

1. INTRODUCTION

The Purpose of this Report

This report provides a selective overview of major findings from the New Zealand Gaming Survey (NZGS) research programme. Additionally, it incorporates some findings from other New Zealand research on gambling participation and problem gambling and brings this total body of information together in a synthesis focussed on answering the question: "What do we know about gambling and problem gambling in New Zealand?" Addressing this question also highlights some of the things we do not know.

During the past two years, national surveys of gambling and problem gambling have been completed in a small number of countries additional to New Zealand. Some of these studies are briefly considered and provide a wider context within which the New Zealand situation is examined.

The present report, Volume Seven of the NZGS, does not provide a comprehensive summary of the content of other volumes in the series. Apart from Volume One, which is a critical review of previous New Zealand and international research on gambling participation and problem gambling, Volumes Two to Six contain executive summaries that serve this purpose. Rather, the present volume picks out and discusses themes and findings that consistently emerge in these reports as well as from an earlier 1991 National Survey (1991NS) and other relevant recent studies. It also considers some of the unexpected and perhaps controversial findings of the NZGS and critiques of these and some other aspects of the research programme.

The New Zealand Gaming Survey

The NZGS was commissioned by the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA). The Department administers New Zealand's three pieces of gaming legislation and services the Lottery Grants Board, which distributes the profits from the Lotteries Commission to the community. Most of the funding for the NZGS derives from the undistributed profits of the Lotteries Commission (applied to the project at the direction of the Minister of Internal Affairs). Some funding also comes from the Problem Gambling Committee (PGC), an organisation with representation from all major sectors of the gaming industry and problem gambling treatment providers. Notwithstanding the sources of funding, the project director's contract is with the Crown through the DIA and neither the Department nor any other organisation is empowered to control the research or to exercise editorial control over the publication of the research findings.

The terms of reference for the NZGS were developed by the DIA in consultation with a wide variety of statutory, industry and national voluntary sector organisations. The intent of the research is to inform government policy on gaming and responses to problem gambling and contribute to local and international scientific knowledge concerning aspects of gambling and problem gambling. It is also expected to provide information that has relevance to a variety of other stakeholder and end-user organisations with an interest in gambling and/or problem gambling.

The project director is Professor Max Abbott. He and Dr Rachel Volberg are the principal investigators, responsible for the overall design and execution of the research programme. These investigators are part of a larger research consortium that undertook the NZGS. Other members of the consortium include Statistics New Zealand (SNZ), the National Research Bureau (NRB) and Taylor Baines and Associates. Other staff members from Professor Abbott's Faculty of Health Studies at Auckland University of Technology and Dr Volberg's company, Gemini Research, were also involved in aspects of the NZGS.

Apart from the present report, the major components of the NZGS include:

- Literature Review (Abbott & Volberg, 1999)
- Longitudinal Survey (Abbott, Williams & Volberg, 1999)
- National Prevalence Survey: Phase One (Abbott & Volberg, 2000)
- Women's Prison Study (Abbott & McKenna, 2000)
- Men's Prison Study (Abbott, McKenna & Giles, 2000)

National Prevalence Study: Phase Two (Abbott, 2001).

As mentioned, while Volume Seven of the NZGS provides an overview of major findings from the reports based on each of these components of the overall research programme, it is skeletal, selective, and does not substitute for the reports that it draws upon. It is broader in focus and tends to present information in black and white when, from a reading of the original reports, it is evident that shades of grey are usually more appropriate. In contrast to the other reports, it has been prepared for a wider readership and an effort has been made to restrict the use of technical terms. Formal referencing is also kept to a minimum.

The 1991 National Survey and its Relationship to the NZGS

As mentioned, this report refers to and makes some comparisons with findings from an earlier National Survey (1991NS) that was also undertaken by Abbott and Volberg and commissioned by the DIA (Abbott & Volberg, 1991; 1992; 1996; Volberg & Abbott, 1994). This earlier research involved a national prevalence survey and a second phase that involved more in-depth interviews with problem gamblers and regular non-problem gamblers selected from the national survey.

The first phase of the 1991NS also provided a baseline intended to enable changes in gambling participation and problem gambling to be assessed when the 1999 NPS was completed. In addition, the NZGS Longitudinal Survey involved re-interviewing 1991NS Phase Two participants seven years after their initial interviews to examine ways in which problem gamblers and regular gamblers without problems changed their gambling involvement and other aspects of their lives over time. These components of the New Zealand research are unique internationally in that they constitute the first national replication survey and the first longitudinal study of gambling and problem gambling in a general population sample.

The NZGS also includes the first study of gambling among women prisoners to use a validated measure of problem gambling and the only multi-site study of male prisoners' gambling and problem gambling.

The Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) Expenditure Data and National Surveys

Other major sources of information drawn on in this report include DIA annual accounts of national expenditure on major forms of legal gambling available in New Zealand and DIA national surveys of gambling participation and attitudes towards gambling. These surveys have been conducted every five years since 1985 (Wither, 1987; Christoffel, 1992; Reid & Searle, 1996; Department of Internal Affairs, in press). They differ from the national surveys conducted by Abbott and Volberg in 1991 and 1999-2000 in that they included a younger age group (15 to 18 years), employed smaller samples, used face-to-face rather than mixed mode (telephone and face-to-face) interviewing and did not assess problem gambling. A strength of the DIA surveys is that they used similar procedures on four separate occasions, allowing changes over time to be assessed. A weakness is that the relatively small sample size, while adequate for examining trends among adults generally, does not allow a fine-grained examination of differences between sectors of the adult population.

The Context of the NZGS and this Report

The NZGS has been conducted at the end of a decade of liberalisation and considerable expansion of gambling industries and gambling expenditure in New Zealand. While the introduction of Lotto (a national lottery) and other lottery products initially led this expansion, liberalisation of access to gaming machines and the establishment of casinos in large population centres played the major role. Many other countries throughout the world have also experienced rapid growth in gambling availability during the past ten to fifteen years. During this time, in New Zealand and elsewhere, there have been concerns expressed about the negative impacts of gambling and debate about the relative benefits and costs of this expansion.

Growing public and governmental concern regarding problem gambling and other aspects of gambling have, in recent years, resulted in the commissioning of research to quantify the extent of gambling and

problem gambling. This has included national surveys in the United States, Australia, Sweden and New Zealand. New Zealand, Australia, the United States and some other countries have also undertaken or recently commenced national reviews of gambling policy. In some jurisdictions restrictions have been placed on the further expansion of particular forms of gambling. In New Zealand, for example, there is currently a moratorium on the establishment of additional casinos. Other jurisdictions have gone further and reduced the availability of some types of gambling, most notably gaming machines.

While concerns about real and perceived adverse impacts and costs associated with the expansion of gambling have increased in New Zealand and elsewhere, the large majority of adults in many countries gamble at least occasionally and attitudes towards gambling are generally more liberal and accepting than they were previously. Government policy has supported the expansion of some forms of gambling, for example casinos, primarily as a means of generating economic development and employment. Gambling on track and sporting events is also regarded as providing a contribution to the racing industry that generates employment and export revenue. The other major forms of legal gambling, namely lotteries and non-casino gaming machines, in addition to generating employment, contribute substantial sums to voluntary sector community and welfare organisations, research, and statutory bodies with responsibilities for the arts, conservation and heritage, and sports and recreation. Considerable revenue from gambling by way of levies and taxation is also transferred to the consolidated fund to support the financing of governmental activities.

During recent years there has been increasing polarisation of opinion concerning the relative costs and benefits of gambling to society. While the NZGS findings are relevant to this debate, the research programme's terms of reference do not include a formal analysis of the wider economic benefits and costs of gambling in New Zealand. This remains an important area for future investigation.

The present report is published at a time when the country's gaming legislation is undergoing formal review. It has been prepared with this review in mind and provides information that will inform discussion and debate that constitute an important aspect of the review process. Probably more is known about gambling participation and problem gambling within New Zealand than in any other country. However it is evident from this report, and reports on the separate components of the NZGS, that some key questions remain unanswered and much of what is known requires qualification and further investigation.

