

An Exploratory Study through a Cultural Life Course Perspective: Gambling in Older Asian People in a Canadian Context

Summary Report for the Manitoba Gambling Research Program

Investigator:

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Research Priority:

Investigate how economic, cultural/social, or jurisdictional factors influence gambling behaviour and what the implication may be for preventing and/or reducing gambling-related harm.

Significance

Although much research on gambling has focused on gambling motivation, patterns and impacts among some vulnerable groups (e.g., youth, women, Aboriginal peoples), research efforts to understand the development and maintenance of gambling behaviors among older adults with diverse cultural backgrounds is scarce. This study is one of the first attempts to explore gambling among older Chinese- and Filipino-Canadian gamblers from a cultural life-course perspective.

Cultural minority groups are vulnerable because they are more likely to wager more heavily when gambling and gamble more frequently than the general gambling population, and less likely to seek help from professionals when at risk of disordered gambling (Raylu & Oei, 2004; Kim, 2012). It is evident that cognition, personality, psychological aspects and familial factors cannot explain all gambling behaviors, and cultural variables also play a role in the development and maintenance of gambling behaviors among older people (Tse et al., 2013; VCGA, 1999; Raylu & Oei, 2002).

Temporal transitions and life-cycle events and individuals' cross-sectional relationships with others are entangled and interact with gambling behaviors, particularly in the case of problem gambling (McComb, Lee & Sprenkle, 2009; Lee, 2014). Participants' experience of maltreatment and trauma before the age of 18 also played a prevalent role in them developing pathological gambling behaviors later in life (Lee, 2014).

Research in cultural minority gamblers and older gamblers is limited. Also missing from the literature is a comprehensive depiction of gambling behavior, motivations for gambling and the impact of gambling on individuals and their families, presented from the gambler's perspective, as are the perceptions of intervention practitioners in terms of the suitability and accessibility of intervention methods for older gamblers of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Research Questions

1. Describe Chinese and Filipino seniors' perceptions of gambling, motivations to gamble, gambling behavior and patterns;
2. Examine the role of culture in the development and maintenance of gambling over the life course; and
3. Identify help-seeking behavior in these populations in Winnipeg.

Methodology

Applying the grounded theory approach through a life-course perspective, the researcher describes gambling motives, behavior and help-seeking patterns. The life-course perspective encompasses personal, historical, cohort, social and network factors in individuals' lives. Older Chinese- and Filipino-Canadian gamblers are analyzed and presented separately in a life-course framework consisting of three categories—childhood and adolescence, adulthood, and older adulthood. Individual cases are also examined and analyzed in comparison.

The research results from a mixed-methods study with qualitative data as a primary analysis base and quantitative data serving as secondary and supplementary. Fifteen older Chinese gamblers, eighteen Filipino gamblers, four gambling-service providers and three intervention-service providers were interviewed individually.

Key Findings

Older Chinese- and Filipino-Canadian gamblers presented similarities in gambling behavior and motivation (e.g., early exposure to and onset of gambling; cultural acceptance of recreational gambling), but differences seemed more prevalent.

While older Filipino gamblers demonstrated more gambling behaviors commonly found in general gamblers than their Chinese counterparts, older Chinese gamblers seemed to have been affected more by trauma related to war and political conflicts early in life. Older Chinese gamblers demonstrated a solitary nature of parallel playing/gambling, and they seemed to be withdrawing from social interactions or cooperative activities. Gambling in parallel did appear to represent a concerning pattern of disengagement of social interactions and cooperative activities (Cumming & Henry, 1961; Achenbaum, 2009; McInnis-Dittich, 2014). A tentative theoretical model consisting of personal, familial, historical, and structural factors is proposed to understand the complexity of older Chinese gamblers' gambling behaviors.

Older Filipino gamblers' views about gambling were closely related to the level of their gambling severity. Problem and heavy gamblers expressed strong negative views about gambling; while those who had controlled gambling habits held much more positive views. Many of them reported poor cognitive control of spending and inability to resist triggering cues and temptation. They also developed personal strategies to rationally control their gambling such as setting different types of budgets.

Conclusions

Suggestions for intervention and policy were drawn based on insights of older gamblers, gaming industry workers and intervention workers. Those include: 1) interventions involving community development, group work and peer support, and individual counselling; 2) promotions of existing resources and supports; and 3) suggestions for gaming facilities such as

organizing programs that could attract older adults and keep them healthy (e.g., a walking group, a karaoke night, bowling or swimming, a EAL program at casino, or gambling games using pseudo currency). It was also advised that the process of voluntary self-exclusion should be easy to access, and become effective immediately.

Implications

This study described and analyzed the life trajectories of these two groups of older gamblers and how the life course interacted with gambling. Despite current intervention programs and viable suggestions from the findings, what effective intervention strategies work well for older gamblers with diverse cultural backgrounds remains largely unanswered. Practitioners and policymakers may need step beyond focusing on “correction” to ask themselves a few questions regarding culturally diverse older gamblers. For example, can our services/programs meet their needs in terms of affordability, accessibility and fun? If yes, what are the services we need to offer and how should we deliver them? How do we sustain these services/programs? And, is it possible for social services to collaborate with the gambling industry to provide for such program?



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