

Promoting health through waka ama (outrigger canoe)

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Waka ama (outrigger canoe) is one of the fastest growing sports in Aotearoa New Zealand. Now Massey University researchers have joined advocates who increasingly see the activity as a vehicle for hauora (health) promotion. As well as the physical benefits for paddlers, it also has a strong tikanga (customs and traditional values) and encourages te reo Māori through karakia (prayer), waiata (song) and the general terms used associated with waka.

As part of new research from the College of Health, 16 members of a waka ama rōpu (group) were interviewed about the social, cultural and [health](#) benefits of the sport. The research is informed by kaupapa Māori (a Māori values framework) utilising narratives to understand the experiences of participants.

Dr. Christina Severinsen and Angelique Reweti, Ngāpuhi, from the School of Health Sciences carried out the research, with the Heretaunga Ararau o Ngāti Kahungunu Waka Ama Rōpu, which is based on the Clive River in Hawke's Bay.

Established in 2001, the paddlers come from many different backgrounds, but their involvement in waka ama brings them together as a uniting force. It brings a sense of wellbeing and connectedness with paddlers spending time together both on and off the water.

"Through a framework of Māori values and beliefs, waka ama improves the health of individual paddlers, their whānau and communities," Dr. Severinsen says. "It's unique as a sport, because as well as the physical benefits for paddlers, it also has a strong tikanga connecting paddlers to each other through whanaungatanga [relationship/kinship] and manaakitanga, [hospitality] and to the environment through concepts of kaitiakitanga [guardianship/protection], all of which have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing."

She says the findings contribute to the evidence base of effective indigenous health promotion, bridging the gap between academia and local community action. "The experience of waka ama is central to health development and maintenance and the kaupapa is a positive resource for paddlers to draw on."

Ms Reweti says increased access to cultural resources through waka ama is seen as key to good health. "Waka ama is an example of health

promotion within an indigenous context, where Māori values and practices are foundational."

Provided by Massey University

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