



## Asian problem gambling in New Zealand

### Who is 'Asian'?

There are two definitions for Asians in New Zealand. The state sector defines an Asian as someone from the Asian continent, and excludes Indians and South Asian New Zealanders. Statistics New Zealand uses the term Asian to describe people with origins in the Asian continent, but excludes peoples originating in Middle East and central Asia. These two definitions are often combined and used in New Zealand, so that Chinese and other East and Southeast Asian people are considered Asian.

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

Many of these ethnic groups have had little experience of the harm of gambling as they do not have easy access to gambling venues at home.

While some may have gambled with family and friends they seldom gamble with strangers and often have never been inside a casino.

Problem gambling has become a major public health issue for Asian people in New Zealand. In 2007 6.9% of new clients to Gambling Helpline, and 7.6% of face to face counselling problem gamblers were of Asian descent.<sup>1</sup> Asians made up 9.2% of the population in the 2006 NZ census.

The shift from social to problem gambling often begins with problems with integration (post migration adjustment issues).

During 2007 the Auckland-based Asian Gambling Hotline

(the only for Asian by Asian service in NZ which includes speakers in Mandarin, Cantonese and Korean) had 883 calls, 291 were new callers, 201 were gamblers and 90 were from significant others. Of the new gambler callers 69.7% were male, and 30.3% were female. Of significant others 71.1% were female and 27.8% were male. 95.5% of the calls were from Asian gambler clients.

The Gambling Helpline reported 6.9% of new clients identified as Asian. 6% of significant others were Asian.<sup>1</sup>

Face to face counselling services report that over 78% of Asian clients cite casino based machines and tables as their primary mode of gambling. Pokies accounted for 13.1% of the primary mode of gambling by Asians.<sup>1</sup>

### When they win, they want to win more When they lose, they want to win back

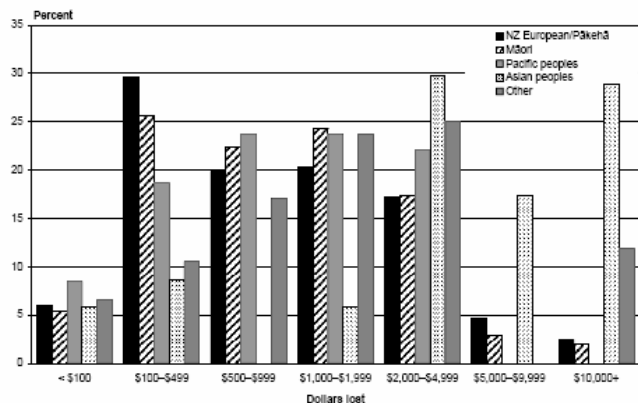
#### Reasons for gambling

- Post immigration adjustment is difficult and often the casino is seen as a refuge from the difficulties of fitting into a new 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, isolation, loneliness and boredom
- For some it is 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



## A comparison of money spent between Asian and other gamblers <sup>1</sup>

Figure 29: Face-to-face intervention services: dollars lost in four weeks before first assessment, new full clients, by ethnicity, 2007



Ministry of Health. *Problem gambling intervention services in New Zealand. 2007 service-user statistics*. Wellington: MOH, 2008.

## Seeking help

In general Asian gamblers try to fix the problem themselves and only seek help as a last resort. Often it is the police, lawyers or relatives who force gamblers to seek treatment.

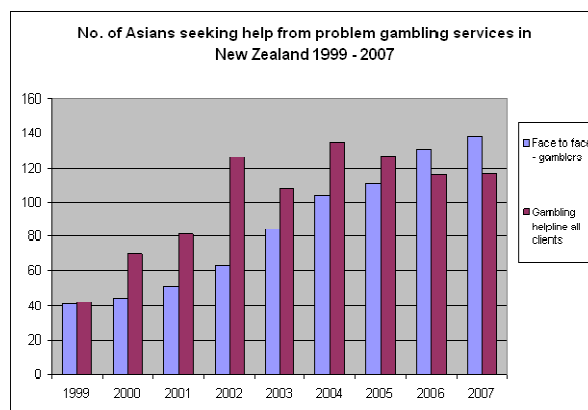
Only a small amount of people will seek help themselves as they see problem gambling as a private thing and are ashamed about losing face. Because of language problems many gamblers aren't confident to seek help from professionals.

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 <sup>2</sup> found that they wanted intervention services which were user friendly, and were appropriate in culture and language. 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 suffer from feeling unsafe, criminal activities, isolation, and a negative image of Asians within New Zealand society.



## Asians at risk of problem gambling are: <sup>3</sup>

- 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
- Asian business men who put large amounts on card games and pokies at private clubs
- International students

1. Ministry of Health (2008) *Problem gambling intervention services in New Zealand. 2007 service-user statistics*. Wellington: MOH.  
2. Wong J (2000) *A study of Chinese attitudes towards gambling and their seeking help behaviour in New Zealand*. Med dissertation. Auckland: University of Auckland.  
3. Samson Tse et al. (2004) *Focus on the future: Asian problem gambling services in New Zealand*. Auckland: Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand.

**Problem Gambling Foundation Hotline 0800 664 262**  
**Asian Hotline 0800 862 342**