

# Problem Gambling in LA County: Problem Gambling Prevalence & Services in Asian American Communities

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### INTRODUCTION

There are four types of gamblers: social, professional, problem, and compulsive. Social gamblers are individuals who gamble recreationally and acknowledge a spending limit. Professional gamblers use gambling as a source of income and do not chase losses to recover after losing a fold. Problem gamblers possess a gambling habit that impedes on their basic needs and chase their gambling losses. Compulsive gambling or pathological gambling is a mental health disorder outlined in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual IV (DSM IV). Compulsive gambling affects the gamblers, their family members, their employment attendance, their health, and their mental health. Problem gambling and compulsive gambling (problem gambling hereafter) has become an increasing social issue in many Asian immigrant communities in Los Angeles County. Though there are only very few problem gamblers in California, their addiction costs the state nearly \$1 billion (Simmons 2006). The costs result in divorces, child custody battles, fraud, imprisonment, theft, depression, suicide attempts, and treatment services (Simmons 2006). While 3.7% of all gamblers in California suffer from compulsive gambling and 9.5% are at-risk, disaggregate data show disparities in particular vulnerable populations (Volberg et. al. 2006). For example, 60% of California Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian gamblers are compulsive gamblers (Gambling Risks in Different Communities Presentation 2009). Twenty-one percent of California Chinese American gamblers are compulsive gamblers and another 14.7% are problem gamblers (Woo 2001). Target marketing by the casinos and cultural factors contribute to this significant disparity. Casinos contract bus agencies to transport clients from the San Gabriel Valley, cities with the largest populations and concentration of Asian Americans in Los Angeles County. Casinos also provide \$15 to \$25 monetary coupons and free lunches for those in San Gabriel Valley who utilize the bus services. For poor, unemployed, and often senior Asian immigrants, this is a great incentive.

### POLICY ISSUE

Are services for problem gamblers located near high risk gambling populations?

### MAP ANALYSIS

Map 1: Accessibility to Casinos in Southern California

Almost all casinos in Southern California are within 0.5 mile away from major freeways including the 105, 710, Interstate 10, 60, 74, 5, 8, and Pala Road. This accessibility allows gamblers to easily travel between counties and even worse between casinos because of their close proximity to each other. Compulsive gamblers who lose at one casino often will visit the next closest casino to chase their losses. Casinos that are further from the freeway likely have less patrons because of their difficult accessibility to gamblers wishing to travel from another casino more easily.

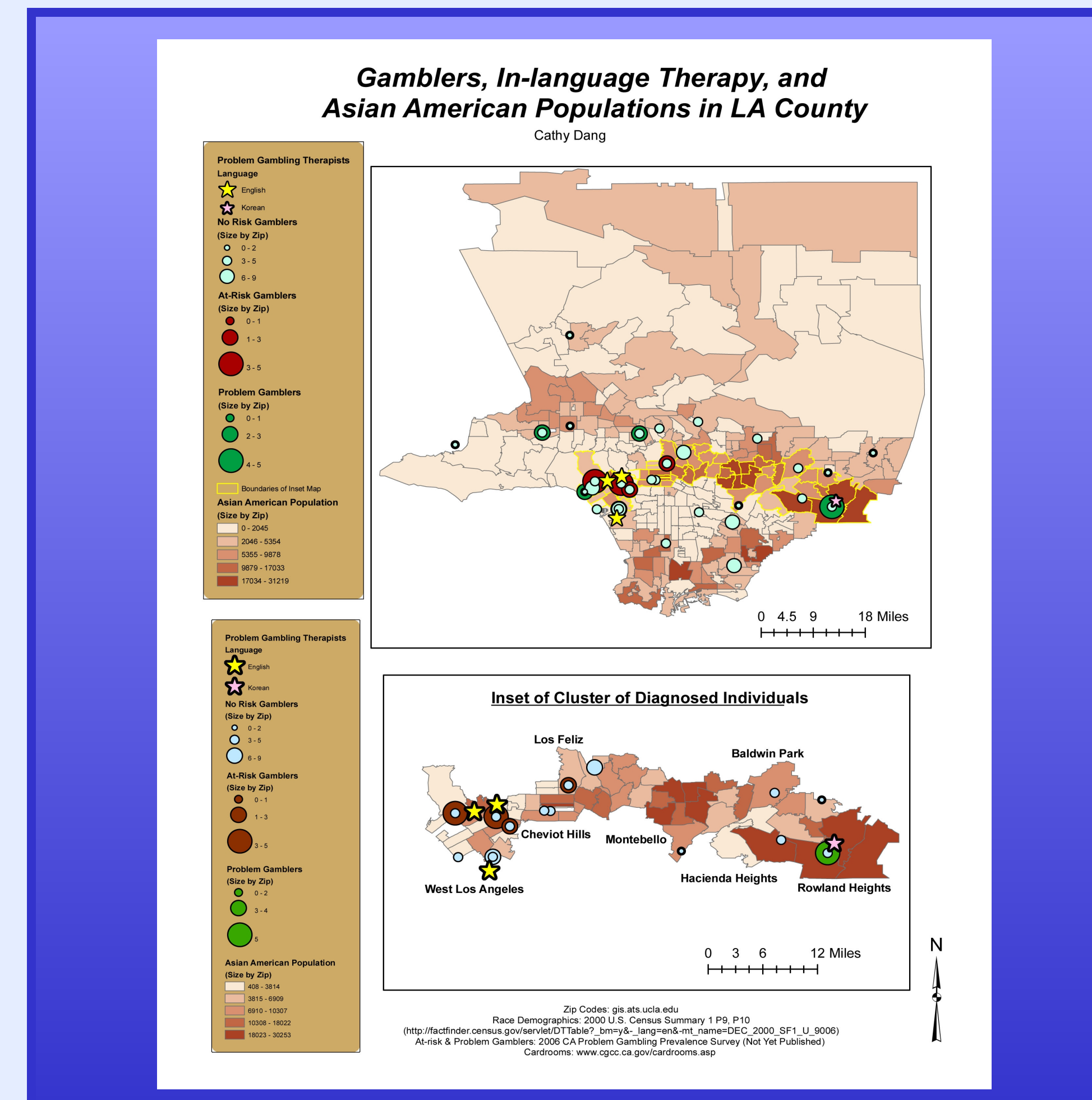
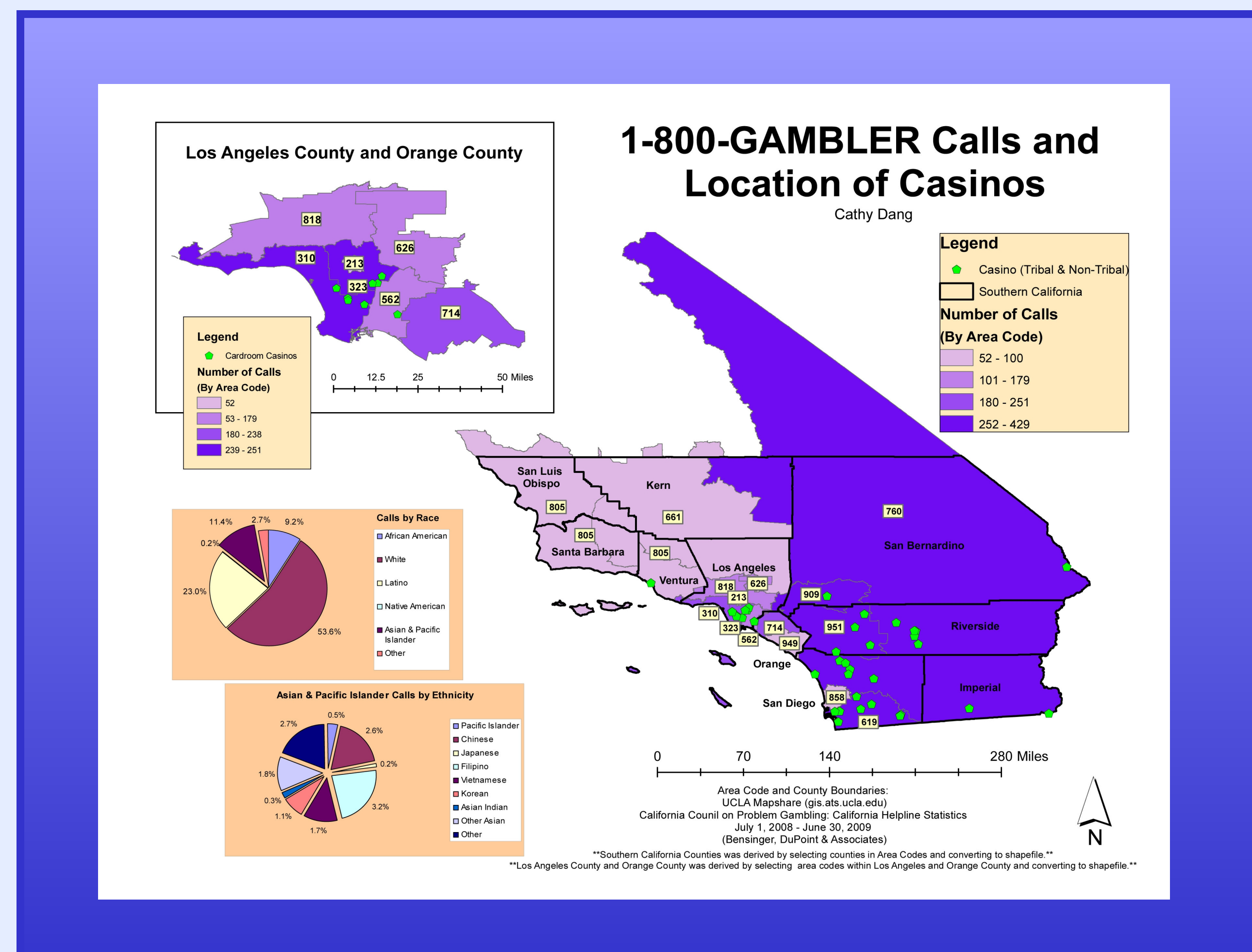
Many of the buses that transport clients to casinos leave from cities in Los Angeles County including Los Angeles (Koreatown and Chinatown), Monterey Park, San Gabriel, Alhambra, Hacienda Heights, and Rowland Heights. Though some of the casinos are located within American Indian reservation areas that have one-lane windy roads, they remain easily accessible even for large buses. For instance, Pala Road which leads to the Pala Band of Mission Indian Reservation is a small windy road that even buses use to take patrons to Pala Casino. The wide distribution of casinos throughout Southern California make it extremely difficult to gauge the impacts of problem gambling in various communities because gamblers travel all over different counties to gamble.



Map 2: 1-800-GAMBLER Calls and Locations of Casinos

1-800-GAMBLER is a helpline that operates 24 hours a day and 7 days a week for gambling addicts to call for counseling, referral, and help. The counties with fewer calls into 1-800-GAMBLER are also the counties with the least amount of casinos such as Kern, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties. Area codes 760, 951, 619, and 951 in Riverside, San Bernardino, Imperial, and San Diego County excluding area code 858 all have significant numbers of casinos. Many of the calls are made from the casino room or from the personal cell phones of the gambler. Most calls made into the helpline come mostly from area code locations that have casinos. However, although area code 714 is absent of any casinos there are still 180 to 251 calls made into 1-800-GAMBLER. Area code 714 includes Orange County, where there is the largest population of Vietnamese people outside of Vietnam. Area codes 818, 626, and 562 have 101 to 179 calls made into the helpline, which are fairly significant considering the smaller number of residents living in these areas compared to the highly dense areas in the City of Los Angeles.

The 1-800-GAMBLER helpline services are only in English and Spanish. Considering the large population of immigrant limited English proficient (LEP) Chinese and Korean Americans living in area code 626 (San Gabriel Valley), LEP Cambodian Americans living in area code 562 (City of Long Beach), and LEP Vietnamese Americans living in area code 714 (City of Westminster), 101 to 179 calls from area codes 626, 562, and 180 to 251 calls from area code 714 is extremely disturbing.



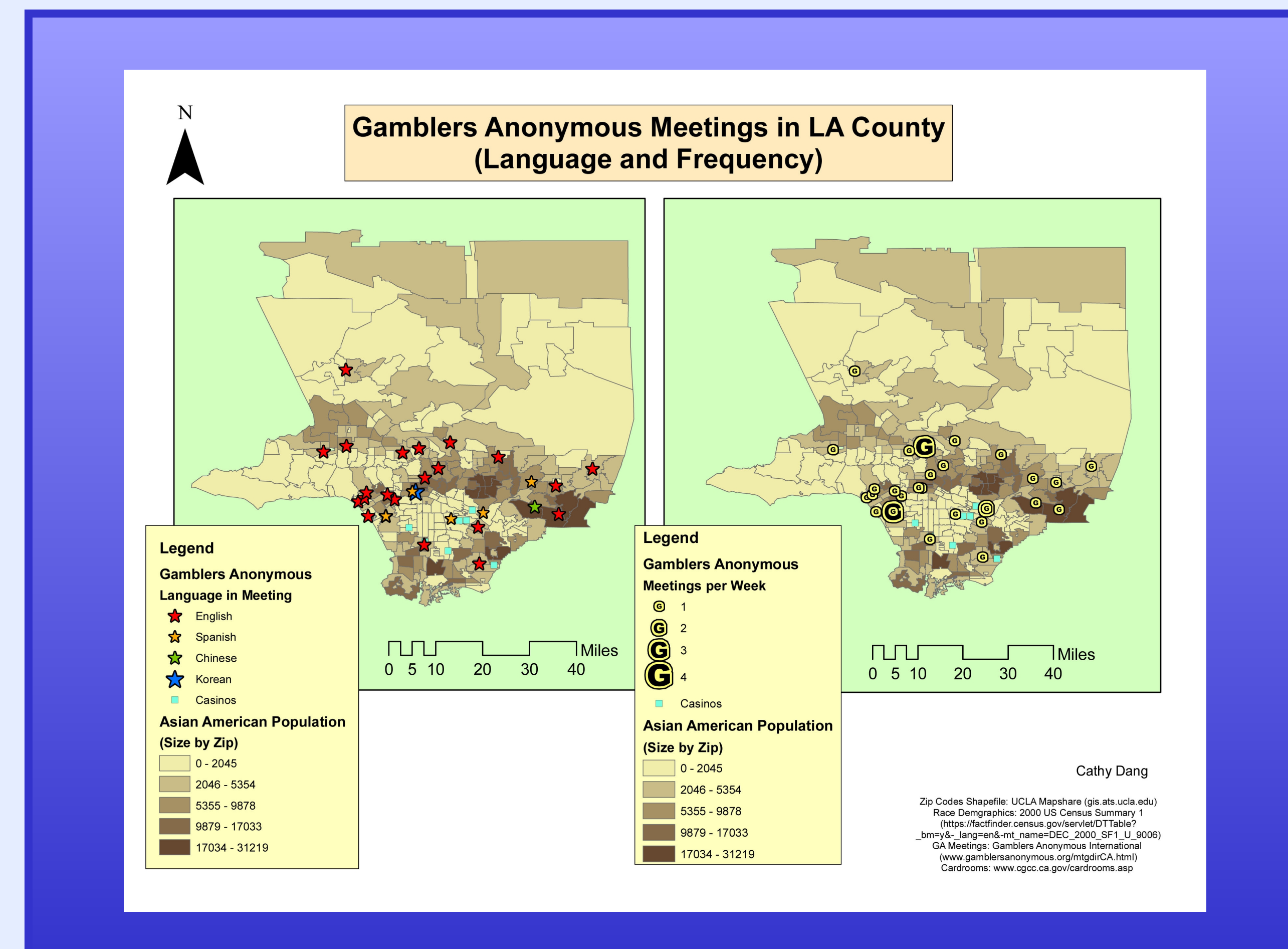
Map 3: Gamblers, In-language Therapy, and Asian American Populations in Los Angeles County

There are greater numbers of at-risk and no risk gamblers living in the western part of the County which has smaller populations of Asian American residents. The 2006 California Problem Gambling Prevalence Survey notes that the study did not recruit enough Asian and Latino respondents proportional to the state (Volberg et. al. 2006). There were 7,121 respondents statewide and only 504 Asian respondents, which is only 7% of the sample pool while Asian Americans make up 12% of the state (Volberg et. al. 2006). Despite such miniscule Asian sample size in the survey, the map shows that there are at least four to five problem gamblers living in the eastern part of Los Angeles County which has some of the largest populations of Asians, 17,034 – 31,219. Asian Americans do not seek help until their problems become extreme or dire. There are more no risk gamblers residing in the less populated Asian communities.

The inset map points out that there are only four problem gambling therapists in the entire county. Problem gambling is a difficult addiction to treat and only a few therapists are trained to practice in gambling intervention. Referring to the western side of the inset map, there are a total of 7 to 13 at-risk gamblers west of Cheviot Hills. The at-risk gamblers are also near three of the four problem gambling therapists, which suggests that existing services in the area do greater work in preventing and intervening with problem gambling on the western side of Los Angeles County. On the contrary, in Rowland Heights where there is a heavy population of Asian residents (18,023 – 30,253) who are mostly Chinese and Taiwanese, there is only one therapist who is Korean-speaking. There are insufficient services and therapists who target heavily populated Asian American communities to prevent and intervene with problem gambling facing the communities.

Map 4: Gamblers Anonymous Meetings in Los Angeles County (Language and Frequency)

Although there are large populations of Asian Americans on the eastern part of Los Angeles County ranging from 2,046 to 31,329, most Gamblers Anonymous (GA) meetings in the heavily populated Asian communities are still only English-speaking. Los Angeles County has one of the largest populations of Koreans, Chinese, and Filipinos in the United States, yet there are only 2 GA meetings that are for Korean- and Chinese-speakers. Even with the one GA meeting in Chinese, Mandarin- and Cantonese-speakers at the meeting cannot understand each other. Frequency of GA meetings are also greater in English-speaking areas in the western part of Los Angeles County including one GA meeting that convenes four times per week. Greater number of meetings per week help to intervene and reduce the number of problem gamblers because there are greater opportunities for the gamblers to attend the 12-step recovery program. On the western part of Los Angeles County, there are more at-risk gamblers and less problem gamblers compared to the eastern part of the County that is heavily populated by Asian Americans. The higher frequency of meetings likely help to reduce the number of problem gamblers while helping those who are at-risk. GA International can better support vulnerable immigrant populations in increasing the number of meetings they have in one week.



### CONCLUSION

Problem gambling services fail to service those most vulnerable to gambling addiction in Los Angeles County. Asian Americans are at high-risk for problem gambling as data shows in mental health studies. However, in-language therapy, Gamblers Anonymous meetings and 1-800-GAMBLER counseling do not exist for limited English proficient Asian American immigrants. There are greater at-risk gamblers on the western part of Los Angeles County where there are fewer Asian American immigrants. The existing therapists likely help the gamblers maintain their status of at-risk and prevent them from becoming problem gamblers. On the other hand, Asian Americans who reside mostly in the eastern part of Los Angeles County do not have therapists who speak their language and do not receive help until it is too late. Funding for problem gambling services need to more appropriately address those most vulnerable – Asian American limited English proficient immigrants – whose rates of problem gambling are more acutely severe than the general population of problem gamblers.

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