



## Ageing of ethnic groups



This paper was prepared by Bill Boddington of the Population Statistics unit of Statistics New Zealand as part of the article series: Structural Change and the 65+ Population.

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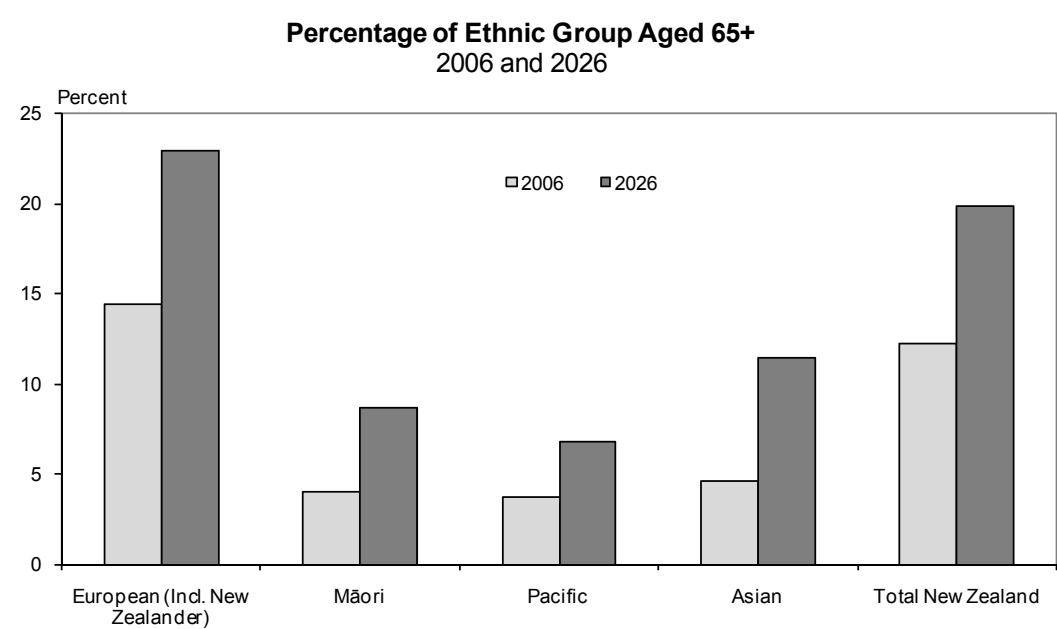
# Ageing of Ethnic Groups

## Ageing and ethnicity

Cultural differences in attitudes to ageing are marked. These differences can reflect past and present life experiences, life expectancies, images portrayed by the media, or the mythologies and traditions of each ethnic group.

Society, policy, and technology may have redefined what it means to be 'elderly' in recent years, but it is likely that this shift in perception is partly because of the overall growth in the 65+ population (those aged 65 years and over). If this is so, then the large variations in the proportion of each ethnic group's population aged 65+ will continue to contribute to differing cultural attitudes to ageing.

Figure 1



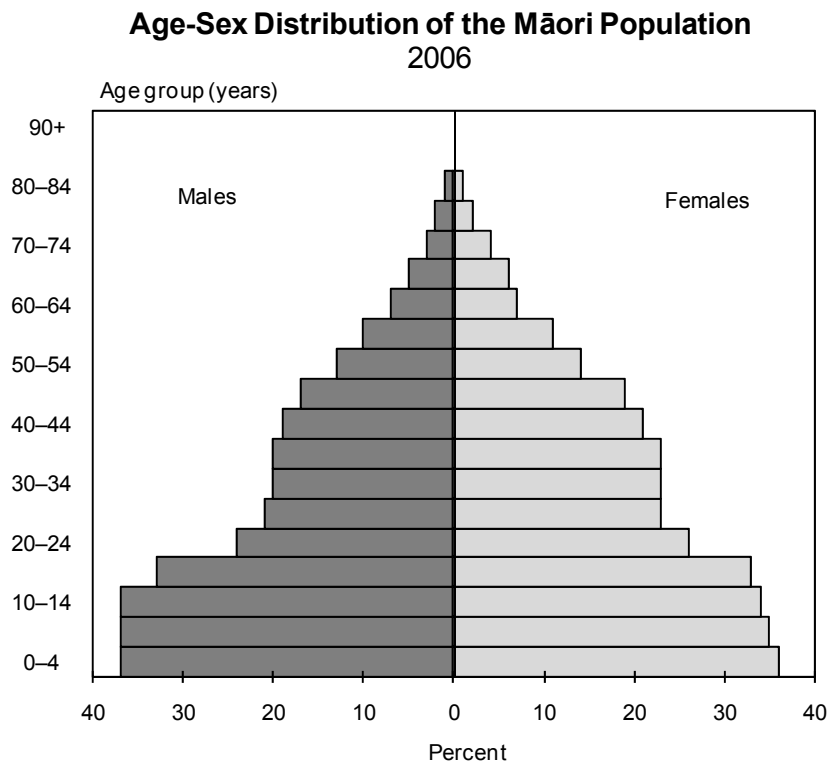
## Dependency measures

Among Māori, high fertility and the much higher mortality rates result in an under representation of people of Māori ethnicity at older ages (Positive Ageing Indicators, 2007). For Pacific and Asian communities, immigration gains over the last 50 years have also contributed to the proportions of their populations aged 65+ being small. Nevertheless, such aged-dependency measures are misleading when calculated for ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup>

Inter-ethnic marriage is a significant factor in the observed younger age structure of Māori and Pacific populations. Ethnic populations are not closed – non-Māori women can give birth to Māori children or have Māori grandchildren. The age-sex pyramid for the Māori population shows almost one-quarter of the population were aged under 10 in 2006. Yet based on birth registrations, approximately half of these children have at least one parent who does not identify as being Māori

<sup>1</sup> Aged-dependency measures give the proportion of elderly to the working-age population.

Figure 2



For data received during the period 2005–07, population projection methodology calculates the average number of live births Pacific males had with non-Pacific women during their life was 1.05 children per man. On average, Māori males were estimated to have contributed 0.97 children with non-Māori women over the same period. In contrast, European and Asian males who partnered with females outside their ethnic group are estimated to have contributed only 0.14 and 0.20 children, respectively.

With this paternal effect and maternal fertility combined, Pacific peoples have almost twice the level of fertility needed to maintain population growth and Māori have 1.75 times the required growth. Even allowing for the effects of intermarriage, neither the European nor the Asian ethnic groups will grow through natural increase. The fact that ethnic age-sex pyramids are not closed, but contains only the ethnic forebears, is very significant for Māori and for Pacific peoples. For Europeans, the effects of intermarriage on age structure are relatively small but still contribute positively to growth; this highlights the error of assuming that non-Māori can be used as proxy for European – the contribution of intermarriage to non-Māori growth is negative.

Dependency ratios imply a closed population in which only Māori are cared for, supported and nurtured by Māori, but if half of Māori children have a parent who only identified with a non-Māori ethnic group(s), then this is clearly not the case. The number of Māori children with grandparent(s) who are not of Māori ethnicity is undoubtedly much higher than 50 percent, for even where both parents identified as Māori, 46 percent of the time, at least one parent also indicated a non-Māori whakapapa (lineage, descent).

Grandparent/grandchild relationships are often a key element in the intergenerational transfer of social and cultural heritage. Higher Māori mortality may have the outcome that non-Māori grandparents have a significant cultural influence on their Māori grandchildren, simply through survival. The loss of Māori

tīpuna (grandparents) means that marae, hapū and whānau-based activities, as well the leadership of kāumatua (elders), have increased importance for the intergenerational transfer of Māori cultural heritage.

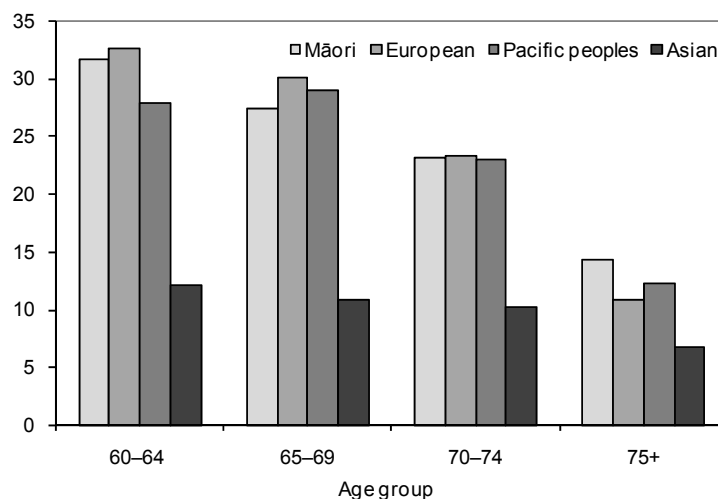
## Kāumatua

Western culture has long held a pessimistic view of ageing. William Shakespeare refers to seven stages of man: infant, school-boy, lover, soldier, justice, pantaloons, and finally a second childhood "... sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.". Advertising tycoon Bruce Barton famously reduced the stages to just four: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and obsolescence. In contrast to Western cultures, many other cultures associate age with mana, status, and additional social/community responsibility. For example, for Māori the mana and standing associated with kāumatua status normally conferred on Māori elders in their mid-60s, also comes with considerable responsibility for marae, whānau and hapū. Eventually, the active kāumatua role switches to a more passive, supportive function. At this stage, kāumatua become 'taonga'; an asset to the tribe and afforded care and protection, while being spared the full rigor of marae obligations (Durie, 1999).

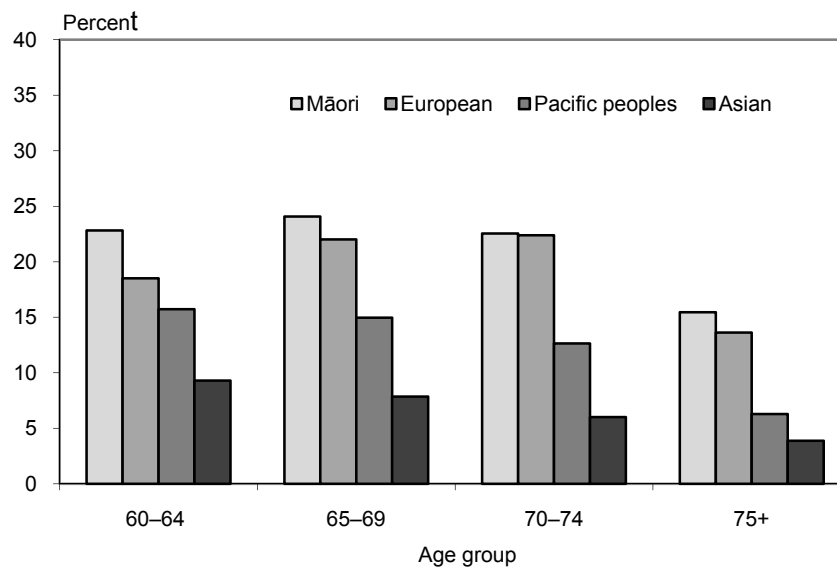
Kāumatua are noted for their public and busy lives. A traditional European view is that the ages 65 onwards are a time put your feet up and to take a less publicly active role. However, the 2006 Census data on voluntary work done by the 65+ population for non-household members and organisations does not support this traditional European stereotype. Based on the census measure of voluntary work, Māori, European, and Pacific populations have very similar levels of involvement in unpaid work outside their own household.

Figure 3

### Unpaid Care of Non-household Children and Infirm 2006 Census



### Voluntary Work Through Group Organisation or Marae 2006 Census



Note that the census only measures involvement in unpaid work, not the number of hours spent doing it. Nevertheless, figure 3 suggests that similar proportions of the Māori, Pacific, and European populations contribute to communities through unpaid work in older age. Despite the similarity for these three groups, it is important to remember that there might be cultural differences in the way that they report their involvement in voluntary work. The census question on unpaid activities includes a tick box on 'voluntary work for or through any organisation, group or marae'. Pacific communities are noted for their church-based activities, but may not view their church-based work as fitting within 'organisation, group or marae'. This may well explain the slightly lower levels of Pacific peoples involved in voluntary organisations.

The Asian ethnic group stands out from the other three groups because of its relatively low levels of voluntary work for non-household members and organisations. Interestingly, there appears to be no association between voluntary work and labour force participation. Those aged 65+ in the Asian ethnic group have the lowest levels of labour force participation (10.5 percent), while the European and Pacific groups have very similar levels (16.6 percent), and Māori have the highest labour force participation at ages 65+ (24.0 percent). Kāumatua do appear to be very busy people, not just because of their voluntary work, but because in many cases they are balancing unpaid activities and paid work at the same time.

### Immigration and transnational families

Ethnic groups with a recent history of immigration also experience an intermarriage effect. However, it is the migration process itself that makes it difficult to understand intergenerational dependency and support. At the 2006 Census there were approximately 700,000 people aged 15–64 years who were born overseas. Physical distance and national borders can be a barrier for family support networks that extend overseas. However, travel overseas is not always more difficult than travel within New Zealand, so it is logical to assume that substantial support networks extend overseas. Moreover, the expatriate Kiwi population is estimated to only be slightly smaller than the overseas-born population living in New Zealand. Therefore, some older New Zealanders will be receiving support from children living overseas and some immigrant populations will be supporting parents and family overseas. To some extent, the

resource bases are equal in size; nevertheless, transnational support does create special challenges, particularly for an island nation like New Zealand.

Family and social reasons are common motivations for migration.<sup>2</sup> As transnational families experience lifecycle changes, particularly as parents age, they can experience pressure to emigrate or to seek to bring family together via family re-unification migration programmes. In a climate of international ageing and increased competition for skilled workers, these pressures have particular significance. Many countries, including China, Korea, and Eastern Europe, are starting to look towards expatriate populations to help address skill shortages and structural change.<sup>3</sup>

## Increasing family diversity

Families extend beyond individual dwellings, across ethnic groups and international boundaries. Human relationships and interactions are undoubtedly influenced by living arrangements, ethnicity, cultural groups, and geographic boundaries; however, they are rarely suppressed by these things.

Family support networks for the 65+ population extend into and out of New Zealand. It is not possible to say with any certainty what proportion of the 700,000 overseas-born New Zealand residents aged 15–64 have parents currently living overseas. Similarly, a significant number of New Zealand parents will have offspring currently living overseas. Since nations differ in state provided care and support in old age, population size may be a poor guide to the transfer of resources in these transnational families.

International mobility makes population analysis based on national boundaries increasingly incomplete. Similarly, inter-ethnic mobility and inter-ethnic partnering make analysis based on ethnic groupings deficient. In particular, inter-ethnic marriages/unions are a significant factor in the younger age structures of Māori and Pacific peoples. For example, it is increasingly common for Māori and Pacific children to have a parent or grandparent(s) who identifies solely with the European ethnic group. So as the number of relatives widens, the concept of a Māori, Pacific or European family is increasingly hard to define.

Because of high levels of past and current inter-ethnic partnering, Māori and Pacific families are likely to remain much more culturally diverse. It is also probable that partners, children, parents, and grandparents who do not identify with the Maori ethnic group, but share an affinity with that group, have a distinctly different ageing experience. To understand the experience of ageing, particularly for Māori and Pacific peoples, it is very important to consider family dynamics.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stats.govt.nz/analytical-reports/internal-migration-report/reasons-for-moving-within-and-between-regions/reasons-for-moving-within-and-between-regions.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2006/UsingReturnMigrationAsaDevelopmentToolAretheRightPoliciesinPlace.aspx>

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