

HEALTH OF MAORI CHILDREN

“SHORTER EXPECTATION OF LIFE”

Maori women should make sure that the child benefit was spent on food and clothes for the child and not on canned foods, cakes, sweets, taxis or gambling, said Miss E. M. Armstrong, representing the Department of Health, in an address to the Dominion conference of the Maori Women's Welfare League at Auckland.

Poor sanitation and hygiene, poor housing, faulty diet and improper clothing, said Miss Armstrong, had all helped to undermine the health of the Maori race. There had been a steady increase in the Maori birth-rate since the beginning of the century, but there was also a shorter expectation of life.

“When we compare European and Maori statistics,” she said, “we find that the death-rate of Maori infants under one year is four times as great as that of the European.

“Proportionately three and a half times as many Maori children die under one year as do Europeans and seven times as many die under five years of age. The main causes of this higher death-rate are poor environment, poor nutrition, infectious diseases and less-efficient infant care. The Maori death-rate from respiratory diseases is about six times as high as the European and the tuberculosis death-rate is 10 times as high. Changes in the social life of the Maori race since the advent of the Europeans have brought about many changes in their health.

“For many years the European infant death-rate has declined steadily, but only recently has this tendency been shown in Maori statistics. Seventy per cent. of European, but only 19 per cent. of Maori children who die, do so during the first month of their lives, showing that the Maori baby is as healthy at birth as the European.”

Insufficient attention was paid to diet in many Maori homes, said Miss Armstrong, and many families lived on potatoes, bread, sugar and tea. Every Maori home should have a vegetable garden, and diets should include more milk and eggs.

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