

Study: Black women with gambling problems outnumber men

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FLORIDA -- African-American women in Florida have 51 percent higher rates of compulsive gambling addiction than African-American men, according to newly released 2009 statistics from a state help agency.

The statistics represent a 6-percent jump in one year. In 2008, African-American women comprised 45 percent of people in the state with gambling problems, according to the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling (FCCG), an Altamonte Springs-based non-profit help center.

“In addition, in 2009, African-American women have statistically higher gambling addiction rates than white, Hispanic, or Asian men or women,” said Pat Fowler, director of the FCCG, which has contracted with the state since 1988 to provide free help to people with gambling addictions.

An estimated 81,542 of African Americans in Florida (from a total population of 2,203,852) are suffering from gambling addictions, Fowler said.

Gambling addiction rates in Florida have been rising steadily ever since land-based casinos began increasing across Florida over the last five years.

And what are gambling addicts most attracted to? The Las-Vegas style slot machines at casinos in Broward and Miami-Dade County.

Of the 2,700 people who called the FCCG’s help line in 2009, 19 percent were black, including African Americans, people from the Caribbean and/or people from Africa. Of those people, a whopping 54 percent are addicted to slots. Of that number, 83 percent are gambling so much that they cannot pay their household bills, according to the FCCG.

Ava, a married, 56-yearold African-American woman from Miami-Dade County who has two grown children, is a recovering addict who gambled away at least \$40,000 on slot machines at various casinos in Broward County. She declined to give her last name or her exact city of residence to a reporter.

On Nov. 21, 2009, Ava decided to call FCCG's toll-free help line after she saw a pamphlet at one of the casinos she frequented.

"It was a card that was located near where you cash your winning ticket, and it said if you think you have a gambling problem to call that number," Ava said. "I went home and called right away."

By state law, all casinos in Florida are required to provide gambling help information, which includes access to the help line and the opportunity to ban themselves from entering a casino.

When Ava called the help line, she said, she was connected to an understanding counselor who referred her to a free therapist and the location of a nearby Gamblers Anonymous meeting.

She has been seeing her therapist and attending her Gamblers Anonymous meetings every week since last November.

And she has not stepped inside a casino since.

"The temptation to gamble is there, even though my credit is ruined, I am hounded by bill collectors, I owe my children and family members money, and my house is in foreclosure," Ava said.

Ava found strength in Gamblers Anonymous, where she encountered fellowship with recovering compulsive gamblers who have been attending steadily for over 15 years.

But every time she turns on the TV or drives past a casino billboard, she is tempted by the alluring advertising that offers her the chance of winning jackpots while having a good time.

“When you are at a casino you are escaping,” Ava said. “You have the music, and the people around you, and the dreams of winning big. But the reality is that most of us walk to the car ashamed with our bank accounts and credit cards emptied out, and knowing that the next day, we will try to find a way to come back again.”

THE MORE YOU KNOW

2009 STATISTICS FROM THE FLORIDA COUNCIL ON COMPULSIVE GAMBLING:

Black/African American statistics below include Africans, African Americans and Caribbean Americans.

The statistics are based on data received from the FCCG Help-Line during the period from January 1, 2009 through December 31, 2009.

During this period, the FCCG received 2,700 Help contacts.

- Black/African Americans made up 19 percent of the help contacts.
- Black/African American is the only ethnicity in which female gamblers outnumber male gamblers, with females representing 51 percent of the total (typical female percentage for other ethnicities ranged from 33 percent to 40 percent).
- Thirty-eight percent of the women were married, 27 percent were never married, and 22 percent were either divorced or separated.
- Children under the age of 18 were present in 38 percent of the households.
- Full-time jobs were held by 61 percent, and 25 percent were unemployed or disabled/collecting workers compensation or disability.

- Slot machines were the primary problem cited by more than half (54 percent), while cards were second (26 percent), and lottery games accounted for 11 percent.
- The most favored gambling locations among this population were land-based casinos (65 percent), followed by convenience stores (12 percent).
- Emotional problems among this population were as follows: 75 percent experienced anxiety, 82 percent were depressed, and 10 percent had serious suicidal ideas or previous attempts.
- Family conflict was prevalent in 76 percent of the gamblers: 66 percent cited family neglect, and 4 percent stated there was family violence due to the gambling problem.
- 83 percent were having problems paying household bills, 47 percent had gambled away savings, equity or retirement money, 40 percent had resorted to selling or pawning assets in order to finance their gambling problem, and 7 percent had declared bankruptcy.
- Illegal acts were committed by 29 percent (fraud, larceny/theft, embezzlement, selling drugs, booking, prostitution, etc...).
- The average income of the gambler was \$42,225, while the average debt due to gambling was \$32,210. It is also important to note that the gambler's average lifetime gambling losses were estimated to be over \$92,000.

FCCG's toll-free help hot line is 1-888-ADMIT-IT (www.gamblinghelp.org).

