

# GAMBLING RESEARCH

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## 11<sup>TH</sup> Annual Conference and Pre-Conference Workshops

Researchers, policy makers, and health care professionals from around the world convened at the Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta from April 11th to 14th for the Institute's annual conference on gambling research. The conference theme was *'The Causes of Problem Gambling'*. Additionally, two pre-conference events were available to attendees. The first was a peer review workshop led by the editors of the *International Gambling Studies* (IGS) journal. A second featured a series of speakers who discussed research investigations on the topic of *'Gambling and Problem Gambling with Indigenous Populations'*.



### Indigenous Gambling Pre-Conference Workshop (CCGR)

The indigenous gambling pre-conference workshop at the Institute's 2012 conference was sponsored by the Canadian Consortium for Gambling Research (CCGR). It brought together a group of 30+ researchers, practitioners, and graduate students who discussed methodologies, approaches and challenges in conducting gambling research with indigenous populations. The day's objectives were to determine research gaps and directions for future research, provide networking

opportunities, and identify funding and potential and future collaborative possibilities.

The first presenter was Dr. Yale Belanger from the University of Lethbridge who provided a *History of Gambling Research with Indigenous Populations*. Based on his comprehensive review of the indigenous gambling literature, Belanger commented that, "Obviously there's an interest [in indigenous gambling research] but it is a sporadic interest". He felt that the field would benefit significantly from a greater depth of research inquiry and recommended continued focus in areas such as sovereignty, community development, economic development, and health.

Dr. Joseph Tindale, Dr. Joan Norris, Éric Thériault, Lisa Pigeau and Yvon Allard presented material entitled *The Challenges of Qualitative Research with Indigenous Populations*. Their research investigation involved a research partnership established with the Métis Nation in Ontario. Much of their discussion related to how an effective research bond was established between the academic researchers and their community research partners. This ongoing process of trust-building was singled out as being the factor that most significantly improved upon the team's original research methodology.

The primary aim of the Alberta Gambling Research Institute, a consortium of the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge, is to support academic research related to gambling.

#### MISSION

To facilitate evidence-based broad research that informs gambling public policy and educates Albertans and the wider audience about the effects of gambling.



In her presentation about the **Challenges of Quantitative Research with Indigenous Populations**, Dr. Cheryl Currie from the University of Lethbridge explained that standard research methods have not worked well in this population. Currie illustrated how she

overcame this challenge using several informative examples from her investigations of urban aboriginal populations in Edmonton, Alberta. Currie strongly recommended that, "Before you begin the study, [establish relationships] with the aboriginal community itself."

Dr. Dawn Martin-Hill of McMaster University presented on the topic **Ethics within an Indigenous Knowledge Methodology**.



Martin-Hill explained that one of her main interests was the process of building trust within the indigenous community. She provided poignant examples from her own experiences about the influence of gender, elders, "insiders", and "ways-of-knowing" among indigenous peoples.

In his presentation entitled, **Who Owns the Research and Results / What Must be Done with the Research**, Dr. Darrel Manitowabi of the University of Sudbury discussed both the "official" research and the "unofficial" body of knowledge that he developed while completing Ph.D. research on Casino Rama in Orillia, Ontario. He noted that the success of his investigation was hinged upon developing "a collaboration of needs." This eventually resulted in a successful blending of his research project with the creation of a local heritage project and museum for the local community.



Dr. Helen Breen from Southern Cross University in Australia presented information about the higher levels of risks faced by indigenous populations in the presentation **Where To Go Next with Gambling Research with Indigenous Populations**. Gaps in the research were also highlighted

which she felt represented important areas for future investigation.

Judith Glynn from the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Institute (OPGRC) provided a fitting end to the day in her synthesis of themes she had identified from



each of the workshop presentations. In **Research Priorities for Indigenous Research in Canada**, Glynn skillfully wove together these themes and charted a course for possible next phases of research related to gambling and indigenous populations. Her more complete synopsis is to be posted on the CCGR website - <http://www.gamblingresearch.org/ccgr/>.

## AGRI Conference 2012: Summaries of Selected Presentations

### The Availability of Gambling and Problem Gambling Rates: Assessing the Relationship

— Dr. Rachel Volberg, Gemini Research [Northampton, Massachusetts, USA]

Dr. Volberg presented findings from her detailed examination of gambling prevalence studies from jurisdictions worldwide. In undertaking this investigation, Volberg was seeking to further untangle the complex relationship between exposure and harm as well as whether individuals and/or communities adapt to gambling availability over time. Volberg's methodology involved developing a comprehensive compilation of 200+ studies that had included a jurisdiction-wide adult prevalence survey. Next, she standardized prevalence rates from individual studies to facilitate comparison of rates between jurisdictions and within the same jurisdictions over time. This allowed her to then analyze changes in standardized problem gambling (PG) prevalence rates over time.



Findings from the study indicated that PG rates started increasing in North America and Australia during the late 1980s/early 1990s and peaked roughly ten years later. This particular period was coincident with rapid introduction and expansion of EGMs and casinos. Since the late 1990s in North America and early 2000s elsewhere, there has been a general downward trend in PG rates. Conclusions from Volberg's research provided support for there being both exposure and adaptation influences on problem gambling rates. She found that increased gambling availability is related to increased PG but that populations appear to adapt over time.



## Cross-Jurisdictional Correlates of Problem Gambling

— Dr. Rob Williams, University of Lethbridge [Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada]

Dr. Rob Williams began his presentation on the correlates of problem gambling by reminding attendees that what are considered “known” correlates come mainly from academic research conducted in Western countries on clinical populations. According to Williams, “They’re all useful information but not necessarily representative of worldwide PG correlates but the purpose of this research is to identify the robust cross-jurisdictional correlates.”

The process of collecting existing PG correlate-related data involved reviewing 202 jurisdiction-wide adult prevalence studies of problem gambling

from 1975 to 2012. The data was extracted and put into tables for comparative purposes. Using this data, Williams determined that the most commonly identified correlates were those related to demographics and game types. Interestingly, Williams said, “Looking at the rough number of studies, EGM [correlates] are not as prominent as one might think.”

Williams indicated that the most consistent correlate-related finding from these individual studies was that of gender (being male is a significant correlate of problem gambling; no single study ever found females to have higher correlate of gambling vs. males). Other correlates mentioned included age (<35 correlated across virtually every study with some exceptions for Asian countries), less than average education, lower income, and marital status (being married was a protective factor in virtually every country). In terms of gambling formats, EGM-type devices were more significantly correlated with PG than any other format, but they did not appear to be the predominant cause of problem gambling worldwide. Williams opined that EGMs might have simply had less time or opportunity to show up in these studies as a correlate.

In concluding, Williams said that almost every form of gambling has been associated with problem gambling in some jurisdictions at some point in time. “We demonize some forms of gambling to a greater extent than others but whenever a new form of gambling is introduced there seems to be new problems introduced.” He cautioned that there are also methodological limitations in that many included studies are not thorough investigations, associated reports do not always provide enough information about correlates to make distinctions, and the majority of research is from Western countries.

## The National Longitudinal Study of Gambling Behaviour (NLSGB): Preliminary Results

— Dr. Don Ross, University of Cape Town [South Africa]

In discussing the findings from several South African studies of gambling behaviour, Dr. Ross first provided a quick overview of the country itself. He explained that the population of



the country is primarily urban, relatively poor and exhibits a high level of income inequality. Particular forms of gambling (e.g., fafi) popular in some parts of South Africa are seemingly unique and involve betting on the interpretation of dreams.

The first study described by Ross was a prevalence study (NUPSGB) that had been conducted in 2008. It drew a true random sample from within several metropolitan centres and participants completed two gambling screens (one was GA-20 for historical comparative reasons and the other was based on PGSI). Problem gambling prevalence was found to be comparable to rates from other countries. It was, however, far higher (5-6%) in residential areas for mineworkers (overwhelmingly males who play “illegal” card/dice games in “illegal” bars). In fact, “The effect of living in these areas was so strong it swamped all other factors,” said Ross.

The second study discussed was the NLSGB longitudinal study that sampled 300 gamblers every three months over a period of 15 months (6 visits in total). In addition to questions related to demographics and psychological screening tools, Ross explained that the fieldworkers also performed a series of lottery choice and time preference “experiments”<sup>1</sup>. Lastly, the final two waves of the study also included a diary intervention. This was done to test whether people who monitored and reported their gambling behaviour on a weekly basis would be significantly different on measures of gambling behaviour and risk severity at follow-up to those who were not contacted.

Findings from the longitudinal study indicated that nearly 60% of individuals visited the high risk category at least once over the sampling times. According to Ross, this shows the instability of PG risk severity classification over the short intervals of the study. Other interesting preliminary study findings involved co-occurring conditions. At Wave 1, there was a significant correlation between PG and depression, PG and anxiety, PG and alcohol, and PG and impulsivity. In concluding, Ross stating that, “Anxiety is a strong predictor... which means anxiety is changing with PGSI from wave to wave. Anxiety scores are changing with the gambling scores. The same with impulsivity.”

<sup>1</sup> *Ultimately the experiments were ruined by fieldworker fraud.*

## Winning: Why do Some Develop Gambling Problems While Others do Not?

– Dr. Nigel Turner, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health [Toronto, Ontario, Canada]

In his presentation, Dr. Turner focused on gambling behaviour of individuals who had experienced early wins in their gambling careers. He stated, “The fact is that gamblers do win and the more they play the more they are likely to win... but their losses will accumulate over time.” Turner explained that one of his ongoing research interests has been the determination of how influential a big win can be in the establishment of a gambling habit or problem.



Turner provided an overview of his initial “winners study” which involved interviewing active gamblers and asking them about the size of their first big win, what to them constituted a big win/loss, when they first identified with having a problem with gambling, and other associations related to problem gambling. Research findings were that an individuals’ concept of a loss was actually smaller than that of a win (as people tended to be risk averse), that gambling problems had highest associations (52%) with opening of a new gaming venue, and that the effect of an early win only occurred with a quarter of participants.

Turner replicated this study with another in the general population (“pathways study”) as well as one with an incarcerated population of males. In the pathways study, results indicated only a minor

relationship between having a win and developing a gambling problem. Wins were identified as being an important factor in developing problems but were not as important as others like emotional issues.

A significant early gambling win was a key variable reported by problem gamblers in the offender study but one that only explained about a quarter of those cases.

Turner next discussed the concepts of reinforcement and volatility that he considered to be two more critical factors that further influence gambling behaviour. He indicated that wins act as gambling behaviour reinforcement. These wins are generally intermittent -- EGM wins especially -- and research has shown this type of reinforcement as being particularly resistant to extinction. In talking about volatility (i.e., a measure of outcome variance), Turner explained that it serves to hide the house edge from gamblers. "In the short term, players experience the thrill of the win, and in the long term the industry is guaranteed to make a profit from their machines." In concluding, Turner felt that wins were an important factor in the development of problem gambling as they serve to shape expectations, but alone they do not necessarily lead to severe problems.

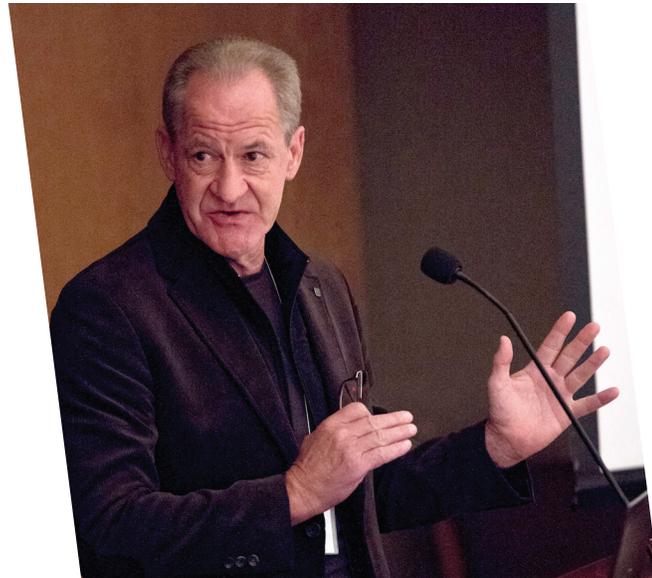
## Pacific Islands Longitudinal Families (PIF) Study

— Dr. Max Abbott, Auckland University of Technology [New Zealand]

In his conference address, Dr. Abbott explained that prospective studies require samples of thousands of individuals to get meaningful results since gambling problems are quite rare in the population. Such studies can also be prohibitively expensive. Though costly, Abbott said, "A focus on longitudinal studies is something that [he] and Dr. Rachel Volberg have been advocating for the past 20 years... to see the development of them is exciting and now we are beginning to be able to make cross-national comparisons."

Abbott's most recent research involvement has been with a team of investigators involved in New Zealand's Pacific Islands Longitudinal Families (PIF) study. Pacific peoples (mainly Polynesian) make up about 8% of the population of New Zealand. The \$10-M PIF study followed 1,398 children of Pacific ethnicity born in a South Auckland hospital during

a single calendar year (Year 2000). Both mothers and fathers were also part of the study that Abbott said was notable because fathers are rarely included in these studies.



The PIF study included a wide range of metrics pertaining to health and development. Data was mainly collected through structured interviews. Gambling questions were included in supplementary studies at child ages 6 and 9 years and included parental gambling behaviour. Results from these studies have made it possible for investigators to identify several potential problem gambling risk and protective factors. These findings have been reported in 4 to 5 gambling-related journal articles of the 40-50 that have been published to date as a result of the PIF study.

Project challenges described by Abbott related to participant retention, funding, inter-university rivalry and concerns about studying a non-Maori group. Despite these hurdles, the holistic study has been able to further our understanding of the impacts of gambling on both the family and child. Future plans include following the children to see how gambling behaviours change over time and how they are associated with parental gambling and other familial, social, health and environmental factors.

**Powerpoint presentations from all conference presenters are available online at:**

**<http://www.abgamblinginstitute.ualberta.ca/Events/2012Conference/ConferenceProgram2012.aspx>**

## International Gambling Studies Workshop, April 11, 2012

Written by: Sally Gainsbury

The International Gambling Studies workshop was designed to enhance peer-review skills for researchers at all levels of expertise and experience but particularly for early and mid-career researchers. This workshop was supported by the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre and the Canadian Consortium of Gambling Research. Approximately 15 participants attended the workshop, including early career researchers, as well as mid-career and senior researchers, and members of research institutes. Delegates were exposed to a detailed exposition of how to effectively review a manuscript submitted for publication from experts in the field, **Alex Blaszczynski** and **Sally Gainsbury**, Editors of International Gambling Studies, and **Michael Wohl** from Carleton University. The workshop covered such material as the role and function of editors and reviewers, what readers appreciated in published articles, and how to go about critically evaluating literature reviews, research design and methodologies, and conclusions drawn. Not overlooked was the importance of following Journal instructions in formatting and referencing.

Peer review is a cooperative process that allows research to be evaluated by independent experts working within the same academic field. Peer review is designed to detect flaws in methodology and interpretation of findings. The purpose is to assist authors to improve the overall quality of manuscripts through objective feedback, and to guide editors in assessing a manuscript's suitability for publication. Understanding the review process and what reviewers are evaluating when assessing manuscripts greatly improves one's own capacity to prepare a manuscript and the chances of acceptance with minimal revisions. These skills are also highly relevant to writing and evaluating grant applications and research proposals.

Feedback after the workshop indicated that delegates were very satisfied with the workshop, that it met their expectations and was highly useful in their ongoing work as authors and reviewers.

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