

Chapter 47

Absence of Crime in African Migrants' Gambling and Policing in Finland: An Analysis

Perpetual Crentsil

University of Helsinki, Finland

ABSTRACT

Gambling is popular among African migrants in Finland. The Finnish lottery, for example, is highly patronised by many active African migrant gamblers and those who have gambled before. Many of these migrants also know that some types of gambling like poker and online games have been linked with criminality or organised crime, prostitution, and internet fraud. African migrants in Finland are generally suspicious of the police, but concerning gambling they do not see the need for any police involvement. There seems to be an absence of crime and policing in African migrants' gambling, which is a relevant finding in this study. But then, are the unemployed who engage in gambling committing a crime or would they be prone to criminal acts? This is an area worth researching deeper into. This chapter explores African migrant gamblers' ideas about their gambling and policing in Finland. The chapter is based on data from qualitative studies conducted in 2009 and in 2011-12 using interviews, conversations and questionnaires.

INTRODUCTION¹

All over the world moral issues surround gambling; it may be hailed as morally good or condemned as morally bad (even compared with theft and greed) and seen as sinful on religious grounds (Binde, 2005, pp. 452-3; Binde, 2007a; Binde, 2007b; Borna & Lowry, 1987, pp. 223). There are motivations for gambling—the aim to win money, social interaction, escapism, relaxation, and amusement (which represents gamblers' reference to their play as amusing, exciting, arousing and rewarding as an activity

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in itself) (Walker, 1992, pp. 247)—which are far from crimes. Analysts suggest that among migrant populations one major contributing factor for gambling could be acculturation process in the society of settlement. Other factors include increased financial stability and higher levels of linguistic and social acculturation reflecting greater integration process into mainstream culture (Momper et al., 2009; Petry et al., 2003). Scholarship point to boredom, isolation and loneliness as well as other cultural factors which make people engage in gambling (Tse, Wong, & Chan 2007; Wong & Tse 2003; Volberg et al., 2001; Parish, 2005). Gambling scholarship identifies a number of gambler types—

- The Recreational or Social Gambler,
- Heavy,
- At-Risk,
- Compulsive, and
- Problem or Pathological Gambler,

which indicate the level of involvement with games and may not be issues for concern.

There is an association between gambling and crime. According to Smith, Wynne and Hartnagel (2003), gambling-related crimes include illegal gambling, criminogenic problem gambling such as forgery, embezzlement and fraud, gambling venue crimes like prostitution and vandalism, and family abuse. In Finland, police records show gambling-related crimes— suspected online-related crimes, suspected crimes relating to lifestyle-gaming crimes, suspected crimes involving a gambler as a victim, criminal activity related to problem gambling, and intimate partnership violence (Kuoppämäki et al, 2014, p. 967). All these may require police presence or involvement.

Many African migrants² know that some types of gambling like poker and online games have been linked with criminality or organised crime, prostitution, and dangerous internet fraud (Griffiths, 2003). But, as far as their gambling is concerned, the African migrant gamblers in Finland did not see the need for any police involvement. Why this is the case is the focus of this chapter. The discussion of African migrants' gambling in Finland begs for attention, and how gambling is generally organized in the country should be explored further in order to see how the police can be involved in reducing crime relating to gambling in the country.

The issue of gambling is very interesting and especially so when it is linked up with the perception of the police. The Finnish Lotteries Act (1047/2001) regulates gambling as a national monopoly (Kuoppämäki et al., 2014). There is nowhere in the Lotteries Act that criminalizes the act of gambling, and it is not easy how to bring in the issue of police in this sense. For example, whether the unemployed who end up gambling are committing a crime or not is not easy to tell. Many African migrant gamblers engage in gambling in order to win money or to test their luck and as a form of entertainment, which is understandable if they are not engaging in any criminal activity with their gambling. But when it comes to the unemployed, the question becomes different and one may wonder why they go there in the first place and whether they would be prone to criminal acts? The clear mechanism between the gambler's unemployment status and criminal activity surrounding his/her gambling is hard to discover. Generally, there is an absence of crime in African migrants' gambling and policing, which is relevant if compared to what happens in other countries. For example, in Canada Turner and colleagues (2009) studied the relationship of problem gambling to criminal behavior among male federal offenders and found that majority of respondents (65%) reported that their criminal activity was a result of their gambling, such as to pay off debts (p. 153).

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