

Gambling has an impact on seniors

By Michael De Groote, Deseret News

WENDOVER – Deep inside the perpetual twilight of a windowless casino in this border town, a sudden noise rises above the background of buzzes, gongs, bells and music riffs. Somewhere behind this or that row of slot machines, an insistent, staccato “ding, ding, ding, ding” accompanies a flashing light signaling someone has won.

The winner is a dark-haired older woman. She sits in front of the gleaming metal and vibrant dancing colors of a video slot machine, leaning forward, shoulders slumped. She seems to be almost in a trance. A yellow cord attached to her clothes links her to a card in the machine – a plastic card called a “players card” that helps the casino keep track of all her betting, winning and losing.

This woman, playing on a recent Tuesday afternoon, is like many other seniors who visit casinos in America. According to a 2013 report by the American Gaming Association, one-third of Americans (34 percent) visited a casino in the past 12 months. Twenty-eight percent of people aged 65 and older visited a casino in the past 12 months. An article in *Psychology Today*, however, puts the percentage much higher: David Oslin at the University of Pennsylvania claims that 70 percent of people 65 years and older “had gambled in the previous year and that one in 11 had bet more than he or she could comfortably afford to lose.”

A measly 6 percent of senior casino visitors go because they want to win and like to gamble, according to a 2002 study by Janet Hope and Linda Havir in the *Journal of Aging Studies*; rather, most say gaming gives them something to do (24

percent) or they participate for fun and socialization (35 percent). Yet, when they do frequent a casino, they enter a carefully constructed world that is less social than it is primarily solitary.

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