

LCQ12: Youngsters' participation in football betting

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Sing-chi and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (July 11):

Question:

The matches of the UEFA European Football Championship (the UEFA Euro) came to an end early this month and during the period when the UEFA Euro matches were held, various sectors were concerned about youngsters' participation in football betting. According to a survey conducted in the North District in mid-June this year, 5% of youngsters under the age of 17 had participated in football betting with their bets amounting to a hundred dollars or less on average on each occasion, and a 17-year-old respondent even indicated that he placed bets of up to a thousand dollars each time, and about 20% of youngsters were very familiar with the operation of football odds. The survey indicates that the problem of football betting among youngsters is serious. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council of:

(a) the number of illegal football betting cases received by the authorities during the period when the UEFA Euro matches were held and the number of such cases involving minors (youngsters under 18 years of age);

(b) the respective numbers of requests for assistance received since 2008 by the gambling counselling hotline (GCH) and the Counselling and Treatment Centres for Problem and Pathological Gamblers (the Centres) which are financed by the Ping Wo Fund set up by the Home Affairs Bureau; among such requests, the numbers of those from minors (youngsters under 18 years of age); the respective numbers of requests for assistance received by GCH and the Centres during the period when the UEFA Euro matches were held, and among them, the numbers of those from minors (youngsters under 18 years of age);

(c) the number of minors (youngsters under 18 years of age) arrested and prosecuted for participating in football betting since 2008; and

(d) the means used by the authorities to prevent minors (youngsters under 18 years of age) from participating in football betting and the measures in place to prevent them from participating in football betting through overseas gambling websites?

Reply:

President,

(a) The Police have strategies in place to combat illegal gambling through intelligence-led operations and will adjust the operational deployment flexibly depending on the actual situation. To combat the illegal gambling activities that might emerge during the UEFA European Football Championship, the Police conducted a new round of operations from June to July 2012. During the operations, the Organized Crime and Triad Bureau worked with the Police Districts to conduct intelligence-led law enforcement actions across the territory, with a view to combating illegal gambling during the matches.

(b) The four counselling and treatment centres for problem and pathological gamblers (treatment centres) funded by the Ping Wo Fund provide telephone counselling and face-to-face counselling or other professional treatment. Please refer to Annex for relevant case figures.

During the UEFA European Football Championship, the four treatment centres provided 743 cases of telephone counselling and 94 cases of face-to-face counselling or other professional treatment, including one case with client under the age of 18.

(c) The number of persons arrested for gambling offence is tabulated as follows:

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
				(up to	
				April)	
Number of	3 375	3 790	4 204	3 379	1 302
arrested					
persons					

The Police do not maintain statistics on the age distribution of persons arrested for gambling offences, or the statistics relating to those persons being prosecuted.

(d) The Betting Duty Ordinance (Cap 108) and the licence issued by the Secretary for Home Affairs to the Hong Kong Jockey Club for conducting football betting stipulated that the licensee shall not accept or authorise any person to accept bets from

juveniles, shall not accept bets in any premises to which juveniles are permitted to have access, and shall not pay dividends to juveniles.

The Administration will also continue to conduct public education campaigns to educate the general public, in particular young people, to stay away from gambling. For instance, the Ping Wo Fund commissioned the Radio Television Hong Kong to organise territory-wide public education campaigns over the past few years to arouse the awareness of school students and young people of the negative impact of gambling. A series of activities were held under the campaigns, e.g. Announcement in the Public Interest (API) design competition and inter-school football matches, etc.

All along, the Police have strategies in place to firmly combat illegal gambling activities through a four-pronged approach in respect of prevention, education, intelligence gathering and law enforcement. The Police have also strengthened intelligence exchange with the Mainland and other law enforcement authorities outside Hong Kong in combating cross-boundary crimes (including cross-boundary illegal gambling activities). The Police will also conduct joint investigations and joint operations as necessary to combat cross-boundary illegal gambling activities effectively.

Ends/Wednesday, July 11, 2012