Mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) for rangatahi Māori need to encompass cultural paradigms that recognise the inherent strengths, qualities and perspectives of rangatahi Māori; incorporate Māori methods of healing to remedy the transgressions placed upon the Māori spirit by historical trauma; and cultivate the foundations of happiness and flourishing from within a Māori wellbeing framework.

In Aotearoa / New Zealand, mindfulness-based programmes have generated significant interest within health, education and workplaces. Although school-based studies are limited, findings on the efficacy of mindfulness programs in schools show a positive association with enhanced mental health and wellbeing. However, secular mindfulness interventions often exclude the spiritual foundations and aspects of mindfulness, which may render it less effective for indigenous and Māori environments where spiritual wellbeing is integral and is a cornerstone of health and wellbeing models. Mindfulness in an indigenous context is interlinked with worldviews that are strongly underpinned by spiritual elements, cultural wellbeing traditions and a deep awareness of one’s connections to the land, nature, family and ancestors.

This study had two central aims, to co-design a mātauranga Māori informed mindfulness-based intervention with rangatahi in a wharekura and to investigate its effects on their wellbeing. Twenty-three rangatahi from a wharekura in Tauranga Moana co-designed and participated in a Māori mindfulness-based intervention. Māori co-design methods were developed to design, implement and evaluate the intervention, alongside quantitative psychological tests to assess improvements in wellbeing and dispositional mindfulness.

Findings showed positive indications for decreased depression and anxiety symptoms, improvements in the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of quality of life and higher levels of dispositional mindfulness. The effective rangatahi centered and mātauranga Māori informed wellbeing components of the intervention were: He Āhuru Mōwai – creation of a calm, safe space, Mahi a ngā tipuna – engaging with practices of our ancestors, Kaitiaki – connecting to kaitiaki for guidance, Te Taiao – integration with the natural environment, Whanaungatanga – emphasis on collectivity and relationships and Hohou te rongo - meditations.

The participative collaborative nature of the research has meant that the effects of the research have been valued by the participants and these impacts have cascaded out to the wider wharekura and community. The Māori co-design
approach to this research was able to validate Māori understandings and practices of mindfulness and recover indigenous wisdoms of mindfulness. Māori co-design research establishes support for transformative outcomes that legitimise an indigenous holistic approach to wellbeing. The result is a restoration of traditional cultural healing practices combined with innovative and new cultural healing practices which align to a Māori world that recognises, values, cares for and celebrates the many diverse manifestations of being a rangatahi in the world today.

Biography of presenting author/s

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Dr Marama McDonald (Ngāti Kauwhata) holds the HRC Erihapeti-Murchie post-doctoral research fellowship in Māori Health at Waikato University. Her research efforts aim to contribute to the development of new health models, knowledge and practices that encompass the multiple and diverse realities of Māori and recognise the intrinsic value of Māori traditions, practices and wellbeing approaches that have adapted and persisted over time. Her current research interests are Māori mental health, mindfulness, Kaupapa Māori methodology and co-design research.