



Department of Social Work and Social Administration
The University of Hong Kong

Caritas Addicted Gamblers Counselling Centre

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***"Gambling and Death"-
A Study on Relationship between Gambling and
Ideation of Suicide and/or Familicide***

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I. Research Objectives

- 1.1 To increase public awareness of the association between gambling and suicidal ideation (and even familicidal ideation). Hence, timely preventive action can be arranged for high-risk gamblers to avoid tragedy from happening.
- 1.2 Enriching the understanding about the bridge between gambling and suicidal ideations equips the front-line service providers with knowledge to effectively approach the high-risk service seekers. A timely, precise, and multi-disciplinarily designed counseling package, as a result, can be delivered.

II. Research Method

- The study included 3,685 gamblers who were serviced in the past decade, 2003-2012. There included 3,171 (86.1%) male and 514 (13.9%) female.

III. Content of the Study

- 3.1 The study investigated the prevalence of suicidal and familicidal-suicidal ideations among the service seekers.
- 3.2 The characteristics of participants with suicidal ideation and familicidal-suicidal ideation were discussed.
- 3.3 The source of data (the intake form) included information of:
 - Demographics
 - Gambling-related experiences
 - Occurrence of suicidal ideation or familicidal-suicidal ideation
 - Physical health
 - Mental health
 - Other presenting problems

IV. Research Result

- 4.1 Of the 3,685 individuals, 3,275 completed *South Oaks Gambling Screen* to investigate the severity of gambling behaviors. The gamblers were assessed and classified into groups: 2,669 (81.5%) were *Pathological Gamblers*, 473 (14.44%) *Significant Gambling Problems*, 89 (2.72%) *Possible Risk of Developing Gambling Problems*, 44(1.34%) *Normal*
- 4.2 720 (20%) reported occurrence of suicidal ideation and 22 (0.6%) reported they had considered taking their family members with them.
- 4.3 The higher *the suicidal ideation levels*, the larger proportion of gamblers reported that they were experiencing other presenting problems of mental and physical wellbeing (including insomnia, loss of appetite, etc.) at that period of time.
- 4.4 Compare to the gamblers without reporting insomnia, those with insomnia were 1.85 times more likely to scale up from non-suicidal to suicidal or even familicidal-suicidal.
- 4.5 Compare to gamblers without reporting the lack of motivation to

work, individuals who were unmotivated to work were 1.64 times more likely to step up from non-suicidal to suicidal or even familicidal-suicidal.

V. Conclusion

Based on the findings, physical health and mental wellbeing, the financial problems and impacts on family and that were presenting to the pathological gamblers should not be shadowed.

Hence, we recommend that frontline staff and the families should be aware of the psychological condition of the problem gamblers such as depression, anxiety, etc. At the same time, their economic status, health (including the sleep quality and appetite) should not be overlooked. Thereafter, appropriate and timely intervention and counseling services can be provided.

Highlights:

1. 2014 FIFA World Cup is coming, we encourage problem gamblers, especially those who have considered completing suicide, to seek help as early as possible,
Hotline for gambling-related counseling service: 183 4633;
2. To prevent young people from participating in gambling activities when they are too young to handle its consequences, our Government must legislate the minimum legal age to gambling to 21;
3. The global economic environment is rapidly changing. It is unwise for people to use gambling as a way to deal with their financial difficulties. This will lead to even more problems; and
4. Although the tax charge from legal gambling could be a way to increase public revenue, the adverse effect of legal gambling to the public should not be overlooked. To strike a balance, the Government is encouraged to set up a surveillance and monitoring system on public's gambling behavior and conduct indicated studies regularly.

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