

BINGO



A Study of Problem
Gambling Among
Alberta Native People

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SPIRIT OF BINGO LAND

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Published by:

Nechi Training and Research & Health Promotions Institute
Box 34007, Kingsway Mall P. O.
EDMONTON, Alberta
CANADA
T5G 3G4

Telephone: (403) 458 1884
Facsimile: (403) 458 1883

Cover Illustration: Sheldon Meek

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data
Cover Title: Spirit of Bingoland
ISBN 1-895734-27-4
First Printing 1994

Printed and Bound in Canada

MAINC
RC 569.5 G35 H48 1994
c.2
Hewitt, David
Spirit of bingoland : a
study of problem gambling
among Alberta native people
3 5057 00452 0655

9412015

HV
6722
.C23A3
H611
1994
C1

SPIRIT OF BINGOLAND

A Study of Problem Gambling Among Alberta Native People



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Funding provided by the
Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Gaming is a sensitive issue within the Native Community. Recognizing this, I would like to particularly thank all those who were prepared to participate in this study. Their willingness to share their experiences in an open and honest manner made this research possible. I would also like to thank the interviewers Dave Belleau, Patricia Butcher, Gerald Giroux and Heather Jacobs. Their knowledge, professionalism and sensitivity contributed enormously to ensuring that the information contained in this report is valid and reliable.

David Hewitt

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OVERVIEW

The purpose of this study was to increase our understanding of Native people who are experiencing problems with gambling so that appropriate research based treatment and prevention programs can be developed.

One hundred and fifty-six Native Albertans, identified by their communities as "gambling to the extent that it was cause for

concern" were interviewed for this study. On the basis of the interview, 149 were found to be experiencing at least one significant problem with gambling. The responses of these individuals are included in this report and are referred to as the "study groups."

WHO ARE THE IDENTIFIED PROBLEM GAMBLERS

Fifty-eight percent of the study groups were women. The average age was 40 years with a range of 15 to 82. The majority (79%) reported they were status Indians. More than one-half (56%) lived on a reserve with a further 20% living in rural locations.

The education level was relatively high with more than **40% having some training beyond high school** and more than **20% having attended or completed university**. Sixty-eight percent were "working at a job or business" and 10% were "looking for work." More than one-third (36%) had a household income of \$15,000 or less. On the other hand, 11% earned more than \$50,000.

Members of the study groups were also relatively active within their communities. More than half (59%) **participated regularly in cultural or community activities**. The majority were involved in three or more activities with a substantial minority involved in five or more.

The average size of the study groups' households was 2.7 persons with a range of 1 - 10. More than three-quarters (79%) contained children with **25% having children five years or younger**. **Sixty-five percent** of the households containing children were **single parent**.

A distinctive feature of the study groups' households was the **presence of extended family**. Nine percent contained grandparents and more than one-quarter (26%) **had other family members**.

The presence of **young children** in a large percentage of the households raises **issues of child care**. On the surface, this might be offset by the **presence of extended family** in a large number of households, the **presence of older children (19% have children aged 13 - 15 and 13% have children aged 16 - 17)** and, for some, the presence of a spouse. Unfortunately, this seems unlikely because people who gamble live in a world of gamblers. One-third (33%) live with a spouse who has a problem, almost one-half (46%) usually gamble with other family members, almost 70% have a brother or sister with a problem and 80% have other relatives with problems.

In addition, members of the study groups began gambling at a relatively early age with almost one-quarter (22%) **beginning before age 16 and 50% before age 19**. This suggests that the older children in these households are also likely to be out gambling to some extent and not readily available to provide child care to their younger siblings.

A large proportion of the study groups had experienced other significant problems or difficulties in their lives. **Sixty percent were former alcohol and drug users**. Almost one-third (32%) **had a serious illness or disability** (the most frequently mentioned was diabetes). **Three-quarters (75%)** had recently experienced a **loss of someone close through death**, with almost one-fifth (18%) of these still experiencing extreme grief over that death.

In addition, almost one-half (48%) of the study groups had **experienced some other significant loss in their lives**. The majority of these involved a personal relationship. Finally, almost one-half (42%) had attended a residential school.

HOW AND WHY DO PEOPLE GAMBLE

Among the study groups, bingo was the gambling activity of choice. It had the highest participation rate (89%) of any activity, was the most frequently played (46% play one or more times per week) and had the second highest average monthly expenditure (\$272). The significant place bingo had in the lives of the study groups is further supported by the fact that it was chosen by 67% as the most or second most favourite game, was among the first gambling activities for 62% and for 48% was the game being played when they first experienced nervousness over the amount of money being spent.

A slightly larger proportion of women than men play bingo. However, **bingo players were proportionally represented in all age and income segments of the study groups.** Other gambling activities of concern were **video lottery terminals (VLT)** because of the high average monthly expenditure (\$182) and their relatively high participation rate (59% currently play). VLTs tend to be played by younger members of the study groups (36% are under 30) but are proportionally represented in all gender and income segments. **Horse racing** was also of

concern because it had the highest average monthly expenditure (\$336) and had a relatively high participation rate (42%). Horse racing tended to be an activity of older men with higher incomes who currently drink alcohol.

Also of interest was the relatively high participation (44%) in **playing card games with friends or family for money.** Playing cards was also among the first gambling activities for 39% of the study groups and associated with nervousness over the amount being spent by 28%.

Although bingo was the game of choice, the study groups did not restrict themselves to one form of gambling. Two-thirds (66%) participated in more than five types of gambling during the past year and 12% participated in ten or more types.

The main reasons for gambling given by the study groups were to win money (94%), for entertainment or fun (91%) and for excitement or challenge (84%). It is also significant that almost **one-third (29%) said they gambled to be alone.**

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF GAMBLING PROBLEMS

The nature and severity of problems related to gambling experienced by the study groups was measured by the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS). The SOGS is a standardized test used in studies of gambling around the world. Using the standard classification of the SOGS, the study groups would be classified as follows:

Lifetime problem gamblers	19%
Lifetime probable pathological gamblers	64%
Current problem gamblers	22%
Current probable pathological gamblers	55%

Feeling guilty about the way you gamble, spending more time or money than intended and having others complain about your gambling were the three most commonly experienced personal or inter-personal problems experienced by the study groups.

Borrowing money from a spouse, borrowing from a relative, using social assistance or family allowance cheques for gambling and borrowing from the household funds were the most frequently mentioned problems related to finances mentioned by the group. It is of interest that for those who have the most severe problems "using social assistance or family allowances" is not among the most frequently mentioned. It is

replaced, in this group, by "pawning personal or family property."

Those who have the most severe problems are more likely to have the following characteristics than those with less severe problems.

1. spend more money on gambling
2. spend more time gambling
3. **more likely to say they gamble to be alone and to forget problems**
4. have felt nervous about the amount being spent on gambling
5. **started gambling at an earlier age**
6. know more people who also have a problem with gambling (family and friends)
7. live with a spouse who also has a problem
8. have been in trouble with the law
9. **have sought help for gambling problem**
10. live on a reserve
11. attended a residential school
12. experience more grief over the loss of someone close