

# **Gambling Issues for Tongan People in Auckland, New Zealand**

**Sione Tu'itahi, Auckland Regional Public Health Service**

## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on a research on gambling issues within the Tongan community in Auckland, New Zealand, being conducted by the Auckland Regional Public Health Services (ARPHS). It outlines the background and rationale for the research, its progress as of the time of writing, and some of its preliminary findings, as well as future plans.

## **Introduction**

In New Zealand, problem gambling is more prevalent among people with lower socio-economic status and lower educational levels, within which the Tongan community in Auckland feature significantly. The Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand identified that among the people involved in gambling, 16% of Pacific people visited the Auckland Sky Casino eleven times or more in one month. Thirty seven percent of Pacific people spent three hours or more at the Auckland Sky Casino during each visit and Pacific people are reported to have spent more money on gambling at the Auckland Casino than any other ethnic group.

Even though there has been an increased prevalence of Problem and Pathological gamblers in New Zealand, Pacific people involved in gambling are less likely to contact treatment facilities.

Managed by *Vaka Ola*, the Pacific staff team at ARPHS, this research is divided into two phases. The first phase, 18 months long and started in December 2002, is community consultation and engagement of interested peoples in the Auckland Tongan community. The New Zealand Health Research Council funds the first phase. The second phase has two parts. The first is the data collection and analysis and the second is the development of a Health Promotion plan to be implemented with other health providers in the Auckland Tongan community.

## **Research Objectives**

The overall objectives of the research project are:

- To explore relevant issues of Tongan people in Auckland which contribute to the risk of developing addiction to gambling and problem gambling.
- To identify the effects of gambling on Tongan people in Auckland.
- To provide relevant information to health planners and providers in planning and implementation of culturally appropriate health preventive strategies for Tongan people in New Zealand against gambling.

## **Background**

In New Zealand, problem gambling is more common among males between the ages of 18-29. The prevalence of problem gambling is six times higher among Pacific peoples than for Maori. In addition, problem gambling is more prevalent among people with lower socio-economic status and lower educational level. Moreover,

among the people involved in gambling, 16% of Pacific people visited the Auckland Sky Casino eleven times or more in one month. Thirty seven percent of Pacific people spent three hours or more at the Auckland Sky Casino during each visit and Pacific people were reported to have spent more money on gambling at Auckland Casino than other ethnic groups. Even though there has been an increased prevalence of problem and pathological gamblers in New Zealand, Pacific people involved in gambling are less likely to contact treatment facilities such as the Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand by phone. (The Study of the Social and Economic Impacts of NZ Casinos, 1998).

### **Pacific Peoples**

Comprised of seven major ethnic groups and a total of 231,801, (NZ Census 2001) Pacific peoples are over-represented at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum compared with other New Zealanders. Among them, Tongan people ( 40,716, Census 2001) stand at the lower hierarchy in most socio-economic categories.

Figures show that Pacific peoples are twice as likely to be unemployed, have less than 80% of the income of other New Zealanders, make up a third of those in overcrowded households and have higher hospitalisation and sickness rates than the rest of the population. These statistics have a cumulative effect on the health and well being of Pacific Peoples. (Pacific Vision Conference Report:1999)

### **Tongans in New Zealand**

The bulk of Tongan migration took place in the 1970's when there was a scheme between the two governments to allow Tongans into New Zealand on a restricted working permit. They were to work in the then booming process industry as unskilled labourers. During this time Tongans also migrated to Australia and America and there are now significant pockets of Tongan communities throughout these countries.

Most Tongans in New Zealand still practise their own customs and traditions while adapting and living in New Zealand. They donate money to their churches and send money back to their home Islands to fulfil family commitments and obligations. At the same time, they experience modern lifestyles including gambling. These influences are factors in the conscious and subconscious changes made within the Tongan family structure.

The Tongan community was chosen for this research project because of four main factors.

- Through consultation with the Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand it was found that the Samoan community had been researched in a small pilot study. It was also discovered a Samoan PhD student, was investigating Samoan women and gambling.
- The ARPHS Pacific Team, *Vaka Ola*, felt that it would be beneficial to have two Pacific community studies in order to compare and identify similarities and differences in factors contributing to problem gambling. It would also be beneficial to compare findings with Maori research.

- Anecdotal evidence shows that many Tongans are highly involved in gambling whether it be casino, local pokie machines, TAB or lotto. Consequences of gambling practices have also been highlighted to the research team.
- Cultural safety and confidence as the ARPHS staff who identified gambling as a research were Tongans as well as a Burmese Doctor who worked in Tonga for 6 years and has strong Tongan affiliations.

### **Relevance to Health - A Public Health Response**

After the July 2001 Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand National Conference, the government officially recognised problem gambling as a public health concern. Current restructuring within the Problem Gambling Foundation includes progressive strategic movements towards a Ministerial Public Health portfolio.

The ARPHS has also identified the prevalence of problem gambling as an emerging concern within lower socio-economic communities. Anecdotal evidence through Pacific community field work and networks indicate that problem gambling is increasingly being identified as one of the factors leading to family and/or partner abuse as well as financial stress and deficit. Pacific staff have identified and expressed concerns working within their communities regarding the impact problem gambling is having within Pacific families.

### **Brief Gambling Literature and Research Review**

The 1997 clinical report of the Compulsive Gambling Society of New Zealand (CGS) noted the significant increase in gaming facilities as well as the increase in problem gamblers. Gambling has considerably grown as a recreational and tourism industry since late 1980's.

This results in an increase in the prevalence of gambling, problem gambling and pathological gambling in New Zealand. The prevalence of problem gamblers and pathological gamblers are categorised into in two groups:

- (a) Lifetime prevalence rates: 4.25 % (+/- 0.6 %)      2.7 % (+/- 0.5 %)
- (b) Current prevalence rates: 2.1 % (+/- 0.4 %)      1.2 % (+/- 0.3 %)

The prevalence for Maori was three times higher and Pacific peoples six times higher than Maori. In addition problem gambling was more prevalent among people with lower socio-economic status and lower educational level. (Abbott and Volberg,1991)

There was a high prevalence of Pacific people with both problem gambling and pathological gambling. Table 2, demonstrates the highest prevalence of problem gamblers and pathological gamblers with Pacific ethnicity compared with other ethnic groups in New Zealand.

### **Table 2: Ethnic-Specific Prevalence of Problem Gambler and Pathological Gambler.**

(Adapted from Australian Institute for Gambling Research 1998)

Ethnicity	Problem gamblers	Pathological gamblers
European	3 %	2 %
Maori	9 %	7 %
Pacific	16 %	15 %
Asian	10 %	1 %

Economic effects such as debt and bankruptcy are common among problem gamblers. In addition to the economic cost, problem gambling has an enormous impact on the family of problem gamblers, financial stress, loss, family and partner abuse and neglect. Problem gambling is also associated with depression, denial, lies, crime, fraud and theft and violence

Existing gaming legislation is inconsistent and focuses on economic issues ignoring socio-economic impact. Robert Brown (2001) suggests that government review their gambling policies to include harm minimisation and harm reduction strategies.

Brown states that a vision of responsible, sustainable gambling can be achieved through a balanced combination of treatment, harm minimisation and health promotion strategies. However, current treatment facilities are limited to providing health care at a secondary level, focusing on intervention at the problem and pathological gambling stage.

### **Progress in Phase One**

At the time of writing, the research team has completed the community engagement and interviewing of 50 participants, including 20 religious ministers, and 30 community leaders and professionals. The data is being analysed.

### **Some Preliminary Findings**

Some of the preliminary findings confirmed anecdotal evidence and findings of previous research on Pacific peoples and gambling.

From the perspective of the participants, gambling is a major health issue that is emerging quickly, and rising very steeply within the Tongan community. Its consequences are manifested in a number of ways such as financial difficulties which led to properties such as vehicles and homes being re-possessed, broken families, neglected children, and an increasing number of people in substantial financial debts.

Contributing factors as to why Tongans are involved in gambling are being analysed. These factors, together with themes and strategies suggested by participants to minimise and remedy problem gambling issues will be detailed in the final report, scheduled to be released in June 2004.

### **Where to from Here**

An application for the funding of the second phase, July 2004-June 2006, is being prepared for the Health Research Council to enable us to explore themes that have already emerged, to interview more widely in the community, and to develop interventions that are culturally appropriate and effective for the Tongan community.

Analysis of Tongan culture and language is central to this enterprise. One of the tools for this analysis is the engagement of authorities in the Tongan culture and language to explore the emerging themes within the context of the research.

A recent study in Queensland, Australia, of problem gambling in four communities (not including Pacific peoples) identified the following as essential strategies

- community education
- provide more culturally appropriate services
- working in partnership with communities
- implementing preventative services
- instigating legislative change

### **The Research Team**

**Ms. Yvette Guttenbeil** migrated to New Zealand with her family during the industrial boom of the 1970's. Daughter of working class Tongan parents she has insight and knowledge of the rapidly changing Tongan community in Auckland. She has worked with Pacific communities in developing and implementing health programmes for youth, women and church congregations. She is the principal investigator for this research project .

**Dr. Tin Htay** is a medical doctor with a postgraduate public health degree. He has 17 years work experience in public health research and intervention. In addition, he has working experience among Pacific communities in Auckland. He lived in Vava'u, Tonga for 6 years and worked as the medical officer for the Vava'u Prince Wellington Ngu Hospital. Furthermore, he has strong affiliation to the Tongan community in New Zealand through his work as well as through his spouse, a Tongan nurse, and his children.

**Mr. Sione Tu'itahi**, Pacific Service Development Manager, Auckland Regional Public Health Services, is of Tongan ethnic background . A lecturer in Pacific Studies and Cross-Cultural Communications, he also works as Pacific Development Co-ordinator at Massey University, Auckland. Sione is the co-ordinator of the research project.

**Dr. Jennifer Hand**, has long-term experience in research and in the evaluation of public services. She has worked cross culturally and with multi-disciplinary teams and has particular interest in linking local communities and indigenous people with trained researchers and tertiary educational institutions. She is Senior Lecturer in the Social and Community Section of the School of Population Health of Auckland University and coordinates the Research, Evaluation and Advisory services for the Auckland Regional Public Health service. She provides a link to the Centre for Gambling studies and academic institutions. She collaborates with the other investigators throughout the project and provides research supervision. She is responsible principally for developing methodology and for ensuring that all investigators receive the particular training they may need.

## *References*

Abbott M. and Volberg R. 1991: Gambling and Problem Gambling in NZ, Report on Phase One. Dept. of Int. Affairs, Wellington NZ. 1991.

Abbott M. and Volberg R. 1992: Frequent Gamblers and Problem Gamblers in NZ, Report on Phase 2. Dept. of Int. Affairs, Wellington NZ.

Abbott M & Mckenna B. 2000. Gambling and Problem Gambling Among Recently Sentenced Women Prisoners in New Zealand. Report Number Four of the New Zealand Gaming Survey, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington

Abbott M, Mckenna B, Giles L. (2000) Gambling and Problem Gambling Among Recently Sentenced Males in Four New Zealand Prisons Report Number Five of the New Zealand Gambling Survey, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington.

Australian Institute for Gambling Research (1998). Study of the Social and Economic Impacts of New Zealand Casinos, Casino Control Authority, Auckland.

Brown. R, PhD (2001): The harm minimisation strategy: A proposed national responsible gambling policy for New Zealand. Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand

Dyall L and Hand J (2003) Maori and gambling: Why A Comprehensive Maori Public Health Response is Required in Aotearoa/ New Zealand. International Journal of Addictions. In Press

Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, (1999): Pacific Vision Conference Report. Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs.

Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, (1999): Pacific Vision Conference Report. Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs.

Rankine J and Haigh D . Social impacts of Gambling in Manukau City. Report for Manukau City Council, July 2003

University of Queensland (2003). Problem gambling in non-English speaking background communities in Queensland. Final Report. UQ Community Service and Research Centre.

For further information, please contact:

Yvette Guttenbeil  
Auckland Regional Public Health Service, Auckland, New Zealand  
(09) 8450955 Email: [YvetteG@adhb.govt.nz](mailto:YvetteG@adhb.govt.nz)