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## Report on Female Gamblers' Gambling Participation and Psychological Well-being

Commissioned by the Social Welfare Bureau, Macau S. A. R.

Government

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Macau

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# Executive Summary

## Purpose

Commissioned by the Social Welfare Bureau, the University of Macau conducted a study on “Female Gamblers’ Gambling Participation and Psychological Well-being” (Referred to as “Female Gamblers Survey”). The study aims at gathering facts on Macao female gamblers and assessing their gambling motivations so that the Social Welfare Bureau can develop measures assisting those female gamblers in need. The “Female Gamblers Survey” has two components, namely the “Telephone Poll” and the “Focus Groups”.

In the “Telephone Poll”, 1013 randomly recruited Macao female gamblers aged 18 years or above completed the questionnaire on phone. The summary of results is as follows:

- Female gamblers preferred to gamble with others, like friends and family, and only 27% of them preferred to gamble alone.
- Over half of the respondents took part in social gambling with their relatives and friends (57%) or bought Mark Six (54%), while some of them preferred gambling at casinos (17%), slot machines (15.60%) or Mahjong houses (4.44%). Only a few took part in gambling activities such as racing track and football/basketball games.
- Regarding the DSM IV scale score, 95.05% (940 people) of respondents scored 2 or below; 2.8% (28 people) respondents scored 3 to 4 and were classified as “probable problem gamblers”; and 2.1% (21 people) respondents scored 5 or above and were classified as “probable pathological gamblers”. Compared with the results of the “Survey on Macau Residents’ Gambling Activities Participation 2010”, the prevalence rate reported by the “Female Gamblers Survey” seems lower, but these two surveys may not be comparable, because the sample of “female gamblers survey” only included female who aged 18 years or older with gambling experience in the past year.
- Regarding gambling motives (namely self-worth, monetary gain, sensation seeking, boredom alleviation, learning, and socialization), most respondents took part in gambling for socialization and boredom alleviation. Unlike male gamblers, searching for self-worth is not a major gambling motive for female gamblers. There was a positive

correlation between all six gambling motives and gambling intention.

- Female gamblers with greater gambling motives on self-worth, monetary gain, sensation seeking, boredom alleviation, and learning reported more addiction symptoms listed on the DSM-IV scale.
- “Probable problem/pathological gamblers“ reported greater motives on boredom alleviation and socialization. Therefore, female gamblers who gambled for the reasons of seeking excitement and social contact may be easier to get addicted to gambling.
- The median age of first-time gambling is 21 years. There was a positive correlation among the age of first-time gambling, socialization motive, and gambling intention. That is, those respondents who started gambling at an earlier age had a higher motivation to gamble for socialization and a stronger intention to engage in gambling again in the near future.
- There was a negative correlation between the degree of being respected by the family and gambling motives on self-worth, learning, sensation-seeking, and monetary gain; that is those who perceived not being appreciated by the families reported greater gambling motives on the mentioned domains. Also, the degree of being respected by family had a negative correlation with DSM-IV, but a positive correlation with GHQ score. Those who were not respected at home reported more addiction symptoms and were less physically/mentally healthy. The present findings show that the status of a woman in her family may have a greater effect on gambling and health than the actual household workload in the family.
- Female who spent more time on housework have higher motivation to gamble.
- Regarding the six aspects of life (family, work, social, housework and individual or family financial situation), the majority of respondents felt that gambling activities did not have any major impacts. However, some respondents perceived that gambling activities affected their family life negatively (14%) while it influenced their social life positively (13%).
- No difference was found between gaming industry workers and non gaming industry worker on the perceptions of the impacts of gambling.
- “Probable problem/pathological gamblers” reported that gambling activities positively influenced every aspect of their life (average value higher than 3); this indicated that they had distorted perception on gambling consequences.
- The health condition of gambling industry employees was worse than their counterparts.

- Health was negatively correlated with most gambling motives (except socialization motive); that is, unhealthy female gamblers reported higher motivation to gamble.
- Regarding knowledge of gambling counseling and services institution in Macau, the Resilience Counseling Centre for Problem Gambling of Social Welfare Bureau is the most well-known (31%).
- 67% of “probable problem/pathological gamblers” (32 people) had no intention to receive any gambling counseling services; 27% of them (13 people) reported that it was unlikely that they would receive the service; and only three of them (6%) reported that they might possibly go seeking gambling counseling services.
- Among those “probable problem/pathological gamblers”, the degree of being respected by family and personal income significantly predicted their intention of help seeking. These findings implied that female gamblers who were not respected at home and had lower income were more likely to seek help for their gambling problems, and thus service should be made more available for those who lack familial support or financial capacity.

Seven “Focus Groups” were conducted, with 31 participants in total. They were randomly selected from the respondents of the “Telephone Poll”. Each group lasted for 75 to 90 minutes. The findings are summarized as follows:

- The gambling motives for female in Macao are mostly consistent with the previous literature, including monetary gain (e.g. earning quick money), sensation-seeking (e.g. for sensory stimulation while gambling), boredom alleviation (e.g. relieving boredom and killing time), learning (e.g. learning how to play new games or how to control their emotions), socialization (e.g. having fun with relatives and friends) and self-worth (e.g. satisfying their vanity). Moreover, some focus group participants suggested that gamblers might be motivated by non-financial reward such as various kinds of auxiliary services offered by casinos, including free food, air conditioning, free tickets, or other non-monetary gains. Other motives also included “having idle money”, “knowing how to play” and “curiosity”, etc.. Materialistic (monetary or non-monetary) rewards, sensation seeking, and boredom alleviation emerged as the main motives of gambling, and the finding is consistent with the survey results.

- Most focus group participants believed that gambling is related to the development of psychological dependence of gambling. They showed some understanding that gambling is addictive and people keep on gambling in order to relieve the withdrawal symptoms.
- Focus group participants held a less optimistic attitude toward whether probable problem or pathological gamblers would seek help or treatment. Some of them explained that it is hard for probable problem gamblers to change their “habit”; problem gamblers may be neither aware nor want to change their problematic gambling pattern; they also may not know how and where to seek help. However, some participants believed that support from family and friends as well as support from society are helpful in the prevention and intervention of problem/pathological gambling.
- There were two factors fostering help-seeking behaviors for female gamblers: the attitude of the gamblers and taking part in gambling-prevention theme activities. Regarding attitude, some participants said that apart from gamblers making an active decision to change their problematic gambling behaviors, close bonding with their families would also motivate them to seek help. As for activities, some participants said that some gambling treatment activities or groups which they can join along with their family members also can increase willingness to seek help.
- Both external and internal factors may obstruct a gambler from seeking help. The external factors are related to the negative influence of gambling companions and the knowledge on gambling treatment offered by various institutions. Treatment-related anxiety such as labeling effect may keep a gambler from asking for help.

# Conclusions

## Female's Gambling Participation

Female gamblers in Macau mainly gambled with family members and friends (e.g. playing Mahjong) (57.16%) or buy Mark Six (53.50%), while some of them go to casinos (17.28%) or locations with slot machines (15.60%). Less than 10% of female took part in other gambling activities. In the four types of gambling activities aforementioned, the wager at casinos was the largest (the median amount is MOP300), compared to gambling with family members and friends (the median amount is MOP200) and playing slot machines (the median amount is MOP160). In terms of monthly expense on main gambling activities, the median amount was less than 500 pataca.

Although more than 20% female gambled alone, Macao female gamblers tended to gamble with their friends (26%) or family members (22%). The participants of the "Focus Groups" indicated that they regarded gambling as a socializing activity, and sometimes they were persuaded to gamble in order to be perceived as an in-group member. With reference to the "Telephone Poll", over half of the respondents were going to gamble again in a short time.

There were 28 "probable problem gamblers" and 21 "probable pathological gamblers" amongst 1013 female participants of the "Telephone Poll". They were not consciously aware of too much negative effects of gambling on their life, but they reported a low level of physical and mental health, such as "feeling hard to overcome difficulties", "feeling unhappy and worry", "losing confidence" and "feeling worthless", etc.

## **Gambling Motives of Female Gamblers**

The main gambling motives for female gamblers in Macau were socialization, boredom alleviation, sensation-seeking as well as monetary rewards. Certainly, those female gamblers who developed psychological dependence on gambling could not stop gambling because of withdrawal symptoms (such as feeling irritable). According to the “Telephone Poll”, female gamblers who reported a higher socialization motive were more likely to start gambling at a young age. The result of the “Focus Groups” showed that apart from monetary benefits, there were some other external reinforcers of female gambling, such as free tickets, free drinks or foods, and even air conditioning. For those female gamblers who were motivated to gamble by sensation-seeking, they might distract themselves from their negative emotional disturbance through sensational arousal during gambling. This may explain why the female respondents who felt disrespected by families reported higher motivation to gamble for sensation-seeking (correlation coefficients with sensation-seeking motive was -.065, self-worth motive was -.140, monetary gain motive was -.145, learning motive was -.087). Relatively speaking, gambling motivations of self-worth and learning were less important motives for female gamblers.

In addition, gambling motives were also linked to problem gambling. For instance, the “Telephone Poll” showed that “probable problem / pathological gamblers” were found to be driven to gambling by the motives of socialization and boredom alleviation. Furthermore, the participants of the “Focus Groups” believed that money is the biggest temptation to problem/pathological gamblers to keep gamble excessively; being unemployed and long-term participation are also the risk factors of problem / pathological gambling.

## **Gambling Participation of Housewives**

According to the result of the “Telephone Poll”, housewife and non-housewife were similar in most aspects; however, by examining gambling motives with how

much time spent on housework, we noted that female gamblers who spent less time on housework had higher gambling motives on socialization, self-worth, and boredom alleviation. On the same line, some participants of the “Focus Groups” emphasized that both sensation-seeking and boredom alleviation were two major motives for housewife (or retired people) to gamble. They suggested that housewives with free time may engage in gambling, say, after sending their kids to schools, or their husbands were away, or they were not satisfied with their life (e.g. quarreled with their husbands). The “Telephone Poll” found that female gamblers who perceived not being respected in their families report higher gambling motivation. Therefore, respect and recognition from family showed stronger impacts on gambling motivations and gambling involvement.

Although the statistical differences on gambling involvement and gambling motives between housewife and non-housewife are not salient, housewife is considered an at-risk group whose social network and knowledge of counseling services are relatively limited.

## **Views on Seeking Help**

According to the “Telephone Poll” and the “Focus Groups”, female gamblers acknowledged there were the positive and negative impacts on gambling. Positive impacts include learning, socialization, relaxation and entertainment as well as relieving boredom. Negative impacts include gambling addiction, emotional problems, violence and crime, as well as hampering one’s familial relationship, financial condition, and career development. Furthermore, the findings of the “Focus Groups” suggested that apart from losing money, employee and mother might neglect their responsibilities because of gambling (e.g. neglect of taking care of children, doing housework and job, etc.) and gambling herein might result in other adverse consequences, such as ruining one’s family relationship and career prospect.

In spite of the negative impacts of gambling, how many respondents know to seek help for their gambling problems? According to the “Telephone Poll”, less than a half of the respondents had knowledge on gambling counseling services available in Macau, and only 30% of female gamblers knew a particular institution that provides gambling counseling services. Therefore, most respondents had no idea on how to seek professional assistance.

Participants of the “Focus Groups” highly valued caring, emotional support from and assistance by their family members, friends and gambling treatment professionals. Some respondents believed that close relationship with their family members is gamblers’ major motivation to seek help. Some of them mentioned that gambling treatment would be helpful to them to solve gambling problem but a few participants were skeptical of the efficiency of gambling treatment. Almost all participants agreed that gambling counseling services should be promoted, and showed concern on insufficient number of mental health professionals in this area. Most of the respondents in the “Focus Groups” were not aware of the way to get help from counseling and services institution.

## **Strengthen the Services to Female Gamblers**

Based on the findings, two major strategies are suggested to reduce female gambling involvement and to encourage them to seek professional help as soon as possible. On one hand, female gambling involvement can be lowered through a variety of activities that satisfy their socialization needs and alleviate their boredom. It can also be achieved by better promotion and education. On the other hand, in order to help and encourage gamblers to seek help at an early stage, female gamblers should be provided with more information regarding help seeking procedure as well as how their privacy is being protected. Some female gamblers not only have limited knowledge of gambling counseling services, but also do not realize the severity of their problem gambling. Therefore, they did not actively seek help. It is essential to

heighten their awareness of problems associated with gambling so as to increase their help-seeking intention, say by publicizing and explaining the service procedures, as well as promoting responsible gambling by casinos.

## **Further Study and Limitations**

In the future, the effectiveness of the suggested intervention strategies on altering some risk factors of female gamblers should be empirically evaluated. For instance, any changes in gambling cognition and help-seeking motivation should be examined after attending individual or group activities held by counseling facilities. The current study has some limitations. First of all, the length of questionnaires is limited inevitably by the telephone survey design. Although the questionnaire was composed of some validated measurement inventories such as GMAB-Motive scale, GHQ, and DSM IV scale, other risk factors such as family structures and roles only were measured by a single item, which may affect the measurement validity and hence interpretation of parts of the results. Secondly, this study cannot test the causality between variables due to its cross-sectional and observational research design. Moreover, the DSM-5 with most updated criteria of gambling addiction has been published recently, but its Chinese version is not yet available. The applicability (i.e. validity and reliability) of the updated criteria on local population should be empirically tested with the data of Macau community and clinical samples, after being translated by mental health professionals according to standard translation procedures. Last but not least, the sample recruited in the “Female Gamblers Survey” represented the adult female gamblers in Macau, and thus only a very small proportion of it was classified as probable problem/pathological gamblers. Further study may recruit a larger clinical sample of gambling addicts in order to further investigate the risk and protective factors of female gambling addiction in Macau, and to test the treatment effectiveness of various approaches on female addicts.