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Re-look problem gambling approach

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

THE REPORT “New measures to curb gambling” (Oct 22) explains the present strategies by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports and the National Council on Problem Gambling to curb problem gambling and its negative effects here.

The measures might appear adequate now, but there are limitations to monitoring advertisements and expanding exclusions.

The latter – family, third-party and self-exclusion orders – has been heavily relied upon, following the opening of the casinos, to prevent certain individuals from gambling in Singapore, including in jackpot rooms and the Singapore Turf Club.

But commentaries from other countries that use these forms of exclusion have explained its disadvantages.

Pathological and problem gamblers may head overseas or to cruise ships to address their gambling needs and might even turn to illegal gambling to counter the enforced exclusion.

If the urges are left to manifest without a structured counselling pedagogy in place, exclusion could potentially aggravate the condition.

Given the challenges and complications in actually managing the exclusion programme – from updating the lists to the involvement of security personnel – a study should be commissioned to evaluate its overall effectiveness and to make amendments if necessary.

As for the monitoring of casino ads, it will be of little consequence, given the primary aim of casino operators to maximise profits; consideration for the ramifications of gambling or attention on social responsibility will still take a back-seat.

It is, therefore, imperative for the MCYS and the NCPG to implement awareness campaigns through the education system and review existing services – along with the exclusion policy – to make them more holistic and applicable, especially with the reported proliferation of the gambling situation.

For instance, therapy or recovery organisations and frameworks should be strengthened, and families should be more

cognisant of help-lines and services. Additional manpower and resources should be committed wherever possible.

Most importantly, for the rehabilitation process to be more sustainable, families should participate more proactively as partners.

The other aspect that has been overlooked is the importance of discourse in schools on the subject and perceptions of gambling.

Rather than dismissing it entirely, incorporating the issue in the moral education syllabus would allow students and educators to fairly evaluate it.

The former would gain the appropriate knowledge to know where to draw the line and simultaneously comprehend the concept of risk-taking.

These forms of public awareness, built up over a substantial period of time, would then extend to households and to activities such as stock market investments.

Prevention is better than cure; if stakeholders choose the comforts of the status quo, the problems might get complicated in the long run.



“After a fine lunch on board, I dived into the pages of the inflight magazine. I learned of a waterfall with miraculous powers, an island where the only horsepower allowed is a horse cart, where the underwater scenery is as spectacular as the surfing above. As we prepared to land, I realised travel isn't just about looking back at unforgettable places, it's about looking forward to the undiscovered ones.”

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