



EARLY STUDY RESULTS SUGGEST GAMBLING PROBLEMS ARE SIGNIFICANT IN MINNESOTA'S LAO COMMUNITY

To date, there have been few in-depth studies of the gambling behavior of Southeast Asian refugee communities. While there have been informal community listening sessions in the Twin Cities at which gambling was discussed, there's not been a rigorous examination of the degree to which this population gambles. However, thanks to a new research initiative jointly funded by Northstar and the Minnesota Department of Human Services, a large study is underway that will provide a better understanding of the scope of problem gambling behavior, and potentially form the basis for innovative, culture-specific intervention and prevention services for this community.

Preliminary results of the ongoing study, which focuses on the gambling behavior of Minnesota's Lao community, suggest that

gambling addiction is a significant problem. Using the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) to gauge the likelihood of problem gambling, nearly 18% of the 47 people surveyed (25% of the total planned sample) scored a 5, indicating a "probable" gambling problem. In contrast, less than 5 percent of the overall U.S. population scores a 5 on SOGS.

The study is being conducted by Serena King, Ph.D., L.P., associate professor of Psychology at Hamline University, in conjunction with staff at the Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota. "Given cultural differences and the concern that members of the community might not be open to disclosing personal behavior, we didn't know what to expect," says Serena. "However, we've been getting rich personal narratives and good quantitative data that should be very helpful."

Findings So Far

Although the study was not complete as of this writing, here are some noteworthy findings to date:

- The prevalence of probable lifetime problem gambling symptoms is nearly six times higher in the Lao community than it is for the rest of the U.S. population.
- More than half of the individuals surveyed earn less than \$15,000. "A lot of people in the community are poor and uneducated," says Sunny Chanthanouvong, executive director of the Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota. "That's why a lot of people want a shortcut to make money."
- Fifty-four percent of those surveyed think the community can benefit from assistance with gambling behaviors.

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COMMUNITY FORUM AND PROBLEM GAMBLING ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING - MAY 10

The next meeting of Minnesota's Gambling Advisory Council takes place on May 10 at the University of Minnesota Children's Hospital (south building) at 2450 Riverside Avenue from 9 a.m. to noon. The community forum portion of the meeting is open to anyone interested in learning more about problem gambling in Minnesota, meeting the various organizations involved in the Council, and understanding the mission of the committee. The meeting includes updates from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance, the Minnesota Problem

Gambling Helpline, Project Turnabout and any other member or visitor that has something to contribute to the conversation. No advance notice to attend is required.

What: Community Forum and Problem Gambling Advisory Committee Meeting

When: Thursday, May 10, 9 a.m. - noon.

Where: University of Minnesota Children's Hospital (south building) 2450 Riverside Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55454

For More Information: Susan Campion, Fairview Problem Gambling Program, at (612) 273-4429 or scampio1@fairview.org



Cathie Perrault
Executive Director
NPGA

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A Grand Reuniting

Hosting a two-day event such as March's Minnesota Conference on Problem Gambling is not an easy task. It begins with a germ of an idea in the fall, gathers steam as renowned speakers are scheduled, and then congeals once myriad logistical details start to fall in place. It's an event that requires a lot of sweat and the help of so many people.

Yet, make no mistake, it's one of the most important—and rewarding—things that we do as an organization. The conference is the one time of year when the issue of problem gambling in Minnesota takes center stage among a range of stakeholders. This includes counselors, social workers, public policy makers and recovering gamblers.

I always enjoy reconnecting with attendees to get a sense of what's important to them and to get reacquainted with the latest trends in the field. We're fortunate that many national experts have ties to Minnesota, making it more attractive for them to present at a "hometown" conference. This includes Jon Grant, Ph.D., former professor at the University of Minnesota, whose presentation on the neurobiology of addiction is captivating and perennially the highest rated conference session.

Thanks to the many people who made this our most successful conference to date. This includes the knowledgeable speakers, clinicians from around the state, and various organizations, such as the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Gambling Advisory Council and the National Council on Problem Gambling. Last, but not least, thanks to the Northstar staff who worked behind the scenes: program manager John VonEschen, office manager Linda Bisdorf, graphic designer Vicki Stark and communications specialist Bill Stein.

If you were unable to attend the conference, our spread on pages four and five gives you a sense of what took place. What it doesn't capture, however, is the camaraderie shared by those with various perspectives, united by a common interest. I hope you'll plan to participate in our next conference, tentatively scheduled for March 2020.

I hope you are enjoying this most reluctant of springs in Minnesota.

Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance is a nonprofit agency whose mission is to help those affected by problem gambling in Minnesota. We do this by promoting awareness and understanding of the issue via our website, newsletter, community education programs, sponsorship of the Minnesota State Conference on Problem Gambling, and training of professionals in preventing and treating problem gambling.

Northern Light is funded by a grant from the state of Minnesota. Designer: ESD Graphics. Writer: Bill Stein

MIKE DOWNEY – 2018 OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT



As with so many, Mike Downey's initial exposure to problem gambling came unexpectedly. The year was 1989 and Mike was working as a probation officer in Alexandria, Minnesota.

"I knew nothing about problem gambling until I worked with a first-time felon in his early 20s," says Mike. "He was a good guy, but had been writing bad checks for pull tabs in bars."

The more they talked, the more Mike learned about the man's gambling behavior and how that was behind the bad checks. "That experience taught me that I needed to learn more about gambling addiction." From that moment, Mike's thirst for knowledge about problem gambling was nonstop and it became an integral part of his career.

When the Minnesota Department of Corrections learned of his interest in the role of gambling addiction in criminal activity, Mike was asked to work on gambling screens that probation officers could give to people convicted of certain offenses to see if compulsive gambling may have been a contributing factor. That requirement became known simply as "Rule 82."

Mike, along with Roger Svendsen, played a leading role in developing a training curriculum for probation officers throughout Minnesota. "I don't know of

any other state that's doing more to address the issue of problematic gambling in the correctional system, and it's all due to Mike," says Don Feeney, president of the Northstar board.

Mike says that when he first talked to inmates about gambling, they laughed. However, things began to change as education about program gambling became more established. "As the years progressed, more and more inmates starting approaching me to seek help once they got out of prison," says Mike.

After retiring from the Minnesota Department of Corrections, Mike joined Northstar as a training consultant in 2010. "Mike was instrumental in expanding our outreach and in establishing new relationships with institutions where gambling addiction is particularly prevalent," says Cathie Perrault, Northstar executive director.

"If you ever wonder if one person can make a difference, you don't have to look any further than Mike," says Don. "I loved the work I did," says Mike. "If I played even a small role in getting people the help they needed, I'm very proud."

In recognition of his long-term service on behalf of problem gamblers, Mike Downey received the 2018 Outstanding Service Award.

Recovery Hope Treatment Center Integrates Problem Gambling Awareness



The risk of cross addiction—when someone who is recovering from one addiction merely substitutes it with another—is very real. One of the missions of Northstar is to educate the addiction and recovery community about this concern so that new problem gamblers don't emerge from those trying to conquer other addictions.

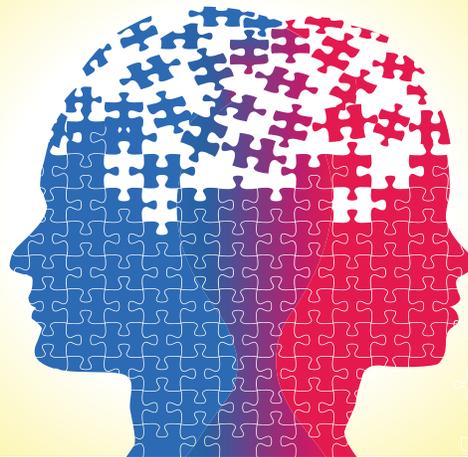
Most treatment centers try to address the issue of cross addiction. However, how treatment centers address this issue can vary.

Recovering Hope Treatment Center, a residential facility that provides treatment to women recovering from drug and alcohol addiction in Mora, brings in a range of outside speakers to discuss various co-occurring disorders with clients and staff. They've invited John VonEschen, Northstar program manager who discusses the risks of crossing into a gambling addiction, to make presentations for the last two years.

"I've known John through the years, and he's always been my "go to" when it comes to seeing a client with a gambling problem," says Sadie Hosley, clinical director at Hope. "When we learned that John provides presentations at no cost, we had no hesitation in having him come out and do the training. I don't understand why everyone wouldn't want to have him come speak."

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MINNESOTA CONFERENCE ON PROBLEM GAMBLING



MANY FACES, MANY SOLUTIONS

The 2018 Minnesota Conference on Problem Gambling took place on March 8-9 at the Earle Brown Heritage Center in Brooklyn Center. Nearly 100 people attended the conference, comprising therapists, vendors, representatives from state government and those in recovery from gambling addiction.

A variety of topics were covered, including:

- The Implications of Emerging Forms of Gambling
- Problem Gambling and the Legal Profession
- Problem Gambling in the Lao Community: Implications for Culturally Based Services
- Problem Gambling in the Military
- The Neurobiology of Addiction
- Treating Problem Gambling Fast with Accelerated Resolution Therapy (ART)
- What About The Family?
- Problem Gambling and Dual Addictions



Kirsten M. provided an account of her personal experience as an accelerated resolution therapy patient of Wade Lang's.



Brenda Deleeuw from the Center for Alcohol and Drug Treatment in Duluth talks with Ollie Stocker from Fairview and Trevor Urman from DHS.



Sunny Chanthanouvong, executive director of the Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota, details the Lao community's gambling experience.



Michael Burke, a lawyer who had a gambling and alcohol addiction, details his struggle and triumph.



Northstar executive director Cathie Perrault kicks off the 2018 conference.



Jon Grant, professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neuroscience at the University of Chicago, discussed what happens to the brain during a presentation on the neurobiology of addiction.



John VonEschen, Northstar program manager, added a musical twist to his presentation on problem gambling and dual addictions.



Allison Kirk and Wade Lang prepare to discuss accelerated resolution therapy.



Nearly 100 people attended the 2018 Minnesota Conference on Problem Gambling.



Dr. Ken Winters provided an update on problem gambling in the Lao community.



Northstar board members Al Lund (left) and John Rundquist.



Keith Whyte, executive director of the National Council on Problem Gambling, discusses gambling behavior in the military.



Don Feeny, Northstar board president, and Dr. Ken Winters

The conference also featured an open house at which recovering gamblers spoke about their struggles and triumphs over gambling addiction. Attendees found this session to be particularly inspiring.

PowerPoints from those presenting at the conference can be found by visiting www.northstarproblemgambling.org/2018-conference-power-points.

Recovery Hope Treatment Center Integrates Problem Gambling Awareness *Continued from page 3*

“John makes people more aware of what’s going on beyond just focusing on their chemical health,” says Sadie. “Someone might spend their Friday nights spending tip money on pull tabs, and then say they didn’t realize the connection. So he heightens their red flags about what to do or what not to do.”

In his presentations, John talks about ‘healthy gambling’ vs. when gambling becomes a problem. “John will ask people to think about when they realized they had a problem with chemicals and to think about gambling in the same way,” says Sadie.

John’s message about unwittingly substituting a gambling addiction for a chemical or alcohol addiction can have a significant effect on peoples’ lives as they seek to live more fulfilling lives. “After hearing John, a few clients have gone to their counselor to get more gambling-related facets built into their treatment plan,” says Sadie. For others, the cross addiction message becomes more relevant a little later on.

The gambling presentations have also inspired at least one member of Hope’s staff, a recipient of a Northstar conference scholarship in 2016, to pursue a gambling certification. The plan is for that staff member to work with clients with gambling addiction when a planned new outpatient center opens.

Please visit RecoveringHope.life for more information about Recovery Hope Treatment Center.

WHAT THEY SAID ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

“This conference was the best decision I have made this year. I found this event reinforced my decision to seek certification as a problem gambling counselor.”

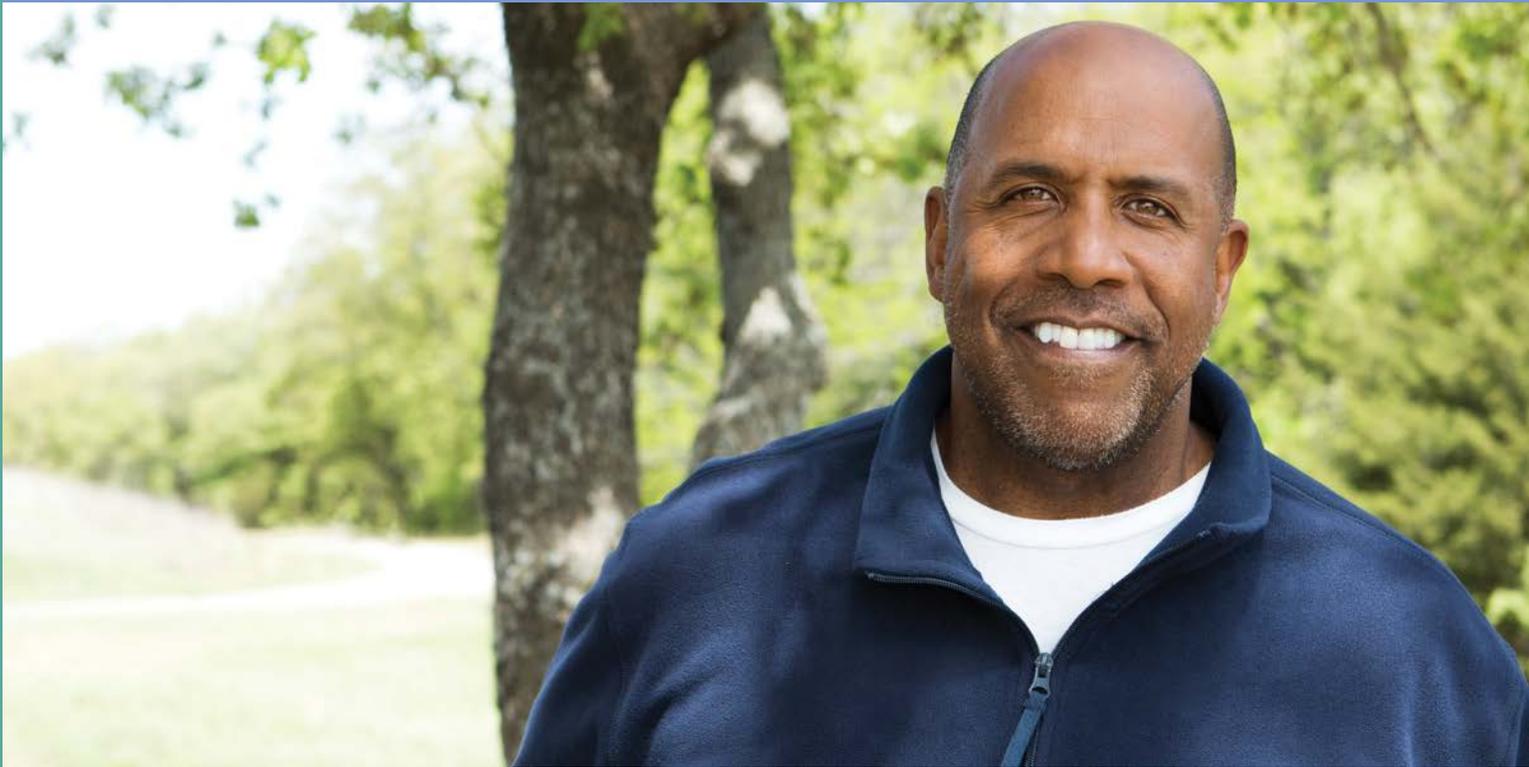
“What I enjoyed most was the opportunity to learn about relevant topics from top-notch speakers.”

“Truly, this is the best conference I remember attending with the exception of the national conference.”

Sixty-eight percent of attendees said they were “very likely” to use the information received at the conference.

Ninety-seven percent of attendees answered “very likely” to the idea that gambling should be recognized on a par with other addictions.

DENNY'S *Story*



"If someone is reading this who is thinking they may have a problem and wondering if they should get help, this is what I would tell them: Don't prolong the problem. Once you start to have problems with sleep and anger, talk to someone. And if you're borrowing money to gamble, you have an addiction. It's that simple."

I didn't start gambling until I was in my mid 20s. Even when I lived in California, not too far from Las Vegas, I never made it to the Strip. My first time gambling was at a casino with friends here in Minnesota.

I would go 3-4 times for the next several years, sometimes by myself and sometimes with friends. But it was generally an occasional, social thing for me, and I was conservative with my gambling.

Once I started having problems at work, I started going more frequently because I knew it was a place where I could lose myself. I did it to escape problems and to chase the big win. The more I gambled, the more I'd lose. That added more and more pressure.

Eventually, my life changed and I was less interested in gambling. I got married and had a son. I gambled maybe 2-3 times a year with a friend; it was nothing more than that.

After a few years, however, I found myself in a rough situation again with work. My relationship also began to suffer. I returned to gambling to escape work and marital issues, and got reacquainted with that high, that rush of winning.

The next two years were difficult, filled with ups and downs that seemed to get more severe. I began to acquire credit card debt and withdrew money from 401K savings. I eventually depleted all my funds. I found myself chasing the win because I really needed the money.

I'd sneak out to the casino late at night when everyone was asleep. I'd make it back in time to get a few hours of sleep before work. This happened maybe 20 times over the course of two years.

Tax time was also very stressful. When my wife saw all the reported winnings, I could no longer hide the fact that I went to the casino far more often than she knew. One year I was able to write off a large percentage of my winnings, but for another I ended up owing the IRS thousands.

I would try to set goals and plans for myself. I wanted to win enough to pay off debt and have a little bit of a cushion. For a time, I managed to do that through high-stakes slots, but I began to slip. I gambled more aggressive and found myself quickly back in the hole.

EARLY STUDY RESULTS SUGGEST GAMBLING PROBLEMS ARE SIGNIFICANT IN MINNESOTA'S LAO COMMUNITY *Continued from page 1*

During the course of these two-plus years, I experienced many feelings and emotions. I was angry... I was angry that I was losing money, angry about the problems I had at work, angry about my marital problems and angry at the casino. And, of course, I was mad at myself. I remember asking myself, "When is this going to stop?"

I also remember feeling like my heart was going to explode because of the guilt and dishonesty I had in trying to hide the problem. I tossed and turned at night, unable to sleep, because of my mountain of problems.

I finally told my wife that I had a problem when I knew I was about to lose her trust. And because of one of her parent's addiction problems, she knew about the various support systems available. She told me in no uncertain terms that I had to get help.

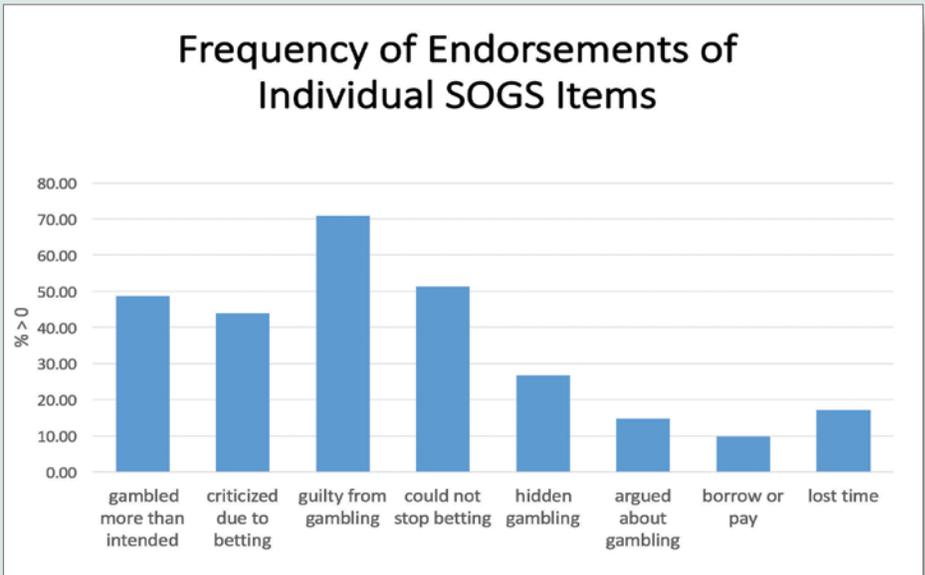
I called the helpline and was told I needed to go to a 30-day treatment center. However, I was concerned about my employer learning about my situation so I opted to go to Gamblers Anonymous. This was just over five years ago; I have not gambled since.

I am lucky that I have had such a supportive spouse. In addition to finding a resource for me, she also attended Gam-Anon. That helped her to understand the process that I was going through.

If someone is reading this who is thinking they may have a problem and wondering if they should get help, this is what I would tell them: Don't prolong the problem. Once you start to have problems with sleep and anger, talk to someone. And if you're borrowing money to gamble, you have an addiction. It's that simple.

Each story of someone recovering from gambling addiction is similar, but the difference is in how much damage you allow to occur. How much damage do you have to have? Do you want to lose your job? Your marriage? Your home? Your life?

I did not want to lose my life as a result of gambling. I would never put my family through that. I finally drew the line and got the help I needed.



- Problem gambling in the Lao community does not appear to exhibit comorbidity (the simultaneous presence of two chronic conditions) with alcohol addiction to the degree it exists in the general population at large. This highlights the fact that problem gambling is different in this community and embedded into the Southeast Asian culture.
- While gambling in the Lao community commonly involves casinos, the lottery and sports, it also frequently takes place in private homes at parties, baby showers, weddings and other events. Betting even takes place at funerals.
- Only 37.8% of those surveyed answered "Yes" to the question of whether they thought treatment could help change gambling behavior. "The perception of psychological intervention with mental health is not as acceptable in this community," says Serena.

Next Phase – Building a Prevention and Intervention Model

The research study will help support the next phase of the initiative, which is to develop a model that will educate the Lao community about gambling addiction and propose ways to intervene in a culturally acceptable way.

"We plan to start with peer-lead groups

stratified according to levels of problem gambling (based on SOGS scores) and levels of readiness to change," says Serena. Efforts will be made to have individuals monitor their gambling behavior and become more aware of their emotions and feelings about gambling. They will also receive information about high- and low-risk gambling, gambling in moderation, and weighing the cost and benefits of gambling for their families. The intervention will likely include elements of motivational interviewing principles and gambling education.

"We'd like to build a cultural component about the role of luck since that drives a lot of behaviors in many Southeast Asian refugee communities," says Serena. "We'd like to develop an opportunity to talk and to have gambling conversations driven by methods that work to reduce risk. This community may be less likely to seek out, engage with, and respond to a traditional 12-step approach or psychotherapy."

"Our hope is that if the intervention model works it can be used for other ethnic communities whose cultural difference makes it harder for them to adopt the support programs that are currently in place for native-born Americans," says Cathie Perrault, executive director at Northstar.



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Summer Issue of *Northern Light* Available Only Electronically

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