



Maori and gambling

Background

Pre-colonial Māori society had no history of gambling, and until recently there was no word for 'gambling' in te reo Māori. Early post-colonial gambling related activities were generally positive experiences. Fundraising activities such as housie and card games were seen as ways to help maintain the marae.¹

Since the 1980s, gambling in New Zealand has gone through many changes¹, and the Māori population has felt the worst effects. Māori are

more likely to have gambling problems because pokie machines – the most harmful form of gambling – are highly concentrated in deciles with high Māori and Pacific populations.²

There is also a concern over advertising and the use of Māori cultural icons being used to promote and normalise gambling. When the first casinos were opened in the early 1990s, Māori carvings were placed in entrances. More recently, lottery scratch tickets have featured native flora and fauna, and marae display plaques with logos of the New Zealand Lottery Board or gaming trusts.³

Māori adults are approximately three and a half times more likely than the average adult to be problem gamblers.

Māori gambling by the numbers

In the 2013 census the total Māori population in New Zealand numbered 598,602, or 14.9% of the total population. One in seven New Zealanders identified as Māori.⁴

The 2012 National Gambling Study estimates that 1 in 16 Māori men and 1 in 15 women are problem or moderate-risk gamblers. Māori adults are approximately three and a half times more likely than the average adult to be problem gamblers.⁵ About a third of moderate-risk and problem gamblers are Māori.⁶

According to the Ministry of Health, Māori were overrepresented among clients of counselling services in 2015 and 2016. Among face-to-face counselling clients, more than one-third (34.2%)

were Māori⁷. The freephone Gambling Helpline reported 13.9% of their callers for the most recent year reported were Māori.⁸

Māori don't have to be gamblers to feel the effects. Half of the Māori surveyed for the National Gambling Study said they knew someone who likely had a problem with gambling, higher than any other ethnic group. Māori reported higher-than-average rates of gambling among their families while they were growing up, and in their current whanau. They also reported high rates of arguing with someone about time or money spent gambling, and high rates of someone in their family going without something they needed due to money being spent on gambling.⁵

Why Maori start gambling...

- Encouraged by advertising (80%)
- To deal with stress and troubles (87%)
- As a social activity (95%)
- Limited entertainment options (92%)
- The hope of winning big money (100%)
- Introduced by friends and family (83%)

... and why they continue

- Easy access to money machines (94%)
- Small wins encourage more gambling (98%)
- Easy access to gambling activities (98%)
- To escape from stress and troubles (96%)
- Need to win more to cover losses (92%)
- Losing control of self (89%)¹⁰

Maori women and children

Research of gambling's effects on Māori women is limited, but it is clear that many were exposed to gambling as children through card games at their homes or on the marae and often actively participated in games. This may have normalized gambling at an age when they were dependent on their whānau for social learning. Others were encouraged by partners or whānau later in life.¹¹

Māori women reported that social interaction was a motivation to gamble. Having a chance to escape from the pressures of home life and be waited on by staff was another attraction. Pubs have become more female-friendly,¹² and Māori-run pokie bars are seen as more welcoming and a more positive environment.¹¹

The negative consequences of gambling can be the loss of relationships, mistrust and isolation from whānau, and financial mismanagement that leads to large debts. Health consequences can include pain from inappropriate seating at pokie

venues, increase in smoking and secondhand smoke, eating disorders, depression and suicidal tendencies. Some women admitted to losing jobs, turning to crime or neglecting their children as a result of gambling.¹¹

Children of parents who have a gambling problem are more likely to become problem gamblers themselves. Parents and whānau who gamble act as role models, especially when gambling activities are a central part of social life. Early participation and views of gambling as entertainment and a way to escape financial difficulties are part of the developmental cycle of problem gambling.¹³

A study of family members of Māori problem gamblers found they were most strongly affected by the neglect they suffered as children while parents were busy gambling. Aside from the lack of essentials, they reported feelings of not being loved or valued.¹³

He waka eke noa

A canoe which we are all in with no exception

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