

**Exploration of Cultural Perceptions, Attitudes and Beliefs
Regarding Gambling and Problem Gambling in the
Tamil Speaking Community
in the Greater Toronto Area**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research project is a collaboration between COSTI Immigrant Services and the Society for the Aid of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) Minorities (SACEM).

Purpose of the Research

Given limited research conducted within ethnocultural communities targeted by this project, the purpose of this research was to explore perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding gambling and problem gambling. The research was also designed to explore how problem gambling may be prevented and reduced, and to assess how approaches, materials and techniques to address the issue of problem gambling in this community can be developed. The Tamil speaking community is one of seven communities involved and was selected given its size in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Participatory Action Research

In order for the results of this project to be meaningful and useful to the communities involved, a Participatory Action Research approach was used. This means community stakeholders were involved from the onset to the completion of the project.

Data Collection Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather data. Focus groups were conducted with service providers and community members as well as conducting individual interviews with service providers who were not able to attend focus groups.

Data Analysis and Results

Qualitative

- Participants in all focus groups identified some cultural and religious stigma associated with gambling not just problem gambling, to varying degrees.
- Despite reporting stigma attached to this activity, participants also listed various forms of gambling that are popular in the community including lottery tickets and card playing.
- From focus group discussions it seems that people in the community are less likely to seek help for problem gambling for a number of reasons: thinking that

this is something they can control on their own, and shame and stigma in admitting to an addiction or mental health issue.

- Barriers to service programming identified by focus group participants include language and cultural differences. Also there is a fear of being misunderstood, even with interpreters when accessing mainstream services. Anonymity was another concern in accessing services in the community.
- There also seems to be a preference for services in Tamil and there are few Tamil counsellors who provide mental health or addictions counselling.

Quantitative

- Sports betting, card games, stocks, lottery, Carom, bingo, racetrack and POGS were reported as common gambling activities in the community.
- Adult males (25%) and youth males (69%) were considered to be at risk.
- The survey also showed that ethno specific community services (56%) were preferred over mainstream agencies for help.
- Problem gambling was identified as one of the top ten issues of the community (68%).
- The most effective methods and venues for public education were identified to be community radio (73%), newspaper (71%), TV (62%), pamphlets/newsletters (41%), workshops/seminars (40%), cultural events (37%), community agencies/centres (36%), and student associations (34%).

Conclusion

This research project brought together a number of stakeholders and provided an opportunity for the community to begin to address the issue of problem gambling, while also providing a base for future research, prevention and treatment.