

# Taiwanese Women's Health

## HISTORY

The island of Taiwan is located southeast of mainland China and north of the Philippines.<sup>1</sup> In 1895, military defeat forced China to hand over Taiwan to Japan. However, after World War II, China regained control of Taiwan. The tension between China and Taiwan goes back to the 1949 Chinese revolution when communists claimed control of the mainland.<sup>2</sup> After the communist victory, two million Nationalists fled to Taiwan. The influx of refugees produced resentment between the native Taiwanese and those from the mainland.<sup>2</sup> For the next 43 years, Taiwan remained under martial law and this allowed for the Nationalist government to use its dictatorial powers.<sup>3</sup> During the 1960s, native Taiwanese called for independence from China. In 1988, Lee Teng-hui became Taiwan's first native-born president. While China has long declared that Taiwan is part of its territory, many Taiwanese have pointed to a strong democracy and economy as a sign that Taiwan is an independent, sovereign country.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

In 1999, 16.1% of Taiwanese American women had incomes below the poverty level.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that in 2000 approximately 150,168 Taiwanese lived in the United States, of which nearly 78,472 were

females.<sup>4</sup>

## HEALTH STATUS

It is difficult to characterize the health status of Taiwanese women. First, many studies combine Taiwanese women with other Asian ethnicities. Second, studies often use small sample sizes, making it difficult to generalize findings. And lastly, there is minimal or no data available for certain health issues that are significant to Taiwanese women.

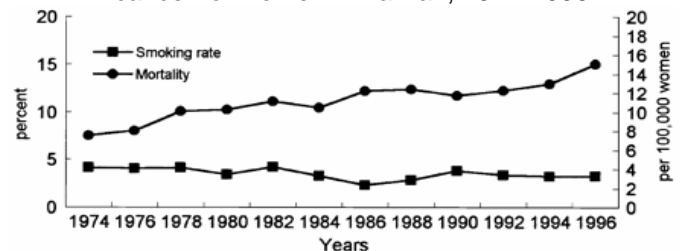
## EATING DISORDERS

A high percentage of Taiwanese female college students are dissatisfied with their body weight.<sup>6</sup> One study found that 51.4% of college females perceived themselves as overweight even though 16.2% of the subjects actually were.<sup>6</sup> Risk factors for eating disorders are high among Taiwanese females.<sup>6</sup> The few reported cases of eating disorders in Taiwan each year may be attributed to inadequate knowledge of the signs and symptoms as well as inadequate assessment of eating behavior.<sup>6</sup>

## SMOKING/LUNG CANCER

The prevalence of smoking has increased dramatically in Taiwan after World War II.<sup>7</sup> In 1994, the estimated number of deaths attributable to smoking in Taiwan for females was 1,216.<sup>7</sup> Lung cancer has been the leading cause of cancer death for Taiwanese females since 1986.<sup>8,10</sup> The mortality rate of lung cancer has increased steadily (see graph).<sup>8</sup> There were nearly 1,350 female deaths from lung cancer per year in Taiwan from 1991-1997.<sup>8</sup> Yet, only 9-10% of females with lung cancer had a history of smoking.<sup>8</sup> Non-smoking females may be involuntarily exposed to tobacco smoke from males (who have a smoking prevalence of 55-62%) or from fumes emitted from cooking oils.<sup>8</sup>

Smoking rate (%) and age-adjusted mortality rate of lung cancer for women in Taiwan, 1974-1996.



## HEPATITIS/LIVER CANCER

Hepatitis is a major public health problem in Taiwan. The prevalence of hepatitis B was 15-20% during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9,15</sup> Many individuals acquire hepatitis B either perinatally or from person-to-person contact during childhood.<sup>9,11</sup> Hepatitis C is often acquired from unsanitary medical practices or blood transfusions.<sup>11</sup> Liver cancer, which is closely related to the hepatitis virus, is the leading cause of cancer death in males and the second leading cause of cancer death in females.<sup>9,10</sup>

## HIV/AIDS

Rates of HIV/AIDS in Taiwan have increased from 15% to an estimated 40% by next year.<sup>14</sup>

In Taiwan, there are approximately 7,000 confirmed cases of HIV/AIDS, 80.6% of which are contracted through sexual

intercourse.<sup>12</sup> Females compose 7.37% of the approximately 2,000 reported cases of AIDS (143 cases).<sup>13</sup> While females constitute 6.8% of the total number of HIV cases in Taiwan, most of them contracted HIV through sex with their male partners.<sup>13,14</sup> Stigma associated with HIV/AIDS is a challenge that Taiwan faces in trying to promote HIV testing and conduct educational programs for high-risk groups.

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## RESOURCES

The following websites are available to provide additional information:

- **National Asian Women's Health Organization**  
<http://www.nawho.org/index.html>
- **Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum**  
<http://www.apiahf.org/>
- **Taiwan Department of Health**  
<http://www.doh.gov.tw/cht/default.aspx>
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Taiwan**  
<http://www.cdc.gov.tw/>
- **American Liver Foundation**  
<http://www.liverfoundation.org/>

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> The World Fact Book, Taiwan. Retrieved from <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/tw.html>

<sup>2</sup> Public Broadcasting Service. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/china/china-taiwan.html>

<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia. Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic\\_of\\_China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_China).

<sup>4</sup> United States Census Bureau, Census 2000. Summary File 4 (SF 4) Sample Data. Taiwanese alone or in any combination.

<sup>5</sup> United States Census Bureau, Census 2000. Summary File 4 (SF 4) Sample Data. Taiwanese alone or in any combination.

<sup>6</sup> Wong, Y., Huang, Y.C. (1999). Obesity concerns, weight satisfaction and characteristics of female dieters: A study on female Taiwanese college students. *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, 18 (2), 194-199.

<sup>7</sup> Liaw, K.M., Chen, C.J. (1998). Mortality attributable to cigarette smoking in Taiwan: a 12-year follow-up study. *Tobacco Control*, 7, 141-148.

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<sup>9</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Taiwan. Hepatitis B. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/tw>.

<sup>10</sup> Chen, C.J., You, S.L., Lin, L.H., Hsu, W.L., and Yang, Y.W. (2002). Cancer epidemiology and control in Taiwan: A brief review. *Japanese Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 32, 66-81.

<sup>11</sup> Nguyen, M.H., Keeffe, E.B. (2003) Chronic Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C in Asian Americans. *Reviews in Gastroenterological Disorders*, 3(3), 125-134.

<sup>12</sup> Taiwan Department of Health. Taiwan embraces need to educate females on HIV/AIDS. Retrieved from <http://www.doh.gov.tw/NewVersion/Media/SE2004.asp>.

<sup>13</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Taiwan. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/tw>

<sup>14</sup> Taiwan Department of Health. AIDS epidemic waiting on doorstep if measures not taken. Retrieved from <http://www.doh.gov.tw/NewVersion/Media/SE2004.asp>.

<sup>15</sup> Lin, W.C., Ball, C. (1997). Factors affecting the decision of nursing students in Taiwan to be vaccinated against Hepatitis B infection. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 25 (4), 709-718.

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