

# *Unregulated Gambling in South African Townships: A Policy Conundrum?*

**Leanne Scott & Graham Barr**

**Journal of Gambling Studies**

ISSN 1573-3602

J Gambl Stud

DOI 10.1007/s10899-012-9330-0



**Your article is protected by copyright and all rights are held exclusively by Springer Science+Business Media, LLC. This e-offprint is for personal use only and shall not be self-archived in electronic repositories. If you wish to self-archive your work, please use the accepted author's version for posting to your own website or your institution's repository. You may further deposit the accepted author's version on a funder's repository at a funder's request, provided it is not made publicly available until 12 months after publication.**

## Unregulated Gambling in South African Townships: A Policy Conundrum?

Leanne Scott · Graham Barr

© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2012

**Abstract** This study was designed to explore the nature of informal or illegal gambling in South African townships, to investigate what motivates people to participate in this form of gambling and what they perceive are the associated benefits and dis-benefits. A series of focus group workshops was conducted with two groups of gamblers, all of whom had experience of some form of township gambling: one group currently lived in townships and the other had previously resided in townships. Gambling for the township residents was a far more frequent activity than for non-township residents and consumed substantially more of their time. The majority of the township residents classified themselves as unemployed, while of those who were unemployed, most people indicated that gambling was a major source of their income; some even described it as their only source of income. The most significant difference between what township and non-township residents expressed as wanting and getting from gambling was that the former indicated quite clearly and unanimously that what they sought *and* gained from gambling was money. Township residents were far more likely to indicate that they used gambling to balance their budgets than ex-township residents who gambled primarily at casinos. A lottery type game called “Fahfee” is the most widely spread and pervasive form of gambling and was unanimously portrayed as a necessary and beneficial form of support for the poor and unemployed. Lottery and Casino gambling were, in contrast, widely perceived by the township participants as being ‘rigged’ and unfair. Township Dice and cards were perceived as being ‘fairer’ and as allowing punters to be more in control than casino gambling. The downside of township gambling was reported to be high levels of violence, crime and insecurity surrounding, in particular, the game of Dice. There was widespread inability to calculate expected payoffs or odds, and an apparent belief that these were not particularly helpful skills for gamblers. In Fahfee, the reliance on dreams to guide choice of numbers appears to eradicate any interest in the odds, or of playing strategically. The findings of this study are preliminary but have serious policy implications for education and for gambling regulation in South Africa.

---

L. Scott (✉) · G. Barr  
Department of Statistical Sciences, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa  
e-mail: leanne.scott@uct.ac.za

**Keywords** Informal gambling · Fahfee · South African township · Illegal · Benefit · Financial management

## Introduction

Gambling in South Africa is regulated by the National Gambling Board (NGB) and all forms of gambling which are not under the control of the NGB are illegal (RSA 1996). Previous studies around motivating factors for gambling in legal casinos (Scott and Barr 2011) indicated that there was substantial overlap in terms of patronage of legal and illegal gambling venues. A substantial proportion of illegal gambling in South Africa takes place in so-called townships, which are essentially satellite suburbs attached to large cities. These largely racially constructed artifacts of apartheid social engineering still have profound impacts on current SA urban life. Scott and Barr (2011) reported that:

Gambling appears endemic to township life, and represents a potent and pervasive form of entertainment and socialisation. Of concern was the finding that gambling is perceived (at least by some) as part of personal financial management and as a means of access to ready cash. There is substantial risk of violence associated with township gambling and (what appears to be) a complicated protocol around protection from violence/theft for participants, mainly associated with higher stake forms of gambling. In contrast, casino gambling represents a safer form of gambling for those who are used to gambling in townships. An illegal form of lottery called Fahfee was reportedly widely played in townships and is linked to mythology around dreams, numerology concepts and, for some at least, is associated with stories/habits passed on from the older generation.

Barr and Scott (ibid) recommended that further workshops be convened specifically to explore the nature of gambling in townships. A recent Gambling Review Commission Report (2011) entitled “Review of South African Gambling Legislation and its Regulation” concurred with the need to further investigate the context and effects of township gambling.

## Objectives and Methods

This paper attempts to explore which forms of gambling are available to people living in Gauteng<sup>1</sup> townships, what motivates people to participate in the identified types of gambling, how gamblers perceive their gambling activities, and how people’s lives are affected by their gambling. The decision to focus this research in Gauteng was due to the fact that, being highly urbanized, this province has the highest participation rate in gambling, particularly in townships (NRGP Gambling Handbook 2009). It was of interest to interrogate both current residents of townships (who regularly gambled in the township) and residents who had moved from living in townships to suburbs outside of the townships. The latter group were recruited on the basis that they had been raised in a township and had spent at least 5 years of their adult lives living in a township, and were also regular (at least once a month) casino gamblers. This group generally represented wealthier gamblers who were

<sup>1</sup> Gauteng is the smallest province of South Africa. It is highly urbanized and is the most populous province, including the cities of Pretoria and Johannesburg.

familiar with township gambling and who, it is argued, could articulate a comparison of the two types of gambling. Some of this group also still gambled in townships. The reason for specifically including ex-township residents was to explore the views of those who were familiar with township gambling and who now chose to gamble in casinos (and who may or may not also have continued to gamble in townships).

It was anticipated that there might be some difficulty in persuading gamblers to participate in the research on account of the illegal nature of township gambling, however the market research company employed to recruit participants found that people were not unduly reluctant. Standard checks and balances were used to ensure that incentives used to attract participants to the study did not unduly bias the sample.

Five workshops were held in central Johannesburg at the end of 2011. A total of 63 participants attended these workshops which were constituted as shown in Table 1.

It was agreed that the objectives of the research could best be achieved through an adapted focus group process. The focus group process was adapted by using a combination of approaches, including an unstructured 'discussion' component as well as an approach referred to as 'Oval-mapping' (Eden and Ackerman 1998) in which a few key questions are presented to the participants for consideration. These questions are displayed separately on large sheets of paper, each of which has blank space below the question for responses from the participants to be posted and are typically mounted in a separate space of the venue (usually a section of wall). The participants are given the following instructions for the session:

Think quietly and carefully about the question posed and then write down as many thoughts as you can (as they come into your head) in response to each question. Write each separate thought on a separate sticky paper (post-it). Be as clear and concise as possible. Once you feel you have exhausted a question, please display your post-its on the blank paper below the question on the wall. Then move on to the next question. If there are already other post-its on the wall when you come to post your thoughts, consider whether the idea expressed on your post-it is saying something different (in which case position it a little further away from the other post-its), or the same (in which case you should stick yours next to the ones that seem similar). Rules: A post-it cannot be removed (except by unanimous consensus). You may go back and add post-its to previous questions if you like. (You may see something someone else has written which reminds you of something you would like to add).

As indicated by the agenda below, once participants had exhausted (and posted) their thoughts on the questions posed, the group jointly worked on clustering the expressed ideas into common themes and then assigned weights to each theme.

**Table 1** Demographic profile of workshop participants

Workshop	No. of participants	Township residents	Ages	LSM <sup>a</sup>
A	12	Yes	24–55	4–6
B	12	No	25–52	9–10
C	13	No	21–44	9–10
D	13	Yes	23–60	4–6
E	13	Yes	30–60	4–6

<sup>a</sup> Living Standards Measure (measured on a scale from one: lowest living standard to ten: highest living standard) which is widely used in South Africa to indicate market segmentation on the basis of degree of urbanization and ownership of assets (<http://www.saarf.co.za/LSM/lsm.asp>)

After the Oval-mapping exercise, participants were asked to score a selection of possible motivations for gambling. They were asked to consider whether the statements were true for them and to indicate the degree of resonance they experienced with each statement, using a scale of 1 (low resonance) to 5 (high resonance). At the same time participants completed a general demographic questionnaire which also included some indicators of health and happiness.

Agenda for focus group sessions:

- Welcome and refreshments.
- Discussion of agenda for workshop and explanation of rationale for research.
- Introductions: participants introduce themselves and explain what kinds of gambling they personally participate in (spending time along the way to explain the logistics of each game).
- Oval-mapping Sessions:
  - Question 1: “What satisfactions/benefits do you hope to get from gambling?”
  - Question 2: “What satisfactions do you feel you actually receive from gambling?”
  - Question 3: “Is there anything you dislike about your experience of gambling?”
- As a group exercise: Obtain clarity on each concept and complete the clustering of similar concepts. The facilitator ensures that concepts are legible and are correctly understood.
- As a group exercise: Obtain views on the relative importance of the different clusters of concepts.
- Questionnaire based Ranking/Scoring exercise.

## Summary Results of Workshops

### Characteristics of Participants

Those residents who lived in townships were largely unemployed (51 % unemployed, 41 % partially employed) whereas those who had moved away from the townships and who frequented casinos regularly were largely employed (75 % in full time employment). The non-township (NT) residents were generally *happier* (average happiness score of 4.4 compared to 3.8 for township residents) and *healthier* (average health score of 4.7, compared to 4.0 for township residents).

NT residents were more likely (64 %) to have thought they should stop/reduce their gambling than township residents (55 %).

### *Gambling Motivation*

Township residents were more enthusiastic about all of the reasons given for gambling in the “Reasons Why I Gamble” (Table 2) except “Gambling opens up a fantasy world for me”. Township residents were significantly more likely than NT residents to state the following:

- I only feel alive when I am gambling.
- Gambling helps me to balance my budget.
- I gamble when I need cash.
- Gambling improves my skills at interacting with people.

**Table 2** Strength of support for different motivators for gambling: 1 = no support; 5 = strong support

Motivation for gambling	Median township response	Median NT response
I get pleasure from playing the particular games I choose to play	5	4
I love thinking about what I might do with my winnings	5	5
I love the fact that for a while I have the chance to be much wealthier than I am	4	4
Gambling opens up a fantasy world for me	3	4
Gambling is a way of spending time with people I like to be with	3	3
Gambling lets me escape from the negative parts of my life	3	2.5
When I gamble I don't think about things that stress me in life	5	3
I only feel alive when I am gambling	3	1
Gambling helps to balance my budget	5	1
I gamble when I need cash	5	3
When I am bored or depressed, I gamble	2	2
I enjoy the excitement and thrill of taking risks	4	3
Gambling helps me to develop control over the way I take risks	4	2
Gambling allows me to demonstrate my skills to myself and others	3	3
Gambling improves my skills at interacting with people	4	2
Gambling improves my skills at analyzing situations	3	3
Gambling improves my ability to work with numbers	5	4

### Responses to Workshop Questions

The responses of the workshop participants were grouped into common themes or factors as follows:

Response themes for Question 1 (“What satisfactions/benefits do you hope to get from gambling?”) and Question 2 (“What satisfactions do you feel you actually receive from gambling?”):

**Money:** expressed as ...“extra cash; to be rich; have quick cash; money to buy food; money to make ends meet; I gamble because of poverty; to put food on the table; to be independent; generate income; money to support my child; some sort of income for kids; to win and be able to maintain myself like buy things that I need; money to fulfil my needs; money for living; money to support my church; make a living; to have something in return; so that I can have a living at the end of the day; to make a profit for a living; to win and support my family; to become rich; I get to make a living; gambling is my means of income; I want to make it through this situation of being unemployed through gambling; money to build my house ...”

**Fun/entertainment:** expressed as “sometimes meeting people there you become relieved of your problems; satisfaction; fun; outing; pleasure; fulfilment; sense of belonging ...”

**Positive outcomes:** expressed as “hope; room for dreaming; get good communication skills; desire; respect; feel alive; stress release; brain/mind stimulation; satisfaction that your earnings do not include hurting other people; it is like therapy; victory; ...”

**Negative outcomes:** expressed as “experience what is wrong; stress; sometimes you stress because gambling means winning or losing; sometimes I become stressful if I lose;

feelings of loss; fights at home; discouraged; anger; grief; disappointment; anxiety; illness; feel withdrawn; vow to change and never go back; bit of heart break; depression; don't really enjoy it; pain; guilt; addiction; not being honest; ...”

Response themes for Question 3 (“Is there anything you dislike about your experience of gambling?”)

**Violence/crime/aggression** expressed as: “... police harassing us when we try to make a living; when people start cheating; fights; be against one another; to fight when you gamble; someone who wins and then drinks alcohol and fights; taking risk at night; crooks; casino owners are crooks; township gambling dangerous because fights break out all the time; Dices because of the fights; quarrels; when you win with people you do not know they will try to rob you; sometimes it gets violent; sometimes it can be very dangerous; I don't like to be robbed ...”

**Losing** expressed as: “... losing; losing my money; not winning; takes a lot of money out of you; lost more than I won ...”

**Addiction/‘bad’ gambling** expressed as: “... always in debt; gambling with my salary before paying the bills; borrow money; planning to play with only R100 but ending up playing with R1000; I hate the part when you just can't stop even when losing; to see myself leaving the game of Dice early in the morning as if I have no place to sleep; breaks up families; breaks up marriages; losing pride; throwing your hard earned money away; regret; losing money is painful as we do not have it but were hoping to get it legally; fear of addiction; addiction; conflicts at home and fear of going home broke; bankruptcy; addiction; unhealthy compulsion to gamble; I don't want to steal money for gambling; using someone else's money for gambling; ...”

The responses of the workshop participants are shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5 below. The most frequently cited response to each question in a workshop is shown as Factor 1, followed by Factor 2 and Factor 3. Most workshops only had two dominant response themes. If only one theme is shown for a workshop then all the responses tabled of this question fell into this category. In summary, the grouped responses broadly show that

- All respondents were focused on getting money from gambling but NT participants were more likely to also see gambling as a source of fun and entertainment.
- Township gamblers indicated that gambling was a source of income. NT gamblers did not see gambling as a source of income.
- NT gamblers were more likely to associate gambling with negative feelings (whilst also being more likely to see gambling as a source of fun and entertainment).
- Township gambling was associated with violence, crime and aggression but NT gambling was not.

**Table 3** What participants HOPED to get from gambling

Question 1: What do you *hope* to get from your gambling experiences?

Group	Demographics	Response Theme 1	Response Theme 2	Response Theme 3
A	Township	Money		
B	NT	Money	Fun and entertainment	
C	NT	Money	Fun and entertainment	
D	Township	Money	Fun and entertainment	
E	Township	Money		



**Table 4** What participants ACTUALLY received from gambling

Question 2: What do you *actually* get from your gambling experience?

Group	Demographics	Response Theme 1	Response Theme 2	Response Theme 3
A	Township	Money	Positive feelings	Negative feelings
B	NT	Negative emotions	Positive feelings	
C	NT	Fun and Entertainment	Negative feelings	
D	Township	Money	Positive feelings	
E	Township	Money	Positive feelings	

**Table 5** What participants reported they DISLIKED about gambling

Question 3: Is there anything you *dislike* about gambling?

Group	Demographics	Response Theme 1	Response Theme 2
A	Township	Violence/crime/aggression	Addiction/'bad' gambling
B	NT	Losing	
C	NT	Losing	Addiction/'bad' gambling
D	Township	Violence/crime/aggression	Losing
E	Township	Losing	Violence/crime/aggression

### Participants' Views on Fahfee (MaChina, Fafi, iChina)

Fahfee is by far the most common form of gambling in Gauteng townships. Apparently originating in China and brought to South Africa in the early 1900's,<sup>2</sup> it was first played by gold miners in the old Transvaal province (Geldenhuis 2009). It is a mobile form of lottery in which punters select a number from 1 to 36 and the winner is paid at a rate of 28:1. The bets are placed and the winnings drawn in a luxury car with tinted windows which cruises the township streets and arrives at a designated station (shop, house, street corner). In many townships it can be played 3 times a day: morning, afternoon and evening; and participants reported that the car can even be seen driving round the wealthy northern suburbs of Johannesburg during the daytime, taking bets from domestic workers. The lottery is traditionally run by Chinese people and the driver of the car is referred to as Mo-China or the Chinaman. A 'runner' (who may be the owner of the station if it is a private house or shop) is employed to collect the bets and disburse the winnings. The Chinaman visits the different stations at the same time each day. The runner collects the bets on a board which has the numbers 1–36 on it. Runners could potentially manipulate the game so the Chinaman (in the car) holds up his hand and makes a symbol so that people watching and waiting for the runner will know what the winning number drawn was.

However six numbers are 'blocked' (bets cannot be placed on these numbers and they are not entered into the draw), making the apparent odds 1–30. The numbers which are blocked are the three numbers which have been 'drawn' in the 3 previous draws and their partners. The partners are shown in Table 6. The authors were unable to establish the basis

<sup>2</sup> Gambling South Africa cites that Fahfee has been played in South Africa since 1910 which makes it likely that it came to South Africa with the indentured miners who were brought to the gold mines in the Witwatersrand between 1904 and 1910. However, other authors (Mellet 2010) contend that it was first played in the Western Cape as early as 1870 from where it spread to the rest of the country.

**Table 6** Fahfee number partners

1:36	7:13	6:33	20:25	11:26	4:35
2:29	19:5	14:34	21:24	12:32	10:23
3:8	9:17	15:16	22:27	30:28	18:31

on which particular numbers are partnered. It appeared to be common cause amongst punters that in a 'fair' game, numbers which had recently been drawn (i.e. winning numbers) should somehow not be 'allowed' to win again.

The perceptions of the odds in Fahfee is a curiosity which was only partially resolved through the findings of these workshops. Despite the apparent parallels with roulette (36 numbers), it transpired, after substantial probing of successive workshop participants, that the winning number in Fahfee is not drawn, as one would assume, through some random, independent process. Many participants claimed they did not know how the winning number was drawn and also appeared to find the interest in the selection process to be somehow irrelevant. Participants of one of the workshops declared that the Chinaman himself *chooses* the winning number, on the basis of self-interest and with full knowledge of the bets placed.<sup>3</sup> When this was discussed with other workshops, there was general concurrence that this was correct and that it was a completely reasonable model for generating the winning number. Longman (1956) acknowledges that there are different draw processes including that "the Chinaman thinks up any number and declares it the winner". Even armed with this knowledge, i.e. that the Chinaman may well select the winning number based on the distribution of the bets, participants seemed to find the idea that this could influence the way in which they placed their own bets as misplaced. It was clear that there is a strong sense of (1) trust in the ability of the Chinaman and (2) an investment in the metaphysical (through dreams) in the way in which individuals place their Fahfee bets. The relationship between dream symbols and numbers varies according to different sources. The symbols associated with the numbers one to five as reported by workshop participants are shown in Table 7.

The reason why six numbers are blocked off (i.e. excluded from those which can be chosen by punters) was explained as "well of course those numbers [that were drawn in the previous three draws] can't come up again otherwise we would know it wasn't fair".

This gives us extraordinary insight into participants' perceptions of odds, risk and random outcomes. It also seems likely that the Chinaman has a good sense of the need for Fahfee to be seen to be fair, which probably accounts for his generally being regarded as a benefactor rather than a businessman.

Thus despite the fact that it is clear that Fahfee has led to people who do not live in the townships ('the Chinamen') becoming extremely wealthy<sup>4</sup> through running the operation in a way in which many punters would not regard as 'fair', Fahfee has the reputation amongst participants of being 'for the poor' and there were no indications of resentment

<sup>3</sup> Ufrieda Ho in her autobiographical book "Paper sons and daughters" (Pan Macmillan 2011) writes of her experiences growing up as the daughter of the Fahfee man. She clearly describes how her father used to show the runner the number he had chosen before the purses containing the bets were handed over to him, indicating that the number *was* chosen by her father but that this number was not influenced by the bets placed by the punters. She does however talk about the responsibility that weighed on her father in thinking up the winning number, and that he took into account the betting patterns of his regulars and that he himself was also influenced by dreams.

<sup>4</sup> "The Limpopo Gambling Board believes that the fifteen major operators in the region alone turn over millions of rands in Fahfee games" <http://www.gamblingsa.com/stories/gsa-billion-rand-fahfee-industry-highlighted.html> Feb 4 2011, accessed on Jan 6 2012.

**Table 7** Dream characters associated with numbers 1–5

Number	Dream characters
1	King, human blood, white man, left eye
2	Monkey, native, a spirit, chief, copper, money, jockey
3	Sea water, accident, frog, sailor, sex
4	Dead man, turkey, small fortune, bed
5	Tiger, fight, strong man

against the Fahfee owners. Many participants cited the fact that they used Fahfee 'to put food on the table' or when they needed 'a bit of extra cash'. This seemed a very contradictory position to hold, and when asked about how they managed to 'put food on the table' on the occasions when they didn't win and in contrast lost their last bit of cash, participants responded that this was not usually a disaster as those who won typically gave a little bit to those who lost. This apparent 'smoothing of the losses and winnings' appears to make Fahfee operate more like a *stokvel*<sup>5</sup> or social safety net than a conventional lottery. In addition, Fahfee has the advantage that small denominations are played (usually R20 per number is the max bet and bets start at a minimum of 50c) so there are not big associated losses. 'It's cheap and you always win something'. Fahfee is also a source of income for some regulars in that they have their personal betting purses in which they place their bets and they can, on occasion, allow others to use these bags for a small cut of the winnings.

Fahfee, like other forms of gambling in townships, is illegal and can occasionally be disrupted by the police. However, also like other forms of township gambling, it seemed widely believed that the police are bought off and thus do not bother the Chinaman or punters. When asked whether Fahfee should be legalized, opinion appeared divided. The unanimous view was that Fahfee was a beneficial and healthy part of township life. It was viewed almost as a 'social service' in assisting the poor and unemployed to make ends meet. Because of this view some participants believed that it should be legalized. However, others expressed the worry that it would get more expensive because the Chinaman would then have to pay tax which would drive up costs of the game. Crime associated with Fahfee appears to be low as associated betting amounts are low. Runners are quick and careful, although there were reports of isolated muggings of runners. A big perception of the fairness of Fahfee (in contrast to that of, e.g., Lottery) appears to relate to its delivering what people expect. It can be that there is no winner in Fahfee but this appears to be an unusual event.

### Participants' Views on Dice

Dice are generally played on street corners or in other public spaces. The most popular form of Dice played appears to be similar to the game of Craps, however the player throws once to establish a number and then must repeat this number to win. The *knocksman* is the owner of the game, as well as the arbitrator and facilitator and the person who will have to pay off the police and pay in if there is money missing. The *knocksman* takes a cut (anecdotally reported to be a third) of winnings earned. Participants indicated that it would be dangerous to play Dice with people one didn't know and trust as games can be rigged by the *knocksman* (false Dice) and/or fellow gamblers appearing to be strangers but in reality

<sup>5</sup> A *stokvel* is an informal savings club where members contribute fixed amounts on a regular basis and get the benefits and security of group savings and rotational credit. *Stokvels* are a source of credit for people who are often excluded from loans from conventional banks.

working together as a team to trick the unsuspecting out of their money. Mostly people play Dice in habitual venues where you “see the same faces at the game where you play”. Dice can be very rough and winners (especially of large amounts) can be victimized. The police cannot be relied upon to protect players, as they are frequently paid off by the *knocksman* to ignore the gambling activities. Winners can expect to have to distribute some of their earnings to extract themselves safely from a Dice game. Dice, in contrast to Fahfee, generally attracts high stakes and stories of people betting their cars, houses, wives, etc. abound. Most workshop participants who spoke of their Dice playing activities associated it with risk, fear, excitement and frequently cited it as an activity they would rather not do but declared that they “could not stop”. Participants were divided as to whether Dice should be legalized. Some felt that it would help to reduce associated crime and violence, others felt that it *should* be illegal because of the associated crime and violence.

### Participants' Views on Cards

The game of cards most popular in the townships appears to be a variant of poker. Cards were reported most frequently as being played in private houses and, unlike Dice, were not apparently generally associated with violence. Individuals use their homes to host card groups and generate a bit of income through this activity as each player pays the house owner to partake. Participants who spoke of their card playing activities (mostly women) generally spoke of it as being a form of social interaction and stress release and indicated that they derived a sense of belonging and support from the group they played with. They also said they played cards to “make a bit of extra money”. As with Fahfee and Dice most participants indicated that they played cards very frequently, if not daily.

### Participants' Views on Casino Gambling and Lottery

Some (37 %) of the participants who resided in townships visited casinos to gamble, with about half of these being regular casino gamblers, and half classifying themselves as occasional. All of the NT participants were casino players (by design) and many of these still played Fahfee, Dice or cards when they visited people in townships, although most said that this would be a very occasional occurrence. Six (25 %) of the 25 NT residents indicated that they were regular township gamblers.

Individuals from the NT group were much more likely to classify their casino gambling as entertainment, a form of recreation and ‘a way to de-stress’. The view that ‘Casinos are rigged’ was more prevalent amongst township inhabitants than the NT group. The game of Dice played in the townships was generally perceived as fairer than casino gambling as ‘there is no technology’... ‘township gambling is not programmed so its fairer’. ‘99 % of people gambling at casinos lose ... its rigged’. Although these negative views were tempered by the occasional ‘It does employ people, which is positive.’ The following views were common amongst regular township gamblers: ‘I am in control with township gambling’; ‘Experience counts with township gambling’ and casino gambling was consistently reported as unfair: ‘the house will always win’; as well as being somehow ‘beat-able’: ‘the best time to play is between 1 and 2 a.m. when the machines are full’. NT dwellers were far more likely to experience casinos as places of entertainment and recreation. Most of the workshop participants also played the Lottery and had similarly strongly unfavorable views as they had to casinos, i.e. that they were rigged. The general view was that ‘everyone plays Lottery’, that ‘Fahfee is for the unemployed’ and ‘casinos are for the well-off’.

## Discussion

Gambling is apparently endemic to township life. Workshop participants spoke repeatedly of the different forms of gambling, from fondly remembered children's games such as *Zwebi*, coin spinning and simple games involving rolling a marble through the space between two bricks, to card schools held at people's homes through to Fahfee and Dice. Many participants indicated that they started their more serious gambling habits while at school, even beginning their careers as *knocksmen* in the school grounds. Children play with whatever scraps of money they can gather and betting starts at levels as low as 5 or 10 cents. The general pattern was reported as 'boys play Dice, girls play cards'. NT participants said they had 'progressed' from township gambling to casino gambling however their reported experiences of the two types of gambling were very different. Some participants indicated that they had come from conservative and/or religious homes in which gambling was frowned upon and forbidden, so they had only been able to begin gambling as independent adults. However all participants indicated a knowledge of the extent and practice of gambling in townships and it was consistently reported as an intrinsic part of township culture.

Perhaps the most striking difference between township and NT participants responses to the workshop questions was that those who lived and gambled in townships indicated that they not only gambled expressly to make money but that they declared that they actually *did make money from gambling*. It should be noted that there is a distinct difference in terms of socio-economic group between the township (LSM 4–6) and NT (LSM 9–10) groups so observed behavioral differences could perhaps be attributed to both culture *and* class.

The township gamblers were largely very positive about township gambling and especially about Fahfee. There was an overwhelming sense that gambling was a form of income, but that the forms of gambling associated with higher stakes (especially Dice) were also associated with high risk and violence, whereas those associated with small stakes were essentially a form of 'social service' and were a necessary part of township life. Krige (2011) confirms this sense of gambling as a legitimate economic activity or 'work'. It is worth noting that many township gamblers appeared to be comfortable holding the contradictory views that gambling was both an income generating activity *and* that gambling lead to serious social ills such as disintegration of families and personal financial disaster.

McCree (1996) gives an interesting account of the Chinese game *Whe Whe* as it was played in Trinidad in the nineteenth century. There are striking similarities between Fahfee and *Whe Whe* in that both are lotteries in which a single winning number (between 1 and 36) is drawn; each number is associated with a particular symbol and there is a strong tradition of using dreams to select numbers. The person responsible for collecting bets and disbursing winnings is referred to as the banker and reference is made to the fact that the banker was known to "help regular players who needed monetary assistance in health matters or otherwise". Interestingly, attempts by the authorities to legalize the game in order to decriminalize it have not been successful in that patrons have chosen to continue playing the (illegal) traditional version of the game rather than the legal state version. Light (1977) argues that numbers gambling provides a financial service otherwise denied to poor communities "Mainstream financial institutions have never been able to provide generally prevailing service levels in poor communities. In the resulting partial-service vacuum ... numbers-gambling banks became sources of capital and a major savings device of urban black communities."

Cards (mainly played by women) were reported by workshop participants as strongly associated with networking and support. The findings of this research indicate that both Fahfee and Cards may operate as social safety nets in that winners apparently distribute small amounts of cash to those in their circle who are seen as needy.

While there were a number of township participants who declared themselves to be 'addicted' to gambling, township workshop participants didn't identify *Addiction*/*Bad* *Gambling* as a significant negative factor. There was a much stronger awareness of the problems of gambling addiction amongst the NT group, who *did* identify this as something they disliked about gambling. Those who described themselves as addicts used the description in a somewhat 'heroic' sense and showed little interest in information on free counseling services.

The main features of the responses to the workshop questions were as follows:

- All township gamblers said they gambled in order to make *Money* (primarily), with one out of three township groups indicating that *Fun and Entertainment* was a secondary motivator for gambling.
- Both NT groups said they gambled both for *Money* (primarily) and for *Fun and Entertainment* (secondarily).
- Township gamblers indicated *unanimously* that they obtained *Money* from gambling which the NT gamblers did not.
- NT gamblers said that what they got from gambling was primarily *Fun and Entertainment* (one group) or *Negative Emotions* (the other group).
- Township gamblers were more likely to associate gambling with *Positive Outcomes* (largely positive emotions such as hope and a sense of having dreams) than NT gamblers were.
- Almost all township gamblers identified *Crime, Violence and Fighting* as the thing they most disliked about gambling.
- NT gamblers were more likely to say that the negative side of gambling was losing and the problems associated with what they identified as 'gambling addiction'.

A disturbing feature of the discussion in most of the workshops was the fact that most of the township residents (and many of the NT residents) in the workshops did not consider the betting odds (or any objective information about the chances of winning) as relevant information in deciding on their bets. There was, in general, a marked inability to use simple numerical information in making financial decisions. This view is perhaps best highlighted in the following exchanges which took place in the workshops:

1. In response to the charge that casinos are rigged, it was suggested that perhaps the casino should display more prominently the information on the odds and the 'house advantage' so that punters could see to what extent things were skewed in favour of the casino in the game they were playing. This was not regarded by participants as helpful or likely to make any difference to how they would approach their game, or alter their view that the process was 'crooked'.
2. With regard to Fahfee betting: the overwhelming majority of regular Fahfee players did not know how the winning number was selected (i.e. random or not) or how many numbers there were that could be selected (i.e. all 36 numbers or some blocked off?) and declared that the only basis for choosing which number to bet on was contained in their dreams. Participants were given the following scenario: "You want to bet on a particular number but you discover that *all* the other punters are also betting on that same number. Would this influence you to bet on a different number?" Respondents

unanimously indicated that they would not be inclined to shift their bet to another number. This was despite the fact that it was accepted that the Chinaman chooses the winning number with, at least, the advantage of knowledge about punters' betting patterns and habits, and possibly even knowledge of their actual current bets, i.e. the draw is reportedly made after he has sight of the bets. The possibility that the Chinaman manipulates the draw depending on the bets did not appear to induce any kind of strategic response from the participants which appeared naïve and a contradiction of their stated aim to 'make money' from Fahfee.

3. A participant stated that Fahfee gave better returns than any financial institution he knew, on the basis that the Chinaman pays out the winning number at a rate of R28 for a R1 bet. When it was pointed out that one needed to take into account losses over a period of time in order to work out the effective return on investment, this was disputed by the participant and others.
4. The overt attempts by the Lottery operators to show that the process of selecting the winning lottery number is random, and therefore fair, did not impress the workshop participants who overwhelmingly declared the Lottery process to be flawed and 'rigged'. In contrast, Fahfee, in which the winning number is secretly selected by the 'Chinaman', was unanimously declared to be a fair game. This view appears to be based on personally knowing and seeing people who win (in Fahfee, but not in Lottery) rather than on the underlying process.

These observations have policy implications for education of citizens and for gambling regulation. It is clear that gambling in townships is a complex issue which should be dealt with cautiously and holistically. Some policy recommendations are tentatively proposed at the end of this paper.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The workshops held across both formal and informal gambling sectors in Gauteng have yielded some preliminary insights into the complexity of thought processes that motivate people to gamble.

There are broad policy implications that arise from the findings of this study. These include the following:

There appears to be very poor understanding of the numerical concepts that underpin simple financial transactions such as risk and rate of return. Despite the fact that some authors (e.g., Krige 2011) dispute that participating in risky games of chance is irrational behaviour, which can be corrected with education programmes, it is argued that a general inability to assess risk places individuals and communities in an extremely vulnerable position. The National Responsible Gambling Programme (see Collins et al. 2011) has developed an educational programme for schools aimed at conscientising young people to the notion of "Taking Risks Wisely". This research strongly supports the need for such programmes targeting both youth and adult educational sectors.

The issue of regulation of gambling is a complex one as despite the fact that, particularly when the stakes are high, township gambling is reportedly associated with high levels of crime and violence, it would seem that gambling is perceived as a safety net for the poor and may also be associated with a re-distribution of cash amongst the poor. Moreover, gambling activities appear to constitute a substantial proportion of how people occupy themselves, and also form the basis of many social networks which provide

security for people with unpredictable and erratic sources of income. The current status quo is that township gambling is illegal but this does not appear to hamper gambling activity. There does not appear to be a basis for recommending increased levels of law enforcement over this particular issue.

Gamblers in townships may be at increased risk of being 'problem gamblers' due to the high availability of gambling coupled with high levels of poverty and low levels of education.

**Acknowledgments** The work contained in this paper was supported by the National Responsible Gambling Programme (NRGP) of South Africa. The authors would, in particular, like to acknowledge the contribution of the CEO of the NRGP, Prof. Peter Collins for his suggestions and comments regarding this paper.

**Ethical Clearance** All human studies have been approved by the appropriate ethics committee and have therefore been performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and all persons gave their informed consent prior to their inclusion in this study.

## References

- Collins, P., et al. (2011). Addressing problem gambling: South Africa's national responsible gambling programme. *South African Medical Journal*, 101(10), 722–723.
- Eden, C., & Ackerman, F. (1998). *Making strategy. The journey of strategic management*. London: Sage.
- Gambling Review Commission Report. (2011). <http://www.pmg.org.za/node/28024>.
- Geldenhuys, K. (2009, February). An ancient game called Fahfee. *Servamus: Safety and Security Magazine*.
- Ho, U. (2011). *Paper sons and daughters*. Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan.
- Krige, D. (2011). We are running for a living. Work, leisure and speculative accumulation in an underground numbers lottery in Johannesburg. *African Studies*, 70(1), 3–24.
- Light, I. (1977). Numbers gambling among blacks: A financial institution. *American Sociological Review*, 42, 892–904.
- Longman, L. (1956). A study of Fahfee. *South African Journal of Science*, 52, 275–282.
- McCree, R. D. (1996). The Chinese game of *Whe Whe* in Trinidad: From criminalization to criminalization. *Caribbean Quarterly*, 42(2&3), 1–27.
- Mellet, P. (2010). *ZINTO: Navigating cape identities—an exploration of identity in South Africa's Western Cape Province*. Saarbrücken: VDN Verlag.
- NRGP Gambling Handbook. (2009). [http://www.nrgp-gambling-handbook.co.za/documents/NRGP\\_2009.pdf](http://www.nrgp-gambling-handbook.co.za/documents/NRGP_2009.pdf).
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). (1996). *The National Gambling Act, No 33 of 1996*. [http://www.saflii.org/za/legis/num\\_act/nga1996156/](http://www.saflii.org/za/legis/num_act/nga1996156/).
- Scott, L., & Barr, G. D. I. (2011). *An in-depth enquiry into the reasons people gamble*. Report submitted to the NRGP. August 2012.