

The Social and Psychological Impacts of Gambling in the Cree Communities of Northern Québec

Kathryn J. Gill Ph.D., McGill University
Jill Torrie M.A., Cree Board of Health
Jeff Derevensky Ph.D., McGill University

Overview

- Background on Aboriginal gambling
 - Development of the research project
 - Formal organisation
-
- Objectives of the research program
 - Project 1 - Qualitative Methods – Community Case Studies
 - The Cree territory
 - Preliminary results
 - Project 2 - Quantitative Methods
 - diagnostic interviews for gambling and other addictions, adolescents

Background

- current intra-community, locally-controlled gambling is focussed on sports teams, numbers games, draws and radio bingos
- intra-community gambling has been perceived as beneficial (social activity, employment, financial support for local charities and radio stations)
- In some Aboriginal communities (notably in the U.S.) funds gathered from local gambling have been directed towards health programs, community centres and youth programs
- there is very little data on the extent or consequences of gambling activities outside communities (VLTs or casinos)

On the Other Hand

- First Nations have expressed concern over gambling, citing corruption of the local tribal leaders, alcohol abuse, gambling addiction, deterioration of traditional values, youth gangs, and reduced child supervision (Zitzow 2003)
- several cross-sectional studies have shown higher prevalence rates of problem gambling among Aboriginals compared to the general population (Zitzow 1996; Volbert & Abbott 1997; Wardman et al 2001)

Observations in Cree Territory

- new forms of gambling take place in Montreal and Hull, and at VLTs in Val d'Or, Chibougoumou and Radisson - all external points of contact of the Cree transfer economy
- local corner dépanneurs sell scratch cards and numbers games licensed through the Loto Quebec. VLTs have been installed inside three Cree communities (only two turn back profits to the community)
- the issue of whether for-profit gambling should be allowed inside Cree communities is controversial; some communities have voted against the introduction of VLTs

Development of the Project

- **Project Originated in the Cree Region**
 - public health workers within Cree communities were concerned with effects of gambling
 - there was a perception that gaming had replacing traditional social activities, with increased child neglect and lack of money for food and heating
- the formal research project was developed at the request of the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB)

Development continued...

- community partners include the regional Mental Health Program of the CBHSSJB, Public Health Departments of each community
- local contacts are the Public Health Officers or Wellness Coordinators from each community
- Coordinator - Jill Torrie
 - Director of Specialised Services of the Public Health Department of the CBHSSJB

Formal Organization

- Regional steering committee
 - Researchers, Research Committee of CBH, Public Health and community partner representatives + link to CBH regional services
- Local community implementation committees
 - Only set up in Mistissini at present: working out local approach that will be proposed to other communities
- Research agreement between the CBHSSJB and McGill includes items related to confidentiality, data ownership (return of data to CBHSSJB at end of project), continued use of data in collaboration with the CBHSSJB, and publication criteria (drafts sent to Research Committee for review within 20 days. No veto over publication but right to include a footnote)

Objectives of the Research

- develop community case studies that will characterise Cree gambling in terms of access, forms and patterns, social context, social costs and benefits
- describe patterns of gambling in relation to demographic, social, psychological and economic factors
- examine the relationships between gambling, substance abuse and social/psychological problems among adolescent and adult Cree

The Cree Territory

- the Cree territory in northern Quebec is known as Eeyou Istchee
- it was subject to the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975
- it covers a land mass the size of Newfoundland, and is bounded by waters flowing north and west into James Bay
- most of the ~13,000 Cree live in 9 communities, 5 along the Hudson and James Bay coasts and 4 inland







Qualitative Methods: Project 1

Production of a Regional Case Study Report on Cree Gambling (in progress)

- The community case studies explore the forms of gambling, the context of gaming and gambling, as well as community access to various forms of gambling (casinos, VLTs bingos etc)
- plan to triangulate findings from a combination of primary and secondary sources, generally in-person key informant interviews from individuals in different departments of the Cree Nation (finance, social services, public health, recreation); Cree Trappers Association etc.

- data will come from 1) existing documentation such as internal CBHSSJB reports related to social and financial management of each community); 2) administrative interviews; 3) community key informant interviews (e.g. church and leaders, social workers, financial aid officers); 4) a structured guide to gather information about each community
- Each regional case study report will provide a risk/benefit analysis of gambling behaviour at the community level (e.g. financial spin-offs vs. costs to social services), present information on the social context of gambling activities in the region, along with a historical chronology and local perceptions of the situation

Hypotheses: Project 1

The data will be examined in order to determine whether there is support for the following:

- 1) variations in gambling opportunities (numbers of venues, bingos and other gambling events) will be inversely related to opportunities for alternate leisure activities
- 2) communities with VLTs (Wemindji, Eastmain, Waswanipi) will have higher levels problem gambling as measured by key informant reports, as well as more evidence for gambling problems in social services records

Preliminary Data - Methods

Qualitative interviews have been conducted with >40 key informants from 5 Cree communities

- Key informants were identified by the Public Health Officer in each community
- Sample included band council members, social workers, financial officers, church leaders, elders, youth protection workers and community health workers
- Informants were interviewed by a Cree-speaking employee of the CBHSSJB, following an interview guide

Preliminary Data – Results

- individuals noted large increase in community involvement (now the predominant leisure and social activity), as well as in forms of gambling (radio bingos, Nevada tickets, loto Quebec, VLTs, scratch cards)
- problems were considered to be largely hidden, with little recognition within the communities
- problems attributed over-involvement in bingos, need to travel long distances, financial problems, child neglect, excessive drinking
- informants from the Cree Trappers Assn noted individuals unable to pay for vehicles or food due to gambling debts

“Gambling did not exist before, now it is very crazy. Wild game used to be distributed to the community for free, now people sell their kill, just to use the money to gamble. There is another thing they do is, sell food plates, this you see when it is bingo night. People also borrow money from each other to play bingo. Before bingo was played every night, the community asked the Band to reduce bingo nights. Bingo has created a big problem. People do not attend public meetings because they decide to play bingo. Agreements cannot go through because not enough people have attended the public meeting”

Elder, Waskaganish

The Impact of Loto Quebec and VLTs

- informants noted the influence of lottery ticket sales, casinos and VLTs on the local economy
- while profits from bingo, penny socials, raffles, remole, Nevada tickets etc are distributed within the community, 45-100% of VLT profits exit the local economy
- in one community, the local radio station bingo program went from earning \$256,000 per year (75% redistributed to local sports teams, charities etc) to \$30,000 following the introduction of VLTs in a nearby town



Chevalier (June 3, 2005)

- Analyses of the Canadian Community Health Survey (2003) Eeyou Istchee Region, by CBHSSJB and INSPQ
- Compared to the rest of Quebec, Chevalier's preliminary analyses found a lower overall rate of gambling among adult (69% vs 81%) and adolescent (25% vs 51%) Cree
- However, there was a much higher rate of problem gambling among Cree adults
 - 9.5% vs 1.7% (in southern Quebec)
- women (10.3%) have a higher risk than men (6.9%)

Quantitative Methods: Project 2

Survey of the Social and Psychological Impacts of Problem Gambling

- detailed survey of gambling and associated impacts using semi-structured and structured instruments in randomly selected respondents from each of the 9 Cree communities (n=500)
- the primary instruments will be The Inventory of Gambling from the Quebec Gambling survey (Ladouceur et al. 2004) and the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI)
- severity of addictive behaviour will be assessed using the Addiction Severity Index (ASI)

- psychological problems and distress will be measured using self-reports including the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI), and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)
- English to Cree translation (and back translation) of all adult instruments will be completed prior to initiating the study
- qualitative data will also be collected in this phase of the study, in order to more clearly identify the motivations for gambling, perceptions of gambling, and help-seeking behaviour

Sampling Methods

- Random sample drawn from Cree Beneficiaries List
- List is well-maintained and brought up-to-date each 3 months (accuracy recently checked for an environmental health study)
- Individuals will be selected randomly but their households will be invited to participate as a whole

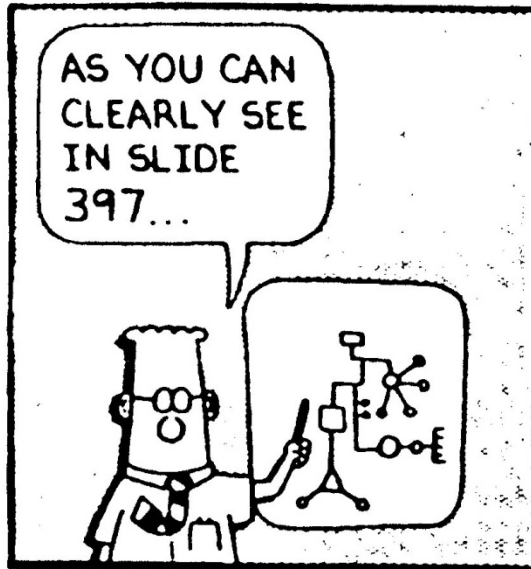
Hypotheses: Project 2

- Risks for problem gambling will be associated with younger age, professional status (middle and upper level management), income, prior or current drug/alcohol abuse, and family history of drug/alcohol abuse and gambling
- Cree gamblers (moderate to high risk on CPGI) will show higher rates of psychological distress, suicidal ideation and substance abuse, compared to non-gamblers

Results to follow in 2006

Dilbert

By Scott Adams



www.dilbert.com scottadams@aol.com



© 2000 United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

