THE IMPACT OF MODERNIZATION ON THE AGED IN AMERICAN SAMOA

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ABSTRACT.Research was conducted in American Samoa in 1976 to investigate the effects of modernization on the aged in recent years. Interviews with eighty-five aged Samoans plus participant observation revealed that their status remains relatively high, although there are signs of potential problems. A major consideration in planning services for Samoan elders should be recognition of the effective support network of the Samoan family and its role in the retention of this high status by the aged.

Prior to the 1970s anthropological research on aging was very limited (Clark 1967; Holmes 1976): but in recent years evidence of anthropological interest in the study of aging and the aged has become increasingly visible. Several major volumes have appeared (Amoss and Harrell 1981; Cowgill and Holmes 1972; Fry 1980; Holmes 1983; Keith 1982; Sokolovsky 1983) reflecting a wide variety of research interests--status and role, community studies, networks, homes for the aged, retirement, disengagement, ethnicity, longevity, culture, and personality, for example. Holmes (1983) provides a comprehensive review of this growing body of data.

A theory which has emerged from some of this cross-cultural research is the aging and modernization hypothesis, which states that as societal modernization increases the status of the aged will decline (Cowgill and Holmes 1972). Contributions to our knowledge on the effects of such change continue to accumulate (Amoss 1981; Cherry and Magnuson-Martinson 1981; Goldstein and Beall 1981; Bhoads, in press; Van Arsdale 1981). Since the islands of American Samoa have experienced a great deal of change in the direction of modernization in recent years and the traditional status of elders has been reported as very good by anthropologists who investigated the society in earlier years (Holmes 1958, 1972; Keesing 1934; Mead 1928, 1930), field research was conducted there in 1976 to investigate the status of the aged under the changing social conditions. This paper is based on that research.

Although the term "modernization" is widely used by social scientists, there is no general consensus as to its definition. Usually such characteristics as urbanization, industrialization, and increased education are included, with various scholars emphasizing different aspects of the process as significant (Cowgill 1974; Cowgill and Holmes 1972; Inkeles and Smith 1974; Lerner 1958; Palmore and Manton 1974) Cowgill's conceptualization seems most appropriate:

> Modernization is the transformation of a total society from a relatively rural way of life based on animate power, limited technology, relatively undifferentiated institutions, parochial and traditional outlook and values, toward a predominantly urban way of life based on inanimate sources of power, highly developed scientific technology, highly differentiated institutions matched by segmented individual roles, and a cosmopolitan outlook which emphasizes efficiency and progress. (Cowgill 1974: 127)

Research on Samoan aging emphasized the four aspects of modernization designated by Cowgill (1974) as most relevant to the aged--health technology, modem economic technology, urbanization, and education.

When compared to the world's most highly modernized societies, American Samoa is not very modern at all. But when placed in context with other Polynesian island areas, specifically Hawaii, Society Islands, Cook Islands, and Tonga, it seems to occupy an intermediate position on a continuum of least modern to most modern. It is difficult to make precise comparisons since reliable, comparable, statistical data are not readily available from all of these areas. We can, however, make approximate comparisons on the basis of general levels of industrial development, the extent of dependence on wage employment, communication and transportation developments, education and medical services available, and so on.

Hawaii, of course, is unquestionably the most modern of these Polynesian islands by any of these measures. It is also the largest in both land area and population. The Society Islands are next in modern development, especially the island of Tahiti. This represents a typical pattern throughout most of Polynesia: major economic development and urban population concentrations tend to aggregate around the government center and major port town. American Samoa is third among these islands in terms of modernization, followed by Cook Islands and Tonga, respectively. Industrial development in these three groups, especially the latter two, has been limited either by lack of natural resources, lack of capital to de-

velop resources into viable market products, or by geographical isolation. American Samoa does have a successful fishing industry with sizeable exports of fish products. Fairbairn (1971) has noted this industry as one of the most highly mechanized in the South Pacific outside of the major industrial areas such as Hawaii and New Zealand.

Tourism is an important source of revenue in all of the island groups considered here, although Hawaii and Tahiti have been most successful in this respect. Again, American Samoa has more tourist traffic than either Cook Islands or Tonga. This is due in part to better access to international transportation and more hotel facilities in Samoa (Inder 1977). Wages are also higher in American Samoa than in the Cooks or Tonga, and in 1974 there was one automobile for every ten Samoans compared to one for every seventy-six Tongans.

Of the five island groups American Samoa is the smallest with its seventy-six square miles (Inder 1977) and has the second smallest population (Crocombe 1973). It is also important to realize that the Samoan islands have very steep, mountainous terrain, which restricts the area available for habitation and business/industrial development. Given these conditions, the degree of modernization in Samoa becomes significant relative to these other Polynesian islands; and as will be described in more detail below, American Samoa has become much more modern relative to its position just fifteen to twenty years ago.

Historical Overview of Contact And Change: Pre-1960

The islands of the Samoan archipelago lie in the west-central portion of the area of the Pacific Ocean known as the Polynesian Triangle, which is bounded by Hawaii to the north, New Zealand to the southwest, and Easter Island to the southeast. Linguistic and archaeological evidence suggest that Samoa, along with Tonga, was one of the earliest settled areas in Polynesia, about three thousand years ago, with initial movement of populations to other Polynesian islands beginning from these island groups (Bellwood 1979; Davidson 1979).

Contact with Europeans reportedly began with the Dutch explorer Roggeveen, when he sailed near Manu'a in 1722. Bougainville, LaPerouse, Kotzebue, and Wilkes also made early contact in Samoa, and these various explorers' descriptions are quoted by Keesing:

> These early visitors found a group of islands which they were moved to describe variously as "l'Eldorado de la Polynesie," "One of the finest countries under heaven," even "the most beau-

> tiful in the Southern Ocean, and consequently in the whole world;" found a people of "colossal" physique, living in villages scattered along the coastline; the degree to which they were at home in their canoes caused the group to be known as "l'Archepel des Navigateurs." (Keesing 1934:24)

Extended contact between Samoans and Europeans began with the arrival of John Williams, a representative of the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) in 1830. He introduced Christianity which has remained the dominant religious denomination in Samoa ever since. The Church was also involved with promoting education, translating and printing the Bible in English, and establishing schools. These first schools were "Pastor's *(faifeau)* schools" in which children were taught reading, writing, and arithmetic (Gray 1960), and Keesing (1934) reports that by 1900 Samoa was approximately 99 percent literate.

In late 1899 there was a partition of the Samoan islands, with control of the four westernmost islands being given to Germany; at the outbreak of World War I in Europe, New Zealand seized control of Western Samoa. The seven eastern islands--Tutuila, Aunu'u, Ofu, Olesega, Ta'u, Swain's Island, and Rose Island--became territorial possessions of the United States, with the Department of the Navy placed in administrative control in 1900. The policy of the Navy in its relationship with the Samoans was one of peaceful coexistence and relative noninterference in Samoan affairs so long as there were no obvious conflicts with U.S. laws. It was supportive of education and facilitated establishment of the public schools, although it was unsuccessful for many years in getting funds from the U.S. government for the Samoan educational system. Public schools had to be supported by local money and thus could not serve all children.

The Naval administration did introduce health services in American Samoa. The Navy surgeon established a dispensary, and the first medical efforts were directed toward inoculation for smallpox and improvement of sanitation in the villages. A hospital was opened in 1912 and a nursing school added at that facility in 1914.

World War II brought increased defense measures and more military personnel to the territory, and for the first time significant numbers of Samoans had opportunities for wage employment. The economic "boom" was temporary, however; when the war ended so did most of these jobs. A few years later, in 1951, American Samoa was transferred into the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of the Interior and a civilian government with an American governor was established.

When Holmes (1958) conducted research in Samoa in 1954, he assessed cultural change relative to earlier observers' recorded reports (Keesing 1934; Mead 1928, 1930) and found that after more than a century of European contact and presence in the islands, Samoan culture had remained relatively stable. The majority of changes had been material items adopted from European culture, but the acceptance of Christianity and the introduction of formal education had been the most significant elements of change through the mid-1950s. This conservatism in Samoa has been noted often by students of Polynesian culture. Holmes (1980) has attributed this stability to the Samoan system of social organization, the *matai* system, particularly the equal opportunity for achievement available to any individual under this system. Hanson suggests that a significant contributing factor in Samoa's stability was the "relatively long period of independence followed by colonial policies of indirect rule . . ." (1973:9), which allowed the traditional system to continue.

Modernization Efforts

In 1960 the U.S. Senate authorized a "study mission" to American Samoa to evaluate and make recommendations regarding the economic, educational, and health systems as well as the general status of the people of the territory. The results of this investigation were published in mid-1961 as a report to the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs (Long and Gruening 1961). About the same time, however, another report appeared in a more widely available source, *The Reader's Digest*, and caught the attention of the American public with its title "Samoa: America's Shame in the South Seas" (Hall 1961). The writer, Clarence Hall, had recently visited American Samoa and sounded the alarm on what he saw as evidence of sixty years of United States' "neglect and apathy" in a fabled paradise. He described wretched sanitary conditions, poor roads, and an inadequate water system, and lamented the Samoans' increased dependence on imported foods. The U.S. government was also chided for inadequacies of the medical system and the schools, in which "a largely untrained and poorly paid teaching force struggles to teach some 5500 eager pupils on the lowest budget (less than $50 per pupil) of any U.S. state or territory in the world" (Hall 1961:112). Although the Senate Committee report had already put the process of change in motion, Hall's article and the subsequent wave of protest from citizens must have encouraged prompt action.

The Senate investigative committee made a number of recommendations for general improvement of the standard of living in Samoa: in-

creased opportunity for wage employment, agricultural improvements, measures for promoting tourism, consolidation of schools, and so on. What followed in the next few years is perhaps best described as an "attack" designed to eradicate all the ills, real or imagined, in American Samoa. Extensive changes were imposed on Samoan society in rapid order. In short, the modern era began in American Samoa about 1962. A number of projects were targeted for completion by mid-1962 when the Fifth South Pacific Conference was to be held in the territory. These first-priority projects included expansion of the airport facilities with a 9,000-foot runway capable of handling large jet aircraft, an auditorium with a seating capacity of 800 persons, a paved road from town to the airport, expanded electric power facilities, and three new high schools (American Samoa, *Annual Report,* 1962).

Over the next few years other changes were implemented. The school system was consolidated as recommended, and twenty-six new grade schools were constructed. Governor H. Rex Lee, who was charged with implementing this vast program of change, also decided that introduction of an educational television system was the best means for rapidly improving educational standards for both teachers and students. This ETV program initially involved only grades 1-8, but soon expanded to include the high schools. Within a few years television programming included more and more taped, entertainment-oriented shows from the U.S., and families acquired their own sets for viewing at home.

Health and sanitation standards were also important aspects of the rehabilitation campaign, with major efforts directed toward eradication of filiriasis (American Samoa, *Annual Report,* 1966). Other health measures introduced were dental care education and a family-planning program; and in 1968 the new 200-bed Lyndon B. Johnson Tropical Medicine Center opened on Tutuila with U.S. Public Health physicians in charge.

The most dramatic changes, however, were in the economic sphere. While a tuna cannery had been established by Van Camp in 1954, it provided employment for only about 350-400 Samoans (Long and Gruening 1961). During fiscal year 1964, a second cannery was built by Star Kist. These industries plus various government jobs have become major elements in the Samoan economy. The completion of a large hotel and improved transportation between Samoa and other major South Pacific cities have also made tourism a more viable industry in American Samoa.

By 1976 when I conducted research in Samoa, these and other changes were evident. Samoans were working primarily in the wage-labor market, where the minimum wage level was $1.05-$1.42 per hour. With the increased availability of wage employment opportunities, fewer people

were engaged in agricultural activities. Imports of food had become increasingly important as had demands for other products such as automobiles, television sets, clothing, and so on. A few specialty shops selling ready-made clothing, shoes, or sports equipment have opened in recent years, and there are now a variety of recreational activities on which Samoans can spend their money--movie theaters, night clubs, a bowling alley, a golf course, and tennis courts.

The educational system now ranges from early childhood education for preschoolers through two years of college, with many young Samoans also attending U.S. colleges on scholarships. Housing has become increasingly western; when a major hurricane damaged many of the traditional *fale* (houses) in 1966, the government offered free replacement housing constructed of concrete blocks, and this trend has continued. The population in 1974 was about 30,000, which represented an increase of 45% since 1960 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983; Marcus et al. 1974). This increase seems largely due to improved health services and reduction of infant mortality.

Telephone service is available on Tutuila and in the Manu'a group (Ta'u, Ofu, and Olosega), as is television. Improvements in communication and transportation have made many Samoans more aware of happenings within and beyond their own locale and no doubt encourage some of the changes within it. This seems especially true of television (Kaser 1965; Siegel 1979).

Aging In Traditional Samoa

Traditionally, the Samoan concept of age was functional rather than chronological. A person was considered an adult or an old person by virtue of abilities and activities, not because one had attained a certain age. Failing physical strength or other incapacities which precluded active, continued participation in normal activities would result in a person being classified as old. Holmes (1972) found that in 1962 most Samoans thought of a person about age fifty or over as "old."

The old person in Samoa lived in a household that was typically a three-generational unit including at least one married adult child with his or her spouse and offspring. These units varied in size, but in 1954 the average household in Ta'u village had ten to twelve residents (Holmes 1958). The household does not usually coincide with the *aiga*, or Samoan extended family, which is a much larger group with members in several households and villages. The aiga, however, is the most significant social

grouping in Samoan culture. Defining its membership is far more complex than understanding its function, and there is no more apt description of the meaning of the aiga than Margaret Mead's:

> An *aiga* member is always one's ally against other groups, bound to give one food, shelter and assistance. An *aiga* may ask for any of one's possessions and refuse to take "no" for an answer; usually an *aiga* may take: one's possessions without asking. . . . Under the shadow of these far-flung recognized relationships children wander in safety, criminals find a haven, fleeing lovers take shelter, the traveler is housed, fed, and his failing resources reinforced, property is collected for a house building or a marriage; a whole island is converted into a series of cities of refuge from poverty, embarassment, or local retribution. (Mead 1930:40)

The aiga is headed by the matai (chief), who holds the hereditary title of the descent group. Matai are elected by their aiga, and candidates may be related to that body by either blood, adoption, or marriage (Mead 1930; Grattan 1948; Holmes 1958). A matai has power in his family and in the village, but he: also has a great deal of responsibility. He control+, the communally owned family land and, as Shore (1982:68) explains, "is usually the object of a continual stream of requests from family members who look to him as a source of material, moral, and political support," demands which the matai is obliged to respond to. He is also responsible for the behavior of his family because individual acts, either shameful or prestigious, reflect on the entire aiga, including its matai (Shore 1982).

Traditionally it was expected that children would care for their aging parents by housing them, feeding them, and providing for any other needs. Preparation of favorite foods, assistance with bathing, giving a back rub, or bringing; a coal from the fire to light a pipe were typical of the traditional behavior patterns toward the aged. Samoans would comment that old age was a good time of life, when one received better food and better care. It also was a time when one was "less constrained to maintain a dignified image on ceremonial and social occasions" (Holmes 1972:77).

Old age was a time when one should be treated with great respect. The principle of respect for age in Samoa is clearly exemplified in Fay Ala'ilima's comments:

> In a good Samoan family those below treated those above with deference and respect. Children did not talk loudly in the pres-

> ence of elders. Girls did not speak rudely to the wife of the *matai.* A *matai* held his mother in great regard. A low chief let a high chief have the final speech. . . . The spirit of respect for those above was equally matched with a deep feeling of obligation towards those below. (Ala'ilima 1961:28-29)

Age has also been linked with authority in Samoan culture. Keesing (1934:30-31), in discussing Samoan cultural ideals, mentioned that "age and rank should be respected and obeyed." Margaret Mead stated that, "Within the household, age rather than relationship gives disciplinary authority. . . . The newest baby born into such a household is subject to every individual in it, and his position improves no whit with age until a younger child appears upon the scene" (1928:40). Even beyond their own household an aged person's requests or complaints were expected to be heeded by younger family members in other households (Mead 1928).

Retirement, in the Western sense, was a nonexistent concept in traditional Samoa. Work was neither demanded nor discouraged from those who wished and were able to assist with household tasks. Older Samoans believed that continued participation in some work helped them maintain strength. The activities of the aged have always been valued contributions to their household and village. The role of advisor to the family was an important function of both men and women and they were always consulted when there were decisions to be made concerning the family.

Old men were usually matai (chief), and thus in an authoritative position in the family as well as being involved in the village-wide affairs of the *fono* (village council). Although a matai title could be held for life, some voluntarily resigned in old age but continued to function as advisors to their successors and still attended fono meetings. Braiding sennit, a twine made from coconut-husk fibers, occupied a large portion of an old man's time. This product was needed in great quantity for building traditional Samoan houses, and was also used for fish nets and the fly switch, ceremonial trademark of the talking chief. Their knowledge of legends and customs made old men the recognized authoritative sources of traditional knowledge, history, and genealogy (Holmes 1972).

Weaving of the numerous mats required in the household for everyday use and the delicate fine mats that were essential elements in ceremonial exchanges was a primary role of old women. Some were skilled as midwives and in the use of massage as a treatment technique. Pulling weeds around the house was a familiar task for elderly Samoan women (Holmes 1972). And supervision of the young children while the parents worked

was an important responsibility for older women in the household. When tattooing was more common, they also prepared the pigment used in this process (Holmes 1958).

Margaret Mead (1928) contended that the lives of Samoan women were characterized by more continuity than men's. This opinion is based on the fact that adult women experienced little dramatic change in roles or activities. They raised large families and worked very hard through the middle years. "Then," according to Mead, "as age approaches, she settles down to performing the skilled tasks in the household, to weaving and tapa making" (Mead 1928:193). The skills were not new to her, but she could now devote more time to them and to teaching others. Being homebound would therefore be less threatening to an old woman, in Mead's view, since the household was always her primary domain of authority. She felt that there was more discontinuity for men in the transition to old age since more of their activities were focused outside the home. Consequently, being homebound in later years might seem more restrictive. According to Holmes (1958), however, while "old men have less to do than old women . . . they may often be seen assisting the older women in household tasks. . . . It is not unusual to find an elderly grandfather taking a turn at caring for the small children" (Holmes 1958:57).

Old Age in the Samoa of the 1970s

Since 1962 the American Samoan world has been bombarded with extensive modern changes--increased educational opportunities, improved health care, and especially economic development. These kinds of changes, along with urbanization, have been suggested as those most likely to negatively affect the status of the aged (Cowgill 1974). Most of the change has occurred on the main island of Tutuila, with much less direct change evident in the Manu'a island group, which consists of three much smaller, less populous islands isolated from Tutuila by some sixty miles of ocean. Since there is no industry in Manu'a, subsistence agriculture and some cash-cropping are still important aspects of life there. Retail business consists of a few "bush" stores, which offer a limited range of canned goods and household supplies. Although transportation is somewhat improved in recent years, few outsiders go to Manu'a. In 1976 there were only four non-Samoan residents on Ta'u island.

In order to assess possible differences in status of the aged who are exposed to different levels of modern development, the research reported here focused on the port town and government center around Pago Pago Bay on Tutuila, and on Ta'u island in the Manu'a group. Interviews were

conducted with eighty-five Samoans aged sixty or over--fifty individuals in the Pago Pago area and thirty-five on Ta'u. In Ta'u 54 percent were women and 46 percent men, whereas the urban sample was 58 percent women and 42 percent men. With the exception of one couple in the urban sample, all of those interviewed were living in extended family households with some of their children and grandchildren.

Observations in Ta'u revealed much more involvement with traditional tasks by all residents. The aged still braid sennit and a man was even observed carving oars for use with the village longboat. Pandanus leaves can be seen drying in the sun for later use by the old women in weaving mats. In fact, they make mats to ship to Tutuila as well as for their own household use. Household activities and routines vary little from those reported by Mead (1928) and Holmes (1958). Traditional activities such as weaving and carving were observed in the Pago Pago area only at the craft *fale* (houses), where production of craft items by the aged is part of the Territorial Administration on Aging program. Men and women of sixty years of age or older were being paid $1.25 per hour (in 1976) for making mats, jewelry, or carvings; the items were then sold in a retail shop at the center. Bingo games are now a popular (and sometimes costly) new pastime for some of the aged on Tutuila. Both the old people of Ta'u and Pago Pago function as babysitters, and this role is perhaps of increased importance in the latter setting where parents work long hours away from home even more than in the past.

Some of the questions asked of elderly Samoans in the interviews were based on traditional ideals concerning care and respect associated with old age. Their responses give us some insight into their perceptions of their own current status. In both samples the aged agree that they are more knowledgeable than younger people about ceremonial matters (94 percent, Ta'u; 95 percent, Pago Pago), and that they are respected for this knowledge (97 percent, Ta'u; 96 percent, Pago Pago). They are still consulted (91 percent, Ta'u; 95 percent, Pago Pago) about decisions concerning family problems, weddings, funerals, titles, and so on, although many (97 percent, Ta'u; 75 percent, Pago Pago) think perhaps the young do not take their advice as much as in the past. There is strong agreement (100 percent Ta'u; 98 percent, Pago Pago) that the old are respected and obeyed by younger members of the community.

An interesting difference in the two groups of aged Samoans appeared when 91 percent of the aged in Ta'u said they received better food and care than other family members, whereas only 52 percent in Pago Pago responded positively to this question. When asked if special things are done for them, again it is the elders of Ta'u (97 percent) who answer in

the affirmative, while only 55 percent of those in Pago Pago agree. The contrast here may reflect the more dramatically changed lifestyle in the urban area, where more activities outside the household compete for the time of younger family members.

These are but a few of the indicators of the status of Samoan elders in 1976. Extensive observation and participation in many aspects of life in the two research sites, as well as interviews with younger family members contributed to the total data base. From the standpoint of the cultural ideals regarding old age in Samoa, the aged in both Ta'u and the Pago Pago area still seemed at that time to hold a position of high status relative to the pre-1962 period.

Cultural Support For Status of the Aged

There are several aspects of traditional Samoan culture which continue as viable principles and institutions today and which explain how Samoan elders have managed to retain this status. These are the Samoan kinship or family system (often referred to as the matai system) with its key components the *aiga* (extended family) and the matai; ideas about dependency; and the reciprocity which characterizes Samoan social relationships.

Robert Maxwell (1970) has said that young men of Samoa are less interested in acquiring matai titles than formerly because they feel the system is outdated, ineffective, and interferes too much in their lives. He concluded that the authority of the aged was thereby in jeopardy. Holmes (1967:9) who investigated attitudes of both untitled and titled men at about the same time as Maxwell's study, found that "the *matai* system is changing but not degenerating." David Pitt (1970), who studied the economic system in Western Samoa, found that traditional institutions, which include the matai system, have proven quite adaptable to new economic conditions. Informants in both Samoa and California (Samoan migrants) verified that people do return to the islands to vie for matai titles, and if they are successful in acquiring a title, remain in Samoa even though they may have lived in the U. S. for a long time.

The continued strength of the matai system as an organizing principle in Samoan society is probably largely responsible for the fact that Samoans have retained so much of their traditional culture. This was recognized by the Keesings (1956) years ago and emphasized in 1980 by the Governor of American Samoa, Peter Tali Coleman, who was quoted in a news story as saying, "We cannot open the land to outside ownership, because we protect our culture through the family system and that system is

tied to the land" (Macdougall 1980). Since most Samoan land has thus far been retained by Samoans, and the matai controls aiga land for the family group, this reinforces mutual interdependence of aiga members and perpetuates the extended type of family. The aiga is still very important to Samoans; repeatedly during the research it was observed that almost nothing takes precedence over the needs of the aiga. In some instances, for example, the needs of the aged result in significant alteration of plans by adult children. In one case, a family felt that a daughter, who lived in the U. S. with her husband and children and who planned to remain there, was needed in Samoa to help care for one of her aging parents. The daughter was persuaded to return to the islands to live. The continuation of the family system that commands this kind of loyalty tends to protect the status of the aged.

Another cultural factor that is an advantage for Samoan elders is the Samoan view of dependency. Dependency of the aged does not have the negative connotations in Samoan society that we see in the United States. Americans tend to emphasize independence and self-reliance of individuals, traits which may well create value conflict for those older people who can no longer maintain independence (Clark and Anderson 1967; Hsu 1972). Samoans, on the other hand, expect the old person to be dependent on others, which perhaps eases the transition into old age.

The concept of reciprocity is fundamental in Samoan culture, and it also helps support the status of the aged. Intergenerational age relationships are characterized to some extent by reciprocal obligations. I found that contemporary Samoan high school students, in writing essays on aging, continue to acknowledge the long-standing cultural ideals about these responsibilities of the young for the old. They emphasized that when one is young and totally dependent, the parents and grandparents provide whatever is needed. This is interpreted by these young people as producing a debt to the elders which must be repaid by caring for them in their old age. Their comments reflect the special status of the elderly: "A person who is old is the most important person in the whole family." They also indicate that being old means not having to work unless one wants to, and perhaps having the family do special things like sending an elder to America to visit a migrant child.

There is a recognition of the authoritative aspect of aging, but this too implies reciprocity in that they know those who serve while young will be rewarded for their efforts when they reach old age. Just as family members are obligated to contribute to the matai for a funeral or wedding in the aiga, they are assured by their participation of the matai's concern when the need is theirs. The aiga supports its members, and ultimately all

can expect to receive their share of benefits. Observations in Samoan households confirmed that the comments in the teenagers' essays are not merely lip serve to tradition; the beliefs are still being practiced. The value of this system has also been demonstrated by its continuation among migrant Samoans in the mainland U.S. (Ablon 1970) and in New Zealand (Pitt & MacPherson 1974).

Implications for the Future

Modernization has not come without impact on the aged. There are some indications of change and a few potential problems. Some of the skills of the elders are in less demand today. For example, with changes in house construction there is much less need for old men to make sennit (braided twine). One hears also of matai titles being acquired by younger men somewhat more frequently, usually because of educational achievements. Educational disparities between young and old could conceivably jeopardize the effective advisor role of the aged, especially former matai. Few old women are needed as midwives now; over 90 percent of the births in American Samoa. were hospital deliveries by the mid-1970s (American Samoa Health Coordinating Council, 1978). On the other hand, in 1976 there was an obvious resurgence of interest in ensuring that young Samoans learn more of their own cultural history. The aged are the most likely resource in that area; knowledge of tradition and ritual has proven beneficial to elders in other societies that have experienced cultural change (Amoss 1981; Cool 1980).

A clue to a potential problem area was revealed in the results of the Psychosomatic Symptoms test (PT). This instrument has been used by Alex Inkeles and David Smith (1970) to assess mental health of individuals in six developing countries. The PT test is similar to the Health Opinion Survey (HOS), and the questions concern symptoms such as nervousness, shortness of breath, sleeping difficulties, headaches, heart palpitations, and so on. It is believed that such items "serve as very good indicators of psychoneurotic and psychophysiologic disturbances--that is, those types of disorder which are prevalent in communities at large" (Murphy and Leighton 1965:110-11). Respondents who report more than half of the symptoms are judged to be suffering from psychic stress.

Since it is often stated that urbanization and industrialization have detrimental effects on mental health, we would have expected the symptom reporting level to be higher in the Pago Pago Bay area aged. It was surprising, then, to find that 66 percent of the Ta'u elders reported six or more of the eleven possible symptoms, while only 38 percent did so in

Pago Pago. The average number of symptoms was 6.3 in Ta'u and 4.1 in Pago Pago. Even though Ta'uans continue to live in the most traditional setting available to American Samoans, with all the stability that normally implies, the results of the PT test suggest that the aged of Ta'u are under more stress than their counterparts in the more modern milieu.

It seems possible that the primary stress-producing factor in this instance is the increased rate of emigration of young people from Ta'u to either the main island or to the United States. Census data show that 28 percent of the Ta'u population is between the ages of twenty and fifty-nine, whereas 46 percent of the Pago Pago area population is in this age bracket (Marcus et al. 1974). Observations in Ta'u village confirm a conspicuous absence of young adults past high school age.

The security of the aged inherent in the traditional culture has depended in large measure on the continued support by the younger generations, including their physical presence to do the harder work. It is perhaps becoming more difficult to cope with changes that occur now that the population has been reduced so disproportionately. Major events like weddings and funerals still draw the migrants back temporarily, but minor crises and the routine activities of subsistence must be borne without the characteristic support groups of the past.

The isolation of Ta'u, which has served to protect it from the incursions of drastic change, has become in some ways a handicap. The major economic development in Samoa has largely bypassed Ta'u, with the consequence that most of the young people who want nontraditional, wage-earning jobs must go elsewhere. This situation appears unlikely to change soon, if ever. The high level of psychosomatic symptoms in Ta'u may stem from uneasiness about the future, which is less predictable now, and an apparent lack of viable alternatives to the current situation.

It should be emphasized that these effects of change are not being suggested as serious problems for the aged now, but they may well be signs of possible trouble ahead. Reports of more recent visitors to American Samoa indicate ever-increasing acquisition of American goods and demands for more individual freedom (James Bindon, personal communication, 1983). In my opinion, the more Samoans lean toward American value orientations, the more threatened the status of elderly Samoans will become (Rhoads, in press).

As a territorial possession of the United States, American Samoa is eligible to receive assistance through various government-funded programs, including those for the aged. It must be remembered that these programs have been planned to meet American needs and operate under regulations perhaps more workable on the mainland than elsewhere. In more than

one instance these transplanted programs have been difficult to implement and of little or no value in Pacific island populations. For example, nutrition programs for the aged have posed problems in both Micronesia and Polynesia. Borthwick has reported that

> only in very rare instances do elderly citizens of the Trust Territory live with so little support from their relatives that they require special governmental feeding assistance. In cases of genuine hardship, the entire family not just its older members, who alone would be served by Title VII, would need support. (Borthwick 1979:4)

The same situation would seem to apply in Samoa. And in 1976 the Territorial Administration on Aging in American Samoa was experiencing difficulty in implementing a nutrition program due to conflicts between program regulations and cultural values.

Intergenerational family relationships can be a strong source of support for the elderly. Johnson (1983) describes such a system for Italian-Americans as does Simić (1983) for Yugoslavians. According to Simić (1983:88), even in urban Yugoslavia "intergenerational relationships are also characterized by high levels of continuity and reciprocity." In American Samoa, the strength of the family network and the integration of the aged in that network should be recognized. The reciprocal social relationships still appear to be working well. Whether Samoans, who have been noted for their conservatism (Hanson 1973; Holmes 1980), can continue to maintain these positive support features of their culture in spite of the onslaught of contemporary forces of change remains to be seen.

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