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WHAT HEALTH CHANGES OCCUR IN MĀORI MALES AFTER RETIREMENT FROM PLAYING RUGBY LEAGUE?

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Māori male participation in rugby league is prolific at all levels in New Zealand however rugby league has a high incidence of injury. The demands of the sport require players to be athletically fit, strong, and healthy during their playing careers. But does any health advantage remain once retired from participation? This is the first exploratory health study of Māori men who have retired from playing competitive rugby league in New Zealand. It uses Māori methodology research by Māori, involves Māori, for the benefit of Māori. A mixed method approach both quantitative and qualitative also contributes substantial evidence. This study researched four groups of ex-players at increasing levels of engagement with 154 involved in the initial survey assessment. This was followed by a detailed analysis of 25 players who were assessed on multiple measures of health. This process was repeated 18 months later with 15 returning respondents and elaborated on

- (A) Physical well-being post-play;
- (B) Injuries experienced during play (through a retrospective analysis);
- (C) Self-assessed well-being; and
- (D) Change over time for a small group. Lastly 10 players took part in kanohi ki te kanohi interviews so the players could tell their own stories in more detail.

There was evidence of a positive reduction in body weight, improved cardiovascular fitness and increased motivation in some players simply through their participation in this research (Hawthorne or observer effect). Whānau (family) was a strong feature in the stories from these men. This research explored a previously under-researched area and provided insight into Māori male health. Most importantly it confirms there is a strong potential for intervention to improve and maintain health status for retiring and retired Māori rugby league players.

Biography

Trevor Clark is the Head of Department, Sport Performance at The Australian College of Physical Education. Trevor Clark's main area of interest is focused on improving sports performance, reducing sporting injuries and the maintenance of health and well-being post-retirement from sport. Most of his recent focus has been geared toward sports concussion.

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