



Māori Social and Economic Indicators under Colonization: A Picture of Progress

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Introduction

Colonization is apparently an ongoing process. According to Ani Mikaere:

“...colonization is not a finite process. There has not yet been an end to it in this country... colonisation endures as a major force in our present reality.”¹

And Leonie Pihama, *et al*:

“Colonisation is both a series of events and an ongoing system of oppression that has disrupted many aspects of Māori social structures and ways of being.”²

The over-riding theme from those academics, politicians and public servants currently holding sway is that colonization was and is a negative experience for Māori. Poor outcomes are given as concrete and conclusive evidence.

This paper takes a different tack. It examines social and economic indicators for Māori under colonization over various time periods (dictated by available data). It relies heavily on graphic depictions. Rather than comparing Māori to other ethnicities, the focus is on how Māori themselves are progressing or otherwise.

A view advanced by Motu research in the early 2000s states:

"The living standards of Māori improved enormously during the 20th century (as did the living standards of non-Māori). One of the most important drivers of that process of improvement was the gradual incorporation of Māori into the market economy, leading to the acquisition of jobs, incomes, new skills and new sets of knowledge. Another driver was the extension of government social services and 'safety net' income support provisions to Māori. A third was the initiative of Māori people themselves: developing new types of business activity and social services, and channelling public funding for social services in directions likely to be of greatest benefit to Māori."³

The change is summarised philosophically:

“The transformation of Māori from members of a tribal-based, communal culture at the beginning of the nineteenth century to members of an individualistic capitalistic culture at the end of the twentieth century is the fundamental story of the change that took place in the Māori economy.”⁴

Minister of Māori Affairs, 2000 - 2008, Parekura Horomia said,

“In recent years we’ve seen tremendous improvements in Māori education, employment and health status. In turn, this has meant that Māori are progressively taking charge of their own destiny, playing an increasingly crucial part in New Zealand’s economy through education, employment and enterprise.”⁵

Māori definition

Briefly and officially:

“As totals have changed over time, so too have definitions of who is counted as Māori. Until the last quarter of the 20th century, definitions of Māori were based on biology or ‘blood-quantum’.

Since 1974, Māori have been defined on a combination of biological, cultural and social bases, pushed by Māori assertion of their right to define themselves as the descendants of the aboriginal inhabitants of New Zealand.”⁶

For statistical purposes government departments record ethnicity using more than one method. The Ministry of Education has predominantly moved to the ‘total response’ method which allows people to identify with more than one ethnic group; therefore, figures will not sum to the total population.⁷ Conversely the Ministry of Health prioritises ethnicity to Māori, followed by Pacific, and then other ethnicities.⁸ An individual identifying as having Māori and Pacific heritage will be identified a Māori. Similarly, for individuals in the Youth Justice system with multiple ethnicities, “... a single prioritised ethnicity has been assigned, prioritised in the order: • Māori • Pasifika • Asian • MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American, or African) • Other • European • Unknown.”⁹

While the prioritised method provides more rigorous counting it can lead to bias in reporting.

Population size

The New Zealand Yearbook 2000 summarises growth of the Māori population during the twentieth century:

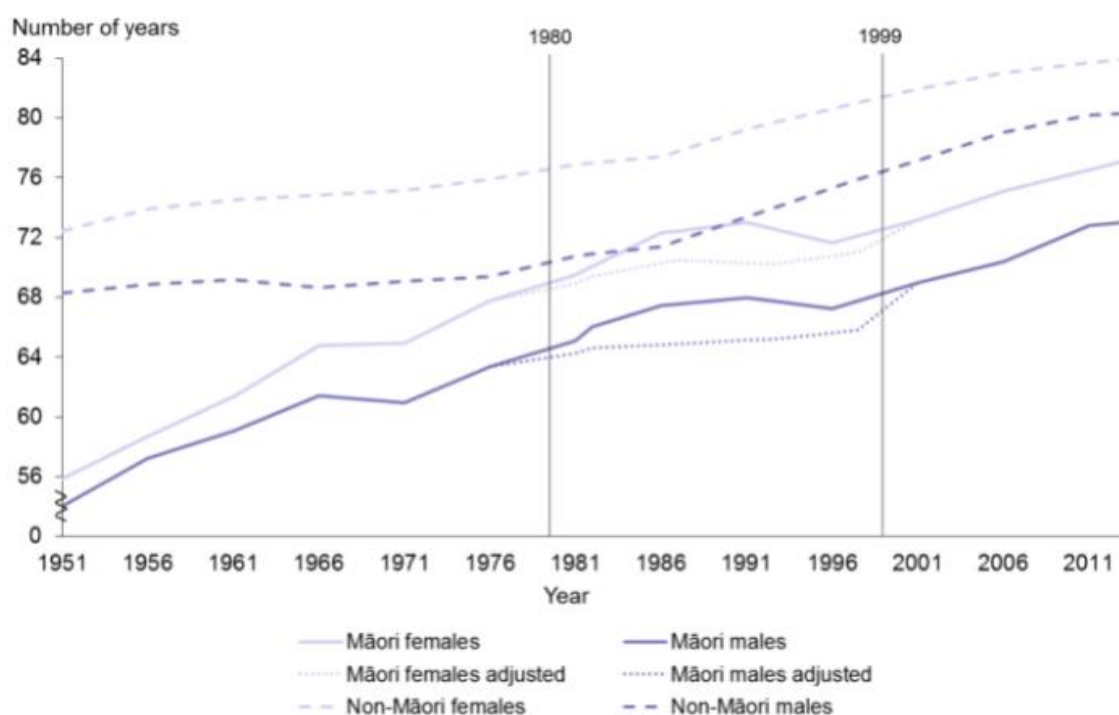
...between the censuses of 1901 and 1996 Māori increased in number from 46,000 to 523,000 people, from 5 to 15 percent of the total population. In the early part of the century the absence of warfare, growing immunity to introduced diseases and improved standards of health care, combined with high birth rates, stimulated a recovery which gathered pace in the 1920s and 1930s. Between 1916 and 1945 the Māori population grew by 86 percent. After World War II. Māori migrated in huge numbers from rural tribal areas to the cities and towns where employment and other opportunities beckoned. In 1936, 83 percent of Māori were living in rural areas; today 83 percent are urbanised. Migration also brought Māori and non-Māori into closer contact and the Māori population was boosted by a growing number of births of Māori children to mixed couples.¹⁰

The Māori population is currently projected to reach one million by 2029 accounting for 15.8 percent of the total population.¹¹

Life expectancy

Before 1840 the average life expectancy calculated from skeletal records was 30 years at birth, and 45 for those who reached adulthood.¹² Life expectancy at birth fell to 22 in the thirty-year period between 1844 and 1874, rose to 27 in 1891 and 33 by 1901, according to demographer Ian Pool.¹³ Since 1951 life expectancy for both male and female Māori has risen faster than for non-Māori:

Life expectancy by gender



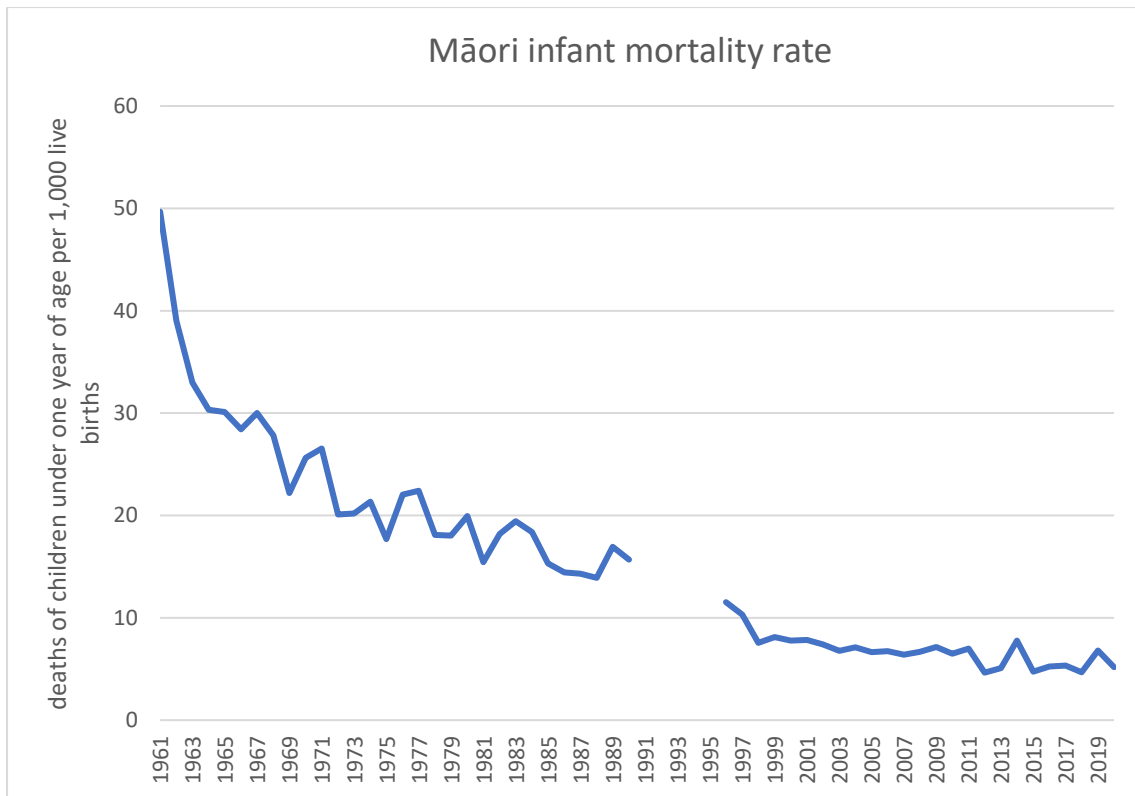
Source: Ministry of Health, Life expectancy

(Explanatory graph note: “During the 1980s and early 1990s, Māori mortality was seriously undercounted due to the different definitions of ethnicity on death registration, birth registration and census forms. The dotted lines on Figure 5 for Māori males and females represent adjusted, more reliable life expectancy figures for this period.”)

By 2018 life expectancy at birth was 73.4 years for Māori males and 77.1 for Māori females.¹⁴

Infant mortality

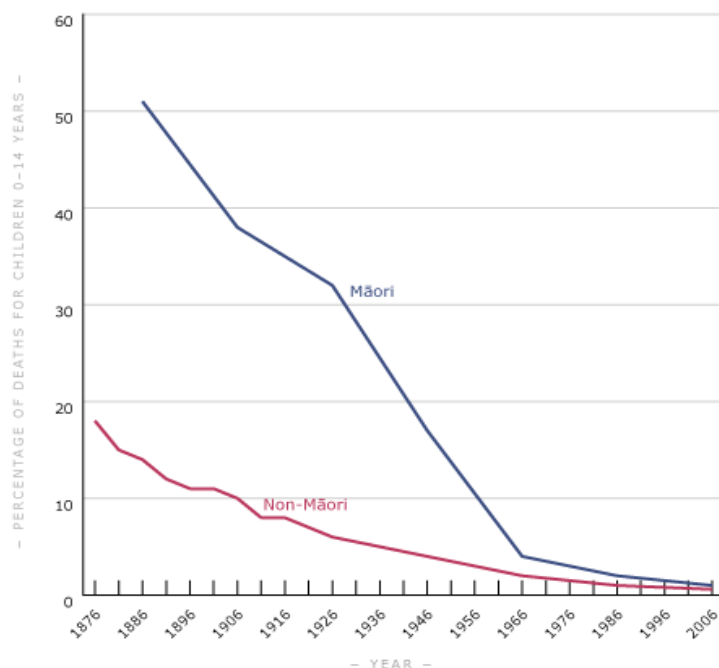
High infant and child mortality rates reduce average life expectancy rates. Māori infant mortality exceeded 90 per 1,000 births between 1925 and 1945, three times the non-Māori rate.¹⁵ Thereafter it plummeted. In 2020 it stands at 5.18 deaths of children under one year of age per 1,000 live births. The rate for the total population is 3.96 deaths:



Data source: Infoshare, Statistics NZ, Table: Infant mortality rate (Māori and total population) (Annual-Dec)

Child mortality

The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand states that in 1886, “51% of Māori children were likely to die between birth and 15 years.” By 2006 the percentage had dropped to just one:



Source: Te Ara, The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, Māori and non-Māori child mortality rates

Reasons given were: “Māori children's mortality fell significantly after improved access to the family benefit, increasing urbanisation and greater involvement by Māori adults in paid work after the Second World War.”¹⁶

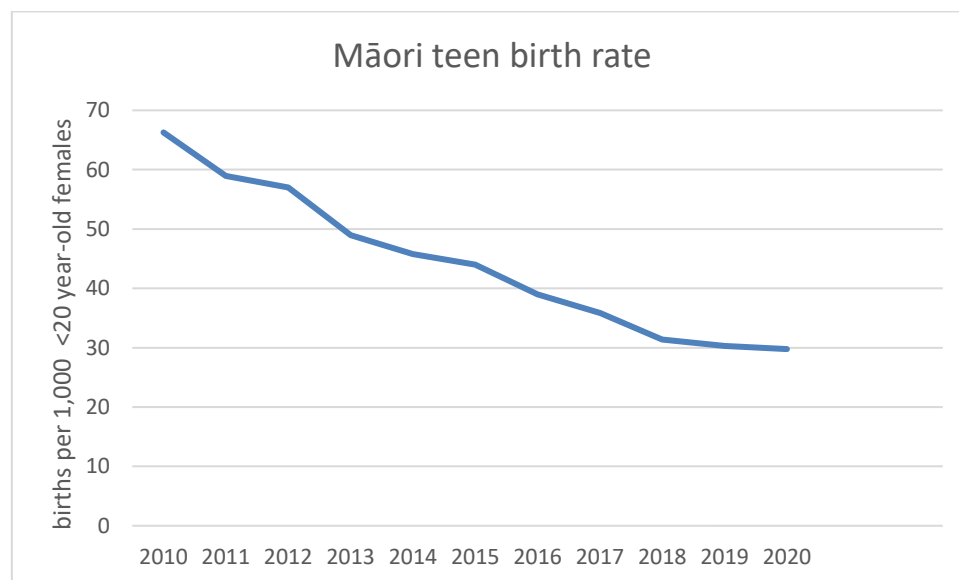
Teen birth rate

Babies of teenage mothers are at greater risk of still birth, infant mortality, low birth weight, Sudden Unexplained Death in Infancy (SUDI), hospitalisation and experience lower rates of breastfeeding and cognitive achievement. Their mothers are more likely to suffer from mental ill-health, post-natal depression, relationship breakdown, and to be unemployed or missing out on education or training.

As a group, teen parents tend to have few educational qualifications, poorer mental health, and higher rates of smoking, alcohol and drug use than the rest of the population. Most are dependent on a benefit and remain so long-term. Being a teen mother commonly co-occurs with having no partner and living in a public rental. Young adult offspring of teen mothers are at risk for a range of adverse outcomes including early school leaving, unemployment, early parenthood, and violent offending. Māori females made up 59.3% of mothers under twenty during the period 2009-2018.¹⁷

In 2011 David Fergusson observed, “Evidence suggests that delaying first parenthood increases the likelihood of healthy child development and greater adult self-sufficiency implying that the children of young Māori parents may be at greater risk of poorer developmental and health outcomes.”¹⁸

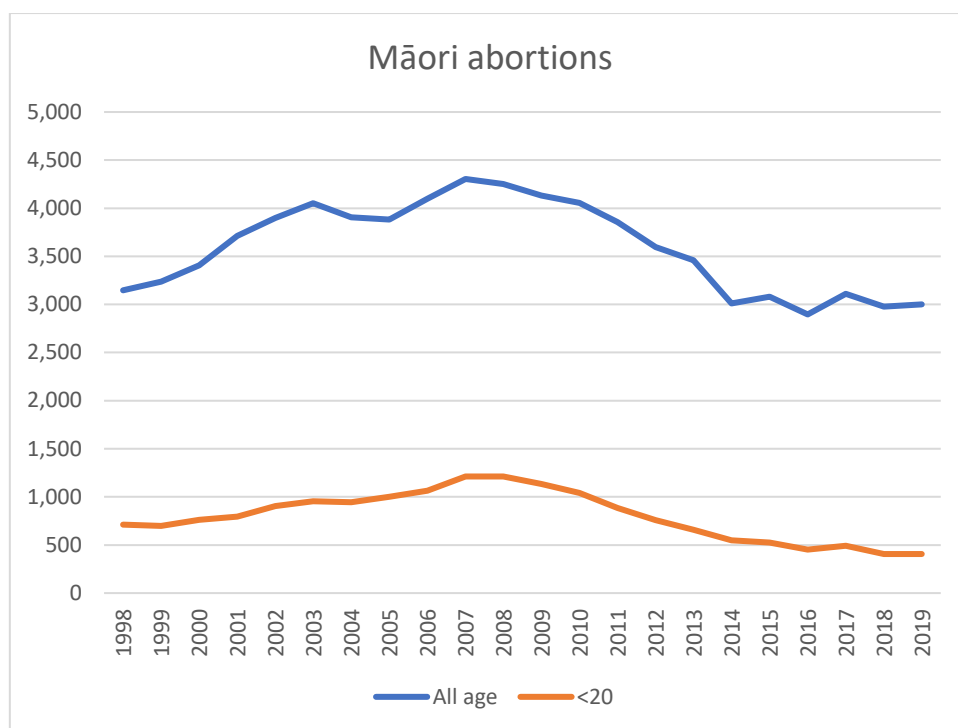
Across the developed world and ethnicities teen birth rates are dropping, a trend generally seen as positive. The Māori teen birth rate is no exception:



Data source: Infoshare, Statistics NZ, Table: Age-specific fertility rates by single year of age (Total population) (Annual-Dec)

Abortions

The declining teen birth rate is not the result of rising <20-year-old abortions which are also reducing. Few - if any - would disagree that a falling abortion rate is a positive development. Māori women are increasingly able to control their personal fertility with ever-more effective forms of accessible contraception.



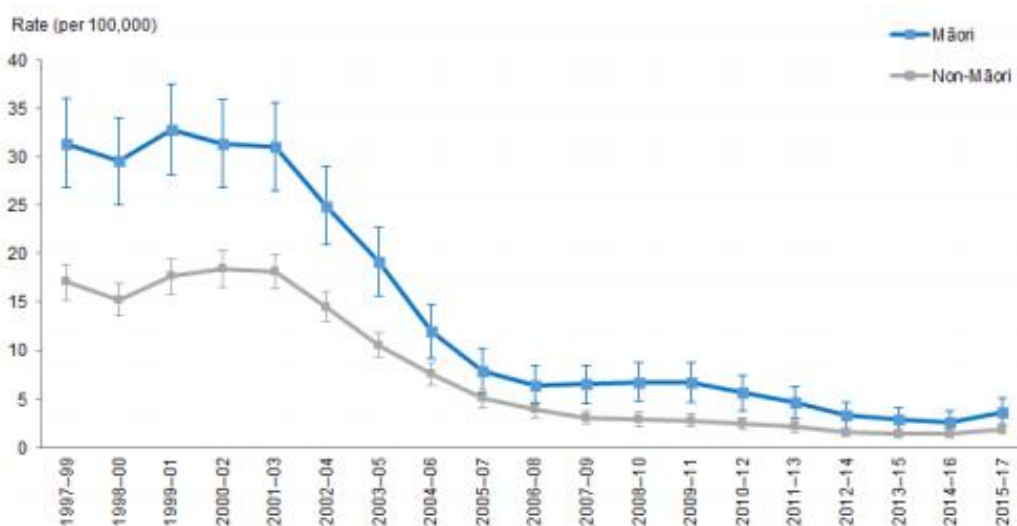
Data: Infoshare, Statistics New Zealand, Abortions by ethnicity and age of woman (Annual-Dec)

Health

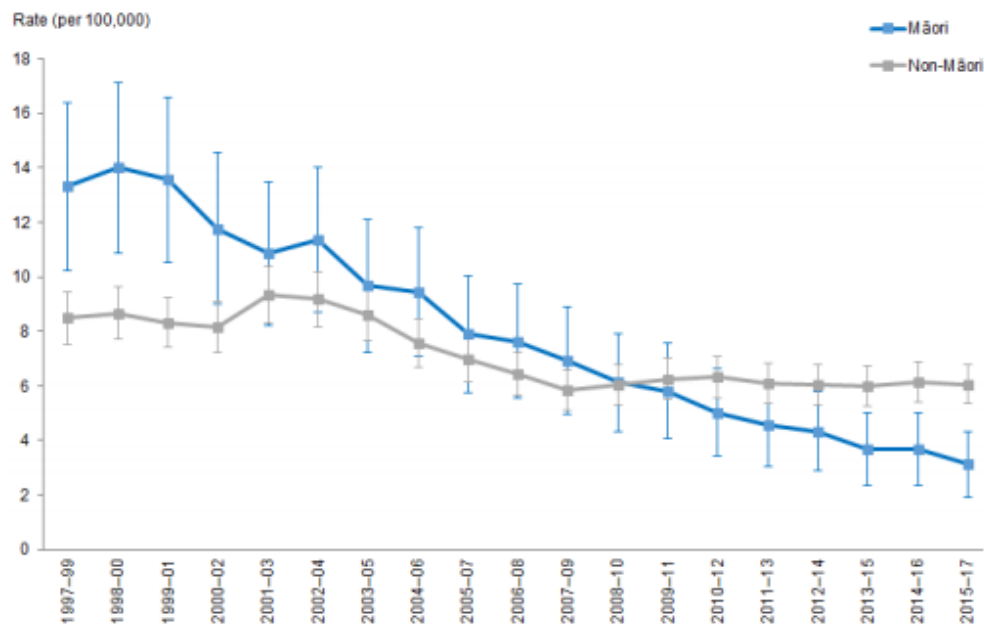
Increasing life expectancy also reflects improved health status.

The following selected charts are from the Wai 2575 Māori Health Trends Report, Ministry of Health, 2020:¹⁹

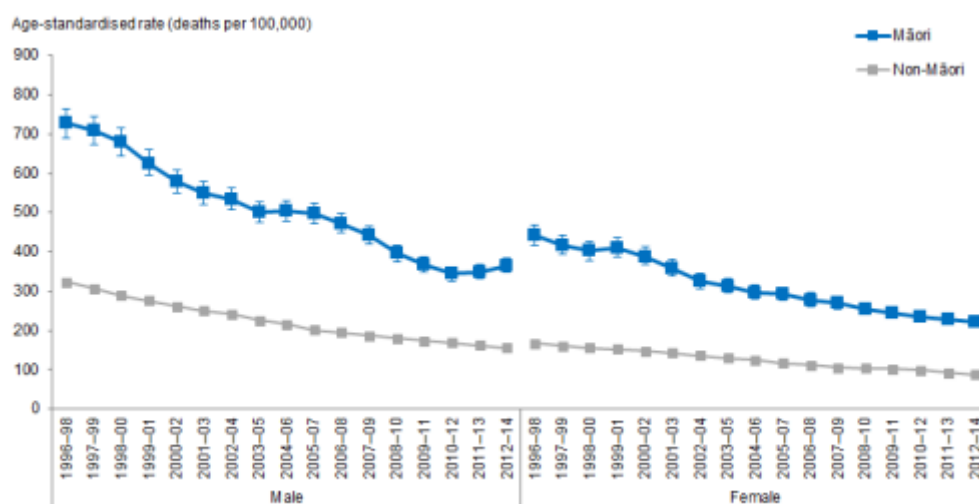
Meningococcal notification rates, Māori and non-Māori, 1997–99 and 2015–17



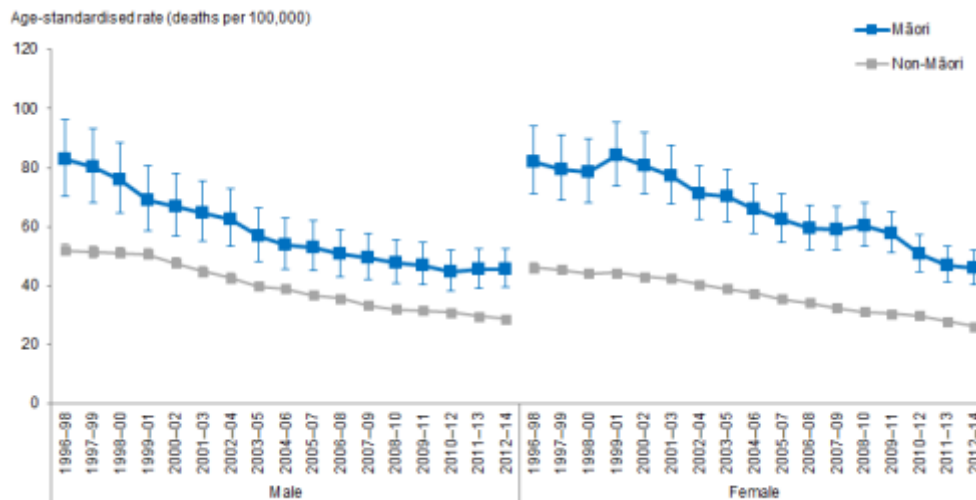
Tuberculosis (TB) notification rates, Māori and non-Māori, 1997–99 to 2015–17



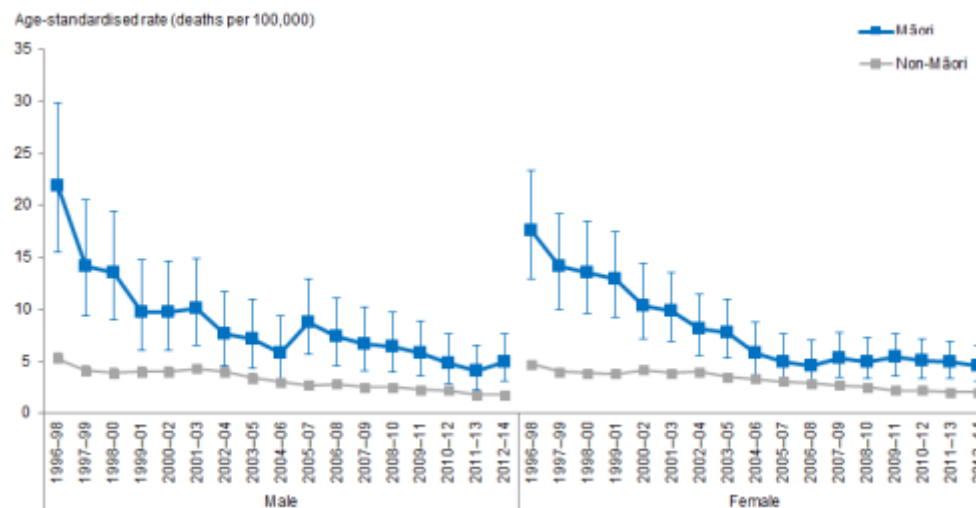
Total cardiovascular disease mortality rates, 35+ years, by gender, Māori and non-Māori, 1996–98 to 2012–14



Cerebrovascular disease (stroke) mortality rates, 35+ years, by gender, Māori and non-Māori, 1996–98 to 2012–14

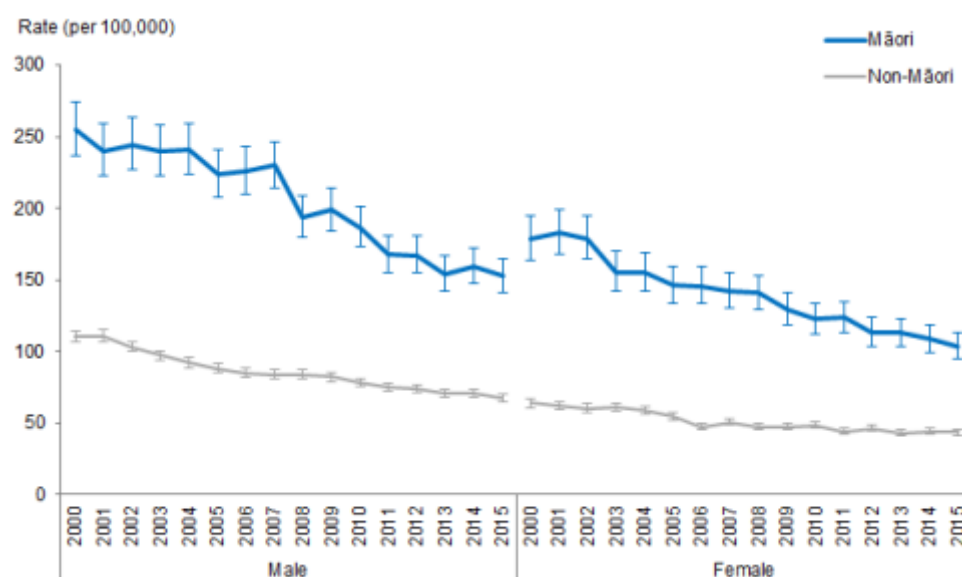


Heart failure mortality rates, 35+ years, by gender, Māori and non-Māori, 1996–98 to 2012–14



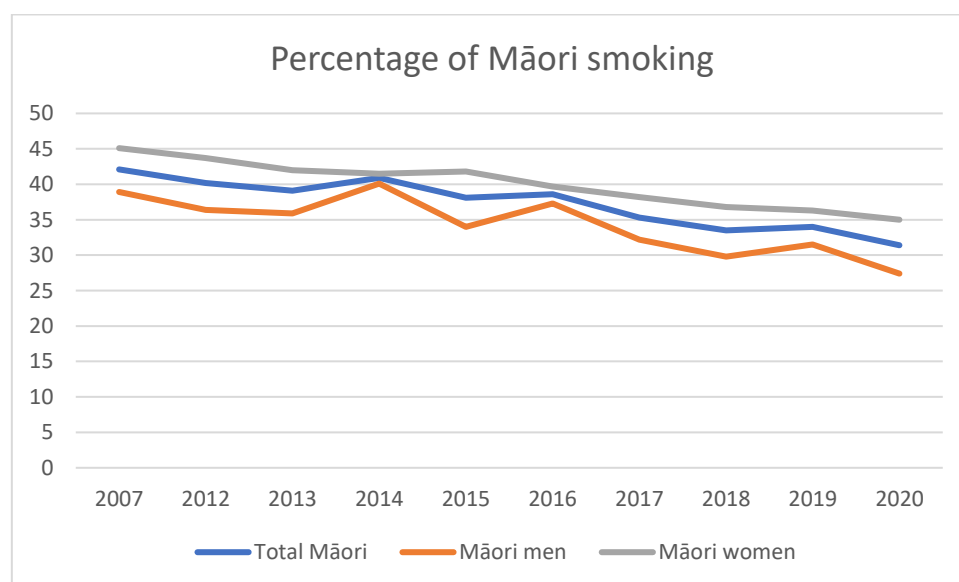
And finally ‘amendable’ mortality rates which describe deaths that could have been avoided with, for instance, timely intervention:

Amenable mortality rates, 0–74 years, by gender, Māori and non-Māori, 2000–2015



Tobacco use

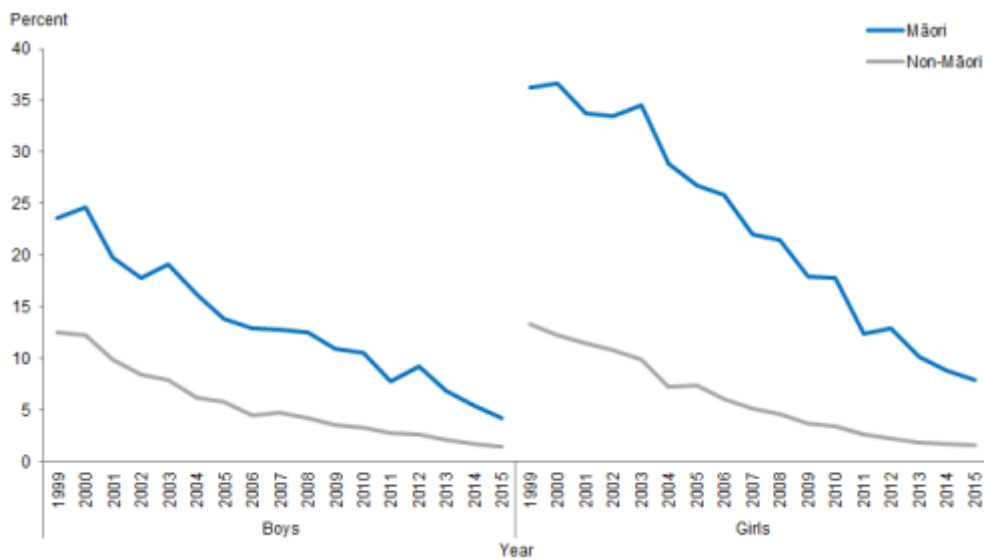
The Ministry of Health surveys tobacco using the following definition: “Current smokers (has smoked more than 100 cigarettes in lifetime and currently smokes at least once a month).” Māori smoking rates are falling albeit slowly:



Data source: Ministry of Health annual survey 2019/2020

Rates among young Māori aged 14–15 are however dropping much faster:

Daily smoking in people aged 14–15 years, by gender, Māori and non-Māori, 1999–2015



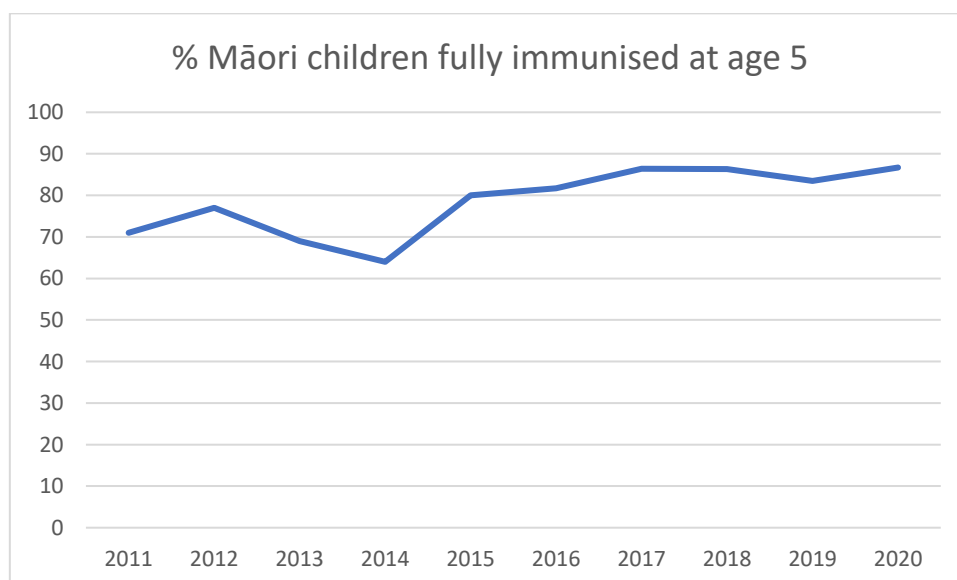
Source: Wai 2575 Māori Health Trends Report, Ministry of Health, 2020

Lung cancer is the most diagnosed and most common cause of cancer death for Māori men and women. Both incidence and mortality appear to be reducing over time.²⁰

Smoking (tobacco and cannabis) is also heavily discouraged during pregnancy because of the increased risk of miscarriage and pre-term births.

Child immunisation

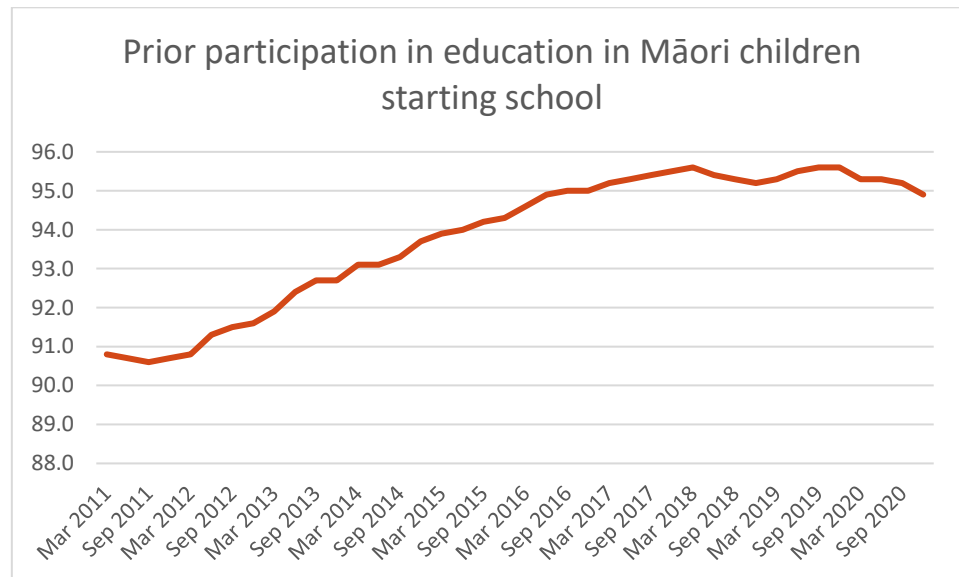
Recent data for child immunisation shows steady improvement:



Data source: National and DHB immunisation data for the three-month period ending 31 March

Early childhood education

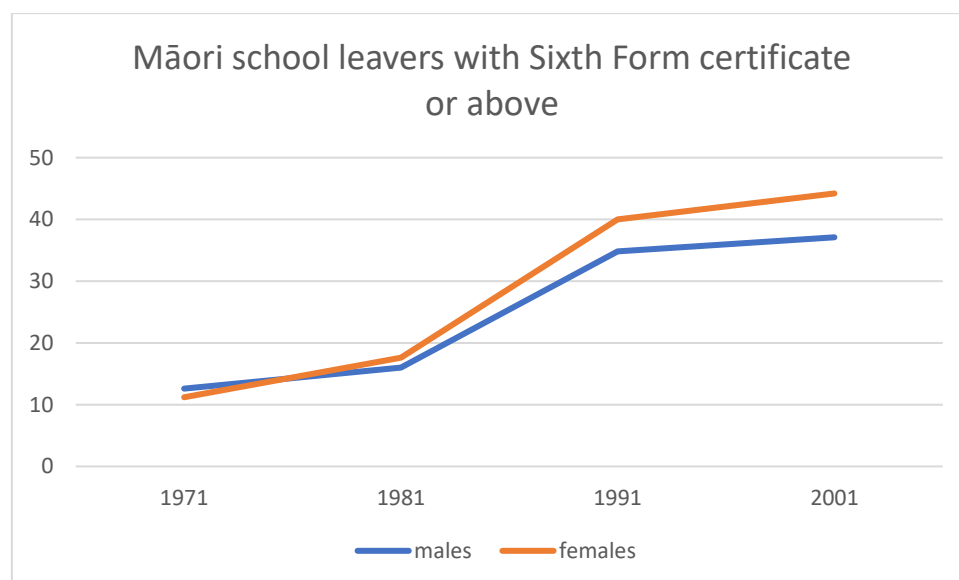
Participation in early childhood education shows similar improvement over the same period (albeit it with a very recent slight decline during 2020 probably due to Covid lockdowns):



Data source: Education Counts, Attendance

Academic Achievement

The next set of data extends back to 1971:

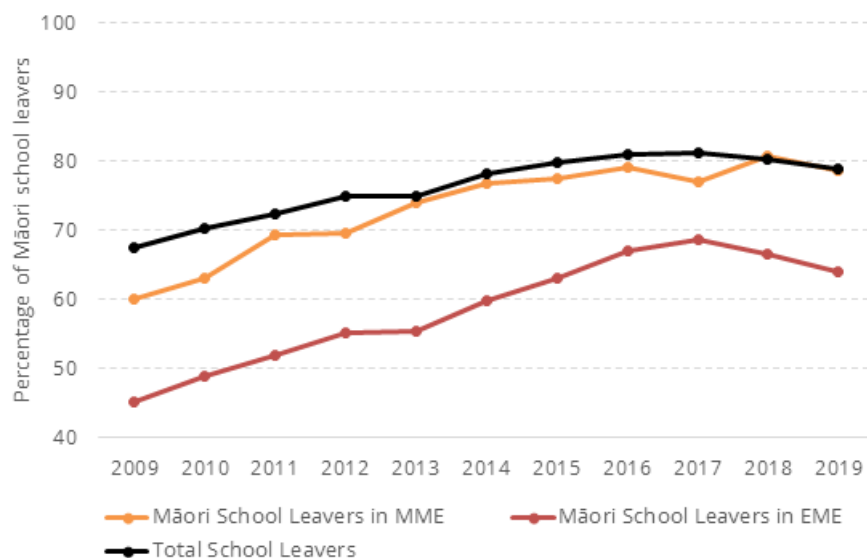


Data source: NZ Department of Education (1992); 2001 School Leaver Statistics compiled by the Ministry of Education

By 2001 around 40 percent of Māori school leavers had achieved Sixth Form certificate or above. The Sixth Form certificate was superseded by NCEA Level 2 qualifications.

The improvement continues particularly for those students in Māori Medium Education where “students are taught all or some curriculum subjects in the Māori language for at least 51 percent of the time.”²¹

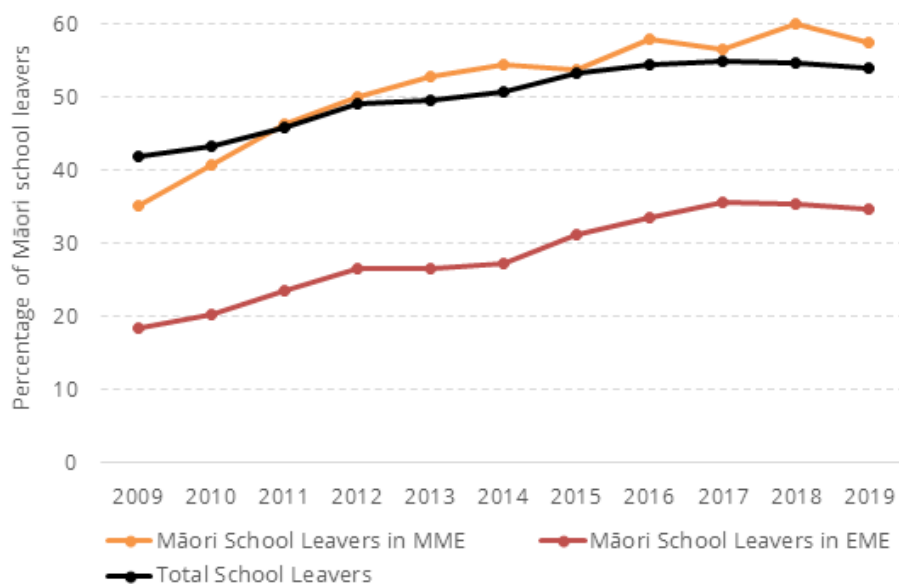
Figure 3: Percentage of school leavers with at least an NCEA Level 2 qualification or equivalent, by education type (2009-2019)



Source: Education Counts, Indicator: School Leavers with NCEA Level 2 or Above (2020) (MME=Māori Medium Education, EME=English Medium Education)

Acquisition of NCEA Level 3 credits also continues to improve:

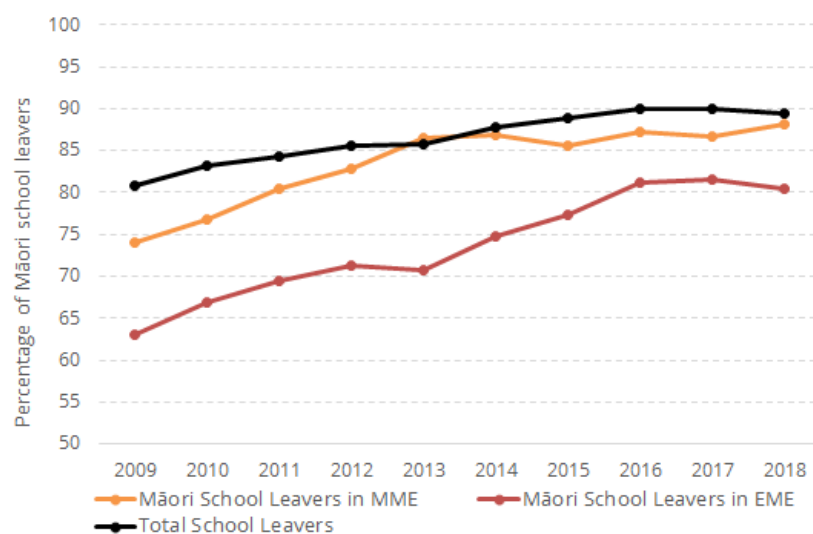
Figure 3: Percentage of school leavers with NCEA Level 3 or above, by education type (2009 to 2019)



Source: Education Counts, Indicator: School Leavers with NCEA Level 1 or Above (2020)

A similar picture pertains to Level 1 achievement:

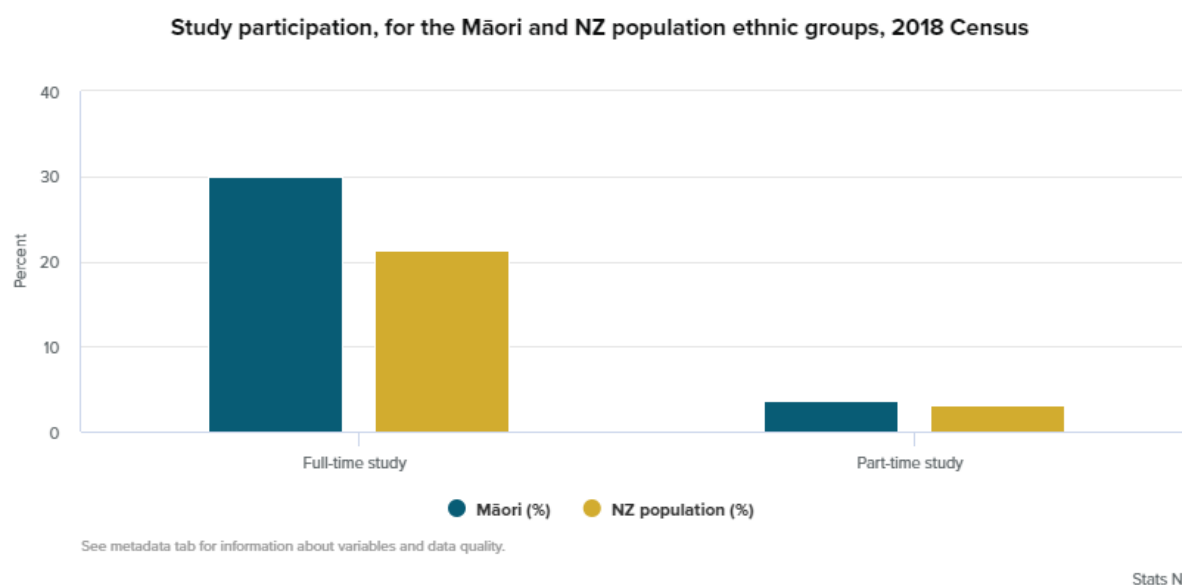
Figure 3: Percentage of school leavers with at least an NCEA Level 1 qualification or equivalent by education type (2009 to 2019)



Source: Education Counts, Indicator: School Leavers with NCEA Level 1 or Above (2020)

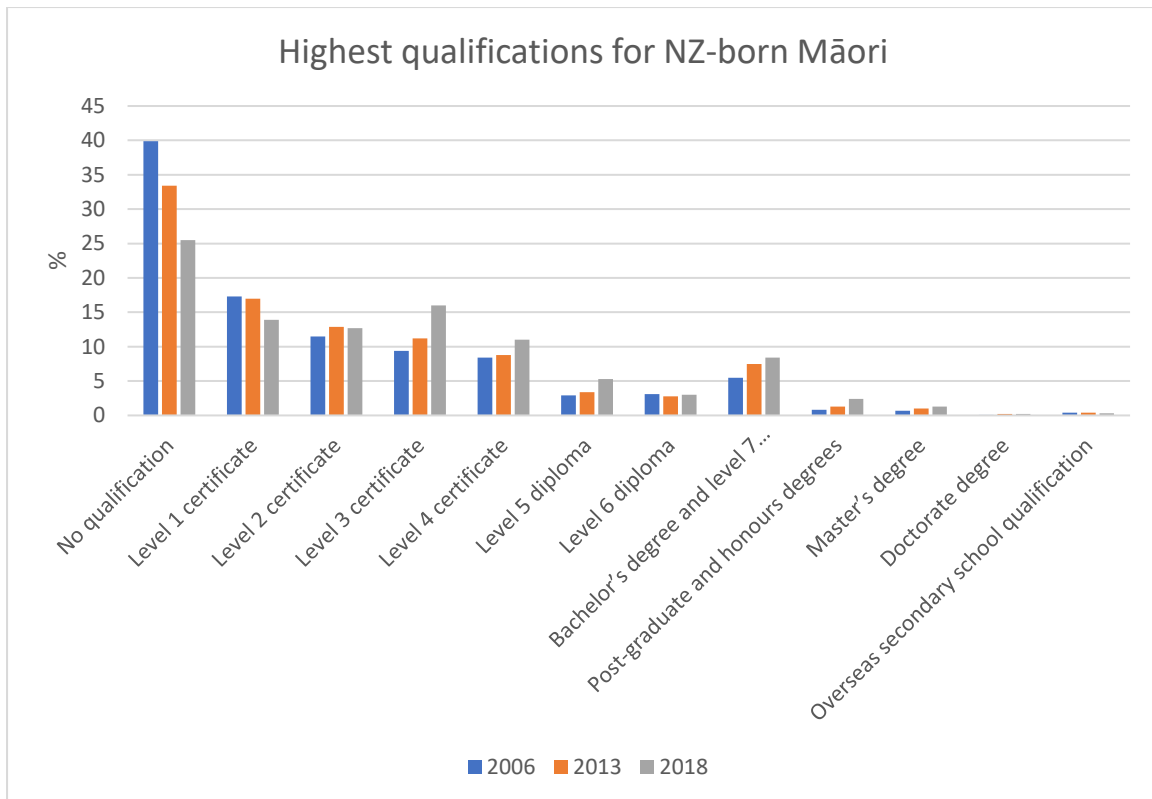
Tertiary Study

In 2018, partially reflecting a youthful population, Māori participation in study was higher than that for the total population:



Source: Statistics New Zealand

Additionally, results from 2006, 2013 and 2018 census show improvements in tertiary qualifications. NZ-born Māori with no qualifications decreased from 40 to 25 percent – or 4 in 10 to just 1 in 4:

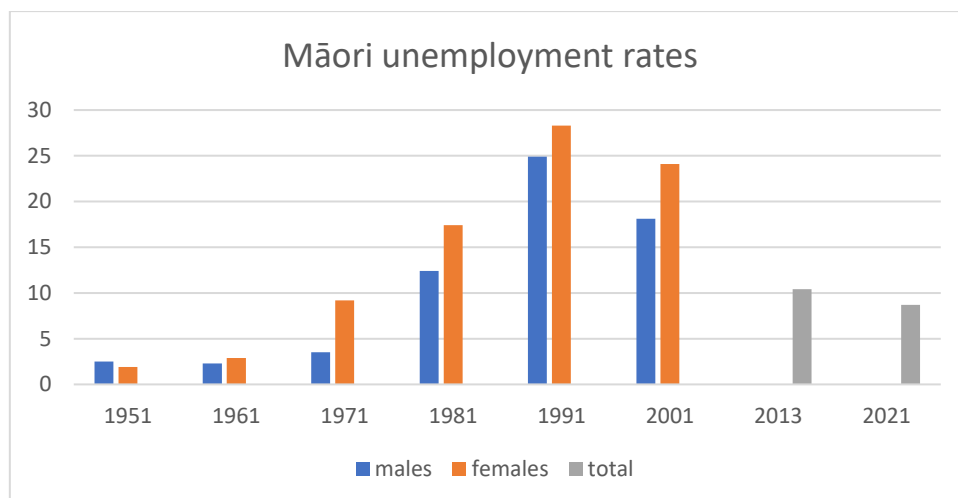


Data source: Highest qualifications, by birthplace, for the Māori ethnic group, 2006–18 Censuses

In 2006 Te Puni Kōkiri summarised educational achievement thus:

“...the last thirty years have witnessed rapid population growth, strengthening of language and cultural identity, unheralded growth and consolidation of resources, including the young and not so young acquiring tertiary qualifications. Second chance learning promoted by Wānanga, Universities and other tertiary institutions has seen substantial growth in the learning renaissance.”²²

Employment

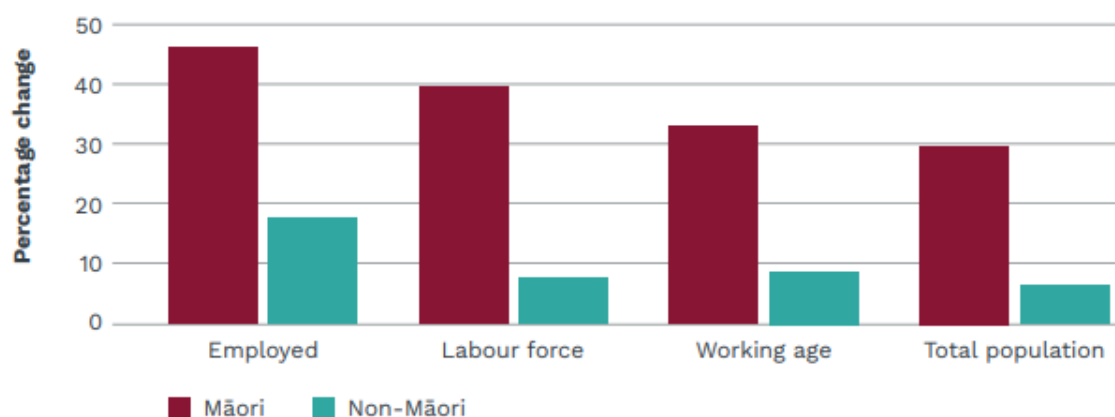


Data sources: Census, 1951,1961,1971,1981,1991,2001,2013. HLF5, March 2021

The employment trend over the last 30 years has been generally positive. More recently BERL reported:

“The Māori population totalled 775,800 in 2018, an increase of 30 percent since 2013. This included 527,000 Māori of working age (15 years and over), an increase of 33 percent. The number of Māori in employment in 2018 totalled 329,200. This is an increase of over 105,200, or 47 percent, since 2013, including a 46 percent increase in the number of Māori employers. The labour force participation rate increased from 66.9 percent in 2013, to 70.6 percent in 2018.”²³

Change in labour force and population, 2013 to 2018



Source: Statistics New Zealand

While Māori employment is usually disproportionately affected by recession, during the Covid pandemic Māori had the smallest increase in unemployment compared to other groups. According to the ANZ’s chief economist, Sharon Zollner:

Māori employment had typically been more vulnerable in previous recessions in New Zealand but 2020 was different.

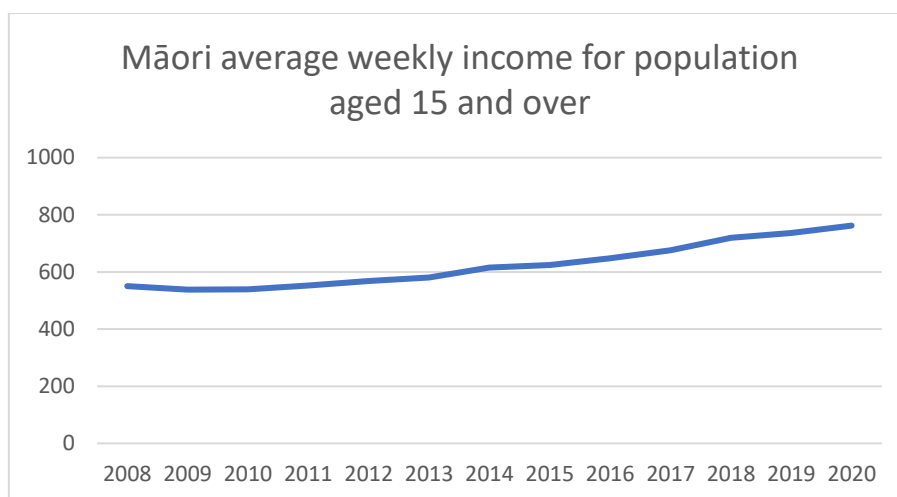
“It just so happens that industries where Māori are currently more likely to be employed have been the ones that have experienced some of the most robust recoveries.”²⁴

In 2000 Simon Chapple wrote the following synopsis:

"Māori ethnicity is a particularly poor predictor of labour market success or failure and there is considerable overlap between Māori and non-Māori outcomes. It is [those who identify as] sole Māori with low literacy, poor education, and living in geographical concentrations that have labour market problems, not the Māori ethnic group as a whole (there are probably also sub-cultural associations with benefit dependence, sole parenthood, early natality, drug and alcohol abuse, physical violence, and illegal cash cropping).²⁵

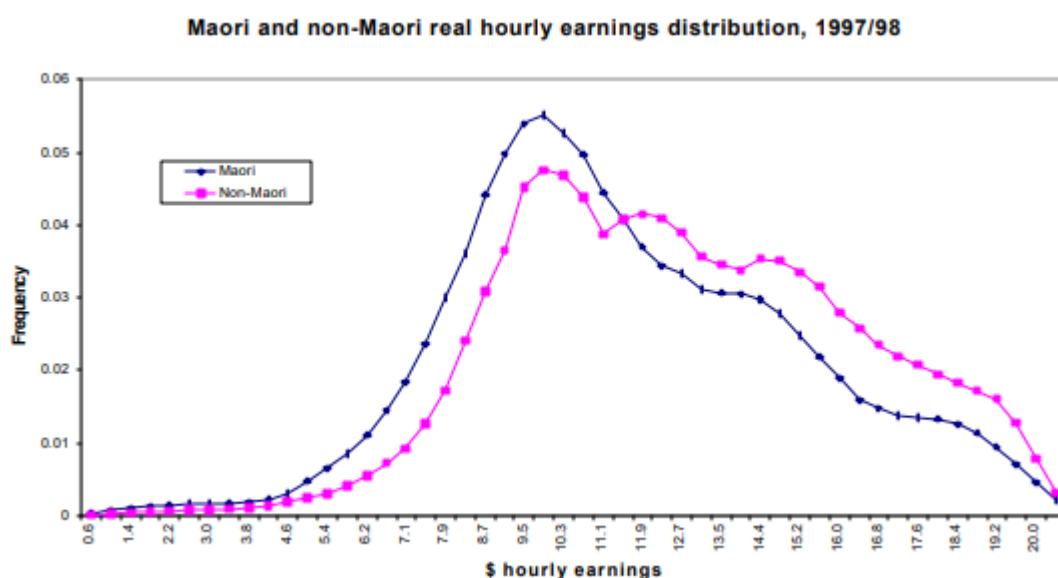
Incomes

The following average weekly income charted from 2008 includes income per person from *all* sources including, self-employment, wages and salaries, and government transfers eg benefits and superannuation:



Data source: NZ.Stat, Income by sex, age groups, ethnic groups and income source

While an earnings gap occurs between Māori and non-Māori, most Māori are normally distributed around the non-Māori bell curve:



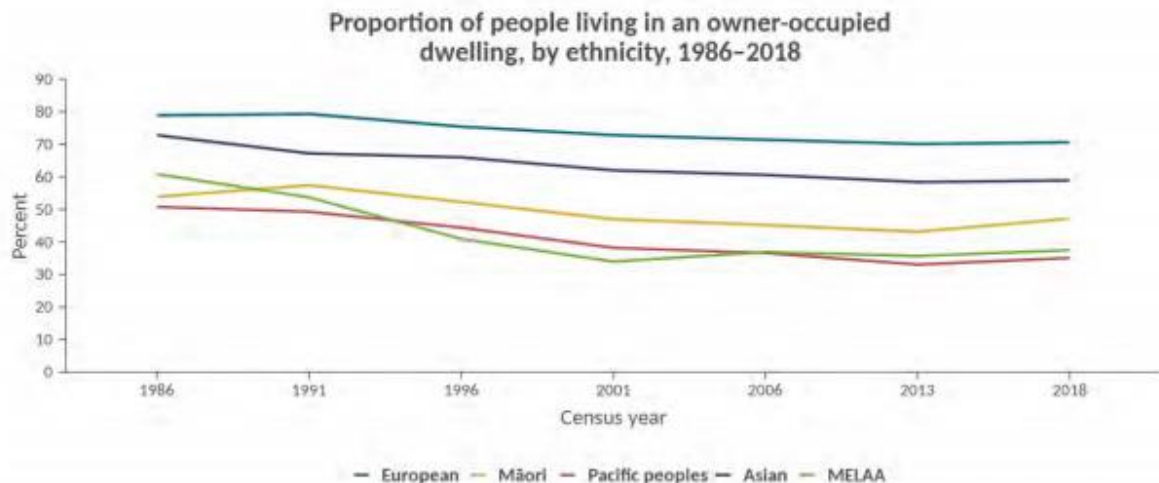
Source: Māori socio-economic disparity, Simon Chapple, 2000

According to Chapple:

“Māori do not share a common experience of socioeconomic disadvantage. The Māori ethnic group is not a group whose boundaries are well defined by socio-economic failure. Socio-economic differences amongst Māori as a group overwhelm socio-economic differences between Māori and other groups. Māori ethnicity is not socio-economic destiny.”²⁶

Housing

Home ownership is steadily dropping in NZ though between the 2013 and 2018 the proportion of Māori living in an owner-occupied dwelling increased:



Source: Housing in Aotearoa, 2020, Statistics New Zealand

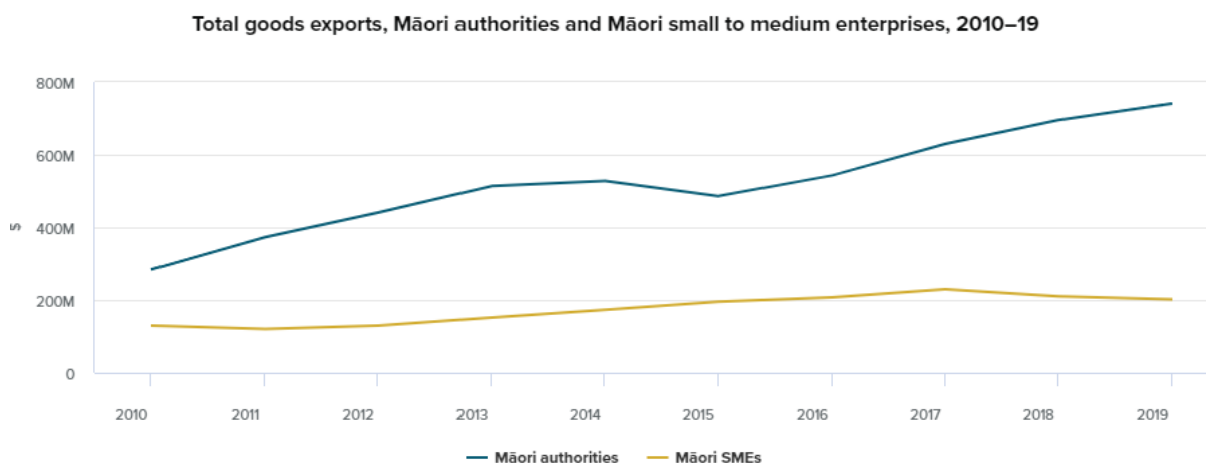
Business

According to Te Puni Kōkiri research circa 2006:

“In less than 15-years Māori have come to own diverse types of businesses, such as: • Private hospitals • Retirement villages • Wine and horticultural distribution channels • Thermal energy companies • Telecommunication businesses • Major tourism businesses and infrastructure • Large corporate dairy farms • Property developments in Australia”²⁷

In the eight-year period 2012-19 Māori-authority businesses grew in number by 25 percent. All NZ businesses increased by 15 percent over the same period.²⁸

Māori exporting grew steadily:



Source: Statistics New Zealand, Tatauranga umanga Māori – Statistics on Māori businesses: 2019

In 2019 Te Puni Kōkiri identified over 10,000 Māori businesses representing 6 percent of all New Zealand businesses.²⁹

The asset base of the Māori economy totalled \$68.7 billion in 2018. According to BERL:

“GDP from Te Ōhanga Māori [the Māori Economy] has increased from \$11 billion in 2013 to \$17 billion in 2018. Overall this increase in Te Ōhanga Māori GDP translates to 37 percent in real growth. This growth outcome compares with national growth in GDP of 20 percent in real terms over the same period.”

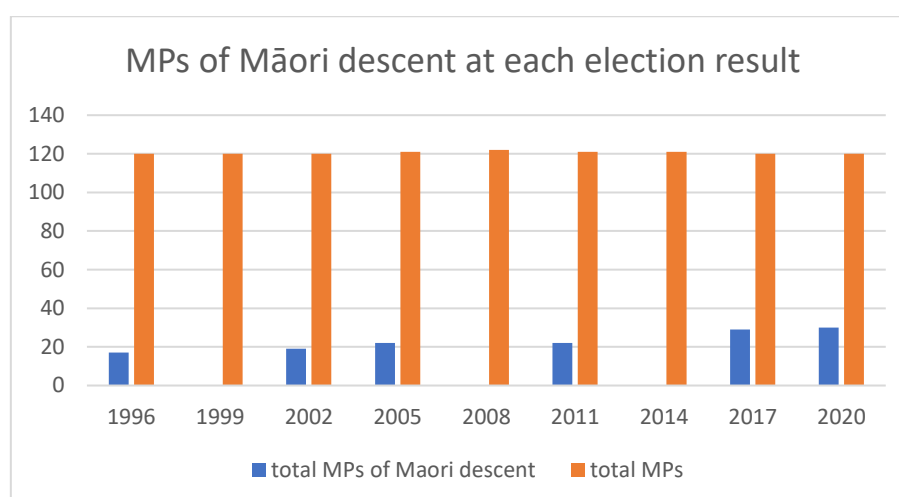
Māori businesses also benefit from tax advantages such as tribal corporations holding charitable status exempting them from paying tax.

Political Representation

Despite their initial introduction being temporary, Māori seats have persisted and increased from the four originally established in 1867 to seven today. Labour had dominated the Māori seats until the formation of New Zealand First, followed by the Māori Party.

James Carroll, in 1893, was the first Māori to win a general rather than a Māori seat. It wasn't till 1975 that another Māori would do this.³⁰

But after the 2020 election, a quarter of all MPs – up from 14 percent at the first MMP election in 1996 – were of Māori descent:



Some variation in numbers exists depending on whether an MP's Māori descent is acknowledged by the data source. Using the most conservative counts however Māori representation in parliament is currently above their representation in the general population.

Sporting and artistic achievement

A google search of 'Famous New Zealanders' produces a National Library resource for schools.³¹ Of the 45 names listed (which also includes individuals from other spheres of achievement), ten were Māori comprising George Nepia, Hone Heke, Sir Apirana Ngata, Witi Ihimaera, Willie Apiata, Princess Te Kerihaehae Puaa Herangi, Moana Maniapoto, Guide Rangī, Dame Whina Cooper and Melodie Robinson.

To prove a point, this brief list will prompt most readers to easily and immediately recall many more Māori names they could add. There is no shortage of Māori who have excelled in their chosen endeavours to become household names.

“... as our films, music, arts, sportspeople, businesses and high achievers have attracted international recognition we have felt a real pride in who and what we are.”³²

Parekura Horomia, Minister of Māori Affairs 2000-2008

Ethnic intermixing

More Māori partner with non-Māori - particularly European - than partner with Māori, such is the extent of inter-ethnic partnering in New Zealand. According to Corrections research the trend is long-standing.

“A detailed examination of marriages by Māori in Auckland in 1960 indicated almost half were to Pakeha.”³³

Census data shows:

Ethnic intermarriage in New Zealand

Table 4: Number of responses in each ethnic combination, opposite sex couples, Total counts, 2001

		Female				
		European	Māori	Pacific Peoples	Asian	Other
Male	European	589,860	35,268	7,068	9,867	1,263
	Māori	38,112	34,464	2,793	861	108
	Pacific Peoples	8,001	4,740	22,026	573	45
	Asian	3,570	717	684	37,716	57
	Other	1,557	162	81	183	2,574
Total Stated		616,386	66,057	30,315	48,135	3,813
						730,335

Source: Ethnic intermarriage in New Zealand

In an update comparing the 2001 and 2013 data Paul Callister noted, “There has been a small but important decline in the proportion of partnered Māori who have a Māori partner. In 2001, 53% of partnered Māori men had a Māori partner. In 2013 this declined to 48%. For Māori women the decline was from 52% to 47%.”³⁴

How children of those partnerships see themselves is another matter of interest.

Tahu Kukutai, 2003, argues that, “individuals who identify as Māori as well as non-Māori, but more strongly as the latter tend to be socially and economically much better off than all other Māori. Their demographic behaviour is similar to that of Europeans.”³⁵

Chapple notes:

“For some people their Māori identity is likely to be very central to their lives. Other Māori are unlikely to think it greatly important: other aspects of their social and personal identities – class, occupation or profession, job, education, religion, leisure pursuits, sports clubs or other gang connections, regional location, family, gender, political leanings and so on – may take precedence. Evidence that their ethnic identity is not all encompassing is the fact that many (roughly half of enrolled Māori) of Māori ancestry are reluctant to take part in national ethnic politics, enrolling on the general rather than Māori electoral roll for general elections. And of the Māori on the Māori roll, noteworthy are the relatively low levels of support for a number of parties based solely on the Māori ethnic group. Most Māori on the Māori electoral roll vote for mainstream non-ethnic parties, again evidence of considerable cultural similarities rather than differences.”³⁶

Migration

Like other Kiwis, Māori migrate, especially to Australia. A Te Puni Kōkiri report found nearly 83,000 – around one in six - NZ-born Māori living in Australia in 2011, with a further 45,000 identifying as having Māori ancestry. At a time when the world was emerging from the Global Financial Crisis, “Māori participation in the labour force and their rate of employment is similar to that of others in Australia.” NZ-born Māori earned a median annual income of \$45,185 compared to the Australian equivalent of \$46,571.³⁷

But what about those poor stats?

Possibly the most promulgated poor statistic relating to Māori is the imprisonment rate. Just over half (52.2%) of the prison population is Māori (4,477).³⁸ That represents however just 0.8% of all Māori aged 18 or older (545,700 at December 2020.)³⁹ It should also be noted that offender ‘preferred ethnicity’ self-identification may produce a similar bias to the practice of ethnicity prioritising referred to earlier.

In any event, imprisonment is heavily associated with a lack of educational qualifications, family breakdown and over-reliance on welfare in childhood. It represents the extreme outcome of compounding factors which drive other poor social outcomes. **Non-Māori also fare badly when these factors come into play.**

The New Zealand Treasury table below demonstrates this clear association.⁴⁰ Māori youth born 1990/91 had the highest likelihood of serving a corrections sentence, having neither level 2 or 4 qualifications and being long-term benefit dependent as children:

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics and outcomes for youth 1990/91 cohort

Characteristics	Cohort number	Cohort %	Estimated outcomes				
			No level 2 quals	No level 4 quals	Mental health	Corrections sentence	Long-term benefit
Gender							
Male	32,118	51%	28%	66%	18%	13%	5%
Female	30,627	49%	21%	55%	21%	5%	13%
Ethnicity							
Asian	4,464	7%	12%	42%	8%	2%	2%
European	39,270	63%	20%	55%	22%	5%	6%
Māori	13,182	21%	41%	78%	21%	21%	20%
Other	717	1%	21%	54%	16%	5%	4%
Pasifika	5,118	8%	30%	71%	11%	11%	11%

The next table expands on the link between length of benefit dependence and likelihood of receiving a corrections sentence:

Characteristics at age 15	Cohort number	Cohort %	Estimated outcomes				
			No level 2 quals	No level 4 quals	Mental health	Corrections sentence	Long-term benefit
Duration supported by benefit as a child							
None	30,636	49%	14%	50%	17%	4%	4%
1-10%	6,486	10%	21%	59%	19%	6%	7%
11-25%	4,944	8%	28%	65%	21%	9%	9%
26-50%	5,961	10%	32%	69%	21%	11%	12%
50-75%	5,145	8%	38%	75%	24%	14%	15%
76-85%	1,917	3%	42%	77%	26%	18%	18%
86-95%	2,055	3%	45%	80%	24%	20%	20%
95%+	5,607	9%	48%	81%	27%	22%	24%

Source: New Zealand Treasury, Using Integrated Administrative Data to Identify Youth Who are at Risk of Poor Outcomes as Adults (AP 15/02)

Conclusion

In 2010 United Nations special rapporteur, Prof Anaya said:

"I cannot help but note the extreme disadvantage in the social and economic conditions of Māori people, which are dramatically manifested in the continued and persistent high levels of incarceration of Māori individuals."⁴¹

For non-inhabitants of this country these comments create a strong impression of widespread discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage. Moreover, matters would appear to be worsening, now requiring international intervention.

As shown in this brief paper, this is simply not the case for *most* Māori. Their living standards have improved enormously, as has equality of opportunity.

Waitangi settlements have allowed tribes to instigate scholarship programmes, invest in business enterprises and educational facilities. There is widespread interest in and promotion of the Māori language and other cultural activities. Immersion schools are numerous. Māori health and social service organisations are growing in number.

The progress of Māori social and economic indicators that has occurred under the process of colonization stands in stark contrast to the constant barrage of contrary claims.

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