

The Certified Gambling Counselling Training Course was a comprehensive course for counselling professionals to understand simply from theory knowledge of problem gambling, counselling techniques for both gamblers and their families to understand the inner voice of gamblers and their family members in the sharing sessions and hotline service.

The fruitful eight weeks gambling counselling course let me really understand how psychology of gambling affects everything, from the games gamblers play to how much they bet and how they handle winning and losing. In addition, how they try to make sense of the randomness in gambling. I understand not only the relationship of cognitive distortions to gamblers such as near miss beliefs and the reasons why they experience the consideration of chasing losses; the need to gamble with increasing amounts of money to get the same excitement or borrowing from family and friends to help with a desperate financial situation caused by gambling etc. The relationship between money and gambling is not as simple as I understand before. Gamblers treat money is not only a media to access in gambling, but also a key motivation for engagement, a potential reward that cause the gambling behavior to become excessive or uncontrolled.

During the macau casino visit, it was not hard to imagine how gamblers are easily attracted to such recreational environments that offer a range of entertainment options such as food, beverage and shows. Under those environment, gamblers can interact socially and test their luck and skill, leading to enhanced social integration, stimulation and self-esteem. More importantly, gambling is also a means of overcoming boredom to gamblers.

After attending the sharing sessions of gamblers and their families, I can fully understand how much gambling can hurt gamblers and their families. Gamblers will go to extreme measures to get money to gamble. I am sadden and shocked to hear that gamblers had the powerlessness and lack of control that under the urge of gambling. They seemed to have effectively been hijacked by gambling thoughts and activities. As such, they were disengaged from their work, families, social lives. Gambling has become their main focus as nothing else is giving them pleasure or satisfaction.

Besides the impacts to the gambler individuals, their families may be affected in different ways. Since gambling problems can be hidden for a long time; so many families are shocked when they learn how much money has been lost and large amount of debt the gamblers have borrowed. As such, financial devastation for gamblers and their families is unavoidable. Endless lies, staying out late or not coming home at all. Threats from creditors called and losing hope for the future. Family members struggle with mounting debts, feeling pushed in a corner by the gambler's demands. When

the spouse, children, siblings and other family members can no longer trust the gambler, feel no sense of security and have no confidence in the gambler or even fear for their future, all contribute to the dissolution of family ties. The result is a breakdown in the family relationships as many families under stress have trouble coping that lead to burnout. On the other hand, I am impressed that many of the spouses try to keep their families together so they seek help from counseling professionals. It is so amazed to see the importance of the family role in the recovery process. I could also see the powerful support effects either physically or psychologically to the healing process of the gamblers although it is such a long-term journey. Though there was tears and complaints between gamblers and their family members seen in the group sharings. There was ambivalent feelings of touched and heartbreaking during family sharings.

I could also see the difficulties that counselling professionals face in the counselling progress. From the sharing of different cases by the counselors, gamblers usually see that gambling as a means of distraction from worry, emotional distress, life stressful issues, tensions and confronting problems. This maladaptive coping strategies caused barriers to motivate gamblers to receive counselling service. In addition, some people with gambling problems find it very hard to get their gambling under control or to stop. If there was any unexpected trigger or a buildup of stress in life, it will lead to relapse. It is difficult to make changes consistently without ever making a mistake.

Last but not the least, I think implementing primary prevention programs in the society to prevent problems before they occur are far more important than counselling services to the problem gamblers . The focus is on educational campaigns using electronic and print media, school programs, videos and presentations designed to raise awareness and improve knowledge about the risks and benefits of gambling and gambling products. These campaigns may address misconceptions about luck and chance in gambling, assist in developing and enhancing a broad range of living skills including coping, social and financial management.

In conclusion, sometimes the addiction is just used as a coping mechanism to try and deal with unresolved issues or ongoing pressures, it is so important that the gamblers finally seek help to address their problems. Although some relationships do not survive in gambling problem, other families struggle through difficulties and grow stronger together after the help of counseling professionals. People can and do recover from problem gambling, but it takes really long time and patience to work through all the issues.

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