

The University of Auckland  
Centre for Arts and Social Transformation

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# Gambling Harm Destigmatisation within Asian Communities in Aotearoa New Zealand

A Qualitative Study



EDUCATION AND  
SOCIAL WORK  
CENTRE FOR ARTS AND  
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION



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**A Qualitative Study on**  
**Gambling Harm Destigmatisation**  
**within Asian Communities in Aotearoa**  
**New Zealand**

**July 2024**

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## Executive Summary

This study is part of the Gambling Harm De-stigmatisation Initiative aimed at understanding how Asian Peoples conceptualise stigma in the context of gambling harms, and thereby to develop appropriate interventions for Asian communities. The purpose of this report focuses on answering the following set of research questions:

- How is stigma surrounding gambling harm conceptualised and discussed within Asian communities, and what factors contribute to its manifestation?
- In what ways does stigma, or alternative conceptualisations, impact the help-seeking behaviour of individuals in Asian communities who gamble and/or experience gambling harms?
- What are the stigmatic barriers preventing early help-seeking among Asian individuals affected by gambling harms, and what strategies can be identified to address these barriers?

To address the questions, 11 in-depth interviews were conducted in April 2024. Six participants identified as individuals with lived experience of gambling and five as significant others who have experience with or are currently supporting an individual experiencing gambling harm. Four participants self-identified as Indian, four as Chinese, two as Malaysian Chinese and one as Singaporean Chinese.

### ***Findings***

Regardless of language, stigma was conceptualised to be negative. Participants spoke about public stigma and self-stigma. Importantly, participants viewed that the public perceives the gambler as the problem rather than gambling as the issue. Participants identified numerous negative labels that were attributed to the gambler rather than the gambling activity.

Similar to other literature, we found that stigma surrounding gambling harm for our participants is intertwined with social norms and cultural values. Participants spoke about gambling being simultaneously stigmatised or illegalised, but socially normalised. This dichotomy creates a complex social dilemma. The concept of shame and “saving face” also plays a crucial role and is evident throughout the interviews, where maintaining individual and family reputation is critical.

Participants spoke about many of the barriers to help-seeking. These included but are not limited to negative experiences with help-seeking (e.g., via gambling establishments and family); lack of confidence in services providers; confidentiality, shame, and saving face; self-attributes such as avoidance; lack of awareness of available services/information, and language barriers. Despite the many barriers, participants also identified a number of enablers to help-seeking to seeking informal support (e.g., self-awareness, acceptance from family and friends, and someone that can be trusted). In addition, participants noted that accessibility, a free-of-charge and safe environment, and trained professionals were important enablers for seeking professional support.

### ***Recommendations***

While the literature has identified a range of barriers that may prevent some Asian peoples from help-seeking, currently there is a lack of evidence-based best practice about how Asians can be appropriately and effectively supported.

Participants in general felt that there was much work to be done in preventing and supporting individuals and families experiencing gambling harm. These included raising public awareness on gambling harm, public awareness of help-seeking, providing holistic and wrap-around services, and

offering different forms of support. More work is needed to ensure that gambling support services are culturally appropriate to meet Asian people's needs. It would be important to ensure the involvement of Asian people in the design, implementation, and evaluation of gambling harm prevention and intervention initiatives. The diversity of Asian peoples in New Zealand should also be considered.



## Introduction

The Asian population makes up the third largest and the fastest-growing ethnic community in Aotearoa New Zealand. Like those in many other Western countries, Asian migrants have been reported to be vulnerable to gambling harm (Tse et al., 2007). Stressors related to acculturation, economic instability, and social isolation can increase vulnerability to gambling as a maladaptive coping mechanism for Asian migrants (Wang & Bellringer, 2022). Within Asian communities, the stigma surrounding gambling harm is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, deeply rooted in cultural, social, and familial contexts (Chee & Lui, 2021). Stigma can prevent individuals and families from seeking help or discussing gambling openly (Hing & Russell, 2017). Despite the significant impact of gambling harm on the individual, families, and community, there is a limited body of research dedicated to Asian gambling issues in New Zealand. Asian communities are often underserved in terms of health and addiction services, and access to these services continues to be low (Tse et al., 2007). To ensure equitable access to support and services, there is a need for culturally appropriate gambling harm minimisation strategies and interventions. It is imperative to understand the stigma around gambling among Asian communities.

## Current Study

This study is part of the Gambling Harm De-stigmatisation Initiative aimed at understanding how Asian Peoples conceptualise stigma in the context of gambling harms, and thereby aims to develop appropriate interventions for Asian communities. This study has the following objectives:

- To understand how stigma is conceptualised and discussed within Asian communities impacted by gambling harm.
- To explore how stigma (or alternative conceptualisations) affects help-seeking behaviour among Asian people who gamble and/or experience gambling harms.
- To discuss suggestions and recommendations on possible approaches to enhance the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of support accessibility, aiming to promote and encourage help-seeking for gambling harms.

## Research Questions

- How is stigma surrounding gambling harm conceptualised and discussed within Asian communities, and what factors contribute to its manifestation?
- In what ways does stigma, or alternative conceptualisations, impact the help-seeking behaviour of individuals in Asian communities who gamble and/or experience gambling harms?
- What are the stigmatic barriers preventing early help-seeking among Asian individuals affected by gambling harms, and what strategies can be identified to address these barriers?

## Methodology

The study focused on Chinese and South Asian peoples and their perception and experiences around stigma and gambling harm. These two Asian subgroups were purposively selected as they represent the largest cohort at risk of gambling harm. Participants were recruited through advertisements through Asian Family Services networks, social media, researcher networks, word of mouth and snowballing. To be eligible, individuals were those 1) with lived experiences of gambling harm or whānau and/or significant others that have supported an individual who gambles; 2) 18 years and older; 3) who self-identified as Chinese or South Asian; and 4) who currently reside in New Zealand.

In total, 11 individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in April 2024. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. Of the 11 interviews, four were conducted in English. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. As an appreciation of the participant's time, a \$100 voucher was given upon completion of the interview. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC: Ref 27274).

## Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. Mandarin transcripts were translated and checked for accuracy. Interview transcripts were analysed for key themes. Two members of the research team independently coded transcripts and any disagreements by the research team were resolved with discussion. Content, narrative, and thematic analyses were used where appropriate. Content analysis was used to identify the patterns that emerge from text, by grouping content into words, concepts, and themes. Narrative analysis focuses on the stories individuals tell and the language used to make sense of them. Thematic analysis was used for finding repeated patterns of meaning.





## Findings

Eleven participants took part in the semi-structured interviews. Six participants identified as individuals with lived experience of gambling and five as significant others who have experience with or are currently supporting an individual experiencing gambling harm. Four participants self-identified as Indian, four as Chinese, two as Malaysian Chinese and one as Singaporean Chinese. Participants' ages ranged from 25 to 65 years old. The years of living in New Zealand varied widely ranging from 8 to 40 years. Of those that reported gambling, years of gambling varied from 1 to 30 years. The types of gambling included casino, slot machine, sports betting, and online gambling.

### Conceptualisation of Stigma

Regardless of English language or in the participants' own languages, the concept of stigma was negatively perceived. When speaking about stigma in relation to gambling, two common themes were noted: public stigma and self-stigma.

#### **Public perception of gambler as the problem**

Participants spoke about the public perception of gambling whereby the gambling activity isn't perceived as the problem but the individual who gambles is. Participants spoke about the public perception that only those who are *irresponsible* and/or *lack self-control* is problematic.

*The general impression is that people who gamble are perceived as idle and irresponsible, spending their time and energy on gambling. Additionally, they may lack financial management skills, leading to personal or family financial troubles. (Significant other)*

*The gambling isn't the problem. Like, you're the problem, the person doing the gambling. Yeah, like that's very common. Like, a lot of people think, you know, the problem is within you. Like, you know, you should have had more self-control or they say things like, you know, you should have, like, how did you not just stop? Why could you just not stop? (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Participants shared their thoughts on how an individual is perceived by the public – from a *loser, liar, one that always borrows money or steals*, to one that is *simply a bad person that hurts their family and friends*.

*The first impression people would have of me is that I'm not a decent person. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*It makes me feel that ... people would look at me as somehow not being, like, a strong enough person or just kind of being like a loser that couldn't control his gambling. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*They know I play, gambling, they [the public] don't consider me as a good person. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*People generally think gambling is bad and that gamblers are liars. My younger brother didn't lie before, but now he lies for money. In the community, people see him as a bad person. His friends think he has changed and become a bad person, so they don't want to associate with him anymore. (Significant other)*

*Because from ancient times, there has been a saying that "nine out of 10 gamblers lose" or "nine out of 10 gamblers cheat." (Significant other)*

Participants gave numerous examples of negative labels in their own language that are attributed to the gambler rather than the gambling activity. For example, 賭狗 *gambling dog*, 賭徒 *gambler*, 敗家子 *gambling scoundrel*, 賭鬼 *gambling ghost*, 過街老鼠 *rat crossing the street*. Participants also spoke about the public stigma that goes beyond the individual to that of the family or significant others.

*When I was young, in the village or other places, there were always some people who gambled or did drugs. Whenever people talked about a family where someone gambled, they would laugh at them and say things like, "That family has a gambler." Families with a gambler were looked down upon. The children and relatives of gamblers were often ridiculed. Kids would tease each other, saying things like, "Where's your dad? Is he out gambling again?" or call someone "the child of a gambler." These kinds of experiences contribute to the negative impression of gambling. (Significant other)*

One participant further described how the stigma was long-lasting.

*In the Asian community, there's generally a moment of hesitation, a "ding" in the mind when they hear that someone has a history of gambling. It's like a small stain on their record, right? (Significant other)*

### **Self-stigma**

Participants described the self-stigma that was attached to the gambler. Some participants blamed themselves for not being good enough to control their gambling behaviour or described themselves as *weak*.

*Every day struggling to talk to myself. Going to work, thinking in my head: why am I, why am I addicted to gambling. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*My older brother used to say I was very filial and obedient, very good to my family. After this happened, I changed completely, full of lies, nothing I said was true. I hurt my family and friends, I know I did wrong. I really couldn't control my desires; they kept growing. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Individuals described the negative emotions (e.g., *fear, shame, and being judged*) that were felt being perceived as a gambler.

*You are completely fearful with the stigma about people's behaviour with you, people's reaction to you. I used to be scared of everyone. Not physically they're gonna damage me, but mentally they're gonna haunt me. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*In my mind, I know it's a bad behaviour. I know people will judge me and it is fair. So that's why I don't want to talk because I know people will judge me. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I think that people would, like in my mind, I think that if I talk about my gambling problem and show it as a weakness, then they would judge me for, you know, being maybe a loser, being pathetic. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

For one participant, he expressed a sense of regret in regard to his gambling behaviour.

*The money I want, I already lose. It's not going to come back – the time I have already wasted. It's not going to come back. That is the biggest regret. I tried to not talk, not to think too much.*

*What has gone? Because it's gonna keep reminding me about my losses, about my time. The time I lose. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*



## Reasons for Gambling

### *Individual level*

There were various reasons for why participants or their significant other gambled. On an individual level, many spoke about using gambling as a coping mechanism to avoid stress from family situations, acculturation, and/or mental health issues.

*One hundred percent, it's [gambling] an addiction problem. It is a [person's] coping mechanism. There's always a comorbidity around it. There is always an ongoing mental health problem going around gambling addiction. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*It is very challenging, especially in New Zealand society, to integrate as a migrant because people who have [or] who are born or have gone to school here, they already have friends. Sometimes it's very difficult to fit in so they get socially excluded. And the second thing, there's a pressure of making your life worthy. You come here, you sacrifice a lot, and then you have to build your house, your career, you need to. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*My mother-in-law and I had conflicts over how to raise the children, which led to more arguments. She would complain to her son, causing more stress, and he would turn to gambling again. (Significant other)*

*Some people under severe mental pressure might try it because they have no other way to alleviate their issues, such as depression or other emotional problems. They might turn to gambling or even drugs, like marijuana, as a way to cope when they have no other options. This isn't necessarily about addiction, but more about trying anything that might help with their mental state. (Significant other)*

Another common reason for gambling was related to financial situations. While some participants spoke about financial hardship others stated that they were well-off, but gambling was a way to make more money.

*My financial situation improved – my salary increased, and my children grew older, so household expenses stabilised. That’s when I started gambling more seriously, to the point of using credit cards to gamble. It was also related to emotional issues. I felt lucky after earning some money, thinking I could use it to buy a car. I had the idea of making more money through gambling. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

For some, gambling was a new experience to try out, particularly for those where gambling was illegal in their home country.

*I was talking to someone that came here when I was at the casino and a lot of the students that come here or who had immigrated, they stay in the city. And one of the first places most people go to is Sky City. So when they go to Sky City, a lot of people see a casino for the first time. And you’ve seen it in movies and you’ve seen it, like, you know, things like that. And then you go in and they realise that, oh, you know, you can walk out of there with a few hundred dollars if you win and it’s so easily accessible. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I came here as a student and then I went to the casino. First time with a friend. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Adding to the excitement of gambling being a new experience, the lack of awareness around gambling harm and the addictive features of gambling contributed to ongoing gambling behaviour. Participants spoke about gambling being easily addictive.

*I think a lot of people don’t understand that it’s actually possible to get addicted to, you know, continually want to gamble and, you know, it’s like an addiction. I think people just think that it’s really fun and entertaining, which it is for some people, but it’s also not for some people. And I think people in New Zealand maybe sometimes don’t realise that. Like, even, you know, if I look at my friend group or the people that I’ve known, a lot of them are able to control their gambling. So they don’t see how it’s possible to have a problem. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I can’t control myself. When I lose money, I want to win it back. I think that after I win it back, I won’t gamble again. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*For instance, when he told me he was slightly involved in gambling, saying he only spent a little each day and could stop anytime, I didn’t realise the severe consequences. Back then, I thought if he could control himself and make some profit, it wouldn’t be a big issue. But I was wrong. My view then was completely different from now. (Significant other)*

*People can’t control themselves when gambling. With drug addiction, you might have periods of clarity, but with gambling, because you constantly need money, you’re always thinking about winning more. Gambling controls your thoughts all the time. With drug addiction, you might be able to go a few hours or a day without it, but with gambling, if you’re in debt, you’re constantly thinking about paying it off and winning more money. There’s never a moment when you can stop thinking about it. (Significant other)*

Other participants noted peer influence and gambling as a career profession as reasons for gambling.

*At that time, he saw other senior managers from major companies being very generous, gambling, and winning. He had to accompany them, sometimes for a whole day and night without leaving the casino. (Significant other)*

*He sees his gambling as his career. (Significant other)*



### **Societal level**

Participants also offered many reasons that were attributed to the environmental or societal level that encouraged gambling. Several participants mentioned the difference in legislation on gambling in their home country compared to that of New Zealand where it is promoted as an entertainment activity and/or tourist attraction.

*New Zealand allows it, so he doesn't think it's illegal. In China, he could be arrested at any time, so he doesn't dare to gamble there. It's all underground in China. (Significant other)*

*In China, gambling is more negatively perceived compared to here where it's legal and seen more as entertainment. (Significant other)*

In addition to gambling being legal in New Zealand, many participants spoke about the welcoming environment of casinos. Several participants spoke about casinos as a convenient place for socialising due to its 24/7 accessibility and the presence, or sense of belonging, in a place with familiar faces.

*Take the casino, for example. If I scan the room, it feels like 70–80% of the faces I see are Asian, predominantly Chinese. This might be an exaggeration, but there's a significant presence. This phenomenon might stem from historical reasons. Early Chinese immigrants often did the dirtiest, hardest jobs, and in their spare time, they engaged in small-scale gambling as a form of entertainment, gradually evolving into more serious gambling. It's like they used it to spend the time and relieve stress, eventually turning into high-stakes gambling. (Significant other)*

*The continuous operation of casinos, open 24/7, makes it easy for people to lose control, neglect their responsibilities, and get trapped in the gambling environment. The allure of the casino, with its comforts and amenities, makes it hard for people to resist. (Significant other)*

The environment of one's upbringing and societal norms were also factors that impacted on gambling behaviour. Participants spoke about the contradictory messaging around gambling where it is framed as illegal or bad in their home country, yet on the contrary, it is seen as an acceptable social activity. Participants often refer to mahjong and poker as examples. Participants describe how it is very

common for adults and elders to engage in playing mahjong and poker at home or at small gatherings and is accepted as a social activity at festivals and celebrations.

*The culture in India around gambling is, it is banned, but a lot of people still do it. And it affects a lot of people. Yeah, it's a hidden thing. And it's actually like, even in India, like at some festivals, like Diwali, it's celebrated by gambling. So you celebrate it by playing cards with your family and friends. Yeah, so not everyone does it, but a lot of people gamble during Diwali. So that's funny because it's banned, but so many people can do it privately in their own houses. Yeah, so, but it's supposed to be fun. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*Playing mahjong occasionally for fun during holidays is okay because the stakes are low, just a meal. It's a social activity. (Significant other)*

*In media productions, like many competitions, like mahjong tournaments, and movies often show these mahjong scenes. It's often a family setting, and, yeah, the camera usually shows these mahjong scenes. Often it's okay; it seems like an entertainment thing, especially during festivals, just to relax. I see that a large part of society accepts playing mahjong. (Significant other)*

*I think in Asia, especially in Malaysia – I'm not sure about China as I grew up in Malaysia – there's a strong cultural perception that gambling is harmful. Many Malaysian Chinese love to gamble, and there are people around us who have similar experiences to mine. It's a common belief among elders that gambling can ruin lives, but they still play mahjong, presenting it as a form of entertainment, not gambling. This sends mixed messages to the younger generation. The older generation might gamble with small amounts of money, not realising that this behaviour can have a deeper impact on the next generation. This issue is more prevalent in Chinese families. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Participants also further noted that they were exposed to these social or gambling activities from a young age.

*My family played mahjong and poker, so I learned these games when I was young. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Several participants that identified as a significant other recalled negative experiences during their upbringing with those gambling around them.

*I dislike it [mahjong] and have a strong aversion to it because of my childhood. In the environment I grew up in, my parents ran what you might call a "dairy" shop with mahjong tables in the back. It wasn't just a game; I saw many women, mothers, who would gamble all night until their husbands came to fetch them, often not returning home. I hated this – why did they not go back home? It left a bad impression on me from a young age. (Significant other)*

*I had a relative who gambled and ended up losing everything. They couldn't pay for their children's school fees, had marital problems, fights, and even the police had to come and mediate. A family with no gambling, even if poor, still has a good atmosphere. But a family with gambling has no atmosphere at all. There's no parent-child relationship, no marital relationship. (Significant other)*



## Negative Life Experience

All participants spoke about the negative life experiences associated with problematic gambling. These included 1) breakdown of relationships; 2) failing expectations; 3) financial impact; and 4) other negative life experiences. All these negative experiences had a negative impact on one's well-being. As one individual with lived experience of gambling summarises:

*Losing money is just a small part of the gambling. You lose so many other things at the same time. You lose confidence, you lose your social life, you lose your friends, you lose your family. So many things you lose. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

### **Breakdown of relationships**

All participants spoke about being distant from family and friends because of gambling.

*My family stopped talking to me during that time – like no one... I lost all my friends. Family, like, pretty much isolated. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*People want to avoid him and run away as soon as he appears nearby. No one wants to have contact with him. (Significant other)*

*I think people don't empathise with the reasons behind someone's gambling. People only see the surface; they think you gamble, so they will not associate with you. (Significant other)*

Conflict and disruption to relationships were commonly reported by participants.

*Disagreements arose because even after paying his debts, he didn't change his behaviour, which led to conflicts within my family. (Significant other)*

One participant with lived experience of gambling recalled that the distance between family and friends was mutual and that he, himself did not care about breaking off the relationship with the family at the time.

*So, you don't care about anything. What's going on, even though your family members, you know, find out, you still don't care. You're happy to cut the relationship with them and continue what you're doing. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Participants offered reasons for the breakdown of relationships. For example, one participant spoke about how the individual that gambled became very secretive, and often hid the behaviour or avoided discussing the issue with family and friends.

*Initially, they might seem like decent people, but after being exposed to gambling in Macau, they become very secretive. They only share the good things, like when they win money, but they don't talk about their losses. They might show off when they win a few tens of thousands, but they don't mention that they've already lost hundreds of thousands before. Gambling changes people drastically. (Significant other)*

Another participant spoke about distancing himself from families and friends as he felt ashamed.

*I distanced myself. My family said gambling is not something that harms others or friends, and it's nothing to be afraid of talking about. But when I came here, I lost contact with everyone. My mom told me to reach out to them, but I didn't want to. I don't have the face to talk to them, and I don't know what to talk about. So, I have no friends. I've seen my former colleagues, friends, and classmates and paid money back to them but afterward, I didn't want to contact them, feeling too ashamed. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Another participant described that it was difficult for significant others to accept or understand the individual's gambling behaviour.

*Originally, a person with a stable income and normal life abandons everything and gets deeply involved in gambling. That mindset is terrifying. As a family member, it is hard to accept someone changing from normal to completely indifferent to family ties. (Significant other)*

The breakdown of relationships affected not only the individual with lived experience of gambling, but also affected the significant other's relationships with families and friends.

*We keep it to ourselves. We deal with it privately because others don't understand and won't help; they just see it as a joke. So, you only say what needs to be said and avoid discussing it with others. It doesn't relieve your mental stress, and others don't understand or want to discuss it. (Significant other)*

*We don't want to let our parents know that we are gambling. I think it's not just me. Maybe many people in my community, many young guys, same age as me they don't want to tell their parents back home. (Significant other)*

### **Failing expectations**

For some participants, being perceived as a gambler was seen as failing family expectations and the expectation of a model minority.

*For the migrant community, you know, our lives are a bit different than the people who were born here or raised here. You're supposed to be, as an immigrant, you know, we're supposed to be very hard working and, you know, taking the very straight route and the good route and making a good career. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*



*I had a lot of responsibility on the family side – even though I was the youngest in the family, I was the first person to go abroad. So, they had a lot of expectations from me and I did not fulfil their expectations. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

### **Financial impact**

Many participants spoke about the financial consequences of gambling harm, leading to debt and loss of assets. These financial difficulties further led to strain on family and friend relationships.

*But he borrowed money from others, sometimes owing four or five hundred dollars. People would call me saying he hadn't repaid them after months, even a year. He didn't ask me for money but borrowed from others, hoping to win and repay them later. When he couldn't repay them, they'd call me. (Significant other)*

*Money talks, you know. And if you are poor and because of the addiction you become poor, you lose your family. I lost my wife and my children because I was gambling. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*There are some friends I borrowed money from before, but I paid them back. Still, I don't want to contact them. They distanced themselves from me, and I'm also deliberately distancing myself from them. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Participants also mentioned other negative life experiences ranging from impact on daily lives and work to that of negative social media experiences.

*I couldn't do my job properly. I can't wait to come home so I can go to Sky City... Those problems going into my mind. Yeah, I need to. I need to find \$5,000 tomorrow. How am I going to find it? I've only got \$500. Like, those kind of thoughts come to my mind. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*It's kind of isolating, quite lonely at that time. Because I've got nothing left, right. So that's kind of that kind of mentality and personality you carry with you. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I did see, like, in the [social media] comments [on an article about an individual's gambling behaviour] that people said that they seemed very ignorant as in that some people would say things like, you know, if he knew what he was doing, like he was in full control of his actions and, you know, he should be sent to prison. He should, you know, it's his fault. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*



## Barriers to Help Seeking

There were many perceived barriers to help-seeking. These included 1) negative experiences with help-seeking; 2) lack of belief in services providers; 3) confidentiality, shame, and saving face; 4) self-attributes; 5) lack of awareness of available services/information; and 6) language barriers.

### ***Negative experiences with help-seeking***

Participants spoke about the negative experiences with help-seeking in gambling establishments, as well as with significant others.

*Like in the casino when you [refer] to the host responsibility, who are the people that, you know, ban you? So, if I go to them and say, I want to ban myself, I think that it's like a very negative experience. They take you to this closed room, and it's very isolated and you feel weird. It doesn't feel very good, even though you're trying to do the right thing because you have an addiction. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*In my family, nobody knows. I only told my partner once, and after that, it has never been the same with us. She always like, um, mentioned [when we are] struggling with money ... that I can spend that much money on gambling on myself. But can't spend on here and there, you know. She always, like, complained. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*Even if it's not to borrow money or ask for help, people won't want to help because I've deceived them before, and they don't trust me anymore. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*Talking to my family about my true feelings just leads to arguments. It causes unnecessary conflicts, so I don't bother. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

### ***Lack of confidence in service providers***

Participants spoke about not having confidence in service providers and not believing that seeking help from services would help.

*Even if they feel uncomfortable, when I suggest they talk to someone, they think it won't solve their problems. For instance, if they have family issues, they believe discussing it with others won't change the situation at home. They haven't experienced the relief that comes from talking to a professional. They haven't tried it and don't believe it would be useful. They lack a deep understanding of this kind of help. (Significant other)*

*A lack of confidence in whether these organisations can actually help. People might not try because they don't know if it will really be beneficial. (Significant other)*

*I never thought about seeking help before. They [family] wanted to take me to rehab or see a psychologist, but I said it wouldn't help. Even the best psychologist can't help if I don't let go myself. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

One participant doubted whether, without lived experience, professionals would be able to understand those affected by gambling harm.

*People who are counsellors or whatever, they don't have experience. They don't have practical experience. They're going to tell me what the book has told me. What is gambling...is...this is. They haven't had experience, right? I'm not gonna learn how to drive a car if I'm sitting in the passenger seat. I have to drive. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

### **Confidentiality, shame, and saving face**

Confidentiality, shame, or "saving face" were described by many participants as a barrier to help-seeking. Participants indicated that people are concerned about others within their community finding out about help-seeking.

*I didn't consider seeking help because I wondered if it would improve the family situation or if some men, who care a lot about their reputation, might think it would cause more trouble. (Significant other)*

*If one person knows about this, it spreads, and it becomes hard to hold your head up. (Significant other)*

Being perceived as a gambler was described by some as bringing shame not only to the individual but also to the family.

*It's like the saying, "Don't air your dirty laundry." (Significant other)*

*It is an Indian [cultural attribute], you know, seeking help is really, you know, we don't talk much about mental health issues or, you know, things like that... Biggest problem is people don't want to be embarrassed. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I didn't want to talk about it because there was a sense of shame. It felt like even if I talked about it, others might not understand and would just see it as gossip, so I was reluctant to discuss it. (Significant other)*

*I think for Asians, and perhaps for other communities as well, there is a reluctance to openly acknowledge that something disgraceful has happened in the family. If we avoid calling it a scandal and just say it's something not so honourable, it's unlikely that someone would immediately rush to seek help just because a family member went to a casino twice. It's not that it's impossible, but it's generally not the first thought. Asians, who are often considered more reserved and shy, might tend to hide or avoid the issue more. (Significant other)*

### **Self-attributes**

Participants spoke about personal attributes that contributed as barriers to help-seeking. One participant spoke about avoidance.

*My husband refuses to acknowledge his gambling problem, which has caused me great distress. So, I'm seeking help for him through [service provider name]. He never admits he has a problem and doesn't want to face it. (Significant other)*

Part of the avoidance was due to not perceiving the gambling behaviour as an issue until it is significantly affecting one's life.

*Even when I was gambling, my wife didn't know. I didn't tell anyone until the situation became dire, when I was in debt and it was affecting our lives. Only then did I decide to stop and talk to my wife and my closest friends. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*The person who is gambling, he would ignore these red flags because the gambler's mindset is like, oh, I've got, for example, \$300 in my account – I can go to the casino, I can make it \$600. I can pay off my whatever and I've still got \$300 and then I can again gamble with this \$300. Make it again, like, you know. Because there is the mindset of the possibility to win. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*He is very stubborn, so it's hard to change his mindset. Since we helped him pay off his debts too easily before, he hasn't experienced real hardship. He still thinks he can win back his losses through gambling. He tries to convince us with his twisted logic to give him another chance. For him, help means getting money. He thinks anyone who gives him money is helping him. (Significant other)*

### **Lack of awareness of available services/information**

Participants spoke about the lack of awareness of services, which prevents individuals from accessing services.

*I had no idea these organisations exist or help. I had no information about that during that time. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*We didn't know much about gambling. We wanted to find information on exclusion orders, how to apply, or psychological counselling. But there's very little information available. (Significant other)*

*When searching for information, it's particularly difficult in countries with legal casinos. The presence of legal casinos can influence the availability of support services. People might think, "If the country allows it, why should we oppose it?" This makes it challenging to find help. (Significant other)*

*There's not much help, except for banning me from gambling completely. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

One participant spoke explicitly about the lack of access to solution-focused information.

*Yes, like on local websites such as Skykiwi, if you search for keywords, you can't find much. On Google, you might find information on the harms of gambling but not on solutions available in Auckland or New Zealand. The specific keywords and relevant information are very scarce. This makes it difficult for families affected by gambling to seek help. (Significant other)*

## **Language barriers**

Not surprisingly, language barriers were also a perceived barrier to help-seeking.

*If they are in a place where they are not fluent in the language, seeking external help becomes an even bigger step. (Significant other)*

*Many people I know face language barriers and other social challenges that make it hard for them to seek help. They feel trapped and isolated, unable to step out and find support. (Significant other)*

*Many don't know how to search on Google. My son can because his English is good. I didn't even know about [organisation name]. I didn't know it would help with gambling. (Significant other)*

## **Enablers to Help Seeking**

Despite many barriers to help-seeking, participants were able to articulate enablers to help-seeking. These included enablers to seeking informal support (e.g., families and friends) and professional services.

### **Informal support**

There was consensus that many go to family and friends before engaging with professional help. Often, this help was in the form of monetary support for gambling debts. For participants, self-awareness was the biggest enabler to help-seeking. Participants noted that they themselves need or the individual experiencing the gambling harm needs to acknowledge the issue.

*No one – people can support you to get out from this – but actually, action has to be taken by you only. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I need to convince myself to give up – that's the only right way. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*The reason I quit gambling [was] it came from me. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*The help he needs is external, but ultimately, it depends on him. He needs to change his own perspective and genuinely not want to return to his old life. The chance of relapse is high for gamblers. The first step is to get him away from the environment. Often, family advice feels like nagging and is hard to accept. (Significant other)*

The acceptance of family and friends was articulated as being of paramount importance. This was for both the individual experiencing gambling harm and those significant others who were supporting the individual.

*When you start to quit gambling, when you truly want to quit, the greatest support comes from your closest loved ones. If they can understand and support you, you will be able to do well. It gives you the confidence to quit. Everyone makes mistakes, but being understood is crucial. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I think it's important to manage my part well, have a good relationship with him, address his mother's issues, and face them together. I accompany him to see doctors for his gambling habit. He trusts me; he's not involved in gambling now. (Significant other)*

*If you could get family support that could make a major difference. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I had colleagues in the same situation whose families didn't support them, didn't help them pay off debts. Everything was on their shoulders, and some even considered ending their lives. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I asked some close friends for their opinions to see what they would say. Some friends told me that since I only have one younger brother and he was so good before, I should help him if I can. Hearing this made me feel better, realising I wasn't the only one willing to persist in helping. Knowing that others might do the same for their siblings made me feel less foolish for trying to help him. (Significant other)*

For many participants, seeking support from someone they trusted was important. This was often discussed in relation to trusting the friend or family in that they would keep it confidential, not hold judgement, and would provide support.

*I've shared it with my closest and most trusted friend. It's very important because this isn't just about me; I also need to respect my son because he will still need to work in the future. And right now, he doesn't even realise how others see him, he has no self-confidence, and he is also sick. (Significant other)*

*I knew he [friend] had psychological issues before and saw a doctor... So, I felt he had more experience, and when I told him about this, he strongly recommended that I seek help immediately, saying it was very useful ... he supported me. ... and I am in contact with [organisation]. (Significant other)*

### **Professional Services**

When asked about seeking help from professional services, participants noted that accessibility, that includes free of charge, providing a safe environment, and the services of trained professionals were important enablers.

*Counsellors helped me step by step to get rid of those thoughts. Finding a counselling centre provided the biggest help for my emotional well-being. Learning how to control my emotions was crucial. Initially, I still had the urge to gamble, but the counsellor explained how I could talk to my wife and manage these issues. They had the experience to guide me, which was very helpful. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I go to therapy every week to see if there's any progress. ... I can talk about it more clearly than with my family. They don't understand as well because a psychologist is a professional, right? I can talk to the psychologist about what's on my mind, and they might understand me. They know what's going on inside my mind. Family members are not professionals; their methods might not be good and could even be wrong. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*[You can trust the counsellors?] Yes, it's quite comforting. I'm willing to open up and talk about anything. Whether it's gambling or life issues, I can share with them. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*Although we share personal feelings and family issues within the group, it is understood that what we share stays within the group. The coach also emphasises that sharing here remains confidential. (Significant other)*



## Benefits from Help-Seeking

The participants interviewed ranged from those that have just realised their gambling behaviour was an issue to those that have received support and overcome their problematic gambling. Participants that have sought help noted several benefits from help-seeking.

### ***Increase in self-awareness***

One recurring theme for individuals that have sought help was the increase in self-awareness. Participants reflected that they became more aware of gambling harm and acknowledged that gambling behaviour was the problem, which in turn led to a decrease in self-blame.

*I went for counselling and that's where things changed for me. It's just self-awareness. Counselling helps you to bring those things to the surface, which are underlying, and you just realise, okay, this is the problem. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

### ***Peer support***

Sharing with people who have had similar experiences and who have overcome their challenges was seen as a source of motivation and giving hope. Participants reported being understood and accepted within a peer group.

*You sit there and, you know, you can just listen to other people who have experienced the same thing as you. And I feel like when you see that you're not the only person that has experienced this type of addiction, it just makes you feel a little bit better that, you know, I'm not the only one. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*Somebody having the same problem, and he got rid of it and he's happy. He never gambled again in his life. And he can share his advice and tell you. That gives motivation. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*I've been there for six months and now, since I haven't gambled in a while, but when someone new comes in and I see them and they gambled two days ago and they feel really bad, it reminds me that, you know, I could go all the way back to step one if I just gambled again. ...*

*I've spoken to some people that stopped talking to their children or they've been cut off from their families because of gambling. So, you know, it gives you hope that if they're okay, then it will be okay. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

### **Feeling not alone**

Similar to the above, another common theme was the feeling of not being alone. This was regardless of whether help was sought from professionals or peer groups.

*I want to find someone to talk to, because the atmosphere at home is already bad. This issue comes up almost weekly and it's very stressful. Bringing it up makes things worse. So, seeing a psychologist is a way to talk to someone and relieve some stress. (Significant other)*

### **Recommendations**

Participants in general felt that there was much work to be done in preventing and supporting individuals and families experiencing gambling harm.

*It's not just about discussing problems endlessly, but about being proactive and offering real solutions. For example, discussing children's issues endlessly without taking action is pointless. We need to provide concrete steps to help. (Significant other)*

### **Public awareness/education on gambling harm**

All participants felt that it was important to raise public awareness around gambling harm.

*More information, more campaigns and more social media, especially better information at venues like Sky City so that people know the harmful effects of, you know, like when you buy a packet of cigarettes, like it shows you that the harmful effects, and people still buy it and that's okay. But at least everyone knows what's possible. With gambling, some people don't know, like if I keep going to the casino every day, what could happen? (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Participants noted that lived experience was a powerful way to raise awareness as well as providing a sense of empowerment to the individual with lived experience.

*It's not just about gambling. You could also share various successful case studies. (Significant other)*

*I'm interested in this kind of help, not just for gambling but also for other support for Asian communities. Seeing stories about how families or individuals sought help is heartwarming. Even if we don't need it now, we might in the future. (Significant other)*

Importantly, participants wanted awareness campaigns that shifted the blame or stigma on the gambler to one that focused on the gambling behaviour and surrounding environment.

*The person is not the problem. Gambling is the problem and that is the distinction. If you see person as the problem, you will never be able to be compassionate towards the person. The problem is the gambling. So, these two things need to be differentiated. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*To make them understand the severe harm gambling causes – to themselves, their families, and society. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*



One participant spoke explicitly about gambling not being seen as an addiction like that of other drug and alcohol addictions.

*When I've spoken to people who have been addicted to alcohol, and they just think, people look at it as an addiction where it's substance based. So they think that there's, like, a reaction in the brain that these people can't control, and they get help for it. And it makes them, it's actually like a proud thing for them to get help. But with someone that gambles and has an addiction, people just think they don't understand why someone could be addicted to gambling, even though it has the same impact as someone with an alcohol addiction would have. But people think that just because it's not – people think alcohol or the drug, once you get into it, you might not be able to control it. And it's that way you should help. But people think with gambling, you can always control it. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Participants spoke about the need for more strengths-based messaging on gambling harm and not only focusing on the negatives.

*I think articles about the pros and cons of gambling should not only emphasise the negatives, which everyone already knows, but also highlight the efforts and benefits of quitting. People often think it's entirely bad without considering the potential for change. For instance, an article explaining how initial losses could prevent worse outcomes could make people more cautious and less likely to get deeply involved. (Significant other)*

### **Public awareness around help-seeking**

In addition to raising awareness around gambling harm, participants also felt the need for public awareness around help-seeking.

*It needs to be, you know, how like with the helplines, like the alcohol helpline, the suicidal helpline, lifeline, all of that is promoted a lot – I see it. But I feel with the gambling helpline, it's not considered, you know, as big of a deal. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Participants felt that there was a lot of stigma around help-seeking and therefore ways to address the stigma and promote early help-seeking is needed. Participants spoke about praising, celebrating achievements, and messages to promote acceptance in the society.

*Actually, getting praise for getting help like you do with other addictions. You know, if someone with an alcohol problem goes to sessions for six months, then they would get a lot of praise by everyone around them. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*If the government could promote more, maybe through pamphlets or TV ads, short ones that say, for instance, "Give people who use drugs a chance." If there were some campaigns, it would help others accept that this is just a part of some people's lives. I think it would help a lot, both the gamblers and their families. (Significant other)*

Some participants noted that supporting help-seeking should be a collective responsibility.

*I think it's important for those who consider themselves to have no gambling issues to also develop a sense of responsibility to help others. If they can achieve this, they can help many who are suffering and unable to seek help. This is why I volunteer – to spread awareness and support. (Significant other)*

*Promotional material, it could say, "If you or someone you know, a friend or relative, needs help, please contact us confidentially." Many people, like my son, who asked me to seek help, might be too afraid to reach out on their own. (Significant other)*

*Typically, weekdays see more elderly participants. This can be beneficial because they often know more and can spread information within their families. They can help their children stay away from gambling by bringing home what they've learned. We don't need the direct victims to attend these sessions. If we educate those who attend about available resources and encourage them to share this information, it can be very effective. (Significant other)*

### **Holistic and wrap-around support services**

Participants shared a range of ideas and thoughts around the types of services that are needed to support individuals and families. Some participants spoke about how to target information specifically for Asian peoples, for example, through popular Chinese social media channels and language-appropriate information.

*Right now, these are mostly found through specific searches related to gambling, but on platforms like Xiaohongshu, even if you don't search for it, the algorithm can push related content to users based on their browsing habits. This way, more people can unintentionally come across this information and learn about both the good and bad aspects of gambling, helping them avoid these pitfalls. (Significant other)*

*Provide more information in Chinese for the Chinese community. Seeing some Chinese booklets or pamphlets attracts your attention, and when you pick one up and see it offers help, you keep it. Later, if your family or someone around you needs help, you might seek it out. That's how I found out about it, and I think it's a good approach. We need more of these. (Significant other)*

Others spoke about the need for a safe environment at every step, from help-seeking, accessing services, to post-services.

*Having more support every step of the way from things like self-banning to, you know, counselling, having more support to tell people that it's okay. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*It also helps the people that need help find a safe space. Because a lot of, especially young people, like, when I was 19, I wouldn't talk to my friends, I wouldn't talk to my parents about my gambling... like, somewhere there's a gambling support desk that's completely private and confidential, I would go and I would talk. Even if, you know, one out of a hundred people talk, then at least they will get some more help. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*More resources to explain to people that [help-seeking is] just not something to be ashamed of. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

Participants also spoke about the importance of early intervention.

*I definitely like to see a lot more like confidence in people getting help early before they hit, you know, absolute rock bottom. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*Many young people get into gambling, and older people who gamble usually started when they were young. For the younger generation, information and awareness need to be more widespread. In schools, they promote this, but it doesn't always work because people don't*

*understand the risks until they've experienced losses. So, families affected by gambling need to quickly find the channels to get help. (Significant other)*

### **Different forms of support**

It was clear that there wasn't a one-size-fits-all approach and various forms of services were suggested by participants. These ranged from written materials, self-directed resources, peer groups, to professional services. Participants also spoke about offering different modes of delivery.

*In places where the Chinese community gathers, people are more likely to notice it. We are sensitive to written information, and if it's displayed there, we might take a closer look and find it helpful. (Significant other)*

*I've gone through various information, various methods and but I would say in my opinion, there should be more social groups. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*For the people who do want to [or] don't want to engage in counselling, I think there should be an alternative way, I guess. I hope [service providers] are also hiring peer support workers who can go directly [to] meet [and] to support people. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*

*Free services .... I would feel that having those resources in place where there's counsellors. (Individual with lived experience of gambling)*



## Discussion

This qualitative study was conducted to understand how Asian Peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand conceptualise stigma in the context of gambling harms, how it impacts help-seeking, and recommendations or strategies to address these barriers. The findings are discussed in relation to the research questions.

*How is stigma surrounding gambling harm conceptualised and discussed within Asian communities, and what factors contribute to its manifestation?*

Regardless of language, stigma was conceptualised to be negative. Participants spoke about public stigma that they were confronted with and the self-stigma that is attached to a gambler. Importantly, participants perceived that the public viewed gambling not as the problem but rather the gambler as the problem – one who had no self-control or was simply a bad person. Participants provided numerous negative labels that are attributed to the gambler rather than the gambling activity. Participants spoke about feelings of shame, and the breakdown of relationships, with several significant others reporting the transference of responsibilities from the individual to family members (i.e., repaying financial debt). The loss of belonging and distance from support networks can result in a reinforcing loop that enhances the degree of harm experienced. In addition, our findings showed how gambling harm manifested beyond the individual to family and friends.

Our findings align with existing literature in that stigma surrounding gambling harm in Asian communities is often intertwined with social norms and cultural values (Feldman et al., 2014; Riley et al., 2021; Wang & Bellringer, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023). It was evident from our findings that in many Asian cultures, gambling is simultaneously stigmatised or illegalised, but socially normalised. For instance, traditional games such as mahjong are prevalent in Chinese society, and are played during celebrations, festivals, and at home as a social and entertaining activity. Yet, problem gambling is heavily stigmatised and viewed as a personal failing or a source of family shame. This dichotomy creates a complex social dilemma and further manifests blame directed at the individual rather than addressing the wider social environment and context of gambling.

The concept of shame and “saving face” plays a crucial role and is evident throughout the interviews, where maintaining individual and family reputation is critical. Being identified as a problem gambler brings with it a stigmatised identity. The participation in gambling appears to discredit an identity and the gambler is viewed as a source of shame to the family. Asian communities often emphasise collective identity over individualism (Stock et al., 2002.; Zhang et al., 2023). The actions of an individual are seen as a reflection of the entire family unit rather than solely the individual. This cultural emphasis on upholding the familial reputation exacerbates the stigma, making it difficult for individuals and families to acknowledge and discuss gambling issues openly.

*In what ways does stigma, or alternative conceptualisations, impact the help-seeking behaviour of individuals in Asian communities who gamble and/or experience gambling harms? What are the stigmatic barriers preventing early help-seeking among Asian individuals affected by gambling harms?*

Consistent with existing literature, our findings found that stigma impacts the help-seeking behaviour of individuals who gamble and/or experience gambling harms (Feldman et al., 2014; Gainsbury et al., 2014; Kolandai-Matchett et al., 2017; Riley et al., 2020). The sense of protecting the individual and family members from shame and losing face leads to avoidance in help-seeking, hiding the individual harmful gambling behaviour. Shame and loss of face are particularly pertinent barriers to help-seeking for individuals situated within collectivist cultures. This applies to both the individual experiencing gambling harm and that of the significant other in supporting the individual (Feldman et al., 2014; Hing

& Russell, 2017). As revealed in our findings, this reluctance can be compounded by a general distrust in services, previous negative experiences with help-seeking, self-avoidance, and lack of awareness of services.

Studies have suggested that Asian peoples are not accustomed to confidentiality in the public sector and are hesitant to trust service providers (Tse et al., 2007). This was evident in our findings where participants noted that the lack of trust was a barrier to help-seeking. Importantly, participants were uncertain about confidentiality and that others might find out about the help-seeking leading to shame and judgement. This fear of judgement can lead to isolation and secrecy, preventing individuals from reaching out for support.

The stigma associated with the individual as a gambler can lead to self-avoidance, as individuals fear being perceived as weak or bringing shame to their families (Hing & Russell, 2017). How gambling is viewed can lead to difficulty in acknowledging when acceptable gambling behaviour has transitioned into problematic gambling. As previously noted, the dichotomy of gambling being illegal and as a social activity can obscure the recognition of gambling harm. When gambling is viewed through the lens of being a social activity, it can be difficult to interpret it as problematic. It is noticeable in our findings that individuals only sought help for gambling-related harm when in crisis and when their problems were severe. The lack of awareness around gambling harm can also contribute to self-avoidance (Feldman et al., 2014; Sobrun-Maharaj et al., 2013). Without adequate knowledge of what constitutes gambling harm, individuals may not be aware of the negative impact on themselves and their families. This lack of recognition can delay the acknowledgement of the problem, which is a critical first step in help-seeking.

Consistent with literature, the lack of awareness of services was also a significant barrier for help-seeking (Sobrun-Maharaj et al., 2013; Tse et al., 2007). This lack of awareness can stem from several factors, including limited outreach and culturally tailored information dissemination. Often, health promotion efforts and service provision do not adequately account for language barriers or the specific cultural contexts of Asian communities. Consequently, many individuals as evident in our findings had limited knowledge on where and how to access support.

#### *What strategies can be identified to address barriers?*

Participants in our study offered a number of recommendations and/or strategies to reduce gambling harm and increase help-seeking. First and foremost, the need to increase public awareness around gambling harm. Awareness campaigns should seek to provide comprehensive information on the risks associated with gambling, recognising early signs of problem gambling, and the potential consequences of gambling. Normalising conversations about gambling harm within families, communities, and workplaces can reduce stigma and shame, making it easier for individuals to acknowledge their gambling behaviour and seek help (Zhang et al., 2023). Importantly, our findings suggest the need for a shift in perspective to move the blame from the gambler to that of gambling. This may include the language used in public discourse, adopting neutral and non-judgemental terminology and educating the public around gambling situated in the wider context.

Help-seeking for gambling-related harm is not the norm for most Asian peoples (Tse et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2023). Therefore, **raising awareness around help-seeking is equally crucial**. Promoting success stories and empowering lived experiences from individuals who have successfully sought help can inspire hope and demonstrate that recovery is possible, encouraging others to seek support. **Additionally, educating the public about what to expect when seeking help can reduce uncertainty and fear about the process**. By clarifying the types of services offered, confidentiality protections, and

the steps involved in accessing support can make individuals more likely to reach out for help. Our findings suggest that help-seeking should be seen as a collective responsibility so that it doesn't fall on the individual alone to seek help. This is particularly important for Asian collectivist societies in that if there is acceptance and non-judgement, this can significantly reduce the stigma attached to the individual and significant other and encourage early help-seeking.

**Holistic and wrap-around services to address the multifaceted nature of gambling harm by integrating support systems at every stage of help-seeking were also recommended by participants.**

This includes supporting the early stages of help-seeking to post recovery, providing support for the individual as well as significant others impacted. Services must also be culturally sensitive and language appropriate to meet the specific needs of diverse Asian communities effectively (Tse et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2023).

Offering various forms and modes of support can increase accessibility and be tailored to individual needs. Providing both in-person and online support options accommodates different preferences and circumstances. Online support, including telehealth and virtual counselling, is particularly beneficial for those who face transportation barriers or prefer anonymity. Developing peer support programmes, where individuals who have experienced gambling harm offer guidance and support to others, can provide a sense of understanding and shared experiences.

While the literature has identified a range of barriers that may prevent some Asian peoples from help-seeking, currently there is a lack of evidence-based best practice about how Asian peoples can be appropriately and effectively supported (Gainsbury et al., 2014; Tse et al., 2007). More work is needed to ensure that gambling support services are culturally appropriate to meet Asian people's needs.

#### *Additional findings*

In addressing the research questions, it was inevitable that participants spoke about the reasons for gambling. Our findings are consistent with a qualitative study conducted by Tse and colleagues (2007) into why Asian peoples gamble. The study reveals that Asian migrants gamble as a way to cope with the stress associated with factors such as isolation, mental health issues, family and financial stress. The easy access to legalised gambling establishments (e.g., casino) was identified as a factor for encouraging new migrants to engage and experience gambling, which was otherwise seen as illegal in their home countries. Our findings add to the evidence that casinos are perceived as an accepting and welcoming environment by people from Asian cultural groups, where being immersed in surroundings that are reminiscent of their own cultural background and in the presence of others who belong to their cultural community can provide a sense of comfort.

We also uncovered gambling-related harms including psychological, financial, and relational harms. Our findings are consistent with existing literature with participants sharing many negative life experiences (i.e., breakdown of relationships, failing expectations, and financial impact), all of which have a negative impact on one's well-being (Sobrun-Maharaj et al., 2013). It is worth noting that much of the research on gambling is directed towards the individual who gambles and is experiencing problems with gambling. Often overlooked is the fact that gambling-related harm generally occurs on a number of different levels: harm to the individual who gambles, harm to family and friends, harm to their whānau, and harm to the general community (Riley et al., 2021).

#### *Limitations*

There are limitations to the study. All participants were self-selected and may not be representative of the broader Asian community. As there is a significant amount of stigma attached to gambling, it can

create a barrier to research participation. The small sample also limits the generalisability of findings to a larger population. Due to time and resource constraints, the study only focused on two Asian subgroups. Even within the Chinese identity category, noted in our findings, there are individuals that identify as Mainland Chinese, Malay Chinese, and Singaporean Chinese. Each of these identities may have slightly different meaning for those who inhabit them. Therefore, research results obtained with people who identify as Malay Chinese may have limited relevance for individuals from other Chinese cultural groups. In New Zealand, many Asian ethnic groups are lumped under one large “Asian” umbrella. Disaggregation of data is important and continues to be an overlooked aspect of research related to Asian peoples and communities.

## Recommendations

Research on gambling in New Zealand, often available in English only, results in an **invisibility of Asian data**. Beyond language access, studies often fail to use appropriate means to contact and reach certain Asian demographics. Studies in English and those distributed through common mainstream channels may not reach Asian communities with limited English proficiency. The lack of nuanced Asian data leads to gambling interventions and services that are not culturally appropriate for Asian gamblers. There is a need for more research to understand Asian gambling issues in New Zealand and inform policy to prevent and reduce gambling harm experienced by Asian peoples.

Individual reasons to gamble in what ways and under which circumstances are profoundly conditioned by their social and cultural contexts (Chee & Lui, 2021). A public health approach is therefore particularly important as it acknowledges the impact of gambling behaviours on the individual, family, friends, and whānau as well as the influences on cultural and community connectedness. An effective model for Asian problem gambling prevention and intervention will need to be Asian-focused and incorporate known best practice (Gainsbury et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2023), shifting away from the conventional one-to-one healthcare model to one that considers the multiple, layered needs of Asian individuals, families, and communities. While there has been a shift from a medical model to a person-led journey recovery model, much work remains to be done in real-world practice. It would be important to ensure the involvement of Asian people in the design, implementation, and evaluation of gambling harm prevention and intervention initiatives. The diversity of Asian peoples in New Zealand should also be considered.

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**EDUCATION AND  
SOCIAL WORK**  
CENTRE FOR ARTS AND  
SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

**The Centre for Arts and Social Transformation** (CAST) was established as the result of a generous gift from the Chartwell Trust in 2019. The Centre researches how the arts have the potential to make a more socially just and equitable world through improving the quality of life of all citizens. The Centre is outwards focused and builds relationships with educators, artists, activists, policy makers and communities to research the power of the arts for social transformation.



**Asian Family Services**  
*Together enriching lives*

**Asian Family Services** (AFS) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) committed to providing mental health and gambling harm support services to individuals of Asian background living in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Our gambling harm initiatives are funded by Te Whatu Ora and the New Zealand Government gambling levy, while our Asian Helpline caters to clients in need of immediate mental health assistance. Our services offered are face-to-face by qualified counsellors, psychologists, social workers, and public health practitioners who speak various Asian languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Hindi, Korean, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese, and English. In compliance with the Ministry of Health and Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act, our staff maintain registration with relevant professional organisations. For over two decades, AFS has been a trusted provider of services to the Asian community, gaining recognition for its robust public health programme. In 2017, we launched the Asha service, designed to assist South Asians affected by harmful gambling and to increase awareness of this issue within the community