

CHARACTERISTICS OF GAMBLERS TAKING CHARTERED DAY TRIPS TO CASINOS

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ABSTRACT

Due to the increasing popularity of gambling, some travel agencies offer chartered bus trips to casinos. This study identifies the characteristics and gambling habits of gamblers who use these services. The 250 participants, recruited from participants in chartered bus trips to a casino, took part in a telephone interview, which included the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS). The results revealed that there were significantly more low-income individuals, elderly people, and women among chartered-trip participants than among casino gamblers in general. However, the percentage of pathological gamblers among chartered-trip participants was similar to that found among all Quebec casino gamblers

Gambling activities are popular in most societies. For governments facing heavy budget deficits, gambling has become an important source of revenue. In the province of Quebec (Canada), the net income of the "Société des casinos" has almost doubled over the past few years, going from 393.8 million dollars in 1997 to 728.9 million dollars in 2003-2004 (Loto-Québec, 2004).

Gambling is a widespread activity for Quebec residents. According to Ladouceur et al. (2004), four out of five adults (81%) reported that they gambled at least once a year. Although casino games were not the most popular gambling activity, 18% of adult Quebec residents had gambled at least once on these games over the past year.

For most people, gambling is a social activity void of negative consequences; however, for some people, participation in these activities leads to the development of pathological gambling. This addiction to gambling is characterized by an uncontrollable, chronic, and progressive impulse to gamble (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Despite an increase in the popularity and accessibility of gambling activities, the prevalence of pathological gamblers in the province of Quebec has remained stable over the past years: 1.0% in 1996 (Ladouceur, Jacques, Ferland, & Giroux, 1999) and 0.8% in 2002 (Ladouceur et al., 2004).

In a study published in 1999, Gerstein and colleagues indicated that municipalities located within 110 kilometres of an area where gambling activities are available reported a greater number of pathological gamblers. Also, the increase in the number of gamblers within these communities was greater than the numbers observed in the general population over the course of the same year (Room, Turner, & Ialomiteanu, 1999). Jacques, Ladouceur

The research described in this article was financially supported by the Ministry of Health and Social Services of Quebec.

and Ferland (2000) empirically tested these two hypotheses and found no increase in the number of pathological gamblers one year after the opening of the first casino in a community. They did observe, however, a significant increase in participation in casino gambling as well as a significant increase in the amount of money lost in a single day (Jacques et al., 2000).

Not many people live close to a casino; in fact, most people have only limited access to them. In order to facilitate access to Quebec casinos, some travel agencies organize day trips for gamblers, with buses leaving in the morning and returning in the evening. Departures are offered every day and on certain days several departure times are offered. These day trips are offered in cities located one to two hours away from the casino. For the most part, they are funded by the "Société des casinos," and the package always includes transportation and a meal for an amount varying from \$10 to \$20. In some casinos it also includes vouchers for gambling that day and for a subsequent visit. These day trips have greatly increased in popularity over the past decade, with the number of trips increasing from 200 to 3,400 per year for one casino alone, the Casino de Charlevoix.

The availability of these inexpensive services increases the accessibility of the casino for people who might not otherwise have gone. Given the low cost, high level of entertainment, and social nature of this activity, these day trips may meet the needs of some people or attract a clientele different from the usual casino gamblers. To our knowledge, no study has yet assessed the characteristics and gambling habits of people who use chartered bus services to access casinos. This study has four objectives: (1) identify the socio-demographic characteristics of people participating in chartered casino trips; (2) assess their gambling habits; (3) provide information about their day at the casino; and (4) identify the reasons for using chartered transportation services.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and fifty people ($n = 173$ women; 77 men) taking part in chartered day trips to a casino participated in this study.¹ More than half of the participants were married (52.8%) and their average age was 59 ($SD = 12.9$ years).

Procedure

With the authorization of the travel agency, research assistants boarded the buses to invite passengers to participate in the study. The research assistants visited a total of 12 buses containing 47 passengers each. All the buses were organized by the same travel agency.

On the bus, the research assistants explained the goals of the study and gave each passenger a flyer containing the name of the research group and the phone number to contact if they wished to participate. Interested participants left their name and phone number on the research group's answering machine. They were later contacted to complete a telephone interview ($M = 14.5$ days; $SD = 10.4$).

This study was conducted entirely in French.

Participation Rate

The participation rate for this study cannot be calculated because the method used for recruitment could not identify how many passengers received the information. Because the

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flyer was given to all passengers present in the buses visited, it is likely that individuals who frequently participate in chartered trips received it more than once. It is also important to note that the recruitment of participants stopped after reaching the 250 respondents desired. The population recruited to participate in the study is similar to what could be expected if recruiting through newspaper ads.

Instruments

*Telephone interview:*² The telephone interview took approximately 20 minutes to complete and assessed the gambling experience of the participants as well as some socio-demographic characteristics. Eight questions directly addressed the participants' socio-demographic characteristics; 28 questions enquired about their day at the casino; and 18 questions evaluated their gambling habits and activities. The South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS; Lesieur & Blume, 1987) was also included in the interview.

The SOGS is a 20-item questionnaire that evaluates the presence of pathological gambling. Individuals scoring less than 3 are considered to show no gambling problem; persons scoring 3 or 4 are considered at-risk gamblers; whereas those scoring 5 or more are considered probable pathological gamblers. This instrument has been widely used in several epidemiological studies (see Ladouceur et al., 1999, Volberg & Steadman, 1988) as well as in several clinical studies (Rosenthal, 1989; Sylvain, Ladouceur, & Boisvert, 1997).

RESULTS

Most of the data presented in this paper are descriptive. However, whenever possible, the frequencies obtained in this study were compared to those obtained in the latest prevalence study conducted in the province of Quebec, in 2002, which included over 8,000 adults (Chevalier et al., 2004). The results from this study were always used as the expected values.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The data reveal that chartered day trips were mainly used by women. The Chi-square test comparing this percentage to that obtained among casino gamblers in Quebec indicated that there were significantly more females among chartered day-trip participants (69.0%) than among Quebec casino gamblers in general (47.8%), $\chi^2 (1, N = 250) = 45.45; p < 0.001$.

Most participants were 45 or older; 48% of the respondents were between 45 and 64 years of age, while 37.6% were 65 and above. A Chi-square test indicated that age distribution was significantly different between day-trip participants and Quebec casino gamblers in general, $\chi^2 (3, N = 250) = 255.43; p < 0.001$. A cell chi-square test using the percentage found by Chevalier et al. (2004) as the expected value revealed that there were significantly more people aged 65 and above on chartered buses (37.6%) than among Quebec casino gamblers in general (11.0%), $\chi^2 (1, N = 250) = 160.81; p < 0.001$.

The socio-demographic data also revealed that people participating in chartered day trips had a relatively low income. In fact, 54.2% of the respondents earned less than \$30,000 per year. This percentage is significantly higher than that found among general casino gamblers (26.1%), $\chi^2 (1, N = 250) = 68.60; p < 0.001$. Considering the high percentage of people with low income, it is not surprising that only 24% of the respondents had a full-time job while 60% were retired. In addition, 39.6% of chartered day-trip users repor-

ted that they had not graduated from high school. Again, a cell Chi-square test indicated that people who use chartered services were less educated than Quebec casino gamblers in general (23.8%), $\chi^2(1, N = 250) = 26.22$; $p < 0.001$. Table 1 presents the percentages obtained for each of these variables, for this study as well as for the latest Quebec prevalence study.

TABLE 1
Socio-demographic Characteristics of Chartered Casino Day-trip Participants and Casino Gamblers in Quebec

Characteristics	Categories	Chartered Trip Participants (%)	Quebec Casino Gamblers (%) ¹
Gender	Men	30.8%	52.1%
	Women	69.2%	47.9%
Age	18 to 24	2.4%	17.0%
	25 to 44	12.0%	38.9%
	45 to 64	48.0%	33.1%
	65 and up	37.6%	11.0%
Income ²	Less than \$30,000	54.2%	26.1%
	\$30,000 to \$40,000	19.4%	17.4%
	\$40,000 to \$60,000	15.9%	25.2%
	More than \$60,000	10.6%	29.3%
Education	No high school diploma	39.6%	23.8%
	High school diploma	29.6%	20.5%
	College diploma	18.0%	34.0%
	University degree	12.8%	21.6%
Marital status	Single	8.8%	n.a.
	Married	52.8%	n.a.
	Common law	13.2%	n.a.
	Divorced	14.8%	n.a.
	Widowed	10.4%	n.a.
Employment status	Full time job	24.0%	n.a.
	Part time job	10.0%	n.a.
	Retired	59.6%	n.a.
	Student	0.8%	n.a.
	Social welfare	0.8%	n.a.
	Other	4.8%	n.a.

1. This data is an excerpt from: Chevalier et al. (2004), *Comportements de jeu et jeu pathologique selon le type de jeu au Québec en 2002* [Gambling behaviour and pathological gambling according to the type of gambling in Quebec in 2002]. Institut national de santé publique du Québec et Université Laval: Auteur.

2. Income is given in Canadian dollars.

Pathological Gambling

A large majority of the participants were occasional gamblers (88.4%). However, 8.0% were screened as at-risk gamblers and 3.6% were screened as probable pathological gamblers. A chi-square test indicated that distribution of the participants in the three gambler categories was significantly different between the two populations studied. A cell chi-square test done afterward revealed that there were significantly more at-risk gamblers among chartered day-trip participants than among Quebec casino gamblers in general (8.0% vs. 3.0%), $\chi^2(1, N = 250) = 20.83$; $p < 0.001$. However no significant difference was noted in the percentage of pathological gamblers (3.6% vs. 3.0%), $\chi^2(1, N = 250) = 0.30$; $p > 0.05$.

The Day at the Casino

Approximately 15% of the participants were using the chartered service for the first time when they received the information flyer, but 2.0% used it at least once a week. Participants had made an average of 7.3 trips ($SD = 8.1$) to the casino over the 12 months preceding the interview. Of this number, 5.6 visits to the casino ($SD = 7.1$) took place through the chartered service. Only 8% of the respondents reported going to the casino by themselves.

Slot machines were the preferred gambling activity for 96.8% of the participants. Interestingly, only 20% of the respondents gambled on video-lottery terminals in bars, even though they are quite similar to the slot machines used in casinos. Number lotteries (98.4%), such as Lotto 6/49 and scratch-and-win lotteries (78.8%) were the other gambling activities most favoured by the participants. None of the participants had ever gambled money on the Internet.

Reasons for Using the One-day Charter Service to the Casino

While the majority of participants said that they used this service because it was fun and entertaining (87.6%), many participants also mentioned doing so to forget their problems (72.8%), to meet people (69.2%), or to avoid loneliness (41.2%).

DISCUSSION

The objectives of this study were to (1) identify the socio-demographic characteristics of people participating in chartered casino trips; (2) assess their gambling habits; (3) provide information about their day at the casino; and (4) identify the reasons for using chartered transportation services.

The results indicated that participants in chartered day trips to casinos differed from the general population of Quebec casino gamblers on some socio-demographic variables. Significantly more women, elderly people (65 years and above), people with low income (< \$30,000 per year), and people with low education (no high school diploma) were among chartered-trip participants. The results also indicated that participants in day-trip package deals were mainly non-problem gamblers. Contrary to what we expected, pathological gamblers were not more prevalent among chartered-trip participants than among habitual casino gamblers. However, at-risk gamblers were significantly more numerous than expected among chartered-trip users.

These results suggested that day-trip participants represent a particular clientele. However, the users of this type of service seem to have few gambling problems. It is possible

that the length of time between the reservation date and that of departure (ranging from a few days to a few weeks), makes it less attractive to pathological gamblers, who are usually known to be more impulsive. Since the percentage of at-risk gamblers is relatively high in this study, it is possible that chartered day-trip services better meet the needs of this category of gamblers.

McNeilly and Burke (2001) previously found among elderly gamblers that many participants used chartered trips to forget their problems, meet others, and to counter loneliness. Thus, the social aspect of this activity was an important factor in choosing chartered trips. Some participants indicated that it was the social aspect of the transportation time that attracted them to these trips—the casino activity being secondary. The travel agencies seem to have well understood this phenomenon because, even though the main objective of the chartered trip was to go to the casino, the transportation time (around 2 hours) was used for recreational activities.

Although chartered-trip participants were mostly occasional gamblers, their socio-demographic characteristics lead us to question the influence the day trips could have on users' gambling habits. According to Chapple and Nofziger (2000) and Toneatto, Bough-ton, and Borsoi (2002), the social aspect of gambling is an important influence on gambling participation for women. In fact, it is the social aspect of the gambling activity that most influences women to repeat their gambling experiences. Feelings of boredom (Ladouceur, Boutin, Doucet, Lachance, & Sylvain, 2000; Brown & Coventry, 1997; Trevorow & Moore, 1998) and a desire to escape from feelings of depression and daily frustrations (Jacobs, 2000) are also frequently identified by women as reasons for gambling and these could be predisposing factors for pathological gambling.

Despite the fact that this study was mainly descriptive of a new phenomenon in the field of gambling, it is important to note that it has some limitations. Given that it was impossible to estimate the response rate, and the fact that the study was conducted only with self-selected participants, it is important to be cautious when generalizing these results. The population studied here might not be representative of all persons who use day-trip services to casinos. Therefore having a larger sample and using a random selection of participants could help generalize these results. Nonetheless, these data, which aim to provide an initial description of this clientele, clearly indicate that the users of these services are individuals who should be carefully monitored. It is important to understand the factors encouraging their participation in these trips, and to clarify the long-term effect of these trips on gambling habits.

NOTES

1. All participants visited a casino located at a distance of approximately a two-hour drive from the city of departure.
2. A copy of the interview is available upon request.

RÉSUMÉ

Face à la popularité croissante des jeux de hasard et d'argent au Québec, des voyagistes offrent des voyages nolisés en autobus pour se rendre au casino. Dans le cadre de cette étude visant à déterminer les caractéristiques et les habitudes de jeu des personnes qui utilisent ces voyages, 250 personnes ont participé à une entrevue téléphonique. Les résultats indiquent qu'il y a significativement plus de personnes à faibles revenus, de personnes âgées et de femmes parmi les usagers et usagères des voyages nolisés qu'au

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sein des joueurs et joueuses de casino en général. Le pourcentage de joueuses et joueurs pathologiques est quant à lui similaire à celui retrouvé chez l'ensemble des joueuses et joueurs de casino québécois.

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