Parental Gambling Addictions and Asian College Students
Here is Student X, an undergraduate at Cal. Although capable of great things, he sleeps in his car instead of a dorm. He can’t afford healthy meals, perform well in his courses, or escape his many financial issues. Outcasted for his apparent irresponsibility, he has a poor support network.

But what’s really happening here?
Student X is anything but irresponsible
In fact, **none** of these issues originate from him

**He is simply a victim of Asian parental gambling addiction**
Asian cultures justify gambling behavior with many reasons. They place great emphasis on **luck** and **superstition**, fueled by their immigrant mentality of risking everything for a new life in a new country.

Contrary to Western belief, most Asians view gambling as a means of **socializing**.
Belief in good luck or fortune pervades customs and rituals.

- Nolan Zane, Ph.D., Psychology
Casinos and card clubs are outlets that Asians can use for socializing.

“At the Commerce Casino outside Los Angeles... Asians make up 80-90 percent of the clientele.” - Sam Louie, MA, LMHC

Gambling and the Asian Community
This is due to Casinos marketing aggressively towards the Asian community, exploiting its cultural beliefs surrounding gambling. They are more likely to gamble than their white, black, or Latino counterparts, according to a 2016 study in the Journal of Gambling Studies. All of this combined, the risk for developing a gambling addiction becomes extremely high.
Gambling and the Asian Community

The rate of gambling addiction ranges from 6 to nearly 60 percent, depending on the specific Asian ethnicity, whereas the national rate is 1-2 percent.

Dr. Timothy Fong, Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at UCLA
Ironically, there is **extreme stigma** related to developing a gambling addiction among Asian cultures. Many who have a gambling addiction are thus too **embarrassed** to confess. As a result, these addicts lack access to necessary support.
Shame is a huge barrier to seeking help for gambling addiction.

- Dr. S. Alex Stalcup, M.D.
What is a Gambling Addiction?

It’s an impulse-control disorder, producing an excessive behavior that disrupts one’s life.

**Gambling addiction** is also known as pathological gambling, compulsive gambling, or gambling disorder.
Signs of a Gambling Addict

- Being unable to control the desire to gamble
- Whenever gambling causes other problems
- Excessive time spent gambling
- Gambling to cope with feelings such as anxiety, shame, loneliness, a sense of being disconnected from mainstream society, etc.
- Using others’ money to gamble when you have none
- Feeling guilty after gambling
- Being secretive about gambling
Repeated exposure to gambling rewires the brain to perceive *liking it as wanting it*, according to Harvard Health Publishing.

Repetitive gambling overwhelms the brain with dopamine, causing the brain to produce less of it. This way, *the pleasure from gambling recedes* yet the habit continues.
A widely overlooked and devastating result of problem gambling is the effects that Asian parents’ gambling addiction has on their child in college.
Parental Gambling Addiction

With gambler parents, the college student’s main financial support is hindered.

As the parent’s addiction continues, the student’s basic needs become increasingly difficult to afford.

The student’s quality of life drastically worsens.
When parents becomes financially devastated, the strain on the student is seriously detrimental.

**This impact is indirect:**
1. The family loses too much money
2. The child can’t receive support
3. Potentially leading to issues as harsh as homelessness
Parental Gambling Addiction Effects

“Some Cal students have to live in their cars because of this burden.” - Stalcup
In addition to money problems, *emotional weight*—worrying about other impacted relatives, feeling the cultural obligation to “hide” the fact, etc.—intensifies the issue.

Family members *lying* for the parents about not having a gambling addiction adds to this weight.

As a result, it’s difficult to use outside resources to help mitigate the problem.
Measuring the effectiveness of addiction treatment becomes impossible with patients lying and not attending meetings.

Dr. Timothy Fong
You are what’s most important in your life

Helping with the addict parent should not be a top priority for the college student.

Only when students are strong, healthy, and resilient can they consider helping with the family situation. Sometimes this is not until after graduation.
Self-Care Tips for Impacted College Students

- Sleep, meditate, and exercise
- Create a strong support network to help you through difficult times
- Avoid covering the truth with lies
- Temporary separation from family is perfectly fine if family is the source of the problems
- Do not hesitate to seek professional help. All college campuses have counseling departments and financial aid offices
- Try and have a positive mindset (everything will be okay)
Prioritizing oneself over classes may seem difficult, however maintaining health and well-being must always come first.
Asian gambling addiction is one of the most overlooked issues of addiction today; because of that, it yields unprecedented consequences.

The more light people can shed on this topic, the more victims and others impacted can easily seek help and free themselves from the chains of the cultural stigma.
Asian Gambling Addiction

It’s important to understand that anyone, even well-educated young Asian-Americans, can get caught up in the allure of money.

Changing the Asian cultural beliefs surrounding gambling is not what we aim for, but rather for people to be aware of them and for those affected by them to adapt safely and skillfully to maintain a healthy and happy lifestyle.
Resources Students Can Seek Out

**New Leaf Treatment Center**
251 Lafayette Cir #150, Lafayette, CA 94549  
Phone: 925.284.5200  
Website: nltc.com

**NICOS Chinese Health Coalition**
1208 Mason St, San Francisco, CA 94108  
Phone: 415.788.6426  
Website: nicoschkc.org

**University Health Services, Tang Center**
2222 Bancroft Way, Berkeley, CA 94720  
Phone: 510.642.2000  
Website: uhs.berkeley.edu

**Financial Aid and Scholarships Office**
201 Sproul Hall #1960, Berkeley, CA 94720-1960  
Phone: 510.664.9181  
Website: financialaid.berkeley.edu

**Basic Needs Services**
2495 Bancroft Way, Suite 72, Berkeley, CA 94720-4500  
Website: basicneeds.berkeley.edu
Developed by Liam Henson in collaboration with UC Berkeley’s University Health Services’ Tang Center, Health Promotion Unit


Cited References


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