

Many aspects of the Casino proposal have been hotly debated in the press over the past twelve months. At this late hour many may say that a YES decision has already been reached, notwithstanding official denials, and that there is very little gain to ask for further consideration. Nevertheless, the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) would like to ask that we only focus on one issue – The Well-Being Of The Family – In these deliberations.

AWARE views the establishment of a casino in Singapore as a retrogressive move that puts at risk the well-being of many families in Singapore. AWARE feels that the social impact of gambling has not been seriously considered, except for a cursory acknowledgement that “there is a problem” and some vague reassurance that “it will be looked into”.

The social cost, as a result of putting families back on track, have been excellently presented in Dr. Gillian Koh’s article published in The Straits Times Review section on Jan 25, 2005 (p.27): ***“Casino debate: laying out all the cards”***.

Currently, there is an absence of a systematic study on the impact of gambling on Singapore. AWARE is asking the authorities to further study and draw lessons from the several studies already conducted in US and Australia, before a decision is made. (We cite some studies in a postscript.)

Studies abroad show that one to eight percent of the population becomes addicted gamblers. Medically, these are termed as “problem and pathological (P&P) gamblers”. Extrapolating statistics from Dr. Koh’s article, the social cost of P&P gamblers in Singapore can be inferred. In the US, studies in 1999 show that 3.44% of the population are P&P gamblers. In Australia, the incidence is 5%. In Singapore, making a conservative estimate, Dr. Koh concludes that 1.5% or 38,300 adult Singaporeans will be P&P gamblers.

What is the likely social cost of P&P gamblers in Singapore? Taking a very conservative estimate of S\$5,000 per annum for treatment per P&P gambler, the annual bill for Singapore is about S\$192 million. In addition, as each P&P gambler is likely to affect spouses, children, parents and extended family and friends, a much larger number of persons -- say 290,000 people -- will be affected in Singapore.

Studies have also shown that the number of P&P gamblers double within a 80 km radius of a gambling facility. Applied to Singapore, this will bring the total to 76,000 P&P gamblers, and 580,000 persons affected.

If families form the bedrock of every society, then why are we putting at risk the well-being of so many?

Furthermore, in a tiny state with a population of just 3.5 million, plus a declining birth rate, Singapore has to take great pains and invest huge sums to “grow” and nurture its population. If the added cost of nurturing a family (e.g. the SDU, education, health etc) were to be computed, the total social cost of one P&P gambler could well double or treble. We could be looking at an estimated total cost of S\$384 m or S\$576m!

AWARE is of the view that setting up a casino is a real threat to the well-being of the family and that the social costs incurred (76,000 P&P gamblers) is just too high a price to pay for the financial gains the casino is likely to bring, and the added tourism figures. In any case, the Singapore Tourism Board has stated that it actually does not need to rely on the casino to boost the numbers.

AWARE feels very strongly that the well-being of the family must not be sacrificed to out-of-town casino operators, who are most likely to be the major beneficiaries of such a move.

AWARE URGES THE GOVERNMENT TO SAY NO TO THIS PROPOSAL OF SETTING UP A CASINO.

THE ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN FOR ACTION AND RESEARCH
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Postscript

1. The Commission concluded that overall, pathological and problem gamblers in the US cost society approximately US\$5 billion per year and an additional US\$40 billion in lifetime costs for productivity reductions, social services and creditor losses - ***National Gambling Impact Study Commission. Washington, 1999.***

2. In Australia the estimated annual social cost of problem gambling is: A\$1.8 billion to A\$5.6 billion - ***Australia's Gambling Industry. Canberra, 1999.***

3. The Case Against Casino Gambling: A Report on the Impact of Legalised Gambling. Pennsylvanians against Gambling Expansion 1994 - This report presents the argument against casino gambling by reviewing case studies of major casino states in the United States. Some of their findings:

*The schools in New Orleans have noted a marked increase in the number of students who come to school unprepared, hungry and sleepy. Many reported they were up late because their parents were out gambling.

*Agencies in the Biloxi/Gulfport areas reported that their case load of clients needing both family counselling and consumer credit counselling services has soared.

*There were increase in uninsured and underinsured persons seeking health care.

*In Biloxi, crisis calls to the Gulf Coast Women's Centre rose from about 400 per month in 1992 to between 700 and 900 per month in 1995.

*Biloxi's Harrison County saw divorce rates jump 250% after casinos opened, from about 400 to nearly 1100 cases per year.

*In Lawrence county ... an increase in child abuse and neglect cases.

*Many researchers and criminal-justice officials agree that crimes related to problem gambling are only beginning to show up statistically in the newer casino areas.

The following Women organizations also share AWARE's stand of Saying No to the setting up of a casino here as the social costs will be too high where the well-being of the family is concerned.