

Study on Hong Kong people's participation in gambling

A report on the evaluation study of the impacts of gambling liberalisation in nearby cities on Hong Kong people's participation in gambling activities and development of counselling and treatment services for problem gamblers was released today (March 13).

A spokesman for the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) said that the study's findings provided the Government with a useful set of updated statistics on Hong Kong people's participation in gambling activities and a comprehensive review of the development of the four counselling and treatment centres financed by the Ping Wo Fund.

Commissioned by the HAB and financed by the Ping Wo Fund, the study was conducted by the Department of Applied Social Sciences of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) in 2008 through a telephone survey, documentary analysis, interviews with members of the four counselling and treatment centres and focus group discussions with users of the centres.

"We are glad to note that the prevalence rates of possible problem gamblers and possible pathological gamblers declined slightly when compared with the rates obtained from two previous studies in 2001 and 2005," the spokesman said.

"However, we are concerned about the findings that 34.2% of the interviewees indicated that they first took part in gambling activities below the age of 18, and that over half had this experience due to the influence of their friends, classmates or family members."

The spokesman said that the findings confirmed the importance of public education in anti-gambling work and the Government's enhanced publicity effort targeting young people. "We will continue to make use of the Ping Wo Fund to support suitable publicity and public education campaigns to arouse the awareness of the public, in particular young people, on the negative impact of gambling," the spokesman said.

Attaching importance to public education, the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee launched the Ping Wo Fund Sponsorship Scheme in December 2008 to

sponsor non-government organisations to conduct public education programmes and activities which aim at preventing and/or alleviating gambling-related problems. The closing date for the first round of applications is noon on March 31, 2009.

“The study has also confirmed the need for gambling counselling and treatment services,” the spokesman said.

“We will continue to publicise the services offered by the counselling and treatment centres to facilitate accessibility for users who are gamblers and their family members who may be looking for guidance and assistance.”

On the advice of the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee, the Government will continue to make use of the Ping Wo Fund to fund the operation of counselling and treatment centres.

“We are conducting a review of the scope and scale of services, amount of annual funding, etc. Preliminary proposals being considered include the introduction of service contracts of a longer duration to facilitate better service and manpower planning by the centre operators as well as to extend the service hours of the gambling counselling hotline to 24 hours a day to strengthen support for gamblers and their family members,” the spokesman said.

“We will take into account the views of the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee, existing operators and relevant stakeholders in the process and aim at completing the tender and award of new service contracts in the second half of 2009.”

The PolyU research team has briefed the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee on the findings. In consultation with the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee and taking into account the findings of the study, the Government is devising an appropriate strategy to address gambling-related problems in the community. Suitable measures will be introduced in phases.

The report is now available at the HAB website (www.hab.gov.hk/en/publications_and_press_releases/reports.htm).

In September 2003, the Government set up the Ping Wo Fund to finance preventive and remedial measures to address gambling-related problems, as well as the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee to give advice on the use and application of

the Fund.

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