

## “Wanna Bet? Raising Awareness of Problem Gambling”

by

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Enter any gambling establishment and you are likely to see someone who is Asian. What is it about casinos that attract Asians, and in particular, Filipinos? Could it be the food, the potential to win big money, or maybe it is just a place to pass the time? I’ve heard it all. Filipinos gamble because they’re smart, they’re good at math, and they’ve got money. Or, they’re lonely, they miss their homeland, so they go to the casino to socialize. Or maybe it is because the casino buses pick up in Mira Mesa, National City, and Chula Vista. It could be a combination of many factors. But whatever the reason, many Filipinos do gamble.

As a Filipino, I’ve grown up with gambling all around me. As a child, I remember my neighbor’s smoke-filled garage where my dad played mahjong for days straight on many weekends. As a teenager, I remember playing cards with my cousins on the patio after my grandmother’s funeral, abruptly stopping when a car window shattered, thinking it was a sign from my grandmother. A few years ago on a Superbowl Sunday, my mom rubbed my pregnant belly with her football pool – her winning just further reinforced the belief that pregnant women are lucky. The Asian culture has these strong beliefs in superstition, fate, and luck, and gambling encompasses all of these. Also, ancient card games originated in early China. So gambling is certainly a part of the social fabric of Asian culture.

One research study found that Asians are 4.7 times more likely than White Caucasians to develop a problem with gambling. Some even theorize that Asian immigrants are more prone to gambling problems because they are inherent risk takers.

Going to the casino for a day of gambling can be innocent fun for most people. But for a small few it can be dangerously addicting. Approximately 2-5% of the population experience some sort of negative consequence

due to gambling, such as using money that should be used to pay rent and bills, missing time with family, lying to others about where they have been, or minimizing how much they lost. Approximately 1 out of 100 people has a serious gambling addiction, resulting in poor health, depression, divorce, job loss, crime, arrest, and even death. The suicide rate among problem gamblers is higher than that of any other addiction.

Research has reliably shown a strong correlation between substance use and problem gambling. Most problem gamblers also have a substance use problem, usually alcohol. One research study found that among all groups of youth, Filipino youth had the highest rate of past-year alcohol use – 1 out of 3 acknowledged alcohol use in the past year. This, combined with social and cultural acceptance of gambling, puts Filipino youth at high risk for gambling, and potentially higher risk for developing problems with gambling.

How do you know that you have a gambling problem? Are you gambling or going to the casino more frequently than you used to? Are you going alone now when you used to go with others? Do you feel the need to bet more and more? Are you going back the next day to try to win back what you lost? Are you lying to loved ones about where you are and what you are doing? Do you rely on others to help pay for expenses you should have been able to afford but cannot because you lost the money gambling?

There are resources available for the problem gambler, as well as for the family members. Just as there is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), there is a 12-step support group for problem gamblers, Gamblers Anonymous (GA). There are over 30 GA meetings a week in San Diego County. The GA meeting list is available on-line at [www.sandiegoga.org](http://www.sandiegoga.org). GA's toll-free hotline is (888) 233-8547. Oftentimes, the gambler does not want help nor realize he has a problem. In that case, family members and friends of the gambler can attend their own 12-step support group meeting, Gam-Anon, regardless of whether the gambler wants help or not. The Gam-Anon meeting list is available on-line at [www.gam-anon.org](http://www.gam-anon.org). Gam-Anon's toll-free hotline is (888) 233-8547.

The California Office of Problem Gambling (OPG) website contains helpful information and resources [www.problemgambling.ca.gov](http://www.problemgambling.ca.gov). The website can be converted easily from English to Tagalog with one click. OPG recently trained licensed mental health professionals across the state to effectively treat problem gamblers and their family members. The gambler and their family members over the age of 18 can receive FREE treatment from any of these State-approved clinicians. The OPG website lists these providers by name, office address, and language they speak. A FREE Problem Gambling Summit will be hosted by OPG here in San Diego on March 4-5 at the Handlery Hotel. Workshops will spotlight the Hispanic community, discuss treatment techniques, and offer tools for financial recovery.

The California Helpline for Problem Gamblers is 1 (800) GAMBLER (426-2537). It is free, confidential, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and languages are available upon request. The helpline is run by the California Council on Problem Gambling (CCPG). The CCPG website also contains helpful information and resources for the problem gambler and family members [www.calproblemgambling.org](http://www.calproblemgambling.org). CCPG will conduct a workshop in San Diego entitled "Financial Strategies for Problem Gamblers and their Loved Ones" on March 3 (the day before OPG's Problem Gambling Summit) at the Handlery Hotel.

Any person who wishes to stop gambling can also ban themselves from a gambling establishment. The gambler can go to the casino or cardroom, fill out a self-exclusion form to prevent entry into the facility, or fill out a self-restriction form to restrict access to a certain machine or table, restrict check-cashing or financing,

or opt-out of the casino's mailing list. Self-exclusion forms for the State cardrooms are available at [www.problemgambling.ca.gov](http://www.problemgambling.ca.gov). To exclude from tribal casinos, a person must go to the casino and fill out their form. The gambler specifies the length of time he would like to be excluded, such as 1 year, 5 years, or lifetime. Some casinos also offer Third-Party Exclusions where a family member can exclude the problem gambler by showing evidence of financial hardship caused by the gambling behavior.

A Filipino family in crisis may count on extended family, friends, their church, and community for support. Social organizations that help the ethnic community can be of help also, such as the Union of Pan Asian Communities (UPAC). UPAC offers free problem gambling education and prevention services. Knowing the signs and symptoms of a problem gambler and the consequences of problem gambling can help a person make better choices. UPAC Problem Gambling Prevention Project provides FREE information and conducts FREE workshops in San Diego County (619) 521-5720 extension 2231, [www.upacsd.com](http://www.upacsd.com).

Gambling will continue to be a part of Filipino culture and in our society. We can enjoy playing responsibly by following these simple guidelines: set a dollar limit and bring only the amount you can afford to spend for entertainment; set a time limit and leave when the time is up; expect to lose; don't borrow money; don't use the ATM; don't use credit; avoid "chasing" lost money; don't gamble as a way to cope with emotional or physical pain; and be aware of the warning signs of problem gambling. Following these guidelines can help prevent problems so that we can continue to gamble as an enjoyable form of entertainment.