

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Tokelau, Austronesian

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

TKL

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Tokelau comprises three atolls in South Pacific Ocean which are located between 8° and 10° S and 171° and 173° W [1]. They are located approximately midway between Hawaii and New Zealand. Closest island to Tokelau is an island part of Western Samoa.

1.4 Brief history:

“Tokelau traditions assert autochthonous origins; provisional archaeological evidence shows people residing in the atolls one thousand years ago with Samoan and Tuvalu cultural affinities. Oral narratives tell of hostilities among the three atolls which ended when Fakaofu gained ascendancy by conquering Nukunonu and driving off the people of Atafu; until the nineteenth century, explorers found Atafu uninhabited, Nukunonu lightly peopled, and Fakaofu clearly preeminent as the place of the highest chief and the shrine of Tui Tokelau.” [2]

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

“Christian conversion and depopulation in the 1860s brought an end to Fakaofu domination, and each atoll became a tiny theocratic polity. Mission dominance was marginally compromised at the end of the century when the atolls were declared British protectorates. For a brief period (1910-1914) protectorate officials were assigned to the atolls, and in 1916 Tokelau was added to the Gilbert and Ellice Island Colony, then removed when New Zealand assumed responsibility for the atolls on Britain's behalf in 1926. Despite these arrangements, the administration of Tokelau is best characterized as benign neglect until after World War II.” [2]
Tokelau has been governed by New Zealand since 1925 [12].

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The three main islands of Tokelau are: Fakaofu, Nukunonu, and Atafu. Located between Hawaii and New Zealand, the word ‘Tokelau’ means north wind [12]. According to the oral history, this north wind carried the first settlers to the islands of Tokelau. Tokelau’s combined land mass sums up to 6.3 square miles [12]. The atolls have “central lagoons completely enclosed by coral reef which forms the base of islets of sand and coral detritus. Although rainfall is 250 to 280 centimeters annually, rain is apt to be scarce between April and September, causing drought, and tropical cyclones or the swells generated by them at a distance are a hazard between December and March.” [1]

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density:

1410 people in Tokelau but total of 3319 people living in other areas who also speak the language of Tokelau; Churches, meetinghouses and cricket pitch are located in the center of the villages while public structures such as hospitals and schools are built in the peripheral regions of the villages [3]; rectangular houses mostly; villages are densely settled [3].

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Breadfruit, swamp taro, pandanus fruit [4]

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Fishermen mainly; some agriculturalists: coconut, banana, arrowroot

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

There is a clear division among different genders and ages; women make plaited mats, hats, fans, and baskets; women also process and allocate food and take care of her family; men do most of their work outside such as harvesting and fishing; children fetch and carry—they must transmit messages accurately and this task depends on the verbal skills; young adults are assigned with most arduous tasks; elders are managers [4]. Also tasks defined as *fakamua* often involve only all “able-bodied males” but women sometimes do take part in these activities [8 pg. 44]. *Fakamua* tasks take primacy over anything else.

2.6 Land tenure:

“Aside from land vested in the village or one of the churches, all land in Tokelau is controlled by recognized cognatic kin groups who jointly tend and harvest its resources and share its produce. Their land includes one or more house sites within the village, where mature female members of the group normally reside. Everyone in Tokelau has rights to land (or has a spouse with such rights) and thus shares the produce from one or more joint holdings. Since all offspring receive rights from both parents, a person's joint holdings are multiple and the people with rights to any one holding may be many. Such holdings are eventually divided and combined with others likewise divided, thus reducing people's multiple rights and the number of right holders” [4]. When the land is divided within the kin group, it is divided in the names of founders’ children, both living and dead, in equitable shares. Once the initial division is made, it is possible to divide the land again for the subsequent generation [6].

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?:

Canoes are made by local materials; sailing canoes, nets, lines, and fishing hooks were widely used, according to early European travelers [4].

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

The nature and composition of the household is not clear among the people of Tokelau but it is centralized on women. Women run the households. Grown boys rarely sleep at their homes, and children frequently sleep with other kin. Households are variable and flexible, but due to open village settlement, it is easy to locate a person at a given time [6].

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

About two years [6].

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Infants are weaned at the age of year and a half or as soon as their mother get pregnant again [6]. Misbehavior can be punished by any adult and can be severe [6].

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

In the recent years, male homosexuality is criminalized in Tokelau. Women homosexuality is ignored [9].

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

“De facto unions are not tolerated in the villages and the majority of Marriages are village-endogamous” [6]. Order of *kaiga* or kinship is strictly exogamous [8 pg. 110]. *Kaiga* is “...composed of all those who can trace ancestry to its founders” [8 pg. 111].

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

At times, adoption did occur [13].

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

People of Tokelau disapprove of marrying second cousin [6]. The rule is that the people who hold common rights to the property should not marry each other. If the second cousins marry, the property is divided between them, and they are no longer kin. “Children are taught the importance of their opposite-sex siblings from a very early age, and from adolescence onwards patterns of respect and deference are followed, and from then on until the end of their lives they are observed...How particular brother/sister pairs manifest these qualities in their behavior differs. Some avoid direct speech altogether, others speak but avoid eye contact, still others converse quite freely but avoid any joking or banter, even with a third party, in the other’s presence” [8 pg. 119].

There is a tension between women and their husbands’ sisters but they are relaxed with their husbands’ brothers. This is the same with the men, and they are relaxed with their wives’ sisters but constrained with wives’ brothers [8 pg. 120].

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

According to oral history, the warfare occurred among the three main islands of Tokelau, with Fakaofu establishing authority over Nukunonu and Atafu [12]. But with the introduction of church and missionaries' arrival, the warfare ceased. Today the governance among these three islands is a cooperative one.

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

5.4 Post marital residence:

Uxorilocal; women stay in her house with her family while men leave their houses [6].

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

"The men's house is a special development in the Tokelau sa organization. This large blood group is found in most western Polynesian societies, but outside the Tokelau and Ellice Islands the definite institution of the men's house is not evident. The building of the Tokelau and Vaitupu men's houses along the sea walls is typical of the location of council houses at Mokil in Micronesia" [13 pg. 162].

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

"Each village has a ruling council made up of male elders and/or heads of recognized kin groups. Two elected officials are part of this body: a political representative of the village to the administration and the mayor or manager of village activities. In the villages, the council has very considerable authority—making local regulations and enforcing them and deciding, directing, and regulating all village activities. Numerous other groups operate in the village context under the direction of the council. The male work force, made up of all able adult men, maintains and improves village amenities, provides food for the village and/or its guests, etc., at the direction of the elders or at their own initiative. The women of the village complement the male work force, undertaking tasks and projects in the female domain such as mat plaiting and village housekeeping under the direction of the elderly matrons. For other purposes, each village is divided into two competing sides. Organized groups within the churches partially replicate the secular organization (e.g., deacons or elders and women's committees). More ephemeral groups are organized from time to time and are recognized by the elders as "clubs" of one kind or another. This scheme of village organization applies to all three Villages, but it takes particular forms in each" [6].

5.12 Trade:

Copra has been the main source of cash in Tokelau and has been used to import kerosene, soap, tobacco, cloth, flour, rice, and sugar [4].

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

"Tokelau villages are very tightly Controlled and basically egalitarian. This order is achieved by a dominating age hierarchy based on the precept that wisdom is acquired with years and therefore elderly people should decide, direct, and supervise. In short, authority comes with age, and in principle anyone will have authority in due course, if he or she lives long enough. Men ultimately have a wider sphere of authority than women, controlling the affairs of the village as a whole. But Tokelau matrons can be very domineering and are not easily dismissed by their male counterparts" [6].

"The hierarchy of authority in a Tokelau village is clear and pervasive. Anyone older is entitled to command anyone younger, and the younger person is expected to comply. Between people of nearly equivalent age a younger person will usually defer to one slightly older, but the older will rarely issue commands. However, as the age gap between younger and older widens, the more likely it is that interaction will be characterized by command and compliance, and when a person reaches the status of elder or matron, roughly sixty years of age, he or she is accorded respect and may have a commanding position within the village" [8 pg. 46]. This system is in one sense an egalitarian one.

"...etiquette of respect requires a person entering an elder's presence to approach quietly, to sit formally, with crossed legs, and to remain silent until spoken to...Elders are continually being consulted, asked permission, appraised of intentions by others, who are seeking approval and sanction for their plans" [8 pg. 47].

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Christianity has been a major religion among Tokelau people since the latter half of nineteenth century. The religion in the past is not well known.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Hospitals are long-standing village institutions in Tokelau. Most people go to the hospitals when they become ill. "Certain local people are recognized masseurs whose skills are sought to relieve or correct various conditions. Although herbal remedies and other "medicines" are used, there are few specialist healers of this sort" [7].

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

“Entering into the village involves more than just being present there, it means taking part, joining in, working and playing with compatriots, and submitting to the *pule* ‘authority, control’ of village life. Most people ‘enter into’ the village by birth; a few join it permanently by marriage or temporarily as visitors hosted by kinsmen” [8 pg. 40].

6.4 Other rituals:

Rhetorical speeches are prominent part of Tokelau’s meetings [8 pg. 41].

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

Four features are important during the ceremonies: prayer, food, games, and entertainment. Entertainment includes a feast, a church service, a cricket match, a song-dance evening, and many more [7]. Performing art is the most prominent among Tokelau arts, and new performances are continually created for song-dance repertoire. Comic skits are also popular, and many older women organize these. Tokelau music is accompanied by log drums (*pate*), *pokihi* (wooden box), and *apa* (biscuit tin) which are used as percussion [11].

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

Catholic and Protestant missionaries competed during mid-nineteenth century to convert Tokelau people [7].

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

“A death in the village is signaled by the tolling of the church bell, and from then until burial all other activity is in abeyance. The body is laid out in the appropriate family home. Women of the immediate family remain in attendance, their wailing broken by speeches, hymns, and prayers of visitors. Before the body is placed in its coffin, people gather at the house of mourning to take part in final farewells. Following a Christian service, the coffin is transported to the burial ground and placed in a deeply dug grave. After the last rites, all men present give a hand in filling the grave. A period of postburial mourning ends with a feast. The influence of the dead is often remarked on soon after burial: the deceased may bring an abundance of fish, or the deceased’s ghost may be encountered, or the ghost may bring misfortune to kin who do not follow specified instructions. Mainly, however, the dead are considered to be remote, though they are fondly remembered”[7].

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.):

Christian traditionally; “Christian morality is preached in support of Tokelau precepts: respect for elders, obedience to parents, unity of community, equality of all, etc.” [7] “Protestant congregations have pastors, until recently Samoan ones, who have been “invited” by the congregation to “serve.” The governance of each parish is in the hands of local deacons and lay preachers, upstanding male members of the congregation. Catholic congregations have catechists, always Tokelauans, and sometimes host a resident, non-Tokelauan priest”[7].

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: N/A

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification: N/A

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

Hula was worn during ceremonial dances [12].

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

There are three terms in describing siblings: sibling of own sex, male or female; sibling of opposite sex, female; sibling of opposite sex, male. ““mother’s brother” and “sister’s child” are marked terms, as is “father’s sister.”” [5]. Sister-brother system is central for Tokelau. “The Tokelau father’s eldest sister is designated as *matua sa* which corresponds to the term of *ilamutu* used in Manua, Samoa. The Manuan *ilamutu*’s son is termed *tama sa*, but in Tokelau the *tama sa* is the first-born son of a man. The change of the term *tama sa* reflects the great importance attached to the first-born son in matrilineal but patrilineal society and the attempt to emphasize the patrilineal line” [13].

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

Uses Hawaiian-type kinship system.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

- Males are considered as ‘boys’ until they are married, with the exception when they remain unmarried into the thirties [8 pg. 58]. The sense of responsibility that comes from marriage, not the age or the strength, determines when the ‘boy’ becomes a ‘man.’
- “Maopoo is the guiding principal of Tokelau values and is best translated as “a unity of a common purpose that encompasses both body and spirit.” This collective ethos is cultivated through communal activities which include fishing expeditions, construction projects, unloading cargo ships, sports competitions, and music and dance. Maopoo is best exemplified to this day through the practice of inati. On special days during the month all the men in the village fish together. Upon their return, they systematically and ritually divide the catch with all the family clans on the island. The inati system is distinctively Tokelauan and embodies deeply held values of equality and fairness. This inati system continues to this day” [12].

Numbered references

1. “Tokelau—Orientation” <http://www.everyculture.com/Oceania/Tokelau-Orientation.html>
2. “Tokelau—History and Cultural Relations” <http://www.everyculture.com/Oceania/Tokelau-History-and-Cultural-Relations.html>
3. “Tokelau—Settlements” <http://www.everyculture.com/Oceania/Tokelau-Settlements.html>
4. “Tokelau—Economy” <http://www.everyculture.com/Oceania/Tokelau-Economy.html>
5. “Tokelau—Kinship” <http://www.everyculture.com/Oceania/Tokelau-Kinship.html>
6. “Tokelau—Marriage and Family” <http://www.everyculture.com/Oceania/Tokelau-Marriage-and-Family.html>
7. “Tokelau—Religion and Expressive Culture” <http://www.everyculture.com/Oceania/Tokelau-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html>
8. *Tokelau* by Judith Huntsman, Antony Hooper
9. “Homosexuality” by Dennis O’Neil http://anthro.palomar.edu/marriage/marriage_6.htm
10. “Music of Tokelau” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Tokelau
11. “Tokelau” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokelau#Economy>
12. “Tokelau” from Water is Rising <http://www.waterisrising.com/content/tokelau>
13. *Ethnology of Tokelau Islands* by Gordon Macgregor