

Pacific Island migrants go bush to avoid remittances

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University of Queensland (UQ) researchers have found Pacific Island migrants are moving to rural Australia to avoid remitting earnings to their wider community in their home countries.

Lead researcher Associate Professor Richard Brown said Samoans, Tongans and Cook Islanders have a culture of sharing their income with large families and [extended families](#).

Professor Brown said however Polynesian church and charity groups send delegates to [migrants](#) living in Australian cities to collect funds, some returning home with as much as \$100,000.

“Migrants do not remit exclusively to their own households back home, but they also out of obligation remit to other households and to organisations especially churches, charities and community groups in need of money for particular projects,” Associate Professor Brown said.

“This makes it very difficult for these migrants to save and invest in assets or the education of their own families – this enormous pressure often leads to resentment.”

He said migrants living in rural areas were under less pressure to remit to others besides their immediate families because they were less likely to be visited by these community groups.

The researchers, including UQ Economics Dr Prabha Prayaga and

Monash University Malaysia Associate Professor Gareth Leeves, surveyed almost 1000 migrants and compared the transfer of funds between islanders living in Sydney to those living in regional Riverina in NSW.

The team found migrants in Sydney remitted as much as 32 per cent of their [earnings](#) to community groups while migrants in Riverina remitted only 16 per cent.

"Indeed, there is evidence Pacific Island migrants are choosing to live in more remote, regional areas of [Australia](#) to escape the growing pressures in the larger cities to share their earnings across the wider community," Professor Brown said.

"Migrant's remittances are the most important source of income and foreign exchange to these countries, over three times as great as official foreign aid."

An ARC Discovery Grant funded the research, which was conducted in 2010-11.

Provided by University of Queensland

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