

# Whānau and Ethnic Identity Support Positive Well-Being among Māori Youth



## RESEARCH

The protective influence of family connectedness, ethnic identity, and ethnic engagement for New Zealand Māori Adolescents

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## Background

Youth in Western societies usually exhibit a decline in life satisfaction between the ages of 12 and 16 due to the stressors of adolescence

This dip in positive adjustment can be even stronger among ethnic minority youth, placing them at a greater risk for depression, anxiety low educational achievement, substance abuse, and more.

Cultural affiliation and family connections can play a strong protective role in fostering positive youth development.

Fellows from the Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, part of Victoria University of Wellington, carried out a study to determine the factors that protect Māori youth from poor outcomes and enhance positive development.

## Main research findings

During adolescent development, Māori youth display a reduction in well-being similar to Western youth.

Among Māori adolescents, a strong ethnic identity and higher levels of family connectedness are linked to greater well-being.

Over time, higher levels of family connectedness among Māori youth lessen the decreases in well-being noted typically in middle adolescence.

Engagement in Māori culture and practices leads to a stronger ethnic identity among youth, which in turn leads to higher well-being levels over time.

## Relevance of findings to New Zealand

The well-being of Māori youth is greatly impacted by the quality of whānau relations, because cultural traditions and positive ethnic identities are transmitted via the family between the generations.

Western conceptions about the 'ideal family' may not apply to Māori. Emphasis within the family unit should be placed on the quality of the relationships, not the structure.

Fostering strong, positive ethnic identities among Māori youth leads to more positive well-being.

Social policies should support ethnic engagement and community revitalization to provide Māori youth with a sense of belonging and pride in their ethnic identity.