

Introduction

Chrysalis Insight Inc welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Gambling.

Chrysalis Insight Inc is a not-for-profit organisation committed to assisting and educating people in crisis due to problem gambling. Chrysalis Inc. is a not-for-profit charity listed on the Harm Prevention Charity Registry.

The main objective of our organisation is to provide and promote recreational alternative environments to help prevent people from falling into the problem gambling trap and assisting directly or indirectly those affected by problem gambling to re-integrate and adapt to other recreational activities.

Gaming venues are marketed as 3rd places but they actually tend to foster social isolation and contribute to many health, physical and emotional problems in our community.

Our vision is that the provision of safe, recreational alternatives (3rd places – 1st being home & 2nd work) to poker machine gambling will make a difference to those who are in crisis due to problem gambling. Social isolation is a major contributing factor to gambling addiction. 3rd Places connect individuals, decrease social isolation and rebuild strong, healthy, vibrant and interactive communities.

This submission however does not address all questions raised in the Productivity Commission's issues paper and terms of reference. It will address issues raised under points 9 and 10 in the terms of reference and reflect the expertise and experience of our organisation gathered during our work in the community and with problem gamblers.

The focus of this submission will be on highlighting a gap in both research and treatment services in addressing "recreational, social alternatives" as a way out of problem gambling and more importantly as a preventative measure to prevent problem gambling from occurring in the first place.

Gabriela Byrne, a qualified teacher, has developed and facilitated the Free Yourself Program (self-help program for problem gamblers) for individuals and in many workshop environments. As the founder and chair of the not-for-profit Chrysalis Inc. she has managed the first 3rd place, a recreational alternative to gaming venues, a 110 seat restaurant with 2 full-time staff and up to 90 volunteers. She is the author of a bestselling book 'The Free Yourself Program' (10,000 copies) and many other self-help materials. She would welcome the opportunity to speak to our submission and respond to any questions the Committee may have regarding the submission.

Assessment of Harm Minimisation Measures since 1999

EGM gambling is often associated with harm caused to individuals and communities.

Many books, research reports & articles have been written covering a wide spectrum on the impact of EGM problem gambling on individuals, families and the wider community and the proposed development of appropriate health measures.

Many other studies also reflect a general concern about the adverse effects of EGM gambling on people (Productivity Commission, 1999, p.3; Roy Morgan, 2000 p. iv; McMillen, Masterman-Smith & Tremayne, 2001; Gambling Research Panel (GRP), 2003, p.13).

In recent years there has been a consistently high level of public interest in responses to these problems associated with problem gambling, especially EGM gambling. Throughout the world various research papers have been written evaluating the effectiveness of various therapy approaches based on the measure of change in a client's problem gambling behaviour.

There is a general lack of established psychological theories in relation to the **causes of problem gambling**. One theory that explores the development of addictions in particular problem gambling is found in Jacobs 'A General Theory of Addictions (1986)'. He suggests that addictive behaviour occurs when people use a substance or activity to change their arousal levels so that they can escape the reality of their existence. Whilst most people use substances and/or engage in activities like gambling occasionally to control mood states, problem gamblers come to rely on gambling to maintain their desired mood state.

Blaszczynski and Nower (2002) suggest a pathway model of the determinants of problem gambling based upon a series of clinical observations with problem gamblers. They acknowledge common influences that affect all problem gamblers, eg. availability and access, arousal effects but suggests that there are three distinct pathways into problem gambling.

Marget, Gupta and Derevensky (1999) and Nower, Derevensky and Gupta (2004) examined problem gambling in the context of poor coping skills. They suggest that gambling may be used as a method of **coping, distraction and escape** from everyday problems.

Gambling due to lack of meaning (purpose) and connectedness in life

Richard T.A. Wood and Mark D. Griffith (2007) conducted a study examining the role that gambling plays in the lives of problem gamblers and the extent it is used as a means of coping. They interviewed 50 problem gamblers, aged between 18 to 63 years. The main focus of the interview was to examine how their gambling problem developed and the role that gambling played in their lives.

Ultimately all reasons why the participants gambled led to a mood modification through this activity. The results identified that 'gambling to escape', loneliness, avoiding problems, & filling the void were amongst the biggest drivers that led to the problem gambling behaviour.

'This refers to fulfilling a gap in a persons life either through alleviating boredom or through providing a means of socialising that was otherwise missing from the lives. Many gamblers reported that gambling was their only available social outlet, even though other gamblers were sometimes seen as acquaintances rather than friends. In many cases existing friends were lost, usually due to unpaid loans and the social void outside of gambling widened.'" (Wood, Griffiths, 2007 p. 115).

Here are some of the comments from interviewed clients:

"I'm in a situation now where I've got spare time and I've got so much of a void to fill (David, age 41).

One of the things from my point of view I don't want to stop (gambling). (it) is my only social thing...(Liz, age 53)

Out of my search/quest for something which was missing in my life and looking back now, I can see there was this massive hole. I was trying to fill all this with gambling (Bill, age 44) (Wood, Griffiths, 2007 p. 115)

"Filling the void" refers to the feeling that something is missing in the participant's life, such as a lack of social activity outside of gambling, but it can also refer to a sense of boredom with their life. The void is subsequently filled by either modifying mood through gambling or through the social function that the gambling activity provides." (Wood, Griffiths, 2007 p. 119)

These findings imply some significant changes in how to think about treatment, intervention and prevention strategies. "The fact that some gamblers are socially rewarded for gambling cannot be altered directly but more adaptive personal and social skills can be taught as responses to stressful situations (i.e. emotional antecedents) that often trigger gambling. For example, relaxations, assertion and social skills training would be good starting places. Furthermore, prevention plans and treatment interventions should aim to **increase the gambler's contact with non-gambling peers and non-gambling activities. Such actions would help in filling the void that so many gamblers appear to experience.**" (Wood, Griffiths, 2007, p. 123)

These findings are backed up by many studies carried out by Borderlands for local governments and other organisations (e.g. Borrell, Hartley & Boulet, 2000a; Borrell, Hartley, Haldun & Boulet, 2003).

They are also consistent with MacKay's research findings over many years (2007) in linking social isolation as consequence of community fragmentation and family breakdown to user-pays approaches to recreation. These altered leisure patterns away from social participation in clubs and other community organisation can explain the penetration of gambling as a leisure activity and the escalation of problem gambling in our communities.

"Across many studies, especially those wherein 'leisure' and 'recreation' was the focus, neo-liberal principles of social organisations were evident in the individualised and commercialised solutions on offer to address social problems of isolation and exclusion from meaningful participation in creative, productive and/or collective activity" (Jennifer Borrell, 2009 p. 240).

Since the 1990s with the increased accessibilities to gambling facilities in Australia, the number of women presenting themselves to Gamblers Help services for help has increased both in total and as a percentage of problem gamblers overall. This explains the increase in studies specifically trying to identify the reason "why women gamble", how to increase this client group's access to support services and to improve the support once they present with the problem.

We know that gambling provides a social outlet for women who want to escape home and be in a safe environment.

"Statistics from Victoria's problem gambling telephone counselling service, G-Line, reveal boredom as the primary motivation for women callers to gambler, followed closely by loneliness, stress and anxiety" (Brown & Coventry, 1997, p.9).

A phone-in for women, conducted in Wollongong, concluded that "predominantly, callers gambled because they were lonely and isolated (68%)". One of the phone-in participants said: "If I give up the pokies and smoking what will I have in my life" (Brittain, 1998, p. 9).

Other research confirms that women's motivation to gamble is strongly linked to the perception of what 'gambling' means to them. The 'Meaning' of gambling in women's lives reaches from needing 'Time Out', 'Cope with difficult circumstances', 'Escape from the real world', to 'Rebellion against the prescribed roles of **good women**' (Surgey & Seibert, 2000, p. xi, xii, xiii).

Wire (Women's Information to conduct research into women experiencing problem gambling and vulnerable through social isolation), a government funded research project demonstrated a strong link between problem gambling and social isolation. 43 women shared their stories and experiences and highlighted the strong relationship between social isolation, a void in their lives and problem gambling. (Wire, 2007)

In exploring studies especially looking at women problem gambling it is hard to say what comes first, social isolation or problem gambling.

In a very recent article published in the Swinburne Magazine – March 2009 'Gap in social options raises pokie appeal', Melissa Marino writes about a study by Professor Mike Kyrios and Anna Thomas who pick up on the very complex issue of how a perceived social activity becomes an addiction and what implication that could have for prevention and harm minimisation measures.

The study highlights that for many of the people their gambling was purposive. It was, either consciously or unconsciously, an attempt to engage with something that would inject purpose or meaning into their lives; while part of the exercise was to make quick or easy money. At another level there was desire to experience something not available to them in their daily lives. For some it was an unconscious attempt to escape, for others it was an attempt to connect with people – an experience of community and connectedness. By the time that people realise that their 'appointment with hope' is a disappointment they are already sustaining serious damage, burning relationships and experiencing their inability to pull back from the edge.

‘The Chapel’ – Recreational Alternative to Gaming Venues – Review

From 2001 – 2004 Chrysalis Insight Inc. operated ‘The Chapel Restaurant’ in the heart of Lilydale, providing the community with a recreational alternative to the many gaming venues in the area. Over those 3 years Chrysalis Insight Inc. worked with up to 90 volunteers (many of whom were directly or indirectly affected by problem gambling) and witnessed many lives positively changed as a consequence of the provision of a 3rd place and the feeling of belonging to a community. Recovery from gambling addiction was sped up by the involvement in a ‘real’ community-building project. This project was strongly supported by the ‘Patron’ of the organisation, World Vision CEO Tim Costello, who participated actively in many fund raising events.

(See attached letters from Jackie and Nola, both part of the Chapel-Pilot project)

In 2004 Chrysalis Insight Inc., in partnership with Swinburne University, the Shire of Yarra Ranges, Gamblers Help Eastern, Rivendell (EACH) and “Know the Odds” conducted a research project at ‘The Chapel Restaurant’ to test a model of engagement and information dissemination relating to problem gambling. The report “Where are the third places: - recreational alternatives to gambling?” recommended that the 3rd Place concept be further explored and expanded. Further information is available at <http://www.ld.swin.edu/au/crd> or contact Chrysalis Insight Inc for a hard copy of the report.

Between 2004 and 2007 Chrysalis has been evaluating the success of ‘The Chapel Restaurant as a 3rd place’, as a creative measure to prevent and minimise the harm caused by problem gambling. Chrysalis has documented what worked and what didn’t, and has discussed many options on how to communicate and market the concept better to a wider community.

Chrysalis Insight Inc hosted several focus groups followed by two community events at Morrison on the Park Café, Mt Evelyn and the Black Spur Nursery, Healesville to further our understanding of the requirements for 3rd Place venues and to obtain feedback from members of our target groups (recovering gamblers, mental health patients, control group).

Chrysalis Insight Inc has been publishing and distributing a quarterly newsletter to over 250 subscribers. The newsletter raises awareness of current events, legislation, and our organisations activities and in particular, facts about poker machine gaming as well as providing resources to those who are, or who know somebody suffering an addiction.

Each year Chrysalis Insight Inc presents the ‘3rd Place’ concept and Gabriela Byrne’s personal story of overcoming addiction at speaking engagements across the country and internationally.

Recommendation:

Evaluating the current research findings and our own experience in working with people adversely affected by problem gambling we would like to recommend the following measures:

1. Development of a strategic response to the experience of many who are socially isolated either before and/or after the experience with problem gambling. This could include the development of more community focused social outlets where people can comfortably go, either alone or in a group and feel welcomed and engaged.
2. Support and increase funding for neighbourhood houses and community centres that make their facility available as an informal gathering place.
3. Support and funding of projects who address a range of socialisation strategies who can be incorporated into the current treatment service model
4. Offer financial incentives and free marketing to commercial venues who offer people other forms of entertainment (eg. Live music, trivia nights, fashion parades, poetry readings, etc.)