

[Problem gambling – A public health concern or a not notable disorder?]

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[Orientation]

- Practitioners/ project workers/ researches/ doctoral students/ both?
- Familiarity with gambling problems?
- My own background: school social work, child welfare, Peluuri gambling helpline, youth mental health services, NGOs (non-governmental organisations)

[The Finnish Blue Ribbon]

- the central association, over 99 member organizations (NGOs mainly)
- based 1984
- does welfare work with alcohol and drug abusers based on Christianity
- www.sininauhaliitto.fi

Main interests & questions in this presentation

- What kind of a "problem" is gambling?
- Is it an increasing public health concern or just one disorder among other (marginal) ones?
- What is done or can be done to help problem gamblers?
- What is or what could be the role of social work practitioners in helping problem gamblers?

Frameworks & point of views of this presentation

- Theoretical & practical
- Individual & social (societal)
- Social ethics & social work
- All these – separately, together and/or combined and intertwined
- How to combine theoretical knowledge base and practical knowledge base ->using common sense and heuristic reasoning?

[Theoretical framework]

- Applied social ethics, ethical theories & political philosophy; how to understand society and social policy and their foundations, limitations & boundaries
- Words and concepts; the ideas of social construction and interest in searching different meanings, views and contexts of problem gambling
- Using systematic method(s) to analyse written or spoken language
- Reflexivity and critical thinking

[Practical framework]

- Practice theories and social work practice knowledge
- Practical and tacit knowledge; the power and wisdom of the knowledge base that experienced practitioners have
- How to find proper way to hear and to help problem gamblers; a challenge to understand and to communicate

Individual versus social, community and society view/level

- What are the individual risk and protective factors? What are the impacts on the individual's everyday life? How gambling can result in harm to people close to gambler?
- What supports and makes gambling possible? What creates the circumstances that can make gambling activity problematic?
- What environmental and sociological processes may result problem gambling?
- What kind of services problem gamblers have? From where she/he can seek help and what kind of help she/he can have?

[What kind of a problem is gambling?]

- A focus of research in medical and psychological studies
- Also raises social and ethical concerns

Problem gambling (PG) is seen individually...

- in a traditional "medical" perspective (Risbeck 2009)
 - using clinical instruments meant to diagnose problem gambling as a progressive and chronic disease
 - there are clear-cut borders between problem gamblers and non problem gamblers
 - focus has been in pathological gamblers

[Is individually seen PG just...]

- seeing gambling as a list of impacts or symptoms?
- labelling gambler (as an addict)?
- considering gambling as a personal choice of "unhealthy behaviour"?
- one disorder among other (marginal) ones

Where is the person, human being? Do we see him/her? And the situation he/she lives in?

[PG has a variety of impacts]

- on the individual (Volberg 2001)
 - losing time, money, job
 - risking social relationships when e.g. lying to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling
 - physical reactions as restlessness, irritability when attempting to cut down or stop gambling
 - risk for a variety of psychiatric disorders: anxiety, depression, panic disorder, mania
 - risk of other addictive disorders: alcohol, tobacco and/or drug dependence
 - suicidal attempts

It can be a personal tragedy.

It affects comprehensively in person's everyday life.

Bringing in the social context and the broader view

Because

- problem gambling has also family impacts (Volberg 2001)
 - physical, psychological and verbal abuse
 - many spouses have high level of depression and symptoms of stress
 - rates of separation and divorce are high

- and it has workplace and financial impacts (Volberg 2001)
 - irritability, moodiness and poor concentration
 - decreased efficiency, impaired judgement and faulty decisionmaking
 - gambling on company time, abuse of telephone or computer facilities
 - lateness or absences from work
 - indebtedness: borrowing or even stealing money, using credit cards over limit, getting loans, bankruptcy

[Definition (one of them)]

- "Problem gambling is a gambling behaviour that creates negative consequences for the gambler, others in his or her social network, or for the community." (Volberg 2001, 10.)

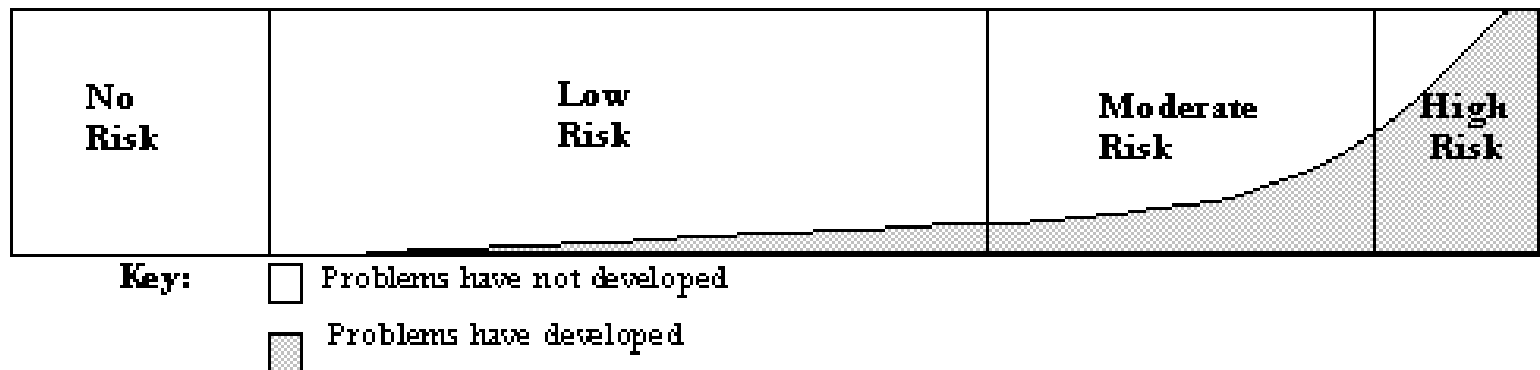
[A modern perspective on PG (Risbeck 2009)]

- continuum without clear-cut borders between problem free gambling and problem gambling
- focus on contexts of gambling behaviour and consequences rather than on the diagnosed states of illness
- the scale of severity of gambling problems should be understood dynamically

Problem gambling continuum

OPGRC (Ontario Problem Gambling Research Center)

Figure 2
The Problem Gambling Continuum



PG – a public health problem (Risbeck 2009, Marshall 2009)

- PG is defined as a public health problem since
 - More than 1 % of the population is affected
 - The problem is unevenly distributed in the population
 - Negative consequences can be prevented with structural means such as regulations

[A public health perspective (Risbeck 2009, Marshall 2009)]

- is holistic
- doesn't overlook sociological and environmental processes
- notices the role of local environment: contextual (social and physical environment) and compositional (characteristics of the area's population) factors

Gambling in Finland (The Finnish yearbook of gambling 2009, STM/Toy 2007)

- Running gambling games is subject to a licence, new legislative proposals and processes are under way
- Annually 3,1 million Finns take part in gambling activities
- During the last 12 months 87% of respondents over 15 years of age had engaged in gambling activities
- There are 16 958 slot machines in 8400 places in every part of the country (e.g. in supermarkets, department stores, gas stations)

<http://info.stakes.fi/pelihaitat/EN/index.htm>

Gambling in Finland (STM/TOy 2007, latest population survey)

- The most popular gambling activities are lottery games, paper and electronic scratch cards and slot machines; internet gambling is increasing fast
- Gambling is most common among the 25-34 and 35-49-year-olds
- The average gambling expenditure is 13 euros/week; problem gamblers 90 euros
- Men play about 80% of all the money spent in gambling
- about 130 000 persons have had gambling problems (3,1% of the population) during the last 12 months
- about third of them are pathological gamblers (42 000 persons)

Challenges (Tammi 2007)

- expenditure accumulates on a small group
- concerns over gambling problems are increasing
- information is scarce on the adverse effects of gambling
- relatively few people are seeking assistance at present

Situation at the same time:

Games are everywhere, 24/7

Gambling is popular and widespread

Gambling is accepted and fun

[Challenges]

- Supervising and regulating gambling is necessary in order to prevent gambling related harms
- Researching, monitoring the phenomenon
- Developing preventive activities
- Developing services and creating help, support and treatment for gamblers

What is done to help problem gamblers?

Are we taking gambling and related harms seriously or are we leaving gamblers to survive on their own?

- We have no longer specific or separate services or service agencies designated to problem gamblers
- Services are hard to find and they vary locally
- Mental, social and health services do some outpatient treatment counselling
- Inpatient treatment finished 03/2009
- Practitioners and/or people close to gambler don't recognize the problem

What is done to help problem gamblers?

- Peluuri National gambling helpline (since 2004)

Callers wanted (Jaakkola 2009):

- Information about gambling problem
- Possibility to talk about gambling problem
- Support and information how to control their gambling
- Guidance and support to financial and debt problems
- Information about treatment facilities
- Solution to their gambling problem

[Something for conversation...]

... and comments

What else can be done to help problem gamblers?

- What is done in your country?
- What are useful and effective interventions?
- What are effective services?

What else can be done to help problem gamblers?

- Giving information about gambling problems
- Educating professionals, practitioners and peers
- Seeing, hearing, supporting
- Being yourself
- Truly meeting, not passing by or sending to see someone other
- Sometimes just listening is enough

[The role of social work practitioners in helping problem gamblers?]

- How do you see a role of social work practitioner in helping gamblers?
- What have you done yourself?
- What have your colleagues done?
- Individual v. broader view?

[The role of social work practitioners in helping problem gamblers?]

Social work practitioner is an expert of everyday life

- Problem gambling affects comprehensively in person's everyday life but causes and consequences vary
- We meet people in their ordinary life situations

We can work together with individuals

How about the broader view: family, social networks, communities, environment?

[Things to keep in mind...]

- what are our attitudes
- Is it "his/hers own problem or fault"
- are we putting blame on gambler

- there's no such thing as "a typical gambler"
>individual situations need individual support
- seeking help and finding ways to recover is hard work
- eg. feelings of shame and stigma can be barriers to seek help

[Ask and learn...]

- how to help and how to make individual plans to recover (Ladouceur 2009)

How much gambler spends:

- 1) money/session
- 2) money/ week
- 3) sessions/week
- 4) time/week

Lie-Bet Screening Instrument

- 1) Have you ever felt the need to bet more and more money?
- 2) Have you ever had to lie to people important to you about how much you gambled?

“Yes”

[Thank you!]

Questions, comments, contacts

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