

Productivity Commission Inquiry

Gambling

Gambling Inquiry
Productivity Commission
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30th March, 2009

To: Staff of the Productivity Commission Inquiry – Gambling.

I thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Commission's, Public Inquiry into Gambling.

My submission to you is from the viewpoint that of a recovering, pathological gambler and not from the viewpoint of a learned person. I hope that this may provide you with some insight into our behavior, thinking or lack there of:

I shall endeavor to address issues as I deem important in point form, with some explanations being necessary.

I have viewed many differing research studies, Universities, "Councils of Gambling", commissions, treatment centers websites and such, both Australian and International and may refer to some.

However I have to question the efficacy of Gambling Studies/Research, departments such as Gambling Research Australia (GRA) and conferences etc. and for what purpose and to what ends is this research taken?

Is it so as governments can be seen to be doing something and to quiet the general public and the broader community and interest groups?

Is it to keep those that do not have a problem with gambling in employment?

I view the vast majority as a panacea for the problem as many are ill informed and far too simplistic in nature and simplistic with their solutions to the problem.

If we were able to completely solve compulsive gambling we could then apply that model to the problem of drug addiction and alcoholism as we are all the same. It is only our drug of choice that differs.

I am an active member of Gamblers Anonymous and as such I can only refer to my experiences as this may impinge on others anonymity.

The similarities in behavior and characteristics of those I have met through this fellowship are astounding.

- High Achievers
- A high intelligence quotient (High IQ).
- Compulsive in nature in almost all that we do.
- Have suffered with continuing depression/mania.
- All encompassing to others.
- A feeling of being two halves and of being different to others from a very early age.
- Compulsive liars and manipulators.
- The urge to gamble being overpowering and at the exclusion of all rational thought and others.
- Extremely strong willed and often admired for this trait.
- Gambled in secret.
- Immaturity
- Emotional insecurity.
- Low Self Esteem.
- Massive ego.
- Self Sabotaging.
- Enormous capacity for self destruction.

The Gamblers Anonymous (GA) 12 step program only mentions GAMBLING in Step 1.

1. *We admitted we were powerless over gambling – that our lives had become unmanageable.*ⁱ

The other eleven steps, refer to the identification of “character defects”, the necessity for changes in thought patterns and responses to normal situations, so as we may have any form of recovery from this insidious disease. This is not dissimilar to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which aims to re teach us how to react and respond to normal life situations.

Having been recently incarcerated with other pathological gamblers, I have witnessed first hand, their reluctance to identify and accept change. The refusal not to gamble whilst in prison, the refusal of any help from agencies such as GA and also the refusal of other forms of assistance such as CBT for the shift in psyche to address the offending issues. These same “defective” characteristics still exist, with the refusal to take full

responsibility for their actions. Without the deflation of the “addicts” ego and the improvement in our self esteem, we will become a recidivist offender.

- **Definition of Gambling**

Gambling, for the compulsive gambler is defined as follows: Any betting or wagering, for self or others, whether for money or not, no matter how slight or insignificant, where the outcome is uncertain or depends upon chance or “skill” constitutes gambling.ⁱⁱ

This strict definition of gambling is necessary for the compulsive gambler, as we can be drawn back into the “dream world of a gambler” very easily.

For example: We may have had a problem with Poker Machines and have amounted many thousands of dollars of debt, but still purchase lotto tickets with the hope that “if I win all my problems will be solved”. They will never be solved.

We want to be told that we can gamble normally again.

Would you give the first drink to an alcoholic or the next “hit” to a drug addict?

The main forms of gambling are poker machines, horse racing, sports events, casinos and lotteries.

- **Participation and profiles of problem gamblers and those at risk.**

The distinction must firstly be made between Problem Gamblers, Compulsive Gamblers and Pathological Gamblers. Stark differences are evident between us. I view problem gambling as a precursor to compulsive & pathological gambling. Which is not to say that all problem gamblers will become pathological gamblers.

The conclusion of the Gambling Research Australia (GRA) Program Working Party’s research “*Towards a National Definition*”, the following definition was reached.

“Problem gambling is characterised by difficulties in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling which leads to adverse consequences for the gambler, others, or for the community.”ⁱⁱⁱ

This definition whilst succinct, is too simplistic in describing “Problem Gambling” as “....difficulties in limiting money.....which leads to adverse effects.....”,

This is a gross understatement of what occurs when we are in the grips of this illness and ignores the fact that compulsive/pathological gambling is an emotional illness and not a financial issue.

The World Health Organization (WHO) differentiates between Pathological and Compulsive gambling, as per the following;

F63.0 Pathological gambling

The disorder consists of frequent, repeated episodes of gambling which

dominate the individual's life to the detriment of social, occupational, material, and family values and commitments.

Those who suffer from this disorder may put their jobs at risk, acquire large debts, and lie or break the law to obtain money or evade payment of debts. They describe an intense urge to gamble, which is difficult to control, together with preoccupation with ideas and images of the act of gambling and the circumstances that surround the act. These preoccupations and urges often increase at times when life is stressful. This disorder is also called "compulsive gambling" but this term is less appropriate because the behaviour is not compulsive in the technical sense, nor is the disorder related to obsessive-compulsive neurosis.^{iv}

The core Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association, fourth edition (DSM – IV) lists Pathological Gambling as; defined by Pathological gambling is now defined as explained by a manic episode:

Pathological gambling is now defined as explained by a manic episode:

- 1. Preoccupation. The subject has frequent thoughts about gambling experiences, whether past, future, or fantasy.*
- 2. Tolerance. As with drug tolerance, the subject requires larger or more frequent wagers to experience the same "rush".*
- 3. Withdrawal. Restlessness or irritability associated with attempts to cease or reduce gambling.*
- 4. Escape. The subject gambles to improve mood or escape problems.*
- 5. Chasing. The subject tries to win back gambling losses with more gambling.*
- 6. Lying. The subject tries to hide the extent of his or her gambling by lying to family, friends, or therapists.*
- 7. Loss of control. The person has unsuccessfully attempted to reduce gambling.*
- 8. Illegal acts. The person has broken the law in order to obtain gambling money or recover gambling losses. This may include acts of theft, embezzlement, fraud, forgery or bad checks.*
- 9. Risked significant relationship. The person gambles despite risking or losing a relationship job, or other significant opportunity.*
- 10. Bailout. The person turns to family, friends, or another third party for financial assistance as a result of gambling.*

As with many disorders, the DSM-IV definition of pathological gambling is widely accepted and used as a basis for research and clinical practice internationally.^v

This definition is more inclusive of the scope of problems faced by the compulsive/pathological gambler and as such is agreed to by the writer.

The Victorian Government sponsored “Gamblers Help” (GH) always makes reference to “*Problem Gambling*”, which again is simplistic, ill informed and irresponsible in view.

- **Profile of Problem Gamblers and those at risk.**

To profile those persons at risk is not difficult as we all exhibit similarities, although no two gamblers are alike.

The quandary is – **“What to do with this profiling and for what purpose.”**

Most of us have at some time turned to GA, psychologists, GH, treatment centers and such; but to no avail. We have been on a merry go round of the above services, but our ego’s and our ability to justify, excuse, lie and a lack of recognition or acceptance of the problem hampers any real recovery we may receive.

Once our financial pressures have been eased, we then think we are cured. Spouses have taken the offending partner back and all seems well. It is at this point that many cease with the assistance of GH, psychologists, GA and such. This is when it is most important to continue with some type of program, but we can’t be told.

In my experience we “take up” where we “left off” and the problem is far worse. Each return to gambling is far worse than the previous.

Over the twenty (20) years of my “gambling career” my longest period of abstinence was approximately 6 1/2 years.

Having received 100,000 share options from my employer, I started to gamble again, not responsibly, but into uncontrollable compulsive gambling. Which then continued for a further 4 years.

The self destruction of a compulsive gambler is not dissimilar to “the cycle of abuse”, recognized by victims of abuse. However we are our own abuser. Our capacity for self destruction is enormous.

We have a saying in GA – Y.E.T. – Your Eligible Too.

To be told that I was in the “at risk group” 7 years ago and that my gambling would lead me to Prison, Insanity, bankruptcy and of constant suicide thoughts. I would have ignored this advice. My thinking was flawed “..you don’t know me, I’m different, they must be weak, I’m strong, I’m intelligent, I’m extremely honest, I would never do anything illegal...” and so on.

To tell a problem gambler they are “at risk” of becoming a compulsive or pathological gambler is pointless. We all perceive that we are different from the next and that we can control our gambling, which is our great hope.

“...When it comes to gambling, we have known many problem gamblers who could abstain for long stretches, but caught off guard and under the right set of circumstances, they started gambling without thought of consequences...”^{vi}

Hence we go from being a Problem Gambler to a Compulsive Gambler and many of us to a Pathological Gambler in quick succession. Never dreaming that something which started out as recreation, would lead us to Prison, Insanity and some to suicide.

“...two thirds of people that use our service end up gambling a lot less..”^{vii}

The above statement used by GH on their website and in the current television advertisement tells “us” compulsive/pathological gamblers that “our” problem is a financial problem. It gives us permission to gamble again. Which is what we want to hear and inevitably we will

The use of children and friends in the advertisement does not spark the response in a compulsive/pathological gambler that the advertisement intends to. Many of us have made promises to our partners, friends and families, sworn with a hand on a child’s head, we will never gamble again however we do so, without any misgivings or thought of repercussions.

Our overwhelming desire and need is to gamble. This desire is all encompassing and consumes our every waking moments and thoughts. We will do anything just to be in action. Whilst problem gambling initially is about the financial concerns, it ends up being about far more than this. Money to us is seen as the currency for gambling. It would not have mattered if we feed a poker machine with pink paper, we still would have gambled.

Also this statement is ignorant of the fact that most of us at one time or another attended many such services, during our “gambling career”. I attended GH about 10 years ago for counseling sessions, yes I abstained for a period of time, however when I did gamble again it was far worse. So to what time frame are they referring? During the time we are receiving counseling only? Do they know what happens to us once we cease this counseling, are we then cured? Was I a successful client? Which is the perception gleaned from this statement.

It is also a requirement of the Victorian Parole Board and Home Detention Program, that GH counseling occur upon release from prison. I strongly objected to this recommendation, for reasons as per the above and my total lack of faith in the GH program.

- **What Impact has Smoking Restrictions had on Expenditure by Gamblers?**

Smoking restrictions have had no impact to us compulsive gamblers. We will “speed” smoke outside and then continue gambling. There may have been an impact on those smokers that do not have a gambling problem.

- **What Have Been the Impacts of Harm Minimization Measures That Have Been Introduced?**

The measures introduced and recommended by the Commission, have no real effect on the compulsive/pathological gambler. We will leave a “venue” to access an ATM.

“...the provision for informed choice...and empowering gamblers...” This is of no interest to those with a compulsive gambling problem, as our overwhelming desire is to gamble, our ego’s hamper this thought pattern.

Self exclusion programs do not work for most, as we will always find a “venue” to gamble at, one were we haven’t been self excluded.

The reduction in the opening hours of venues is probably of most importance. I like others have left a venue at 3.00am closing time and found another venue that stays open until 5.00am. So if all venues had a similar closing time, this would assist the compulsive gambler for that evening.

The measures mentioned by the Commission are really of no benefit to those of us with a compulsive gambling problem, we will ignore all warnings and show no logic in our quest to gamble. The recreational gambler is the gambler that will take notice or listen to such advice.

In summary to quantify recovery rates is nigh impossible as the vast majority of compulsive/pathological gamblers, gamble in secret. We will not admit to our gambling, we think we are fooling others and ourselves and have become expert liars.

It is not until we reach our personal “rock bottom” that any form of change will occur. This “rock bottom” can not be quantified, as it varies from person to person.

Those that are not compulsive/pathological gamblers often ask the question, ”why don’t you just stop?” or “why do you gamble?” –

We can’t stop, we are compulsive gamblers. We gamble because we are compulsive gamblers.

We must fully accept that we are a Compulsive/Pathological Gambler for any chance of recovery otherwise we will at varying intervals gamble again.

-Nothing changes if nothing changes.

ⁱ Gamblers Anonymous Identification Booklet, page 4.

ⁱⁱ Gamblers Anonymous Identification Booklet, page 14.

ⁱⁱⁱ [www.gamblingresearch.org.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/GRA_Reports_Files1/\\$file/NatDefs_ExecSum.pdf](http://www.gamblingresearch.org.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/GRA_Reports_Files1/$file/NatDefs_ExecSum.pdf)

^{iv} www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/bluebook.pdf

^v en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_gambling, <http://www.psych.org/research/dor/dsm/dsmintro81301.cfm>

^{vi} *Gamblers Anonymous Identification Booklet*, page 13.

[/www.problemgambling.vic.gov.au/video-archive/i-had-a-gambling-problem-tv-spot](http://www.problemgambling.vic.gov.au/video-archive/i-had-a-gambling-problem-tv-spot)