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| **E Tū Toa Rangatahi – hei tū he Rangatira: Rugby for Positive (Māori) Youth Development and (re)connecting with the environment.** |
| **Problem**Durie (1999) stated Waiora (the Natural environment), a Health Promotion key, links to the “external world and to a spiritual element that connects human wellness with cosmic, terrestrial and water environments…Something is lost when the spiritual connection between people and the environment is felt second hand” (p. 3). Due to colonisation, and mass urbanisation of Māori (indigenous NZers), there was a disconnection for many relocated Māori with their tūrangawaewae (place of belonging). This disconnection with whenua (land base), maunga (sacred mountains), awa (river) and for some their whakapapa (genealogy) had profound inter-generational impact upon the health and well-being of Māori. The Ministry of Social Development’s (2016) ‘Social Report’, for e.g., showed from 1996-2012, Māori suicide death rates were significantly higher than non-Māori. For Māori youth (15–24yrs) suicide rates in 2012 was 48.0 per 100,000, compared with the non-Māori youth population rate (16.9 per 100,000). Both local (Houkamau & Sibley 2010; 2011; Muriwai, et al., 2015) and international scholars (Snowshoe, et al., 2015; Auger, 2016) advocated well-being benefits for connecting with ‘culture as cure’.**Intervention**In attempt to reconnect Māori youth with their culture NZ’s Māori Rugby Board created regional and national initiatives termed ‘Māori Rugby Development Camps’ for male and female players. At these camps, rangatahi (youth) are pro-actively encouraged to (re)connect (back) with their whakapapa, tūrangawaewae and whenua. This presentation is based on the primary author’s 2018 ethnographic observations during a week spent ‘in-camp’ (Noho marae style) at one of the national Māori Under 18s team trials in Rotorua, NZ. A follow-up focus group with a half dozen youth also provided further insights into this qualitative study. **Outcomes**Coming into camp, at the Powhiri (welcoming ceremony) many youth reported being whakama (shy) or feeling anxious about their (lack of) Māori-ness. Indeed, at the start of the week their body language and actions were passive. The transformation over the course of the week, however, saw majority of these youth go from incompetent to confidently walking in Te Ao Māori (the Māori world). These and other observations were later confirmed by youth in a follow-up focus group after the camp. **Implications**Hokia te maunga tapu: return to your sacred mountain. Reconnecting with culture and the environment significantly benefits well-being. **Format**Oral |