

Researchers Bet Casino Data Can Identify Gambling Addicts

Written by Administrator

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Carl Kiilsgaard for The Wall Street Journal

Kitty Martz says she lost \$200,000 gambling in Australia.

For most of her life, Kim McGuinness was no more than a casual gambler, taking occasional trips with her husband to Atlantic City. But after he died, Ms. McGuinness says her pattern changed dramatically. Suddenly, she was hitting the slot machines hard, often betting through the night.

"I was lonely," says the 56-year-old New Yorker, who says in two years she gambled away more than \$1 million, losing all of her husband's life insurance and most of their 401(k) funds.

That was two years ago. And the last place Ms. McGuinness, who is also being sued for past gambling debts, says she would have turned for help would have been the casinos. She says they only encouraged her betting. But now, researchers believe that the very data casinos used

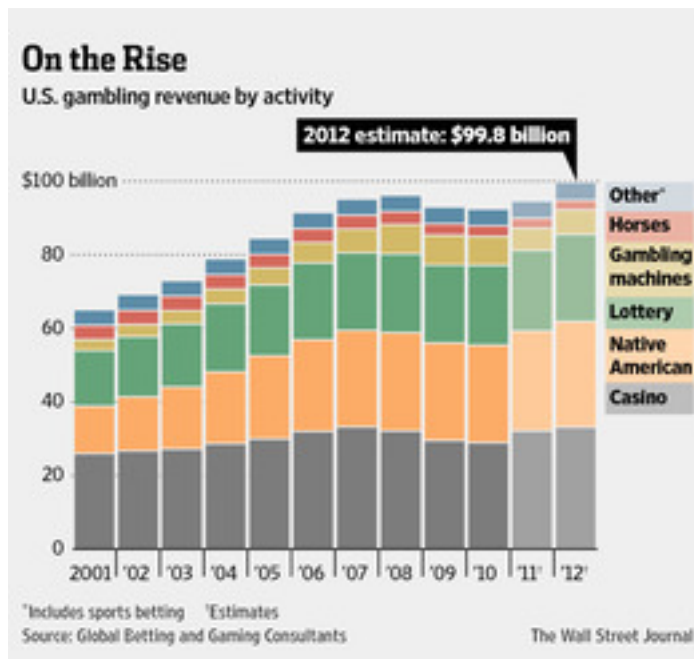
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to track her—and many customers'—betting habits can be used as a tool to reduce the intractable problem of gambling addiction.

Similar to the way geneticists have invented tests to predict cancer risk, a group of addiction scientists and industry consultants say they can use casino customer-tracking information to create computerized models that can spot and warn people with high risk profiles. The new research essentially turns the industry's own data, often used in connection with loyalty cards to identify and pamper the best customers, on its head.

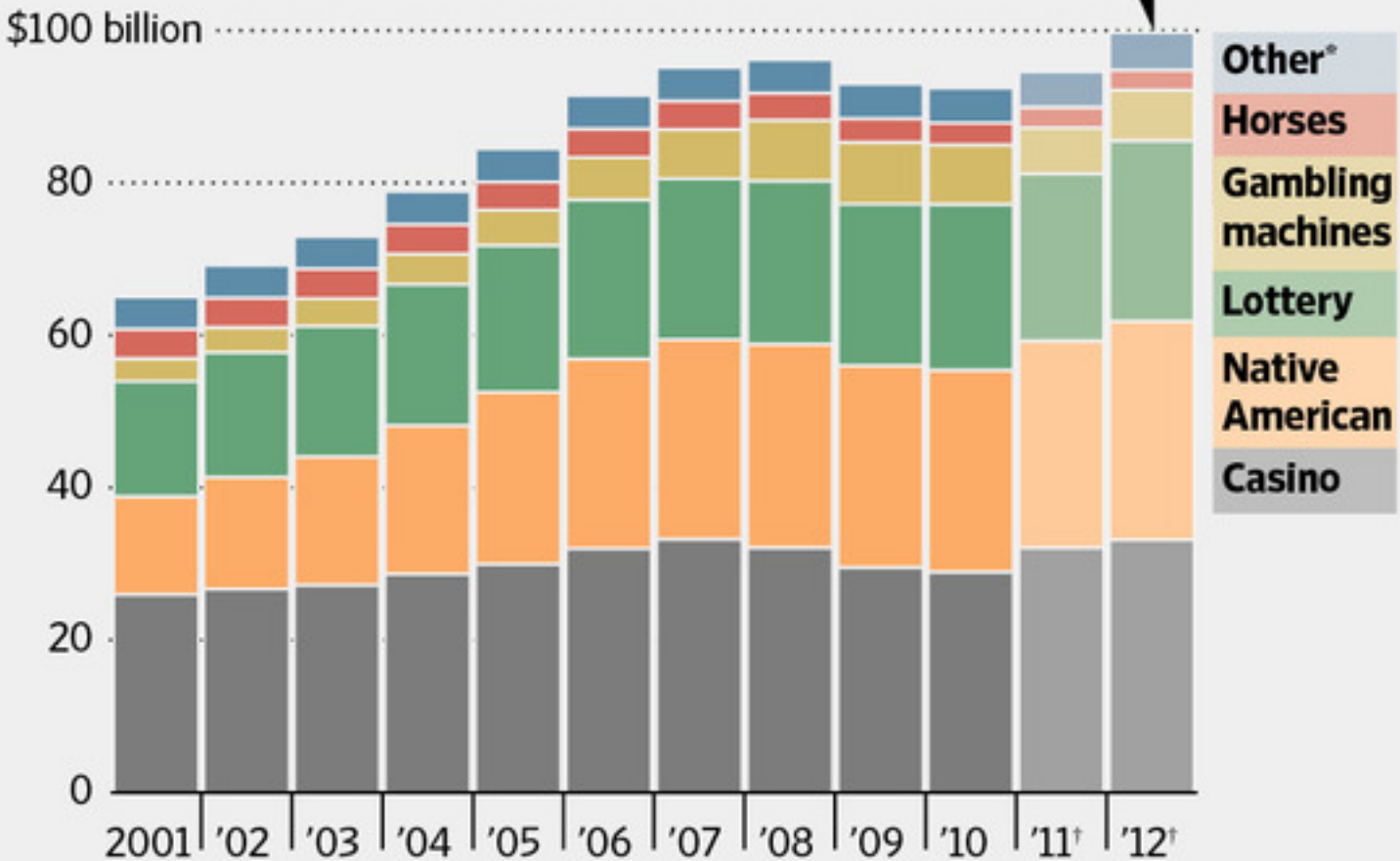
Early forms of the systems already have been employed by some government-run casinos outside the U.S. and by some online-betting firms. The models vary, but in general they look for risky betting patterns such as intensive play over long periods, significant shifts in behavior, or chasing losses—betting more heavily in an attempt to recoup prior losses. Depending on the system, flagged gamblers may be given education tools or a detailed analysis of their behavior, or in rare cases be barred from playing.



On the Rise

U.S. gambling revenue by activity

2012 estimate: \$99.8 billion



*Includes sports betting †Estimates

Source: Global Betting and Gaming Consultants

The Wall Street Journal

Addiction Prediction

The systems researchers have developed for spotting gamblers with potential problems vary, but some things they look for include:

Length of play: When player gambles for long stretches.

Intensity of play: Playing at rapid pace or increase in number of bets placed.

Chasing losses: Attempting to recoup losses by increasing bet size.

Changes in behavior: Gambling with larger stakes, longer periods of time.

Win and loss patterns: Unwillingness to take small losses or small wins.

Time of play: More late-night gambling can be riskier.

Money management: Adding money to account in middle of session.

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