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Young Pacific Male Athletes and Positive Mental Wellbeing

Caleb Panapa Edward Marsters

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Abstract

Background: Recent studies and increased media reporting across Australasia have linked young Pacific male elite athletes to depression, suicide, and other adverse mental health-related events. Despite these events, little is known about positive mental wellbeing and young Pacific male athletes.

Aim: This research aimed to explore young Pacific male athletes' perceptions of what contributes to positive mental wellbeing and peak performance at an elite level of sport. It is believed that this research will provide useful information to better support the mental health and wellbeing needs of young Pacific male athletes.

Methodology: This qualitative study conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with 20 young Pacific males (16-24 years) engaged in elite rugby league or rugby union programmes in Auckland. Interviews were semi-structured and underpinned by the Health Research Council of New Zealand's (2014) Pacific Health Research Guidelines. A grounded theory approach was used for data analysis.

Findings: Participants defined positive mental wellbeing as being holistic and emphasised the importance of family support and reciprocity, a well-balanced life, performing well, and personal development. Risk factors for athletes' mental wellbeing included familial pressures, a lack of alternative activities and interests away from sports, difficulties transitioning to an elite level of sport, performance-related issues such as dips in form, injuries, alcohol misuse, and stigma around mental illness. Key protective factors for positive mental wellbeing for these athletes included family support, the support of their significant other, Christian faith and spirituality, the 'brotherhood', a secure 'Pacific athlete' identity, personal development, and supportive sports organisations. This study recognised that sports organisations, schools, Pacific families, and Pacific communities need to engage more actively with young Pacific males to reduce stigma around mental illness, increase awareness of mental health, and openly discuss issues around mental wellbeing.

Conclusion: Recommendations from this study provide evidence-based strategies for promoting and supporting positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes. This research may be of benefit for elite sports organisations and their staff, schools, sports coaches, sport administrators, mental health professionals, health services, researchers, Pacific communities, and Pacific families to ensure the young Pacific males of this country thrive and flourish.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents. Thank you for your love, inspiration, wisdom, and patience. Without you, none of this is possible. Also to the rest of my family, my strength comes from your strength. Big thanks to each and every one of you. To my love, thank you for all your support.

To our dear Panda. *E 'enua te po, e takaroronga te ao.* Much love uncle.

This thesis is also dedicated to everyone working to support positive mental wellbeing among our youth in New Zealand and the wider Pacific. I hope this information may be of benefit to your invaluable work.

Lastly, this thesis is dedicated to the young men who took part in this study and all the brothers doing their thing. Keep going hard.

Acknowledgements

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Glossary

National Rugby League   elite professional rugby league competition based in Australia and New Zealand. Commonly referred to as the 'NRL'

New South Wales Cup   premier open age rugby league competition in New South Wales, which includes one New Zealand team. Commonly referred to as the 'NSW Cup'. The NSW cup acts as a feeder competition to the top flight NRL competition

Professional athlete   athletes whose primary source of income is their sport

Semi-professional athlete   athletes who receive payment for their participation, but do not rely on sport as their only income

Super Rugby   elite professional rugby union football competition in the Southern Hemisphere and Japan

Tapu   forbidden, prohibited, unlawful, sacred

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter details the focus and rationale of this research. This chapter outlines the mental health of Pacific peoples in New Zealand and provides an overview of Pacific male youth in New Zealand. It also provides a summary of the historical and sociocultural context surrounding Pacific participation in elite sports and how this context impacts on the mental wellbeing of young Pacific male athletes today. Lastly, it will define the aims and objectives of this research and outline the structure of this thesis.

Rationale

The topic for this study was selected as there remains an urgent need for more research on positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific males in New Zealand, who are disproportionately burdened by mental illness (Ministry of Health [MOH], 2008a). The focus on young Pacific male athletes came about after findings from Tiatia-Seath's (2015) study on Tongan youth suicide in New Zealand, and a flurry of high-profile mental health-related media reports, suggested that young Pacific elite athletes may be at an increased risk of experiencing negative mental wellbeing in comparison to other youth in New Zealand. These findings were not isolated phenomena, with statistics showing that young Pacific males in general have experienced adversely high rates of acute mental health problems over the past 10 years in comparison to the rest of the New Zealand population (MOH, 2008a). It became apparent that there was a need for further investigation.

Currently there appears to be no literature focused on the mental wellbeing of young Pacific male athletes in New Zealand, although it is recognised that there is an emerging evidence base in Australia (Horton, 2012, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Whilst these scholars have provided insight into the lived experiences of Pacific athletes in elite sports, research has yet to focus on mental wellbeing or involved participants living in New Zealand. Gaps remain in the literature regarding young Pacific athletes' perceptions of mental wellbeing and the risk and protective factors impacting upon their mental wellbeing. This research aims to address these gaps, provide potential solutions, and identify future research foci.

The contextual nature of mental wellbeing means psychological concepts alone cannot explain these inequalities in mental health, so it is vital that qualitative research such as this is carried out to better understand the sociocultural context underpinning these statistics (Puna, 2013). These disparities are especially concerning as 50 percent of the Pacific population are under the age of 22 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). The Pacific youth population is expected to grow exponentially over the next 10 years, so this is an issue that has the potential to become overwhelming if left addressed (Statistics New Zealand, 2015).

Mental health and Pacific peoples in New Zealand

The literature paints a bleak picture of the mental health status of Pacific peoples in New Zealand, and demonstrates the need for further research on ways to support positive mental wellbeing for Pacific communities. Pacific peoples experienced late presentation to mental health services with high rates of

involuntary, forensic, and acute admissions, which indicates the need to find ways to support early intervention and preventative strategies (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009; MOH, 2008a). Historical and sociocultural elements, such as migration, acculturative stress, cultural disconnect, and socioeconomic disadvantage, were acknowledged as some of the main factors impacting upon the mental wellbeing of Pacific peoples in New Zealand (Foliaki, Kokaua, Schaaf & Tukuitonga, 2006; HPCG, 2012; Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009; MOH, 2012).

There remains a lack of research on the mental health of Pacific youth who, like Pacific adults, are disproportionately burdened by mental illness (MOH, 2008a; Pulotu-Endemann et al., 2004). Pacific youth face increased challenges to achieving and maintaining positive mental wellbeing in comparison to other young New Zealanders, often exhibiting substantial resilience in the face of personal and communal adversity (Fa'alili-Fidow et al., 2016; Saaulii-Sauni et al., 2009; Siataga, 2011). Thus, it is suggested that initiatives should build upon these resiliency factors and utilise strengths-based approaches to support positive mental wellbeing among Pacific youth (Fa'alili-Fidow et al., 2016; MOH, 2008a; Saaulii-Sauni et al., 2009; Siataga, 2011; Tiatia, 2003). As with other Pacific age groups, the use of mental health services is significantly low for Pacific youth in comparison to non-Pacific populations (MOH, 2008a). Of concern is that Pacific youth aged 16-24 years have higher rates of depressive symptoms, self-harm, and suicide attempts than the general population, with suicide rates highest among young Pacific males (Kokaua, Schaaf, Foliaki & Wells, 2009; MOH, 2008a; MOH, 2010; Tiatia-Seath, 2014).

Pacific male youth in New Zealand

Young Pacific males are over-represented in criminal statistics, adverse health outcomes, and educational underachievement in New Zealand (MOH, 2008a; Ioane, Lambie, & Percival, 2013). The sociocultural and economic context surrounding young Pacific athletes drives most of these outcomes, as it increases the chance of risky behaviours in adolescence (MOH, 2008a). Pacific youth are also more likely to have reduced access to significant protective factors for positive development and wellbeing, such as quality nutrition and safe housing, because of their socioeconomic circumstances (Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2011).

In regards to general health outcomes, akin to most young peoples in New Zealand, Pacific youth are generally healthy (MOH, 2008a). However, the likelihood of risky health behaviours are increased for young Pacific males because of a higher proportion of Pacific families living in high deprivation areas (MOH, 2008a). This is significant as these behaviours lead to many of the preventable health issues impacting Pacific communities, such as diabetes and heart disease in adulthood (MOH, 2008a). Whilst sociocultural factors have the greatest impact on health, increased barriers to accessing healthcare further increases the risk of adverse health outcomes for Pacific youth (MOH, 2008a).

In regards to education, young Pacific males 'underachieve' and are more likely to leave school with no formal qualifications in comparison to the general population (Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2011; MOH, 2008a). Education is an important determinant of health, as it facilitates socioeconomic advancement, which can improve access to key economic resources that

support good health and allow for the fulfilment of vital kinship obligations (MOH, 2008a). Reduced involvement in early childhood education, inadequate nutrition, and teaching methods and curriculums that are not conducive to Pacific needs are some of the key factors contributing to educational underachievement for Pacific male youth (Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2011). Educational underachievement has a negative ripple effect as employment opportunities are reduced and risk factors for numerous health problems are amplified as a result of lower income opportunities (Statistics New Zealand & Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2011).

Study context

Personal, historical, and sociocultural forces interconnect to underpin the context surrounding this research and the experiences of young Pacific male athletes in elite sports. Rugby union and rugby league, are by far the most popular sports played by young Pacific males in New Zealand today (Horton 2014; Sport New Zealand, 2015). This came about via British cultural imperialism, where the popularity of rugby union grew rapidly in the Pacific Islands and accrued substantial social and cultural capital (Horton, 2014). As a result, young Pacific males were afforded significant status if they proved themselves on the rugby field (Horton, 2014).

With the introduction of professional rugby, success on the field now holds the additional benefit of being a potential career pathway (Horton, 2014). Sport is no longer just an athletic outlet for young Pacific males, but an economic opportunity that enables socioeconomic advancement and the fulfilment of kinship obligations (Uperesa, 2014; Teaiwa, 2016). The allure of big money contracts and a lucrative career in professional rugby is amplified for many young Pacific males, as they are more likely to live in the most deprived areas of New Zealand and experience significant financial burden (MOH, 2008a). Frequently scouted in professional rugby union and rugby league, young Pacific males see professional rugby as a viable career pathway and a truly attainable opportunity to secure financial stability for themselves and their families (Besnier, 2014; Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013).

Pacific athletes are now central to the cultural and financial success of professional rugby around the world, becoming key 'commodities' of the global sports labour market (Zakus & Horton, 2009). Player demographics in the NRL, a professional rugby league competition based in Australia and New Zealand, illustrates the growing prominence of Pacific athletes in professional rugby. In 1996 Pacific athletes only made up 12 percent of the NRL's playing rosters, but today Pacific players make up 40 percent of the players in the NRL and over 50 percent of players in the NRL's under-20 league; a gross overrepresentation compared to the relatively small Pacific populations in New Zealand and Australia (Field, 2013; Panapa & Phillips, 2014). These numbers are expected to rise as young Pacific athletes make up most junior representative teams in New Zealand and the more populated Pacific regions in Australia such as Sydney (Field, 2013). Similar trends are prevalent in rugby union (Besnier, 2014; Grainger, 2008; Zakus & Horton, 2009). The natural athletic ability, unwavering determination, and robust physical traits that Pacific Island athletes are well known for is a major reason for these statistics and contributes to why Pacific male athletes are sought after in elite sports (Besnier, 2014).

A career in either code of professional rugby has become an attractive opportunity for young Pacific males to also validate their masculinity, and attain treasured social and cultural capital for both individual and family alike (Besnier, 2014; Horton, 2014). Such an intense focus on the physical facets of Pacific male athletes often takes away from the mental and personal traits they possess however, and such a dichotomy between the body and the mind can impact negatively on the mental wellbeing of young Pacific male athletes; a concept that is further discussed in Chapter 2. Literature Review: Historical perceptions of Pacific athletes (Hokowhitu, 2004).

Rugby is now deeply entrenched in most Pacific communities, which further motivates young Pacific males to pursue a career in professional sports (Horton, 2014). Yet, for every success story there are scores of young Pacific athletes who do not 'make it' big, and in some cases, find themselves facing huge difficulties when transitioning away from sports (Besnier, 2014; Schofield, 2015). Numerous stressors also remain for those who do manage to secure professional contracts. The reality of both codes of professional rugby is that the average length of a player's career is about three to four years (Price, 2007). Alongside high expectations and very real responsibilities, this uncertain environment can have a debilitating effect for some Pacific athletes (Horton, 2014; Teaiwa, 2016).

When it goes wrong

Two incidents involving young Pacific rugby league players demonstrate the impact that this context can have, and illustrate the need for greater action towards promoting and supporting positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific athletes. The incidents involved Mosese Fotuaika, a 20-year-old NRL player of Tongan heritage, who was found dead by suicide after a season-ending pectoral injury and Alex Elisala, a 20-year-old NRL player of Samoan heritage, who passed away after an alcohol-related incident (Cadzou, 2013; Horton, 2014). Fotuaika and Elisala were both born in New Zealand and both migrated to Australia after being recruited in their early teens by elite rugby league schools in Queensland (Horton, 2014). High levels of intrinsic motivation, external expectations, and the 'reality' of perceived failure were identified as major reasons for their deaths (Horton, 2014).

Both Fotuaika and Elisala had become major breadwinners for their families and would have assumed significant social and cultural status among their community and peers (Horton, 2014). However, it could be argued that neither were equipped nor appropriately supported to deal with the additional pressures they assumed because of their impending success and the potential 'shame' associated with 'failure' (Horton, 2014). These events show how a complex mix of sociocultural and historical factors can negatively impact the mental wellbeing of young Pacific athletes. While these two incidents are extreme examples, they illustrate the need for further investigation into how positive mental wellbeing can be supported for young Pacific male athletes.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this study is to explore young Pacific male athletes' perceptions of what contributes to positive mental wellbeing and peak performance at an elite level of sport. Using a strengths-based

approach, it is envisaged that this qualitative Auckland based research will provide useful information to better support the mental health and wellbeing needs of young Pacific male athletes.

The key objectives of this study are to:

   a) Identify and describe risk and protective factors that impact upon the mental wellbeing of young Pacific male elite athletes (16-24 years);
   b) Explore young Pacific male athletes' views of what constitutes positive mental wellbeing;
   c) Provide information to help inform current suicide prevention and depression initiatives with a particular focus on Pacific males; and
   d) Expose potential future research foci toward advancing Pacific knowledge around mental wellbeing, suicide prevention, and Pacific male youth.

Thesis outline

Chapter 1 Introduction provides the rationale for this research and the importance of exploring young Pacific male athletes' understandings of mental wellbeing. This chapter outlines the mental health of the wider Pacific population and the current issues influencing mental wellbeing for Pacific male youth in New Zealand. It discusses the historical and sociocultural context surrounding Pacific male athletes' participation in elite sports and how this context impacts mental wellbeing for young Pacific male athletes' today. Lastly, this chapter states the aims and objectives of this research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review examines the literature on Pacific mental health and Pacific athletes' mental health. It first provides definitions of key terms in this thesis, to ensure consistent meaning between the literature, researcher, and reader. It explores Pacific definitions of mental health and highlights the key differences to Western definitions. It explores existing information on the risk and protective factors impacting the mental wellbeing of Pacific athletes. The inclusion of mental health research involving non-Pacific athletes is used to sustenance the limited literature involving Pacific athletes, but it is not assumed that these findings are transferrable to Pacific athletes. This chapter provides an overview of current Pacific youth-related wellbeing initiatives in elite sports, revealing a lack of culturally appropriate mental health focused initiatives. Lastly, it exposes the gaps in existing literature and the need for more research on this topic.

Chapter 3 Methodology explains the methods used to undertake this research. It outlines the qualitative approach used to collect data from the 20 young Pacific male athletes interviewed. It explains the theory that underpins the planning, data collection, and analysis phases of this research. This chapter describes the sample population and recruitment process, before explaining the importance of the pilot phase. Lastly, this section goes over the overall interview process, data analysis method, and ethical considerations for this research.

Chapter 4 Findings provides results from the 20 semi-structured interviews with young Pacific male athletes. It provides a summary of the participants who took part in this research. Key themes and subthemes from interviews are presented in order with the key objectives of this study: defining positive

mental wellbeing, risk and protective factors for mental wellbeing, and participants' views of what could be achieved to support positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes moving forward.

Chapter 5 Discussions and recommendations discusses the findings in light of the literature. It explores how these findings fit and do not fit with existing literature and what this means in regards to the aims and objectives of this research. Concepts such as positive relationships, spirituality, hypervisibility, masculinity, and identity are explored in response to the issues raised by participants. Lastly, recommendations for promoting and supporting positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes and future research opportunities are provided.

Chapter 2 Literature review

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to young Pacific athletes and mental wellbeing, with a particular focus on positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific athletes. It provides definitions of key terms used in this research to ensure consistent meaning between the literature, researcher, and reader. It then outlines how the literature was sourced and explores Pacific perceptions of mental wellbeing and how these differ to Western perceptions. It examines literature on the mental health status of Pacific male athletes. Risk and protective factors impacting upon young Pacific athletes' mental wellbeing will then be examined. Lastly, this chapter addresses the urgent need for further research in this field, and the need for more Pacific-specific research given the unique experiences of Pacific athletes.

Definition of terms

There are several terms that need to be defined in the context of this thesis. The following terms have been chosen to ensure consistent understanding between the literature, researcher, and reader. It is important to note that within this thesis, the terms 'mental health' and 'mental wellbeing' are used interchangeably.

Defining 'health'

In order to understand Pacific health issues, it is first essential that Pacific definitions of health be understood. Pacific peoples define health in a holistic manner that emphasises a reciprocal balance between personal, family, community, cultural, and spiritual wellbeing (Samu & Suaalii-Sauni, 2009). Health for many Pacific Islanders is not merely influenced by personal wellbeing, but the wellbeing of family and the wider community (Craig, Taufa, Jackson, & Han, 2008). Pacific definitions of health are largely based on the values commonly found throughout the Pacific, which follow Pacific peoples as they continue to migrate around the world; values such as respect, *aro'a* (love), humility, loyalty, and responsibility to family and community (Craig et al., 2008; Puna, 2013).

Defining 'mental health'

Pacific definitions of mental health can be found in Chapter 2 Literature Review: Perceptions of mental health.

Defining 'Pacific peoples'

The terms 'Pacific peoples', 'Pasifika peoples', 'PI peoples', and 'Pacific Islanders' are used interchangeably and refer to persons of Pacific origin (Tukuitonga, 2013). Pacific is an umbrella term used to group a variety of different ethnic affiliations and people that identify as belonging to one or more of the Pacific sub-regions of Polynesia, Melanesia, or Micronesia (Dunsford et al., 2011). People with mixed, Pacific and non-Pacific, heritage also come under the Pacific peoples umbrella (Tukuitonga,

2013). In this thesis, 'Pacific peoples' refers to people who self-identify as belonging to one or more of the seven largest Pacific population groups in New Zealand: Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, and Tuvalu (Ministry of Pacific Islands Affair, 2013; Tukuitonga, 2013). While these Pacific groups are commonly viewed as a homogenous group based on their similarities, shared experiences, cultural attributes, and belief systems, each of these seven groups have their own diverse and unique cultural identities, languages, customs, social structures, belief systems, ideologies, histories, and worldviews (Finau & Tukuitonga, 2000, MOH, 2008a).

Defining 'youth'

Among Pacific peoples, the term 'youth' can refer to 'young peoples' who are either not yet married, still at school or university, or of adolescent age (Agnew et al., 2004). In this thesis, youth refers to young peoples aged 16-24.

Defining 'elite athletes'

In this thesis, elite athletes refer to young men engaged in an elite rugby league or rugby union programme. Elite athletes are those eligible to play at the national, international, or professional level. Given the youth focus of this study, age group provincial representative players were also included.

Perceptions of mental health

Traditional views

Pacific views of mental health can be categorised into three main groups: traditional views, contemporary views, and a mix of traditional and contemporary views (Vaka, 2014). Each perception provides a foundation for the way mental health is understood and offers insight into the differing worldviews among Pacific peoples (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009). Factors such as disconnect from traditional culture, loss of language, and mixed ethnic backgrounds can lead to differing worldviews, which contribute to these different perceptions of mental health (Le Va & Te Pou o Te Whakaaro Nui, 2009).

Traditional Pacific views of mental health commonly centre on spirituality (Bush et al., 2009; MOH, 2008a; Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2009). Spirituality, for Pacific peoples, can be a blend of beliefs and values based on either traditional Pacific, Christian, non-Christian beliefs, or a combination of the three (Le Va & Te Pou o Te Whakaaro Nui, 2009). As an example, traditional perceptions may associate mental illness with breaches of *tapu* (sacred spiritual bonds) by an individual or their family; and the traditional approach to healing may be to seek healers with the spiritual powers to restore spiritual, physical, mental and social balance (Bush et al., 2009; MOH, 2008a; Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2009; Tamasese et al., 2005). It is significant to note that in many Pacific families, traditional healers are still being used today (Worth et al., 2005)

Contemporary views

Contemporary views of mental health are popular among New Zealand-born [NZ-born] Pacific peoples and Pacific youth because of their unique sociocultural experiences (Mila, 2013; Puna, 2013). Contemporary Pacific views generally embody the shared Pacific values of holism and collectivism, however less focus is placed on traditional knowledge due to greater Western influences and limited knowledge of traditional beliefs (Mila, 2013; Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009; Puna, 2013).

Contemporary views may be a direct result of the complex and ever-evolving realities Pacific communities experience in New Zealand. These realities are particularly complex for Pacific youth who often grow up being influenced by contradicting Western and Pacific value systems (Bush et al., 2009; Mila, 2013; Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009; MOH, 2008a; Tiatia-Seath, 2014). Contemporary Pacific views of mental health can generally be placed on a spectrum between traditional Pacific views and Western views (Bush et al., 2009; Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009). This spectrum is often referred to as the 'va' by Pacific mental health researchers, which roughly translates to the 'negotiated space'. The 'va' is a concept that can be used to explain the wide spectrum of perceptions that exist between biomedical and traditional Pacific belief systems (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009). Contemporary views and the concept of the 'va' are increasing in popularity, particularly among mental health services looking to better meet the mental health needs of Pacific youth in New Zealand (Mila, 2013; Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2009).

Suaalii-Sauni et al. (2009) highlighted that the Pacific perceptions of mental health used by Pacifi-specific mental health services relied heavily on the perspectives of Pacific Island-born adults, which led to NZ-born and youth perspectives being overlooked. This has contributed to additional barriers for these groups when accessing Pacific-specific services (Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2009). However, Puna (2013) found that NZ-born Cook Islands youth were still accommodating towards traditional perceptions of mental health and in some cases shared the same views as Pacific Island-born Pacific adults. Ultimately, the more acculturated one is to New Zealand culture, the more likely they are to have contemporary, and in some cases Western, views towards mental wellbeing and vice versa (Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009, Puna, 2013; Tiatia, 2012).

Mainstream views

Pacific perceptions of mental health, both traditional and contemporary, differed to those found in the mainstream literature. Without making any conclusive generalisations, mainstream views of mental health appeared to be dominated by clinical and biomedical paradigms and tended to take an individualised stance (Alefaio, 2009; Bush, Chapman, Drummond & Fagaloa, 2009; Pulotu-Endemann, Annandale & Instone, 2004; Tiatia, 2012; Tukuitonga, 2013). Pulotu-Endemann et al. (2004) argued that Western perceptions of mental health are derived from clinical perspectives where clinicians are objective in their explanations of mental health, in attempts to standardise medical diagnoses. In most instances, this undermines the subjective nature of mental health (Pulotu-Endemann et al., 2004). In contrast, Pacific perceptions of mental health are holistic and based on collectivism (Pulotu-Endemann et al., 2004).

The World Health Organization (2014) defines mental health as a state of wellbeing in which an individual can realise their own potential, is resilient in the light of typical life stresses, can work successfully, and can contribute to their community. Although this definition provides a holistic view and acknowledges the importance of social connections, it still places the individual at the centre. As most Pacific peoples hold fast to collectivism, it is important to acknowledge the impact of the 'relational self' on Pacific perceptions of mental health (Alefaio, 2009; Samu & Suaalii-Sauni, 2009; Tamasese et al., 2005).

Bush and colleagues (2009) provide an apt description of the concept of the relational self:

> *"It is a total being comprising spiritual, physical and mental elements which cannot be separated. It derives its sense of wholeness, sacredness and uniqueness, from its place of belonging in family and village, genealogy, language, land environment and culture" (p. 142).*

Pacific male elite athletes and mental health

There is an emerging body of literature on the mental health experiences of Pacific male athletes in elite sports, all of which focuses on the risk factors for mental wellbeing. These factors include cultural marginalisation, socioeconomic disadvantage, familial pressures, 'sports-migration' or relocation, and a lack of lifestyle balance (Horton, 2012, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Depression, anxiety, substance misuse, and suicide were the main mental health issues for Pacific male athletes (Horton, 2012; Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). In regards to non-Pacific literature surrounding this topic, Frank, Nixdorf and Beckmann (2013) affirmed that mental illness in athletes originated from both competition-based and everyday life stressors. Orlovska and others (2014) also acknowledged the influence of head injuries on athletes' mental health, asserting that head trauma from 'collision' sports increased the risk of mood, personality, and cognitive disorders for elite athletes.

Rodriguez and McDonald (2013) stated it is not possible to examine the mental health of Pacific athletes in isolation from the broader sociocultural and global issues impacting these athletes. Increasingly, young Pacific male athletes are being viewed as valuable 'commodities' in global sports markets. With this label, as well increased fame and fortunes, come additional pressures (Horton, 2012; Lakisa et al., 2014). Recent suicides by young Pacific male athletes and an increasing number of Pacific athletes speaking out about their own battles with depression, suggests that Pacific athletes are at increased risk of experiencing adverse mental health outcomes and that there are factors unique to Pacific athletes that require further investigation (Horton, 2012; Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013).

Risk factors

Socioeconomic stress

Features of socioeconomic disadvantage such as reduced employment prospects, lack of educational opportunities, low living standards, and dangerous social environments were identified as having adverse effects on mental wellbeing for young Pacific male athletes (Foliaki et al., 2006; Horton, 2012; Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Rodriguez and McDonald (2013) argued that the accumulation, and maintenance of wealth, is harder for many Pacific families as a result of the complex nexus of class, social disadvantage, and cultural practices.

Familial pressures

Pressures to succeed and unrealistic expectations of reciprocity from some family members were contributing factors to negative mental wellbeing for Pacific athletes (Horton, 2012; Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Schaaf, 2006; Tiatia-Seath, 2015; Zakus & Horton, 2009). Lakisa et al. (2014) identified kinship obligations, pressures regarding reciprocity, and high expectations from family as some of the unique experiences faced by young Pacific athletes. The concern is that the pressure may mount when families become reliant on athletes' economic contributions. Studies showed that many Pacific athletes came from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and were expected to assume increasing kinship obligations as their sports careers progressed; for example, providing financially for their families at a young age (Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2009). Success in sports provided an opportunity for these young athletes to attain financial stability for their families and in some cases become the major financial contributor, which only amplified the pressure these Pacific athletes take on to becoming professional (Horton, 2012; Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2009). Lakisa et al. (2014) found that there were often misunderstandings around the amount of money young athletes earned, which further exacerbated the expectations placed on young Pacific athletes, particularly those in the junior grades and on minimal contracts.

The shame associated with perceived failure

Horton (2012) asserted that the inability to fulfil kinship obligations was a major reason for why young Pacific athletes experienced added anxiety, shame, and guilt. Expectations increased for eldest sons and those who attained the label of *fo'i pele* (the golden child) (Fuka-Lino, 2015; Tiatia-Seath, 2015). The patriarchal system central to most Pacific cultures, meant greater expectations, pressures, and responsibilities were placed upon males, especially eldest sons and *fo'i pele*, as a result of their 'rank' in the family (Bush, Chapman, Drummond & Fagaloa, 2009; Fuka-Lino, 2015; Horton, 2012; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Tiatia, 2003; Tiatia-Seath, 2015; Zakus & Horton, 2009). Interestingly, Lakisa et al. (2014) identified that NZ-born Pacific athletes were more likely to limit their financial remittances, particularly to extended family, regardless of the strength of their cultural ties and transnational relationships.

The *mana* (prestige) associated with succeeding as a professional athlete, and the subsequent shame associated a perceived failure, was another element that impacted upon mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes (Horton, 2012, 2014; Teaiwa, 2016). It is essential to note that athletes did not necessarily seek this *mana*, but rather it was a consequence of the heightened fame associated with their participation in an elite sport (Horton, 2014). Tiatia-Seath (2015) and Rodriguez and McDonald (2013) affirmed that families, coaches, and sports organisations must be more aware of the unique set of pressures facing young Pacific athletes in order to provide effective support. These expectations can be a heavy burden to carry and often lead to two contrasting outcomes for young Pacific athletes: pride and prosperity or shame and disappointment (Horton, 2012; Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Tiatia-Seath, 2015). This is evident in Tiatia-Seath's study (2015), where one interviewee reflected on the events that led up to the suicide of his older brother:

> *"He had his trials and he didn't make the team bro yeah and I think it was just too much pressure. I don't know, last year at high school you know, you don't know what to do next year and too much pressure from the coaches and everything and my parents giving him pressure too"* (Tongan athlete's younger brother, as cited in Tiatia-Seath, 2015, p. 29).

Intergenerational misunderstandings

Intergenerational misunderstandings around cultural and kinship obligations, particularly the responsibility to support extended family, were onerous demands and impacted negatively on the mental wellbeing of some young Pacific athletes (Bush et al., 2009; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Puna, 2013; Saaulii-Sauni et al., 2009; Siataga, 2011; Tiatia, 2003).

Alefaio (2007) argued that traditional Pacific principles of respect, service, and reciprocity are more challenging to uphold for young Pacific peoples in New Zealand as they grow up in tough urban environments surrounded by conflicting Western principles that are competitive and individualistic. Communication barriers between youth and elders amplified cultural misunderstandings (Tiatia-Seath, 2015). For instance, cultural traditions, such as *fa'a'aloalo* (respect), often hindered the ability of youth to comfortably raise personal issues with parents and community elders (Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Tiatia-Seath, 2015).

Rodriguez (2012) suggested that an increasing number of Pacific youth growing up in families with both Pacific and non-Pacific heritage, can lead to additional familial complications for youth. Especially when it comes to identity establishment and 'coming of age' in a vastly different environment than that of their parents and older family members, which also contributes to generational conflicts and misunderstandings (Bush et al., 2009; Fuka-Lino, 2015; Rodriguez, 2012).

Cultural assimilation

Panapa and Phillips (2014) identified that young Pacific athletes who were more assimilated to Western culture found it easier to settle into elite sporting environments and encountered less negative experiences than those from traditional Pacific backgrounds. They suggested that the predominantly Anglo-Saxon power structure of the NRL was the main reason for this. Nevertheless, this type of

environment led to greater bonding and ethnic pride among Pacific athletes (Panapa & Phillips, 2014). This seems to contradict the notion that in New Zealand, Pacific youth with greater Pacific cultural connections, experience lower levels of negative mental wellbeing than those assimilated to Western culture (MOH, 2008a). These findings suggest that a strong cultural connection is a protective factor in general life, but may be a hurdle to settling into the elite sports environment.

Historical perceptions of Pacific athletes

Hokowhitu (2004) emphasised the impact of historical forces on the mental wellbeing of young Pacific male athletes, and argued that historical perceptions of Pacific athletes as 'raw materials' to be commoditised remains a common attitude in elite sports circles today. Rodriguez and McDonald (2013) posited that such attitudes contribute to the growing risk of exploitation for young Pacific athletes. Grainger (2008) suggested that the objectification of Pacific rugby players as 'primitive' and 'wild' had a negative effect on the mental, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing of Pacific players and their families. Rodriguez and McDonald insinuated that these dehumanising and hypermasculine perceptions influenced identity development and behavioural norms for young Pacific men both inside and outside the sporting environment. Zakus and Horton (2009) supported these views, and advised that young Pacific rugby players were often recruited for their superior physical traits with a heavy emphasis on them simply 'being there', with no real concern towards positive developmental opportunities away from sports.

Sports migration

Global sports migration was found to be a growing issue for young Pacific athletes looking to secure professional contracts (Horton, 2012; Lakisa et al., 2014; Zakus & Horton, 2009). Pacific athletes typically experienced complex migration patterns, which, alongside cultural obligations, generated significant psychological stress for athletes trying to secure professional contracts (Lakisa et al., 2014). Horton (2012) found that many young Pacific athletes whom were recruited by overseas rugby clubs faced increased expectations from family back home and were more susceptible to exploitation as they were often left isolated in their new environment with little to no formal support systems around them.

The impact of injuries

Injury was associated with an increased risk of negative mental health outcomes for young Pacific athletes (Horton, 2014; Price, 2007; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Rodriguez and McDonald (2013) found that there were a number of complex sociocultural and sports-specific elements that amplified the impact of injuries on mental wellbeing. These factors included the cost of rehabilitation, potential income loss because of time away from work, reduced access to appropriate medical practitioners, and the timing of injuries in regards to big games such as finals (Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013).

The New Zealand Rugby Players Association (NZRPA) (2013) surveyed 123 retired professional rugby union players to gain an insight into their post-rugby experiences and found that 48 percent of players were forced into early retirement because of unexpected injury, which often led to financial hardship

and an increased risk of depression. Almost all 123 players surveyed by the NZRPA stated that they were pressured to play while injured or pressured to return from injury before full rehabilitation, which had a negative psychological impact on athletes. Podlog and Eklund (2007) argued that the number of athletes returning from injury prematurely is expected to rise because of medical advances and increased demands to return to play.

Injured athletes who removed themselves entirely from sports because of injury were at increased risk of negative mental wellbeing, as sports was often one of the few spaces where young Pacific athletes felt a strong sense of identity and belonging (Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). A complete move away from sports was a risk factor for depression, and alcohol misuse was found to be popular coping mechanism, which further compounded the impact of injuries (Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Suicide among injured athletes was a topic of major concern (Hughes & Leavey, 2012).

Physical head injuries were also acknowledged as a risk factor for negative mental wellbeing. Although no studies have yet been published regarding elite athletes, Orlovska and colleagues (2014), whose study investigated the relationship between head injury and subsequent psychiatric disorders, identified that a head injury before the age of 15 years of age, increased the risk of depression by 59 percent, the risk of bipolar disorder by 28 percent, and the risk of organic mental disorders by more than 400 percent among young Danish children. This is the largest study investigating head injury and subsequent mental illness to date.

Limited interests outside of sports

Evidence exists about the danger of young Pacific male athletes putting all their efforts towards a career in professional sports with little focus on back-up career options (Christensen & Sorensen, 2009; Horton, 2012; Horton, 2014; Price, 2007; Schaaf, 2006). The percentage of young Pacific athletes that make it professionally is very low, but many young Pacific men continue to pursue careers in professional sports with no backup options, which is largely the result of sociocultural factors that make back-up options such as tertiary education and apprenticeships harder to access (Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Zakus & Horton, 2009). This contributed to a limited balance in athletes' life and increased the pressure athletes put on themselves to make it professionally (Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Alongside high stakes and very real responsibilities, this context often had devastating psychological consequences for young Pacific athletes who experienced failure or perceived failure (Horton, 2014).

Price (2007) emphasised that most of the contracts secured by young rugby players were full-time and thus required greater effort and time from athletes, which reduced their ability to pursue educational or other back-up options. Nonetheless, sport remains a zone of success and potential socioeconomic advancement for many young Pacific athletes (Horton, 2014). These athletes pursued careers in professional sports because they wanted to and viewed this option as a calculated risk for financial stability for themselves and their family, regardless of the realisation that not everyone can play at a professional level (Hokowhitu, 2004; Horton, 2012, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Schaaf, 2006). Price (2007) highlighted that young Pacific and non-Pacific athletes' identities were almost exclusively

invested in their chosen sport. Price, and the NZRPA (2013), emphasised that most athletes had unrealistic expectations for their sporting careers and were unaware of the opportunities provided from clubs regarding career development and post-career planning. A career in elite sports was often not conducive to athletes engaging in pursuits outside of sports, and this may be especially true for young Pacific athletes whose kinship obligations and collectivist views may inhibit their ability to focus on dual career paths (Price, 2007). Evidence revealed that involvement in elite sports, in most cases, did not adequately allow for the attainment of key life skills that young athletes require later in life, as these young athletes often sacrificed the potential breadth of their future selves to pursue a career in professional sports (Horton, 2014; Price, 2007; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Zakus & Horton, 2009).

Identity foreclosure

Identity-foreclosure refers to an individual committing to a strong sport-specific identity without exploring, or having the opportunity to explore, other options or ideas. Identity foreclosure impacted negatively upon the mental wellbeing of young athletes (Clews, 2015; Horton, 2014; Hughes & Leavey, 2012; Price, 2007; Rice et al., 2016; Schaaf, 2006). Schaaf's (2006) study, which examined the motivations of elite Pacific male rugby players in New Zealand, asserted that rugby often defined the identity of young Pacific athletes because of its all-encompassing environment. Price (2007) emphasised that both codes of rugby play a formative, not just expressive, role in sculpting young athletes' identities because of the publicity and value placed on rugby in New Zealand. It is believed that this is more prominent among young Pacific rugby players as rugby is heavily entrenched in Pacific communities (Horton, 2014; Schaaf, 2006). Price and Clews (2015) argued that many athletes experienced identity-foreclosure as a result of the elite sporting environment, which left very few avenues away from sports for athletes to shape and express their own identity and individuality. The risk of identity-foreclosure increased as athletes' public recognition grew, often leading to a way of thinking that downplayed the need to think about a life and career away from sports (Price, 2007). Identity foreclosure exacerbated the negative psychological impact of poor performances, injuries, and public criticism (Clews, 2015; Hughes & Leavey, 2012).

Burnout

Burnout refers to the condition in which athletes fail to manage stress or an organisation fails to moderate stressful situations, and was identified as a risk factor for young Pacific athletes' mental wellbeing (Clews, 2015; Crampton, 2014; Hodge, Lonsdale & Ng, 2008; Horton, 2014; Hughes & Leavey, 2012; Rice et al., 2016). A lack of enjoyment with their sport, limited formal and informal support, poor performances, overtraining, and pressure from management, family, and media were the main elements contributing towards burnout in athletes (Crampton, 2014; Goodger, Gorely, Lavelle, & Harwood, 2007; Hodge et al., 2008; Price, 2007). Hughes and Leavey's (2012) literature review on the incidence and aetiology of mental illness in elite sports found that burnout was strongly correlated with depression among non-Pacific elite athletes. Burnout is becoming increasingly more apparent among young athletes as recruitment into intense sporting programmes and high levels of high-impact training are occurring at progressively younger ages (Jowett, Hill, Hall & Curran, 2016).

Alcohol and other drug misuse

Substance misuse remains one of the high-profile issues impacting upon the mental wellbeing of young Pacific male athletes and young Pacific males in general (Clews, 2015; Hughes & Leavey, 2012; Ioane, Lambie & Percival, 2013; NZRPA, 2013; Rice et al., 2016; Tamasese et al., 2005; Tiatia-Seath, 2015; Tukuitonga, 2013). The Ministry of Health (2008a) and Faalii-Fidow et al. (2016) identified that Pacific youth had higher rates of binge drinking and substance-related mental health disorders than other New Zealanders. Reardon and Creado (2014) stated that alcohol and drug abuse is popular among athletes for many reasons, especially as a way of coping with stressors such as pressure to perform, injuries, physical pain, and depression. Doherty and colleagues' (2016) study also identified that non-Pacific elite male athletes commonly used alcohol to gain temporary relief from anxiety or to avoid depressive moods.

Findings from Rice et al. (2016) and O'Brien et al. (2012) found that alcohol-related aggressive and antisocial behaviours were higher among non-Pacific male athletes in comparison to non-Pacific non-athletes. Sønderlund et al. (2014) revealed that the excessive use of alcohol and recreational drugs among athletes was directly associated with several risky behaviours reflective of depression, poor self-image, and loss of emotional control. Excessive alcohol use among male athletes was usually connected to sports where hypermasculinity and violent social identity were the norm (Sønderlund et al., 2014). Excessive alcohol use in the context of celebration, team bonding, and 'mateship' was also identified as being part of the culture in certain sports; for example, rugby league in Australia (Duff, Scealy & Rowland, 2005; Sønderlund et. al, 2014).

Stigma around mental illness

Stigma and discrimination around mental illness had a significant impact on mental wellbeing for Pacific athletes and Pacific youth in general (Crampton, 2014; Horton, 2012; Hughes & Leavey, 2012; Pulotu-Endemann et al., 2004; Rice et al., 2016). Rice et al. (2016) found stigma, discrimination, and a lack of understanding around mental health and illness to be key barriers to help seeking among non-Pacific athletes. Rice et al. and work by Hughes and Leavey (2012) emphasised that current approaches to mental illness in sports are fraught with stigmatisation, denial, and dichotomous paradigms of mental versus physical illness that prioritise physical wellbeing over mental wellbeing. Tiatia-Seath (2015) identified that Pacific youth, especially males, experienced significant barriers to seeking help from their personal networks, for example friends and family, as a result of the stigma around mental illness that exists in numerous Pacific families and communities (Tiatia-Seath, 2015). A lack of confidence seeking help and accessing mental health services was evident among Pacific athletes (Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Rodriguez and McDonald (2013) argued that negative views towards mental illness and the perceived shame and embarrassment with seeking help were major barriers to seeking-help among Pacific athletes.

Barriers to seeking help for negative mental wellbeing is found to be an issue for young Pacific athletes and young Pacific youth in general (Foliaki et al., 2006; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Pulotu-Endemann et al., 2014; Tiatia-Seath, 2015). It is well documented that Pacific peoples are much less

likely to access mental health treatment in comparison to other New Zealanders, which remains a major challenge for the mental health sector (Foliaki et al., 2006). Young Pacific patients were also likely to give health professionals false information in order to downplay their experiences and provide doctors with the answers they perceived as correct (Tukuitonga, 2013).

Hypermasculinity

The literature readily highlighted the negative effect of hypermasculinity for Pacific athletes (Chen, 2014; Horton, 2012, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014). Rugby union and rugby league were shown to provide young Pacific men with a valid, if not 'traditional', means to express what has now become the hegemonic form of masculinity among Pacific males (Chen, 2014; Horton, 2014). The literature argued that while these young men may be strong, aggressive, and confident on the field, many may well be in a volatile psycho-emotional state and less able to cope with failure because of hypermasculine attitudes that hinder emotional expression and help-seeking (Chen, 2014; Horton, 2014). Recent studies have found that hypermasculine norms increase internalised stigma towards depressive moods, restrict ways of coping, and promote the masking of emotions that can lead to self-destructive behaviours (Doherty et al., 2016; Horton, 2014; Valkonen & Hanninen, 2013). Literature by Hokowhitu (2004), Rodriguez (2012), and Teaiwa (2016) highlighted similar findings regarding hypermasculine attitudes towards Pacific male athletes, and outline in greater depth the origins, influencing factors, and impact of such attitudes on the psyche and norms of young Pacific men today.

Protective factors

Family support

Family is a main priority for most Pacific peoples, and this was no different for young Pacific male athletes. The importance of family in light of mental wellbeing was a common theme throughout the literature, with positive familial support and regular family interaction key components of positive mental wellbeing for these athletes (Alefaio, 2007; Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Schaaf, 2006; Tiatia-Seath, 2014). As aforementioned, family in the Pacific context does not merely refer to immediate family, but can include extended family, close family associates, and in some cases the wider community (Alefaio, 2007; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2012). Jones, Mahoney, and Gucciardi's (2014) found that family was an important source of support for young NRL players, particularly during transitional phases such as getting injured or being selected for representative honours. Away from the general love and support family provided, family were influential in shaping the skills, identity, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms young athletes acquired (Hellstedt, 2005). Support from extended family and the wider community, especially in times of increased stress, was also identified as a major strength in Pacific communities and was a protective factor for positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific athletes (Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Schaaf, 2006).

Cohesive families provided Pacific youth with emotional support and security as they developed and was associated with reduced levels of stress, delinquency, and wayward behaviours (Alefaio, 2007).

Young Pacific athletes were appreciative of the sacrifices their parents made to support their careers and recognised their achievements as 'family property', a direct reflection of their families' support (Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Schaaf, 2006). This was also evident in Lakisa et al.'s (2014) study, which found that all 47 Pacific NRL players surveyed attributed their success to the support of their family and wider kinship networks. Being able to reciprocate familial support had a positive impact on mental wellbeing for Pacific athletes, with many of athletes finding great pleasure in being able to advance the socioeconomic positions of their family (Lakisa et al., 2014).

Pacific athlete camaraderie

Participation in elite sports facilitated the cultivation and mobilisation of cultural support networks between Pacific athletes (Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Lakisa et al. (2014) affirmed that because rugby is a symbolic marker in Pacific communities, it naturally bought Pacific players together at the highest playing levels, which allowed for the cultivation of a collective identity for Pacific players. This collective identity provided players with a sense of belonging, strengthened bonds between elite Pacific players, and installed greater pride in their respective cultural heritages (Lakisa et al., 2014).

The advantage of these networks was highlighted by Panapa and Phillips (2014) who found that many young Pacific athletes benefitted greatly from experienced Pacific athletes, who acted as mentors and provided comradeship, companionship, and security for younger Pacific athletes. Similarly, Rodriguez and McDonald (2013) found that many young Pacific athletes considered the experienced Pacific athletes as their role models and major sources of support. Panapa and Phillips affirmed that experienced Pacific athletes implicitly recognised this relationship, and acknowledged the unique struggles and sense of difference experienced by younger Pacific athletes in elite sport, as recollected by the following athlete:

> "*We talked to the senior [Pacific Island] boys, they were always there and they really helped us. They were in the same position as us. They understood a lot from where we were coming from, that was a big help, having to talk to them . . . hang out with them*" (Samoan NRL player, as cited in Panapa & Phillips, 2014, p. 1382).

Horton (2014) and Panapa and Phillips (2014) explained that these collective networks are also the result of Pacific athletes being part of an ethnic group that is often marginalised by formal power structures in elite sports and society in genereal. Shared experiences and common heritages led to Pacific athletes forging a collective identity in response to this marginalisation (Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Pacific athletes were more than willing to overcome their individual nationalistic differences in order to cultivate a collegiality among Pacific players, which provided a nurturing and supportive environment for younger Pacific athletes (Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013).

Athletes emphasised how support from other Pacific athletes strengthened their own cultural identity and allowed them to gain a greater appreciation of core Pacific values, such as reciprocity, respect, love, and compassion, and the benefit of these values in elite sports (Panapa & Phillips, 2014). The fact

that this collective identity was linked to greater cultural pride was a positive sign, as the literature has outlined the positive relationship between a secure cultural identity and positive mental wellbeing for Pacific youth (Ministry of Social Development, 2010; Umana-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Positive reinforcement of cultural elements in elite sporting environments was also recognised as a key factor in the development of a secure cultural identity for young Pacific male athletes (Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; McDonald & Rodriguez, 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014).

Organisational support

Schools, clubs, and organisations were identified as key sources of support of for young Pacific athletes (Horton, 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Price, 2007; Schaaf, 2006). Organisational support, such as sports psychologists, mental health clinicians, management, and sports administrative staff, were found to be readily available for Pacific athletes; however, the accessibility and cultural appropriateness of such services for Pacific athletes remained unclear (Horton, 2014; McDonald & Rodriguez, 2013). Lakisa et al. (2014) highlighted that a deeper understanding of the family situations and kinship obligations of Pacific athletes is central to developing trust and strengthening relationships between sports organisations and Pacific athletes.

Religion and spirituality

Spirituality was a major source of support for many young Pacific athletes (Alefaio, 2007; Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; McDonald & Rodriguez, 2013; Schaaf, 2006). Church is at the heart of most Pacific communities and is a strong source of support and spiritual sustenance for many (Alefaio, 2007; Horton, 2014). The literature emphasised the significance of spirituality for young Pacific athletes. For example, one Pacific athlete put a lucrative NRL contract on hold at the age of nineteen to complete a two-year ministry service (Lakisa et al., 2014).

Tiatia (2008) stated that spirituality is vital for many Pacific youth, as it acts as a buffer against stress and negative outcomes, strengthens resiliency, increases perceived social support, and provides youth with an optimistic view of life. Lakisa et al. (2014) identified that religious practices such as prayer and attending church were coping mechanisms for some Pacific athletes and gave athletes' actions greater meaning. Puna (2013) affirmed that spirituality was very important to Cook Islands youth, regardless of whether they attended church, which suggesting that spirituality is deeply engrained in the identity and psyche of most young Pacific peoples regardless of their religious affiliation.

Religion was identified as having a negative effect in some cases as well, with certain forms of religious practice, mainly those based on shame and prejudice, perceived as detrimental to mental wellbeing for Pacific youth (Tiatia, 2008). A move away from religion altogether, however, was identified as a risk factor for mental wellbeing and often led to increased isolation and reduced self-esteem for Pacific youth (Tiatia, 1998; Tiatia, 2008). Ultimately, religion played a central role in facilitating positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes and their families. As Lakisa et al. (2014) argued, the social institutions of sport and religion could coexist and flourish given the right sociocultural settings. Schaaf (2006) highlighted that clubs, coaches, and organisations must be mindful of the centrality of religion for

young Pacific athletes and work to ensure that the spiritual needs of these athletes are recognised in the elite sports environment.

A secure cultural identity

A strong and secure cultural identity was a vital protective factor of positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes and young Pacific males in general (Anae, 1997; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Rodriguez, 2012; Pulotu-Endemann et al., 2007). Family and social backgrounds strongly influenced young Pacific athletes' cultural identities (Lakisa et al., 2014; Pulotu-Endemann et al., 2007). Fa'alili-Fidow et al. (2016) identified religion, language proficiency, acceptance by other Pacific peoples, and cultural pride as crucial aspects of a 'secure' cultural identity for Pacific youth in New Zealand. Anae's (1997) study, which explored identity development among NZ-born Samoans, found that developing a secure cultural identity is a two-step process for NZ-born Samoans. First a process of identity crisis begins, where individuals explore alternatives in the face of confusion, which is then followed by resolution and commitment, where individuals gain a secure understanding and acceptance of their own cultural identity.

In a later study, Anae (2003) found that NZ-born Pacific youth were more likely to adopt a 'PI' (Pacific Island) identity as a result of feeling more connected with their Pacific peers than their Island-born elders. The PI identity provided a broader identity than identifying as only 'Samoan', 'Tongan', or 'Cook Islander', and allowed for greater inclusion and socialisation for many Pacific youth (Anae, 2003). The PI identity was found to be a phenomenon exclusive to youth however, with many of these youths reverting to their original ethnic identity as they matured into adulthood (Anae, 2003). This phenomenon is similar to that found in the elite sporting environment, as discussed earlier, where Pacific athletes are willing to overcome their nationalistic differences to cultivate a strong and supportive network among each other (Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014). While Anae's findings are mainly related to NZ-born Samoans, they provide an insight into the identity development challenges faced by many Pacific youth growing up in New Zealand.

Young Pacific athletes strongly valued the impact that their distinctive cultural upbringings had on shaping their identity, with many cultural customs regularly practiced by athletes; for example, speaking the native tongue, adhering to directives from parents, prayer, and respecting traditional protocol during major events such as weddings and funerals (Lakisa et al., 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Notably, Rodriguez (2012) affirmed that embracing the notion of hybridity was vital to establishing a cultural identity capable of successfully navigating both Pacific and Western worlds and minimising the negative psychological effects of this dichotomy. Pacific athletes that had a strong Pacific cultural identity but were still able to navigate and engage with the dominant Anglo-European society experienced less psychological stress and enjoyed the greatest educational and career success (Rodriguez, 2012; Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010).

A masculine identity

Sports, in particular rugby, allowed for the cultivation of a 'legitimate' Pacific masculine identity for young Pacific male athletes, which had both positive and negative effects on athletes' mental wellbeing; as discussed earlier (Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Horton (2014) suggested that sports, in particular rugby, is a positive socialising agency for young Pacific males who face challenges to their identity, sense of belonging, and worth in almost all other social spaces.

Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation, which refers to engagement with sports and training because it is personally rewarding, helped young Pacific athletes to stay positive in their journey towards a career in elite sports (Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Schaaf, 2006). Schaaf (2006) affirmed that the likelihood of 'burnout' is vastly reduced in athletes with high intrinsic motivation to succeed. Pacific athletes noted the importance of self-motivation and self-assessments for improvement, and the importance of staying positive and resilient in the face of adversity (Schaaf, 2006). Schaaf (2006) and Lakisa et al. (2014) stated that many young Pacific athletes found great pride in knowing they had the talent and opportunities to represent their families on the elite stage and help them financially. This was the main motivation to participate in elite sports for many Pacific athletes, despite the negatives and risks associated with chasing a career in professional sports (Lakisa et al., 2014; Schaaf, 2006). Unlike literature focused on European and North American athletes' motivations, the literature focused on Pacific athletes found that extrinsic motivations for a career in elite sports, such as money and fame, came secondary to intrinsic motivations, such as being able to provide for the family, defy lower-class labouring stereotypes, and fulfil God's plan for them as athletes and role models (Schaaf, 2006).

A balanced lifestyle

A balanced lifestyle that involved a variety of activities and not just sports was identified as vital to achieving positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes (Horton, 2014; Price, 2007; Schaaf, 2006). A 'healthy' and balanced lifestyle for young athletes was defined as athletes having a secure identity founded on a broad range of social and cultural activities and not merely formed and reinforced by sports (Price, 2007). A balanced lifestyle was associated with greater autonomy, greater resilience against stress, and lower rates of 'burnout' among Pacific and non-Pacific elite athletes (Hodge, Lonsdale & Ng, 2008; Horton, 2014). Zakus and Horton (2009) emphasised the importance of sports organisations facilitating education and employment opportunities for young athletes. The NRL's mandate that all athletes in the elite Under 20 competition must study or work a minimum of 24 hours per week to be eligible to play was recognised as a good example of how sports organisations can promote balance among young athletes (Zakus & Horton, 2009). Such initiatives ensure young athletes have back-up career options should they not progress to the professional level. The NZRPA's (2013) survey also indicated that athletes with a strong education were best equipped to deal with the demanding challenges of professional rugby, both on and off the field.

Overview of current mental wellbeing initiatives in sport

A number of wellbeing initiatives for young elite athletes have been established over the past ten years.However, only a few have targeted young Pacific athletes (Crampton, 2013). These initiatives have been implemented at both the grassroots and policy level, and are both community-based and organisational-based (Crampton, 2013). Some examples include players' associations, the inclusion of education and alternative career planning into training schedules, and media campaigns focused on raising awareness of mental health in sports (Crampton, 2013; Zakus & Horton, 2009).

Initiatives focused specifically on the mental wellbeing of young Pacific male athletes were limited, but several programmes were aimed at improving overall player welfare for Pacific athletes. Those relevant to this study included: New Zealand Rugby League's 'It's More Than Just a Game' programme, delivered in partnership with the Ministry of Education, which uses rugby league as a medium to improve education, health, and wellbeing for Pacific youth (State Services Commission, 2015). Auckland Rugby Union's 'Pro Sport' programme, aims to provide education and employment opportunities to Pacific rugby players who have just left high school (Auckland Rugby Union, 2015). New Zealand Rugby Union's [NZRU] 'Personal Development Programme', aims to assist Pacific and non-Pacific rugby union players with their own personal and professional development; for example, completing education, developing long-term career plans, and learning how to capitalise on business opportunities in sports (NZRPA, 2013). Another initiative is the NRL's 'CareerWise' programme, which supports young athletes to attend university or trade school (NRL, n.d.). This programme is enforced by the NRL's 'No Work, No Study, No Play' policy which affirms that all players in the NRL's elite Under 20s competition must work or study for at least 24 hours per week to be eligible to play; this policy also bans clubs from scheduling compulsory training for under 20s players between the hours of 8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday (Horton, 2014; NRL, n.d.). The NZRU are also in the early stages of developing and implementing initiatives focused on raising player awareness of mental health and wellbeing as well. For instance, all new Super Rugby and under-18 development players must now attend a compulsory mental health and wellbeing course as part of their induction at the beginning of the season (N. Price, personal communication, June 22, 2016).

The current initiative leading the way in this specific field is the NRL's 'State of Mind' programme. This programme is aimed at reducing stigma around mental illness, facilitating positive help-seeking behaviours, and increasing the mental health literacy of athletes and the wider community (Le Va, 2015). The NRL's 'State of Mind' programme has been in place since 2012, and originates from a similar programme founded in the United Kingdom in 2011. New Zealand-based Pacific mental health organisation Le Va recently collaborated with the NRL to provide Pacific-specific advice and how to better meet the needs of the growing number of Pacific players and communities engaged with the NRL in New Zealand, Australia, and the Pacific Islands (Le Va, 2015). As part of this partnership, Le Va devised a 'Wellbeing Relocation' assessment tool after identifying that relocation was one of the greatest hindrances to mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes (Lauano, 2016). This tool assesses the holistic needs of athletes about to relocate and sends an overview of athletes' needs and concerns to their new club. Athletes' needs often range from cultural-specific requirements, to finding

accommodation and social networks, right through to identifying if the player would benefit from a psychologist during the initial relocation period (Lauano, 2016).

The main strength of the aforementioned initiatives was the strong emphasis on facilitating greater balance among young athletes. These initiatives focused on facilitating education and employment opportunities for young athletes, and supported them to make the most of these opportunities. Enforcement of these programmes further promoted a positive message to young athletes that a career in elite sports is not the be-all-and-end-all. Focusing on the social determinants of health, such as employment and education, also provides young athletes with transferrable life skills and the opportunity to develop an identity away from sports, which is vital to succeeding off the field and life after sports (Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Schaaf, 2006).

Whilst these initiatives mark a positive trend towards increased awareness around mental health, room for improvement remains. Apart from the Le Va and NRL partnership programme and ARU's 'Pro Sport' programme, most initiatives lacked awareness of the sociocultural-specific factors that influence wellbeing for Pacific athletes. These initiatives provide a great foundation to work from, however, and their effectiveness could be greatly improved by simply utilising more sociocultural-appropriate ways to engage young Pacific athletes, their families, and their communities; for example, incorporating central Pacific elements such as family, community, and religious faith (Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Price, 2007). In general, a more holistic approach that incorporates aspects important to young Pacific male athletes, such as family, communitarianism, reciprocity, spirituality, and comradeship, would help to support and sustain positive wellbeing among young Pacific athletes. It is hoped that the findings from this research will help facilitate this and highlight additional factors that can support positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes.

It is also hoped that findings from this study will lead to greater understanding of the strengths of young Pacific athletes, which can be used to cultivate more strengths-based approaches towards positive mental wellbeing for these athletes; a major gap that remains in current literature and practice and a major reason for undertaking this study. As comparatively little research has been carried out in the area of strengths-based positive mental wellbeing and elite Pacific athletes, there is enormous room for programmes to boost this aspect of athlete wellbeing. Such improvements would likely go on to benefit performance and increase the likelihood of a successful transition away from sports when athletes' playing careers end (Rice et al., 2016).

While young Pacific peoples are generally more accepting of Western approaches to mental wellbeing, it would be beneficial for both players and organisations to adopt a Pacific, or at least hybrid-Pacific, approach when planning and implementing these programmes (Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2009). The literature suggests that this has been a major challenge, with current NRL welfare and education manager Paul Heptonstall admitting that there are cultural nuances and pressures that most non-Pacific sports administrators, coaches, and clinicians struggle to identify and understand (Lakisa et al., 2014). This research aims to shed some light on these nuances and pressures, in hopes of addressing such issues.

Gaps in the literature

Upon undertaking a comprehensive review of the literature, it is clear that there is a lack of information focused on the wellbeing of young Pacific athletes in New Zealand. Research relevant to the wellbeing of Pacific athletes was scarcely focused on mental wellbeing, often focused on older athletes or those nearing the end of their careers, or grouped Pacific and non-Pacific athletes together. Schaaf (2006) was the only literature that involved Pacific athletes based in New Zealand. Schaaf's research investigated the motivations and lived experiences of three Samoan men, aged between twenty and twenty-five, playing professional rugby in New Zealand. So, a large gap remains in regards to research on the mental wellbeing of young Pacific athletes.

Despite this, the current body of literature is useful for informing the next generation of research looking at the wellbeing of elite Pacific athletes. It provides an insight into the sociocultural context and lived experiences of Pacific athletes, which helps given the holistic nature of wellbeing for Pacific peoples. Further research around mental wellbeing and what it means to young Pacific male athletes will raise awareness and increase understanding of this topic for key stakeholders, so that they can provide the best support for Pacific athletes.

Summary

This chapter has provided definitions of key terms used in this research to ensure consistent meaning between the literature, researcher, and reader. It outlined the different perceptions of mental wellbeing that exist among Pacific peoples, and highlighted the key differences between Pacific and Western perceptions of mental wellbeing. It provided an overview of the mental health status of Pacific male athletes. This chapter looked at the risk and protective factors of mental wellbeing for young Pacific male athletes in current literature, and utilised non-Pacific research to provide sustenance for a topic yet to be formally researched from a Pacific perspective. It has looked at current wellbeing initiatives, relevant to young Pacific athletes, and identified the need to increase the emphasis placed on the mental side of athlete wellbeing and employ more sociocultural-appropriate approaches to supporting mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes, Lastly, this chapter highlighted the need for more Pacific-specific research to be carried out to improve existing initiatives and inform the development of future interventions aimed at supporting positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes and young Pacific males in general.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology used to guide and carry out this research. First, an overview of the study aims and objectives is provided. The qualitative approach used for this research and the researcher's 'positionality' are then described. Next, the theoretical framework that guided data collection in this research is explained. The sampling, recruitment, and data collection methods used in this research are also discussed. An overview of the pilot phase and the overall interview process is then provided. Lastly, ethical considerations and the data analysis process are presented.

Aims and objectives

The aim of this study was to explore young Pacific male athletes' perceptions of what contributes to positive mental wellbeing and peak performance at an elite level of sport. Using a strengths-based approach, it is envisaged that this qualitative Auckland based research will provide useful information to better support the mental health and wellbeing needs of young Pacific male athletes.

The key objectives of this study were to:

a) Identify and describe risk and protective factors that impact upon the mental wellbeing of young Pacific male elite athletes (16-24 years);

b) Explore young Pacific male athletes' views of what constitutes positive mental wellbeing;

c) Provide information to help inform current suicide prevention and depression initiatives with a particular focus on Pacific males; and

d) Expose potential future research foci toward advancing Pacific knowledge around mental wellbeing, suicide prevention, and Pacific male youth.

Review of the literature

A literature review was undertaken to explore both national and international evidence. Relevant public health database search engines were accessed through the University of Auckland library. Due to a paucity of literature on the mental wellbeing of young Pacific athletes, literature on the mental wellbeing of non-Pacific male athletes and young Pacific males in general was also reviewed. Most of the literature sourced was published between 2006 and 2016 to ensure the most up-to-date sources were being used, but the oldest source dated back to 2001.

Searches were limited to published journal articles (n=33), books (n=5), theses (n=7), and reports (n=13); other documents relevant to the study, such as conference presentations, websites, and news articles, also informed this literature review.

The primary search engines used included: Science Direct, Pacific Health Dialog, Medline, PubMed, Index NZ, Scopus, Trove, and Google Scholar; the University of Auckland library catalogue search engine was also used to access literature. Citations in the most relevant studies were explored to ensure that all key articles and studies were captured. Keyword search strings comprised of the

following terms: *Pacific* OR *Pacific Island** OR *Polynesian athletes* AND *depression** *mental wellbeing*, *adolescents* OR *young people* OR *youth** *risk factors in sport*, and *protective factors in sport* OR *Pacific males*; terms were entered independently and as combinations to ensure a wider capture of relevant sources.

Additional Google searches were undertaken to identify grey material such as reports, theses, conference presentations, websites and other relevant government, non-profit organisation and educational resources not accessible via scientific databases. The Ministry of Health and Le Va websites were also searched, and several resources were acquired through personal networks; 11 resources were gathered through these avenues.

The literature was then read and critically analysed. Findings from the literature were compared in order to identify recurring themes and sub themes. These themes were used to inform the final construction of this chapter, which allowed for existing literature to be summarised and evaluated. This review allowed for the identification of current research gaps and provided context for where this research stands in regards to these gaps.

Research design

A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this type of study. It is a form of social inquiry used to capture participants' experiences, understandings, and creations of the world around them (Hammersly, 2013). It then captures their interpretation of these experiences (Polit & Beck, 2010). The benefit of this approach is that it acknowledges the influence of perception on lived experiences and its approach to data collection aligns with the conversational way many Pacific peoples share knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Vaioleti, 2006). As such, adopting a qualitative approach allows for deeper exploration of participants' attitudes, views, and beliefs towards mental wellbeing in the context of their own lived-experiences within this current study.

Qualitative research is subjective in nature, often influenced by historical events, the sociocultural context, the unique lived-experiences of participants, as well as the researcher's interpretation of the data collected personal biases, perceptions, experiences, and culture and the way they approach the research and interpret the data (Creswell, 2014). This process is called reflexivity and is a way for researchers to evaluate their own 'positionality' within the research (Bourke, 2014; Creswell, 2014).

Researcher positionality

Reflecting on researcher positionality is important in qualitative research, as 'who we are' most often influences the research design, the methodology, and interpretation of findings. Bourke (2014) affirmed that researcher positionality is determined by where the researcher stands in relation to participants and their lived experiences. It is common for researchers to position themselves as either an 'insider' or 'outsider' researcher. An 'insider' researcher refers an investigator who has a direct connection with research participants and their settings, whereas an 'outsider' researcher is someone who does not share any commonalities with participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

I am a 23-year-old Pacific male, born and raised in Auckland, and of Cook Islands heritage. In this study, I occupy the space of both an 'insider' and 'outsider' researcher. From a sociocultural perspective, being a young Pacific male myself, I am an 'insider' researcher; however, from an individual perspective, with participants being elite athletes, I am an 'outsider' researcher. This aligns with works from Puna (2013) and Dwyer and Buckle (2009), which stated that just because a researcher is part of the culture under study, does not mean they understand the subculture of those being studied. Recognising this positionality ensured greater self-awareness and limited the effect of my own values and beliefs on this research. Conducting this process of reflexivity enabled the views of young Pacific male athletes to be void of researcher biases.

Being a young Pacific male myself also helped to cultivate open engagement with participants. In many Pacific cultures, it would be seen as disrespectful to discuss some of the interview questions with older persons, so having an interviewer of a similar age and from a similar sociocultural background created a greater sense of openness for participants. The researcher's sociocultural background also enabled the use of informal discourse, as required, to create a more natural environment for participants. This awareness encouraged participants to be their authentic self and share their genuine views and experiences.

Grounded theory

A grounded theory approach was employed for this study. This is an inductive approach that generates new theories based on the data collected, which is useful for studies where there is lack of existing evidence (Buetow, 2007). The term grounded theory is derived from the notion that theories generated are not tied to any pre-existing theories, but rather, directly grounded in the data collected (Creswell, 2013). It encompasses set principles for data collection, data analysis, and data reporting, which can be utilised to develop valid theoretical explanations for social processes, behaviours, and interactions (Chamaz & Belgrave, 2012; Creswell, 2013).

A key feature of grounded theory is that data collection and analysis inform and influence one another through a repeated cycle as new themes emerge (Chamaz, 2011). This allows for added flexibility around the way data is collected. For example, the researcher can be flexible with the type of questions that will be asked during interviews. Less rigid questioning enables for rich interview data to be obtained and rigorously analysed to ensure robust theories are developed (Chamaz & Belgrave, 2012).

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used for this study where recruitment was based on certain criteria relevant to research aims and objectives (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). A sample of 20 participants were recruited, which is considered appropriate for a qualitative study of this nature.

The criteria for participation included: Pacific self-identification, aged between 16 to 24 years, living in Auckland, and engaged in an elite rugby league or rugby union programme. Sampling also ensured an adequate representation of geographical location, ethnicity, and age.

Recruitment

An advertisement (see Appendix A) was disseminated among the researcher's personal and professional networks. Personal networks included connections via Facebook. The advertisement was also emailed out to elite sporting organisations whom had access to young Pacific athletes. Three organisations, Auckland Rugby Union, Auckland Rugby League, and Le Va, a Pacific mental health and addictions non-government organisation, showed interest in the study and shared the advertisement on their websites, among their networks, and via social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. This approach was very effective as there were a number of 'shares' that broaden the reach.

As interest in the study grew, a number of potential participants made contact with the researcher. A Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix B) was sent via email or Facebook messenger to those who expressed their interest to participate. The Participant Information Sheet explained the study in lay terms and in greater depth. The researcher and potential participant then discussed the details of the study via phone calls, text messages, or Facebook messenger. Participants were then given another opportunity to ask questions about the research and clear up any concerns they may have had before confirming to participate. This process ensured participants were well informed before taking part voluntarily. Once it was confirmed that participants had read and fully understood the Participant Information Sheet, interviews were arranged at a time and place convenient to them. Participants were notified that the interviews would be face-to-face and would last no longer than 90 minutes. Participants were also reminded that they could contact the researcher at any time to seek clarification, make changes, or withdraw their participation. Facebook messenger, text messaging, and phone calls were the preferred methods of contact for participants.

Although this approach was effective, an unintentional snowballing technique also proved helpful and progressed the overall recruitment process a lot quicker. To achieve this, the researcher asked participants if they could share the study advertisement with peers who met the criteria. Typically, it was shared with their teammates. This approach helped to develop greater transparency and trust between the researcher and potential participants. It also made it a lot easier for potential participants to come forward as they were trusting of the person whom had already taken part in the interview process. This approach aligns closely with the Health Research Council of New Zealand's [HRC] (2014) Pacific health research guidelines, which emphasise the importance of establishing trust and positive relationships when undertaking research with Pacific communities.

Data collection

The interview schedule (see Appendix C) consisted of 11 semi-structured questions, which aimed to capture and explore participants' experiences and views in regards to project aims. The use of semi-structured questions also allows for some degree of guidance and control during interviews, but with enough flexibility to ensure participants can share their experiences and thoughts freely.

The interview schedule was developed in consultation with experts in the field of Pacific athlete wellbeing, thesis supervisors, and a review of national and international literature. The interview

schedule was designed to address both positive and negative factors that impact upon participants' mental wellbeing, participants' perceptions towards positive mental wellbeing, and participants' views on what factors they considered would be beneficial to supporting positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes in elite sports. Demographic information was collected which included ethnicity, age, residence, and rugby code. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic, it was important to first establish a relaxed environment, therefore a set of opening questions enquired about their sporting careers. The design of the interview schedule allowed for flexibility to explore in more depth emerging concepts as they arose which is much akin to what is expected of a grounded theoretical approach.

An electronic diary was also kept throughout the entire study, which included entries of the researcher's brainstorming ideas and where no identifiable information was recorded. This process was beneficial as it allowed the researcher to reflect on their positionality and thought process throughout the study.

The interviews

The pilot phase comprised the first six interviews. It aimed to assess whether the sampling approach was effective, to test the interview schedule, to collect preliminary data, and to evaluate the overall interview process. Discussions were then had with topic expert and primary supervisor, Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath, to evaluate the overall interview process and discuss and analyse preliminary themes to focus on what would guide the remaining interviews. As a result of the pilot phase, the interview schedule was reordered to ensure interviews flowed naturally and revised to explore protective factors for positive mental wellbeing in greater depth. No other changes to process were required. Data from these interviews were included in the overall study findings.

Interviews were one-on-one and face-to-face carried out at a location of the participants' choice and at a time convenient to them. Locations included local rugby clubrooms, local fast-food establishments, libraries, and participants' homes. Interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes and were audio recorded, with the participant's permission. All interviews were conducted in English.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher verbally outlined the study and went through hardcopies of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix D) with participants. During this process the participants were encouraged to raise any concerns they may have had and were given the opportunity to ask questions related to the study or interview process. Participants were then asked if the interview could be digitally audio-recorded and were informed that recording could be stopped at any time at their request and that all audio recordings from the interview would be handled as per ethics approval guidelines. Participants were assured that all identifiable information they gave during the interview would be anonymised in order to protect their privacy and identity. To ensure participants' privacy and identity were protected, all audio recordings of interviews were securely filed once transcribed on locked premises, and all identifiable information such as names, sports teams and organisations were omitted from the final analysis.

Participants were informed that they could pass on any questions of their choosing without giving a reason, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time within one month after the interview and without giving a reason. Once participants confirmed that they understood the study processes and were happy to take part, they signed the study Consent Form. All consent forms were completed and signed by participants prior to the interview.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews were deemed appropriate. Interviews closely aligned with a Pacific research framework known as 'talanoa', which is grounded on providing a safe and familiar environment for participants (Vaioleti, 2006). Talanoa is common to most Pacific cultures in that it refers to formal and informal conversations that involve the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and ways of thinking (Vaioleti, 2006). A crucial principle of talanoa is that it is based on sharing knowledge rather than extracting it, an empowering and essential protocol when gathering sensitive information within Pacific contexts (HRC, 2014; Te Pou o te Whakaaro Nui, 2010; Vaioleti, 2006). It was this type of concept that overarched the interview process.

The development of authentic, meaningful, and respectful relationships is a key principle of the talanoa framework. It is also the underpinning component in Pacific cultures, and was deemed vital to carrying out these interviews. It is documented that both Pacific and non-Pacific males are more reluctant to discuss the topic of mental health, whether negative or positive, and so developing a safe and open forum for the young males interviewed was essential (World Health Organization, 2001). It was important that participants felt comfortable sharing their stories, experiences, and opinions about a sensitive subject matter. There were a number of simple yet effective methods implemented to facilitate this. Offering food and drinks at the beginning of interviews helped to develop an informal and positive atmosphere and led to general small talk related to the participant's day, sports, education, work, and other general topics. Participants were also informed of the rationale for the study and the value of their experiences and knowledge towards supporting mental wellbeing among athletes like themselves and other young Pacific males. This helped to show an appreciation for their knowledge, views, and experiences. Lastly, the reassurance that all information from interviews would be anonymised helped to communicate a sense of trust and openness.

Following interviews, *pākau aro'a* (gift) were given to participants as a token of appreciation for their time, knowledge, and contribution to the study. The provision of gifts aligns with HRC's (2014) Pacific Health Research Guidelines and underpinned by the core Pacific values of respect, appreciation, and reciprocity. These are crucial elements to the development and maintenance of positive and meaningful relationships.

Additional field notes were made immediately after interviews. Field notes described the general atmosphere of the interview and documented the aspects that worked well in the interview, and those that did not, as well as other notable observations. Other than the participants' interview number, no information personally identifying participants were recorded. Each interview was transcribed soon after the interview took place and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

Analysis

A grounded theory approach was used to analyse data collected from interviews and field notes. Grounded theory is an inductive methodology involving the use of constant comparative analysis to analyse data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparative analysis utilises three stages of analysis to create emergent categories and develop theoretical models to explain the data collected and phenomena studied (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A key function of constant comparative analysis is that data analysis and data collection takes place simultaneously, which allows for the two processes to influence one another in order to focus on, and gain a deeper understanding of developing concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The first stage of analysis is referred to as 'open coding'. This is the initial process where common concepts within the data were identified and placed into comparable groupings, which then lead to the development of preliminary categorising that aimed to describe the topic of interest (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding was performed by electronically highlighting relevant and noteworthy data with each interview transcript and identifying and grouping common concepts.

The second stage of analysis, known as 'axial coding' allowed for comparisons and contrasts, of the groups identified in the open coding phase (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Axial coding promoted the development and linking of categories and subcategories, which led to new ways of 'seeing' the data. Axial coding was undertaken by cutting and pasting data from interview transcripts into each of the separate question areas and then arranging this data into the categories derived from the open coding process. Interview transcripts were re-read for concepts that overlapped in to multiple categories so that they could be compressed into a single category. Data from interview transcripts were colour coded in order to keep track of the data source as links arose between themes.

The third and final stage was 'selective coding'. Selective coding refers to organising and integrating the categories, subcategories, and common concepts into a coherent structure to describe the areas of investigation. Narratives were considered the best strategy for developing categories and subcategories to clearly support the core themes.

This whole analysis process was repeated until saturation was reached and no new concepts emerged from the data. This allowed for strong theoretical understandings of the phenomenon to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Ethical considerations

The protection of participants' welfare, rights, privacy, safety, health, and personal, social, and cultural sensitivities was of paramount importance in this study. Ethics approval was sought, and approved, via the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (see Appendix E).

Accredited ethics approval is vital for research that involves human participants, as the risk of violating moral principles and the human rights of participants exists without adequate protection throughout the research process (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). Respect, autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice were the key ethical values and principles that underpinned the design, implementation,

analysis, and dissemination of this study to ensure the protection of participants from start to finish. These principles were carried out through the use of tools such as the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix B), Consent Form (see Appendix D), and written and verbal discussions with participants to ensure they understood the study and/or study procedures and address any questions and/or concerns they may have had regarding the study so that they were able to make a well informed decision to participate.

As this study involved Pacific participants and centred on Pacific worldviews, the study was also conducted in accordance with the HRC (2014) Pacific Health Research Guidelines, which outline key principles that can be utilised to reinforce the cultural and ethical appropriateness of research involving Pacific peoples in New Zealand. These principles include cultural competency, respect, reciprocity, meaningful engagement, service, rights, balance, and protection (HRC, 2014). These principles interact holistically and are based on developing culturally meaningful and ethical relationships, which are essential when undertaking research with Pacific communities (HRC, 2014). These values and principles guided much of the research process and were implemented throughout the study.

Out of courtesy and respect for participants' professional relationships and obligations, approval and endorsement of this research was obtained from elite sporting organisations prior to any recruitment activities.

Summary

This chapter described the methods used to undertake this research. It also outlined how the literature review was carried out. A qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate and effective way to explore the ideas, beliefs, and experiences of young Pacific male athletes regarding the subject area. Regular reflection on the researcher's 'positionality' during this study was vital to ensuring participants' views and experiences were captured and not influenced by researcher bias. The grounded theory framework used to collect and analyse data was also detailed. Descriptions of the sampling, recruitment, and data collection methods used in this research were provided in this chapter. This chapter affirmed the importance of a pilot phase, which allowed for refining of the interviewing process. This chapter highlighted the importance of ensuring that the conduct of research is ethically sound and participants' interests are held to the utmost importance. Lastly, this chapter detailed the analysis process utilised to expose significant findings that allow the views and experiences of young Pacific male athletes to be authentically represented.

Chapter 4 Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the interviews. It also presents an overview of the participants who took part in this study. Findings are arranged thematically under key categories and concepts. These categories and concepts have been organised in accordance to the four key objectives for the study outlined in Chapter One's Introduction: 'Aims and objectives'. This chapter examines participants' definitions of positive mental wellbeing. It then explores participants' views regarding the risk and protective factors that impact upon their mental wellbeing both 'on and off the field'. Lastly, it presents participants' recommendations for what can be achieved to better support positive mental wellbeing and suicide prevention for young Pacific males engaged in sports.

The research participants

A demographic overview of study participants is presented in Table 1. The criteria for participation included: Pacific self-identification, aged between 16 to 24 years, living in Auckland, and engaged in an elite rugby league or rugby union programme.

Table 1 provides demographic information for the 20 participants who took part in this study. To clarify, 'NSW Cup' refers to the premier open age rugby league competition in New South Wales, which includes one New Zealand team. The NSW cup acts as a feeder competition to the top flight National Rugby League competition. 'Provincial rep' refers to players who are part of one of 14 provincial rugby union teams in New Zealand. 'NRL development' refers to athletes contracted to an NRL club, but playing at an age-grade level. 'Development' contracts refer to age-grade athletes who are contracted to a club, but are unpaid. 'Semi-professional' contracts refer to athletes who receive payment for their participation, but do not rely on their sports as their only income. 'Professional' contracts refer to those athletes whose primary source of income is their sport. Bracketed numbers represent the age-grade if applicable.

Table 1

Demographic summary of participants

Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Area of residence	Code	Playing level	Contract
1	22	Tongan	Central Auckland	Union	Club	None
2	22	Samoan	South Auckland	League	NSW Cup	Semi-professional
3	18	Samoan	South Auckland	Union	Provincial rep (U19s)	Semi-professional
4	19	Tongan	Central Auckland	Union	Provincial rep (U19s)	Professional
5	19	Tongan	Central Auckland	Union	Provincial rep	Professional
6	23	Tongan	West Auckland	League	Club	None

7	23	Fijian	West Auckland	League	Club	None
8	19	Samoan/European	West Auckland	Union	Provincial rep (U19s)	Professional
9	19	Tongan	Central Auckland	Union	Provincial rep (U19s)	Professional
10	16	Cook Islands	South Auckland	Union	First 15	None
11	21	Samoan/Niuean	Central Auckland	League	NRL	Professional
12	16	Tongan	South Auckland	League	NRL Development (U16s)	Development
13	17	Samoan	East Auckland	Union	First 15/Super rugby (U18s)	Development
14	18	Tongan	South Auckland	Union	First 15/Super rugby (U18s)	Development
15	19	Samoan	West Auckland	Union	Provincial rep (U19s)	Semi-professional
16	18	Samoan	West Auckland	Union	Provincial rep (U19s)	Semi-professional
17	19	Tongan	South Auckland	Union	Provincial rep (U19s)	Professional
18	19	Tongan	South Auckland	Union	Provincial rep (U19s)	Semi-professional
19	24	Samoan	West Auckland	League	NSW Cup	Semi-professional
20	19	Cook Islands	South Auckland	League	NSW Cup	Semi-professional

The ethnic makeup of participants included those who identified as Tongan (n=9), Samoan (n=6), Samoan/European (n=1), Samoan/Niuean (n=1), Cook Islands Māori (n=2), and Fijian (n=1). In regards to the sports played, 7 participants played rugby league and 13 played rugby union. Four participants were not contracted to any sports club, three were on age-group development contracts, seven were on semi-professional contracts, and six were on full professional contracts. The average age of the young Pacific male athletes interviewed was 19.5. The youngest participant was aged 16 and the oldest 24.

Defining positive mental wellbeing

Participants viewed positive mental wellbeing holistically, emphasising the importance of family, friends, their spirituality, their sport, and a healthy lifestyle balance. Performing well, in relation to their chosen sport, was a common theme in participants' definitions of what positive mental wellbeing meant to them. Lastly, positive mental wellbeing was about having the freedom and capacity to improve oneself, personally and away from sports.

Family support and reciprocity

All participants described the love, support, and reassurance of family as essential elements when defining what positive mental wellbeing is. Participants agreed that having a positive relationship with family was central to living a happy and positive life. It was acknowledged that support from family was important to stay grounded, focused, and motivated to self-improve. These attributes were deemed essential if one was to succeed at the elite level. The following quotes exemplify the importance of family support for young Pacific male athletes:

> "I feel on top of the world aye, but sometimes I get a bit too overboard. So I remember how I came from humble beginnings. It's not the amount of stuff I have, but the love I get from family and others that makes me feel complete. It helps me keep a positive attitude and remain humble. It's helped me grow. Everyone supporting you makes you feel good, it makes you hungry for more, and makes you want to challenge your weaknesses and improve yourself" (P15).

> "The biggest one for me is family support. Getting that external appreciation from your family, that positive vibe coming from them, a reassuring vibe. It just gives you that happiness inside" (P2).

Some participants noted the importance of reciprocating family support in their definitions of positive mental wellbeing. Making their families proud and helping their families financially were the two common forms of reciprocity described, as expressed by the following:

> "It's just being able to provide for family, and just keeping the family happy. Making them proud" (P4).

> "I would probably say being able to help, to help family and others. But only when you're at the top of your game, because it's hard to help someone when you're struggling yourself" (P3).

A 'well-balanced' life

Participants also defined positive mental wellbeing as having a well-balanced life. Participants defined a balanced life as having the following factors present in their lives: positive relationships with family; positive relationships with friends; a positive relationship with their partner; performing well on the field; taking care of educational or employment responsibilities; and having a strong spiritual connection. In short, when everything is going "pretty well". The following excerpts describe the notion of a well-balanced life entails:

> "It's when you're happy. Mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and all that. When you're happy in all those areas you could say you are in a positive mental wellbeing… balanced. An example is when things are good with family, your girlfriend, you're good with God, content, studies are going well, and you're playing well. To me that's positive mental wellbeing" (P11).

> "I think a combination of everything. When everything off the field is going pretty well, and you're performing well on the field, and you got a good spiritual connection at the same time.

Just having all three in a good balance helps. And if one of them was a bit down it would affect other areas because they're all connected in some sort of way" (P13).

Performing well

Some participants defined positive mental wellbeing as reaching peak physical fitness and performing well in their respective sport, as demonstrated in the following statement:

"[Positive mental wellbeing] is when I'm playing well. And like we have skinfold tests and fitness tests and if my skinfold is going down then I feel real happy and feel like I'm in the best shape to play" (P5).

Participants who prioritised their physical fitness and performance did not entirely neglect other facets of their lives however:

"[Positive mental wellbeing] is when I'm training well and at my peak and best physical wellbeing. But also maintaining a strong connection with family, having time out with the boys, and spiritually as well, being good with God. Just when everything's going good around you and that all goes on to the field and you perform well" (P16).

Overall, most participants noted a positive correlation between mental wellbeing and performance on the field:

"[Positive mental wellbeing] is just feeling relaxed. I can tell when I'm distracted or worked up about something going into a game. So my best mindset is being relaxed and enjoying myself and the company around me. Remembering we all started rugby to have fun first. So enjoying yourself and then performance and everything will come after that" (P17).

Personal development

Just under half of the participants acknowledged the importance of personal development and growth when they defined positive mental wellbeing. Participants defined personal development and growth in the context of both engagement in sports and off-field activities such as education, spirituality, and self-confidence. Participant 14 captured this concept best:

"I reckon [positive mental wellbeing] is when you're mentally prepared to do whatever you want… when you're prepared to take risks to better yourself. So determined and having the freedom to do want you want… like some people have boundaries that surround them and they block themselves from doing what they want and reaching their peaks. So that self-confidence to do what you want is positive mental wellbeing to me" (P14).

Risk factors

Risk factors for mental wellbeing were briefly discussed during interviews. Many of the risk factors for mental wellbeing have been discussed in previous investigations involving Pacific athletes; for example, Besnier (2014), Horton (2012, 2014), Lakisa et al. (2014), Panapa and Phillips (2014), Rodriguez and

McDonald (2013), Uperesa (2014), and Zakus and Horton (2009) to name a few. Therefore, this section will present risk factors that may not have been addressed in this existing body of literature.

This section is divided into seven key areas, which emerged from the interviews: familial influences, a lack of balance away from sports, transitioning to the elite level, performance issues, injuries, alcohol misuse, and stigma around mental illness.

Familial influences

Pressure to succeed

Most participants stated that familial pressures to succeed, whether real or self-imposed, had a negative impact on their mental wellbeing. The pressure to succeed professionally was mainly derived from athletes wanting to provide for their families financially and give back to their parents for the sacrifices they had made to support them. Failure, or perceived failure, to secure a professional contract often led to negative thoughts and feelings of anxiety, which participants described as having a negative impact on their performances on the field as well. The following excerpts best captured the impact of these pressures on both performance and mental wellbeing:

> *"If I think about the pressure [to succeed professionally] too much you can see it in me as a person and also it gets into my performance. Off the field, if you think about the pressure you don't have fun when you're out and about; you keep thinking 'I should be doing this and this'. The pressure will really effect you if you think about it too much and it will get to you because I've had that before… I've had the pressure get to me and that definitely had a negative influence, like a anxious feeling and that goes on to impact your performance on the field"* (P14).

A few participants explained that not having alternative career options to fall back on intensified these pressures:

> *"I see [the pressure to succeed professionally] big time. I know some of my boys rely on rugby a lot; they're trying to make an income out of it. So when they don't perform and they get cut, they feel like they don't have anywhere else to turn or anything to fall back on. I know some of my boys that didn't make the squad right now are pretty dream shattered about that. And they're actually quite down about it. Because you go so hard for something and yea…"* (P3).

One participant, who had not attained a professional contract since leaving school, described how familial pressures to succeed professionally can be driven by the false hope families garner when athletes succeed at the age-group representative levels, exclaiming:

> *"Heaps of the first 15 coming out of high school pursued rugby as a profession. Even though they were unsuccessful, family expectations mean you are sort of expected to keep going and carry on [chasing a professional career]. Rep squads and first 15 give [family] that false hope like you can make it, but in reality only a few do. Everyone wants to be a Malakai Fekitoa, but that's not the way it plays out. A lot of [teammates who did not make it professionally] just fell

back in life in general. Some held on to tech courses and stuff like that. But the main dream of being a pro sportsman failed and that hits you hard" (P1).

A couple of participants chose to see the positive side of these pressures. Participants described how the pressure to succeed motivated them to work harder for their families' sake and made them appreciate their achievements even more:

"I reckon there is [pressure to succeed professionally] aye. There's always pressure for us to perform, but at the same time… there's a positive and negative side. It's good, the pressure for us. It reminds us that it won't come easy and that when we get there it all will be worth it. So there's a positive side to the pressure" (P4).

Communication

While all participants viewed their families as positive sources of support, some athletes found it hard to communicate with their parents about their sports career and issues away from sports. Participants agreed traditional hierarchal family structures, intergenerational differences, language barriers, and the *tapu* that surrounds mental health were key contributors to this issue. Participants shared:

"There's [communication] barriers through cultural practices, because even when you know the language there are practices you are unaware of. For me at least, it's more of keeping [personal issues] to yourself. Because in Pacific families there are certain things that are talked about and certain things that aren't. If you're going through those certain things, I mean just phases in life in general, you can't turn to your mum and your dad. There are things that are taboo [sic], some things are on and others are off limits. You can't be like "aww I'm having problems with drinking" because they won't find that acceptable at all to begin with. I feel like for Pacific Islanders we do as we see. We wait until our parents or elders say it's okay and then we start talking about stuff and doing stuff" (P1).

"I probably go to the boys mainly [when problems arise]. It's hard to talk with my parents about that stuff because of the language barrier. I have to talk Tongan to them and they try to speak English to me. So I mostly just go to the boys about it" (P18).

Lack of balance away from sports

Just over half of participants acknowledged a lack of balance away from their respective sport as a risk factor for mental wellbeing. Participants highlighted that limited downtime and prolonged periods of intense training and competition made it harder to find balance away from sports. Most participants found this schedule mentally exhausting when they did not have people or activities that momentarily took their mind away from sports careers. A lack of balance was especially harmful during extended time away from sports. Participants found that a lack of balance also hindered other aspects in their lives such as education and personal relationships, as one participant explained:

"I've been pretty injury prone. It was stressful not being able to play and you start to get depressed at that. Especially at school when I was focused on nothing else but rugby. I just

stopped going to school and it was a depressing time not being able to play and then you get back do your rehab and play and then another injury and you just feel like giving up and stopping" (P16).

Finding balance after relocating away from home was maintained to be a challenge for many participants, as expressed in the following statement:

"The expectations were increased big time from back home, so league became the main focus. The difference from [Auckland] and [Sydney] was when I was [in Auckland] it was more chilled, I could still go to school and work and study. [In Australia] I was pretty much training full time and I only worked like Sunday and Wednesday. I have a more balanced life here [in Auckland]" (P2).

Some participants shared that they were unable to escape their identity as an athlete, even at home, which led to these athletes feeling drained and overwhelmed, as best captured by the following statement:

"Sometimes when I come home [my family] don't understand the pressure, especially after a game. Like sometimes I just want to come home and be myself, but they want to talk about the game like what went wrong or just talk about the team in general; good and bad. Sometimes I just want to be me and talk about anything and not just about rugby. That's why friends help a lot, because they play and are the same. They don't want to speak about rugby all the time, just want to be boys… hang out… be kids for a night" (P14).

Almost all participants agreed that they would like to live more balanced lives away from their chosen sport, but were too focused on their sports careers to do so. The lifestyle and work ethic required to participate at the elite level was noted the main reason participants were unable to live more balanced lives. The following statement best captures the basic work, time commitments and dilemmas faced by participants:

"Trainings are now four hours a day, so the amount of time to be with family and school is reduced. All the time I have is based around sports, so there's not much time I have to be around family and stuff. It effects my socialising with family… and friends as well. Like I only have two days off over this two week [school holiday] break because of camps and training and [NRL development squad] trainings" (P12).

Participants also acknowledged that their busy schedules hindered their ability to attend to their own mental wellbeing, affirming:

"We've started learning about [mental health]. We've started going into the environment with high performance and stuff and they try to drill us and teach us different scenarios and how to deal with it. So [mental health] is sort of something I try to attend to, but with all the other things going on it's not really one of the higher priorities" (P20).

Signs of burnout

Signs of burnout were evident among some participants, particularly those at school or on semi-professional contracts. This often hindered athletes' mental wellbeing and their ability to live more balanced lives, as expressed in the following:

> *"Last year I felt like man this is a long season. It's pretty much January to November then December off then restart at January through to November again. Sometimes it feels like too much, like I've been playing rugby all year and I just can't be bothered anymore" (P14).*

> *"I probably could study a bit more, but I'm always tired… always busy with something else" (P8).*

Some stated that not being able to properly manage their time impacted upon their ability to live more balanced lives. This was most common among participants still at school and those enrolled in tertiary studies. As the following participants explained:

> *"Obviously the massive goal is to become an All Black. Off the field, I'm studying towards a Bachelor of Sport and Recreation so I can become a PE teacher when I'm out of rugby. It's pretty hard with the studies… I could study more. Just the time management and stuff, but rugby is the priority right now. Especially just coming out of high school and into uni, you don't really have much knowledge of how to manage your own time which is also something that plays a part" (P9).*

Stereotyping of Pacific athletes in schools

A few participants described how negative stereotypes of Pacific athletes had a negative impact on their disposition to foster balance between their sports and their education. The following excerpt captured this well:

> *"The negatives would be the stereotypes that brown people can only play rugby and can only make first 15 and that's it. I would say it's embedded at the early stages, but I mean as a 17 year old you don't see that. Where they expect you to be a no brainer because you know how to pass a ball. It puts you into this box and you're expected to stay there and not grow and just be an athlete. Just play rugby. Especially in [high school], that rugby for a Tongan is the only way. And then when [athletes] come into real life and it never plays out, they don't know anything else because they've only been fed rugby" (P1).*

Transitioning to the elite level

Sports migration

There is a lot of literature in this area, but it is important for this research that it is addressed. Some participants stated that migrating away from home, often at a young age, had a negative impact on their mental wellbeing. For some participants, sports migration referred to relocating to another region, in

most cases Australia, to play sports. For others, it meant relocating from their home island in the Pacific to attend and play for high schools in Auckland.

Isolation, homesickness, and increased pressure to succeed from family back home proved to be the main challenges for relocated athletes. A few participants also expressed concerns about challenges that arose when moving to new schools, as a result of gaining a sport scholarship:

> "Half way through year nine I quit the institute. You know coming from a [Decile 1 school] to this environment at [Decile 9 school], its quite different and kind of takes a couple years to get use to. Then I just went down hill after that. It took some time to get back on track" (P18).

Hypervisibility

Just under half of participants acknowledged their newfound popularity, or 'hypervisibility', as a challenge when transitioning to the elite level. Participants described how they were not equipped to take on the responsibility of being a role model, where their actions would be closely observed and scrutinised by the public, particularly across social media. However, a few participants stated that they became familiar with their newfound fame over time. Athletes playing at the professional level and well-known high school athletes were the most impacted. For instance:

> "I find at times [being a role model and in the spotlight] is pretty challenging. It's just little things. You think you're just a kid and don't think what you do impacts others. Like social media posts or the way you act in front of the boys or adults. If it's a bad thing they do it as well or it gets blown out of proportion. It's been a little bit challenging, because I'm not really use to it. I think as time goes on you feel more obligated to do it and you kind of feel good about yourself as well. You feel like 'these boys are looking up to me' and you kind of pinch yourself because you don't think you're all that. When your young you wouldn't think you would be in this position so it's humbling as well" (P14).

> "I guess there's been ups and downs with [being a role model]. Like negative people coming in and trying to take you down and take you away from your morals and that, but there's been a lot of positives. Like kids coming and just saying good game and asking about my [super rugby] games. I just try and give them advice. Like you're being idolised sort of, but you don't really plan on it being like that. You become like a role model whether you like it or not, so you just want to help others and the younger ones coming up" (P15).

Performance issues

Some athletes noted performance-related issues such as dips in form, getting dropped from the team, or not getting selected had a negative impact on their mental wellbeing. Naturally, participants found bad games and dips in form disheartening. The impact of poor performances only intensified when scrutinised by the media and the wider public:

> "[Scrutiny over performances] is something the team has recently come under… a lot of pressure from the media and fans. Yea it plays a lot on some of the boys mind" (P11).

Some participants found getting dropped or not being selected for higher representative honours negatively impacted upon their mental wellbeing:

> *"Definitely not making the [super rugby] 18s last year and also getting dropped to the bench put me down. It was a televised game; it was a rival match against [school]. I remember I didn't come out of my room for a whole week and didn't speak to anyone the whole week… just pretty quiet… feelings like that. Those times hit pretty low and it's a confidence thing as well… like I put in all this work and nothing came out" (P14).*

Injuries

All participants believed injuries were a major risk factor for mental wellbeing. They shared that being dropped from their team or missing opportunities of securing a professional contract due to an injury injuries impacted badly upon their mental wellbeing, with one participant claiming:

> *"I blew my shoulder in 2012 with [NRL Club]. So my 2013 season was ended because of injury. I was only 17 and just finished school. My next step after school was to make it professionally. That was probably one of my lowest points and then the club said we want to release you because you won't be any use to us, it was real tough" (P2).*

Not being an active member of the team because of injuries had a negative impact on just under half of the participants. They described feelings of isolation, anxiety, and frustration when faced with lengthy periods away from their sport. The following participant expressed this concept best:

> *"I just came off one of the biggest setbacks I think any league player could face, I was out of the game for 10 months. I did a big knee injury. That's been one of the biggest setbacks. It was massive, especially in terms of how it played on my mind and just being away from the team and not being able to play the game you love" (P11).*

Alcohol misuse

Just under half of participants highlighted the misuse of alcohol as a risk factor for mental wellbeing. Participants recalled stories with them and their teammates over indulging in alcohol and the negative consequences of their behaviours on their mental wellbeing and their sporting careers. Alcohol was also commonly used as a 'coping' mechanism when faced with setbacks or perceived failures associated with the sport. For example:

> *"One of the older boys recently got dropped from [development programme], and he took it badly aye. He just turned to eating and drinking a lot. Stopped playing because he got injured and it just went down hill from there. I think the pressure and everything got to him. He already made it to [Super Rugby] and had his debut and I think the pressure of not performing and then a set back of injuries just got to him. He just didn't handle it right" (P4).*

> *"Too much alcohol is bad too. I've been drinking since the start of the year, like every weekend. We haven't really stopped, not even one weekend I think… and that's probably what's got me locked down now" (P6).*

Stigma around mental illness

Almost all participants felt it was almost normal to remain silent when feeling down or going through personal issues. They recognised the negative effects of remaining silent when going through mental health related issues such as anxiety and depression, but agreed that the *tapu* around mental illness from cultural, gender, and sporting perspectives made it difficult to talk openly about such issues. The following statement best captured this concept:

> *"[Mental health] is a real issue and it's probably a taboo [sic] issue for us PI players, which doesn't probably get discussed as much as it should. I mean look at all the young PI players who committed suicide over in Australia and that's not spoken about. Because I know when [suicide] happens, in the media they put a blackout on it because they don't want to let out that it was a suicide… so it's probably a topic that needs talking about more" (P11).*

Athletes described not wanting to pass their problems on to others, especially family members, as a reason for remaining silent when coping with personal issues:

> *"[Problems] are more something keep to myself. I don't want to bring [family] into it. I don't want to put my problems on them. I had a lot of downs at school, just a lot of negative people and I felt like giving up. I thought about it and didn't want to let it get into my head, but I didn't want to give my problems to them and then it gets to their heads… So I just kept it to myself" (P14).*

Some participants stated that they kept their problems to themselves in order to protect their sports career and reputations, as one participant described:

> *"I think it's not talked about as much as it should be. Sometimes it's uncomfortable to bring stuff up and some people just don't want to. But I think you have to bring [issues] up to stop it. When it comes to pressure and being nervous I just keep it to myself, because you don't want anyone to think you're not ready to play or not confident because they will take you off the team" (P16).*

A couple of participants argued that the influence of elders and coaches sometimes reinforced this 'silent culture':

> *"[Mental health problems] are not really talked about at all. That aspect is always shrugged under the carpet. It's like everything else but the mental side. If there's ever a problem, it's at the top of the hierarchy aye, like if the elders or coaches ain't talking about it why should the players?" (P1).*

Hypermasculine attitudes towards Pacific males

Almost all participants agreed that hypermasculine attitudes towards young Pacific males impacted negatively on athletes' mental wellbeing. Participants affirmed that these hypermasculine attitudes were often internalised and led to negative views towards negative mental wellbeing and limited help seeking behaviours. Hypermasculine norms were found to influence the way athletes coped with mental health issues. For example, being more inclined to supress their emotions:

"Being a Pacific man you're supposed to be strong and not show any weakness and if you have any problems you handle them yourself. We're just too stubborn really, like we have too much pride. Not just with depression and suicide, but just little things as well… like I hate losing little arguments and stuff. I think it's just what we saw growing up and what we see on tv and stuff. I think it takes a generation to change that and certain people to change that… like All Blacks coming up and speaking up and starting little campaigns and saying 'it's okay to come out with your problems'" (P14).

"For me at least, it's because of the masculinity side. Like everyone has to be tough, you can't be depressed, and you can't go through suicidal thoughts. That's seen as not manly. That's very much an important issue but not talked about. The sad thing is that even the coaches and the people who manage and oversee teams don't make it important. So kids think 'why should we even talk about it if the coach doesn't'" (P1).

Some participants felt it was abnormal for young Pacific males to share their personal problems or approach others for help:

"It's hard for us Pacific Islanders to speak up, because we're not comfortable with it. We like to joke around with the boys, but when it comes to stuff like this we just keep quiet. It's not really seen as manly to share your issues and get in your feelings and stuff" (P18).

Protective factors

Exploring protective factors for positive mental wellbeing was the main focus in interviews. Findings showed that positive and supportive relationships with families, friends, partners, and teammates, strong Christian faith, spirituality, and a shared 'brotherhood' between Pacific athletes were some of the key protective factors identified. This section is divided into eight key areas: family support, significant others, the Christian faith and spirituality, the 'brotherhood', friends, identity, life skills, and organisational support.

Family support

Athletes defined family as their immediate and extended family, as well as close childhood friends in some instances. A stable family where family members are happy was recognised as the most important protective factor towards positive mental wellbeing, followed by support and love from parents. Participants also believed that family was a major motivator to succeeding as a professional athlete. This is expressed in this statement:

"Family and faith are the big ones. They are the most important things and probably what motivates and pushes me to stay positive through the tough times. You've always got your family to support you. Especially being a Pacific Islander, you always got some family around you so you don't have to go looking for support, it's always there" (P16).

It was identified that younger athletes were more likely to rely on their parents for support when faced with adversity such as an injury or not being selected for representative teams. For instance:

"Last year in the [competition] semi finals I got concussed in the first 10 minutes. That was my second concussion in three weeks and it took me out of the game. I couldn't help my team and we lost and that sort of took me out of contention for the NZ secondary schools camp. The thing that kept me going was knowing that my family was there to support me and they kept telling me I had another year to make things right. They just kept reminding me that I'm still young and still a kid and got to have fun doing the things I do, I've got to enjoy yourself" (P13).

Family aware of the realities of elite sports

Having family members who could empathise with the elite sports environment was also a protective factor for positive mental wellbeing. Athletes felt less anxious when they knew their families understood the pressures, time commitments, and mental strain associated with playing at an elite level. This statement is an apt description:

"Yea [family] know how it is [being an elite athlete]. My sister use to play hockey at the top level and she tried to balance it with her studies, but she couldn't so she knows what I'm going through and she really helps. [Family] understand the pressure and my goals and know how hard it is to get up there, because a lot of other boys are trying to chase that same jersey… Warriors, All Blacks and all that… so the support and understanding they have helps to keep me positive. And Dad's been in my shoes so he knows how it is from experience. So they know, they kind of understand everything" (P15).

Remaining grounded and well-balanced

Most participants considered that their families helped to keep them grounded and balanced while participating at the elite level. Athletes whose parents instructed them to focus on back-up options away from sport, were more likely to live well-balanced lives. Participants also believed family kept them grounded by reminding them what is truly important in life. The following excerpt best captured these views:

"I'm doing my teaching degree and it's my first year. My family is real supportive around it. My mum and dad are real big on education and push me in my education and just remind me that rugby is not the only thing and I'm just one injury away from everything ending, so I need something to fall back on" (P17).

Significant others

Significant others were significant protective factors for positive mental wellbeing for some participants. Significant others in the context of this thesis refer to participants' partners. Athletes viewed their significant other as a source of support and happiness, someone who kept them balanced, and someone whom they could share their problems with:

"I've had a girlfriend for the past two years and we're going pretty strong and I don't think I'd be as balanced as I am if it wasn't for her. She helps to get my mind off rugby and everything else and just relax. We share everything, so she helps when I have any problems or need to vent.

Just hanging out with her really helps to keep me balanced, especially when I'm tired from trainings, study, games and that" (P8).

Participants highlighted that partners who were aware of the time commitments and sacrifices required of an elite athlete were especially helpful:

"I'm starting to have this thing with a girl and she's helped me stay motivated and positive. But last year I had a thing with this other girl and she was kind of negative and a bit of a distraction. Just heaps of late nights and she put pressure on me and made me decide between her or rugby. But my new girl… just that support and wanting to see me succeed. Almost being selfless and willing to sacrifice the time. She's an athlete herself though, with her netball she's quite good. So that has a lot to do with it because we're sort of in the same boat" (P14).

Christian faith and spirituality

Most participants acknowledged their Christian faith or spirituality as a key protective factor for positive mental wellbeing. All who claimed religion was important identified as Christians and most had been brought up in religious families. Participants strongly believed that positive spiritual wellbeing led to reduced anxiety, greater resilience, and a more positive outlook on life in general.

The church

The Church was a vital source of support, provided a highly community oriented and positive environment, and was imperative to many participants both spiritually and socially. Church allowed them to stay in touch with friends, family, and the wider community, while attending to their spiritual needs:

"I reckon it was church in some sense [that helped the participant stay positive]. Even though I'm not very religious now, church played a big role in terms of community and things like that. Just people being there for you. Like if you have a bad game or life ain't going your way you can come back to a community that's there for you" (P1).

Church was very meaningful for participants who had relocated for sports. It served as a place to build networks and settle into their new communities. Church was also viewed as something 'stable' or familiar to their lives back home. The following quote expressed this concept best:

"I would say the only thing that kept me the same as I was back home [in Auckland] was church. It kept me positive with everything, especially when I was injured over [in Australia]; it helped me through. A lot of us would sacrifice the night going out to wake up early to go church. It was more unique to the Pacific boys. It helped a lot of us NZ boys that went over by ourselves. We kind of put it on ourselves to make that commitment to keep going [to church] and it kept our bond strong and kept our support networks strong. Our support through church was real strong" (P2).

Attending church services and church-related events was important for some athletes. Just under half stated that attending church and engaging in church youth groups was part of their weekly schedule.

Athletes stated that attending these events lowered their stress levels, improved their spiritual wellbeing, and reminded them of what is important in their lives. For instance:

"I was part of a discipleship group and that helped keep me busy and kept me accountable in terms of my word and stuff. I kind of strayed away from that a bit now, but it's still there. My faith keeps me grounded and reminds me that there's more to life than just footy" (P11).

"I have a church learning centre that we use, like a youth type thing. We go there and some of the members at church are teachers so they come and tutor. That's like two hours and really helps a lot to make the school side of things less stressful" (P12).

Spirituality

Some participants described themselves as spiritual but not very religious. Spirituality, for these participants, was a personal relationship with God and associated with a deep Christian-based faith but not necessarily strict religious beliefs required of some denominations. They emphasised that God and their faith were very important to them, regardless of their infrequent church attendance. This view was more prominent among athletes 20 years and under:

"Faith is important to me, but I'm not as religious as some of the other PI boys I know. I wouldn't rate myself as the most religious in the world, but I would place myself as a spiritual person. Like when you're good spiritually you feel good about yourself and it goes into your life and game and stuff" (P19).

"I'm pretty spiritual, but don't really go to church. Like you don't have to go to church every Sunday to be holy. Which is true. So it depends on the individual when it comes to the church side of things. But I'm pretty spiritual and pray regularly and all that" (P18).

Prayer

Just over half of the participants claimed that prayer or speaking with God was a positive method to 'offload' their problems. This had a positive impact on athletes' mental wellbeing and reduced feelings of anxiety, especially during challenging times:

"Honestly, I just pray [to stay positive]. I pray before games. Even at year 13 this guy offered me an under 20s contract in Australia and he kept saying to come over to play with the under 20s and stuff but I had to move there and I was like not really keen, but prayer helped. Coming up to game day, praying helps as well. Like there's big crowds and the pressures on, but I try to block all that out and focus on the game. And praying helps with that. Dealing with what you can and putting the rest in His hands" (P15).

"I reckon it's good to have time to ourselves to think about whatever's going on. Like when you go to church or even praying in your room, that's someone else you can talk to. Just let out whatever it is you want to let out if you don't feel comfortable talking to anyone else about it. That's something I do" (P17).

'Brotherhood'

The support and comradeship provided by teammates was found to be a protective factor for mental wellbeing for almost all participants. Athletes commonly referred to this concept as the 'brotherhood'. Participants stated that a strong brotherhood between teammates was a source of support, fun, and positivity both in and away from sports. The following excerpts best captured this concept:

> "I think the brotherhood is the best part about playing rugby. Just meeting new people and complete strangers and then by the end of the year its like you've grown up with them. When you go on the field it's that mana inside you that you link to your other brothers. Brotherhood is a big part of the game. Everyone's just amping each other up and got each others back, like that mentality if one's down then the rest of the pack is there to pick you up" (P16).

> "I think [suicide and depression awareness programmes in the NRL] are going pretty good. A lot of the boys are buying into it real big. You know showing support, showing that brotherhood between each other. I think the biggest blow for Pacific athletes is injury. That's where it can hit them at their lowest. And then you got that brotherhood that lifts you up. That's a big part" (P2).

The brotherhood was an especially significant source of support and resilience for injured athletes. Participants acknowledged that teammates who had been through similar injuries or experiences were able to provide advice and support, which helped them to stay positive:

> "I had good friends, especially boys at the club who had gone thru knee injuries and that helped me stay in a positive frame of mind" (P11).

Participants noted that developing a strong bond with their teammates led to a more open team environment:

> "It depends on the team you're in. Some teams have that strong brotherhood so you can sort of share your issues, but there's others where the team bond is not that strong so they don't want to share it in case others talk bad or mock them so it depends on the team bond. The rep teams are quite good, because we have a lot of camps and that helps to build the supportive and open culture and that's why we're so together" (P15).

Expanded social network

For some participants, a positive aspect of sports was being able to expand their social networks. They enjoyed meeting new people and making lifelong friends through sports. They also appreciated the social and business opportunities that presented themselves away from sports due to their social positioning as elite athletes. For instance:

> "Just going to training and seeing all the boys and stuff, just being in that environment. And you get to meet heaps of different people, like you meet people from all over Auckland and NZ. Most of the time we get to socialise heaps as well because of trainings and camps, so it's quite enjoyable playing against other top players and meeting people and all the other opportunities you get from playing rep footy" (P12).

Friends

Most participants viewed close friends as central to maintaining positive mental wellbeing. Athletes viewed their close friends as major sources of support and balance. Close friends were especially beneficial as a positive outlet for athletes to get their minds off their sports careers. The following statement best outlined how athletes' friends helped them stay positive:

> "Something as simple as when I finished [Super Rugby team] camp. I stayed at home then the next night I went to the movies with the boys and just something like that got my head off of rugby and made me relax more. Otherwise I would of just thought about the camp and dwell on every little thing, but hanging out with the boys keeps my mind stays off that and I just live in the present. So friends are pretty important to staying balanced and positive for me" (P13).

Some participants identified their best friends as people they could share their personal issues with and talk to when they were feeling down, particularly those issues deemed inappropriate to share with family:

> "With my close friends, I feel way more comfortable going to them [then coaches or family] and it's something I do. Like when I didn't make the 18s [Super Rugby team] I was pretty pissed off and wasn't really happy. My best mate who was in our team and this other mate of mine who we went to school with, I went to them about it. That really helped me to get over it and they just gave me advice on it and helped me through it. Like we had a good chat for about two hours and it just really helped me get through it… get it off my chest… you feel lighter and a weight off your shoulders. Like I got it out now and time to focus on the next goal and next move" (P14).

> "I reckon it kind of depends [who you share issues with]. If it's to do with school or rugby, say not getting selected, I feel comfortable talking about it with my family. If it's something to do with a girl or something, I would be talking to one of my close mates. So yea I have that support system with family. Like my Dad always asks why I don't talk to him about girls and laughs and stuff so I know they're there, but I would rather talk to the boys about that kind of stuff" (P17).

Identities

Having a strong and secure identity, both as an individual and as part of a collective group, was identified as a key protective factor for positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific athletes.

The 'Pacific' athlete identity

All participants were proud to identify as a 'Pacific athlete' and highlighted the positive bond shared between athletes of Pacific heritage. Participants believed that this bond provided young Pacific athletes with support and mentorship, and affirmed the positive impact it had for their own mental wellbeing. Shared cultural backgrounds, experiences, values, and motivations were key features for one's identity. Whilst the Pacific identity was recognised as important, it did not override participants'

individual ethnic identities. Above all, this collective identity facilitated greater inclusion and broader support systems for young Pacific athletes. The following quotes best expressed this concept:

> *"It's the boys you hang around with [that promotes positive mental wellbeing]. Like there's heaps of motivation between the Islander boys knowing that we all struggle and stuff, all the struggles we've been through. Like even chilling with my mate knowing he came over from Tonga and stuff. I always go pick him up for training and we always complain that we're tired, but we just keep saying hard work will pay off. So there's like a whole other brotherhood between the Island boys" (P4).*

> *"Just being happy and hanging with all the boys. Especially the other PI boys, because the struggles are real aye, so just grinding it out together. Like our group from school… three of us at [rugby union province], few at [rugby union province], few at [rugby union province]. We all have similar goals and all came from nothing, so it's pretty cool to see us doing something we love for a living aye… so that just makes you happy" (P18).*

Common goals were a feature of the Pacific athlete identity. Almost all participants stated that they wanted to make their family proud and were motivated by the struggles and sacrifices their families, especially their parents had made for them. This was a protective factor for positive mental wellbeing for some participants, who drew strength and resilience from knowing sports was a way to address these struggles and make their families proud:

> *"Probably family [help to remain positive], just knowing all the sacrifices they've made and just the struggles we go through. At least once we make it professionally it will put a smile on their face and we'll be able to contribute to the family" (P4).*

The elite athlete identity

Identifying as an elite athlete had a positive impact on mental wellbeing for most participants. Three positive aspects of identifying as an elite athlete emerged from the interviews, these included: being able to challenge oneself, being viewed as a leader, and gaining 'esteemed' social status. Athletes noted that for the most part, they enjoyed the day-to-day lifestyle of an elite athlete:

> *"You get to challenge yourself everyday, push yourself to get better. You meet a lot of people who always ask you how you do it and how do you get better and stuff… but its just practicing good values, working hard everyday, waking up early in the morning. I think those are the benefits of being an athlete at this level. Another good thing about it is you have to keep your standards high. It's good for you to make sure you practice those disciplines and be the best you" (P13).*

> *"When I got selected [for provincial team] it was the meanest buzz because just getting into that… and even getting into the First 15 was the biggest thing. Making the first 15 means you're like the top dog in school aye. Like no one fucked with you man, was a mean buzz" (P18).*

Learning from the experiences of other players

Having the opportunity to learn from more experienced players had huge benefits for participants' mental wellbeing and their overall experiences as elite athletes:

> *"Yea, my brother [helped], he's probably modelled what not to do. That's helped me mentally just knowing the right from wrong. That's helped me vicariously... not doing it but watching and learning from him. I can see the negatives of what drinking, smoking, partying, and girls can do, so that's why I went in the opposite direction" (P11).*

Life skills

Time management

Just over half of participants maintained that good time management was a significant protective factor for positive mental wellbeing. Athletes found it challenging to manage their time when they transitioned into the elite sports environment, mainly because of their busy schedules and the work required of an elite athlete. This challenge only grew for athletes who were also working or studying. For instance:

> *"I think it's manageable [to live a balanced life while chasing a professional career]. You can have your professional football life alongside your social life and family time and your own time. It's just knowing how to manage your time throughout the day and then trying to manage it throughout the week. Time management is the key thing to staying positive for me. It helps to keep you on top of things and reduce the stress" (P2).*

Goal setting

Some participants noted the setting of short-term and well-planned goals as a key protective factor for positive mental wellbeing. Athletes explained that setting goals gave their actions direction and helped to keep them focused and motivated, which strengthened their resilience to 'push on' during tough times:

> *"Setting goals is a big thing and something I do personally. Setting goals that scare you, but excite you at the same time, short term achievable goals, and then celebrating them and aligning them with one long term goal… that's a big thing to staying positive" (P11).*

Mental toughness

Just over half of participants believed a positive and 'strong' mindset was important to achieving positive mental wellbeing. They defined a positive mindset as being optimistic and being able to see the positives in everything. Whilst a strong mindset was defined as being able to remain resilient and overcome adversity in troubled times, it was their spiritual faith and the motivation to help their families that was key for them in reaching a 'strong' mindset:

> *"Just having strong faith and having a strong mentality would be key [to staying positive]. Not letting any setbacks take control over your future. Like pushing through and all that. Like for me, my injuries… I try not to let me injuries stop me from wanting to try achieve higher and play*

better. Always know if one door closes another always opens, because it's a ruthless business" (P2).

"It's probably a personal thing [that supports positive mental wellbeing]. I'm a real competitive person and I believe I have a strong work ethic which is heavily influenced from my upbringing, from my Mum, so that's the biggest motivation. The desire I have to just be successful and make something of my life. I just build that off a good work ethic and determination, because I want to try and be remembered you know. When you get old and look back at your life, I want to say I did this. So that's what helps me… that mindset" (P11).

Organisational support

Keeping injured athletes engaged

Staying engaged in the team environment and encouragement from management personnel reduced anxiety, stress, and feelings of isolation for participants when injured. The following statements best expressed this concept:

"They [NRL club] did a lot of off-field stuff to keep that bond together with the team to make it feel like you're not out of the team when I was injured, which helped. They made us do a lot of bonding off the field, especially the injured guys. We would mix and mingle with the regular playing guys" (P2).

"Back at school I had real good support systems, teachers and coaches. Because I had no family, so the teachers and the coaches really supported us Tongans. Like when I was injured, they say like 'everything's going to be alright, just let it recover and then we can get back to it and work hard'. So they just give us time and keep us positive and keep us motivated. Give you extra trainings and rehab plans. Putting in extra work for me to help get me back to full strength" (P5).

Promoting a lifestyle outside of sport

Just over half of participants found it helpful when sporting organisations provided opportunities and activities for personal development away from sports. Educational and employment opportunities were often on offer and, helped them find balance away from their sport, which had a positive impact on their mental wellbeing. For example:

"That's something that, once we get higher in the grades like [province representatives] and that, they force you to look at other things away from rugby as well. With [provincial team] you either have to be studying or working or be employed to play, so that's something that they push if you want to be in the [provincial team]. That's something that they're really strong with and help you with. I think it helps us to remain grounded as well. For those that think we just train all day and do nothing else, we're either studying or working as well. So we know how it feels and also have a back up plan when rugby finishes" (P4).

Good relationships with management

Maintaining positive relationships with management, especially coaching staff, was identified as a protective factor for positive mental wellbeing for participants. It helped to increase their confidence and self-esteem in an elite sports setting:

> "I think I've built a good relationship with my coach over the years, known him since year nine. He's pretty helpful and we catch up every week at the beginning of the week. He asks how everything's going, and off the field he asks if everything's all good; real positive and supportive. It puts me in a good mind space because I don't have to stress out too much because we have a coach who cares and understands. The coach is a big influence in that way" (P13).

Some participants described the positive impact of having open and approachable managers. Participants felt less anxious when they could share their sports-related concerns with managers. This statement is a clear example:

> "At [provincial team] they're really good with that sort of stuff, they really help us with whatever it is and if we're having issues. If we can't talk to anybody else about it or our parents they really make us feel like we can come and talk to them about it. Like this year I kind of had too much on my plate. I got selected for [provincial team], and also had under-19s and then club rugby and [development team] and my uni as well. I knew something was going to give and I didn't want it to be my studies, because I had exams coming up in a few weeks so I had to make the decision to give one thing up so I could keep on task with everything else. So I spoke with the managers about it and they were happy I could talk to them about it, because I didn't really know the coach so I didn't' feel comfortable going straight to him about it. So they did it for me, called and let him know and they were fine with that... it just took the worry away" (P17).

Having downtime

Finding time to relax and unwind away from demands of their careers and other obligations was deemed important to ensuring positive mental wellbeing. Participants found that finding time to relax by themselves, at least once a week, allowed them to reflect, clear their minds, and recharge:

> "I found a day to yourself just to unwind [supports positive mental wellbeing]. Because you're constantly doing something like training, and if you're not training you want to catch up with friends and family. One thing for me that helped was every Friday night after training I would just relax, not talk to anyone just relax. I would go hit the spa by myself late at night and just have time to myself to unwind. It's pretty full on so you want a fresh mind" (P2).

Mental health initiatives

Mental health initiatives, such as the NRL's State of Mind programme, and mental skills classes, impacted positively on most participants' mental wellbeing. Participants shared that such initiatives

informed athletes of what mental health is and how they can look after their mental wellbeing as elite athletes. Thoughts included:

"Yea [NRL's State of Mind programme] is raising a lot of awareness. It helps, as there's now more awareness around it. Like there are systems, and the boys know which systems they can go to and tap into when it comes to things like that. So you can go quite privately to the people… so the boys know who to talk to now" (P11).

"At the [national representative] camp we just had a few days ago, during one of the programmes we had a session with one of the NRL agents and he talked about depression and how it effected the players. There were a few players from the NRL who spoke about depression and stuff. One of the [New Zealand Rugby League national representative] players going through it at the moment spoke and said how depression is actually getting into the mind of the players and affecting their game and also off the field. It's to do with media and stuff and getting blamed for losses. So he talked about depression and it was a big thing… it was quite a full on talk and all the boys really learned a lot" (P12).

Recommendations for supporting positive mental wellbeing

For sports organisations and elite programmes

Raising awareness and open communication

Participants acknowledged the effort being made to reduce stigma around mental illness, and emphasised the need for greater awareness and open communication about mental health issues. Participants affirmed that a more open environment to share and discuss mental health is needed to set the tone that it is okay for themselves and other athletes to seek help if required. For instance:

"Probably more awareness around suicide [would help promote positive mental wellbeing], as it's associated with rugby league seeing that there's been a lot of deaths around suicide. Because it's talked about, but probably just talked about for the sake of talking about it. I can only recall of one time when they've talked about it and they said to ask and tell a friend. Probably trying to push that message forward with suicide. Because it is a problem, especially in rugby league. Not just the one off talk about it once a year, but maybe once a month and having a checklist of the signs or how to ask if people are really alright" (P11).

A few participants highlighted the need to spread mental health initiatives to semi-professional and age group representative levels as well:

"[Mental health and illness] is nothing I've really been told or talked about until now with you. I guess maybe the coach doesn't talk about depression because we're not professionals so he doesn't think we have as much pressure or go through depression. I think it would be helpful to let the boys know about [mental health and illness] and be aware of what's going on around them and be able to understand the problems that players go through. So just making more

awareness, because we're starting to see the awareness with the professionals but not in club footy and rep teams" (P16).

Meaningful athlete engagement

Participants stated that it was crucial to have meaningful and effective athlete engagement, and not be patronising or share generic information when discussing mental health:

> *"I think we're starting to know that it's there and starting to know more about [mental health], but I think maybe just knowing how serious it can be would help us a bit. Because when people talk about wellbeing, we can be like 'aww yea wellbeing...' [sarcasm], but if they let us know how serious it can be it would make us think 'oh shucks we need to listen up' and switch us on" (P13).*

Most participants agreed that the use of high profiled athletes whom they can relate to would be worthwhile strategy, particularly those who have overcome or experienced mental health-related issues themselves. Participants shared that the lived experiences of well-respected athletes would have the biggest impact on them and their peers:

> *"I guess the best way to get the message across is using role models and idols who have been through it and have put their hands up first. I know it would be tough on them because they're just humans as well and not much different to us. I guess it starts from them putting their hands up and showing people that they are depressed or suicidal and that they are not afraid to ask for help. So that's the best way I reckon. Your idols coming out and saying it's okay kind of makes you feel like this guy's not perfect either, he has his flaws and he's letting people know. You feel like if he can share and get help why can't I" (P14).*

Supporting personal development away from sports

Some participants believed that more initiatives, such as workshops and classes, around personal development off the field would help young athletes prepare their pathways to becoming an elite athlete:

> *"Having programmes for us athletes would help. Programmes for the younger players to spread the message of positivity as early as you can. For them to understand what professionals deal with and how to prepare for those challenges because it stays with you more when you're younger, but when you're older it can be too late because there's a lot of money on the line and that. Not just training but going over wellbeing, contracts, and nutrition with players at younger ages like when they just start with rep teams. Just looking at the stories and stats we need to do something about it aye" (P15).*

For schools and age-group programmes

Preparing the way

Most participants recognised that support around career planning and goal setting when they were younger would have reduced some of the stress and anxiety they experienced during their careers, particularly during their last year at school:

> "For year 13s the pressures increase and there's pressure to sort out what you're going to do next year. So help with planning your future to get to where you want to be… like even an hour session or something would help" (P13).

Most participants also believed that it would have been beneficial to have had a greater understanding of the reality of elite sports when they were playing at the age-group levels, particularly the challenges faced and how to prepare for them:

> "Probably getting into schools. Especially how there's a lot of college First 15 and First 13 competitions. Probably have professional players get into schools and letting younger players know the realities. Instead of waiting until they get to a semi-professional level like under-20s and NSW cup to start promoting [mental health]. That way we can target every athlete in the schools and then anyone else who's there. So it won't be a shock when players do make it and won't be dreams shattered if they don't" (P2).

> "For the younger players, I think just having them look up to something big and know the truth. Like I think some of them think it's easy to make it professional, but letting them know of the realities of how hard you have to work to get professional is important. They think it's easy to make rep teams and ITM and Super Rugby but there's heaps of people who are good. You have to work extra hard and train extra to get there and even then it's hard to make it. So letting them know how hard you have to work… the truth" (P4).

Greater focus on personal development

Just under half of participants described the benefit of developing the 'whole' person and not just an athlete during athletes' younger years. These participants stated that developing other aspects in life helps to build confidence and promotes balance. The following excerpt best expressed this concept:

> "More around the professional side of things at school [would promote positive mental wellbeing]. I know some PI boys just come to school to play rugby and don't really focus that much on study, so we need to push that education is important when they're starting high school. Like sending the message that you're at school to study as well, not just to play rugby or for your mates… you're there for a whole lot of things and there to learn. So more support around growing the person, not just the athlete and starting when they're young. Like I found a few of the boys I grew up with grew away from rugby because they weren't supported in other parts of life and I reckon if they had that support when they were younger they could be superstars right now. So just sitting down with them and planning and making pathways and

just showing them like this is the ultimate goal and just showing them how they can make it and giving them the belief that they can make it… building confidence" (P14).

For wider communities

Raising awareness and communicating openly about mental health
Almost all participants recognised the need to raise awareness around mental health in the community and agreed that a good way to do this would be to communicate more openly about mental health and positive mental wellbeing in the community:

> *"Awareness is important in our Pacific community. [Mental health] is something that is not old but also not new to the Pacific community. We're not aware of our mental health and if we are we don't cater to it as much as we should. We don't talk about these issues. It's simple things like this interview that can become an initiative but we don't utilise it. I think that's what the message would be. Just to talk about it aye. Because people are like 'shhh don't say that that might hurt someone's feelings'" (P1).*

> *"I reckon anyone can do it, it's not just the sporting community, it's the general Pacific community. Pacific males who don't play sport have their problems too, so you don't know who is going through depression or going to kill themselves. Having a community approach would be good and just bringing everyone together and having that one message to promote positive mental wellbeing and supporting each other, because it can effect anyone" (P15).*

Again, participants acknowledged the importance of having well-respected figures, such as star athletes, share these messages with young people in the community. This was largely based on the belief that the message would have a greater impact on young Pacific males:

> *"Because of [star Pacific athletes'] influence and platform it would help raise awareness, and if they were able to work with communities more it would be even better. Because the community can only do so much, but young teenagers have a different mindset and don't usually look at the community for role models. They look at Malakai Fekitoa and all the All Black players aye. Who they want to be. So what those athletes do plays a part too" (P1).*

Some participants highlighted the importance of informing and educating athletes' families and peers when raising awareness, for example:

> *"It's important to not just raise awareness for athletes going through it, but also for people around them and how they can see the signs and behaviours and stuff… and how people can ask for support or how people can approach others to help" (P14).*

<u>Summary</u>

This chapter has examined findings from one-on-one in-depth interviews with 20 young Pacific male athletes living in Auckland, New Zealand. It has provided a summary of the research participant

demographics, participants' definitions of positive mental wellbeing, and the risk and protective factors for athletes' mental wellbeing. Participants' views towards what could help support positive mental wellbeing were also outlined. The findings showed that perceived familial pressures, lack of balance away from sports, transitioning to the elite level, hypervisibility, performance issues, injuries, alcohol misuse, and stigma around mental health were key risk factors for young Pacific male athletes' mental wellbeing. Conversely, it was apparent that family support, significant others, Christian faith and spirituality, the 'brotherhood', close peers, a secure 'Pacific athlete' identity, organisational support, and various life skills reinforced positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific male athletes. Lastly, this chapter outlined participants' recommendations for promoting and supporting positive mental wellbeing and suicide prevention among young Pacific male athletes. Participants acknowledged the importance of raising awareness and openly communicating about mental health in sports organisations, schools, and the community, and using well-respected and relatable athletes to effectively engage young Pacific athletes. Ensuring young Pacific athletes focus on holistic personal development and are well informed about the challenges associated with a career in elite sports were also common recommendations.

Chapter 5 Discussion and recommendations

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to research objectives and in the context of existing literature. It addresses the strengths and limitations of the project and provides recommendations for promoting and supporting positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes. In addition, future research areas have also been outlined.

Positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific male athletes

This study entered relatively new ground, with a focus on what mental wellbeing means for young elite Pacific male athletes. The findings demonstrate that positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific male athletes is multifaceted. The main factors that emerged from interviews were family support, a well-balanced lifestyle, performing well, and personal development.

Family support and reciprocity

Love and support from family, as is common throughout the Pacific mental health literature, is an essential component of positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes. The positive impact of family support heightened participants' determination to succeed and to maintain humility, traits viewed as beneficial to sustaining positive mental wellbeing in a world reserved for the sporting elite. Schaaf (2006) similarly indicates family to be a powerful incentive to ensuring sporting success. In the context of mental wellbeing, this may explain why young Pacific male athletes place additional pressure upon themselves, which in turn, brings about high levels of anxiety. The fear of failure and disappointing their families are two factors that require closer attention, as they would be beneficial to unravel in mental wellbeing initiatives.

Being able to reciprocate family support, often by making their family proud and providing financial stability, was another central aspect of positive mental wellbeing for these athletes. A deep desire to reciprocate familial support was prevalent in other studies involving Pacific athletes (Lakisa, Adair, & Taylor, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). These findings show that it is crucial for family support to be even stronger when young athletes experience setbacks in their careers or are unable to provide financially. Given most Pacific athletes' lower socioeconomic backgrounds and the high stakes of professional sports however, it may be difficult for many athletes and their families to take such setbacks lightly (Horton, 2014).

A 'well-balanced' life

Participants emphasised the importance of having a well-balanced lifestyle in terms of positive mental wellbeing. The strong link between balance and wellbeing revealed in this research is comparable to other studies involving elite athletes (Hodge, Lonsdale, & Ng, 2008; Horton, 2014; Price, 2007). In contrast to mainstream literature on athlete wellbeing, these athletes perceived a well-balanced life as having supportive social and spiritual relationships away from sports rather than multiple career options

away from sports. This is akin to Puna's (2013) work where young Cook Islanders viewed balance in a similar manner. These findings demonstrate the importance of positive relationships for young Pacific athletes, and the potential to promote positive mental wellbeing and 'back up' career options through these relationships.

Performing well

Peak physical fitness and performing well were revealed to be key constituents of positive mental wellbeing for these athletes. Participants' emphasis on performance indicates that their mental wellbeing is heavily impacted by the way themselves and others appraise their performances. The danger of this is that these young athletes' sense of worth may be persuaded by external performance evaluation, which has been identified as having a detrimental impact on mental wellbeing for elite athletes (Doherty, Hannigan, & Campbell, 2016; Lemyre, Roberts, & Stray-Gundersen, 2007). Moreover, elite athletes who prioritise performance-based 'perfectionism' are at higher risk of negative mental wellbeing (Rice et al., 2016). These findings suggest that a strong emphasis on physical fitness and performance is likely to have a negative impact on mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes who carry these views, especially if they get injured or are not performing well. It would be beneficial to examine this concept in greater detail moving forward, and explore potential coping mechanisms to support positive mental wellbeing when these athletes are injured or not performing well.

Personal development

Participants described personal development as the ability to improve themselves and continually achieve their goals. For most of these athletes, this also meant having the autonomy and self-confidence to do as they pleased. It appears evident that young Pacific male athletes value their autonomy and the ability to improve themselves. Personal development was commonly associated with education as well, which suggests that these athletes value education and are aware of the need to focus on back up career options away from sports. Personal development has been linked with reduced depressive moods and improved self-esteem and self-confidence for young male athletes, indicating that there is significant potential to support positive mental wellbeing through personal development (Goodkind, LaNoue, Lee, Freeland, & Freund, 2012; Rice et al., 2016; Woodruff, 2016). It is crucial to acknowledge that personal development does not naturally happen through participation in sports, so it may be useful for schools and sports organisations to put strategies in place to help facilitate personal development for these athletes (Newhouse-Bailey, Dixon, & Warner, 2015).

In summary

Young Pacific male athletes view positive mental wellbeing as the culmination of several interconnected factors. For these athletes, if one factor suffers then mental wellbeing as a whole suffers, so it is important that athletes have supportive relationships during these times. The holistic and relational way these athletes viewed positive mental wellbeing reaffirms the views of Pacific scholarship that Pacific people view health in a holistic way and highlights the importance of familial servitude and social belonging for young Pacific athletes (Alefaio, 2009; Bush, Chapman, Drummond & Fagaloa, 2009; Mila-

Schaaf & Hudson, 2009; Samu & Suaalii-Sauni, 2009; Tamasese et al., 2005). While these athletes prioritised balance, their perceptions of positive mental wellbeing, away from family and social relationships, were largely centred on sports. This suggests that these athletes may be at increased risk of developing overly salient athletic identities (Doherty et al., 2016; Horton, 2014; Price, 2007). The development of well-balanced identities may well be the key to protecting young Pacific athletes' mental wellbeing if any one of these elements is diminished.

Risk factors

As mentioned in the findings section, existing literature has covered much of the risk factors that impact upon the mental wellbeing of young Pacific male athletes. This section will place briefly discuss those factors that are already well known and cover new factors in more depth. Seven key areas emerged from the findings: familial influences, an unbalanced lifestyle, transitioning to the elite level, poor performance, injuries, alcohol misuse, and stigma around mental illness.

Familial influences

Pressure to succeed

Whilst family is a key factor in any young Pacific athlete's life, in some cases family were also seen as a hindrance to their mental wellbeing and development. This was especially evident when unrealistic pressure and expectations were placed upon these athletes. These young athletes commonly internalised familial pressures, intensifying the pressure placed upon them to succeed. These internalised pressures were associated with securing lucrative contracts that could provide financial stability for athletes' families. This occurred whether family members directly imposed these pressures or not, which indicates the importance of ensuring athletes and families discuss their expectations for one another and set realistic goals. Self-imposed pressures may also be the result of Pacific cultural norms that place greater expectations upon males to provide for the family, so these athletes are facing very real kinship responsibilities that are only heightened by their status as elite athletes (Bush, Chapman, Drummond & Fagaloa, 2009; Horton, 2012; Sorensen, Jensen, Rigamoto, & Pritchard, 2015). On the flipside, the potential shame and embarrassment associated with failure may further exacerbate these pressures (Horton, 2014). These athletes' experiences with familial pressures are consistent with findings from numerous studies that captured similar experiences for other Pacific athletes (Horton, 2014; Lakisa, Adair, & Taylor, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Schaaf, 2006; Tiatia-Seath, 2015; Zakus & Horton, 2009). While socioeconomic circumstances and cultural protocol are the main determinants of familial pressures, promoting and facilitating open communication around this issue between athletes and their families may help (Hellstadt, 2005).

Lack of balance away from sports

A lack of balance away from sports had a negative impact on mental wellbeing for these athletes, particularly during long periods of competition or prolonged time away from sports. A limited balance

away from sports was linked to similar outcomes for Pacific athletes in Australia (Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Participants defined balance in a social manner, which emphasised the need to engage in social and recreational activities outside of sport. This was seen to reduce stress and helped athletes think about other things other than only their sports careers. This form of balance differs to that portrayed in the literature, where non-Pacific athletes emphasised a 'healthy' balance as being able to balance education and work commitments alongside their sports careers (Jones, Mahoney, & Gucciardi, 2014). What appears evident is that positive social relationships are what matter most to young Pacific athletes when it comes to living a balanced life.

The inability to escape the 'elite athlete' label had negative connotations for some athletes, who felt that they were viewed as merely athletes everywhere they went including at home. It is imperative for those closest to these athletes to remember the influence they have on shaping these young athletes' identities. It also indicates the need for athletes to be engaged in a variety of activities so that they can explore and sculpt their self-identity in aspects other than just sports.

Finding a healthy balance between their sports career and non-sports activities was a challenge for those who relocated for sports. Those who relocated for sports recalled stories of isolation and becoming entirely entrenched in their sporting goals. Considering the way these athletes view balance, this should come as little surprise as they become far removed from their key social networks. For some participants, solely focusing on their sport was a way to cope with the initial shock of relocation, but may be problematic in the long run if it negates their ability to focus on broader life concerns or if they fail to develop positive social relationships in their new locations. Similar issues were prevalent for both Pacific and non-Pacific elite rugby players who relocated to pursue careers in New Zealand and Australia (Price, 2007; Zakus & Horton, 2009). These findings demonstrate the potential for identity foreclosure among both relocated and non-relocated athletes, so it is important to ensure young Pacific athletes are encouraged to explore other identities and social roles away from sports. Identity-foreclosure refers to an individual committing to a strong identity without exploring, or having the opportunity to explore, other options or ideas. While non-relocated athletes appear to be able to foster a well-balanced identity, it may be beneficial to ensure these athletes explore additional workforce and educational pathways to protect their wellbeing if they relocate and become disconnected from their social networks. Further research into fostering balanced identities away from sports is required for both relocated and non-relocated athletes.

Signs of burnout

These athletes felt that they were too busy to achieve the balance they would like in their lives, with most participants referring to experiences indicative of burnout. Young elite athletes often face extreme time constraints and these participants acknowledged that such time constraints hindered their ability to care for their own mental wellbeing. This was most common among athletes enrolled in secondary school and tertiary education, as sports was their main priority and they often found themselves sacrificing their studies because of their full schedules. The impact on participants' educational outcomes was not explored in depth in this research, but many participants shared that they would

benefit from having more time to study. Similar experiences were prevalent among non-Pacific student-athletes in Australia (Cosh & Tulley, 2013).

Considering the very low percentage of athletes that secure professional contracts at the elite level and experience lengthy professional sports careers, it is important that young athletes pursue have other career options to fall back on if their sporting goals do not eventuate (Aquilina, 2013; Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Whilst further research is required, developing young athletes' time management skills has been identified as one way to support athletes to simultaneously manage their sport and educational pursuits (Aquilina, 2013; Cosh & Tulley, 2013).

Stereotyping of Pacific athletes in schools

Some of the young athletes interviewed stated that racial stereotypes negatively impacted upon them and their peers' education. Athletes believed that many teachers placed less focus on elite Pacific athletes' educational outcomes, viewing them as athletes rather than student-athletes. Whilst there appears to be no research in this area, these findings echo the racial-based prejudices experienced by African-American student-athletes in many tertiary institutes in the United States (Comeaux, 2011). It is essential that such stereotypes be addressed in education, where efforts should ensure effective engagement in education for young Pacific athletes moving forward (Gavet, 2013; Horton, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013; Zakus & Horton, 2009).

Transitioning to the elite level

Sports migration

The impact of sports migration on young Pacific athletes is popular in the existing literature (Horton, 2012; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Zakus & Horton, 2009). It was revealed that athletes experienced isolation, homesickness, and increased pressure from their family whom they left back home because of sports migration. Numerous other studies discovered comparable findings among relocated Pacific athletes based in Australia and Europe (Horton, 2012; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Zakus & Horton, 2009).

This study discovered that some athletes who were on sports scholarship also experienced difficulties, such as isolation and behavioural problems, when integrating into their new school. This was most common among athletes who had migrated from the Pacific Islands and those who had moved from low decile schools to higher decile schools. Expectations to succeed and increased competitiveness in their new environments were found to be key reasons for these difficulties. However, these athletes noted that they felt more at ease at their new schools after making new friends and feeling supported by staff. These findings reinforce the need to ensure the right care is given to relocated student-athletes when they start at their new schools on sports scholarships, particularly those from the Pacific Islands or from vastly different school settings. It appears that no research has been conducted on this concept to date, so further research on this issue would be beneficial.

Hypervisibility

Hypervisibility refers to a type of scrutiny based on popularity. Many of these young athletes stated that their new found 'fame' was a major challenge when transitioning in to the elite level, largely because of hypervisibility which led to heightened expectations and obligations to assume the responsibility of becoming role models. This increased the pressure athletes felt and the unwanted scrutiny from the public. Studies involving non-Pacific elite athletes have similarly recognised that the fame associated with competing at the elite level can lead to damaging public scrutiny for elite athletes (Hughes & Leavey, 2012). As the prominence of sport across all forms of media grows, it is expected that the pressure on Pacific athletes to be representatives for their communities and all Pacific peoples is going to rise (Teaiwa, 2016). Whilst little research has been carried out on the effects of hypervisibility in elite sports, these findings demonstrate that hypervisibility among young elite athletes requires urgent enquiry moving forward; specifically, to identify ways young athletes can cope with hypervisibility and get the most out of their elite sports experiences.

Participants' hypervisibility often translated to increased social status among their peers and the wider public, but did not necessarily translate to socioeconomic advancement or equality in other aspects of their lives; for example, education. This is akin to the hypervisibility of young African-American basketball players in the United States where these players make up most of the labour force that drives significant profitability in elite youth basketball, but are unlikely to see any monetary return for their time and effort (Hawkins, 2010; Martin, 2015; Runstedtler, 2014).

As the economic benefits of professional sport continue to rise, it would be beneficial to examine hypervisibility in relation to the exploitation of these young athletes, particularly as the exploitation of young Pacific athletes is becoming more prevalent around the world (Horton, 2014; Zakus & Horton, 2009). Many stakeholders view this process as a 'necessary evil' however, which provides young Pacific athletes and their families the opportunity to be 'seen' and secure professional contracts that would allow them to realise their dreams, fulfil kinship responsibilities, and address often urgent socioeconomic need (Besnier, 2012; Horton, 2014). These findings highlight that young Pacific athletes are at increased risk of exploitation and negative mental wellbeing because of their hypervisibility in elite sports. Elite youth sports programmes must aim to protect these athletes from any possible exploitation, and education is needed to support young Pacific athletes on how they can deal with hypervisibility.

Performance issues

Dips in form, getting dropped, and not getting selected for representative squads were the main performance issues experienced by participants. Most performance issues were internalised by participants and led to short-term feelings of sadness, but were overcame through the support of teammates, family, and friends and by setting new goals to focus on. These findings are indicative of the term 'narrative wreckage', which refers to the negative impact on athletes' mental wellbeing when they fail to live up to their own performance standards (Carless & Douglas, 2009). External scrutiny, particularly from the media and social media, also had a negative impact on participants' mental

wellbeing. External scrutiny is especially damaging for young Pacific athletes whose worth is heavily influenced by external performance evaluation and acceptance from others (Doherty et al. 2016). These findings support much of the literature (Crampton, 2014; Doherty et al., 2016; Horton, 2014; Rice et al., 2016). Finding ways to help young athletes cope with both internal and external scrutiny is essential. Ensuring young athletes' self-worth is not entirely derived from their participation in sports and external performance evaluation may help.

Injuries

Almost all participants stated that they had experienced some type of depression because of injury. Those who suffered season-ending injuries or missed contract opportunities due to injuries were particularly vulnerable during injury periods. This affirms findings from all literature related to mental wellbeing and elite athletes (Crampton, 2014; Horton, 2014; Price, 2007; Rice et al., 2016; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). Removing athletes from the team environment when they were injured further amplified the negative psychological impact of injuries for some athletes. This signifies that keeping injured athletes engaged with the team environment is important to lessen the blow of injuries on mental wellbeing. Ultimately, strong and positive support systems and setting up activities to keep injured athletes engaged with the team appear to be key factors to help young Pacific athletes cope with injuries (Horton, 2014; Rice et al., 2016).

Alcohol misuse

While most participants did not regularly consume alcohol, athletes shared that alcohol misuse was common among teammates and their peers particularly binge drinking and the use of alcohol to 'cope' with setbacks. Similar findings were found among non-Pacific elite male athletes who also regularly used alcohol to 'cope' with setbacks (Doherty et al., 2016). These athletes appeared to be aware of the negative consequences of misusing alcohol and binge drinking, which suggests that young Pacific male athletes perceive such behaviours negatively. Further research is required to confirm this claim, but it is encouraging to hear, as alcohol misuse is associated with increased suicide ideation and attempts and is the most common cause of admission to mental health institutions for young Pacific males in New Zealand (Fa'alili-Fidow et al., 2016; HPCG, 2012; MOH, 2008a; Puna, 2013; Tukuitonga, 2013).

These findings imply that the drinking culture associated with sports such as rugby may still be prevalent. Hypermasculine attitudes that promote binge drinking and the 'numbing' of emotional distress may also contribute to the commonality of alcohol misuse among elite athletes (Teaiwa, 2016). It is becoming increasingly more important to pass on a more socially responsible attitude to young athletes when it comes to topics such as alcohol misuse (Price, 2007). It is vital that young Pacific athletes are informed of the dangers of alcohol misuse and that alcohol should not be viewed as a solution when problems become overwhelming (Tiatia-Seath, 2015). The alternative avenues available to support young Pacific athletes experiencing distress, anxiety, or depression should be promoted alongside this information. Interestingly, the misuse of other drugs was not a common theme in the interviews, despite recent media coverage suggesting other drugs are being misused in elite sports.

Stigma around mental illness

'The silent culture'

Although participants believed it is important for young athletes to share their problems with others, they were still more likely to remain silent when experiencing anxiety or depressive moods. They considered that traditional masculine gender norms and *tapu* around mental health, particularly in Pacific and sporting communities, makes it difficult for many young Pacific athletes to voice their concerns which can cause problems to build up and become too much. This aligns with findings from the literature, which exposed that many Pacific and non-Pacific athletes and Pacific peoples in general found *tapu* around mental illness to be a barrier to seeking help and sharing their problems with others (Crampton, 2014; Horton, 2012; Hughes & Leavey, 2012; Pulotu-Endemann et al., 2004; Rice et al., 2016; Tiatia-Seath, 2015).

Much work has been undertaken in Pacific communities and sports such as rugby to reduce the stigma attached to mental health, however a dominant theme in this study revolved around 'keeping your problems to yourself'. From a sporting perspective, elite male athletes have commonly felt like there is little room to express any sense of 'vulnerability' in the highly competitive realm of elite sports (Doherty et al., 2016). These athletes' views may be influenced by a number of factors embedded in the sports environment, which encourage athletes to deny 'weakness' and display emotionless qualities in order to live up to stereotypes of a mentally tough athlete (Doherty et al., 2016). This is dangerous as external stigma can often lead to internalised stigma, where athletes develop negative feelings and stereotypes towards themselves when experiencing mental health problems, which can exacerbate mental health problems for these athletes (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2012). Many participants noted that the destigmatisation of mental illness starts in the home, with family identified as having large influence over athletes' attitudes towards mental health. This aligns Suaalii-Sauni and colleagues' (2009) study where Pacific mental health service users acknowledged stigma around mental illness often originates at the family level.

Athletes in this study generally felt well supported by family but did not feel comfortable sharing their problems with family. While stigma played a part, participants commonly noted 'not wanting to pass their problems on to family' as a key reason for remaining quiet as well. This is indicative of the relational nature of many Pacific youth, but could also represent a form of internalised stigma where mental illness is perceived as a burden that they do not want to pass on to their families. Improving mental health literacy among young Pacific athletes and their families could be to one way to help young athletes open up about their issues with family, however further research is required to definitively understand this concept.

Athletes also acknowledged that they were more likely to remain silent in order to protect their sporting careers and not stir up any 'trouble' that may tarnish their reputation among management and other clubs. Little research has been carried out on this concept, but it is evident in media coverage that elite athletes who do speak out about their experiences with mental illness usually do so once they have retired or once there is less at stake professionally. These finding demonstrate that privacy and in some

cases anonymity may be key to helping these young athletes seek-help and share their problems with others. Thus far, internet-based interventions have proven to have little to no impact on increasing anonymous help-seeking behaviours among young elite athletes (Gulliver et al., 2012b). Finding ways to develop trust and help young Pacific athletes without risking their reputations and careers is vital and should remain an important focus of future research.

These findings show the need to raise mental health literacy among young athletes, sports managers, and athletes' families. Since participants noted that management, in particular coaches, can influence their views on help-seeking and opening up about any issues, it would be beneficial for coaches to have an active role in any programmes seeking to raise awareness among these athletes. Athletes noted that using well-respected and relatable athletes could be an effective way to reduce stigma and raise awareness also. All things considered, developing trust, protecting athletes' privacy, and acknowledging Pacific perceptions of mental wellbeing will go a long way to destigmatising help-seeking for young Pacific elite athletes and their families.

Hypermasculine attitudes towards Pacific males

Hypermasculine attitudes towards Pacific male athletes were found to be a contributing factor to the stigma attached to mental health for these athletes. As mentioned previously, the masculine sports environment subconsciously encourages athletes to deny 'weakness' and display emotionless qualities that define a mentally tough athlete (Doherty et al., 2016). These masculine norms were further amplified among young Pacific male athletes. Athletes noted that there is often no room for weakness, depression, and negative mental wellbeing as a young Pacific man, let alone as an elite Pacific athlete, and acknowledged this to be a major reason for why most young Pacific athletes keep their problems to themselves. Being perceived as 'tough', 'staunch', and 'strong' and avoiding labels such as 'weak' and 'emotional' were common reasons as to why participants were more likely to avoid bringing up mental health-related issues. Dealing with problems by yourself and being a source of strength for others were also key factors as to why young Pacific athletes felt more inclined to keep their problems silent.

These traits have positive connotations in the sporting world, and in some instances fulfil significant kinship obligations for Pacific males such as being role models. However, they are suggestive of hypermasculine norms that can be harmful to mental wellbeing. Recent studies have likewise found that hypermasculine norms often increase internalised stigma towards depressive moods, restrict ways of coping, and promote the masking of emotions that can lead to self-destructive behaviours (Doherty et al., 2016; Horton, 2014; Valkonen & Hanninen, 2013). Literature by Horton (2014), Hokowhitu (2004), Rodriguez (2012), and Teaiwa (2016) highlight similar findings, and outline in greater depth the origins, influencing factors, and impact of such attitudes on the psyche and norms of young Pacific men today. For example, Teaiwa explains how Pacific men are at the forefront of sports such as rugby that are marketed as hypermasculine spectacles, which both glorify and demonise primitive hypermasculinity.

Considering the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon, it may prove difficult to address these norms directly. However, the use of well-respected Pacific male athletes who can publicly defy these stereotypes and promoting mental wellbeing from a positive strengths-based perspective may be a way

to breakdown these norms. Ultimately, transforming perceptions of Pacific athletes as hypermasculine caricatures to more value-based perceptions such as resilient, efficacious, and prosperous could have widespread positive impact on help-seeking and mental wellbeing for both young Pacific athletes and Pacific men in general (Teaiwa, 2016).

Protective factors

Examining the protective factors for positive mental wellbeing was the main focus of this study. Little research has been conducted on protective factors and positive mental wellbeing among elite athletes, especially young Pacific male elite athletes. So, this section covers relatively new ground. Positive and supportive relationships with family, significant others, friends, and teammates, strong Christian faith and spirituality, and the 'brotherhood' between Pacific athletes were some of the key protective factors identified in the interviews. This section is divided into eight key areas that emerged from interviews: family support, significant others, Christian faith and spirituality, the 'brotherhood', identity, life skills, and organisational support.

Family support

Family is at the core of wellbeing for most Pacific youth and this study illustrates the central importance of family in supporting positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes as have a number of previous works (Alefaio, 2007; Craig, Taufa, Jackson, & Han, 2008; Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Schaaf, 2006; Tiatia-Seath, 2014). Participants mentioned happy, strong, and supportive familial relationships as the most important aspect of mental wellbeing for them. This is akin to the findings in both Pacific-specific and athlete-focused literature. Family support was especially significant for younger participants aged 18 years and under.

The influence of family on mental wellbeing was most apparent in participants' relational views where athletes noted a positive correlation between family wellbeing and their own mental wellbeing. This illustrates the relational and family-centric nature of these young athletes and the close link between family wellbeing and individual mental wellbeing, which is highlighted in much of the literature (Alefaio, 2009; Bush, Chapman, Drummond & Fagaloa, 2009; Mila-Schaaf & Hudson, 2009; Samu & Suaalii-Sauni, 2009; Tamasese et al., 2005).

Participants stated that family support also enhanced motivation and increased their feelings of success, self-esteem, and confidence in sports as well as aspects of life such as education. This echoes findings from Jones, Mahoney, and Gucciardi's (2014) study, which found family to be an important source of motivation and support for young NRL players, particularly during transitional stages.

These findings further emphasise the importance of family support for young Pacific male athletes, and highlight a major reason some young Pacific athletes struggle when they relocate away from their family as noted in the literature review and risk factors section (Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014).

Family aware of the realities of elite sports

Athletes noted that it was especially helpful to have family members, namely parents, who understood the realities of elite sports. Participants stated that they experienced reduced anxiety and greater feelings of support when their families were well informed of the realities of elite sports, such as contracts, time commitments, travel, and the realistic chance of a short career. Athletes that had siblings or parents who had been elite athletes were particularly vocal about the positive impact of this concept, and stated that these family members were particularly helpful during the challenging times in their careers. While greater insight is required, these findings highlight the positive impact of having close mentors, such as ex-athletes, who have been through similar journeys and can share their wisdom with younger Pacific athletes. This affirms findings from Panapa & Phillips (2014), Price (2007), and Rodriguez and McDonald's (2014) studies that found many young New Zealand rugby players, including Pacific players, had benefitted from mentorship at some point in their careers, although the use of mentors for young players was not an established or regular practice. This further illustrates that the benefit of using relatable and culturally appropriate mentors for young Pacific athletes, which would likely have a positive impact on their mental wellbeing, particularly during the challenging times in their careers.

Family also supported positive mental wellbeing by acting as an 'anchor' for many participants, which kept them focused and reminded them of what is important in life. This concept was not prevalent in existing literature, but Price's (2007) study found similar outcomes in terms of mentors that kept younger rugby players grounded and focused, particularly when faced with distractions and temptations that may hinder their sporting careers. Participants mentioned how family helped to facilitate balance, by encouraging these athletes to attain educational qualifications and remain active members of the family unit and community groups. These findings illustrate the influence of family in facilitating balance for young Pacific athletes and the potential to support positive mental wellbeing utilising athletes' family members.

Significant others

Significant others, or partners, were a source of support, balance, and happiness for these athletes. Participants noted that they felt like they could share almost anything with their partners. However, some athletes also said that there were times where they had experienced negative mental wellbeing and significant depressive moods because of ex-partners. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that having positive relationships with significant others has major benefits for athletes' mental wellbeing. Little research has been carried out on this concept, but multiple studies have found relationship issues to be key risk factors for suicide among the general Pacific youth population (MOH, 2008b; Tiatia, 2008; Tiatia-Seath, 2015). The impact of significant others on mental wellbeing appears to vary from person to person. As findings from the interviews illustrate, significant others are an incredible source of support, happiness, and resilience for young Pacific athletes when such relationships are going well.

Christian faith and spirituality

Athletes experienced less anxiety, greater resiliency, and a more positive outlook on life in general as a result of positive spiritual wellbeing. Findings from the interviews underline a positive correlation between spiritual wellbeing and mental wellbeing for these young athletes. This aligns with much of the literature, which illustrates the importance of Christianity and spirituality for Pacific athletes and Pacific communities in general (Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; McDonald & Rodriguez, 2013; Schaaf, 2006; Sualii-Sauni et al., 2009). Interestingly, just over half of the athletes interviewed felt that they were not the most religious people but still emphasised the positive impact of spirituality, specifically the church community and believing in a higher power such as God. Several athlete-centred fellowship groups were also evidence of Pacific athletes' strong Christian faith.

The Church

Church was a key source of support, positivity, and community for these athletes, and the findings illustrate their strong faith. Most athletes attended church, in most cases sporadically but particularly during tough times, and this research indicates the centrality of church as a source of support and community for Pacific youth. Away from the spiritual benefits, church helped athletes develop a sense of community and fostered positive support networks away from sports, which were especially helpful when athletes experienced challenging times in their lives. Church-related activities such as discipleships and youth groups were also beneficial sources of support and happiness for these athletes. The importance of church for these athletes is mimicked throughout most Pacific communities, and affirms findings from the literature (Alefaio, 2007; Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; McDonald & Rodriguez, 2013; Schaaf, 2006; Tiatia, 2008).

A significant finding was that athletes who had relocated away from home found church to be a significant protective factor for positive mental wellbeing. Relocated athletes noticed that attending church allowed them to build social networks and feel part of their new communities, which made the transition period a little easier for them. Similar findings were found in Zakus and Horton's (2009) study, signifying church is one of the central elements of community formation for relocated Pacific athletes. Given the influence of church in Pacific communities and the impact of church on mental wellbeing for young relocated Pacific athletes, church attachment may be a great tool to support positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes relocating; however, church alone may not be the answer as some athletes in this study eventually returned home because of homesickness regardless of church attendance.

Spirituality

Some athletes stated that their spirituality, or faith, was more important to their mental wellbeing than religion. These athletes viewed spirituality as a personal relationship with God and prioritised faith and 'answering' to a higher power over adherence to religious norms such as regular church attendance and accepted religious behaviours. Participants often stated that they had a deep faith and believed in God, but were 'not very religious' themselves. Such beliefs were still largely aligned with the Christian religion, with participants still identifying themselves as Christians. This aligns with Tiatia (1998) and

Puna's (2013) claims that traditional religious beliefs are more communal beliefs in Pacific communities, whereas spirituality refers to a more personal and individualised relationship with God or other higher powers. These findings imply that some young Pacific athletes, and young Pacific peoples in general, may have more 'relaxed' views towards religion but still value spirituality and God when it comes to their mental wellbeing. These findings are especially significant considering a recent study that revealed that Pacific youth with more relaxed religious views were two times less likely to attempt suicide than Pacific youth with strong and meaningful religious beliefs; however, further research into this phenomenon is required (Teevale et al., 2016). Findings from this research imply that spirituality is deeply engrained in the identity and psyche of most Pacific youths, regardless of the strength of their religious beliefs, and should be acknowledged alongside religion when finding ways to support positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes.

Prayer

Prayer was an important protective factor for participants, particularly as a coping mechanism when faced with increased stress, anxiety, or challenging times. Athletes explained that prayer helped to get their problems off their chest and seek protection when faced with challenging events. Lakisa et al. (2014) similarly noted the prominence of prayer among Pacific athletes in Australia, and some non-Pacific elite athletes have also used prayer to cope with uncertainty (Coakley, Hallinan, Mewett, & Jackson, 2009). Interestingly, a recent study in the United States by Ellison, Bradshaw, Flannelly, and Galek (2014) found that prayer reduced anxiety and offered emotional comfort for non-Pacific peoples, however further enquiry into this area is required. These positive effects may account for why prayer is viewed as a key coping mechanism for these athletes, and demonstrates the positive role prayer plays in the lives of young Pacific athletes.

'Brotherhood'

Most of these athletes spent a lot of time with their teammates and found these relationships to be one of the most positive aspects of playing elite sports. Participants highlighted that the brotherhood cultivated with teammates provided a strong source of support, positive energy, and fun times. Role modelling and learning from other athletes' experiences were other benefits of this bond. The brotherhood provided athletes with a strong sense of social affiliation and inclusivity that upheld a secure sense of identity for these athletes. Team sports such as rugby have always been a strong source of comradeship for males in New Zealand, from the local level to the international representative level, so it is no surprise that teammates were a central source of support and resilience for these athletes (Grainger, 2008). Similar findings are prevalent in the literature, which highlighted the positive impact of these relationships on general wellbeing, particularly for young and newly relocated athletes (Horton, 2014; Lakisa et al., 2014; Panapa & Phillips, 2014; Rodriguez & McDonald, 2013). A separate brotherhood was also prevalent among Pacific athletes; a concept discussed in detail later in this chapter (see The Pacific athlete identity).

Participants noted that a strong bond between teammates often led to greater trust and a more open team environment, aspects that were viewed as key prerequisites to sharing personal issues with

others. No existing literature has looked into this concept and further research is required, but these findings suggest that teammates are a central point of contact for those struggling with mental health-related problems. This echoes sentiments from Jerome Ropati, former professional rugby league player of Samoan heritage, who claimed that teammates are often the first point of contact for Pacific athletes who are feeling down or who may be experiencing significant stress because of kinship obligations and expectations (J. Ropati, personal communication, April 22, 2016). These relationships hold significant potential to reduce stigma around mental illness and promote early intervention among athletes.

Friends

Participants valued the support and trust of close friends and acknowledged the importance of these relationships in sustaining positive mental wellbeing. Close friends were viewed as people athletes could hang out and relax with to help get their minds off the pressures of elite sports, which athletes viewed as essential to living a well-balanced life. Close friends were even seen as family for some athletes, which is a concept only recently recognised in literature involving Pacific youth (Rodriguez & McDonald, 2012; Tiatia-Seath, 2015). Athletes placed great trust in their friends and felt more comfortable discussing personal issues with them, especially more private topics such as girlfriend or school problems that were viewed as 'off-limits' when speaking with Pacific parents or elders.

Whilst studies by Horton (2014), Panapa and Phillips (2014), and Lakisa and colleagues (2014) found friends to be highly valued by Pacific athletes, no research has yet investigated the impact of friends on athletes' mental wellbeing. Non-sports related literature has demonstrated the positive impact of close friends on mental wellbeing for Pacific peoples however (DeFreese & Smith, 2014; Foliaki et al., 2006; MOH, 2008b; Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2009; Tiatia-Seath, 2015). These findings insinuate that close friends are very influential in the lives of these young athletes and may be a key resource when looking to support positive mental wellbeing among these athletes. The use of close friends as mental health advocates would also be beneficial in terms of early intervention, as they are persons who athletes are more likely to share their problems with alongside partners and close teammates.

Identities

Having a strong and secure identity, both as an individual and as part of a collective group, was identified as having a positive impact on participants' mental wellbeing. Whilst most of the literature on identity and elite athletes focuses on foreclosed versus balanced identities in the context of education and employment, this research examined identity from a cultural perspective given the unique sociocultural experiences of Pacific athletes (Clews, 2015; Horton, 2014; Hughes & Leavey, 2012; Price, 2007; Rice et al., 2016). The 'Pacific athlete' and 'elite athlete' identities emerged from the interviews as having positive impacts on mental wellbeing for these athletes.

The Pacific athlete identity

Identifying as a Pacific athlete in elite sports gave players a great sense of pride and often led to the formation of strong bonds between other Pacific athletes in their respective sports. From an individual

perspective, this instilled cultural pride, and as a collective identity this provided athletes with support and mentorship, both of which support positive mental wellbeing for athletes. Shared experiences, values, motivations, and similar cultural backgrounds further strengthened these bonds. This affirms findings from Lakisa and colleagues' (2014) and Panapa and Phillips (2014) studies, which found a similar collective identity among Pacific NRL players in Australia. Such bonds were revealed to provide Pacific NRL players with mentorship, comradeship, inclusivity, and greater pride in their own individual cultural backgrounds (Lakisa et al., 2014). This aligns with findings from Anae's (2003) study, which found that NZ-born Pacific youth were likely to identify as Pacific, alongside their individual ethnicity, as it facilitated greater inclusion and socialisation than merely identifying as their individual ethnicity. It is important to note that the collective Pacific identity did not override participants' individual ethnic identities, rather the Pacific identity provided an authentic way to ensure greater inclusion and larger support networks for Pacific athletes in elite sports.

This collective identity is also believed to be the result of Pacific athletes being part of an ethnic group that is often marginalised by formal power structures in elite sports and society (Panapa & Phillips, 2014). These circumstances naturally lead to Pacific athletes forging this collective identity as a response to this marginalisation.

There appears to be great capacity to promote mental health initiatives and support positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes utilising this shared identity. Recent initiatives in elite sports, such as the NRL Pacific leadership camps, are positive examples of culturally appropriate strengths-based programmes that utilise this collective identity to promote positive wellbeing among Pacific athletes (Teaiwa, 2016). These findings demonstrate the influence of the Pacific identity in cultivating strong and positive support systems for young Pacific athletes and the positive impact this identity has on cultural pride, inclusion, and mentorship. Moving forward, it would be valuable to further explore the way Pacific athletes navigate the Euro-centric world of elite sports and identify potential methods to support them in doing so.

The elite athlete identity

Identifying as an elite athlete was viewed as having a positive impact on mental wellbeing for participants. This illustrates that while Pacific athletes acknowledge the problematic nature of elite sports and the associated pressures and fame, they still recognise the numerous positives associated with identifying as an elite athlete. For instance, the 'esteemed' social status afforded to them, which had a positive impact on self-worth for participants. The status of elite Pacific athletes translates to a sense of *mana* for many athletes and has been known to enhance elite athletes' self-worth, not just with family and Pacific communities but also among their clubs, fan bases, and the public (Teaiwa, 2016). While participants noted this as a positive aspect of identifying as an elite athlete, young athletes must be warned of the dangers to mental wellbeing when external appraisal highly influences elite athletes' self-worth, as this appraisal can be removed at any time (Doherty et al., 2016).

Being regarded as a leader was also found to be a positive factor of identifying as an elite athlete for a few participants, specifically being in the position to help others and become a role model for younger

fans. This was an interesting finding considering that most participants found being viewed as a leader and role model as one of the more challenging aspects of elite sports. Participants who had experience as leaders within their schools, churches, or communities were especially prepared to deal with the leadership responsibilities of elite athletes. These findings suggest that leadership development and easing young Pacific athletes into leadership roles may be of great benefit to their mental wellbeing as they transition into higher echelons of elite sports. This is akin to findings from a recent study, which found that community leadership roles boosted mental health and personal agency among Pacific youth in South Auckland (Han, Nicholas, Aimer, & Gray, 2015). More leadership roles should be given to young Pacific athletes as they transition into the elite sports environment, as it appears to have a positive effect for most athletes. Leadership development programmes and a greater focus on personal development may help develop the leadership capabilities of these young athletes and equip them to better deal with the leadership expectations of elite athletes.

Life skills

Time management

These athletes viewed time management as one of the most important skills to achieving positive mental wellbeing as an elite athlete. Specifically, participants acknowledged the necessity of effective time management to living a well-balanced life and keeping on top of both sports and non-sports commitments such as education, employment, friends, and family obligations among others. Apart from being a crucial life skill, finding ways to develop time management capacities among young athletes, particularly for those just entering the elite level, would go great lengths to reducing stress and supporting positive mental wellbeing for these athletes (Jones & Lavallee, 2009). For these athletes, it appears that their social relationships with others, such as parents, peers, coaches, and academic staff, have great influence to help them cope with the time demands of elite sports. Athletes' perceptions of time also impact their ability to manage and prioritise certain activities. Athletes who frame time as rigged and out of their control often neglect non-sports activities such as education in order to prioritise their sport, while those who perceive their time as fluid and within their control experienced healthier balance and personal agency (Cosh & Tulley, 2014). Teaching athletes to frame their time in this manner could be a great way to improve the time management capacities of young Pacific athletes.

Goal setting

Many participants stated that sitting down with someone to plan their careers and set goals helped them to stay focused, resilient, and motivated in the long term. This aligns with findings from Rice and colleagues' study, which found that goal setting, alongside quality mental preparation, had a positive impact on mental health and resiliency for non-Pacific elite athletes. Interestingly, some participants noted that they had little to no goal setting experience before leaving school. These athletes believed help with setting goals and planning their careers while they were at school would have made the transition from age group to elite level easier. Almost all participants encouraged the implementation of

career planning and goal setting sessions at the age group level as means to support positive mental wellbeing among young athletes.

Mental toughness

These athletes viewed mental toughness, referred to as a 'positive' or 'strong' mindset by participants, as important to achieving and sustaining positive mental wellbeing. Athletes stated that mental toughness helped them stay resilient and dig deep during challenging times. The development of mental toughness is often a long-term process for elite athletes, which is influenced by numerous interacting factors such as motivational climate, enjoyment, social support, past sports and non-sports experiences, and a deep desire for excellence (Jones, Hanton, & Connaughton, 2002). Spiritual faith, remaining optimistic, and wanting to fulfil kinship responsibilities were the key factors driving mental toughness for these athletes. Future research in this area would be extremely beneficial and help identify ways to build upon the mental strengths of young Pacific athletes.

Organisational support

Keeping injured athletes engaged

Being actively involved and remaining close to the team environment had a positive impact on resiliency and recovery for injured athletes. Feeling a part of the team environment reduced feelings of isolation, and regular contact with team staff helped to relieve stress and anxiety, and an absence of such factors was found to hinder participants' mental wellbeing significantly. Close communication between athletic trainers and injured athletes similarly relieved anxiety and was a protective factor against suicide for young American athletes (Smith & Millner, 1994). Benson (2016) suggests that perceptions of inclusivity are major determinants of mental wellbeing for young athletes, particularly newcomers and those who do not occupy prominent positions in their team such as injured athletes; aligning with findings from this research. How Pacific athletes respond to injury may vary from case-to-case and there is no predictable sequence, but these findings indicate the importance of keeping injured athletes engaged with the team and ensuring close communication between injured athletes and management, especially team trainers.

Promoting a life outside of sports

Promoting a balanced lifestyle, namely through the facilitation of educational and employment opportunities away from sports, was found to be one of the most effective organisational actions that supported positive mental wellbeing for participants. Athletes were reminded that sport is not the be-all and end-all by sporting organisations that endorsed the importance of balance. Educational and employment opportunities allowed young athletes to develop skills away from the game that could be used to find employment when their sport careers end. For the most part, these opportunities were organised or mandated by organisations. These findings are positive signs, as the development of transferrable skills is crucial to combatting identity foreclosure among young athletes (Aquilina, 2013). It has been claimed in the past that elite rugby in New Zealand mostly does not facilitate the development

of transferrable life skills that athletes require after their sporting careers, so findings from this study indicate that some progress may be being made to better support the development of such life skills, although further research is required to confirm this claim (Price, 2007). Implementing personal development initiatives in culturally appropriate ways that effectively engage Pacific athletes should be a top priority moving forward. Participants stated that utilising relatable mentors and career planning workshops were the best ways to effectively engage young Pacific athletes to undertake such initatives.

Good relationships with management

Athletes stated that positive and open relationships with management, namely coaches and training staff, reduced stress, increased their confidence, and led to a more comfortable environment to bring up any sports-related issues they had. It has been argued that young athletes adopt certain attitudes and behaviours towards wellbeing from team staff, which influences how athletes view and prioritise their own wellbeing (Wensley, 2016). So, it is vital that team management display positive attitudes towards mental wellbeing and prioritise mental wellbeing as important for young athletes. This would likely have positive effects on these athletes' mental wellbeing and reduce stigma around mental illness in the sports environment.

Mental health initiatives in sports

Mental health initiatives in sports, especially the NRL's State of Mind programme, were identified as having a positive impact on mental wellbeing for participants. While little research has been undertaken to evaluate the impact of these programmes, responses from the athletes interviewed were positive. For many athletes, the introduction of these programmes was the first time they had discussed the topic of mental health in the open and allowed them to grasp a deeper understanding of mental health in the context of both sports and life in general. This supports Sebbens, Hassmen, Crisp, and Wensley's (2016) study, which found that even brief mental health initiatives can improve the mental health literacy of team staff and promote early detection of mental health problems among elite athletes. These findings highlight the need to build upon and cascade current mental health initiatives for Pacific athletes. Collaborating with players' associations, local clubs and schools, and Pacific community groups would further enhance the positive impact of these initiatives.

Recommendations for supporting positive mental wellbeing

The following discussion points are included to shed light on participants' perspectives of what could be achieved to better support positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes. Given the limited literature on these topics, no assumptions should be made regarding the effectiveness of these recommendations.

For sports organisations and elite programmes

Open communication around mental health

Promoting open communication in the elite sports environment, with regards to sharing both sports-related and general mental health issues among teammates and management, was one of the most common recommendations for how positive mental wellbeing can be better supported for young Pacific athletes. Athletes believed that communicating openly could help raise awareness and reduce the stigma attached to mental health, especially when led by team leaders and coaches. This is a significant finding given the fact that young athletes often adopt their attitudes and behaviours towards mental wellbeing from the leaders and coaches in their sporting circles (Wensley, 2016). Participants asserted that it would be a lot easier to share their problems with others or seek help if mental health discussions were normalised in both elite sports and Pacific households. It was interesting to note that some participants expressed the need to do the same at non-elite levels of sports, such as club rugby and age-group levels. Initiatives, such as the Ministry of Education's 'It's More Than Just a Game" programme, have used grassroots sports as a medium to improve Pacific education and health outcomes (State Services Commission, 2015). Developing similar initiatives focused on reducing stigma and normalising open communication around mental health would be of benefit. It would be especially beneficial if such initiatives collaborated with local community groups and schools, which may benefit both up-and-coming Pacific athletes and Pacific youth in general.

Meaningful athlete engagement

Athletes stated that more direct methods of engagement are required to effectively get mental health information across to young Pacific athletes who may be more withdrawn or indifferent to such discussions. Participants viewed talking with, rather than down to, Pacific athletes as one way to achieve this. Athletes also highlighted the importance of hammering home the seriousness of the topic, as many athletes felt, while wellbeing is often talked about, it has often used in a tokenistic and generic manner in their past experiences with such talks. The use of relatable and well-known Pacific athletes, particularly those who had their own experiences with mental health problems, was viewed as one of the most effective ways to engage and get the message of mental health and positive mental wellbeing across to young Pacific athletes, with many participants highlighting the influence that past athletes have had on other aspects of their lives and the potential impact that such stars could have on promoting positive mental wellbeing among these athletes.

Supporting personal development away from sports

Echoing sentiments from existing literature and this discussion, participants expressed the positive impact of personal development on mental wellbeing. In particular, athletes felt like greater support and opportunities to focus on off-field development would equip young Pacific athletes with the capacity to deal with both success and failure in elite sport. Personal-development classes and workshops were a popular response for how to achieve this. These findings highlight the need to continue building upon existing personal development initiatives for young elite athletes, such as Auckland Rugby Union's

(2015) "Pro Sport" programme, and developing new programmes, preferably culturally responsive, to support, facilitate, and meet the personal development needs of these athletes.

For schools and age-group programmes

Goal setting

Support with sports-specific career planning and goal setting, especially for year 12 and 13 students, was viewed as an area that could be targeted to support positive mental wellbeing and arm athletes with the skills to cope with their futures in, and away from, elite sports. Many participants stated that they did not have a clear career pathway or set of goals until they were leaving or had already left school, and felt like greater focus on sports-specific career planning at age-group and school level would reduce some of the stress and anxiety associated with chasing a career in elite sports. Athletes highlighted the use of regular career planning sessions at school may be an effective way to support aspiring Pacific athletes to make the right choices and prepare as best they can for a career in sports.

Educating athletes on the reality of a career in sports

Participants found that their preconceived views of a career in elite sports largely differed to the reality they faced. Athletes voiced their concern that many young Pacific males pursuing a career in professional sports may be doing the same, without understanding the challenges faced and how to prepare for them. Participants noted that many young athletes might not be aware of the pressure elite athletes experience and the very real possibility of failure. Participants believed that these realities must be made clear to aspiring athletes at a young age. This concept is discussed in Price's (2007) study, which also found that young rugby players were unaware and unprepared for the reality of professional rugby. Nevertheless, many of the athletes understood the need to have back-up options, regardless of whether they were actively pursuing them or not, which suggests that some progress is being made.

Greater focus on personal development

As with participants' recommendations for sports organisations, athletes appealed for greater off-field development in schools. Athletes noted their schooling experiences, with some explaining that they often went to school just to play rugby and see their mates. In hindsight, these athletes recognised the importance of personal development and a well-balanced education, not just to have a back-up career pathway but also to develop key life skills and personality traits that can help with a career in elite sports. Schools, especially those with well-funded sports programmes, must ensure personal development opportunities are promoted to young Pacific athletes to ensure they are obtaining the life skills required to succeed in life and attain a well-balanced education. Of which will inevitably benefit them as athletes and support their ability to better cope with the challenges experienced in elite sports.

For the community

Raising awareness and communicating openly about mental health

Participants were quick to point out that the stigma associated with mental health was also common in Pacific communities, not just among athletes. Athletes expressed the need to raise awareness and communicate more openly about mental health in Pacific communities, especially in Pacific homes. Again, the use of well-respected and relatable sports figures was acknowledged as a powerful tool to effectively engage Pacific peoples and raise awareness in Pacific communities. Rice et al. (2016) highlights the importance of engaging with elite athletes in the domains of mental health because of their position as visible role models and ambassadors, which may be vital to reducing mental health stigma, promoting help-seeking behaviours, and facilitating greater engagement in services. Such actions would be beneficial for Pacific athletes and 'hard-to-reach' groups in the general population such as young Pacific men. Many initiatives exist to raise awareness about mental health, such as the Ministry of Health's "Like Minds Like Mine" programme and many other programmes organised by non-government organisations, so continuing to build upon these programmes will be a positive step moving forward.

Study limitations

Findings cannot yet be generalised to all young Pacific male athletes given the small sample size. Moreover, recruitment was limited to elite rugby players in the Auckland region. Extending this research to the wider New Zealand region and different sports could possibly result in different findings. Further research looking at different sports, with a greater sample size and recruitment area would address this.

The voluntary nature of this study may have reduced the representativeness of participants. Again, further research with a greater sample size would help to address this.

There was a paucity of literature focused on the mental health of young Pacific male athletes, and no active research being undertaken in New Zealand. Most of the literature related to Pacific athletes had been undertaken in Australia. Thus, literature on the mental wellbeing of non-Pacific male athletes and young Pacific males in general was used in the literature review and discussion sections. However, no assumptions were made about the transferability of such literature to the context of young Pacific male athletes.

The Pacific label used in this study covers a variety of individual Pacific ethnic groups. While the literature and findings from this research suggest that the Pacific identity is prominent among Pacific athletes in New Zealand and Australia, the literature suggests that these findings may not be generalisable to athletes based in the Pacific Islands.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have emerged from the findings of this study. They provide useful information to help support positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes by informing

mental wellbeing initiatives and strategies, elite sports programmes, youth sports programmes, within schools, sports clubs and among Pacific communities.

- Elite sports can be an unstable career. It is important that family, particularly parents/caregivers, support and encourage young Pacific athletes when they have experienced a setback or are unable to contribute financially.

- The brotherhood among Pacific athletes is a meaningful source of support and beneficial to helping athletes 'bounce back' in the face of adversity. There is huge potential to use, and to work alongside this support system to reduce stigma, raise awareness, and facilitate any type of early intervention

- Families, schools, and sports organisations must prioritise strong relationships when supporting positive mental wellbeing. The more social support that can be mobilised, the more effective strategies will be.

- Some young Pacific male athletes adopt the attitudes, views, and beliefs of those around them. If family, friends, and team administrators and coaches prioritise positive mental wellbeing, so will these athletes.

- There is always the potential for young Pacific athletes to lose sight of the importance of lifestyle balance as they pursue their goals. Those who play an influential role in the lives of these athletes, namely family, friends, and team staff, have a responsibility to keep young Pacific athletes aware of the 'bigger picture'.

- Elite sports programmes must work to prioritise personal development through the facilitation of work experience and education opportunities for young athletes, particularly for athletes beginning their elite sports careers at the Secondary School level.

- Schools must ensure the right care is given to new student-athletes when they arrive to New Zealand on sports scholarships, especially those from the Pacific Islands or from less pressurised school settings.

- There is a need to build upon existing mental health initiatives and identify ways to implement these initiatives in culturally appropriate ways that effectively engage young Pacific athletes. Collaborating with Pacific player networks, local clubs and schools, and Pacific community groups would also be a good step towards widespread and meaningful engagement.

- The ways in which young athletes receive mental health information is just as important as the information provided. Interactive programmes and the use of relatable 'star' athletes were found to be the most effective ways to engage these athletes.

- Young Pacific athletes need access to clearly communicated information about how to stay mentally healthy, how to understand and recognise mental health problems and where to go to get help. In other words, more efforts must be afforded to mental health literacy. Preferably as soon as they enter elite age group programmes.

- With any initiative, it is essential to maintain a healthy balance between clinical, social, and cultural perspectives of mental health to ensure efficacy and successful engagement with Pacific athletes, families, and communities.

Future research

This thesis has uncovered many areas that require further investigation in order to better support young Pacific male athletes and understand positive mental wellbeing. The findings and discussion in this thesis have helped to identify areas for future research. These include:

- A larger study with a larger sample size that includes Pacific athletes from a variety of sports.
- Evaluating interventions that aim to improve mental health literacy and reduce stigma around mental illness among young Pacific male athletes and their families.
- Identifying the first point of contact for young Pacific male athletes for help-seeking.
- More of a focus on certain age ranges, as there are significant differences between the 'schoolboys' (16-18 years), recent school leavers (18-20 years), and young adults (21-24 years) age groups.
- Athletes removed from the elite sports environment, either temporarily or permanently, appeared to be at greater risk of negative mental wellbeing. There is a need to identify ways to better support these young men, especially those who do not secure a professional playing contract.
- Further investigation into anxiety and depression among young Pacific male athletes is needed.
- Investigation into the impact of hypervisibility on young Pacific athletes. In particular, exploring ways to help young athletes cope with hypervisibility and prevent the risk of athletes being exploited by sports organisations and agents.
- It would be valuable to further explore the way Pacific athletes navigate the Euro-centric world of elite sports and identify potential methods to support them in doing so.
- A Pacific Island-based study of players who go overseas on either sports scholarships or club contracts.

Conclusion

The 20 young Pacific male athletes that participated in this research shared their views, experiences, and knowledge regarding positive mental wellbeing and elite sports. They identified risk and protective factors for mental wellbeing and performance in elite sports, and shared their thoughts on what could help promote and support their positive mental wellbeing. Findings from this study illustrate the complexities therein and affirm that a holistic approach is required to understand mental wellbeing for these young Pacific male athletes. Historical and sociocultural factors, as well as various personal elements impact upon mental wellbeing of these athletes.

Recommendations, which were informed by current literature and the findings of this study, provide evidence-based strategies to promote and support positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes. This research provides new and essential information for mental health services, schools, elite sports organisations and their staff, youth sports coaches, Pacific mental health researchers, Pacific communities, and Pacific families looking to promote and support positive mental wellbeing among young Pacific male athletes and ensure the young Pacific males of this country thrive and flourish.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Kia Orana, Talofa lava, Mālō e Lelei, Fakalofa Lahi Atu, Ni Sa Bula Vinaka, Hello,

My name is Caleb Marsters and I am a Master of Public Health Student at The University of Auckland. I am doing research for my thesis looking at Young Pacific male athletes' opinions of what could help towards positive mental wellbeing and performance at an elite level of sport. This study is looking for male Pacific athletes aged 16-24 years living in Auckland to take part in this important research.

Who to contact

If you are interested please contact me, Caleb Marsters (Researcher), to make arrangements and to answer any further questions or concerns you may have about this research:

> Caleb Marsters
> Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
> The University of Auckland
> Phone: 021 0234 1426 (Txt or call)
> Email: cmar502@aucklanduni.ac.nz

What will happen?

- If you are interested, a one-on-one interview will be conducted at a time and place convenient to you.
- Interviews will be informal semi-structured discussions with the researcher Caleb Marsters and will last up to 90 minutes maximum.
- You have a chance to share your personal views around what could help towards positive mental wellbeing and performance at an elite level of sport for young Pacific athletes.
- 3 key themes will guide discussion:
    - Your views of what you believe positive mental wellbeing is
    - Your opinions around what impacts upon your own mental wellbeing and performance; both the positives and the negatives and on and off the field
    - What you believe could be done to better support and promote positive mental wellbeing for emerging young Pacific male athletes
- This research will provide information to help inform future support to address and meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of young Pacific male athletes.
- If you choose to take part in this research everything will be kept strictly confidential and no material will identify you in any reports, presentations and publications relating to this study.
- You will be given a $30 gift voucher for your time and as a token of appreciation for sharing your experiences.
- Your participation in this project is voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study without giving a reason up to one month after your interview.

Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix B

<u>Interview schedule</u>

1. What is culturally important for you as a young Pacific male? (Prompt: connection to your culture, other important aspects in your life, what is important to you as a young Pacific male? etc)

2. Describe your sports journey up to this point? And your future goals?

3. What have been the highlights of your career so far?

4. What have been the lows? (Prompt: both on and off the field)

5. How have you coped with the low times (if any?) (Prompt if required: do you have any particular support systems/people who make you feel better, if so who and why?)

6. In your own words how would you define positive mental wellbeing?

7. What are the major factors that influence your mental wellbeing, both positive and negative? And what things in particular improve your mental wellbeing/make you feel good mentally? (Prompt: Factors can be both on and off the field)

8. Do you think mental health and associated topics such as depression and suicide are important issues for young Pacific male athletes? (Please describe) (Prompt: is enough being done? etc)

9. Do you think pressure to perform and succeed has an impact on young Pacific athletes' wellbeing? In what ways?

10. What messages and ideas do you think are most important to share with young Pacific athletes in order to promote and support positive mental wellbeing? And what do you think would be the most effective way to get these messages across?

11. Lastly, do you have any further thoughts you would like to share around the mental wellbeing of young Pacific athletes?

Appendix C

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

Young Pacific male athletes and positive mental wellbeing

Student Researcher: Caleb Marsters
Principal Investigator: Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath

Introduction

My name is Caleb Marsters. I am a Master of Public Health Student at the School of Population Health at the University of Auckland. My main supervisor is Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath and my second supervisor is Dr Vili Nosa; both staff are based within the Pacific Health Section at the University of Auckland, and are very experienced Pacific health and wellbeing researchers and experts.

The project

Reason: The reason I am doing this research is to look at young Pacific male athletes opinions of what could help towards positive mental wellbeing and performance at an elite level of sport. This research is a response to recent media attention of young Pacific male athletes which suggests that there may be distinct issues faced by this group that needs deeper exploration.

Aims: The main aim of this research is to identify the positive views that young Pacific male athletes' have in relation to mental wellbeing and explore how these views will then provide useful information to support and promote positive mental wellbeing amongst young Pacific male athletes, and potentially Pacific youth males in general.

Duration: Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated and will include a one-off interview that will last up to 90 minutes maximum. The research period is May 2016-February 2017, where findings will be submitted as a thesis and presented at seminars and lectures and published in journal articles.

Benefits: This research gives you the chance to share and discuss ways we can better support and promote positive mental wellbeing for young Pacific athletes and potentially Pacific male youth, as well as discussing issues around depression and suicide. Overall, your input will provide useful information that will help to inform future support to address and meet the mental health and wellbeing needs of young Pacific male athletes.

Risks: There are no expected risks or harm to you as a result of participation or nonparticipation in this study. Participation is voluntary. All information gathered on this issue is viewed as sensitive and confidential and will be strictly handled and stored safely and securely.

Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research because you are an elite Pacific male athlete who is engaged in an elite rugby league or union programme and/or part

of a professional rugby league or union team aged between 16-24 years and live in Auckland, New Zealand.

To find potential participants, like you, we have used an advertisement that has been shared with my own personal networks as well as on social networking sites (such as Facebook).

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline this invitation to participate without giving a reason and without penalty. The choice is entirely up to you.

If you do accept this invitation you are free to withdraw without giving a reason and without penalty. The cut-off date for withdrawal is one month after the interview takes place.

What will happen if I do accept?

If you choose to participate, we will set up an interview time with you as soon as possible once you've accepted your invitation to take part in this research.

The interview is expected to take up to 90 minutes at the longest, and will be carried out at a location and time suitable to you. You do not have to answer every question in the interview, and you may stop answering questions at any time.

I would like to digitally record the interview (audio only) and this will only be done with your permission. Recording can be turned off at any time during the interview at your request and you can ask to have certain bits deleted afterwards as well. If at any time you are not comfortable with being digitally recorded you can ask for me to write your answers down or you can write the answers down yourself.

Again, even if you do accept to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any penalty.

If you have any further questions about the research process, please do not hesitate to email me at cmar502@aucklanduni.ac.nz. Or my primary supervisor Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath at j.tiatiaseath@auckland.ac.nz if you have any questions about the researcher or the study.

Confidentiality

If you choose to participate in the interview, you can be assured that no material that can personally identify you will be used in any reports and publications on this study. All information both written and recorded will be transcribed into electronic transcripts (word documents) and will be strictly handled and securely stored at all times. You will also be offered the opportunity to review your transcript. If you accept this offer you will be given a two week turn around period to make any changes. After the study is finished, all information will be securely kept for a period of six years, and then professionally destroyed (i.e. digital files deleted and hard copies shredded).

If you would like to receive a copy of the findings from this research it will be made available to you. Copies of the digital recordings and transcripts will also be made available to you at your request.

Any concerns related to the topic of mental health?

If you have any concerns related to interview discussions or to the topic of mental health please feel free to contact the free-phone Youth Helpline on 0800 376633, or free text 234 to Youthline New Zealand. You can also visit www.thelowdown.co.nz and/or www.auntydee.co.nz for further support regarding mental health and wellbeing. Also, feel free to contact one of the contacts below if you have any questions or concerns about this study.

Participation gift

We value your contribution to this study greatly and the only cost to participate in this study is your time. A gift voucher ($30) will be given to you upon completion of the interview. You may keep the voucher even if you choose to withdraw from the study after your interview. Light food and refreshments will also be provided at the interview for you.

Contact details

Student Researcher: *Caleb Marsters* Master of Public Health student School of Population Health Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences The University of Auckland E: cmar502@aucklanduni.ac.nz	Principal Investigator *Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath* Lecturer School of Population Health Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences The University of Auckland E: j.tiatia-seath@auckland.ac.nz Phone: 09 923 6719	Second supervisor & Head of Department: *Dr Vili Nosa* Head of Department - Pacific Health School of Population Health Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences The University of Auckland E: v.nosa@auckland.ac.nz Phone: 09 923 6719

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373 7599 extn. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

If you want to talk to someone who is not involved with the study or have concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study you may contact the Health Advocates Trust.
Telephone: 09 623 5799

Thank you very much for your time and consideration to help make this study possible.

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on Monday 30th May 2016 for three years. Reference number: 017417.

Appendix D

Office of the Vice-Chancellor

Finance, Ethics and Compliance

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE (UAHPEC)

30-May-2016

MEMORANDUM TO:

Dr Sipaea Tiatia-Seath

Pacific Health

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 017417): Approved

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your project entitled **Young Pacific male athletes and positive mental wellbeing**.

We are pleased to inform you that ethics approval is granted for a period of three years.

The expiry date for this approval is 30-May-2019.

If the project changes significantly, you are required to submit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

If you have obtained funding other than from UniServices, send a copy of this approval letter to the Research Office, at ro-awards@auckland.ac.nz. For UniServices contracts, send a copy of the approval letter to the Contract Manager, UniServices.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, you are requested to notify UAHPEC once your project is completed.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals. If you wish to do so, please contact the UAHPEC Ethics Administrators at ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

Please quote reference number: **017417** on all communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application.

(This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)
UAHPEC Administrators

University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department / School, Pacific Health

   Dr Vili Nosa

Caleb Marsters

Dr Denise Greenwood

Additional information:

1. Do not forget to fill in the 'approval wording' on the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms, giving the dates of approval and the reference number, before you send them out to your participants.

2. Should you need to make any changes to the project,please complete the online proposed changes and include any revised documentation.

3. At the end of three years, or if the project is completed before the expiry, please advise UAHPEC of its completion.

4. Should you require an extension, please complete the online Amendment Request form associated with this approval number giving full details along with revised documentation. An extension can be granted for up to three years, after which a new application must be submitted.

5. Please note that UAHPEC may from time to time conduct audits of approved projects to ensure that the research has been carried out according to the approval that was given.

Appendix E

THIS CONSENT FORM WILL BE HELD FOR A PERIOD OF SIX YEARS

Project title: Young Pacific male athletes and positive mental wellbeing

Principal Investigator:	**Student Researcher:**
Dr Jemaima Tiatia-Seath	Caleb Marsters
Research Fellow	Masters of Public Health Student
Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences	School of Population Health
The University of Auckland	Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
E: j.tiatia-seath@auckland.ac.nz	The University of Auckland
	E: cmar502@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Declaration by participant:

I have read the Participant Information Sheet asking for volunteers to participate in this study looking at young Pacific male athletes' views of what could help towards positive mental wellbeing and performance at an elite level of sport, and I have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary.
- I understand that I may choose to withdraw from the study at any time within one month after the interview without giving a reason.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material, which could identify me, will be used in seminars, guest lectures, presentations, fono (meetings), theses, and any other publications that may arise.
- I have had time to decide whether or not to take part.
- I know whom to contact if I have any questions about the research.
- I consent to my interview being digital voice recorded.
- I know I that recording can be turned off at any time during the interview at my request.
- I know that I do not have to answer any question(s) that I don't want to and I can stop that interview at any time.
- I am aware that these recordings will be transcribed by the researcher.
- I know that I will be offered the opportunity to review my transcript, and that if I accept this offer I will be given a two week turn around period to make any changes.
- I understand that all information will be securely kept for a period of six years after the study and then it will be professionally destroyed (i.e. digital files deleted, hard copies shredded).
- I understand that data from my involvement will be used to form the basis of the researchers Master of Public Health thesis.
- I am aware that if my participation causes any personal distress, I can: access assistance via:
    - Youth Helpline on free-phone 0800 376633, or free txt 234

- o The Lowdown online via www.thelowdown.co.nz
- o Aunty Dee via www.auntydee.co.nz

I wish to receive a copy of the summary of results (circle one)   **YES/NO**

If yes, email address that you want results delivered to:

_____

Participant name: ……………………………………………………………

Signature: ……………………………………………………………

Date: ……………………………………………………………

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on Monday 30th May 2016 for three years. Reference number: 017417