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Waka Ama as a Māori Public Health Intervention for Wāhine Hauora

This paper presents a Kaupapa Māori public health intervention that centres mana wāhine and the lived experiences of Tainui wāhine engaged in waka ama. Guided by Kaupapa Māori methodology, the study utilises semi-structured interviews and photovoice to privilege wāhine voices and visual narratives, enabling participants to articulate their understandings of hauora within culturally grounded contexts. Positioned in response to the enduring impacts of colonisation, including Raupatu, this research highlights the importance of reclaiming Indigenous knowledge systems and practices as pathways to wellbeing.

Waka ama is conceptualised as a holistic, strengths-based public health intervention that extends beyond physical activity to encompass spiritual, emotional, and collective dimensions of health. Through engagement with tikanga, whakapapa, and relationships with atua such as Tangaroa and Hinemoana, wāhine experience enhanced cultural identity, resilience, and connection to te taiao. The use of photovoice further amplifies these insights, capturing the intergenerational and relational aspects of waka ama as a site of cultural continuity and healing.

This research contributes to public health discourse by demonstrating the value of Indigenous-led, culturally embedded interventions. It argues that integrating Kaupapa Māori approaches and mana wāhine frameworks into public health strategies is essential for advancing equitable hauora outcomes for Māori and supporting tino rangatiratanga in health.

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