

## Korowai People of Papua New Guinea

\*If a question is not answered, I could not find any related information on the subject

### 1. Description

- 1.1 Name of society: Korowai      Language: Kaluf-aup      Language family: [Awyu\(-Ndumut\)](#)
- 1.2 ISO code: Khe
- 1.3 Location: live between the Eilanden and Upper Becking rivers, east of the Becking headwaters.
- 1.4 The Korowai are notorious for their tree-hut style housing which was originally used to make a neighboring attack very difficult. They live in dense rainforest in Papua New Guinea relying mainly on sago palms for food source although fish, pigs, and beetles are also in their diet.
- 1.5 Until very recently the Korowai have had no contact with the outside world and many groups of Korowai still resist any contact from outsiders. However they have recently let filmmakers in to their clans to film them. Also recently, in the later 1990's the first convert to Christianity occurred. As far as neighbors, the biggest and most relevant neighbors are the very similar Kombai.
- 1.6 Ecology: Hunter Gatherer society living in the mountainous rainforests. Also practice horticulture relying on a bananas and tubers.
- 1.7 Population size: About 3,500. Mean village size: 20-30 Home range size: Up to 15 in one home.

### 2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple: Sago palm, bananas, tubers, sweet potatoes
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Fish, Pigs, cassowary, Weevle Beetle larva, lizards, little marsupials, bats, birds
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow
- 2.4 Food storage: Very little known food storage
- 2.5 Sexual Division of production: Women beat the sago palms to produce a flour like substance. The males do the big game hunting while children hunt little game such as lizards and smaller rodents.
- 2.6 Land tenure: Distinction between land holding and land using rights. Their territorial decrees are based on their ancestors land. There are portions of land not owned by any clans which are "territories of the spirit"
- 2.7 Ceramics: Any bowls or ceramic like tools made from bamboo and sago palms.
- 2.8 Specified sharing patterns:
- 2.9 Food taboos: Eating the larvae of the Weevil beetle.
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft: Until very recently they do not exist. However recently dugout canoes have been used.

### 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):
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): m-20 or so; f-early teens
- 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?: Yes, often times a pig is common for a bridal purchase.
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Male dominated inheritance.
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Children (*mbambam*) are raised mostly by their mothers and other clan females, and grow up in the females' room. Boys move to the males' room in their early teens.
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: There are no homosexual related practices in the korowai despite the presence of homosexual related initiations and acts in other nearby tribes.
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): marriage is exogamous and polygynous.
- 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: Often young girls who are wives of the older men endure corporal punishment.
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No, in cases of adultery the husband has the right to shoot his wife through the thigh.
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? Other female members of the clan will raise the orphans but the mother's brother is ultimately responsible for the children and is said to be the protector.
- 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? An avoidance relationship exists between a man and his wife's mother. When a man violates the avoidance taboos with his mother-in-law, his children are believed to become ill.

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations. The husband may not adopt his wife's mothers name or even speak of it.

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?) Often a women will marry outside of a community and create friendships with neighbors in doing so.

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Often times the mothers brother will arrange his sisters daughters marriages.

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: Warfare with other clans is rare. But in-group killing can result from adultery, theft, and *khakhua*.

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

4.18 Cannibalism? Yes. In Korowai society, lethal crimes committed by a male *khakhua* (witch doctor), the solution is to kill the *khakhua* and distribute the body parts to the clan to be eaten.

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: 20-30 people.

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): In times of seasonal rains, clans can not hunt and often revert to sacrificing their pet pigs.

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): The patriclan is the basis of social, political and economic organization. Physically, mentally and verbally strong men dominate the clan but their power is not institutionalized nor is it hereditary.

5.4 Post marital residence: Live mostly with the Patriarc.

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): If outsiders enter their region bow and arrows are drawn until the outsiders are able to prove that their intentions are good. Sometimes the invader is killed.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Females are not allowed to participate in rituals.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization: After a certain age (normally about 10), girls are sanctioned off to the girls house and similarly, the guys begin to live in an all boys house.

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): No, mainly just different sections in one big tree house.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Live in specialized tree-houses 10-40 meters off the ground.

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

5.12 Trade: Not much history of any trade considering many clans still use stone axes.

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Perhaps the man with the most wives.

### **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

6 Time allocation to RCR: Not a huge part of daily life. Once a lifetime a Korowai clan must organize a sago grub festival in order to stimulate prosperity and fertility in a ritual fashion. In desperate times, the clan will sacrifice domesticated pigs to the spirits of the ancestors.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): some older women are said to have knowledge of divination and healing techniques. They claim the ability to communicate with ancestral spirits and other spiritual beings in order to neutralize disastrous events, or detect *khakhua*-witches. Some males are known for their knowledge of magical methods for harming objects, places, people, and even entire clans, by burning human residues such as hair or finger-nails, or charmed magical arrow-tips (*ayulekha daup*).

6.2 Stimulants: Tobacco.

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

6.4 Other rituals: When catching a wild pig it is said that its place near the bank of the river whereupon it is shot many times. The next two days, the river is not allowed to be bathed in because it is said that the god is eating and drinking the pigs blood.

6.5 Myths (Creation): According to the myth of origin, the creator spirit Ginol created the universe from the mythical pig Faül's carcass. The first human couple is said to have been originally male siblings who received their offspring after a castration ritual, after which Ginol does not seem to play a further role in humankind's history.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): At least four genres of oral texts are found among the Korowai:

- origin myths (lamolaup) known only by older males,

- folktales (wakhatum), shared by all the people,
- magical sayings (ndafunmahüon) not likely to be known by children,
- totem traditions (laibolekha mahüon) that are commonly known.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Only men perform in the rituals, the women are left out and if the rituals are seen by the women then the ritual is deemed unsuccessful

6.8 Missionary effect: Some of the people converted to Christianity but mostly the Korowai are very resistant to missionaries.

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Korowai believe in the existence of a reciprocal type of reincarnation.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No.

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) Ancestors worship of Ginol Silamtena, the creator spirit.

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Red, black and white body paint in times of ceremony.

7.2 Piercings: Mainly sago, dog teeth or pig teeth piercings through the nose and ears.

7.3 Haircut: Mainly short, very curly hair similar to negrito hair.

7.4 Scarification: Yes.

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

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Paint, piercings, dog/pig teeth necklaces.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## 8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate: Yes. The brother of a deceased man is to marry his widow.

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

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

-The men invert their penises

-The reason they live in tree houses is in fear of head hunting tribes such as the citak. It gives the korowai a tactical advantage being able to see what's coming their way. Being off the ground and into the trees also puts them out of harms way of floods and helps with mosquitos.

-Before any contact with westerners in the 1960's the korowai thought they were the only humans that existed

- To catch fish the korowai dam streams or rivers and beat toxic roots in to the water, momentarily stunning the fish

-Although cannibalism has been known to happen, there have been no recorded cases within the last 60 years

## Numbered references

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