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He tirohanga taurahere tangata:
The social context of older Māori alcohol use in
Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Abstract

Older Māori alcohol use is an area requiring immediate attention because: older Māori will make up a significant proportion of the future Māori population, there is clear and evidenced health impacts of alcohol use; including those related to older age, and, little is known about older people's alcohol use, especially among older Māori. This thesis utilises a public health perspective and a social perspective of alcohol use to develop a nuanced understanding of the social context of older Māori alcohol use.

Three exploratory studies were grounded in a Māori centred research approach. The first was an analysis of existing survey data to explore older Māori alcohol use, and its relationships to socio-demographic variables. This study identified two significant relationships: hazardous alcohol use among older Māori is related to social network membership, and binge drinking is related to Māori cultural identity. To explore the nature of these relationships the next stage of the project involved two qualitative studies to provide a broader social perspective of alcohol use.

Study two explored the personal experiences of alcohol use among thirteen older Māori to understand the broader social location of Māori alcohol use. Findings from a thematic analysis of interview data highlighted four key social contexts in which Māori alcohol use occurs: a sporting culture, a working culture, the context of family, and Māori culture, and important social factors and key life events which influence Māori alcohol use across the lifetime. The third study drew on the shared perspectives of alcohol use among five kaupapa whānau (groups with a common purpose) comprising older Māori members, to understand the socially shared meanings of Māori alcohol use. Narrative analysis of the data revealed the importance of whanaungatanga (maintaining relationships) in determining older Māori alcohol use and their engagement in social environments where alcohol is present. These findings additionally highlight Māori cultural understandings of alcohol use.

Overall, this thesis highlights three central features that contextualise Māori alcohol use: whānau (family); whanaungatanga; and diversity. This thesis suggests important shifts in theoretical approaches to understanding Māori alcohol use that will guide future research. Further, the findings provide suggestions for the development of culturally responsive alcohol policy and health promotion practice to better meet the health and wellbeing needs of Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

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