. These figures were obtained from the export records of air freighted betel nut (Cited Radway 2006). Betel nut is now the most important cash crop for Yap, with an estimated value of USD 3,000,000 between 2003 and 2004 (Gov. Robert Robuecho, cited Radway 2004). The true value of the crop is likely to be even higher because the statistics do not include betel nut transported in personal luggage.

The United States Food and Drug Administration lifted the ban on betel nut importation for personal use in 2000. The main reason was that people were ignoring the ban anyway, which was regarded as posing a greater agricultural risk (Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service). Some states in the United States of America require the husk to be removed from the betel nut because it is the husk that poses the greatest risk of introducing agricultural pests and diseases.

**Income expenditure**

Gibson reported that betel nut and tobacco accounted for 2.32% and 3.09%, respectively, of total household expenditure in urban households in Papua New Guinea. When urban household incomes increased, the most significant increase in demand occurred for betel nut, fresh vegetables and sweet potato (Gibson 1998).

Frequent users of betel nut and betel quid may buy it in preference to other essential items. Several questionnaire respondents remarked that habitual users will sacrifice food and medicine in favor of betel quid ingredients, especially tobacco. These appetite suppressant products may be bought instead of food to satiate hunger. Economic impact figures from Palau have predicted a regular betel nut chewer spends USD 32.55 a week on betel nut, which equates to USD 1,692.60 per year. A 1995 survey on the prevalence of betel nut use estimated the cost to Palauans of betel nut use and its associated additives (slaked lime, pepper leaf and tobacco) was USD 9.2 million annually (Country Profiles 2000).
In the Western Pacific Region, increasing areas of arable land are being converted to the production of betel nut (Vele 1982; Gibson 1998). Statistics from Guam show 4100 pounds of betel nut were harvested from 16 farms in Guam alone (Guam Statistical Yearbook 2008). In the Region, larger scale plantations are more visible and home gardens are being planted with Areca palms rather than food crops.

Families may compromise their food security in changing from food production to cash crops. Food insecurity could result if the price obtained for the betel nut crop drops due to market saturation or if the price of food staples (e.g. sweet potato) increases due to scarcity. Experience in Guam with the Areca palm blight demonstrates that heavy reliance on one crop can be disastrous if the crop fails. In addition, Areca palms take at least four years to become productive, creating a significant lead time before income is generated from the land.

Experience in Taiwan has shown there may be other unforeseen problems in changing from traditional crops. The rapid expansion of betel nut cultivation has placed farmers at risk of the progressive loss of fertile soil and land erosion because the Areca palms do not retain soil during the rainy season (Ko et al. 1992).

**Reef destruction**

In Solomon Islands, harvesting of *Acropora* coral to obtain lime for betel quid has destroyed important reef habitats and caused changes in coral reef communities as reefs become devoid of stag horn *Acropora* corals. To reverse these negative impacts of coral harvesting, local women have been trained as coral farmers. The coral grown has been used to regenerate the reefs and supply coral for the United States of America aquarium market, generating essential export revenue (Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT). Marked destruction of reef coral for use in betel quid also has been noted in parts of Papua New Guinea (McEldowney 1993).

Betel nut was viewed as an important part of the economy by 55% of respondents. It was noted that it was more important to the micro-economy at a family group level.
Health Concerns: Why is Betel Nut Use a Problem?

While betel nut has been used for its stimulant properties, concern has long been expressed over its association with negative health consequences. A significant percentage of respondents (73%, i.e. 16 of 22 people) to the questionnaires believe that betel nut use affects the health of their community. The physiological effects of betel nut use may be caused by the betel nut alone or by the combination of the additional ingredients -- the lime, P. betle leaf and tobacco. These ingredients may act in their own right, or synergistically with the betel nut, to cause the health effects commonly associated with habitual betel nut use.

Pharmacology

The use of betel nut is associated with both immediate and long-term physiological effects. The immediate effects can occur within minutes of chewing the betel nut because the ingredients are absorbed directly into the blood stream via the oral mucosa. These effects are caused by activation of the sympathetic pathway by the betel nut alkaloids and have been described as a combination of the following symptoms (Rooban et al. 2005):

- Dizziness and heart palpitations
- Heightened awareness
- Hot sensation and sweating
- Epigastric discomfort and diarrhoea
- Increased respiration and heart rate
- Diminished thirst and hunger
- Relaxed, happy feeling

The effects of betel nut are more pronounced in first-time users and if the chewer is suffering from malnutrition or a physical illness such as malaria (Cawte 1985). Regular users of betel nut may develop tolerance and therefore experience less dramatic initial symptoms (Burton-Bradley 1979; Winstock 2002).

Habitual use of betel nut has been associated with a number of long-term adverse health effects: specific oral effects, including oral precancer and cancer and other types of cancer, heart and respiratory effects, diabetes mellitus, poor pregnancy outcomes and mental illness, addiction and toxic effects.

Effects on Oral Hard Tissues

Tooth discoloration and dental caries

Chewing a combination of betel nut, lime and P. betle produces the copious red saliva associated with betel quid use. With regular betel quid chewing, this stain becomes embedded in the teeth, gingiva and oral mucosa. The colour deepens from red to black with increasing duration and frequency of use.

Traditionally, this tooth colouration was regarded as aesthetically pleasing by some societies, but with Western influence it seems to be becoming less so (Norton 1998). Vigorous brushing of the teeth, particularly with the fibrous husk of the betel nut, is used to reduce the amount of staining.

Several studies have discussed the role of tooth stain in a reduced rate of dental caries in regular betel nut users (Moller et al. 1977; Howden 1984; Nigam & Srivastava 1990). Howden (1984) reported that the stain acted as a physical barrier to tooth demineralization.
It also has been suggested that the use of lime with betel nut contributes to the reduced rate of dental caries in some betel nut users because it increases the intra-oral pH and provides a source of calcium for remineralization of the tooth enamel. (Alependava 1992).

**Excessive tooth abrasion and fractured teeth**

The hard fibrous nature of the betel nut causes fractured teeth and extensive abrasion of the occlusal tooth surface of regular users. The molars, premolars and canine teeth frequently completely lose their cuspal form and the incisors become shortened. The abrasive nature of the lime further increases this effect. A survey of oral health of the Huli people from Southern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea, reported nearly half of those aged 45–64 years had back teeth that were completely smooth and flattened (Newell 2001). Tooth attrition is more pronounced in coastal areas that have higher rates of betel nut use (Davies 1990).

**Temporomandibular joint pathology**

It has been speculated that the chewing forces generated during habitual betel nut use could give rise to deterioration of the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) (Trivedy et al. 2002). This is difficult to prove because many of the symptoms associated with TMJ pathology, e.g. trismus, also occurs in fibrotic conditions linked to betel nut use.

### Effects on Oral Soft Tissues

**Periodontal Disease**

Periodontitis is a significant cause of tooth loss for adult Pacific islanders (Cutress & Tapealava 1996; Cutress 2003). It is a progressive gum disease that results in the loss of the supporting structures of the teeth and is linked directly to inadequate oral hygiene. Poor oral hygiene is frequently associated with betel nut chewing (Nigam & Srivastava 1990; Pickwell et al. 1994). Studies of betel extracts containing arecoline have suggested betel may be cytotoxic to periodontal fibroblasts, thus exacerbating pre-existing periodontal disease (Trivedy et al. 2002).

Tobacco use is associated with increased severity of periodontitis and tooth loss (Bergstrom 1989). Therefore, it is likely that the concurrent use of tobacco with betel nut predisposes users to periodontitis. The Ministry of Health in Palau states that as a consequence of the majority of the population in Palau using tobacco products, “the entire population in Palau is considered to be at very high risk for development of periodontal disease” (MOH Palau 2005, p. 9). Periodontitis is further exacerbated by diabetes mellitus, a disease also associated with betel nut use (see section on Diabetes Mellitus below).

Treatment of periodontal disease and stain removal from teeth and repairing fractured teeth due to betel nut chewing, may require continuing dental treatment at significant cost to the betel nut user.

**Betel chewer’s mucosa**

Betel chewer’s mucosa (BCM) first was described by Mehta et al. (1972). It is characterized by a brownish-red discolouration of the oral mucosa localized to the site of betel quid placement and is associated with epithelial hyperplasia (Trivedy et al. 2002). Although BCM is not considered to be a premalignant lesion, it frequently coexists with premalignant lesions, e.g. leukoplakia.

The use of lime in betel quid damages the oral mucosal membrane, leading to direct abrasion of the mucosal surface and ulceration.
Betel -induced lichenoid lesions

Daftary et al. (1980) identified lesions in regular betel quid users at the site of betel quid retention, principally the buccal mucosa and tongue, which histologically showed a lichenoid reaction. These lesions disappeared with the cessation of betel nut use.

Leukoplakia, erythroplakia and oral submucous fibrosis

Oral leukoplakia can be defined as a predominantly white patch on the oral mucosa that cannot be characterized clinically as another lesion (Axell et al. 1984). Various types of leukoplakia exist, including speckled, nodular and verrucous leukoplakia (Trivedy et al. 2002). Erythroplakia is a bright red velvety patch on the oral mucosa that cannot be characterized as another condition (Hashibe et al. 2000).

There is extensive evidence of oral leukoplakia among betel nut chewers who chew with or without tobacco. Ikeda et al. (1996) reported the prevalence of leukoplakia in selected Cambodian populations was 2.2% among men and 0.6% among women. Several studies report that the prevalence of oral leukoplakia appears particularly high in Papua New Guinea (4.6%-17%), with the prevalence in the Papua New Guinea lowlands being among the highest in the world (Pindborg et al. 1968; Forlen et al. 1965; Atkinson et al. 1964; Bailit et al. 1968; Thomas 1993; Newell 2002).

A significant dose-related relationship of the frequency and duration of betel nut chewing has been demonstrated for both erythroplakia and leukoplakia (Gupta 1984; Hashibe et al. 2000; Lee et al. 2003).

A malignant transformation rate for oral leukoplakia of 0.1%–17.5% is reported in the literature (Van der Wall et al. 2002). Downer and Petti (2005) calculated the global incidence of oral cancer incidence due to leukoplakia was 6.2–29.1 cases for every 100 000 people. Lee et al. (2003) reported a statistically significant interaction between betel nut and tobacco in the causation of oral leukoplakia.

Oral submucous fibrosis (OSF) is characterized by persistent and recurrent stomatitis leading to progressive sclerosis of the dermal and muscular tissue of the oropharynx (Norton 1998). Early stages may present with fibrotic bands across the palate which progress to other areas of the oral mucosa and the oropharynx. Advanced stages are characterized by restricted oral opening and protrusion of the tongue, making eating, swallowing and speech difficult (Rajendran 1994). Betel nut chewing is now widely accepted as the most important etiological factor in the development of OSF (Warnakulasuriya et al. 1997).

OSF also has shown a malignant transformation rate of between 3% and 7.6% (Pindborg et al. 1984; Murti et al. 1985; Sinor et al. 1990). Murti et al. (1985) followed a group of patients with OSF for 17 years, after which the malignant transformation rate of OSF was 7.6%. Given that oral cancer can take many decades to develop, it is possible that these studies may underestimate the long-term malignant transformation rate.

Oakley et al. (2005) reported a significant number of high school students in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands presented with oral lesions associated with betel nut and tobacco use. Oral leukoplakia was present in 12.9% of students while 8.8% had OSF (one third of whom already showed a restriction in mouth opening). Cessation of betel nut and tobacco use has been shown to decrease the severity of lesions, sometimes leading to their complete resolution (Gupta et al. 1995).

Oral cancer

Cancer of the oral cavity is the sixth most prevalent cancer worldwide (Hamner et al. 1986; Parkin et al. 2005), with squamous cell carcinoma accounting for between 90% and 99% of all oral cancers (Pindborg 1980; Jamrozik 1985; Forastiere et al. 2001). In 2002, oral cancer cases were estimated at 274 000 worldwide, almost two thirds of which were men. Melanesia is reported to be the Region with the highest incidence -- 31.5 per 100 000 in men and 20.2 per 100 000 in women. This compares with an incidence in Australasia of 10.2 per 100 000. Australasia is defined as Australia, New Zealand, New
Review of Areca (Betel) Nut and Tobacco Use in the Pacific

Guinea and neighbouring islands. The average mortality is commonly less than half the incidence (Parkin et al. 2005); however, the mortality rate from oral cancer in the Federated States of Micronesia and Melanesia is significantly higher. Barton et al. (2001) reported that 80% of the people with cancer in Papua New Guinea will die of the disease. The Micronesian oral cancer cases that received treatment at the Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii, reviewed by Carpenter et al. (2005), had a 67% mortality rate.

The use of tobacco and alcohol are the major etiological factors in the development and recurrence of treated oral cancer in Western populations. Detailed evaluations are available elsewhere for the role of tobacco and alcohol in the etiology of oral cancer (IARC 1985b; IARC 1988; NIH 1992). Individually, regular use of tobacco and alcohol increase the risk of developing cancer and the recurrence of treated oral cancer by about sixfold (Silverman 1972). When tobacco and alcohol habits coexist, they act synergistically to increase the risk of oral cancer dramatically to a multiple of each individual risk factor (Rothman & Keller 1972).

The association between the use of betel nut and oral cancer has been known for many years (Orr 1933; Eisen 1946). The International Agency for Research on Cancer conducted an extensive review of the available literature on betel nut chewing in the production of the 2004 monograph “Betel-quid and Areca-nut chewing and some Areca-nut-derived nitrosamines”. The evaluation, based on expert opinion and the available literature, resulted in the following conclusions (IARC Monograph 2004, p.239):

- Betel quid with tobacco is carcinogenic to humans (Group 1)
- Betel quid without tobacco is carcinogenic to humans (Group 1)
- Areca nut is carcinogenic to humans (Group 1)

This evaluation was based on strong evidence of betel nut causing the precancerous condition, OSF, and sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals. There was also strong supporting evidence. The IARC linked oral cancer to the use of betel quid without tobacco and oropharyngeal cancers to betel quid use with tobacco.

Commonly, 70% of oral squamous cell carcinomas present in just 20% of the oral mucosa. However, the dominant site differs greatly among countries. In Western countries, the floor of the mouth and tongue are the most common sites, but betel-associated lesions usually present in the buccal mucosa from the corner of the mouth posteriorly and the lateral border of the tongue (Thomas & MacLennan 1992). This finding was supported by Endican et al. (2010) in their review of the oral cancer cases treated at Goroka General Hospital, Papua New Guinea, between April 2008 and August 2009, where over 97% of cases were located in these sites within the oral cavity.

Pacific studies

The Federated States of Micronesia

Palafox et al. (2004) reported that the age-adjusted cancer prevalence for the Federated States of Micronesia during the period 1985-1998 showed marked geographical variation. Yap showed the highest oral cancer prevalence of 22.1 per 100 000. The other states had much lower prevalence rates with Kosrae 7.9, Pohnpei 6.2 and Chuuk 3.8 per 100 000.

The Yap Memorial Hospital medical records reported oral cancer represented the second most common cancer at 14.1% of all cancer cases between 2000 and 2002 and 7.7% of cancer deaths between 1998 and 2002.
**Guam**

Early studies in Guam suggested betel nut chewing posed no increased risk of oral cancer (Wells 1925; Gerry et al. 1952) or that the risk of oral cancer from betel nut chewing was equivalent to the risk posed by tobacco use (Haddock 1981). Commonly, the study’s subjects were Chamorro, who had used betel nut alone, not in combination with other ingredients. However, since the Compact of Free Association (United States Public Law 99–239, 1986), there has been significant immigration from the Federated States of Micronesia, which may have changed the risk profile of oral cancer.

The Guam Cancer Registry 2003-2007 ranks oral cancer as tenth in cancer incidence for Guam (Guam Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition 2009). Oral cancer incidence is higher for males (sixth in incidence). Deaths due to oral cancer were ranked ninth in cancer-related mortality for both men and women.

The Guam Cancer Registry also reports a large variation in the age-adjusted incidence of oral cancer among ethnic groups; Micronesian (29.4) and Caucasians (26.7) had a very high incidence, Chamorro (18.0) had a high incidence and other ethnic groups had significantly lower oral cancer incidences: Filipino 2.7, Asian 6.2 and USA 10.3.

It has been suggested these statistics may be skewed slightly because Micronesians may travel to Guam for medical treatment. However, even taking this into consideration, the etiology behind the differences in oral cancer incidence rates should be explored further. The frequency of betel nut use and the mode of use, i.e. with or without tobacco, definitely should be considered in determining the factors that contribute to the difference in incidence rates (Haddock 2005).

**Papua New Guinea**

Oral cancer in Papua New Guinea has been known and reviewed for many years (Eisen 1946; Backhouse 1955). The Tumor Registry of Papua New Guinea was established in 1958, and within six years Atkinson et al. (1964) reported a disproportionately high incidence of oral cancer in the country (17.4%) and a distinct geographical variation in oral cancer prevalence. A higher incidence of oral cancer was shown to closely match areas of betel nut use.

Thomas (1993) provides a thorough discussion and extensive literature review of the etiology, geographical distribution and incidence of oral carcinoma in Papua New Guinea. Notable features are the high incidence of oral cancer there, particularly in men, where it is the most frequently reported cancer and a distinct geographical variation in prevalence. The annual average reported oral cancer rate per 100 000 for the highlands was 3.5 for men and 1.9 for women compared with 50.7 for men and 21.8 for women in island provinces. Typically, oral cancer was most prevalent in the 45-year age group, which is 20 years earlier than Western populations (Coates & Armstrong 2000). Further, it was site-specific with the site of tumor presentation corresponding to the site of lime application in 77% of reviewed cases. Typically, cases of oral cancer presented very late when the disease was well advanced and difficult, if not impossible, to treat (Thomas 1993).

In a further case-controlled study of cancer cases in Papua New Guinea, Thomas et al. (2007) showed that betel quid is an independent risk factor for the development of oral cancer (Thomas et al. 2007).

Barton et al. (2001) reported the high mortality rate from oral cancer in Papua New Guinea because of the late presentation of cases and lack of knowledge of the availability of treatment. The authors reported 80% mortality from all types of cancer in Papua New Guinea. Endican et al. (2010) reported 80% of the oral cancer cases presenting at Goroka General Hospital between 2006 and 2008 had been in the third or fourth stage.
Oral cancer incidence in the highlands has been increasing dramatically along with the increase in betel nut use, and Barton et al. (2001) reported an impending epidemic in oral cancer in the highlands of Papua New Guinea. One specialist interviewed for the report stated there was already an oropharyngeal cancer epidemic at the Kudjip Health Centre (Dr Bill McCoy, cited Barton et al. 2001, p. 14).

**Palau**

The Palau Cancer Registry reported an oral and pharyngeal cancer incidence rate of 11.5 per 100,000 between 1991 and 1995. A dramatic increase was reported between 1997 and 2002 when the incidence rose to 18.0. The Oral Health Division reports that these figures may be underestimates because cases only are registered if there is a formal diagnosis in Palau. Suspected cases that are referred for treatment and formally diagnosed elsewhere may not be registered (Palau Ministry of Health 2005).

**The Marshall Islands**

Palafox (2004) reported that the oral cancer prevalence for the Marshall Islands was 12.6 per 100,000 between 1985 and 1998. While this is lower than other regions in the Pacific, it is still a significant figure and could reflect a trend towards higher incidence associated with increasing betel nut use.

**Solomon Islands**

Reed (1977), in his review of the age-adjusted cancer incidence in Solomon Islands in the mid-1970s, reported cancer of the lip, mouth and pharynx represented 15% of all cancers. This percentage was significantly higher than the histologically-proven oral cancers diagnosed in the Honiara Central Hospital, which accounted for 9% of malignancies in men and 8% of malignancies in women.

Wilson et al. (1983) estimated the annual reported incidence of oral cancer in Solomon Islands as 10 per 100,000 between June 1980 and July 1983, while the annual incidence of histologically-proven oral cancer was five per 100,000.

A small case-control study of oral cancer showed that the group identified as the highest consumers of betel nut had a significantly greater risk of oral cancer than those who did not chew betel nut or only chewed occasionally (Wilson et al. 1983). It also was shown that chewers who added lime had five times the risk of those who did not add lime.

In a review of 48 newly diagnosed cases of oral cancer between 1994 and 1997 and in 1999, Lumukana and King (2003) reported the annual incidence ranged from seven to 13 cases per 100,000.

**Treatment for oral cancer**

The treatment for oral cancer usually involves surgical removal of the lesion with or without radiotherapy (Bhandary 2003). Chemotherapy as an adjunctive therapy recently has been used to reduce the invasiveness of oral cancer and improve the survival rate. A recurrence rate of 80%-90% for oral cancers treated with aggressive surgery alone has been reported at Goroka General Hospital, Papua New Guinea (Endican et al. 2010).

Traditionally, oral cancer that is diagnosed and treated early has a good prognosis and outcome. However, oral cancer can spread rapidly along tissue planes, invade bone and muscles and show a high rate of lymphatic spread (Bhandary 2003). Bhandary reported a five-year survival rate of 86% for patients treated within a month of becoming symptomatic as opposed to 47% for those treated within seven months. None of the patients who waited for 12 months for treatment survived.
Even among those successfully treated for oral cancer, many have a significantly reduced quality of life as a result of their cancer treatment (BDA 2000). Subsequent alterations in appearance and difficulties in eating, drinking, swallowing and speaking can have devastating consequences for those affected.

Carpenter et al., in their review of the Tumor Registry (1977–2003) of the Tripler Army Medical Center in Hawaii, which provides tertiary care for remote Pacific island nations, concluded that “betel nut induced oral carcinomas are aggressive malignancies requiring aggressive treatment and long-term follow-up” (Carpenter et al. 2005, p.158). In particular, first and second stage betel nut-induced oral carcinomas, particularly those in the buccal mucosa, behaved more invasively than normally would be expected and therefore required adjunct therapy to surgery alone as well as intensive and long-term follow-up (Carpenter et al. 2005).

Barton et al. (2001) reported that a significant barrier to obtaining treatment for oral cancer in Papua New Guinea was the general lack of knowledge about cancer in the country. “Few people in the community knew what cancer was, how it was caused, and that treatment was available”, (Barton et al., 2001, p. 14). This lack of awareness was demonstrated at all levels of society, from community health workers through to government. Therefore, increasing general awareness of oral cancer in Papua New Guinea is regarded as an integral part of treatment for oral cancer.

**Other Cancers**

Betel nut chewing has been associated with a higher risk of other cancers. Rajkumar et al. (2003) demonstrated a significant association between chewing more than five betel quids a day (with or without tobacco) and cervical cancer.

Chewing betel quid without tobacco has been demonstrated to be associated with an increased risk of liver cancer in a dose-dependent manner (Tsai et al. 2001). This increased risk was demonstrated after controlling for sex, age, alcohol, smoking, drinking, anti-hepatitis C virus (anti-HCV) and hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg). The association of betel nut chewing and liver cancer may be important in Yap, where liver cancer was the most prevalent cancer (15.6% of total cancer cases) between 1998 and 2002 and the leading cause of death by cancer (23.1% of cancer deaths) between 2000 and 2002 (Taoka et al. 2004).

The highlands of Papua New Guinea already have a high incidence of liver cancer because of a high rate of hepatitis B infection (WHO 1998). The increased prevalence of betel nut use may further increase the burden of liver cancer in this region.

A recent study of women in northeastern India identified betel nut use as an important risk factor in the development of breast cancer (Kaushal et al. 2010). The risk factors of tobacco smoking, tobacco chewing, betel quid chewing and alcohol were analysed in 117 breast cancer cases and 174 cancer-free controls, and betel quid chewing was reported as the main risk factor for the development of breast cancer. Also, women with a betel quid chewing history had five times the risk of contracting breast cancer than those who did not chew betel nut (Kaushal et al. 2010).

**Other Effects**

**Cardiovascular and respiratory effects**

Studies in humans suggest betel nut chewing is associated with activation of the sympathetic pathway, with elevation of adrenaline and noradrenalin (Chu 1995) and, in higher doses, the parasympathetic pathway (Chu 1994). The resulting symptoms can range from tachycardia, palpitations, tachypnea or dyspnea, hypotension to acute myocardial infarction. Usually the effects of betel nut use are mild and transient. However, acute betel nut toxicity and subsequent death has been reported (Deng et al. 2001).
Bronchoconstriction and aggravation of asthma have been demonstrated in betel nut chewers (Kiyingi 1991; Kiyingi & Saweri 1994). The authors of the paper recommend that asthma sufferers avoid using betel nut.

The long-term use of betel nut on respiratory and cardiovascular health remains unclear. Singh (1994) warns against betel nut chewing before the administration of a general anesthetic.

The detrimental effect of tobacco on cardiovascular and respiratory health is well documented (IARC Monograph Vol. 37 1985, NIH, 1992). A recent meta-analysis of cardiovascular disease (CVD) in Taiwan concluded there is an association between betel nut chewing with or without tobacco and the risk of CVD and betel nut use may even impose a greater risk of CVD than smoking (Zhang et al. 2010).

The development of a betel nut habit also may increase the use of tobacco and thereby increase its adverse effects on cardiovascular and respiratory health.

**Adverse pregnancy outcomes**

Acute and chronic fetal exposure to betel nut has been associated with placental abnormalities, spontaneous abortion, lower birth weight of infants and preterm birth (Yang et al. 2001). These occurrences are further exacerbated by the use of tobacco with betel nut during pregnancy (WHO 1999). Animal studies have shown prenatal betel nut exposure can produce tetragenic effects (Sinha et al. 2001).

In a study on the effect of maternal betel quid exposure during pregnancy on birth outcomes among aborigines in Taiwan, Yang et al. (2008) reported that betel quid chewing during pregnancy has a substantial effect on a number of birth outcomes, including sex ratio at birth (fewer males born), lower birth weight and reduced birth length (Yang et al. 2008).

Senn et al. (2009) in a study of betel nut chewing among pregnant women of Madang Province, Papua New Guinea, reported betel nut chewing had a statistically significant impact on birth weight reduction. The main reasons for pregnant women chewing betel nut were reported as a means of preventing morning sickness and preventing a foul-smelling mouth. Fully 80% of the women thought that chewing betel nut would not have any effect on the fetus (Senn et al. 2009).

**Dependency, addiction and withdrawal**

Chronic daily use of betel nut has been demonstrated across many cultures (Gupta et al. 2002). Frequent heavy users often experience withdrawal symptoms, which may include anxiety, mood swings, irritability, paranoia, lack of concentration, sleep disturbance and increased appetite (ADF 2006). Evidence of the development of tolerance to betel nut and betel quid has been shown (Winstock et al. 2000), with the effects of betel nut use being stronger for first-time or occasional users than for habitual users.

Burton-Bradley (1966) identified three syndromes associated with frequent betel nut use -- habituation, addiction and toxic psychosis. Using tobacco with betel nut significantly increases its addictiveness. In one Indian study, dependence on betel nut was demonstrated in 38.8% of those who used betel nut alone as opposed to 79.6% who used it with tobacco (Velayudhan et al. 1999). Ysaol et al. (1996) also reported heavier usage of betel nut among tobacco users in Palau. Winstock et al. (2000) reported that typical dependency symptoms in users of betel quid with tobacco included difficulty abstaining, lethargy, headache and sweating on withdrawal. Symptoms were relieved by partaking of betel quid and continual sequential use, analogous to chain-smoking.

Some studies have reported cases of neonatal withdrawal syndrome in infants born to chronic betel nut users and arecoline, the principal neuroactive alkaloid in betel nuts, has been found in the placental tissue (Garcia-Agar et al. 2005; López-Vilchez et al. 2006).
**Mental illness**

Burton-Bradley (1966) reported that the use of betel nut may be associated with acute, reversible toxic psychosis with subsequent auditory hallucinations and delusions. This was a rare occurrence found in susceptible people. Errington (1970) reported that people of the Duke of York Islands in Papua New Guinea used particular nuts to promote visions and spiritual access.

Sullivan et al. (2000) reviewed schizophrenia patients in Palau and reported a beneficial effect on the primary symptoms of schizophrenia in people who chewed betel nut. They suggested the benefits were caused both by the muscarinic agonist actions of the arecoline along with some social functions of betel nut chewing.

**Diabetes and glucose intolerance**

The use of betel nut has been linked to the development of hyperglycemia and diabetes mellitus, both experimentally in the laboratory (Boucher et al. 1994) and in human case studies (Tung et al. 2004): “This association is dose-dependent with respect to the duration of betel nut use and the quantity of betel nut chewed per day”. Mannon et al. (2000) demonstrated an association between chewing betel nut and increased waist size and weight, factors known to be related to the development of glucose intolerance and diabetes. Paulino (2009) found betel nut chewers in Guam were 5.7 times more likely to be obese than nonchewers (Paulino 2009).

Using betel nut may further exacerbate complications due to diabetes. Tseng (2008) reported betel nut chewing was significantly associated with hypertension in Taiwanese patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus, and the association was stronger in women (Tseng 2008).

Hsin-Fen et al. (2010) demonstrated the first in vitro evidence of a betel-quid-induced change in fat cell metabolism that could help explain the mechanism by which betel nut chewing could cause metabolic syndrome disorders.

A further study suggested that exposure to paternal betel quid chewing also increased the risk of early-onset metabolic syndrome in human offspring in a dose-dependent manner (Chen et al. 2006).

The association between betel nut use and diabetes mellitus is particularly relevant to many Pacific island communities already struggling to cope with the growing burden of diabetes. There is a misconception by some users of herbal medicine that betel nut use is a treatment for diabetes (Benjamin 2001; and Dennie Iniakwala, pers. comm.), rather than a causal agent or associative factor.

Benjamin (2001) concluded, after reviewing the literature and conducting a community screening in Papua New Guinea that betel nut chewers have high fasting capillary blood glucose and diabetics should therefore be advised not to chew betel nut. Tobacco, whether chewed or smoked, also has been implicated in the development of, and increased severity of, complications in diabetes mellitus (Kawakami et al. 1997; Persson et al. 2000). Concurrent use of both betel nut and tobacco could significantly increase an individual's risk of developing diabetes mellitus.

**Communicable diseases**

Concern has been expressed that the frequent expectoration of excess saliva caused by chewing betel quid poses an environmental health hazard (Emi Chutaro, pers. comm.; Divi Ogaoga, pers. comm.). Saliva may contain bacterial and viral matter, thereby providing a vehicle for disease transmission.

Tuberculosis, a bacterial infection transmitted by inhalation of infected particles, is prevalent in many Pacific island communities (WHO 2006). The control of spitting and coughing in infected people is advised to minimize the possibility of disease transmission. The spitting of excess saliva as a result of betel nut chewing may provide a significant vehicle for infection in countries with a high prevalence of betel nut use and tuberculosis infection.
Sputum receptacles, which frequent chewers of betel nut may carry with them or leave lying around, may contain viable viral particles of hepatitis B or C.

Oral lesions associated with betel nut can provide an infection pathway for blood borne diseases.

**Dietary effects**

The use of betel nut affects the diet in three main ways. Firstly, the ingredients contained within the betel nut chew supply some dietary nutrients. Weegels et al. (1994) reported betel nut contains a negligible amount of protein and energy, which could play a role in the diet of consumers of very high quantities of betel nut. P. betle leaf contains large amounts of carotenes (80.5mg/g) and some vitamin C (1.9mg/g), (Wang & Wu 1996) Inclusion of the leaves in the betel quid may be an important source of carotenes if the leaves are swallowed.

Secondly, the physiological effects of betel nut use may affect the consumption and absorption of nutrients consumed as part of the regular diet. Finally, betel nut and the associated betel quid ingredients may be bought in preference to nutritious food.

How significant these factors are in affecting an individual’s overall diet will depend on many variables, including the general basic diet, level of addiction to betel nut, relative price of betel nut and associated products and frequency of use.


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Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Dr Donna Kennedy Langly in collaboration with the Tobacco Free Initiative unit of the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific. The review of this report and the development of recommendations were done through key informant interviews conducted in 2006 and during the Meeting on Control of Betel Nut and Tobacco Chewing held in Manila, Philippines in August 2010. In this regard, we recognize the outstanding contributions of the following:

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