

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Casino Paradise: The Turkish Cypriots and Gambling Addiction

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Main Points

- The economic, social and political structure of a society affects individuals' addictive behaviors.
- Over time, social gamblers can turn into pathological gamblers.
- The most important motivations of individuals in gambling in TRNC are (a) relaxation, (b) money and (c) socialization.
- There is a positive relationship between the political process and the Turkish Cypriots' gambling addiction in northern Cyprus.

Abstract

Cyprus, which is surrounded by Turkey in the north, Syria in the east, Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon in the southeast, and Egypt in the south, is the third-largest island in the Mediterranean. The island has been divided into two separate states, i.e., the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and the Republic of Cyprus (Cyprus), since military action by Turkey in 1974. However, the TRNC is recognized by no country other than Turkey and has been blockaded politically, socially, and economically. As a result, it has become a casino paradise that harbors all kinds of illegal activities. In this study, semistructured interviews were conducted with 20 gamblers and one casino manager living in Cyprus. The social life experienced in a situation of political isolation and the effect of this situation on an individual's gambling habits were analyzed. A positive relationship was identified between the political situation of Northern Cyprus since 1974 and Turkish Cypriots' gambling addiction. The findings indicate that social, economic, and political arrangements should be made in accordance with the political situation of Northern Cyprus.

Keywords: Cyprus, casino, gamblers, gambling addiction, P. Bourdieu

Introduction

Cyprus has always been a strategically important island that various civilizations throughout history have wanted to control. The administration of the island has changed hands many times before the Ottoman Empire conquest. Dating back to BC 3000 until 1571, respectively, Egyptians, Hittites, Acas, Dorians, Greeks with some colonies, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Persians, Alexander the Great, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, British, Genoese, Mamluks, and Venetians reigned in Cyprus (Özarslan, 2007).

The longest uninterrupted period of domination by a single power—the Ottoman Empire—lasted 307 years. The rapid decline experienced by the Otto-

man Empire in the 19th century came with military failures. To guard against the Russian threat, the administration of Cyprus was temporarily handed over to Britain via a secret defense treaty (the Treaty of Cyprus) signed on June 4, 1878 (Eroğlu, 1975; Özersay, 2002).

During the first decades of British rule, the colonial authorities took a very liberal attitude toward the spread of both Greek and Turkish national ideologies. During this time, the violence intensified between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The Greeks wanted enosis (unification), while the Turks wanted taksim (separation) (Toluner, 1977). After Turkey's intervention (1974), Turkish Cypriots came under the protection of Turkey. Between 1977 and

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1983, the two sides held talks without results. Thus, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) was established. With this, the division of the island gained legitimacy. As a result, the Republic of Cyprus (the Greek Cypriot administration) has been recognized by 192 of the 193 members of the United Nations. Turkey is the only country to recognize the TRNC.

An isolated structure in political, social, and economic dimensions has negatively affected Turkish Cypriots in many ways. The most important result is that it has become a casino paradise, and the people tend to be addicted to gambling. However, in the 1950s, Turkish Cypriots ran a small number of casinos in private clubs and owned only four casinos in 1991. The gambling industry has grown exponentially with the prohibition of gambling in Turkey in 1997. After 1997, several casinos moved to Turkey following the Las Vegas casino model. This presence has grown in the last 15 years, creating an international gambling industry (Çakıcı et al., 2019). The socioeconomic crisis caused by political isolation made the TRNC a casino paradise, where over time gambling habits have become widespread among Turkish Cypriots. In this research, it was analyzed on the concepts of P. Bourdieu's social capital and habitus.

Gambling Addiction in Literature

Gambling behavior was first described as a separate diagnosis in DSM-3, published by the American Psychological Association in 1980, and increased interest in issues such as making diagnostic criteria more qualified, evaluating its prevalence, identifying possible causes, and developing effective treatments. In 2012, the *Diagnosis and Census Manual of the Psychological Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association* was included in the category of gambling addiction, addictions with DSM-5, and it was entitled under the "Substance-Related and Substance Abuse" category. The most important reason for the habit of gambling to be treated as an "addiction" so late was because it is not physically apparent like drug addiction. This new behavioral perspective opens the possibility of excessive internet use, shopping, and eating behaviors to also be included in the category of "addictions" in the future.

There are many studies on gambling addiction in literature. Gambling addiction is studied sociologically under certain topics: the harm caused by gambling addiction (Binde, 2016; Salonen, Hellma, Latvala, & Castrén, 2018) and the lifestyle of gamblers (Casey, 2003; Raymen & Smith, 2017). In the context of this study, the studies are focused on Turkish Cypriots, which bring a sociological perspective on gambling addiction.

Çakıcı has an important place in these studies. Çakıcı, Karaaziz, and Babayiğit's article (2019) entitled "The relationship between gambling prevalence, risk factors and cultural attitudes in TRNC: 2007-2014." brings a sociologic perspective to the gambling problem in the TRNC. According to this article, the prevalence of problematic and pathological gambling in the world varies from region to region. The prevalence of "extremely high" PPK (problem and pathological gambling) was found in four different indigenous minority groups in the world: Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico, Maori in New Zealand, Native Americans in North Dakota, and the Turkish Cypriots in the Northern Cyprus. It is seen that the sociocultural characteristics of these ethnic groups living in the four regions of the world are similar. Çakıcı et al.

(2019) defined the common characteristics of these four groups as colonization history, economic exploitation, socioeconomic disadvantages, low education level, and high unemployment rate.

Another study of Çakıcı reveals how serious the gambling addiction is in Northern Cyprus. According to Çakıcı's article entitled "The prevalence and risk factors of gambling behavior in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (2012)," 55% of the participants are involved in one or more of the 17 kinds of gambling activities throughout their lives. Possible gambling addiction in the TRNC was determined as 2.2%. 32% of the participants stated that they had a problem with gambling at least once in their lives (Çakıcı, Karaaziz, & Özbahadır, 2019).

Methodology

In this research, the impact of the socioeconomic lifestyle caused by the political isolation of the TRNC and its influence on gambling habits of the Cypriots was analyzed. This study is based on field research with semistructured interviews with 20 Turkish Cypriot gamblers and one casino manager. These interviews were completed within one month (2020). The interviews with the participants took approximately 1 h. The Ethics Committee Report (2020/59) was approved by Harran University.

Qualitative research is built on the critique of ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions possessed by the quantitative research paradigm. Quantitative research means that reality is an objective entity independent of human consciousness; this reality should be examined from a certain distance in the research process; it is based on the assumptions that a value should not be attributed to this reality and the use of an official language free from personality in the process of reporting research findings (Creswell, 1994). In this context, the qualitative research method was used within the framework of the research. The qualitative research method was preferred in our research because of its applicability to the original subjects and subjectivity that it provides to the researcher.

The participants were reached with the snowball sampling technique. The snowball technique is a sampling technique used when the limits of the universe and those who are members of the universe cannot be determined precisely (Altunışık, Coşkun, & Yıldırım, 2004, p. 130). The majority of the participants were interviewed at different casinos, and the others were interviewed at the participants' homes with the help of their acquaintances.

Ten of the participants are women and six of them are men. It can be said that the number of men and women gambling in casinos is almost equal. The average age of the participants is 50 years. 10% of the sample is 26-35 years old, 30% is 36-54 years old, and 60% is 56 years old or older. Based on the percentages, it is understood that the majority of the participants are middle age and over. The theoretical part of the research is based on the social capital and habitus concepts of P. Bourdieu, which has an important place in sociology. This research is limited to the views of Turkish Cypriot gamblers living in the TRNC.

A day in Northern Cyprus

Daily activities of individuals offer important clues about their lives. Especially with the reproduction of modernity, free time has gained new meaning. With capitalist development, leisure time

has become clear as a time of layoff and the time required for the reduction of work. Therefore, leisure was designed as an area dependent on work required for job substitution and has since remained an extension of the work.

Hemingway (1996) stated that leisure is “deformed by increased commodification and consumerism.” However, the historical meaning of freedom in leisure has been lost within consumerism. Leisure is no longer a time of personal development and reflection nor of social benefit (Hemingway, 1996). In this study, in order to find clues about their lives from their daily activities, the participants were asked the question: “How do you spend a day in Cyprus?” Participant statements are as follows:

What am I doing for a day? My daughters have workplaces. We have a family business. After breakfast, I’m going there. I cook for the workers. After cooking their meals, my work starts here [at the Casino]... [laughter]. Sometimes I come at 2 p.m.; sometimes I come at 3 p.m. As soon as my work is over there, I come to the casino. (Female, Chef, 62 years old).

I have grandchildren. They are with me when they get sick if they can’t go to the kindergarten. Generally, we go in the afternoon [to the Casino]. We have friends. We gamble on machines. We cannot be big players because we are retired... There is nothing else to do in Cyprus. I went to the municipality yesterday. I said “Should it be only a casino in my life?”. I want to do something different. I found a photography course. I meet with my friends every two weeks at our houses [they play bingo]. So time goes by. (Female, Housewife, 58 years old).

The issue that the participants complained about most during the interview was that they have nothing to do in their daily lives without the casino. According to the participants, there is no social life, especially for adults. By “social life,” participants mean neighbor relationships, which were very common in society before the war in 1974. Further opinions and observations of the participants interviewed are as follows:

There was socialization before 1974. Why did it exist? I know because I was a mujahid. In Limassol, we lived in a Greek neighborhood. Our neighbor was Greek. The woman had six children. There wasn’t much money. In the morning, she would prepare breakfast for them and give them to me. There was a neighborhood relationship. After 1974, it disappeared. Why did it disappear? When we came to this site [to the northern part of the island] after 1974, people were all devastated. There was no home, there was nothing. People were not in a position to look at each other, and everyone had their own troubles. That is why these neighborhood social relationships broke up. They scattered people. For example, my family is in Famagusta, our other family is in Guzelyurt and the other one is in Kyrenia. This settlement system has removed neighborhood relationships. (Male, Ex-Casino Owner, 65 years old).

We used to have wonderful neighborhood relationships. Now everyone is in casinos. There are no relationships. (Female, Retired, 73 years old).

Historiography, for Bourdieu (1984), is important, as the meanings in a network of relationships must be understood correctly if the ways through which relationships formed through the histor-

ical process are to be known. He noted that such areas are locations of power relations; transcendental trends include objective possibilities. A field does not in any way turn into a direction. In the same way, everything is not possible or impossible at all times (Bourdieu, 1984). We can understand from the statements of the participants that the events experienced in 1974 and subsequent processes changed the Turkish Cypriots’ lives.

First Experience in Gambling

One of the most important points in addiction is the individuals’ first experience. The lives of individuals can be changed significantly by that experience—as the number of people becoming addicted thereafter is considerably high. In this context, the participants were asked: “What was your first experience in gambling? Why did you first go to the casino?” Some participant statements are as follows.

Our relative insisted 20 years ago. She said “Let’s go.” We went. We used to play with coins. She bought me a plate of coins. I sat down and started to gamble on the machine. The machine started to give money. I said “I will not go to the casino anymore” on that day. The next evening, my relatives said, “Let’s go.” I gambled again. I lost some money on the third night. This is how we continued to play in the casino. (Female, Retired Photographer, 70 years old).

We worked hard in those days. We worked shifts, I got bored a lot. All-day and night was work. One day my friends said “Let’s go have fun.” Where should we go? We are married with children. My husband doesn’t like going outside. I can’t go to a bar or something. We go to dinner once in a while. We said “Let’s go to the casino.” We went to the casino, it used to be cheap. It was not as expensive as it is now. We liked it. We went to the casino in the following weeks. Then we got used to it. We don’t have any other fun. (Female, Doctor, 55 years old).

Participants’ first experience in gambling echoes Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and social capital. Bourdieu offered a new definition that has gained an important place among the conceptual tools of sociology. The most famous of these is in *Le Sens Pratique* (Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action, 1998): Associated with a certain class of existence condition produces habitus. These are sustainable and transferable structures. According to Bourdieu, habitus is a learned and durable system of preferences and practices, produced by historical and social conditions (Bourdieu, 1998; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In this context, social capital is the combination of actual and potential resources, more or less institutionalized mutual recognition and recognition relationships linked to owning/saving networks, or, in a different way, it is related to resources based on belonging to a group (Bourdieu, 1983, pp. 190-191)

As can be understood from participant statements, an important part of the social life in Cyprus is based on casinos. In such an environment, individuals are more inclined toward gambling behavior especially in stressful periods or in special situations such as retirement. With the widespread behavior of gambling in society, this situation is normalized and is not found to be strange. In Northern Cyprus, individuals become gambling addicts under the influence of their social capital and habitus. As Bourdieu (1983) said, the same habitus is experienced by individuals who share similar life conditions.

What Motivates Gamblers?

According to the literature, among the most important points concerning addiction are the reasons motivating gamblers. This research seeks for an answer to this question. Thus, in this context, the participants were asked “Why do you gamble? What are you feeling while gambling?” Some participants’ statements are as follows:

I gamble for lingering. Yes, I used to play to win, I was ambitious. I played to the point where I could afford it. But the result of gambling is frustration. In the past, my grandmother once said, “Don’t curse anyone, be blind or lame. Say “Be a gambler.” Why? Because the gambler will never be happy in his life. I listened to my grandmother. But I went on my way. (Male, Ex-Casino Owner, 70 years old).

You feel relief while gambling. If you have something on your mind, you don’t think. If your head is full, if there is something wrong in your life, there is nothing in the casino until you get out. If you lose money, it is more (laughter) after you leave. (Female, Engineer, 50 years old).

I’m relieved psychologically. You are completely focused on the machine. You focus on getting bonuses. What are you doing then? You’re relieved. (Is your goal to relax?) My goal is just relaxation. (Female, Housewife, 65 years old).

To forget their sorrow. I have some customers who lost their children; for example, I have a doctor customer. He has lost his daughter. He’s gambling like crazy. It is not about money. Just to forget his sorrow... First, gambling starts like this. Then, if you fall into it, gambling is a swamp.... Winning psychologically is a very different feeling. Even their voices are changing. (Male, Casino Manager, 41 years old).

As can be seen from the statements of the participants, individuals primarily gamble to relax. The desire for relaxation and to not think about anything, which is seen in many addictions, also manifests itself in gambling addiction. Contrary to the general belief in society, money is not the first and the most important motivation to gamble. As one participant noted:

Do you know why old people come to the casino? Because there is no activity in Northern Cyprus. The man calculates: I could go to Eziş [a restaurant] with this 100 Turkish lira. On the other hand, if I gamble with this 100 Turkish lira in the machine, I eat for free. I also get my cigarettes. I have fun. I can even make money if I win. They go to the casino because of this. People have nothing to do. In the past, people had a lot to do. (Male, Ex- Casino Owner, 70 years old).

Another motivation to gamble is socialization. Casinos also offer many services to reinforce individuals’ gambling behavior. Food, soft drinks, cigarettes, and alcohol are provided free of charge to gamblers. These high-quality services also prevent individuals from entering other socializing environments other than gambling.

Conclusion

Cyprus has been struggling with a political problem that has not been resolved in the past 50 years. This political problem affected both sides negatively. However, because of the lack of not being politically recognized, the TRNC has become an isolated struc-

ture. This situation has negatively affected Turkish Cypriots socially, economically, and psychologically.

The following conclusions were reached in this research. First, the literature usually separates gamblers into pathological gamblers and social gamblers. Pathological gamblers are those with severe addiction levels; social gamblers, in contrast, gamble for social activity purposes and include those with low dependency levels. In this research, many individuals started as social gamblers and turned into pathological gamblers. Second, in this research, the most important motivations of individuals in gambling in the TRNC are (a) relaxation, (b) money, and (c) socialization. Contrary to what is generally thought, gamblers gamble to relax and socialize more than for money in Northern Cyprus. The important reason for this is undoubtedly that individuals do not have any social activities to occupy their days. This impact is evident, after 1974, when the redistribution of the island separated families and friends from each other and severed culturally accustomed neighborhood and friendly relationships.

Consequently, this research shows that there is a positive relationship between the political process and the Turkish Cypriots’ gambling addiction in Northern Cyprus. At the same time, the findings from the study confirm the appropriateness of the Bourdieu approach to our subject. Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and social capital help explain Turkish Cypriot gambling addiction. Moreover, we suggest that, for future work, the types of addiction that developed in Northern Cyprus after 1974 should be further examined.

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