

Preliminary Findings

'Exploring the Presence of Gambling and Family Violence in Vietnamese Families.'

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Diana Tran has a background in Commerce and Social Work from The University of Melbourne. She is conducting research into the social issues in the Vietnamese community at the Ignatius Centre for Policy and Research (Jesuit Social Services). The current research project is a six-month project which began in late February and will be completed by the end of September, 1999.

For this research project the author has formed extensive networks in the Vietnamese community which has enabled her to gather rich data through interviews and focus groups with service providers and community members on the issues surrounding gambling and family violence.

Project background

The rationale for this research topic was a response to the current lack of research on the impact of gambling in the Vietnamese community specifically , and the virtually non-existent literature available on the links between gambling and family violence. Anecdotal evidence from Vietnamese welfare service providers and the limited literature available on the issue suggest that gambling has devastated many families in the Vietnamese community (see e.g.,Tenekegioglou, K. 1996, Nguyen, P. 1996, The Age, 25/07/96, The Age 17/4/96).

Consultations with service providers in the current research found that family violence (which may include financial, emotional, physical, psychological violence) is often linked to the problem gambling activity of a partner and the consequent impact on families and children is devastating. Brown, S., et al (1999: 30-32) highlighted in her report on the impact of gambling on services ' Who Picks up the Tab' that this particular area warranted more research.

The available information clearly shows the under- use of gambling counselling/support services by Vietnamese families . Therefore, the seriousness of problem gambling and it's impact on the community is virtually hidden. The particular reluctance of some cultures such as the Vietnamese to speak about gambling has been confirmed in various papers and reports (see, e.g., Australian Vietnamese Welfare Association, 1998: 2-3; Brown & Coventry 1997, : 10-11; Brown, S., et al. 1999: 12-13; Wesley Gambling Counselling Service 1998: 30-31).

The reluctance of gamblers and their families to seek outside help has been attributed to reasons such as the lack of community knowledge about services, the unfamiliarity with the concept and benefits of counselling , denial, shame, and lack of time or priority for focus on personal and psychological issues (Dinh, T. 1998: 20). Other communities such as the Arabic community share similar reasons for not attending formal support services (e.g., see Estratiou, N. 1997 : 24).

Goals of project

- 1):** The first goal is to explore the issues arising when there is gambling and family violence present in Vietnamese families.
- 2):** Our second goal is look at the various pathways to which families access assistance when faced with gambling and family violence related issues. Through this exploration a clearer picture of the impact of gambling on Vietnamese families may emerge.
- 3):** From above findings we may be able to build an effective and appropriate model of prevention and harm minimisation for the Vietnamese community in relation to gambling.
- 4):** Through information collected in the data collection process the report endeavors to build on existing models of support so that a ‘ best practice model’ of support for individuals and families affected by gambling- related issues can access the appropriate assistance.

Methodology

- Literature review
- Service Surveys (15 respondents)
- Interviews with service providers (28 people)
- 2 community focus groups conducted at the Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre in Flemington (20 people)
- 1 focus group with service providers (12 people)

Total number of participants : 60 (some participants responded in an interview and focus group)

Preliminary findings

Context: The Vietnamese community in Australia.

The much highlighted issue that came out of conducting this research particularly in the focus groups for service providers was not gambling or violence. The overriding issue was regarding the Vietnamese community, its experience as a migrant community in Australia and the challenges they faced. Settlement issues are seen to be inextricably linked to the social issues of gambling, violence and substance abuse in the community.

“The thing that comes out very clearly from the literature that is every new migrant group that has come to Australia has engaged in gambling, The Italians, Greeks, way back. It has got something to do with how they spend time and review the transition from where they’ve come from and where they are now and what that means culturally.”
Problem gambling community educator.

The particular challenges currently faced by Vietnamese include: High levels of unemployment (up to 40%), low paid work in factories or outwork, limited English language proficiency, limited social supports, lowered status, unresolved past traumas, social and cultural differences, and intergenerational conflict (Nguyen, V. 1997).

Moreover, families have experienced fragmentation due to the migration experience. Therefore, in addition to the ‘regular’ family unit, families can consist of step parents and step children, sole parents with children or young people without any family in Australia or are estranged from family and so on. (e.g., see Lam, C. 1998, Nguyen, V. 1997; Nguyen V. & Mai, H. 1995)

The view taken is that the Vietnamese (even after many years in Australia), like other ethnic communities in Victoria (e.g., Arabic, Turkish, and Spanish communities) are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of gambling because of the specific issues they face. The negative media stereotyping of Asians as ‘natural gamblers’ holds little truth when the social issues in the community are looked at more holistically (Tenekegioglou, K. 1996).

If you place all the abovementioned stressors, particularly the financial pressures into the lived experience of the family, one can imagine the difficulties in relationships at home. Herein lies the attraction of the Casino and pokie venues. The complexity and pressures of family life in Australia is often dealt with through means such as gambling albeit with negative consequences. Below are two examples:

- A Vietnamese gambling counsellor recalls the story of one of his clients “a man in his forties ...claimed that ...he had a heavy burden because he did not provide for the family. He felt that that if he could have a big win at the Crown casino he could prove that he was able to earn money. No-one would look down on him.”

- “They are so bloody poor that gambling is like a way out for them. Many are newly arrived, they have settlement difficulties, none have English skills. They work in low paid jobs...the father came home with \$350 a week and the family had four kids. They are so frustrated that gambling is like a way out for them They think ‘I can buy a house, get a better life for my children’ .” Family support worker

In another situation a youth worker recalls :

- “ The kids who have parents who gamble , I find it’s the only way for them [parents] to cope with the stress...that they are carrying from the refugee/settlement experience. ...when I visit them at home I end up talking to them about this , not the drugs, just about the difficulties and pressures they are going through. A lot of the kids end up on drugs because of the tensions at home. The parents are releasing the tensions on the young people. The only time they [the parents] have a break from work is to go out to the casino...to relax.” Vietnamese youth worker.

With the lack of alternative venues for relaxation and a sense of community connectedness in the Australian community, one family support worker in a focus group observed “ the casino represents entertainment, its where you meet other Vietnamese people , its safe , it’s a good night life for a lot of Vietnamese families”

But in a community focus group with women it was found that *all* of them opposed the casino as a form of entertainment , perhaps as they have seen families break down because of gambling . One woman said “ \$10 does not last long at the casino, only a few minutes. Even if you win you're unlucky because you become hooked. It seems so glamorous in the advertising. There’s no discussion of the bad side of it. No one is rich , they only become poor. Only the boss is rich”

The down side of that form of entertainment is problem gambling and it’s negative impact on the family and children as many support services that serve Vietnamese families have experienced.

- An indication of the impact of the current social problems on the community is this statistic: Fitzroy Legal Services state that a majority of it’s clientele are Vietnamese. Their records show that 25-30% of their clients are of Vietnamese origin. The main cases are drugs, gambling and family violence related issues.

Service Issues

The research found that services *other* than formal gambling counselling services paint a more accurate picture of the impact of gambling on the Vietnamese community. Families , such as the spouse and children affected by problem gambling in the family often come to Vietnamese community services and Vietnamese specific workers seeking emergency assistance. The following are some reasons why:

Workers who work closely with the Vietnamese community have built up a strong profile in the community through not only one to one client work but through organising festivals ,functions, group outings and many years of work with the Vietnamese . Their community agencies are firmly entrenched in the values and traditions of the community they serve . People feel comfortable with and have come to trust and respect these workers.

Clients often came to access the service through word of mouth and workers are usually accessed for than one issue. An informal approach is used. Counselling (although it's not labeled as 'counselling') often featured, but was the end product of a long process of engagement through crises intervention. Some community agencies and centres often provided groups for women or the elderly , so a mutual support system was also available.

These agencies include:

The Springvale IndoChinese Mutual Assistance Association (SICMAA -Springvale)
Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre (VWRC-Flemington)
Vietnamese Community in Australia, Victorian Chapter (VCA- Footscray)

Vietnamese specific workers from mainstream agencies:

The North Yarra Community Health Centre (Fitzroy)
North Richmond Community Health Centre (Richmond)
North West Region Migrant Resource Centre (St Albans)
Orana Family Services (Coolaroo)

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- The Vietnamese welfare agencies and Vietnamese specific services providers consulted for this project have confirmed that since the introduction of the temporary and then permanent Crown casino in the 1995 there has an increase and now a *steady but high* level of gambling related issues presented by families at services. The demand for crises assistance such as Centrelink income support, emergency financial assistance and accommodation continues at the same rate as in previous years.
- Generic Vietnamese services and service providers continue to see the majority of gambling related cases. For example , in Sicmaa's 1998 annual report, out of 1200 family conflict cases, 70% were indicated as being gambling related cases. However, due to very limited resources long-term counselling is often unavailable and the client is referred on to a gambling counsellor service like for their gambling partner or themselves.
- Nonetheless, the numbers of Vietnamese attending formal counselling like BreakEven services continue to be insignificant. Even though there are now two Vietnamese gambling counsellors and service providers are referring clients or their partners to gambling counselling , most workers express doubts that the referral is followed up. The stated reasons include, denial, shame, the stigma of having a

gambling problem, and lack of familiarity with the concept of counselling and its efficacy.

- While it is the family members that attend Vietnamese services themselves, the husbands of women who gamble or women who gamble do not seek out assistance. Many workers have mentioned simply that—“ they (the gambler) don’t think they have a problem” . (The previously mentioned reasons also apply) . All the Vietnamese welfare service providers interviewed mentioned that only about one client (since the service started to see the impact of gambling on families) has actually self referred to their service seeking problem gambling assistance.
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- *One of the two Vietnamese gambling counsellors in Melbourne says “ I have seen only 10 clients (gamblers and families) in the past six months . Counselling does not exist in Vietnam. People think that by talking you cannot solve anything. Gambling is something you don’t talk about outside the family. Even in the mainstream communities only one out of ten problem gamblers would seek assistance. So you can imagine what it’s like for a small minority community . I am concentrating on explaining to people through community education how counselling can help them.”*
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- Some workers don’t refer on for the above reasons and take on the client themselves, even though they may not have the gambling counselling skills. (e.g., a CSS worker at the Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre engages in couple counselling in some instances) .

“The only Vietnamese clients we see are those who are involuntary and are court ordered” Mainstream problem gambling counsellor.

- At other times the mainstream gambling service refers clients back to a Vietnamese worker who must counsel the client even without expertise in the gambling area .“The reason they refer to me is that even though they use an interpreter or the client can speak English, they felt that they couldn’t get the full picture of the family. They felt they were going round, round and round getting nowhere. They wonder that me, being Vietnamese who knows the culture and language for that group, the [client] could be more open and more honest. That is usually the case.” Social Worker
 - In both of the community focus groups it was found that generally participants were likely to deal with problems in the family as much as they could and not seek outside assistance. Thus, it is *impossible* to accurately gauge the full extent of problem gambling in the Vietnamese community.
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Client Profile and Issues Relating to Gambling and Violence

- Vietnamese women and children suffer the consequences of a partner's gambling more acutely because many are often economically and socially disadvantaged. In the Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre's annual service report for 1997-1998, 50 percent of the female clients were from sponsored migration marriages and one quarter of the women suffered from gambling related issues caused by their partner. In addition to the usual settlement issues and stress that migrant women must face such as isolation, lack of English literacy, transport, child care and health care (Alcorso & Schofield, 1991), they often have the burden of dealing with the impact gambling and violence in the family and consequently are vulnerable to suffering mental health problems:

“ It's usually the women that come to seek help. The men usually leave and dump the kids on to the mum. Women always accept the responsibilities. They're always left with the children and a whole lot of debt . This lady was left with her husband's \$20,000 debt from 'hui' ' (community bank). People hassled the wife for money, knock on the door. They were quite dangerous because she could get beat up if she didn't pay. Besides the physical impact of not having any food, the threat of being evicted from their flat and having no gas and electricity- they were fearful. She was so depressed. When I went to her flat it was so chaotic. The children were left to their own devices- the children are really at risk.” Family support worker

- Consultations with workers who mainly deal with women's issues in the Vietnamese community has found that a high number of gambling related cases involve some form of family violence . All workers who had contact with women estimated that up to **50-60%** of their gambling related cases involve family violence (this includes financial, emotional, psychological and physical violence , sexual violence was never mentioned) and the end result was often family breakdown and the women and children needing emergency housing or refuge accommodation .
- Some workers stated that women whose partners gamble stay in the situation for a long time and often shoulder the responsibility to pay off his financial debts until they can't bear it any longer (CSS worker at VWRC).

The Vietnamese workers who spoke about this topic were from the following agencies:

Women's Health West (Domestic violence outreach worker)
Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre (CSS worker)
SICMAA (Family support worker)
North Yarra Community Health Centre (Family support worker)
VCA (Social worker)
Australian Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association (AWWVA-Gambling counsellor)

Common observations from service providers:

- **Violence as a direct result of a partner's gambling**

“I have some cases where women call up and they are being threatened by the male for money to continue gambling. But they fear being hurt by their partner if they tell too much or disturb the household too much” Viet. problem gambling counsellor

Adds a social worker “ ...after a night of gambling the husband comes home asking for money to pay back friends or for food and after a row they hit their wife”

“ Gambling causes other forms of domestic violence . They become poverty stricken, they have no money to buy basics , clothes, food. There's the emotional anxiety and shame that their partner spend the family assets on gambling” Social/welfare worker

- **Gambling as part of the violence experienced**

Workers mentioned that gambling often occurred as part of other abuses:

“Most of the cases that have gambling and violence issues , gambling seems to exacerbate the problem as with drugs and alcohol. It's part of the violence that happens to them. Financial abuse is a form of abuse” Domestic violence outreach worker.

One worker saw gambling *as abuse*:

“ To me gambling is abuse because the person has already got that nature. To abuse the family financially and leave them with debt, is another form of abuse. Gambling is also another way for them to not deal with the issue , not deal with their violence, their behavior” Family support worker.

- **Gambling as a form of control and escape from abuse:**

In the reverse scenario, gambling is used as a form of escape for some women and has different meanings for others in violent relationships:

“I'm working with another Vietnamese woman, she's a gambler. The whole casino thing became a recreation for her because she was away from her husband a lot. She said that her husband was really violent and abusive, it was the only way she could escape him. The kids who were 9,10 were left to their own devices. She sold her whole house to pay back her debts.” Family support worker.

“ I find that those who feel powerless have begun to gamble as a way of asking for help within the family system” Problem gambling counsellor.

“ I find it may decrease the domestic violence because they can say you can hit me until your blue in the face but you’ll never get the money back. ”
Mainstream/Multicultural problem gambling counsellor.

- **Gambling and it’s impact on children.**

As also described in previously in this paper children suffer some forms of abuse as a result of a parent’s gambling:

A social worker recalls a case, “ T. is a single mother with several children , she gambled for fun with friends initially , then she became hooked . Her children were constantly shipped to their grandmother’s or to their aunts and uncles houses while T. went to the casino . The children’s caretakers then wanted to claim social security benefits to support the children since they became the main caretakers. However, it became difficult because T. did not want to give up the money because she used it to gamble” Social worker

Another worker talked about a lady who left her child with friends for 10 days, child protection was eventually called in. “ When they found her, she was at the casino with two packets of nappies in her hand. How hard was it for her to leave the casino you can see.” Community development worker.

- **“ Gambling is almost form of self abuse for some families. This is what I see.** The younger people abuse themselves through drugs, and the older people abuse themselves through gambling. There’s lots of issues there” Family support worker.

Some additional points: Move towards EGMs in the Vietnamese community.

- Some workers mention the occurrence of outside violence to the family by debtors who are owed money.
- Young people involved in dealing drugs who gamble often lose and owe thousands of dollars to their ‘pimp’.

The co-ordinator from Sicmma tells “ they [young people] end up gambling and losing the money and can be killed- this is why I bring it up. They owe money not only to the pimps, the suppliers of drugs, they also owe money to other drug suppliers. ”

- Sicmaa a welfare service in Springvale has observed that the trend is moving away from Casino gambling “ The problem of the pokies is overtaking the casino” the co-ordinator comments . Similarly women in a community focus group in Flemington say that they know of many people , especially men and elderly who frequent the pokies in pubs.

This is not surprising since Maribyrnong and the City of Greater Dandenong have the highest concentration of poker machines in Victoria. Unfortunately, it also

corresponds to the areas with the highest number of residential concentration for Vietnamese in Victoria.

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Recommendations

Through consultations and focus groups these recommendations have developed:

1. A formal mechanism should be developed to assist ethnic workers and Vietnamese specific agencies collaborate with formal gambling counselling services like BreakEven. Through an outreach model, links between agencies can be formally established

*Resources can be shared such as mutual support, cultural issues exchanged, gambling counselling training, and community development projects may be developed. In an outreach model a trained gambling counsellor/financial counsellor can be placed once a week at a community agency. This would bridge the current gaps and barriers in service provision while having access to a community that tends to attend these particular services more often than a formal service.

•Forums or newsletters for workers who deal with gambling issues (ethnic and mainstream) to exchange experiences and reflections to create a sense of collaboration rather than work in isolation from each other. Common issues in different communities can be highlighted and dealt with collaboratively.

2. Prevention strategies should be promoted through community groups, centres, workshops, schools, and through media such as SBS radio and ethnic newspapers. Emphasis would not be on problem gambling but a holistic discussion about how to maintain 'healthy' families, the difficulties faced during settlement and post settlement and where to go for these issues whether they be family, health, personal or other difficulties.
3. Another prevention strategy can be aimed at strengthening families and their resilience in the face of various challenges. This can be dealt with through interventions aimed at the supporting family and children. For example through family /relationship mediation and promoting healthy recreational activities as a way of relationship building and as way to deal with stress and day to day issues
4. The funding for two part-time Vietnamese gambling community educators is too short term. One worker's contract is almost over only after six months. Obviously very little be achieved. There needs to be more resources and more ongoing work devoted to community education and strategies for the minimisation of gambling related harm. For example, there should be on going programs introduced through community agencies and media promotions specifically to educate the community about how to protect their assets against a family member's gambling

debt, how to deal with a partner's debt legally, how to deal with gambling related violence as a victim and where to go for assistance.

*For those who have problems with gambling, information can be provided on what the odds are for gambling at particular games, who to pick up that one is having problems controlling their gambling, strategies to cut back on gambling and the promotion of the negative impact of gambling on the family and where to seek help.

5. Due to the lack of attendance at formal counselling services, a self help- manual should be produced to families and individuals who will never attend services. It should be advertised widely and generally available through the mail.
6. As counselling services will take time to be accepted as legitimate form of assistance in the Vietnamese community, informal means of support must be provided. The Community Support Fund must acknowledge the limits of therapy and broaden the gambling assistance criteria to resourcing alternative recreational venues as a positive avenue for Vietnamese families to recreate. The CSS worker at the VWRC holds a karaoke night every Friday night as his agency in response to the lack of recreational opportunities in the community. He says that "people attend and say to him if this was here before we would not have to go to the casino. If one had a problem, the worker would be accessible immediately in an informal environment"

*Community centres should also be able to be eligible for resources from CSF as they currently lack the resources and time to provide group outings (such as picnics and camping trips for youth, women and the elderly). This form of recreation is one that promotes a sense of community connectedness, allowing members to build their social supports and helps them to forget about their daily concerns. One youth worker mentioned that he had to conduct trips for youth voluntarily because they were so important.

These groups provided a forum for people to discuss the difficulties in their life, gambling and drugs specifically are not mentioned at all. The empowering affect of these trips was mentioned by all members as they felt they were heard and found out that they all were facing similar difficulties at home.

7. The needs of Vietnamese women and children in regards to the impact on their health should be examined more closely, particularly when family violence occurs in at least at least half the of gambling related cases.
8. This is a neglected area. More research needs to be conducted into the issues Vietnamese men in Australia, their needs and the most appropriate ways of supporting them with their concerns, especially as workers revealed that more men than women are gambling in the community.

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