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## **Problem Gambling and Ethno-Cultural Groups**

The issue of problem gambling within ethno cultural communities is very much an issue of access and mostly due to language barriers.

Ethnicity applies to all cultural groups. It is not exclusive to minority ethno-cultural communities.

### **THE PROBLEM IS THE SAME**

Q: Why talk about gambling and ethno-cultural groups?

A: Problem gambling is the same for every culture.

Gambling is a universal human activity. At present, research indicates that the percentage of pathological gamblers is the same for all peoples.

95% of the population are healthy when it comes to gambling and have been involved in gambling activities,

5% of the population are problem gamblers, and

1% of the 5% are compulsive/pathological gamblers.

**"The rate of gambling activity amongst ethno-cultural groups is similar to gambling rates for the general population. (ARF Study, 1996)"**

However, we need to emphasize that is not the issue of gambling but the lack of access to information and resources that may place individuals from ethno-cultural groups at risk of further developing the problem.

The prevalence of gambling within Toronto's Chinese community appears to be lower than the general adult population across Canada, despite stereotypes of the high prevalence of gambling among the Chinese. **Chinese Family Life Services Study (1998).**

There is very little research done in regard to Problem Gambling and Ethno-Cultural Communities. Due to this situation, this website will be treated as a "work-in-progress" and it will be updated as soon as more information is available.

## **Are the reasons for ethno/multicultural communities and gambling different?**

Whether people belong to ethno cultural or multicultural communities or the mainstream culture, the reasons for gambling, and the problems that can develop are the same.

According to the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, CAMH, People from different cultural backgrounds gamble:

- **To socialize**
- **To escape problems and isolation**
- **To socialize with members of cultural groups**
- **To regain social status**
- **To celebrate religious festivals**

Gambling is a way to socialize for all peoples. However, people of different cultural backgrounds have unique social and recreational activities as well as their preferences for games. In the Italian community for example, card playing is very popular, whether at home or at social clubs. Children of Asian cultural background are taught to play the game Mahjong, or Fan-Tan, which is a traditional and very simple pebble-counting game. “Fan” means “to turn over” an object, which could be a cup or a bowl, and “Tan” means “spread out” the stones.

When talking about gambling and ethno-cultural groups we have to acknowledge the issue of immigration – life in transition. The extra stress on newcomers and refugees may put them in a more vulnerable position to develop a problem as an escape to release feelings of loneliness, homesickness, sadness and anguish.

People from different cultural backgrounds may use gambling to regain lost status, to feel part of the new community, part of the crowd, to feel that one “belongs”. However, the social stigma that is attached to gambling among ethno-cultural populations within their own communities may prevent gamblers who may develop a problem to neither admit that there is a problem within certain community nor to seek the professional necessary help. Therefore, few will acknowledge that one may have a gambling problem and that external help to address the problem is needed. There is a greater stress on family members to deal with this problem and also to provide the necessary health, financial and legal care.

There can also be an issue of conflict of values between gambling as a religious or cultural practice, versus the modern western practice of gambling for entertainment.

Since gambling is a tourist attraction, there are more opportunities for multilingual people to be employed within the gaming industry (casinos, bingo halls, etc.). Due to the availability/accessibility of gambling venues, there is a high incidence of problem gambling within the gaming industry.

### **Why then talk about ethno/multicultural communities and gambling?**

Ethno-cultural communities are under-represented in gambling treatment. The lack of appropriate, culturally sensitive counselling services specifically designed for ethno cultural populations in specific languages mean that these populations don't have equal access to services and therefore they may be in a more vulnerable situation.

The Ontario Problem Gambling Help line within the period of July 1, 2000 to June 30 2001, has received 7,284 phone calls. From those calls, 3,777 were requests for general information and 3,548 were requests for treatment services, from which 24 calls were tabulated to request services in languages other than English. The languages in which services were requested are: Punjabi, Serbian/Croatian, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Portuguese, French, Tamil, Spanish, Chinese, Polish, Farsi and German. There's also a demand for tools to assess the risks and treatment needs of problem gamblers to be interpreted in other languages.

According to Statistics Canada's 1996 Census, multicultural communities In Ontario make up 1/3 of the population of Toronto, 8% of the population of Hamilton, Kitchener and London, and 3.5% of the population in the St. Catharines-Niagara area.

Due to the increased numbers of gambling venues in Niagara, Ontario, Canada and globally, more research on gambling and ethno-cultural communities is necessary. As of May 2001, the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre (OPGRC) as awarded \$1.6 million for research focusing on special populations, which includes amongst others: ethno-cultural groups.

The results of this report will be a great help in overcoming this situation. Once more information is available, effective practices for the assessment and

treatment of problem gambling for ethno-cultural populations will mean that more Ontarians can get help.

### **Developing Effective Practices for Ethno-Cultural Groups**

Working in partnership and/or very closely with ethno-cultural communities is a key element for developing effective and alternative mental health practices to address the issue of problem gambling.

As A. Blaszczynski, concludes in his article “Gambling Problems in a Multicultural Society”, of research done in Australia,

***“In order to achieve better outcomes for ethnic clients, therapists must accommodate cultural differences and specific cultural needs of ethnic clients. The cultural background of ethnic clients provides them with a context for actions and interactions with each other. This context will have embedded in it culturally based beliefs, values, attitudes and role requirements. Awareness of the influence of culture will allow therapists to gain more relevant information from ethnic clients by asking more appropriate questions and allow for more culturally appropriate interventions.”***

These practices must include:

- **Outreach**
- **Developing partnerships and/or coalitions**
- **Prevention and awareness programs**
- **Counselling in various languages**
- **Language-specific publications**
- **Increased collaboration with service agencies working specifically with ethno-cultural groups**
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**Ways counsellors can test and modify their own attitudes and perceptions**

- **Counsellors need to increase self-awareness and develop relevant skills**
- **Focus on the individual.**
- **Learn the cultural and religious beliefs, and traditions related to gambling.**
- **Consider the element of stress.**

- Consider the role of family in the person's culture.
- Understand the concept of "time" (provide extra time, longer appointments, flexibility in keeping/missing appointment, lateness, etc.)
- Understand the family's structure and expected roles within each culture,
- Find out about the historical cultural perspective and context of gambling.
- Learn about the perception of gambling in the client's culture.
- Know the common forms of gambling of client's particular culture.



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