



GAMBLING RESEARCH REVEALS

The placement of casinos in Alberta's Aboriginal communities: An interview with Cheryl Currie

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FIRST NATIONS CASINO gambling facilities in Alberta has long been the subject of intense interest to the province's aboriginal communities. Since the formalization of the province's First Nations Gaming Policy in 2001 and the subsequent removal of a casino development moratorium, one new First Nations casino has opened—River Cree Casino and Resort in Enoch—and several more are currently under construction.

The likelihood of future aboriginal casino applications was an important factor in Dr. Garry Smith's decision to apply for an Institute grant to develop a research-based tool to assist communities with such decisions. Specifically, Smith and his project collaborators have developed and are refining a framework for Albertan First Nations to use themselves when considering the introduction of a casino. Co-investigator Cheryl Currie of the University of Alberta recently provided answers to the following questions related to their project:

What was the purpose of this Institute-funded research investigation?

CURRIE: The purpose of this pilot study was to create a framework that would help individual First Nations think through the possible impacts that gaming expansion might have on their community, make enlightened decisions about whether to introduce a casino, and make preparations to reduce negative impacts if a casino venture is developed. It was envisioned the framework would also help communities monitor the social and economic impacts of a casino in their community.



The purpose of such a framework is to promote a balanced perspective.

Co-investigator Cheryl Currie of the University of Alberta

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute is a consortium of the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge. Its primary purpose is to support and promote research into gaming and gambling in the province.*

OUR MISSION

To significantly improve Albertans' knowledge of how gambling affects society



The purpose of this pilot study was to create a framework that would help individual First Nations think through the possible impacts that gaming expansion might have on their community.

What sorts of questions were included in the survey instrument that was developed and how were they chosen?

CURRIE: Our goal was to select questions that would provide information to help First Nations assess the feasibility of constructing on-reserve casinos. We also selected questions that would help First Nations monitor the social and economic impacts of the venture. The two community-based members on our team made a number of suggestions on the particular questions we should ask and how this information should be collected.

The questions we asked were designed to provide information in four key areas of Aboriginal community life that would likely be impacted by the introduction of a casino: 1) individual level—e.g., problem gambling prevalence, substance abuse related to problem gambling, self-esteem impacts, 2) family level—e.g., current and historical impacts of gambling on families, 3) community level—e.g., perceptions about the impact of gambling on the community, and 4) economic impacts—e.g., money spent gambling, perceptions about the development of a casino.

Why did you choose to test the survey instrument with members of the Samson Cree First Nation and Ermineskin Cree First Nation?

CURRIE: We were interested in working with a First Nation [Samson Cree] who had been approved for casino development but had not yet begun construction, so that if a casino went forward the community would have some baseline information they could use to monitor the social and economic impacts of the venture. We also wanted to work with a First Nation [Ermineskin Cree] that did not have plans to develop a casino as a comparison group.

Were there any challenges in gaining the trust of the First Nations communities prior to or during their participation in this preliminary study?

CURRIE: Dr. Jim Battle, one of the research team members, is an Edmonton based psychologist who has done extensive counseling work with Alberta and northern Canada First Nations communities; as a result, Dr. Battle's contacts paved the way for the research team to conduct the on-reserve interviews.

Data collection went very smoothly, thanks in large part to the two community-based members of our research team who were instrumental in recruiting participants, setting up where data would be collected, and letting community members know when we would be there. They also provided a much valued, community perspective on the kinds of questions we should be asking and how data should be collected in these First Nations.

What did your initial survey tell you about gambling, problem gambling, and other types of behaviours in the Samson/Ermineskin sample?

CURRIE: Using the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI), we found almost three quarters of residents who volunteered to participate in these communities were already problem gamblers. While this may suggest problem gambling in these First Nations is already very high, it is important to keep in mind this was a pilot study that was not designed to assess problem gambling prevalence. We used a convenience sample rather than a random sample of participants and the findings cannot be generalized to all members of these communities. Still, the prevalence rate we documented is not unusual; many studies have documented high levels of problem gambling in First Nations commu-

nities. For example, a study done in 2005 found that more than half of all members living on the Kainai (Blood) First Nation in Alberta were problem gamblers¹.

The findings also suggest many people in the communities have had serious problems with alcohol. There is substantial research evidence to indicate people with previous addictions are at greater risk for gambling problems^{2, 3, 4, 5, 6}. Based on this evidence, if a casino is built in Samson Cree Nation, those who have experienced previous addictions may be at greater risk for developing gambling problems. Our findings also suggest nicotine dependence was very high. Smokers told us they smoked more cigarettes when they gambled to control the negative emotions caused by gambling.

What socio-economic impacts were identified by individuals in the communities as being of significance?

CURRIE: We found that compared to residents without a gambling problem, residents who met CPGI criteria for problem gambling said they felt less connected as social members of the community. Problem gamblers were more likely to feel they did not belong and were less happy to be members of the community. It is likely that building a casino in Samson Cree will increase problem gambling, at least temporarily. While this is a pilot study, our initial findings suggest problem gambling may negatively impact community well-being. Thus, increased problem gambling in Samson Cree may further impact social ties by increasing the number of people who do not feel they are a connected part of that community.

Do you anticipate that a standard survey instrument will be developed that could be used across First Nations communities? Would it be

applicable to “mainstream” communities?

CURRIE: A mainstream instrument that was easy to administer and could help First Nations assess both the social and economic feasibility of constructing on-reserve casinos would be ideal. But it is important to remember that First Nations communities in Canada are extremely heterogeneous. The information each First Nation would need to make a decision about a casino venture will differ. Thus, the questions that need to be asked in each community will differ as well.

What else should we know about the framework?

CURRIE: We have attempted to develop a framework that outlines four main areas these questions could fall into. The purpose of such a framework is to promote a balanced perspective. Too often, assessments are made based on the possible economic impacts of casino development. There are multi-level social impacts to consider as well at the individual, family and community level. We have tried to emphasize a multi-level focus in this framework. Gathering information about the possible social-level impacts of a casino before it is built is extremely valuable. It gives the community time to make preparations to reduce negative impacts by improving problem gambling treatment services or developing responsible gambling campaigns. It also gives the community time to strengthen the positive impacts that a casino might have such as training individuals who want to work in the casino and educating community members about budgeting and financial planning.

It is our hope that First Nations with gambling venues or those who are considering gambling expansion will be interested in the results of this study.



Other Institute Projects Related to Gambling and First Nations:

Examining Gambling and Problem Gambling in Albertan Aboriginal Communities—Dr. Rob Williams (Principal Investigator)—Major Grant #37

Aboriginal Gaming in Canada: An Overview of the Issues Affecting an Industry in its Infancy —Dr. Yale Belanger (Principal Investigator)—Small Grant

Institute Conference 2008

The Institute's 7th annual conference on gambling research will take place on April 4th and 5th at the Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta. This year's conference is titled "Gambling in Society: A Question of Balance." Additional details will be made available from the Institute web site over the next several months.



ALBERTA GAMING RESEARCH INSTITUTE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Dr. Nady el-Guebaly, Chair,
University of Calgary

Dr. Jo-Anne Fiske, University
of Lethbridge

Dr. Andrew Greenshaw,
University of Alberta

Dr. Chris Hosgood,
University of Lethbridge

Mrs. Sheila Murphy, Public
Member

Dr. Erin Gibbs Van Brunschot,
University of Calgary

Dr. Dan Mason,
University of Alberta

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Vickii Williams
(vickii.williams@ualberta.ca)

NODE COORDINATORS

University of Alberta:
Dr. Garry Smith
(garry.j.smith@ualberta.ca)

University of Calgary:
Dr. David Hodgins
(dhodgins@ucalgary.ca)

University of Lethbridge:
Dr. Robert Williams
(robert.williams@uleth.ca)

INSTITUTE LIBRARIAN

Rhys Stevens
(rhys.stevens@uleth.ca)

Your comments and queries are welcome
either by e-MAIL: abgaming@ualberta.ca
PHONE: 780.492.2856

Cheryl Currie and Rhys Stevens	Writers
Vickii Williams	Editor
Epigrafix	Design/Layout
Media queries	780.492.2856

* The Institute is funded by the Alberta
government through the Alberta Lottery
Fund.

ISSN 1499-2639 (Print) ©AGRI 2007
ISSN 1499-2647 (Online)

The investigation "A Prospective Study on the Impact of the Placement of Gambling Casinos in Aboriginal Communities in Alberta, Canada" was funded by the Institute as a small grant (#S12). Principal investigator is Dr. Garry Smith of the Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta. Co-investigators are Cheryl Currie (Ph.D. student, School of Public Health, University of Alberta) and Dr. Jim Battle (James Battle and Associates Ltd., Edmonton). Community research partners are Sharon Gladue (Samson Cree Nation) and Terry Quinney (Ermineskin Cree Nation).

¹ Williams, R., Wynne, H., Nixon, G., & Frank, L. (2005). *Using participatory action research to study Canadian Aboriginal gambling*. Paper presented at the 6th European Conference on Gambling Studies and Policy Issues: Malmo, Sweden.

² el-Guebaly, N., Patten, S. B., Currie, S., Williams, J., Beck, C. A., Maxwell, C. J. & Wang, J. L. (2006). Epidemiological associations between gambling behavior, substance use & mood and anxiety disorders. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 22, 275-287.

³ Bland, R. C., Newman, S. C., Orn, H. & Stebelsky, G. (1993). Epidemiology of pathological gambling in Edmonton. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 38, 108-112.

⁴ Cunningham-Williams, R. M., Cottler, L. B., Compton, W. M. & Spitznagel, E. (1998). Taking chances: Problem gamblers and mental health disorder—Results from the St. Louis Epidemiologic Catchment Area Study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 88, 1093-1096.

⁵ Rush, B., Veldhuizen, S. & Adlaf, E. (2007). Mapping the prevalence of problem gambling and its association with treatment accessibility and proximity to gambling venues. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 20, 193-213.

⁶ Petry, N. M., Stinson, F. S. & Grant, B. F. (2005). Comorbidity of DSM-IV pathological gambling and other psychiatric disorders: Results from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 66, 564-574.

From the Institute Library...

Did you know? The Library section of the Institute web site includes a comprehensive listing of gambling prevalence studies from Canadian, American, and international jurisdictions. Many of these materials also contain hyperlinks to the full-text of the original source documents.