



Study Ties Risk of Problem Gambling with Proximity to Casinos and Other Gambling Opportunities

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Individuals who live within 10 miles of a casino or in a disadvantaged neighborhood are more likely to experience problem gambling, according to new research from the University at Buffalo's Research Institute on Addictions (RIA).

A casino within 10 miles of home has a significant effect on problem gambling and is associated with a 90 percent increase in the odds of being a pathological or problem gambler, said Michael Welte, Ph.D., principal investigator on the study.

The likely reason for the increase, he added, is that the availability of an attractive gambling opportunity can lead to gambling pathology in some people who otherwise would not gamble.

The study, involving a national telephone survey of 2,631 U.S. adults, was reported in the current issue of *Journal of Gambling Studies*.

While geographic location nearly doubled the risk, Welte stressed the importance of placing the study results in perspective.

"Individual traits have a stronger relationship to gambling pathology than geographic location," Welte added. "For example, in another analysis of this survey that previously was reported, we found that problem drinkers had 23 times the odds of having a gambling problem than individuals who did not have a drinking problem."

According to Welte, "Gambling behavior and problem gambling behaviors are multifaceted and influenced by social and environmental factors. Social and environmental influences on gambling behavior and pathology are interesting in themselves. They have a special relevance to public policy debates. Because localities vary in the location and density of gambling opportunities, such as casinos or lottery outlets, public policy makers have some influence over the rates of problem gambling in our society."

Welte said respondents living in disadvantaged neighborhoods reported much higher rates of problem gambling than those who do not live in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Ten percent of those who live in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods are problem gamblers as compared to about one percent of those who live in the least disadvantaged neighborhoods.

"We know that this is not simply an effect of poverty at the individual level," explained Michael R. D'Amico, senior scientist at RIA and a research associate professor in the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine in the UB School of Public Health and Health Professions. "Acceptable gambling by family and friends, unrealistic expectations from gambling combined with desperation, might be the explanation."

Welte added that it also must be acknowledged that some of the problem gamblers in the study might have been forced to move to disadvantaged neighborhoods by financial setbacks.

Past-year gambling was more common in states with two or more forms of legal gambling. The average number of times gambled per year also was higher in those states with more forms of legal gambling. In fact, the odds of gambling for study respondents during the past year increased by 17 percent for every additional form of legal gambling in their state.

For the purposes of this study, levels of gambling behavior were labeled as "any gam past year," "frequent gambling" (defined as gambling 104 or more times in the past "problem gambling" (manifesting problem gambling symptoms such as preoccupation gambling and needing to gamble with increasing amounts of money to get the same excitement).

The other researchers involved in the study were Grace M. Barnes, Ph.D., senior rese scientist with RIA and adjunct associate professor in the Department of Sociology in College of Arts and Sciences; William F. Wieczorek, Ph.D., director of the Center for I Social Research at Buffalo State College, and Marie O. Tidwell, Ph.D., project director study.

Funding for the study was provided by a \$1.2 million grant from the National Institut Abuse and Alcoholism.

The Research Institute on Addictions (RIA) has been a leader in the study of addictio 1970 and a research center of the University at Buffalo since 1999.

The University at Buffalo is a premier research-intensive public university, the larges comprehensive campus in the State University of New York.

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