



23 October 2012

MEDIA RELEASE

SINGAPORE PROBLEM GAMBLING CONFERENCE 2012

“Addressing Harms to Families of Problem Gamblers”

1. The National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) held the third Singapore Problem Gambling Conference today at the Orchard Hotel. The one-day conference focused on **“Addressing the Harms to Families of Problem Gamblers”** and provided a platform for experts and practitioners to exchange knowledge on the latest developments in research, prevention and treatment of problem gambling.
2. The first conference since the opening of the IR casinos in 2010, its focus was on families affected by problem gambling. The one-day conference was attended by some 150 help professionals specialising in various addictions, primarily in the field of problem and pathological gambling.
3. The keynote address was presented by Prof Alex Blaszczynski, a renowned expert in the field of gambling studies and Director of Gambling Research at the University of Sydney. He spoke on “Responsible Gambling: Preventing A Family of Harms”, covering the adverse effects of problem gambling on the family, and the measures that could be employed to control the negative harm consequences.
4. Other notable speakers at the conference included: Prof David Chan, Behavioural Sciences Institute, Singapore Management University; Dr Rachel Volberg, Gemini Research; Dr Samson Tse, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, University of Hong Kong; Dr Mathew Mathews, Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore; Dr Song-lee Hong, Department of Social Work, National University of Singapore; Mr John Chua, National Addictions Management Service, Institute of Mental Health; and Mr Charles Lee, Thye Hua Kwan Problem Gambling Recovery Centre. More information on the speakers and topics can be found at [Annex](#).
5. Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Mr Chan Chun Sing graced the event as the Guest-of-Honour. Mr Chan emphasised the

importance of having a holistic approach to addressing problem gambling that encompassed individual responsibility, the family and the community. Family support was a significant impetus to help problem gamblers fight their addiction. He also acknowledged the NCPG's efforts in reaching out to problem gamblers and their affected family members through public education and outreach initiatives, and improvements to help services.

6. Said NCPG Chairman, Mr Lim Hock San: "Problem gamblers rarely feel that they have a problem and therefore do not seek help. It has become increasingly clear that gambling addiction does not concern only the gambler. It affects the gambler's family, friends and others around him, and they often suffer the collateral harm of problem gambling, both emotionally and financially. We hope the Conference will provide a useful learning opportunity to build capability in our professionals assisting individuals and their families affected by problem gambling."

About the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG)

The NCPG was appointed in August 2005 as part of Singapore's national framework to address problem gambling. The Council comprises 13 members with expertise in legal, psychiatry and psychology, social work, counseling and rehabilitative services. The Council's role is to provide advice and feedback to the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) on public education programs on problem gambling and on the effectiveness of treatment, counseling and rehabilitative programs; to decide on funding for these programs; preventive and rehabilitative programs; and on the applications for exclusion of persons from casinos. Stop Problem Gambling. Turn Your Luck Around, Know The Line. Call 1800-6-668-668. For more information, please visit www.knowtheline.sg.

Media Contact:

Mr. Chung Sang Pok
National Council on Problem Gambling
510, Thomson Road
#12-05/06 SLF Building
Singapore 298135
Tel: 6354-7073
HP: 9672-4112
Email: chung_sang_pok@mcys.gov.sg

CONFERENCE SPEAKERS AND PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

Prof Alex Blaszczynski

“Responsible Gambling: Preventing a Family of Harms”

Prof Alex Blaszczynski is a Professor of Clinical Psychology and currently the Head of the School of Psychology, The University of Sydney. He is the Director of the Gambling Research Unit and Treatment Clinic, and Editor-in-Chief, International Gambling Studies. He has published extensively on the topic of the psychology of gambling, and responsible gambling policies and guidelines.

Irrespective of its terminology, disordered, pathological, problem, or excessive gambling results in financial pressures, and marital and dysfunctional family relationships. These impacts are manifested through inter- and intra-personal consequences of loss of trust, respect and face, anger and resentment and high rates of separation, divorce, and domestic intimidation.

One of the most stressful factors affecting spouses and significant others is the sense of helplessness, frustration and isolation that emerge as a function of feelings of inadequacy, lack of resources or inability to effectively communicate with the gambler and to intervene to (a) overcome denial or direct rejection of assistance, (b) encourage referral to and compliance with, professional treatment programs designed to help clients regain control, (c) seek personal counselling and support to deal with current physical and psychological stresses and future uncertainties and potential relapses, and (d) minimising the deleterious consequences of family discord on children.

Although psychological effects of parental divorce on children are well documented, there is a perplexing absence of research on the specific effects of gambling on children within the context of families affected by disordered gambling. Superimposed on the outcome of exposure to parental conflicts and abuse are the impacts of loss of face and embarrassment caused by peer group reactions to disclosures of financial and marital problems, and to the influence of social learning in moderating the child's future attitudes and gambling behaviours.

This presentation summarises the current status on disordered gambling and family dysfunctions, and outlines potential responsible gambling measures directed toward the psychological health and well being of spouses, children, and relatives of such gamblers. Initiatives such as third-party exclusion, GamAnon, family service within addiction services, and support services are essential approaches to quarantine negative consequences of disordered gambling within society.

Dr Rachel Volberg & Dr Mathew Mathews
“The Many Impacts of Problem Gambling on Singaporean Families”

Dr Rachel Volberg has been involved in epidemiological research on gambling and problem gambling since 1985. Dr Volberg has directed, and consulted numerous gambling studies throughout the world and is presently engaged in a number of projects internationally. She is working on projects in Canada to assess the impacts of the introduction of online gambling and to identify best practices in population assessments of problem gambling. Dr Volberg is also a member of research teams in Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden conducting large-scale longitudinal studies to identify predictors of transitions into and out of gambling and problem gambling. In addition to her own consulting business, Dr Volberg holds appointments at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, NORC at the University of Chicago and the Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand.

Dr Mathew Mathews is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies, National University of Singapore where he is part of the Society and Identity cluster. Before joining the institute, he was teaching at the university's sociology department. While his research interests are diverse, several of his recently completed or current projects examine issues related to the family – marriage and parenthood, marriage resilience, single mothers and low income families. Mathew's previous work on addiction include examining the impact of problem gambling on families, problematic alcohol consumption among young adults and youth perception of appropriate treatment for internet dependency. Besides his academic interests, Mathew is actively involved in community service and serves as President of Alive Community Network, a local Voluntary Welfare Organization and is on the advisory board of Marriage Central and One People.sg.

Problem gambling has a profound impact on family members. While this has been previously documented, we report on the first study to consider the extent of this impact in Asian societies where the family continues to be a very important basis for social organization. This study is based on in-depth interviews with 50 Singaporeans with a family member who is a problem or pathological gambler and examines how their financial, emotional and social well-being is impinged by gambling. The enormous losses of savings, property and lifestyle, the emotional tensions based on constant harassment from moneylenders, the threats of suicide by the gambler and the distancing of social networks place family members of problem gamblers in a vulnerable state. The results of the study reveal the extent to which the family is mobilised in Singapore to cope with problem gambling. While the impact of problem gambling on families is similar across societies, routine mobilisation of the extended family and the greater role of public shame and embarrassment in dictating Asian families' responses underscore the need for specialised services in these societies to assist family members to better cope with the financial, emotional and social strains caused by problem gambling.

Dr Samson Tse & Dr Hong Song-iee
“Gambling in Later Life: A Mixed-Method Study in Singapore”

A/Prof Samson Tse is currently an Associate Professor and Director of the Master of Social Science in Counselling Programme at the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong. He has had long standing interest in wellness recovery for individuals with psychiatric disability and problem gambling. Dr Tse has been involved in the design and implementation of a number of mental health and addiction-related projects in New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Before returning to Hong Kong in 2009, he held the position as Associate Professor and research centre director in the School of Population Health, Faculty of Medical Health and Sciences, The University of Auckland in New Zealand.

Dr Hong Song-lee is a social gerontologist who concentrates on the development of ageing policies, programs, and service delivery systems. She is currently Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work, National University of Singapore. She did her bachelor's degree at Yonsei University, master's degree at Seoul National University and PhD at the Washington University in St. Louis.

This study (1) identified the possible risk and protective factors related to problem gambling; and (2) explored the cultural and social meanings of participating in gambling activities among older adults. A mixed method of quantitative and qualitative study was employed. At the first stage, a stratified-sampling survey was administered to 3,010 resident older adults aged 55 and above. The survey involved face-to-face interviews of around one hour using English, Chinese, Malay or Tamil questionnaires. Post-survey weightings were applied based on corresponding cohort proportions from Singapore National Statistics published in 2010.

At the second stage, based on the criteria of the 9-item (Canadian) Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), 39 older adults from the quantitative survey participated in the qualitative study. Among those who gambled in the past 12 months, 2.2% were identified to possibly have ‘problem gambling’ based on the PGSI. Problem and moderate risk gamblers are more likely to be Chinese, have secondary education, and have a higher personal monthly income. Help-seeking behaviour for problem gambling was very low. From the qualitative study, the three main risk factors for gambling that emerged were: being greedy for more money, recouping losses, and gambling to socialise. While the main protective factors were: “realising the odds are against you”, realising the dangers of excessive gambling, and family. The study findings can contribute to design more tailored preventive and remedial interventions for older adults who gamble.

Prof David Chan
“Gambling and Subjective Well-Being”

Prof David Chan is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Behavioural Sciences Institute at Singapore Management University. He received numerous scholarly awards and is the first non-American to receive the Distinguished Early Career Contributions Award from the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP). His works have been cited over 2,000 times in journals from various disciplines. He has served as Editor and editorial board member on several journals. He is a member of the National Council on Problem Gambling and serves on several advisory panels and governing boards in Singapore and United States. Professor Chan is an elected Fellow of the SIOP, Association for Psychological Science, American Psychological Association and the International Association of Applied Psychology.

Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to the individual's overall life satisfaction as well as satisfaction with specific life domains such as family life and work. In the study of problem gambling, it is important to examine how the gamblers' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours are related to their levels of SWB, and if so, the nature and extent of the relationships. Based on data from a national survey, this study examined the relationships linking SWB with specific gambling behaviours, perceptions of and attitudes towards gambling, self-control in gambling and probable pathological and problem gambling. Results indicate that SWB levels are negatively associated with a variety of gambling behaviours and perceptions. In addition, gamblers who are assessed to be probable pathological and problem gamblers were more likely to experience lower levels of SWB. The overall patterns of findings indicate the importance of examining issues of SWB in the research on problem gambling. Practical Implications of the results and future research directions will be discussed.

Mr John Chua
“Essence of Treatment for Families of Problem Gamblers”

Mr John Edward Chua, a Certified Substance Abuse & Gambling Addiction Counsellor, has been with the National Addictions Management Service since his return from Australia in 2006. He obtained a Master of Counselling from The University of Queensland (Australia) in 2005. He recently completed a two-month residency with the Problem Gambling Services, Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (DMHAS) in Connecticut, USA. His specialisation includes conducting one-on-one counselling session and group session for individuals who have been diagnosed with substance and/or gambling addictions. He also facilitates recovery support programmes for family members of these individuals. In addition, Mr Chua conducts public education programme for family members of compulsive gamblers in helping these families to gain better understanding on problem gambling.

Studies indicate that problem gambling causes significant societal and familial harm in addition to adverse personal effects to the gambler. Research indicates that up to ten significant others (particularly members of his/her immediate and/or extended

family) can be adversely affected. Whilst family members play a central role in the treatments for all health related problems, including addictions, the treatment providers, on their part, may not have given the family members as much attention as needed. Family members significantly impact the process of addiction as well as recovery. The relationship patterns that typically contribute to the continuation of problem gambling behaviours need to be addressed.

In addition, a recent study carried out by the National Addictions Management Service indicates that family members of the addicted individual experience greater psychological morbidity and stress compared with controls. The study highlighted that interventions could focus on possible strategies to enable family members to deal with the addiction in a more effective manner. Generally, family psycho-education and some form of therapy have been shown to have significant therapeutic value. The experience is that actual attendance among family members remains poor. Treatment providers need to be more proactive in getting family members involved in treatment for their own needs, which should optimise treatment for the problem gambler.

Mr Charles Lee
“Helping Families of Problem Gamblers”

Mr Charles Lee obtained his Bachelor of Science Degree(Psychology) from the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point. He then went on to do a Post-grad Diploma in Certified Substance Abuse Counselling conducted by the Department of Health, State of Hawaii, USA. In addition, Mr Lee also obtained his Certified Gambling Addiction Counsellor certificate, conducted by the Association for Professionals Specialising in Addiction Counselling (APSAC). Mr Lee started off as a Counsellor for heroin addiction at the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises. He then joined the Family and Juvenile Justice Centre, Family Court, Subordinate Courts of Singapore doing Reconciliation counselling, Family Violence counselling, Custody and Access Evaluation Reports, mediation on divorce matters (Custody, Care & Control and ancillary matters-Division of Property, Maintenance and Access). He was sent for training at the Parramatta Registry, Family Court of Sydney, Australia. He is currently the Programme Director of the Thye Hua Kwan Problem Gambling Recovery Centre and a member of APSAC.

Addiction is a disease which affects the family and the addict. While most of the attention is focused on how the addicted person could seek recovery from the addiction, it is equally important for the family to seek treatment. This talk covers some areas that may benefit families with addiction: Healing Process – to help family members heal from the hurt and pain caused by the problem gambler; Dealing with Guilt & Overcoming Shame, and Dealing with Co-dependency – these could have its grip on the family members, leading them to bail out the problem gambler’s debts; Building Healthy Boundaries – to let go of shielding and protecting the problem gambler but instead learn to render positive support; Wealth Protection – for family member to protect their wealth so that they are financially independent of the problem gambler; Legal & Financial Assistance information – issues like division of property, spousal maintenance and children’s maintenance, division of property,

Personal Protection Order and divorce petition filing; and Dealing with Illegal Money Lenders.