

Research explores factors behind hazardous drinking among Māori

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Research undertaken by Victoria University of Wellington Ph.D. student Taylor Winter suggests that experiences of discrimination may

contribute to higher rates of hazardous drinking among Māori.

The research forms part of an ongoing collaboration between health psychology researchers across Victoria University of Wellington, Brown University in the United States, University of Sydney, and University of Otago. The South Island iwi, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, also made a substantial contribution to guiding and supporting Taylor's work.

Taylor says researchers suspected that one mechanism leading to higher levels of hazardous drinking could be the stress associated with experiences of discrimination. "So we expected to find a [positive association](#) between the experience of racial discrimination and hazardous alcohol use among New Zealand Māori, and in fact perceived experiences of discrimination explained approximately 35 percent of the increased risk of hazardous drinking observed in Māori," he says.

The researchers used data from the New Zealand Health Survey, a nationally representative cross-section of the population.

"The research goes a long way to quantifying the impact of discrimination, but it is not without limitations," Taylor says.

"This approach, measuring people from one point in time, means we cannot conclusively say if discrimination explains increased risks of hazardous drinking or if hazardous drinking explains increased risks of discrimination for Māori. In future work, we hope to undertake a longitudinal survey that follows individuals across multiple timepoints, giving insight into how the impacts of discrimination unfold over time."

The findings suggest that initiatives to reduce experienced discrimination in Aotearoa New Zealand, beyond their inherent social value, could also help reduce hazardous [drinking](#) and ease the disproportionate health burden alcohol places on Māori, he says.

Recent reports from the Waitangi Tribunal and Health Quality and Safety Commission concluding that institutionalized racism is still present in our healthcare system, give the research particular relevance, Taylor says.

"One thing we need to be mindful of is that research on discrimination does not lead people to take the view that discrimination is intractable and, as a result, place the onus on Māori to get better at dealing with [discrimination](#). The onus must be on changing the current culture in Aotearoa New Zealand in which every-day racism and structural racism are common place."

Provided by Victoria University of Wellington

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