



Women and gambling in New Zealand

- In 2007 almost half (49%) or 872 gambler callers to Gambling Helpline were women.¹
- In 1997 only 29.1% of clients were women, but by 2004 (50.1%) women clients overtook men. In 2007 it was down to 43%.¹
- In 2007 90% of new female gambler clients cited poker machines (pokies) as their primary mode of gambling.¹
- In 2007 67.8% of significant other clients receiving face to face counselling were women.
- Over 81% of Maori women use pokie machines as their primary mode of gambling and 83% of Pacific women.¹
- The average loss in four weeks prior to treatment by males was (mean \$3733) and females (mean \$2763).¹
- Women played the pokie machines for longer periods, but less frequently than men, spending about \$531 per annum.²

Narratives from a study of gambling counsellors and clients conducted in New Zealand³

Women and pokie machines

Women see casinos and pokie venues as female friendly and safe, many are now found within the community and handy to shopping areas.

Access

[I go to] the locals usually, but it used to be the casinos until the locals started [with the jackpots] because the locals just didn't pay out enough. I used to hit the casinos for the higher dollar machines. (Client)

The other day we took note. Whichever bill we went to pay there was a poker [machine] venue within [walking distance] of where we parked. We went to the Post Shop.... We went [to the supermarket]... and then to get a video. Everywhere we went there was a poker machine venue. (Counsellor)

Appeal of machines (escape)

I loved the flashiness of it. I didn't have to think about husband, children, home, work... as soon as the credits come up... I just adored it... It's an overwhelming desire. How many people get that euphoric feeling in the everyday? (Client)

You are in your own little cubby [hole]. You can control who comes in and who comes out. (Client)

The machine, apart from having to feed money in to it, doesn't ask anything of you...women perceive this as time out. (Counsellor)

Behaviour

I became totally obsessed. It became a daily thing. I wasn't looking after myself... I wouldn't leave the machine to go and get a drink. If I was at a machine that would be it. I'd stay for hours... I would travel for miles if I really had a focus [on one machine]. (Client)

There is a definite trend about claiming particular machines. Look out if anyone was on [that machine]. Most times I would try to wait for that machine.... I would be quite annoyed if someone was on it when I arrived.... There was a claiming of machines.... And there was an amount of aggression about [claiming] the machines. I thought I knew when [the machine] was going to come up [win]. (Client)

A gambler has to be clever. You don't get away with going [gambling], you don't get away with hiding money or compensating for [loss] without having half a brain on you.... I mean I would make it up, money, lies. Lies to the point where I'd believe it. Because I believed it, everyone else did. Then I found out that [worked] and I used it to my advantage. (Client)

1. Ministry of Health. 2008. *Problem Gambling Intervention Services in New Zealand: 2007 service-user statistics*. Wellington, MOH.

2. Department of Internal Affairs (2008) *People's participation in, and attitudes to, gambling, 1985-2005. Results of the 2005 survey*. Wellington: DIA.

3. Liz Kiata. 2004. *Playing the pokies'. Women gambling on the electronic gaming machines (EGMs). A New Zealand context. Final report of findings*. Auckland, Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand.



Manipulation of the pokie machine

Particular music of a particular machine [calling to be played].... Heart beat music. (Client)

I like to hear my machine. If the bands starts and I can't hear my machine. I have to move away. I have to hear my machine. (Client)

The thing with the poker machines is that they are quite sensory. You have got the tactile, the visual and the audio. The lights, the whistles, the bells and the little tunes. (Counsellor)

Guilt and financial loss

I've been physically sick after playing the poker machines and losing all the money. I've walked outside the casino bar and literally vomited. (Client)

I carried the guilt for years. I stopped gambling but I over compensated. I paid my [children] off... [When I was gambling] nothing was important, nobody was important except my fix. I had to get to the casino. (Client)

Shame is about being out of control...It might be about normalizing that, and then talking about the options...practical things like writing a letter to a creditor (Counsellor)

Counselling

The overall consensus of the women about seeking treatment was that it is forced on you. If you get to a point where there's no further down you can go and the only way is up... you have to get to a pivotal point in your life. To take charge, you know what I mean?

One to one

When I'm in crisis I am totally desperate. I need help right at the moment. I don't need a programme six months down the line.... With the counsellor's help we can find something that works for me. (Client)

Group therapy

I think the beauty of the group is to get all the stories, although different, that we can all relate too. (Client)

That's the beauty of this group. We've been there, done that, and we all try to find a solution to get out of it. (Client)

Support groups are a really good way to normalize a lot of the processes that people are going through, that other people are going through the same thing... de-stigmatising it. (Counsellor)

Some of these women have never been asked how they feel. They have never been asked what they think and had it taken seriously. Women who have never been asked 'what would you like to do?'. I actually feel privileged that women share their stories with me. (Counsellor)

I think the crux of it comes down to the poker machines' ease of access, the fact that you don't need to engage with anyone else or think of anyone else, or take anyone into consideration to actually play the machines. You need to break that cycle by getting into the emotional triggers that are driving you. I've not meet a woman that's not driven by some kind of emotional situation. (Counsellor)

Problem Gambling Foundation Hotline

Produced by the Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand,
P.O. Box 8021, Symonds Street, Auckland.
Phone 368 1520

www.pfgnz.org.nz / www.pfgnz.org.nz/library/