

Public Health Association Media release

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Casino offers warm welcome to lonely immigrants and refugees

New research has found Asian immigrants and refugees in Auckland are finding a safe haven at casinos and developing gambling habits that contribute to the “huge harm” being done to Asian communities.

The Director of the Centre for Asian and Ethnic Minority Health Research at Auckland University, Amritha Sobrun-Maharaj, told the Public Health Association conference today that her study has uncovered the enormous impact of gambling on Asians in Auckland, their families and their community.

“Some have lost their life savings to gambling, their businesses, their marriages and families,” Dr Sobrun-Maharaj told the delegates, at Canterbury’s Lincoln University.

“The Asian community is now the fourth-largest ethnic population in New Zealand. Fifteen percent of them don’t speak English. Many are isolated and have trouble trying to integrate. A large number are unemployed or “misemployed” – such as when a doctor from India ends up driving taxis – and their self-esteem plummets.

“Gambling is a public health issue for Asian people in New Zealand– they will spend time on poker machines, betting on horse racing or on Lotto – but the biggest problem being reported in Auckland is the casino. If you go there, you will see that many of the punters are Asian.

“The casino offers a safe haven where they are made to feel welcome and important. They are taken to VIP rooms to gamble, provided with free beverages and food, and there is a loyalty programme to encourage them to become regular customers.

“This is very appealing to ‘new New Zealanders’ who are often not at a casino just to have a good time, but in a desperate attempt to improve their finances.”

Dr Sobrun-Maharaj says the research will be used to find ways of combating gambling addiction among Asians in New Zealand.

Media are invited to attend the whole or any part of the conference.

To arrange interviews with Amritha Sobrun-Maharaj or any Conference speaker, please contact Penny Cooper (Conference media liaison): 0274 547 584.

Links:

- [Conference website](#)
- [Conference handbook and programme](#)
- [Presenter abstracts and information](#)
- [Presenter abstracts only.](#)