

Executive Summary

People from the islands of Tonga have been migrating to Aotearoa/ New Zealand since the 1960s in search of a better life for themselves and their families. Some have unfortunately become problem gamblers. This research project grew out of the concern of public health workers and their networks and some Pacific community leaders that Tongans were experiencing the hazards of gambling. More and more stories linking gambling not only to financial loss but also to a range of health and social problems including family and partner abuse, neglect of children and elders and lack of supervision of young people were circulating in the close knit Pacific communities.

Vaka Ola the Pacific Peoples group within the Auckland Regional Health Service (ARPHS) was inspired by these stories and supported the formation of a research project. The Tongan community became the focus as Tongan researchers were available and there was already some research in other Pacific communities. The findings will be shared with other Pacific groups who are likely to be experiencing similar problems.

The project was planned in two phases. The first phase was 18 months long and began in December 2002 to consult with the community, gather information locally and through literature reviews about gambling issues and successful interventions and begin to engage the community in actions to prevent and minimise the negative effects of gambling. The second phase if funded will provide analysis and develop and implement a Public Health Promotion plan in collaboration with health and social agencies.

The methodology developed reflects the team's commitment to cultural integrity and desire to better realise the various possibilities and understandings of "our own things" rather than trying to fit into western research processes. Specifically Tongan values and principles were contributed through the adoption of the Helu-Thaman's (1999) *Kakala* model that was chosen to guide recruitment of participants, interviewing of participants, collection and analysis of data and presentation and sharing of findings. This model is based on the traditional process of fragrant garland making.

Twenty ministers of different churches and denominations, fifteen health and social service providers and fifteen community leaders were interviewed as associated with the time of "*toli kakala*" or searching for selecting and picking the most appropriate flowers and fauna. The data input, analysis and write up period is when the flowers are given to the "*kau tui kakala*" the people with special skills who weave and put the garland together. Authorities in the Tongan

language and culture were involved at this point in interpreting and understanding the cultural themes selected as relevant to the issue. In accordance with the *kakala* model the final phase of "*luva e kakala*" is when the information is presented as a gift by the researchers back to participants, the community and key stakeholders.

The complexities of analysing findings within appropriate cultural frameworks continue to challenge and expand the parameters of social theory and analysis and it is hoped that this contribution will support other Pacific communities to research 'their own things' in their own ways.

For the purpose of this study problem gambling is defined as those individuals that experience 'occasional or regular gambling to excess to the extent that it leads to problems in other areas of life, particularly with finances, work and inter-personal relationships.' (National Research Council 1999)

Gambling was defined on a continuum with non-gamblers on one end and pathological gamblers on the other. Levels of gambling progress along the continuum depending on the extent and effect of the gambling activity.

This study specifically focuses on identifying problem gambling within the above definition in the Tongan community. Pathological gambling was acknowledged and considered to a lesser extent as the team did not have adequate training to diagnose and assess pathological gambling within the information gathered. Problem gambling was socially defined therefore, much of this report refers to problem gambling issues rather than pathological gambling.

In addition, the team agreed that problem gambling prevalence information from Abbott (2000) stating that of the total Pacific peoples gambling population in New Zealand, sixteen percent were reported as being problem gamblers, which compared unfavourably with other ethnic groups. The Australian Institute for Gambling Studies Research (1998) also states that Pacific peoples adult populations are the most at risk of all ethnicities with a risk of six times that of New Zealand European/Pakeha for problem gambling behaviour.

Research data from the first phase has shown that Tongan people in Auckland are deeply involved in the array of gambling opportunities such as Casino, Pokies, TAB and Lotto. The major source of problems identified was the Pokies machines which are located in neighbourhoods near concentrations of the Tongan population. While Tongans do frequent the Casino in the central business district it is the increase in local venues for poker machines that

was seen as a major problem. At the community level increased availability and accessibility of gambling activities and venues in the local community contributes to a changing landscape in many of the most deprived areas around Auckland.

To date, strategies to counter balance this new social hazard such as health promoters working in raising community awareness, have been under-resourced and are not able to counter the bombardment of market enticements, excitement and the sheer revenue resources of the gambling industry.

Ironically, the dreams of some Tongan migrants for a better life have been transferred from participation in the economy and social life of New Zealand to the sites of the gambling industry, Casinos and Pokies machines. Prominent members of the community, leaders and church groups and groups of women go to gambling venues. This contributes to normalisation so that people feel gambling is an OK or endorsed activity. Socio- cultural sanctions particularly in relation to the participation of older women in public places and in relation to youth, particularly young women, have shifted as a result of this normalisation of gambling.

Participants noted that casinos, pubs and bars were now acceptable places for Tongan women to frequent. In addition youth from otherwise strict family homes drive older family members to the Casino and are then left unsupervised for hours in town and sometimes at night. They may have been told to go home but in some cases hang around or gamble themselves while waiting for their mothers and the older groups.

The **impact** from the perspective of those interviewed was that gambling was having a negative effect on Tongan people and Tongan culture. Gambling has become a major health and social issue in the Tongan community. The consequences of problem gambling and addictive gambling were seen in financial difficulties that led to homes and vehicles being repossessed, marriage breakdown, an increasing number of people in debt, neglect of children, lack of supervision of young people and leaving old people at home or at the Casino alone.

Households suffered when the mother expected to be the stronghold of Tongan families keeping everything together and her partner became involved in gambling. Women in abusive relationships do use gambling as an escape from her personal problems and situation. She gains a sense of freedom in that she is out of her home, interacting with a machine she may think she controls and is living her hopes and dreams in that possible win.

There is a lack of definition of gambling and “problem gambling” within the community and a misconception that gambling is endorsed entertainment and fair. Unlike alcohol, drugs and tobacco where the community have some understanding of the effects, gambling is an ‘unknown evil’. Tongans generally have very poor knowledge about the way gambling venues operate and the technology that controls winning. The belief that there is a generosity involved and that all money that is put into the machine is returned is widespread. Formulas of when the best time to gamble and locating the most ‘full’ machines circulate around the community. Formulas such as ‘after midnight on a Sunday night’ is when the machines are ‘fullest’ contribute to the widespread notion that the machines are controllable, fair, reciprocal and generous.

The culturally grounded analysis uncovered a number of influences promoting gambling other than the usually stated reasons of entertainment, relaxation and socialising. Tongans like other groups say they gamble in hope of winning. They want financial freedom/success. Winning is a blessing, a sign of *tapuaki/moniua* or being blessed/lucky. It suggests that their participation in gambling is rewarded by God and therefore endorsed.

The Tongan belief in dreams and signs contributes to the belief that the activity of gambling is basically benign. Gambling is a logical and realistic option for improving ones status and upward class movement for Tongans in New Zealand. The hope of hitting a big win and being able to fulfil ones obligations and distribute winnings among family, friends and church both in New Zealand and Tonga is a powerful motivation. However the array of reasons for gambling includes the excitement of an urban venue, hope of financial gain, the sense of freedom and for women especially the chance of financial freedom, loneliness and lack of alternatives for recreation, the lack of opportunity for accumulating finances in low wage work, addiction and vulnerability to the advertising and gambling culture of New Zealand.

Analysis of Tongan themes such as *fua fatongia*, *fua kavenga*¹, *feinga*, *tapuaki/faingamalie*² showed that some cultural elements supported gambling. For example gambling is viewed positively when it is presented and understood as an activity requiring *feinga*³ persistence, courage and determination. Understanding that the majority of Tonga people in New Zealand have low socio-economic status and the options for generating alternative funds and finances is limited gambling becomes a logical and rational place for *feinga*. For a people with limited

¹ *Fua fatongia fua kavenga*: Tongan word for Fa’alavelave refers to family/community/village/country related obligations, duties, commitments and practices. Events such as funerals, weddings, church building funds, village development projects etc...

² *Tapuaki* – blessing / *faingamalie* – opportunity, luck

options gambling activity and venues offer a place to increase *feinga*, persistence, determination and is often explained as '*koe lava ia e feinga/ko e 'osi ia e feinga*' (I've exhausted all my options, that was my final effort).

On the other hand, the quality of *fakapotopoto*⁴ is admired and is a reason for not gambling. People who are *fakapotopoto* are sensible with resources, proficient in distribution, practical, smart and consistent. Success and leadership in any field is linked to this quality and people who are not *fakapotopoto* are believed unlikely to succeed and likely to experience sadness and financial hardship.

An important purpose of this study was to inform the public and policy makers about what is needed. Interventions must be developed within a public health framework, empower those who participate and be culturally informed and ethnically specific. The development of public health problem gambling **interventions** is now the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. Study findings particularly the understanding of Tongan cultural values that have been developed, informed recommendations for the way forward.

Specific recommendations are addressed to the New Zealand Government, to Territorial Local Authorities; to Public Health Units; to Social and Health Service providers; to community leaders to the pastors of churches and to Tongan Academics and Professionals. There is an urgent need for co-ordination of these groups, for a holistic public health approach and for partnership of the community in developing and implementing community care and community awareness programmes. Legislation and policy to limit, monitor and control the expansion of the gambling industry and its advertising is essential to reinforce these messages. The development of alternative recreational programmes will also contribute to preventing problem gambling.

The particular processes of this study based on a Tongan research methodology enabled the researchers to identify and mobilise leaders within the community and to initiate interest in the development of a co-ordinated approach to address gambling in the Tongan community. These analyses have improved understanding of the participation of members of the Tongan community in gambling and in predicting and intervening to prevent problem gambling and addiction.

³ Feinga – persistence, trying your best/hardest, exhausting all options/avenues

⁴ Fakapotopoto, skilful with resources, smart, sensible, reliable, manages well

Given the targeting of poorer and under resourced communities by the gambling industry, possible cultural congruence, lack of social and financial opportunities, the lack of education about the odds of winning and the hazards of gambling and existing addiction it would be surprising if gambling did not increase in the Tongan community and with it increases in the social problems identified. Intervention is urgently required.