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| **Forced migration in the Marshall Islands – impact on wellbeing & cultural resilience as told through the poetry of youth** |
| **Background**The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is located in the Northern Pacific. Five centuries of colonisation, ballistic/nuclear testing & military expansion have led to forcible (often permanent) displacement of Marshallese. Further, many Marshallese (particularly the young) now migrate to the US to escape stretched resources, overcrowding, poverty & ill health. This has resulted in loss of cultural, socioeconomic & environmental connection, and many face discrimination & poor service access. A mechanism for supporting resilience from such impacts is to develop strategies that build on community strengths. This presentation is grounded in the Marshallese Arts Project - participatory arts workshops in 2017/18 with youth, teachers & community members in the RMI and Honolulu. The use of arts-based practice, and specifically poetry, has resulted in an enhanced understanding of the unique qualities of the young Marshallese experience.**Methods** Poetry workshops by Marshallese performance poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner were conducted with RMI youth in schools: two in the RMI & one in Honolulu, over a 1-2 week period. A total of 57 poems were developed by the students: 35 in the RMI (18 by those from the Bikini community) & 22 by Marshallese in Honolulu. Four research team members conducted discourse analysis and themes were presented back to the education sector stakeholders, to the children and teachers at the schools.**Results** The use of poetry as data revealed themes relating to: kinship & cultural connections, particularly with respect to relationships with grandparents; migration & the Marshallese diaspora; poor health & death; and (commonly adverse) personal experiences. While the themes could be aligned across the different school contexts, there were different relationships expressed in the RMI (gaining and maintaining culture) compared to the US (losing or modifying cultural knowledge and expression). Aspects of cultural identity were also prioritised differently across context. Poetry was presented back to family & community. **Discussion** This project determined the efficacy of poetry-writing for engaging with & documenting the voices of young Marshallese. Artistic expressions of identity & culture can suggest how intrinsic strategies of community resilience might be deployed to build capacity in the future. These strategies are particularly important with further RMI emigration patterns resulting from climate change-related environmental damage.**Keywords** |