EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gambling and Problem Gambling in Massachusetts: In-Depth Analysis of Predictors

March 23, 2017

In 2013/2014, a general population survey of 9,578 Massachusetts adults was conducted with results reported in Volberg et al. (2015). The present report is a follow-up to this. Whereas Volberg et al. (2015) provided a description of the characteristics of non-gamblers, recreational gamblers, at-risk gamblers, and problem gamblers, the present report focuses on identifying the univariate and multivariate predictors of membership in these groups.

SEIGMA
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS
OF GAMBLING IN MASSACHUSETTS

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH SCIENCES

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Executive Summary

This report is a compendium of four separate but related analyses completed on a general population survey of 9,578 Massachusetts adults conducted from September 2013 to May 2014. The four analyses included examination of:

- Univariate and multivariate differences between Recreational Gamblers and Non-Gamblers
- Multivariate predictors of Level of Gambling Participation in terms of number of formats engaged in, frequency of gambling, and gambling expenditure
- Univariate and multivariate differences between Recreational Gamblers and At-Risk Gamblers
- Univariate and multivariate differences between Recreational Gamblers and Problem and Pathological Gamblers

There is considerable overlap in the characteristics of Recreational Gamblers and Non-Gamblers. However, there were several variables that statistically predicted greater likelihood of being a Non-Gambler. The strongest predictor was having fewer friends and family that were regular gamblers. Perhaps not surprisingly, not using alcohol was also a fairly strong predictor of being a Non-Gambler. The other predictors were having higher educational attainment; being a student, homemaker, disabled or retired; being in the age range 18-34 or 65+; being born outside the United States; not being a binge drinker; having lower household income; not using tobacco; having a less happy childhood; not having served in the military; being non-White, and not having problems with drugs or alcohol.

While there is considerable overlap in the characteristics of people who have low levels of gambling participation relative to people with high levels of participation, there were also several variables that statistically predict higher involvement. Interestingly, the portion of friends and family that were regular gamblers was also the strongest predictor in this analysis, with higher gambling involvement being associated with more friends/family involvement. Lower educational attainment, male gender, binge drinking, poorer health, and tobacco use were also predictive of higher gambling involvement.

There are greater differences between Recreational Gamblers and At-Risk Gamblers. In order of importance, people who were At-Risk Gamblers were significantly more likely to be casino gamblers, have a greater portion of friends and family that are regular gamblers, play instant lottery games, play daily lottery games, be male, be online gamblers, be born outside of the United States, participate in private betting, have lower educational attainment, play bingo, not purchase raffle tickets, have lower household income, have mental health problems, and have no alcohol use in the past 30 days.

The greatest differences were found between Recreational Gamblers and Problem/Pathological Gamblers. In order of importance, people who were Problem/ Pathological Gamblers were significantly more likely to: play daily lottery games, have a greater portion of friends and family involved in gambling, be Black, engage in casino gambling, be male, engage in online gambling, play instant lottery games, have other behavioral addictions, have lower educational attainment, be born outside the United States, and have lower childhood happiness.

There are several important implications for prevention from these findings:

- The lack of marked differences in the health and mental health status of Non-Gamblers versus Recreational Gamblers suggests that intervention efforts to prevent harm from gambling should probably not be directed at gambling generally, but more specifically to excessive levels of gambling and/or At-Risk Gambling.
- The social network of gamblers is a particularly important target for prevention, as portion of friends and family that are regular gamblers was the strongest overall predictor of Non-Gambling and Level of Gambling Participation, and the second strongest predictor of At-Risk Gambling and Problem/ Pathological Gambling. The power of this specific predictor makes it clear that:
  - Gamblers need to be aware of the normalizing effect that their social group has on their own gambling behavior;
  - Friends and family of regular gamblers need to be aware of the facilitative role they have on that person's gambling; and
  - All gamblers need to be aware that problem gambling (and presumably heavy gambling) has a substantial genetic component and, if they have a positive family history of problem gambling, need to be particularly vigilant to the risks of excessive gambling engagement.
- There are certain demographic groups meriting special attention for prevention due to their consistent association with higher levels of gambling involvement, At-Risk Gambling and/or Problem/Pathological Gambling. These are males, individuals with lower educational attainment, immigrants, and African-Americans.
- Most problem gamblers are involved in an array of gambling formats, all of which contribute, to some extent, to the problems they experience. Nonetheless, consistent with other research on this topic, there is evidence that certain forms of gambling pose elevated risk to Massachusetts residents due to their continuous nature (i.e., casino gambling, instant lottery games, daily lottery games) and/or greater convenience and 24-hour availability (i.e., online gambling).