



Pokies , poverty, foodbanks and problem gambling in NZ

Social banditry

The high number of poker machines in areas which are classified as highly disadvantaged has been labeled by some as social banditry.

In New Zealand the losses on the pokies involve a small proportion of the population but are concentrated in low socio-economic communities. The losses were large and in already disadvantaged areas this caused greater harm in communities which could least afford the loss.¹

Research has shown that in New Zealand:

- There is a higher exposure to gambling, particularly poker machines, in low income areas;

- Maori women are the highest ethnic group presenting for treatment;

- Residents of less affluent areas participated in gambling activities at a higher level than more affluent areas.²

Opportunity and accessibility

A recent New Zealand study examined whether the 'pokies' were more easily accessible in low socio-economic communities in New Zealand and found that the greatest number were found in decile 9 areas (1=least disadvantaged; 10=being most disadvantaged).³

Per head of population decile 9 areas had nearly thirteen times the machines as decile 1 areas. Over 54% of machines are in decile 8-10 areas where the population consists of 56% Maori and 72% Pacific peoples. Also 56% of expenditure on pokies is in Decile 8-10 areas.

In June 2008 there were 659 TAB outlets across New Zealand. Between 2004 and 2008 there was a

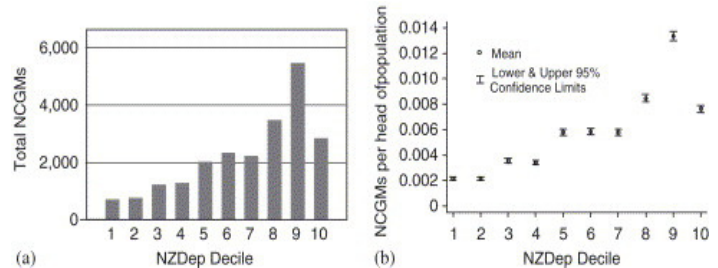


Figure 1. Distribution of non-casino gaming machines across NZDep deprivation index deciles (1=least deprived; 10=most deprived): (a) Total machines by NZDep decile. (b) Poisson proportion (machines per head of population) and 95% confidence intervals.³

13% increase in outlets. In 2008 there were 1005 Lottery outlets across New Zealand. 49% of TABS and 46% of lottery outlets are also housed in Decile 8-10 areas. These areas also have the largest number of large pokie venues (18 machines plus). While there are fewer machines overall, they are found in larger concentrations in low socio-economic areas.

Distribution of Lottery Commission outlets and TABs follow the same patterns as pokie venues and machines which suggests that deprivation is indeed linked to greater exposure to many types of gambling. This concentration disproportionately affects those living in these areas, particularly Maori.⁴

A 2009 report states that the proportion of Maori, Pacific Island and Asian populations are found in areas containing 3 or more venues which is higher than the New Zealand average. Similarly areas where large venues are located have larger numbers of recent immigrants. Between 2004 and 2008 most (52%) of pokies were installed in decile 4-8 areas.⁴

A study in 2008 on neighbourhood access to opportunities for gambling found that it was related to gambling and problem gambling behaviour, and that access contributes substantially to neighbourhood inequalities in gambling over and above-individual level characteristics.⁵

Foodbanks: If you need help from a foodbank please contact one of the following:

Auckland City Mission, Christchurch City Mission, Downtown Community Ministry (Wtn), NZ Council of Christian Services, Salvation Army



Children

The Australian Productivity Commission found that the children of problem gamblers were affected in many ways, and the most immediate one was poverty, as problem gambling tends to eat up resources that would otherwise be spent on household items such as family entertainment, a serviceable car, a pleasant home, holidays and even food.

Food banks

The key reason for using foodbanks is lack of income. However, foodbank users are increasingly presenting with multiple and complex reasons which require more substantial resources to resolve.

In Auckland, the areas with the highest number of poker machines tend also to be the areas with the highest numbers of foodbank clients.

A study in 2005 found that approximately 35% of foodbank clients were either problem gamblers themselves or were affected by the gambling of others. Seventy percent of users were on benefits, and 56% were Maori and Pacific Island women.⁶

Eighty percent of foodbank users reported being in debt. The debt was mainly to WINZ (mainly through special benefits grants) and gambling.

Risk factors

Risk factors for problem gambling and debt are:

- the availability and access of pokie machines
- socio-economic such as poverty and unemployment
- social such as significant others who gamble
- cultural such as family and community practices and their control over gambling²

Conclusion

- Knowledge of the distribution of poker machines provides the opportunity for policy implementation to ensure that inequality in the distribution in low decile areas is investigated and stopped
- There should be more control over gambling environment such as the examination of the close proximity to money machines for cash withdrawal
- Modifying the gambling environment to prevent easy access and availability and changes to venues such as those at restaurants and drinking establishments
- Need to incorporate problem solving and coping skills in treatment programmes as well as control of gambling behaviour

One of the reasons that people start gambling is the centrality of poverty and the belief that gambling is the only possible way out

Profile of food bank user

- Sole parent families were the most common household type at five out of seven foodbanks
- Single households were the most common type at the PS Otago and Wellington DCM foodbanks
- Sole parent families were over-represented at six foodbanks when compared to the national average
- Half or more households have children or clients at six foodbanks
- Most clients were aged between 25 and 40 years
- At six of the foodbanks the majority of foodbank clients were women
- Pakeha clients were the most common ethnic group at six foodbanks
- Maori are over-represented at each foodbank when compared to city census percentages

NZ Council of Christian Social Services⁷

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