



Asians and gambling

Asians make up the fastest growing ethnic population in New Zealand today. Chinese is the largest group, followed by Korean. Other groups include Thai, Japanese, Sri Lankan, Filipino, Malay, Cambodian and Vietnamese.

Many Asians in New Zealand have had little experience of the harm of gambling as they do not have easy access to gambling venues at home. The shift from social to problem gambling often begins with problems with integration after immigrating.

Problem gambling has become a major public health issue for Asian people in New Zealand. Asians made up 7.9% of problem gambling service clients in 2014/15.¹ However, it is estimated that one in four (24.5%) of moderate-risk/problem gamblers are Asian.⁴



Happily, the numbers of Asian problem gamblers appear to be declining. A 2011/12 study of gambling in New Zealand showed that percentage of Asians gambling at moderate or problem risk levels had declined slightly since 2006/07.²

In 2011 the Auckland-based Asian Family Hotline (a for-Asian, by-Asian service which includes speakers in Mandarin, Thai, Vietnamese, Cantonese and Korean) provided 937 sessions of counselling.³

Asian Family Hotline: 0800 862 342

Which Asians are at greatest risk of problem gambling?

- Those who are lonely and speak little English. They go to the casino to find others so they can converse in their own language.
- Those working in the food industry.
- Tour guides with large amounts of cash.
- Night shift workers.
- Older Asian early settlers who gamble to get away from family lives.
- Asian women who gamble while their husbands are working in their country of origin.
- Poor (lower income) people who want to try their luck.
- Businessmen who put large amounts on card games and pokies at private clubs.
- International students.⁶

Seeking help

Asian gamblers often try to fix the problem themselves and only seek help as a last resort. Only a small amount of people will seek help themselves as they see problem gambling as a private thing and are ashamed about losing face.

Because of language problems many Asian gamblers aren't confident about seeking help from professionals. Police, lawyers or relatives are usually the ones who force gamblers to seek treatment.

When contacting counselling services Asian clients are likely to expect their counsellor to be directive or authoritarian, and are surprised that this isn't the case.

A study on Chinese clients found that they wanted intervention services which were user friendly, and were appropriate in culture and language.⁵ They wanted to be able to express themselves in their own language and be fully understood in terms of their background.

They wanted professional help with support to build up their self esteem and self confidence. They also wanted help to control money and to put self exclusion orders in place.

The outcomes of gambling are poor health, stress, financial problems, family problems, loss of job or business, alcohol consumption, loss of trust from friends and family, children feeling unsafe, criminal activities, isolation, and a negative image of Asians within New Zealand society.

The stigma that is associated with problem gambling can be reduced when we talk about it

Common reasons why Asians living in NZ gamble

- Post-immigration adjustment is difficult and often the casino is seen as a refuge from the hardships of fitting into a new and unfamiliar culture.
- The casinos are seen as an attractive environment to visit, as there is often a lack of 'suitable' entertainment elsewhere.
- Venues are seen as accommodating and sensitive to the needs of Asian clients and they are somewhere to go where they can meet up with other Asians.
- A way to escape from problems such as isolation, loneliness and boredom.
- Having a large amount of life savings for settlement.
- Access to legal licensed gambling premises.
- For international students there is increased freedom with no parental control and free time while studying.
- Unemployment.
- Sense of loss and feeling of deprivation in regard to status, family, friends and possessions. Loss of traditional family role.
- Easy money (other than working).
- Not integrating well into new society/culture.
- Absence of family.

1. Ministry of Health (2015) Problem Gambling Service User data. Wellington: MOH. URL <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/preventative-health-wellness/problem-gambling/service-user-data>. (Accessed 26/01/12)
2. Rossen, Fiona. (2015). Gambling and problem gambling: results of the 2011/12 New Zealand Health Survey. Auckland: Ministry of Health.
3. Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand database, 2012.
4. Devlin, M. (May 2011) Technical report. Groups at risk of at-risk gambling.

- Wellington: Health Sponsorship Council. <http://www.hsc.org.nz/publications/2011/groups-risk-risk-gambling-technical-report>
5. Wong J (2000) A study of Chinese attitudes towards gambling and their seeking help behaviour in New Zealand. Med dissertation. Auckland: University of Auckland.
6. Samson Tse et al. (2004) Focus on the future: Asian problem gambling services in New Zealand. Auckland: Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand.

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