

International multidisciplinary Symposium

27-29 June 2018, University of Fribourg

Gambling addiction: Science, Independence, Transparency

Clients' profile at the gambling venues of the province of Varese

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June 27th 2018



Outline

- **The Italian context: characteristics of the gambling offer**
- **An observational study of gamblers “in action”. An “ethnological study”**
- **Main conclusions of the study and some hypothesis of psycho-socio-environmental intervention**



The Italian context: characteristics of the gambling offer

In Italy, the process of legalization of gambling started in 2003. The sector industrialized thanks to the concession regime. It has created a pervasive offer. Such offer:

- has indiscriminately reached all citizens in their places of life
- concerns "physical" gambling (in bars, tobacconists, slot rooms, betting shops, etc.)
- and "digital" gambling (online, app, etc.).



The Italian context: characteristics of the gambling offer

Italy leads Europe in:

- absolute value of gambling losses
- loss per inhabitant (11% more than the UK, over twice the rates of France, Germany and Spain)
- gambling losses in proportion to GDP (1,07 percentage points of GDP)

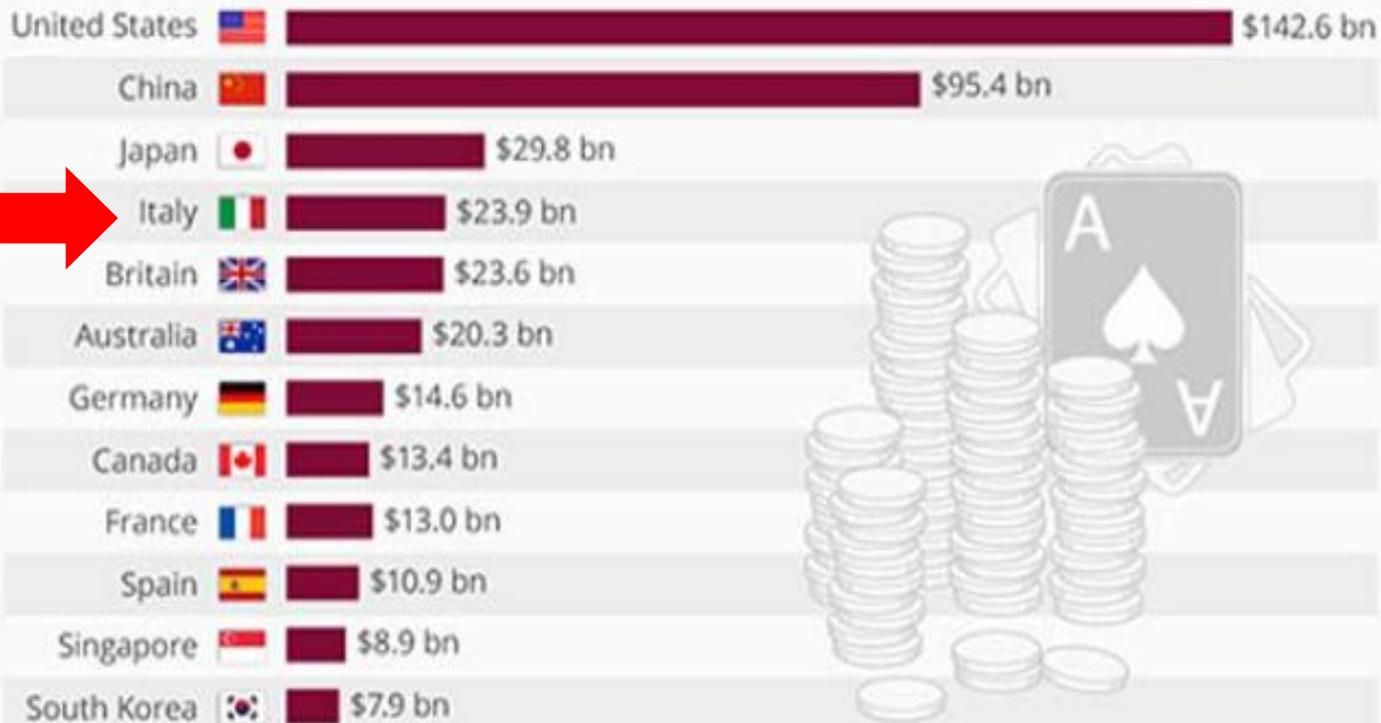
(Source: The Economist, Sept. 2, 2015, digital editions, re-elaboration by Paolo Jarre 2018)



The Italian context: characteristics of the gambling offer

The Countries With The Biggest Annual Gambling Losses

Largest gambling losses by country in 2014 (in billion U.S. dollars)



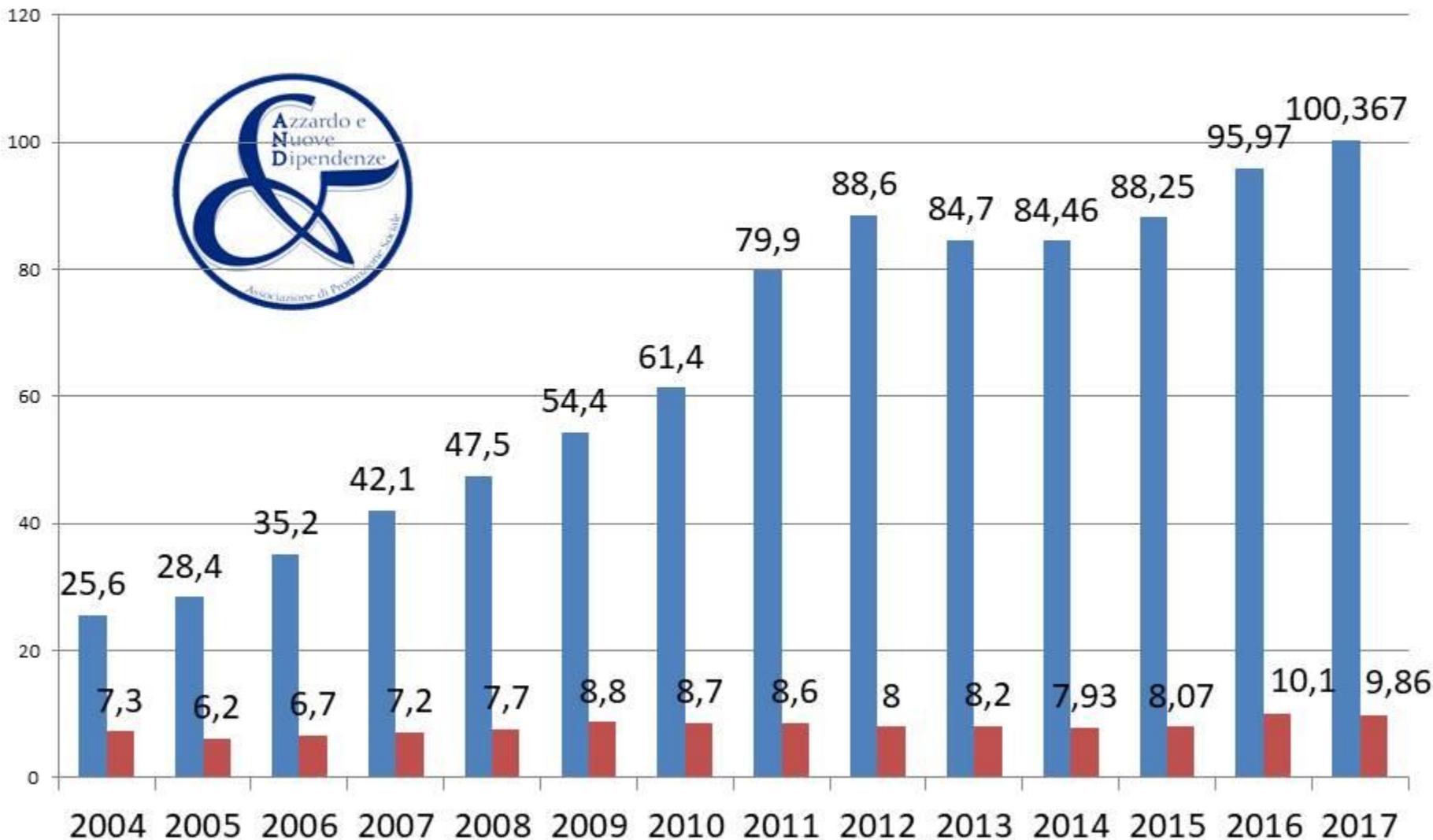
*Fonte: The Economist, Sep 2nd 2015, *digital editions*.



Money gambled (in billions of euros)

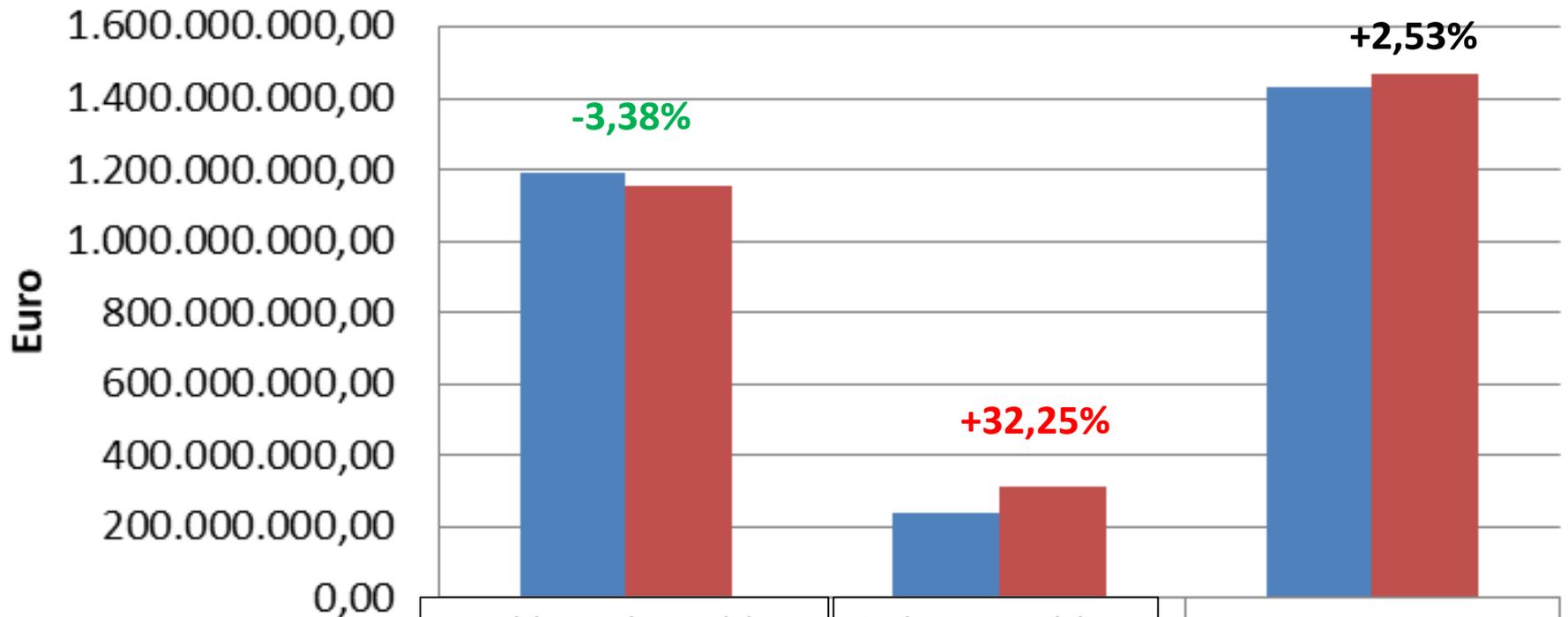
■ Money gambled

■ Tax revenues



Money gambled per year in the province of Varese

...almost a million and a half euros!



	Land based gambling	Online gambling	tot
■ 2016	1.192.915.973,9	237.439.557,28	1.430.355.531,2
■ 2017	1.152.599.036,4	314.006.158,93	1.466.605.195,3



Population: 889.410 inhabitants

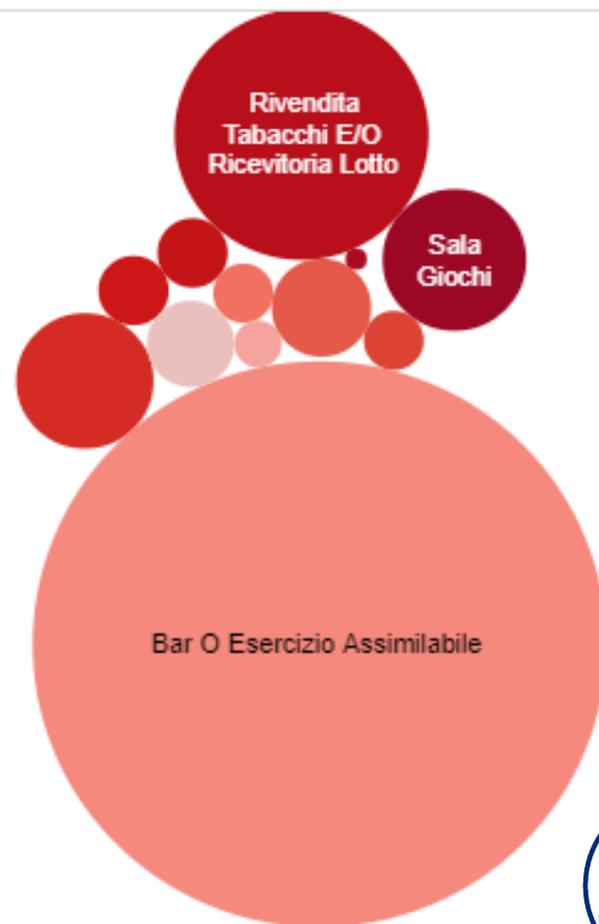
1049 authorized locations offer gambling in the province of Varese (2016)

TIPOLOGIA ESERCIZIO	
Bar O Esercizio Assimil..	734
Rivendita Tabacchi E/O ..	144
Sala Giochi	46
Esercizio Dedicato Vlt/Sl..	42
Comer	22
Agenzia Scommesse	17
Negozi Di Gioco	11
Ristorante O Esercizio A..	11
Circolo Privato	8
Edicola	8
Altro Esercizio Commer..	5
Sala Bingo	1

Elaborazione di Varesenews

Fonte dati: Agenzia Dogane e Monopoli

Tipologie esercizi autorizzati



An observational study of gamblers “in action”

Some questions:

- How does this proximity affect the consumption of games of chance?
- Who are the gamblers?
- How and how much do they gamble?
- Do they have a social or problematic profile?

Purpose of the present study:

Observe the behaviors of gamblers while gambling, in order to detect the presence of problematic or pathological behaviors



An observational study of gamblers “in action”

When, where and what:

- From January to March 2016
- In 18 cities and villages in Varese province
- 37 exercises and shops visited (48% of those to whom it was asked)
- 157 hours of “live” observation (sessions minimum 2 maximum 4 hours; different time slots during the day)
- 670 gamblers observed “in action” (slot)



An observational study of gamblers “in action”

Methods:

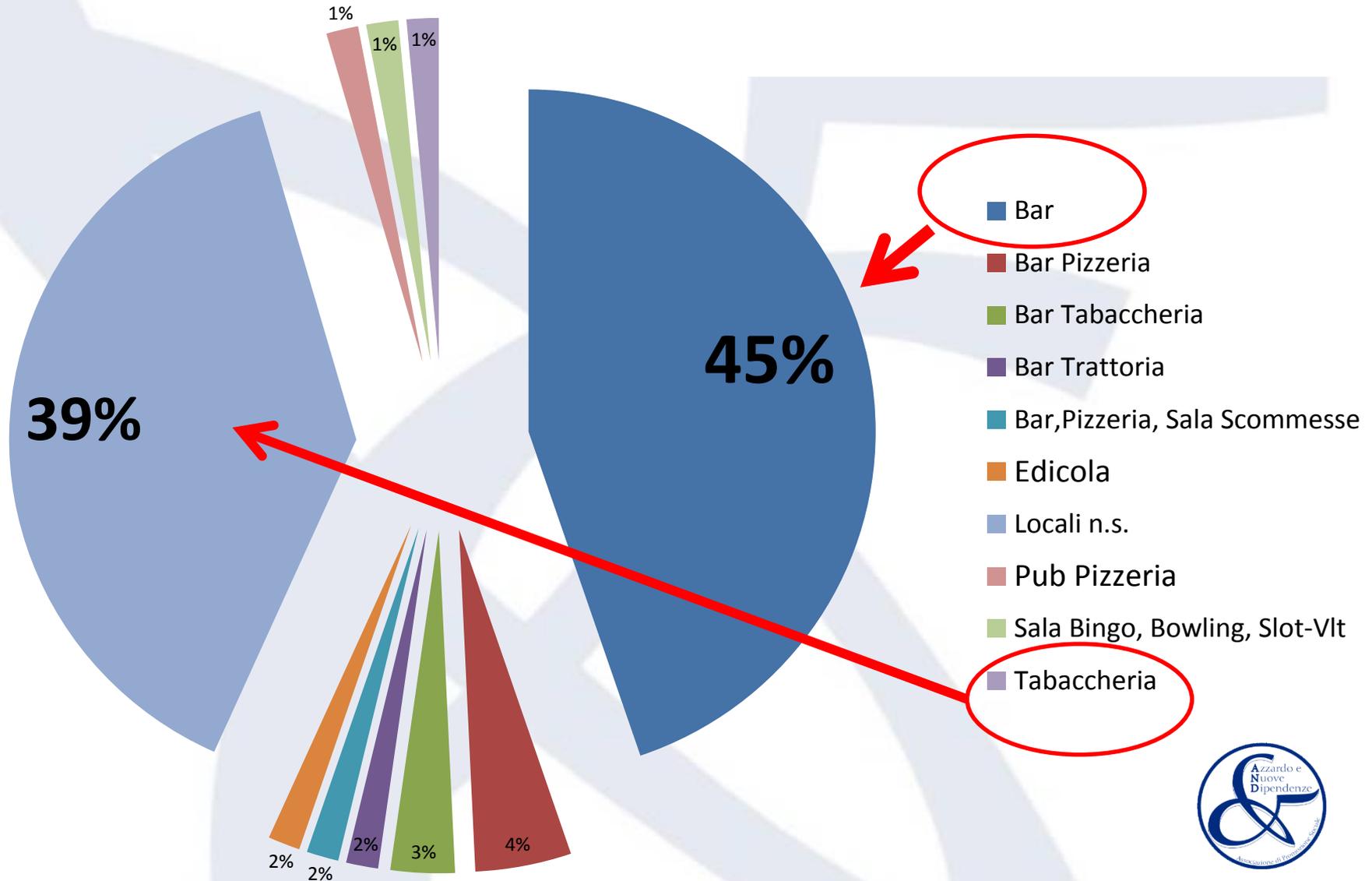
- 4 researchers - professional observers (with clinical experience on gambling treatment and trained for this specific study)
- they had to observe gamblers ethnologically in a neutral way (prohibition to gamble and to interfere with the gamblers' activity)
- used an “individual structured behaviors checklist” (specifically prepared for this study, based on scientific knowledge*)
 - *Iannone (2005), IRGA check list (2007) & Häfeli (2009)
(problem gambling behavioral indicators)
- information and agreement of the managers of the shops visited



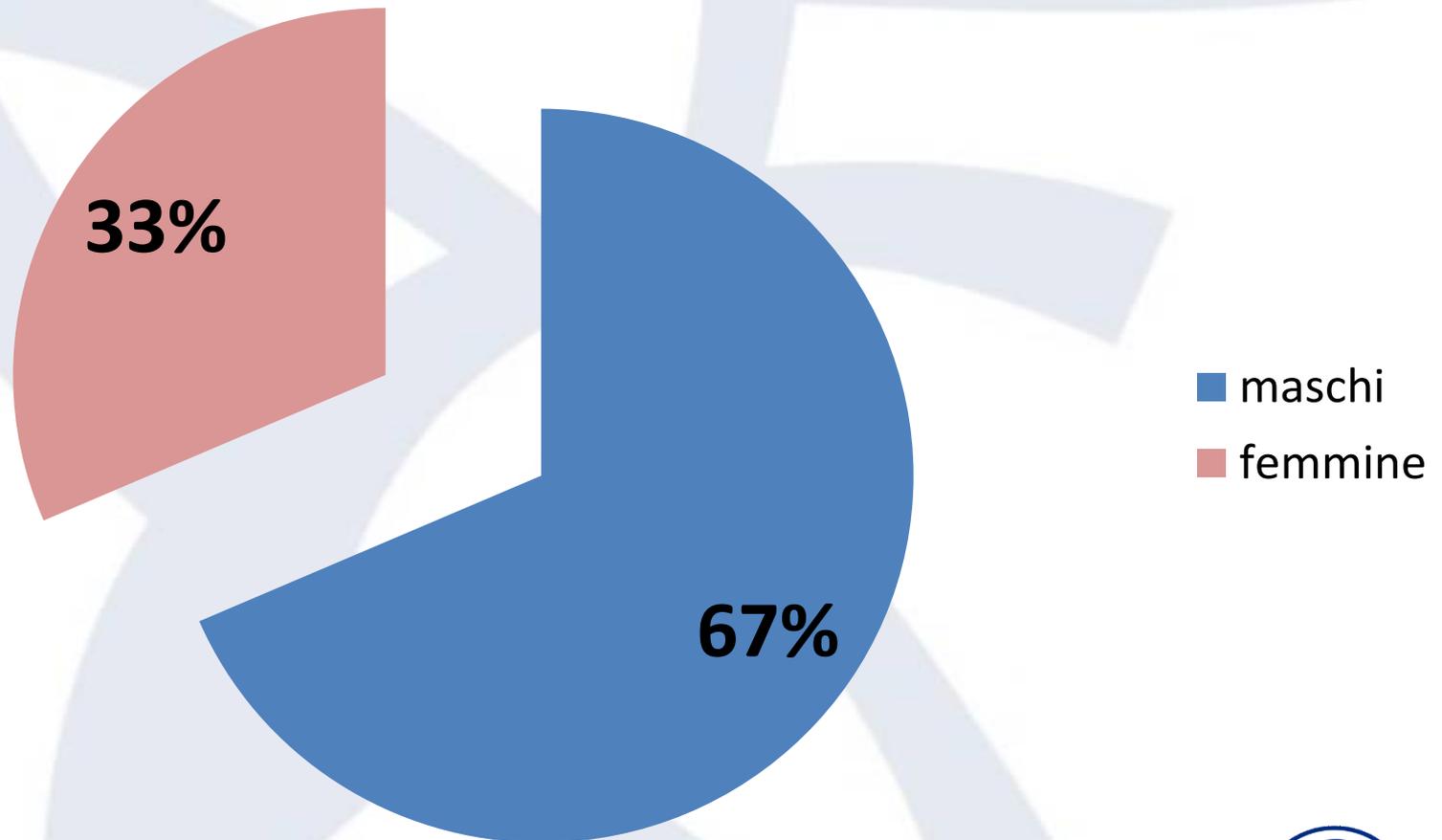
Context data (21 cities and villages)

- Only 1 city (>50.000); 4 small cities (>12.000); 6 big villages (>5.500); 9 small villages (<5.400)
- Average year income per capita: 21.438 €
- In 7 towns there are Slot+VLT; in 13 towns, only slot; in only 1 little village, no Slot nor VLT
- 1.069 EGM in total (951 Slot + 118 VLT)
- 4,9 EGM per 1.000 inhabitants: range: 1,2-14,1 (50% over the average).

Type of shops visited

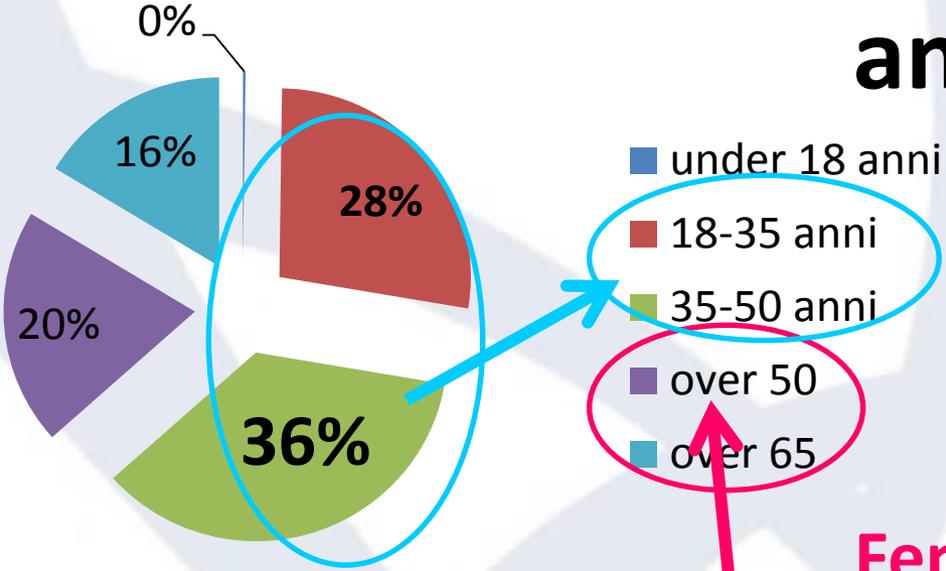


Clients observed - by gender (N=663)

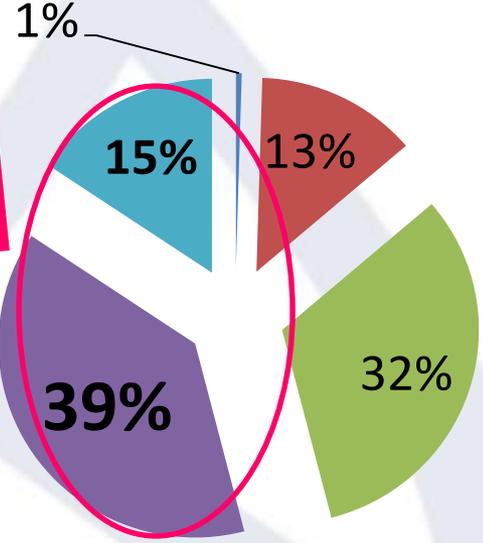


Clients by gender and age (N=633)

Male (n=444)



Female (n=219)



Main results

<i>Indicators of Problematic or Pathological Gambling</i>	% (on 663 observed clients)
Seemed to be a “regular” client	65%
Little cared of / scruffy in their appearance	17%
Neglected	3%
Time on device > 30 minutes	29%
Time on device > 60 minutes	11%
Time on device > 120 minutes	3%
Gambled alone	60%
Drinked alcohol while gambling	20%
Gambled in the presence of underage kids (often children to be taken care of: sons, nephews,...)	6%

Main results

<i>Indicators of Problematic or Pathological Gambling</i>	% (on 663 observed clients)
LINK BETWEEN EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND GAMBLING:	72%
Appeared ... totally “absorbed”	32
... Relaxed	18
... Nervous / anxious	17%
MOOD CHANGES OVERTIME:	
Became depressed, angry, aggressive	20%
Became excited	9%

Main results

<i>Indicators of Problematic or Pathological Gambling</i>	% (on 663 observed clients)
SHOWED “SENTINEL” BEHAVIORS:	48%
Could not quit gambling easily	19%
Stopped only when had run out of money	12%
Left the bar out to withdraw money to pursue more gambling	3%
Had emotional outbursts during gambling or when losing	7%
Implemented some superstitious rituals	8%
Choose their preferred slot and stuck to it overtime	44%
Gambled on multiple machines at the same time	3%
Asked for reserving the slot machine during breaks	2%

Main conclusions of the study and some hypothesis of psycho-socio- environmental intervention



Main conclusions of the study

- Almost *one in three* slot gamblers holds back gambling more than half an hour, putting at risk or even damaging his/her money and other activities.
- 72% of the customers experience unpleasant emotions or use gambling as a mood modulator (both criteria that identify risk profiles).
- Approximately *one in two* shows some "sentinel" behaviors (pathology indicators).

Almost 18% customers (just under two in ten) show a very problematic gambling profile.

- All this, under the eyes of the shopkeepers:
in fact, 65% are regular and known customers.



Some hypothesis of psychosocio-environmental intervention-1

The diffusion of gambling at a very low threshold in the territory, especially in small villages, has *changed the nature of some shops: they have changed from **places of socialization** to **places of gambling**.*

- Could an alternative perspective be proposed? **Could a law limit the number of shops with EGM, or games of chance in a territory** (especially in small villages) ? At least 50% of the shops in a territory, free from hazard? Or maybe even more than 50%?



Some hypothesis of psychosocio-environmental intervention-1

- Places that **do not** necessarily **expose people to passive gambling** (close to their daily places) **should ALSO BE AVAILABLE to citizens** (in particular young and old).
- That is, *we should provide citizens with the opportunity to choose between places with and places without gambling.*
- Today, in many Italian towns and villages, this choice no longer exists. In whichever bar one goes, most likely he will find slots and / or other games of chance.



Some hypothesis of psychosocio-environmental intervention-2

Should the concept of sensitive population (vulnerable or at risk populations) be revised?

- We initially excluded adults, male and female 35-50 years from our concept of “sensitive population”.
- Field research forces us to deeply change this concept.
- If it is true that the 35 or 50 years of age are not themselves “sensitive targets”, it is also true that it may depend on them ... as a sensitive population!
- It is the case of adults with children (left out of the room or at home) or of the elderly, or the disabled.

Some hypothesis of psychosocio-environmental intervention-2

- The concept of “belonging to a fragile target” as it is generally adopted by the public opinion, the politics, the media, and even by professional operators, could therefore be dangerously deviant from a broader conceptualization of the passive damages caused by regular, problematic or pathological gambling.
- **Fragility can not and should not be limited to the “fragile subject”. Rather, it should include all those who will be impacted by the consequences of the excessive gambling behavior of others.**



Some hypothesis of psychosocio-environmental intervention-3

Gambling and minors

- The observations showed various ways in which the involvement of minors in gambling activities takes place.
- Although underage gamblers were not so prevalent in our observations, we recall that the epidemiological investigations conducted on minors reveal frequent underage gambling.
- The presence of minors in the gambling areas has been observed in a large number of situations. Therefore, it is necessary to think about minors inside the gambling venues in other circumstances.



Some hypothesis of psychosocio-environmental intervention-3

- Minors present in gambling venues are a category of subjects that should be questioned.
- Gambling attractiveness, assisted payouts, reference-adult emulation, passing normalization messages, mirror neurons functions in learning gambling behavior, and much more, all represent situations not to be underestimated.
- Minors in this condition are certainly the children or relatives of adult gamblers, but also the children of shopkeepers who spend many hours in their parents' business place.



Thanks

- Thank you for inviting me
- Thanks to all the research team (Anna Colombo, Beatrice Rappo, Paolo Andreotti, Susanna Redaelli, Maddalena Borsani)
- Thanks to the 21 Municipalities and the 32 shops that collaborated by networking in this study
- Thanks to Dr Carlevaro, who has enhanced the the research presented here
- Thanks to Alexander Tomei, who helped to translate this presentation
- Thanks everybody for your attention

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