

Transplanted Lives: Immigration Challenges and Pathological Gambling Among Four Canadian Chinese Immigrants

Lee, Bonnie K.¹, Fong, Mary², & Solowoniuk, Jason³

Correspondence: Bonnie Lee, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, School of Health Sciences, Addictions Counselling Program, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 3M4, Canada. E-mail: bonnie.lee@uleth.ca

This project was funded by an OPGRC Level 1 Research Award (Project No. 2324).

An edited version of this paper was published in Shek, D., Yiu, T. I., Chan, E. (Eds.) (2007). Proceedings of Inaugural Asian Pacific Problem Gambling Conference 2005: Advances in Problem gambling: Theory, Service and Research in the Asia-Pacific Region. Hong Kong: Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Permission obtained from Dr. Daniel Shek for posting this article on the OPGRC website.

Abstract

The contribution of immigration stress to the development of pathological gambling is complex to delineate. Four in-depth case studies of Chinese who emigrated from Hong Kong to Canada in the years 1968 to 1974 reveal a late onset of pathological gambling nearly 30 years after immigration. Immigration stresses in the form of language and cultural barriers, intensified work, lack of leisure and recreation, insecurity of employment, racial discrimination, and social isolation are described by the participants. Chronic stresses from immigration interact over time with dwindling psycho-social resources as a result of marital alienation and a thinning social support and extended-family network. Discordant marital relationships deprive these immigrants of comforting havens in a new land despite their financial and material success. In mid-adulthood (age 47-59) three decades after immigration, life crises, deaths, transitions, empty nest as well as job insecurity overtax these immigrants' coping capacities. These major life challenges activate unresolved early psychological trauma resulting in overwhelming distress for these individuals. Ignorant of the risks, these immigrants found gambling to be an outlet for their dysphoria and for meeting psychological needs. This study is limited by the small sample size of a specific cohort of four Chinese immigrants in Canada. Findings therefore serve only as a hypothesis for future studies. In-depth family assessment in the treatment of pathological gamblers and the addressing of marital relationships in problem gambling prevention and treatment programs for immigrants are recommended.

¹ Assistant Professor, University of Lethbridge, School of Health Sciences, Addictions Counseling Program

² Problem Gambling Counselor, Chinese Family Services of Ontario, Toronto

³ Academic Assistant, University of Lethbridge, School of Health Sciences

Acknowledgement

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre for funding this study with a Level 1 Research Award.

Transplanted Lives: Immigration Challenges and Pathological Gambling Among Four Canadian Chinese Immigrants

Bonnie K. Lee, Mary Fong, Jason Solowoniuk

Public perception, anecdotal information and the media have painted a picture that associates Chinese immigrants with problem gambling in North America and Australia (Glionna, 2006; Skolnik, 2004; Wong & Tse, 2003). A higher than average prevalence of gambling among Chinese, Asians and Southeast Asians, compared to the mainstream population in Australia and the United States, has been supported by a few research studies (Blaszczynski, Huynh, Dumalo & Farrell 1998; Chinese Family Services of Greater Montreal, 1997; Lo, 1996; Petry, 2003; Sin, 2005). However, the reasons for this higher than average representation have only been surmised and not well understood.

Service providers and researchers (Chinese Family Services of Greater Montreal, 1997; Tse, Wong & Kim, 2004; Wong & Tse, 2003) have signalled the importance of understanding Chinese problem gamblers in the context of immigration. Immigrants face unique challenges related to their settlement and adjustment in a new country as a minority group (Beiser, 1999; Noh, Beiser, Kaspar, Hou & Rummens, 1999; Noh & Kaspar, 2003; Wong & Kim, 2004; Wong & Tse, 2003). These challenges have an impact on immigrants' mental health, depending on how successfully they are negotiated and what supports are available to them in their adopted country (Beiser, 1988, 1999). Although research has linked immigration stress, prejudice, and racial discrimination to poorer mental health (Hsu, Davies & Hansen, 2004; Noh et al., 1999; Noh & Kaspar, 2003), the link between pathological gambling and immigration stress has not been well delineated.

This paper identifies and describes the stresses related to immigration experienced by four Chinese Canadian immigrants drawn from four intensive case studies. What is striking is that despite the immigration stress all four experienced through the years, they did not develop pathological gambling until the third decade after immigration. An attempt to understand this phenomenon raises a number of questions concerning the determinants of pathological gambling among these Chinese immigrants. Our findings suggest that pathological gambling cannot be attributed to any single cause by itself, including the factor of immigration stress. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that immigrants face onerous challenges socio-culturally, economically, and occupationally. As we will propose in this paper, a multi-dimensional psycho-ecological framework is necessary to understand the complex of interacting pre-immigration and post-immigration factors that culminate in the development of pathological gambling in the lives of these four immigrants.

We will restrict the scope of this paper to the identification of significant immigration stresses experienced by the participants in the three decades after immigration. Within a context of legalized gambling, we will give particular focus to how immigration stress interacts with current crisis and life transitions, breakdown of

marital relationships in a dwindling network of social support in precipitating the onset of gambling in the third decade post-immigration. These interactive factors leading to pathological gambling is an area which has not yet received attention from the immigration and gambling literature. The activation of residual pre-immigration trauma will be alluded to but not developed in depth in this paper.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a comparative, inductive collective case study method (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) to gather information and compare qualitative data on pre-immigration and post-immigration life experiences of four Chinese immigrants meeting DSM-IV-TR criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) for pathological gambling. The authors chose a case study method based on the premise that immigration stress is best understood within the context of individual lives. Using a grounded inductive case study method, we conducted a mid-level analysis of the data as they clustered around categories and themes across cases. Multiple case studies allowed for comparison and contrast across cases, which is not possible in a single case alone. Four participants provided a good degree of comparison and contrast to discern key patterns on immigration stress and pathological gambling, to signal any anomaly and deviation from these patterns, and allowed us to contain the study within manageable parameters supported by a Level 1 Research Award from the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre.

Recruitment and Sampling

This research study proceeded upon the approval of the University of Lethbridge Human Subject Research Committee.

Participants were selected using a convenience sample. They were chosen purposely from the active client pool at the Chinese Family Services of Ontario in Toronto, where they were receiving services for their problem gambling behaviours. Inclusion criteria included (1) meeting DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) pathological gambling criteria; (2) having stable psychological condition; (3) ability to benefit from the interviews of the study for self-understanding and insight; and, (4) capacity to speak to their breadth and depth of experience regarding pre and post-immigration stress and its relationship to pathological gambling. In the recruitment, we emphasized to potential participants that their clinical services would not be compromised whether or not they elected to take part in the study and that the research study would be conducted separately from the regular counselling services they received. An honorarium of \$100 was offered to each participant as a token of appreciation for their time and participation. One participant declined the honorarium, saying that his chief motive was to benefit other Chinese immigrants by sharing his own experience.

Interview Procedure

An Interview Schedule was used to guide the semi-structured interviews, covering immigration history, adjustments and life in Canada, education, health, occupation, social and family life, relationship changes, personal changes, onset and triggers of problem gambling and perception of gambling. The second author of this article, a registered social worker and problem gambler counsellor, interviewed research participants in Cantonese. Each participant was interviewed five times, with each interview lasting about one to one and a half hours.

Data Analysis

All the interviews were audiotaped and simultaneously translated and transcribed. The qualitative analysis on the written transcripts, read by three researchers, followed the chronology of pre-immigration and post-immigration experiences of the four participants. The researchers sought corresponding meaningful units in each case and across the cases (Creswell, 1998). First, we aggregated the common units into ten or more categories for each chronological phase of the participants' lives. Next, we collapsed them into broader thematic patterns with a focus on answering our research question of how these themes might contribute to pathological gambling and how they interacted among themselves. Then, we highlighted the interacting themes in each phase of the participants' lives, forming a descriptive narrative that illuminated the network of interconnected factors leading to the development of pathological gambling.

Bias

The principal investigator of this study is a marriage and family systems therapist. The qualitative analysis reflects a sensitivity and propensity towards mapping complexity, interrelationships and dynamic interactions in the interpretation of data. The first two authors are also Chinese Canadian immigrants from Hong Kong, which could predispose their sympathies towards the plight of Chinese-Canadians immigrants. Triangulation of coding and interpretations with the involvement of a third researcher served to re-dress any bias.

Trustworthiness

The coded data, categories, and themes were reviewed sequentially and repeatedly by the authors of this article, who were all trained in qualitative methodology. The findings were also member-checked with the participants for their feedback and corroboration. Three out of four available participants confirmed the interpretations and explanatory framework advanced in this paper, which they said also further clarified their understanding of their pathological gambling. The fourth participant was unavailable for checking the interpretative findings.

PARTICIPANTS

Our four participants consisted of three men and one woman, ages between 55 and 61. Three were born in China and one in Hong Kong, a British colony until 1997. They immigrated in the years 1968 to 1974, a period when Canada expanded its immigration quota. These participants' level of education ranged from elementary school to university. Their occupations were similarly diverse, varying from labourer to scientist. Current annual household incomes ranged from \$6000 (Canadian currency) for those on social assistance to \$150,000. Two participants were divorced as a result of pathological gambling and two were still married. The elapsed time between the pathological gambling onset and this study ranged from two to eight years. Participants reported that they started problem gambling 22 to 31 years after immigration to Canada. The self-reported frequency of gambling at the worst stage of their problem ranged from once to four times a week. Preferred games were blackjack and baccarat. Total amount of money lost through gambling by each participant ranged from \$75,000 to \$250,000. At the time of the study, all except one of the participants were abstaining from gambling. Participants had been receiving counselling for their gambling problem for periods of eight months to two and a half years.

To protect the identity of the participants, only pseudonyms (Cathy, Felix, Peter and Keung) with altered identifying details are used in reporting the qualitative data.

FINDINGS

We present the main types of stresses experienced by participants in each of the three decades after immigration to show their progressive social isolation and erosion of coping resources, situated in a changing social economic landscape with the expansion of legalized gambling and job insecurity as they entered mid-adulthood.

Early Phase Immigration Stress (1st Decade)

Upon immigration, all four participants experienced culture shock and language barriers, the impact of which they under-estimated. Culture shock entailed adapting from the densely populated and socially networked urban environment of Hong Kong to the geographically dispersed environment of Canada, which offered limited contact with their own ethnic group. Their social network, unsurprisingly, was meagre compared to what they had in their home country.

For all four participants, stresses associated with the first decade after immigration were related to establishing financial independence, upgrading their education, overcoming language and cultural barriers, and sponsoring extended family members. From the moment they arrived in Canada, all four participants started looking for work immediately. Filled with hope and ambition, they expended nearly all their energy towards establishing financial independence. They worked multiple jobs and extended hours. Along with intense work, they were equally driven in the pursuit of part-

time and evening study. In doing so, the participants overworked themselves to such an extent that there was little time left for leisure and self-replenishment. In fact, with their relentless work ethic, leisure was not a thought that occurred to them. Their strong sense of family responsibilities made sponsorship of extended family members an immediate priority. This placed greater demands and burdens on them, albeit enabling them to benefit from pooled financial, practical and moral resources shared with extended family members. In doing so, participants were able to improve their financial and social status in a short time. It also led them to home ownership within the first five years and free from mortgages or debts after ten years.

In sum, we witnessed in their accounts the enormous resiliency and determination they evidenced in reaching their material goals. However, what they failed to attend to in terms of building and nurturing social, family and psychological resources presented insidious and latent risks in the following decades.

Case Illustrations (1st Decade)

Language barriers

Language difference posed a significant social barrier for the participants, as Keung described:

I felt I had more restrictions living in North America ... mainly because of the language barrier ... I wasn't so mobile because I didn't know the language ... I couldn't communicate, unlike when I was in the mainland or Hong Kong, or even in South Asia, where travelling was more feasible.

Peter spoke about the language barrier in his job search:

After all, this was an unfamiliar place for me ... I knew nobody and I was not familiar with the place and the language.

Language and cultural differences limited friendship circles, according to Felix:

At the beginning, I thought ... of course language would improve with time...but at the beginning when (my) language was not as fluent, there was more distance between us. Who knows, if I had been fluent and spoke like a local, we might be closer.

Geographic and environmental difference

In addition, the geography and cultural environment came as a shock and required adaptation, as Peter recalled:

For the first couple of weeks, I was in fact stunned by the quietness ... especially when I was living in a quite remote area ... H.K. was a very noisy place ... I lived

with my sister's family when I first arrived. It's like a dead city... To an active person like me, it's so boring.

Financial stress

Cathy only had CA\$100 in her pocket when she landed in Canada:

I didn't bring anything specific with me. I had one new coat, some old sweaters, and a teapot. I remembered I wanted a few more big coats, but I didn't have the money to buy them.

Family expectations

Cathy described her pursuit of employment upon arriving in Canada and the stress it induced for her. At the time, she had to cope not only with the language and cultural barriers, but also with familial expectations.

He (my elder brother) called me dumb and stupid. He pressured me to go find office jobs the second day I arrived. I couldn't even understand 20 percent of people's spoken English, how could I get an office job? When I went home without any job offers, he called me "useless" ... I was so hurt, but I couldn't answer him back. I just hid and cried.

Intensified workload

Another participant, Keung, shared his early experience of employment in Canada. Working seven days a week in a grocery store accentuated the reality of long working hours that shattered his previously held illusions of what employment was supposed to be like in Canada:

They said working hours here were a few hours a day and you get Sundays off, but once I got here, that wasn't the case ... You had to work long hours (eight to ten a day)...It wasn't easy. My job was like seven days a week.

Felix reported that on top of studying, he never worked fewer than three jobs at a time in his first ten years in Canada.

At the beginning, it was actually quite difficult and trying. We had to work a few jobs. I had one full time and other side jobs on top of going to high school..

Peter, after studying English for six months, pounded the pavement and knocked on doors to find a number of part-time jobs.

If not for immigration, we wouldn't have had to work so hard ... We had to work very hard to settle in ... We couldn't even ponder the time we were trying that hard ... or else we might not be able to do it. We worked like a bull...and a dog.

Both of us were busy working. By the time we went home, we dropped dead most of the time ... We might share the same bed, but we didn't have energy to talk for days ... We were too exhausted, period.

Reaching financial goals

Because of their determination and proclivity for hard work, all four participants were able to reach their goal of financial independence and home ownership within the first decade. Cathy reported:

I started running my business part-time at home after we bought our third house ... I worked like a machine. It was only the recent four to five years that we took short bus tours to nearby places. Most of the immigrants coming here knew little about the place ... They needed to equip themselves to face all kinds of changes. Nobody wanted to work in factories their whole life. That's why I tried all means to upgrade myself ... It might be hard, but you've got to try.

However, financial and material success came with an intangible price. Their single-minded focus placed great strains on themselves and their marriages, a trend which we will elucidate in vignettes from the next decade.

Middle Phase Immigration Stress (2nd Decade)

The second decade after immigration evidenced weakening extended family ties and distancing marital relationships. The immigrants' focus was dispersed between tending to their children and pursuing their careers. Concomitantly, they also experienced shrinking of their ethnic social networks and struggling against cultural barriers that precluded in-depth friendships with Canadian-born citizens. All participants reported employment insecurity because of actual and perceived discrimination and lack of Canadian credentials. In other words, the second post-immigration phase continued to demand a great deal of time and energy. Thus, participants had to divide their attention among work, training aspirations, and family responsibilities.

Meanwhile, little time was allotted for rest, recreation or marital relationships. Participants were also not psychologically aware of such deprivation. Living out of the traditional Chinese understanding of marriage, that it is built primarily on prescribed cultural and gender roles and responsibilities, the Chinese immigrants concentrated on fulfilling these roles. They failed to detect that they were drifting apart from their spouses. Despite these immigrants' heroic efforts to look after their kin, they received little or no acknowledgement from either their immediate or extended families, which eroded their psychological and spiritual well-being. All these caused an accumulation of resentment. Using case illustrations and quotes, we describe the stresses in the second decade that contributed to the gambling problems the participants developed in the third decade.

*Case Illustrations (2nd Decade)**Marriage and family stress*

Keung called himself the “breadwinner” of the family, and his concept of division of labour within the family was very distinct. The demands of work left him little time for family.

Men are responsible for things outside the family, it means making money to support the family financially. Women on the other hand, responsible for the inside such as doing housework, child care, cooking etc ... W. (his ex wife) was the primary care taker ... cause I had to work ... I worked long hours. When I got off from work, the kids were usually asleep. I left home slightly before 9 am. When I got home, it was almost midnight. I barely had time to spend with our kids ...but I couldn't do much about it. I needed to work. I could only spend time with them on my days off ... walking around the neighbourhood.

As Peter pointed out, marital relationships were strained by children, work, and study:

Having shouldered a large part of parenting responsibilities, my wife got very fed up when the kids were not under control. She might yell at them when failing to discipline them in the “civilized” way. Since I needed a very quiet environment to concentrate when I was working, I would lose my temper and scold S. as well. I blamed her for not being able to contain the kids. I saw it as her incompetence as a mother. Gradually, the kids realized that if they provoked Mom enough to make her yell, I would come up and blame S. In other words, they learnt how to use me to go against Mom.

Lack of communication with their spouses compounded their increasing social isolation. In maintaining a surface harmony, Felix dropped his own interests and social contacts because of his spouse.

Like my ... hobbies. I had to give them up. I used to call my friends over, but I saw that she didn't like my friends. She thought they were uncouth, or not refined enough. Therefore, I subconsciously drifted from them, and overtime I lost all of them.

Discrimination in the workplace

Our participants all reported actual and perceived discrimination in the workplace which undermined their sense of job security. While Felix spoke about his encounters with blatant discriminatory remarks, Cathy described how she was “fired” when she pointed out errors made by a junior staffer:

Take the last office job for instance. My boss was a white guy. He was very discriminative, very racist...very mean indeed...very nit-picking...why picked on me alone? ... I explained to the boss why I asked him (junior staffer) to be more careful next time ... The company would lose money because of these mistakes ... These mistakes could be avoided, right? ... To my disappointment, my boss took his side and confronted me for being too rude to him. He gave me a lot of hard times after that, and eventually, I was laid off.

Weakened extended family ties

As extended family members married and set up their own nuclear families, participants reported the dilution of relations with their extended kin. Unlike Hong Kong, distances in the large Canadian metropolitan cities precluded more frequent contacts with extended family. Felix mused:

I think ever since my whole family came, with my brothers and sisters, and father...we got further apart in our relationship instead of closer over the years. I think that has had a great impact on my life, in the overall sense. I feel regretful that material things have affected our family relationship ... After each of us got married, we had our own lives to lead. We had our own responsibilities to the nuclear family and, undoubtedly, most of us had to focus on making a living too. Before we knew it, we were each leading our own lives. This was especially the case when perhaps none of us ever slowed down to think about what was happening or wondered if we should pay more attention to our own familial (family-of-origin) bonding. So we drifted apart.

Cathy described her experience of weakening family ties and the subsequent distress and disappointment that such familial conflicts engendered:

I thought my brother knew the contribution I made for the family, but he never showed appreciation for what I did. Instead of showing recognition or being grateful, he said, 'You wouldn't have made it without my signature.' Wasn't I stupid? I did all the work, I gave him all the money I made ... and yet, he wasn't appreciative at all.

As the second decade closed, the participants had secured a good measure of material success. On the downside, as extended family and social network thinned out, the absence of support and appreciation from their marital partners became more detrimental as they faced the challenges of racial discrimination and job insecurity.

Late Phase Immigration Stress (3rd Decade)

In the third decade after immigration, the onset of pathological gambling erupted, in all cases precipitated by a crisis, setback, or life transition. These critical events brought to the fore the degree of disengagement and discord in the marital relationship

when the spouses not only failed to lend the participants support but in most cases also remained critical and devoid of understanding. With advancing age, and in one case due to an accident, three of the four participants suffered from deteriorating health in this third decade. As their children became more independent and left home, the bleakness of the marital relationship became too stark to deny. Without support or anyone to confide in, these immigrants felt overwhelmed by their current psychological state and life challenges.

Such events occurred at a time when legalized gambling in Canada was expanding and, interestingly for these immigrants, gambling was a familiar past-time to which they had been exposed early in life in their native culture. Of note during this third post-immigration decade, participants had also more disposable income and time on their hands. Ultimately, recent crises and alienation from self and spouse activated early unresolved intrapsychic conflicts, unmet expectations, and unexpressed emotions, such as grief and resentment, together with low self-esteem owing to a lack of acknowledgement, and hence a continuous need to prove themselves.

Case Illustrations (3rd Decade)

Crises, setbacks and life transitions

Keung's slide into pathological gambling may have been due to an accumulation of stresses experienced in the first two decades of immigration (marital disconnect, extensive work hours, language barriers, and a limited supportive network), brought to a head by a business venture gone awry during his third decade in Canada.

I tried getting into small business ventures, but they failed... We worked the business for about 2 months, but our storage was burglarized and everything got stolen. When all the goods were gone, we just couldn't do anything about it. Since both of us didn't have money, we thought we would take a loan from the bank. But you know how it is with loans, you have to pay them back. When we lost everything and nothing worked out, I thought of trying my luck to recoup my losses at the casino.

Having tried his luck at the casino and coming home empty-handed, Keung then experienced another setback, a debilitating accident, as he remarked:

I got hit ... I was unable to work.. I tried but I couldn't do it, I just couldn't work ... I have no income now; I am relying on social assistance.

A major setback for Peter in this last decade was his business slowdown, which undermined his self-esteem as the family provider.

Well, I was very upset initially.. I got very irritated, asking a lot of "why". I couldn't really take it ... pass my own standard ... I felt very bad ... couldn't face myself ... didn't earn enough for the family ... I am incapable, incompetent and useless. Feeling extremely incapable, I got irritated and impatient about myself

and the people around. I would easily pick on a fight ... mainly with my wife ... for no apparent reason ...It's hard ... I couldn't face myself at all at that time.

Business downfall was bad, but the onset of illnesses made it worse.

Different kinds of illnesses came almost at the same time ... I wouldn't deny the possibility that they were related to our overworking. I thought we might have crossed the line, and now we had to bear the consequences. My wife humoured me, saying that there's nothing we could do ... we had used up our quotas ... that's why we had to accept it.

For Felix, the development of his gambling disorder had similar antecedents that were also experienced by the other three participants. He had a relentless pursuit for financial independence, experienced perceived and actual discrimination, and marital conflicts. He also had free time and a disposable income for gambling,. In addition, Felix disclosed another precipitating factor he experienced during his third decade in Canada. His sister, who was like a mother to him, passed away.

My sister's death ... I don't think that is the entire reason ... But that would be a very big reason – the fact that she died. She has been gone for seven years now ... But how I ended up here is because I felt at that time that all I was working towards was meaningless, so were my notions of helping others. For a split second, I realized I have lost everything. Suddenly I have nothing to focus on in life. I was quite satisfied with everything, but when my sister passed, that was a huge thing in life for me. ... Even though I knew that gambling was not a good thing, I just didn't care because I thought the worst would just being losing all my money. I felt like what difference was it going to make even if I lost everything. I have already lost such an important person in my life. I just felt happier when I was gambling.

In addition to the aggravation of marital problems, Cathy also suffered the loss of her mother, her one and faithful ally. She spoke about her mother with regret and guilt:

I felt very guilty for not being able to spend more time with her. She had been very sick for a few months... I felt very sorry for not being able to keep her company or take care of her more... I was guilty... I was very sorry for not being able to spend more quality time with her.

Deterioration of marriage

Speaking in detail regarding marital disillusionment and gambling, Cathy offered some insight into a long-standing source of unhappiness in her marriage and her use of gambling as an act of defiance and self-assertion of independence.

I didn't get upset until recent years. I wasn't that happy all along. I made over \$200,000 in total house-selling and he (husband) never said thank you. I had been working very hard in all aspect since day one. Everything I did was for the better of my family ... Yet, I ended up getting nothing from it. I didn't see the meaning ... That wasn't right. I didn't even have a joint account with my husband, who was fully in charge of the money. This was something I had been wishing for in a long time. But when I started having money for myself, I felt guilty ... It's only after some time that I used the money to gamble.

Through the aid of gambling and its intoxicating effects, she was able to wash these feeling of bitterness away and bolster her sense of self-worth and power.

There was a huge sense of satisfaction when I was able to make the right guess ... I felt invincible, intrepid, smart and competent ... Yet, when my sanity came back, I would blame myself for gambling away the money I might have used for a down payment in buying another house for investment. Very quickly though, another thought sneaked in, 'What's the big deal ... my husband hasn't even gone to a casino.' What I meant was, at least I tried everything; he didn't even have the guts to try.

Peter commented that continued marital discord and work-related conflicts led him to seek solace at the casino.

Every time I got stressed out at work, I would think of going ... Or give myself excuses for going ... Whenever I got upset, I had this voice in my mind saying, 'Go and have fun.' Gambling could relieve stress; it was self-consolation ... Conflicts with my wife was the major reason.

Marital relationships for these immigrants were fraught with serious conflicts. Cathy described the storms in her marriage:

I think his personality was like his grandma, very quiet but grumpy ... very hot-tempered indeed. The first time he threw a temper tantrum, I was so scared. I hid in the room and cried. I couldn't figure out why he was so angry. He banged the door of our room and scared the shit out of me. I am not exaggerating. The whole house trembled. I sat in the room crying, thinking that he should at least let me know why he was so upset. I thought over and over again and concluded that I hadn't done anything wrong to deserve this. I stopped crying and made up my mind that I wouldn't cry again.

After a period of counselling, Peter reflected on his own role in the marital breakdown:

I made all decisions. I was like a tyrant ... I had been like that for a long time. My family feared me a lot ... whenever I threw temper tantrums ... I was very

busy ... When I was very stressed out, I usually displaced my anger and frustration on them. I seldom went upstairs to talk to them. Instead, I asked them to come down to the basement to see me ... that's why my relationship with them was not good from day one. There's always a reason why relationship didn't work out. My tyranny just pushed them away.

All four participants had also suffered childhood trauma, the details of which will appear in another paper. Thus, in addition to the immigration stresses identified in the foregoing themes and vignettes, the losses, abuse, neglect, deprivation, and overwhelming demands the immigrants experienced in their childhood and early adolescence, as well as their lack of self-worth and the limited models they had of family relations and communication, conspired to compromise their coping resources in the challenging times of the third decade.

Gambling as an Outlet for Distress

Beset by multiple problems and limited coping resources, these immigrants wandered into gambling without knowing the risks involved and their own predisposition to developing a problem. They did not realize that their social isolation, marital breakdown, life crises, low self-esteem, and unprocessed emotions put them at risk. In addition, they mentioned that gambling was a sanctioned recreation because it is legal, as Keung said:

There's nothing good or bad about it, especially when the government allows it. It really is up to the individual to not get over-involved or addicted to it. I can't really say if it's addictive; I can't say till now ... but I just treat it a form of entertainment.

Peter was influenced by the rosy picture the media painted of gambling.

The media never talked about the potential risk of gambling. It only reported on good news about whoever won jackpots, but it never talked about how people lost their families through gambling. It over-emphasized the glamorous side of gambling, usually blinding people from seeing the real picture of gambling.

Gambling was a way for them to cope with the painful emotions and disappointments, a reprieve from circumstances to which they saw no exit. Felix summed it up well:

Losing a loved one. My environment also wasn't very ideal and I was at a point in my life when I was under some stress financially. At the time, my kids were about to go into university and would need financial help from me. Furthermore, I wasn't happy in my career, yet I felt I had to continue with the job because I still had so many responsibilities. All those affected me...I had so much going on that I couldn't control, emotionally and physically. When I was at the casino, I could park everything on the side.

The euphoria, comfort and elevated self-esteem that winning provided were something all these individuals could not find in real life, as Felix further described:

I think there was a sense of satisfaction when I win. I was very happy. When I had a lot in my pocket, I felt very elated as if I had achieved something significant. It was an easy way to escape, and I didn't have to go home to deal with anything... I would feel very comfortable there. Oh yeah, very comfortable and very excited. It just felt good to be sitting there, playing pairs and such.

Gambling was also a way to vent unexpressed emotions, since constructive ways of doing so were unknown to them. Cathy related her anger and despair:

I didn't have any money left ... the general direction within the family couldn't be reconstructed ... like in the latter stage ... the finance ... I was mad, very mad indeed. I gambled to vent. I did it on purpose. I was thinking, after all, I didn't have money after all these years of hard work. I might just gamble everything away.

Peter and Keung hoped to make up their financial losses at work through gambling. According to Peter:

As I earned less, I wanted to try my luck through gambling ... I thought, "If I am lucky enough, I might be able to make the difference."

DISCUSSION

These four case studies allow us to gain an in-depth look into the factors contributing to the development of pathological gambling in four Chinese immigrants. Although the stresses of immigration were most acute in the first decade, pathological gambling did not develop until 30 years after immigration. A complex interaction of factors is described in this paper to explain this phenomenon.

In the first two decades, these immigrants were absorbed by their single-minded pursuit of financial independence and meeting family responsibilities. Their material success was achieved at the expense of their attention to marital relationships and psychological well-being, of which they had little knowledge. They were unaware of the emotional load they carried from childhood and from pre-immigration trauma, on which we will elaborate in another paper. The immigration stresses identified in this study were language and cultural barriers, actual and perceived racial discrimination associated with job insecurity, the need to upgrade their education and professional credentials, intensified work and limited social and friendship networks. Indeed, one must give them credit for the remarkable resiliency they demonstrated in achieving their material goals despite these immigration odds. Their family and work ethic served them well in the early years. Unfortunately, these coping mechanisms were insufficient in later years to prevent them from developing gambling problems with the escalation of marital conflicts,

economic and job setbacks, health deterioration, life crises and transitions and loss of close family members. Their crumbling internal and interpersonal resources came at a time of legalized gambling expansion. As gambling was a familiar pastime from their own culture, and coupled with a disposable income, available time, and their ignorance about the risks of gambling, these immigrants chose gambling as an accessible outlet for relieving their internal distress. Gambling thus offered an illusion for reparation of their losses and disillusionment.

These findings of pathological gambling as a result of disconnection intra-psychically, interpersonally, inter-generationally, and spiritually corroborate with the Pathological Gambling Family Systems Framework developed by the first author of this article based on an earlier study with a Caucasian Canadian sample (Lee, 2002, 2003, 2005). Immigration stressors identified in this study also bore out earlier findings disclosed in a landmark Canadian report, *After the Door had Been Opened* (Beiser, 1988).

While existing gambling literature has pointed out that immigration stresses such as social isolation, language and cultural barriers and racial discrimination are associated with gambling (Tse, Wong & Kim, 2004; Wong & Tse, 2003), this study sheds further light into the intricate dynamics of how external immigration stressors interact with the gambler's own set of predispositions and resources brought to meet these challenges. What this study highlights are the psychosocial resources or lack thereof, that could tip the balance between successful coping and a fall into pathological gambling. The failure of marital support and family life were key factors identified by these four immigrants in their demise. Chronic stress, mood disturbances, life setbacks and crises, feeling being overwhelmed, the alluring messages of legalized gambling, and ignorance of personal vulnerabilities and risks were interactive factors in the development of pathological gambling. Less obvious and conscious to them was the role of unresolved early life trauma and conflicts in compromising their present coping capacities.

This study is limited by a small sample of four Cantonese-speaking Chinese immigrants in Ontario, who immigrated to Canada between 1968-1974. It is important to note that Chinese immigrants constitute a heterogeneous population consisting of many subgroups. Each cohort of Chinese immigrants may reflect different countries of origin embracing different cultural, historical, and political backgrounds. Their dispositions and backgrounds also interact with the political, social and economic contexts of their host country at a given time. Hence, immigration and other psycho-social stressors identified in this study as contributing to pathological gambling should only serve as a hypotheses to stimulate further research and empirical validation.

We hope that the factors and dynamics delineated in this study will alert us to the need for a more in-depth assessment into the family history and marital relationships of gamblers. Furthermore, given the often immense challenges immigrants face as they transplant their lives in new soil, we hope our present findings will prompt the development of psychological consciousness and marital communication to enhance immigrants' coping capacities in our gambling prevention and treatment programmes.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (4th Ed.)*, Textual Revision. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.
- Besier, M. (1988). After the door has been opened (Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data). *Report of the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees*. Retrieved February 20, 2006, from http://ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20Library/health/candian_taskforce/candian1.html
- Beiser, M. (1999). *Strangers at the gate: The boat peoples first ten years in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Blaszczynski, A., Huynh, S., Dumalo, V. J., & Farrell, E. (1998). Problem gambling within a Chinese-speaking community. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 14(4), 359-380.
- Chinese Family Service Center of Greater Montreal (1997). *Gambling and problem gambling among Chinese adults in Quebec: An exploratory study*. Montreal: SFCGM.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: Thousand Oaks.
- Glionna, J. M. (2006). Gambling seen as no-win situation for some Asians. *American Renaissance*. Retrieved February 20, 2006, from http://www.amren.com/mtnews/archives/2006/01/gambling_seen_as_nowin_situati.php
- Hsu, E., Davies, C. A., & Hansen, D. J. (2004). Understanding mental health needs of Southeast Asian refugees: Historical, cultural, and contextual challenges. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 24, 193-213.
- Lee, B. K. (2002). Well-being by choice not by chance: An integrative, system-based couple treatment model for problem gambling. *Final Report, Ontario Problem Gambling Research Postdoctoral Research Award*. Guelph, Ontario: Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre.
- Lee, B. K. (2003). *A family systems model for conceptualization and treatment of pathological gambling*. Poster session. Presented at the Conference on "Regulating Addiction". The National Center for Responsible Gaming and Institute for Research on Pathological Gambling and Related Disorders, Division on Addictions, Harvard Medical School. December 7-9, Las Vegas.

- Lee, B. K. (2005). *The untold tale: Case studies of gamblers and spouses*. Paper presented at the Responsible Gambling Council Discovery 2005 Conference, April, Niagara Falls.
- Lo, J. (1996). *Problem gambling in Calgary's China-town and East-End*. Calgary, Alberta: Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission.
- Noh, S., Beiser, M., Kaspar, V., Hou, F., & Rummens, J. (1999). Perceived racial discrimination, depression, and coping: A study of Southeast Asian refugees in Canada. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 40 (3), 193-207.
- Noh, S., & Kaspar, V. (2003). Perceived discrimination and depression: Moderating effects of coping, acculturation, and ethnic support. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(2), 232-238.
- Petry, M., Armentano, C., Kuoch, T., Norinth, T., & Smith, L. (2003). Gambling participation and problems among South East Asian Refugees to the United States. *Psychiatric Services*, 54(80), 1142-1148.
- Sin, R. (2005). *Studies of Chinese gambling in Canada: A critical review*. Paper presented at the Inaugural Asian Pacific Conference on Problem Gambling, Hong Kong, November 23-24, 2005.
- Skolnik, S. (2004). Deck stacked against Reporter. Retrieved February 20, 2006, from http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/161827_gambling24.html
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tse, S., Wong, J., & Kim, H. (2004). A public health approach for Asian people with problem gambling in foreign countries. *The Electronic Journal of Gambling Issues*, 12, 1-16. Retrieved February 20, 2006, from http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue12/jgi_12_tse.html
- Wong, J., & Tse, S. (2003). The face of Chinese migrants' gambling: A perspective from New Zealand. *The Electronic Journal of Gambling Issues*, 9, 1-11. Retrieved February 20, 2006, from <http://www.camh.net/egambling/issue9/opinion/wong/>
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Applications of case study research* (2nd ed.). London: Thousand Oaks.