

**The Impact of Expanded Gambling
Opportunities on
South Australian Society**

*A Submission to the Productivity Commission
Inquiry into
the Australian Gambling Industry*

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report comments on the social impact on the South Australian community of the expansion of gambling opportunities since the introduction of gaming machines.

Relationships Australia (SA) Inc, formerly known as The Marriage Guidance Council of South Australia, is an independent, not-for-profit, non-Government organisation that has been providing counselling services to people with problems related to gambling since November 1995. This is a new client group for this organisation which differs significantly from clients of its other counselling services in that their levels of anxiety and depression are higher and the amount of suicidal thoughts and behaviour is significantly higher.

The responsible approach taken to problem gambling by the Australian Hotels Association and the Licensed Clubs Association, and that they are the sole providers of funding for gambling rehabilitation in this State, is noted.

Relationships Australia (SA) is not in a position to comment on the economic impact of expanded gambling opportunities in South Australia but, as a community service provider of long standing, we consider we are in a position to comment on the social impact.

This report:

- ◆ Provides information about the extent of problem gambling in South Australia. Recognised Australian research would suggest that approximately 11,000 people in this State have a significant gambling problem. According to the Hill Inquiry (1995), a further 55,000 people are at risk of developing a gambling problem. It is a widely-held belief in gambling rehabilitation and research fields that each problem gambler affects between five and ten others. If this is correct, then 116,000 other South Australians are bearing some of the cost of the gambling boom in this State.
- ◆ Information is provided about the nature and extent of problem gambling evidenced in clients of the *Break Even* Gambling Rehabilitation Service conducted by Relationships Australia (SA) during the period November 1996 to February 1998.

Section 1 of this report - "Gambling in South Australia" - looks at gambling in South Australia, its extent, and the political, social and intra-personal context for the development of gambling problems.

Section 2 - "Who are the Gamblers and their Families?" - provides information on the *Break Even* Gambling Rehabilitation Service client and problem profile of Relationships Australia (SA).

Section 3 - "Identified Issues and Associated Recommendations" - includes the following detailed recommendations on the areas of service delivery, research and the gambling industry.

SECTION 1 - GAMBLING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

A. BACKGROUND

Relationships Australia (SA) Inc is a non-profit organisation which for fifty years has had a reputation as the premier provider of relationship counselling in South Australia.

Relationships Australia (SA) is part of a national Relationships Australia network which provides gambling rehabilitation services in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia.

Relationships Australia (SA) tendered to provide gambling rehabilitation services because the experience of our interstate colleagues led us to believe that the expansion of gambling opportunities with the introduction of gaming machines to South Australia was likely to have a significant impact on the community. We also recognised that the issues facing problem gamblers and their families would be extremely complex; therefore, it would be important to appoint experienced, professional staff with a range of expertise.

We provide gambling rehabilitation services targeting the central and eastern metropolitan area, the Riverland, the Murraylands and Kangaroo Island. However, while our clients are predominantly from these areas, people from all over the metropolitan and near country areas use the agency's Hutt Street service.

The Relationships Australia's *Break Even* Gambling Rehabilitation Service has provided 180 workshops and presentations on gambling-related issues to over 1700 people from various professional and community groups. It was clear to us that the level of community understanding of the nature and extent of problem gambling was initially poor. However, both professionals and the wider community are becoming more aware and concerned about problem gambling.

Since the establishment of our Gambling Rehabilitation Service 3 years ago, we have conducted approximately 3,000 interviews with over 1,000 people. Approximately 89% of them have not been clients of other Relationships Australia (SA) services. In other words, this is a new client group, and we are not providing an extra service to existing clients.

B. THE EXTENT OF PROBLEM GAMBLING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- ◆ Australians' popular reputation as people who love to bet is confirmed by analysts who estimate that approximately 90% of Australia's adult population participate in some form of gambling (Tasmanian Gaming Commission, 1997).

- ◆ Recent estimates of the prevalence of problem gambling in Australia are that 1.16% (plus or minus 0.34%) of the population are problem gamblers (Dickerson *et al*, 1995). On this calculation, 11,000 people in South Australia are likely to be problem gamblers. Problem gambling can be said to exist when a person is spending more time and/or money on gambling than they can afford or their gambling is having a negative impact on their relationships.
- ◆ The Hill Inquiry (1995) reported that 40% of South Australian adults had played gaming machines during the previous 12 months. The Inquiry noted that the 6% of South Australian adults (about 66,000) who were at that time playing gaming machines at least once per week were responsible for 56% of the total expenditure on gaming machines. Hill suggested that this 6% of the adult population is likely, to a significant extent, to contain the group at greatest risk of becoming problem gamblers (1995, p.41).
- ◆ It is widely believed in gambling rehabilitation services that each person with a gambling problem has an impact on between five and ten other individuals. Using Hill's figures, this would mean up to 116,000 South Australians at any one time are likely to experience a negative impact because of someone else's gambling problems. We are not dealing with an issue that affects only a small number of people.
- ◆ The group of people at risk of developing gambling problems is not static. It appears that the number of people for whom problem gambling has a direct impact is increasing as opportunities for legal gambling expand. Later in this report information will be given about apparent risk factors, the dramatic increase in the development of gambling problems reported by Relationships Australia (SA) clients, and outcome data suggesting it is possible to resolve gambling problems.

C. WHY DO GAMBLING PROBLEMS DEVELOP?

The Political and Social Context

Firstly, and probably most obviously, gambling problems develop when opportunities to gamble are available. The accessibility of games, both legal and illegal, encourages gambling and exposes more vulnerable individuals to the risks of becoming excessive or problem gamblers. While some writers are not willing to make a connection between the accessibility of gambling and the number of problem gamblers, others believe that the incidence of problem gambling is higher in areas that provide legalised games (Eadington, 1989, Lesieur, 1992, Volberg, 1994).

Gambling opportunities are rife in South Australia. It is possible to gamble not only at locations specifically designed for gambling - the Casino and racetracks - but also at local hotels and clubs, newsagents, supermarkets, delicatessens and pharmacies. South Australians can gamble at gambling venues, over the telephone and via the Internet. A change in the attitude to gambling of our Government has facilitated this expansion of gambling in South Australia, but this change of heart is not confined to this State nor to this country.

Commenting on the position in the United States, I. Nelson Rose states, "As a matter of public policy, Government no longer merely *permits* some forms of gambling; it now actually

promotes the practice" (Rose, 1994). In South Australia, as in the United States, the goal of the Government to find ways of raising revenue without increasing taxation is a powerful motivating factor.

The legalisation and promotion of an increasing variety of gambling codes has resulted in a major shift in public attitudes. Rose reports that in the United States: "Polls now reveal that, for a majority of our citizens, the taint of sin formerly attached to gambling has faded - 'after all, if the State Government urges that a person gamble, how bad can it be?' " (1994). We would argue that the same change in attitude has occurred in South Australia.

Sir Paul Hasluck writes of the situation in Australia:

In my lifetime, I have seen no greater change in Australian social mores than in the popular outlook on gambling. The change I notice is not only the changes in the laws relating to gambling and lotteries nor the change in social practice but rather the fact than any argument about the ethics of gambling has ended. The lure of getting something for nothing, the hope for gain without effort, brought the nation into a moral vacuum. As a nation we have popularised greed. (1992)

Governments and private enterprise stand to gain financially from this expansion. This paper will argue that, where benefits to the State are concerned, we should not confuse gross profit with net profit. Evidence will be presented which indicates that the long-term social costs (and by implication the economic costs) to individuals and the community are considerable.

Intra-Personal Context

Secondly, in our experience, gambling problems often appear to start with a period of extreme emotional vulnerability. This may arise from a significant loss or disappointment, such as the death of a loved one, the breakdown of a relationship or the loss of a job. The person either consciously or unconsciously discovers that playing poker machines gives them symptomatic relief. The more they use poker machines as a tool to avoid their pain the more likely they are to develop other, gambling-related, problems.

The Gaming Context

The speed and frequency of games seems to have a connection with the development of gambling problems, as does their availability. Thus the majority of our clients have problems with gaming machines and the TAB which are located in hotels and clubs in practically every suburb and town in South Australia.

Professor Mark Dickerson suggested at the recent (November 1998) National Association of Gambling Studies Conference that people who gamble weekly or more often on gaming machines, have a one in three chance of developing a significant gambling problem.

D. HOW GAMBLING BECOMES A PROBLEM

The cycle of problem gambling behaviour is best explained by Skinner's (1953) theory of operant conditioning. Skinner's research, which has been extensively replicated, found that the most successful way to ensure the repetition of a particular behaviour is to reward the participant at varying intervals. In essence, most forms of gambling are contingent upon unpredictable rewards. However, the clearest example of Skinner's random reinforcement

schedule is found with gaming machines. The players know that a reward will eventually be given from the machines. However, there is no way of predicting when a reward will occur - the only way to gain a possible reward is to keep playing.

'Lydia' migrated to Australia from a strife-torn part of the world several years ago. Her violent ex-husband would not permit her children to emigrate with her. Her grief is intense, and she gambles to lessen the pain of her multiple losses. Her gambling is affecting her new marriage.

Analysis of a three-month sample of clients with a personal gambling problem found that 82% had developed the problem after suffering the following recent identifiable losses:

◇	loss of employment	-	8%
◇	death of a loved one	-	22%
◇	loss of a relationship	-	30%
◇	loss of health	-	28%
◇	financial loss	-	4%
◇	losses associated with migration	-	2%

We have noted that a number of clients with losses related to health are also clients of Workcover.

In addition, an analysis of the gender differences related to losses found that 32% of men and 68% of women reported recently experiencing one or more of the above losses.

Gender

An examination of the gender distribution between each group revealed a much higher proportion of women in the non-gamblers group (72%) than the other two groups (gamblers 52%; relationship counselling clients 56%). Finlay concluded that as the number of female gamblers presenting for treatment is on the rise, male family members of problem gamblers may constitute an 'at risk' group requiring assistance by gambling rehabilitation services.

Age

31% of non-gamblers were over 50 years compared with 14% of the gamblers and 8% of relationship counselling clients.

Evidence of problem gambling has been found in younger age groups such as 19 to 29 year old Australian men (Dickerson et al., 1996). Problem gamblers report the onset of gambling behaviours in early adolescence: Ciarrocchi and Richardson (1989) found that 46% of the problem gamblers in their study commenced gambling between 10 and 13 years while 27% placed their first bets between 14 and 17 years.

The age of our clients probably says more about the targeting (or lack of targeting) of young people by community education and media campaigns. Mr Geof Muecke from the South Australian TAB informed a public hearing of the South Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into Gambling that the TAB advertising campaign was attracting young people.

Relationship Status

Only 44% of gamblers in Finlay's study of Relationships Australia (SA) clients reported being in a relationship. This compared with 81% of non-gamblers and 74% of relationship counselling clients.

The combined gambler and non-gambler percentage of clients living in a long term relationship of 62% compares with figures published in the Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund Evaluation (Leahy 1998) of 50%. An earlier analysis of Relationships Australia (SA) data suggested that 59% of gambling rehabilitation clients lived in normal family relationships (including with parents).

Our data shows that 80% of our clients have had a gambling problem for less than five years.

The group of people at risk of developing gambling problems is not static.

Length of Gambling Problem

◆	Less than 12 months	-	27% of clients
◆	1-5 years	-	53%
◆	5 years and over	-	20%

Clearly, the finding that 80% of our clients report developing gambling problems within the past five years supports the contention that problem gambling has escalated in South Australia since the introduction of gaming machines.

Gambling Code

◆	Gaming machines	-	73%
◆	TAB	-	19%
◆	Casino games	-	6%
◆	Keno and Lotteries	-	2%

We anticipate that with the expansion of TAB into hotel venues and with the increased frequency of races and the availability of telephone betting that we will see an increase in the number of clients reporting problems associated with this form of gambling.

Most of our clients are **self-referring** and recognise they have a problem related to gambling. The features that distinguish this group from other clients of Relationships Australia (SA) are the high levels of shame, despair and hopelessness. This is evidenced by our recent research where we compared the levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation (thoughts) of *BreakEven* Gambling Rehabilitation Service with Relationship Counselling Service clients. The results of this study are outlined in Chart 1.

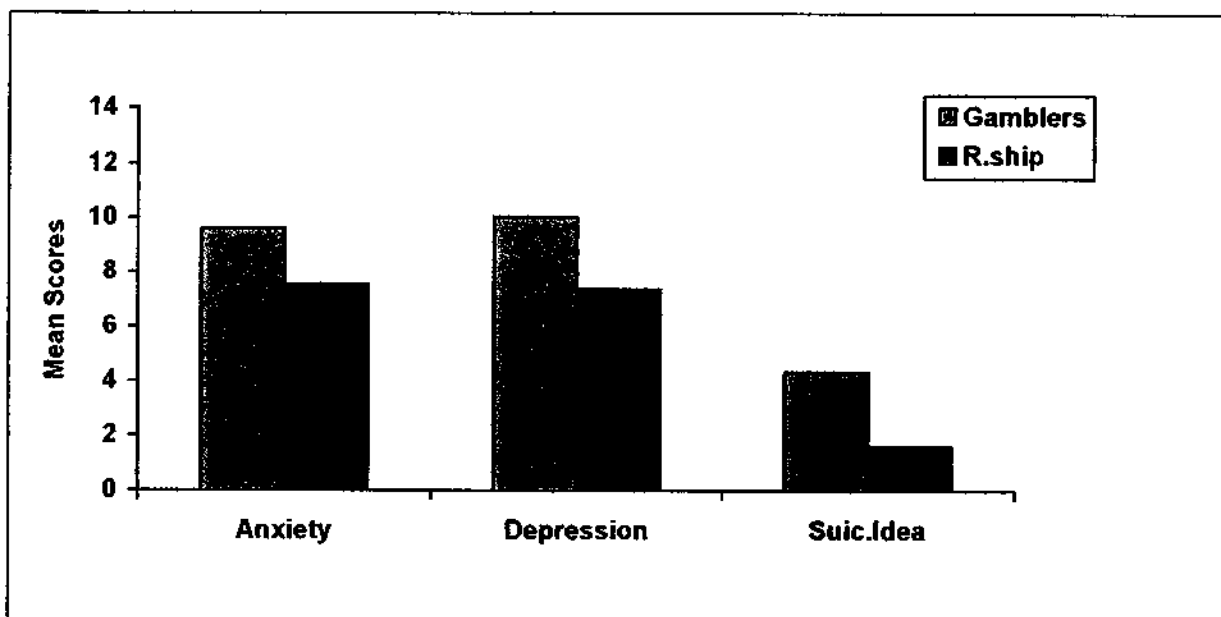


Chart 1 - Mean anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts/behaviour *BreakEven* and Relationship Counselling Service clients. Marks Parkin General Health Questionnaire.

The above findings indicate that our Gambling Rehabilitation Service clients are reporting higher levels of anxiety and depression than the Relationship Counselling Service clients. More importantly, our gambling clients are expressing much higher levels of suicidal thoughts and behaviour than the relationship counselling clients. These findings are alarming.

Our clients come from all walks of life (Chart 2). They are not society's drop outs: 58% are in the work force, 12% are unable to work and 10% are unemployed.

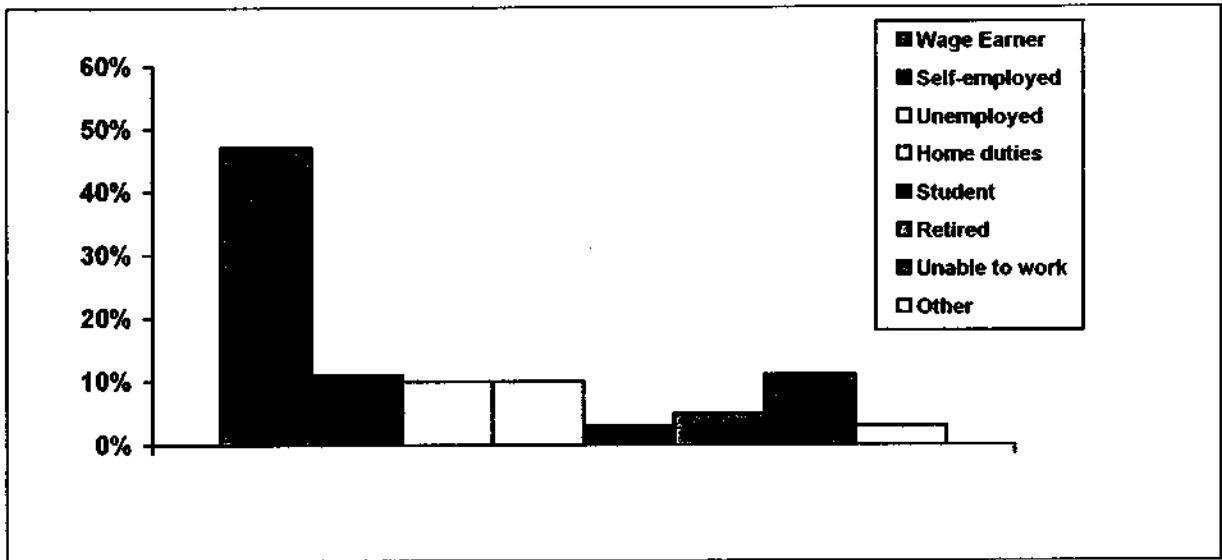


Chart 2 - Employment status, Relationships Australia (SA) BreakEven Gambling Rehabilitation Service clients (November 1996 to February 1998).

Finlay's 1998 comparative analysis of three client populations of Relationships Australia (SA) showed that a higher proportion of the gamblers in her study were unemployed (14% than the non-gamblers (5%) and relationship counselling clients (8%).

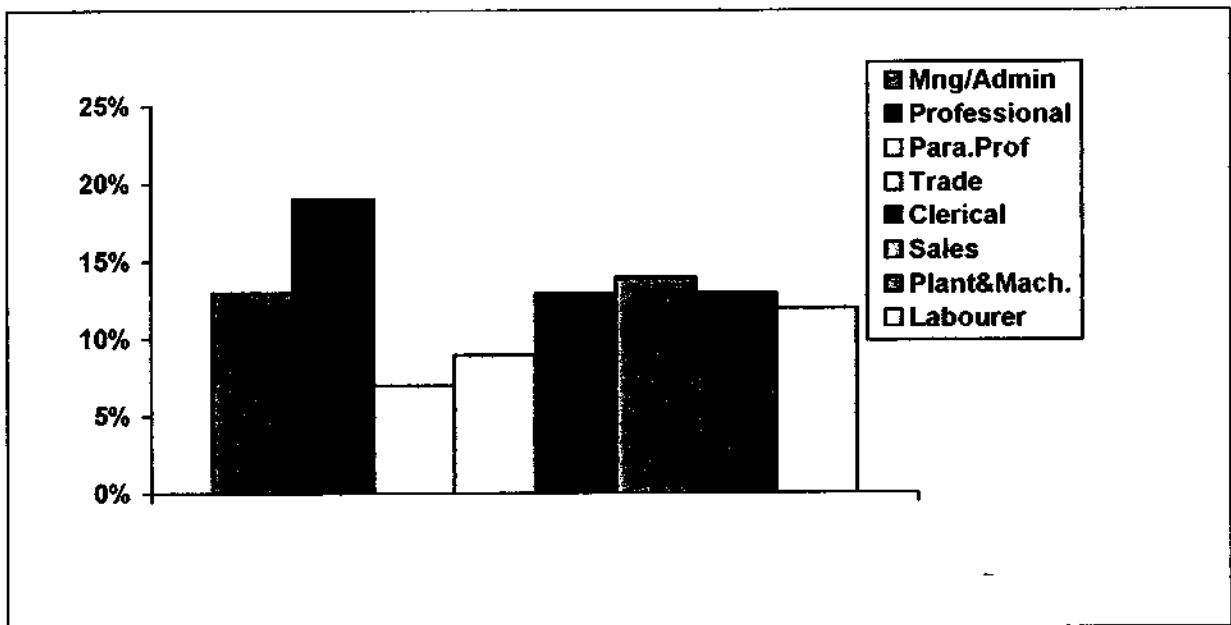


Chart 3 - Occupational distribution, Relationships Australia (SA) BreakEven Gambling Rehabilitation Service (November 1996 to February 1998).

Annual Income

Finlay's (1998) analysis of three client populations at Relationships Australia (SA) indicated that 55% of problem gamblers earned less than \$20,000 while 42% of non gamblers and 32% of relationship counselling clients were in this category.

It is worth noting that 26% of gamblers and 25% of non-gamblers had incomes over \$30,000 and this compared with 48% of relationship counselling clients (who accessed a fee-paying service).

An analysis of the socio-economic profile of 460 clients of the Relationships Australia (SA) Break Even Gambling Rehabilitation Service (McCarthy 1998) showed a distribution of income levels similar to the national ABS figures except for the upper quintile. This study showed that the mean income level of gambling rehabilitation clients was almost \$2000 per annum higher than the ABS value for metropolitan Adelaide. In contrast the 85 clients who completed a question on household income had a mean annual income of just over half the metropolitan Adelaide mean. McCarthy found that gambling rehabilitation clients at Relationships Australia (SA)

- * have a similar distribution of income levels as the general Adelaide population.
- * do not show a significant relationship between income level and the severity of gambling problem as measured by the South Oaks Gambling Screen. In other words clients with a low income were not reporting more severe gambling related problems such as unpaid debts or property pawned or sold than clients with a higher income.
- * the severity of gambling problems is not based on class.
- * there is a significant relationship between income level and amount of money spent on gambling

However McCarthy cautioned that this study only applied to Relationships Australia (SA) client population because the sample was not representative or random.

The 'normality' of our client group is further evidenced by Charts 4 and 5 which show that 59% of our clients live in normal family relationships and 40% are parents with dependent children. These figures do not include the number of dependent and non-dependent children over the age of 16 whose lives are also affected by parents with gambling problems.

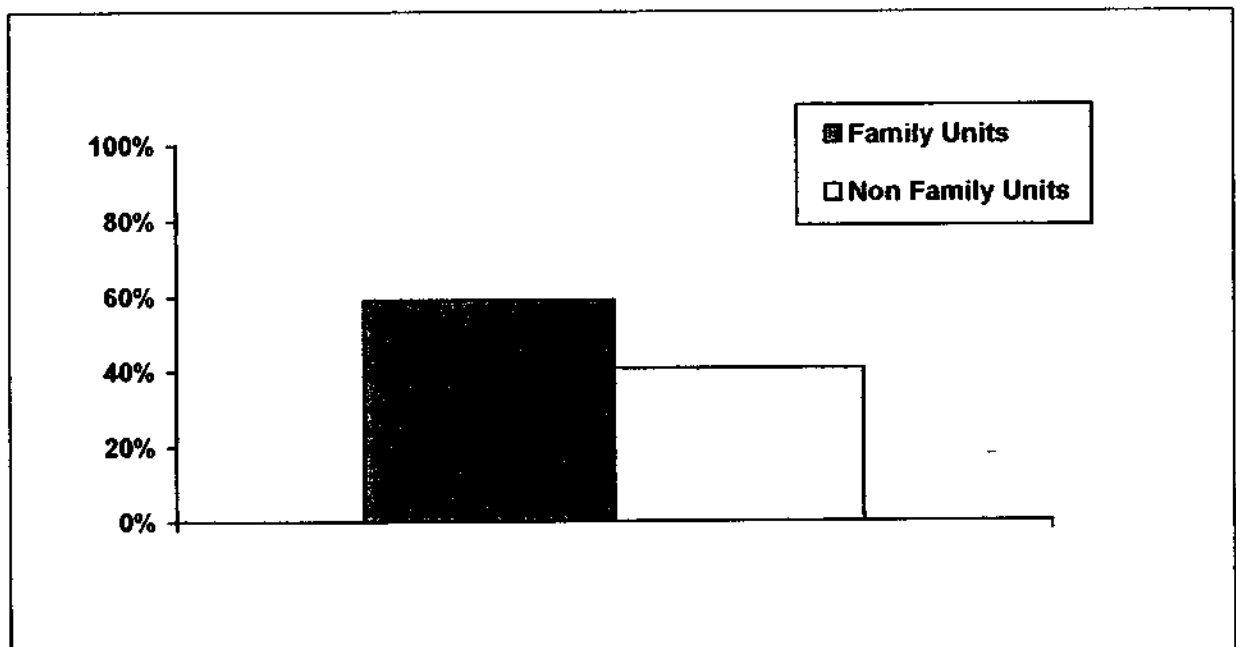


Chart 4 - Relationships Australia (SA) Break Even Gambling Rehabilitation Service clients living in family or non-family units (November 1996 to February 1998).

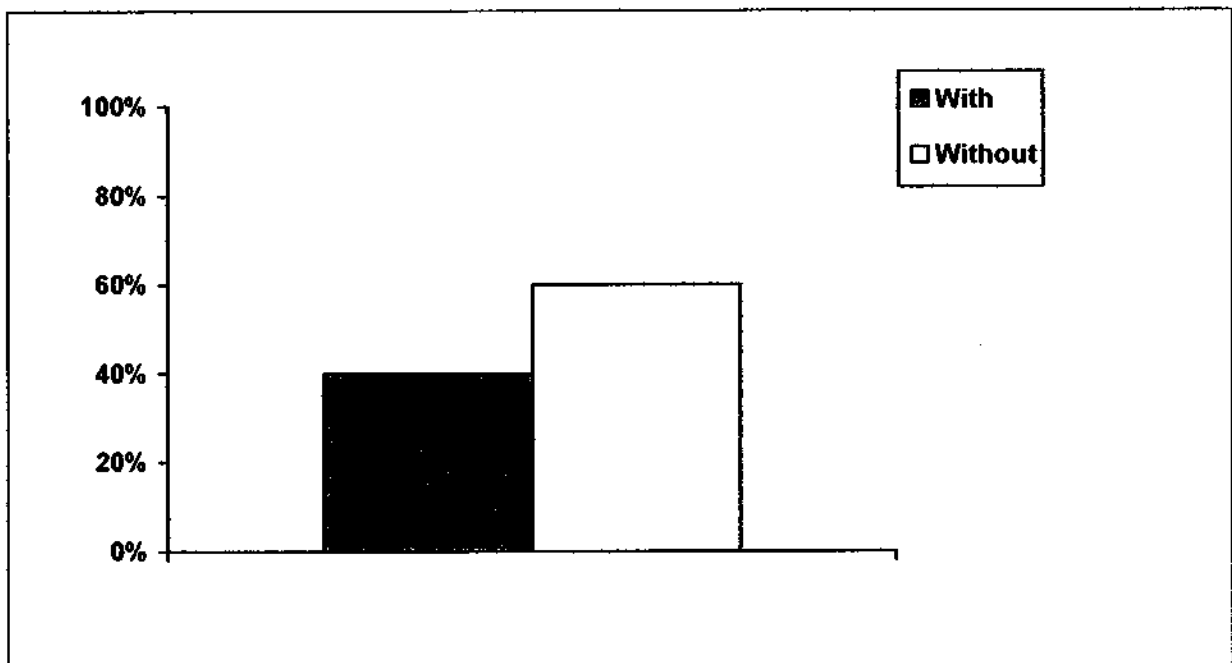


Chart 5 - Relationships Australia (SA) BreakEven Gambling Rehabilitation Service Clients with and without dependent children under 16 years (November 1996 to February 1998).

While the majority of media focus implies that gamblers are impulsive, irresponsible and potentially criminal, in our professional opinion our clients are generally responsible citizens who have experienced and managed a normal range of personal problems. The vast majority of the people we see are not fools, and they have previously been able to live within their budgets.

It is clear from our counselling sessions with clients that gambling problems have often developed alongside or as a consequence of other difficulties.

'Kylie' was a trusted and honest employee who developed a gambling problem after her father's death. She discovered that she could "borrow" cash from the till. She found herself on a merry-go-round as she chased her losses in an attempt to repay the money. Kylie is now awaiting a Court appearance and her husband 'Dale' is struggling to face the probable consequences for him and his three young children if/when she is gaoled.

'Leeanne' has schizophrenia. Her illness is generally well-controlled, but she has a limited support network and social skills. She came for help when she had gambled the money she needed for her medication. She is now living in SAAP funded accommodation and is unlikely to live independently in the near future.

All our clients are voluntary. On the whole, they are clear about what motivates them to gamble. Generally, they care about the consequences of their out-of-control gambling behaviour and want help or information that will allow them to take (back) control of their lives. There are exceptions: a few people attend counselling because they anticipate the counsellor writing a letter for an impending Court case, or they are hoping to lessen the pressure from a partner or parent by their attendance. However, we have found that these few reluctant clients rarely continue counselling when they discover that it takes hard, and often very emotional, internal work to change such 'reinforced' behaviour. We have also noticed that some of them do recontact us later when their motivation to tackle their problem has increased.

B. WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF GAMBLING PROBLEMS ON FAMILIES AND CHILDREN?

'Josie', a mother of three young children under seven, from a nearby country town contacted us after she had used the housekeeping money for gambling. She was frightened that her husband would 'beat her up' if he finds out. She felt particularly guilty because her children were suffering as she was emotionally distant and they were not eating well. This couple is now separated and the father gave up his job to care for his children.

Families

Our statistics show that 33% of our clients are partners or family. It is clear from our data collection (Chart 6) that they experience the full gamut of financial, social and psychological distress displayed by the clients who have a personal a gambling problem: their levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation are comparable with their gambling partner.

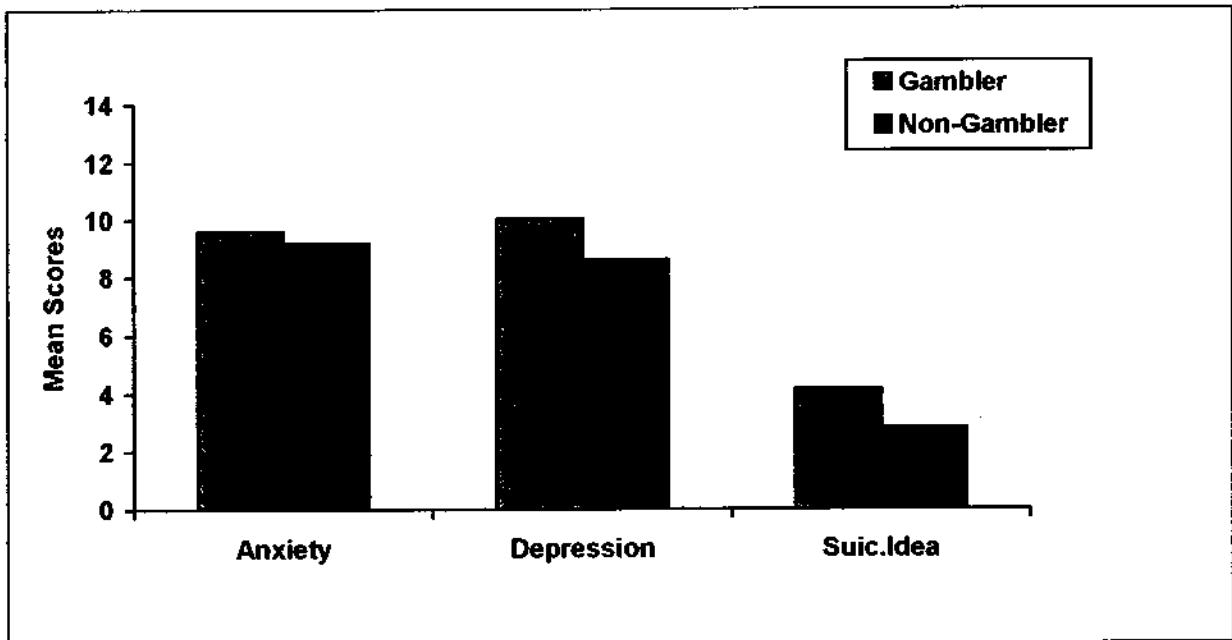


Chart 6 - Mean scores for anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation in gambling and non-gambling clients using Marks Parkin General Health Questionnaire.

The marriages of compulsive [a term Relationships Australia (SA) does not find helpful] gamblers often end in separation or divorce. Nearly half of the spouses of gamblers suffer from depression, headaches, gastrointestinal ailments and insomnia. (Lorenz and Yaffee, 1988). The lying and deceit of the compulsive gambler engenders marital tension. Much of the conflict focusses on money. The family's growing indebtedness leads to defaults of loans, repossession of property, lack of money for everyday necessities, and the harassment of the spouse by creditors (Blume, 1988).

'Geraldine's husband is stealing from the family company. As his business partner, she is terrified about the consequences for herself and her children. They will lose their home if the business collapses. She is afraid about his mental stability. She is on medication for anxiety and depression.'

Criminal activity associated with problem gambling.

Many of our clients who have committed a crime to support their gambling problem report that they have never done anything like this before. We believe that the incidence of gambling related crime is under reported: very few families will lay charges against another member of their family and many employers are also reluctant to press charges.

Children

40% of our clients have an average of 1.5 dependent children. It is perhaps not unreasonable to assume that, if our client group represents a random sample, a minimum of 4,400 South Australian children under the age of 16 are directly affected by the problem gambling of a parent and the distress and problems this creates for the other parent.

Very little is known about the impact of parental problem gambling on children in Australia. North American research indicates serious levels of pathology in the children as well as their parents. Children of problem gamblers live in a volatile and confusing environment. The gambling parent is likely to ignore them and dismiss their needs on the one hand and at other times to be doting and indulgent. The children respond to this seesawing relationship by feeling angry, hurt, lonely, guilty, abandoned and rejected. The home environment of pathological gamblers may leave children socially isolated and physically and emotionally deprived (Lesieur and Rothschild, 1989), and are two to three times more likely to be abused by both the gambler and by the spouse, who may abuse the children to vent anger and frustration about his or her spouse's gambling (Lesieur and Rothschild, 1989; Lorenz, 1987).

Because of financial problems and marital discord, children experience stress-related illnesses such as allergies, asthma and digestive disorders. Fear and anxiety about their own welfare and worry about family stability contribute to poor school performance.

'John', a University student, is a separated father of three young children. His gambling problem was exacerbated by drinking. He became deeply depressed and actively suicidal when he realised that he had not collected the children from school because he was playing the pokies and he had no idea where they were. Some months of counselling later, with his gambling and drinking problems under control, he is dealing with the impact of his problems on his relationship with his children.

A study by Jacobs *et al* (1989) examined the impact of problem gambling on children. They found that children of problem gamblers were at consistently greater risk than their peers in the following areas:

- ◆ **Health threatening behaviours** (smoking, drinking, drug use, overeating and gambling). When asked to check their primary goal when indulging in each of a list of potentially addictive substances and activities, the children of problem gamblers were 20% more likely than their peers to identify "escape" from "emotional tension", an unhappy home or "a humdrum life".
- ◆ "The consistently higher frequencies of unusual, dissociative-like reactions are a sombre indication that children of problem gamblers not only indulge more frequently and more heavily in potentially addictive substances and activities, but also that they appear to be at much greater risk for developing a frank addictive pattern of behavior". (Jacobs *et al*, 1989, p.265).

- ◆ **Psychosocial risk indicators** (broken homes, unhappy childhood, legal action pending, overall quality of youth rated as 'poor').
- ◆ **Psychological problems** (Dysphoria [profound sadness], school and work problems and suicide attempts).

Jacobs *et al* (1989) also makes the point -

“Dramatically underscoring the greater pervasiveness and seriousness of the combined family, health and personal adjustment problems faced by children of parents described as problem gamblers is the finding that their level of acknowledged attempts to commit suicide was twice that of their classmates who attributed no problems with gambling to their parents (12 vs 6%)”.

Jacobs *et al* believe that “the results reflect a definite linkage between parental problem gamblers and elevated risks for dysfunctional behaviors among offspring ... One cannot resist the conclusion that, without early and competent intervention, children of problem gamblers - (a) will be seriously disadvantaged when attempting to solve their present and future problems of living, and (b) as a consequence are, themselves, high-risk candidates for developing one or another form of dysfunctional behavior, including one or another addictive pattern of behavior.” (pp.266-7).

Lesieur and Rothschild (1989) further researched Jacobs' views and tested children of Gamblers Anonymous members in the United States. They noted that, when compared with nationally-normed samples from intact families, the GA children were more likely to have experienced physical violence in general and abusive violence in particular. GA and GamAnon members were more likely to throw something, slap or spank, kick, bite or hit with a fist, and hit or try to hit with something than parents in the nationally-normed group. 73% of the control group, 80% of GA fathers and 88% of GA mothers admitted using one or more violent tactic to resolve conflict with their children.

We are very concerned at the lack of knowledge about the impact of problem gambling on Australian families and children and consider that research into it should be instigated as a matter of priority. We are pleased to be partners with the Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital in a qualitative research project designed to find out from children and young people their experience of growing up in a family where a parent has or has had a gambling problem.

Impact on employers

It is clear from discussion with our clients that problem gambling has a significant impact on their productivity as employees. Our clients come from all walks of life and many of them express concern about the impact their problem gambling is having on their ability to concentrate at work. They report thinking about "slipping out" at tea and lunch breaks and often coming back late. We are also aware that clients take sick leave when they are particularly distressed by their own or their partner's gambling.

An international financial consultant whose wife had a significant gambling problem reported that he was unable to concentrate at work when he knew she was likely to be gambling. This man had extremely high levels of anxiety and depression and scored 9/9 for suicidal thinking at first contact. His anxiety was particularly high when he was overseas representing his firm in high level negotiations.

In discussions with supervisors in a state government organisation concern was expressed at the extent of problem gambling at middle and senior management levels. It was the view of those at this meeting that senior management would be reluctant to provide information to staff about recognising the signs of problem gambling in staff or their client group because of their personal involvement with the problem.

C. CAN PEOPLE WITH A GAMBLING PROBLEM BE ASSISTED?

Relationships Australia (SA): Model of Practice

Problem gambling does have the potential for solution. It is our experience that the earlier the person decides to change their behaviour or access professional help the easier it is to resolve gambling problems.

A clear understanding of Skinner's psychological principles of operant conditioning has informed the development of Relationships Australia (SA) Gambling Rehabilitation Service's model of service delivery that connects people to a counsellor as quickly as possible.

We provide a range of services:

- ◆ Community education - workshops and information sessions.
- ◆ A Self-Help Kit, winner of a National Innovation Award, is distributed through various community organisations and to telephone enquirers.
- ◆ Telephone counselling - this has the advantage of anonymity and convenience, which is important for many.
- ◆ Office-based individual and family counselling.

Not only do we need to be available quickly to callers who are often very distressed and in crisis but also the counselling process is often intense and time-consuming. People expect to speak to a counsellor when they ring the toll-free number, as this facility is promoted as a telephone counselling service. Should a counsellor not be available immediately,

arrangements are made for a return call. Not all callers want, or are ready for, face-to-face counselling.

Relationships Australia (SA) has developed and distributed over 3,000 copies of a National Award-winning Self-Help Kit which provides information for family members and problem gamblers about how to recognise and respond to gambling problems, as well as information for people wishing to take charge of their gambling behaviour without professional assistance. Feedback from readers indicates that it is found to be useful and suggestions from readers have been incorporated in subsequent editions.

Once clients have decided that they are ready to work on their problems, they often need counselling over several months in order to assist them in their management of the ups and downs associated with taking control of their gambling problem.

The focus of therapy includes:

- ◆ Crisis management: which includes immediately assisting clients with legal, financial and relationship issues.
- ◆ Attention to gambling behaviour, which includes the development of individual strategies to modify or cease this behaviour.
- ◆ Resolution of underlying issues, such as relationship breakdown, grief and loss, recovery from childhood sexual and physical abuse, in order to ensure long-term effectiveness of intervention.
- ◆ Management and response to lapses.

Contrary to popular myth, scientists have so far been unable to identify the “addictive personality” or “gambling” gene. The experiences of Relationships Australia (SA) in working with people with a gambling problem indicate that anyone can develop such a problem. In particular, the combination of a recent tragedy associated with the powerful behavioural learning principles that form the basis of the gaming machines and the pervasiveness of such machines constitute a “problematic gambling cocktail.”

D. POSITIVE TREATMENT OUTCOMES

Our data indicates that clients can learn to change their gambling behaviour. Many clients have reported either a marked reduction in gambling or complete abstinence after therapy.

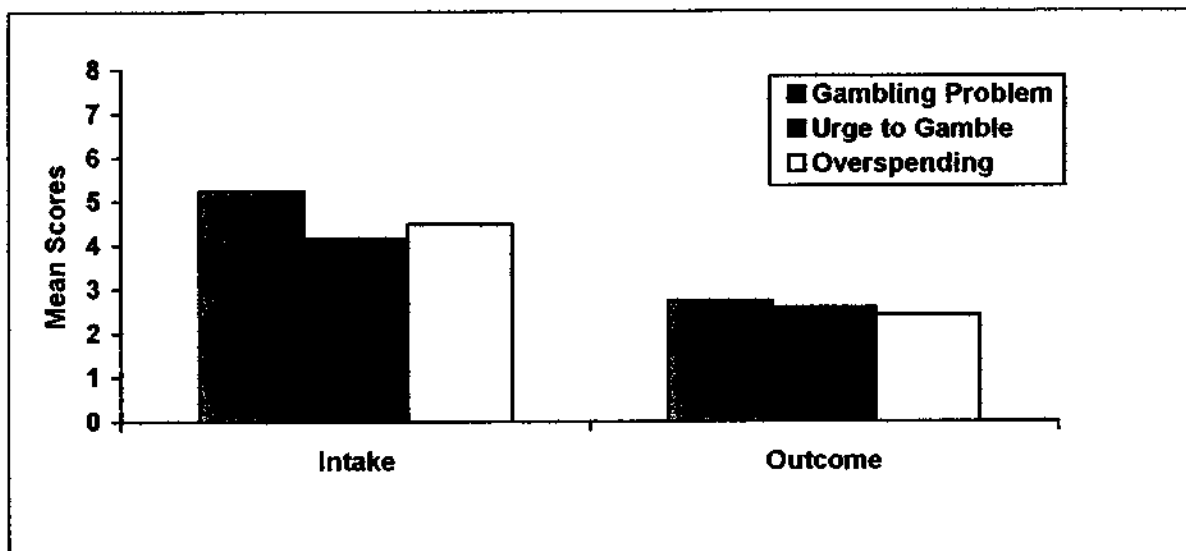


Chart 7 - Changes in mean scores from intake to outcome for state of gambling problem, urge to gamble and overspending in a gambling session. Relationships Australia (SA).

In addition, significant improvements in our clients' psychological well-being have also been noted in the reductions in anxiety, depression and suicidal ideas expressed in our outcome data (Chart 7).

'James', a bank executive, married with two pre-school children, was very distressed when he contacted Relationships Australia. He could not understand how he, an intelligent, well-educated person had developed the habit of "slipping into a pub" during working hours and again after work when he should have gone straight home. He was very fearful of the impact of his gambling on his finances, his marriage and his job. Once the link between his gambling and work stress became clear, he was able to reduce his level of gambling, but his pregnant young wife is still distressed and highly anxious.

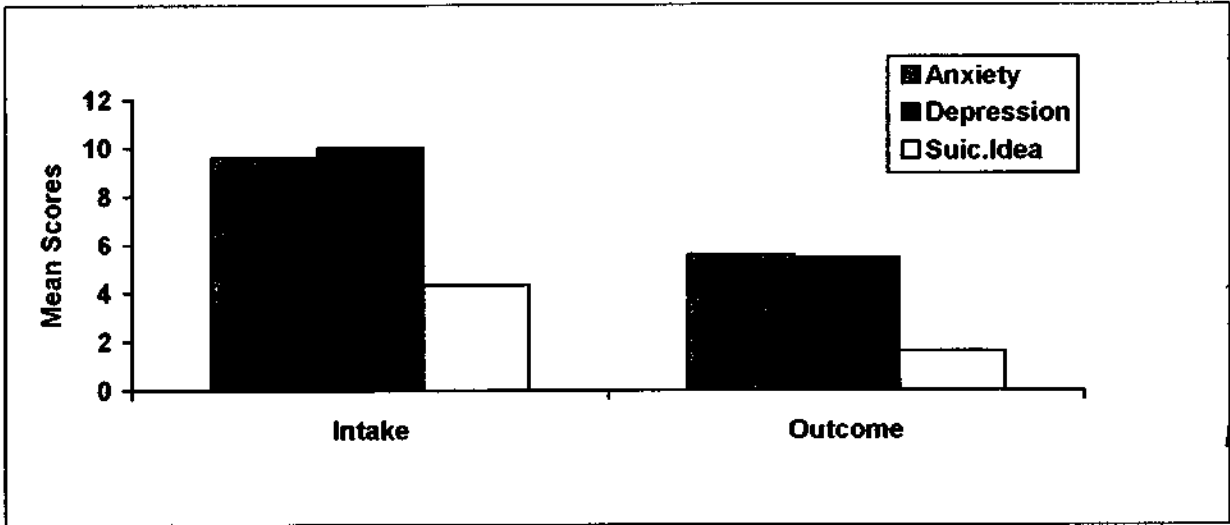


CHART 8 - Changes in mean scores from intake to outcome for levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation: Marks Parkin General Health Questionnaire. Relationships Australia (SA) *BreakEven* Gambling Rehabilitation Service. (November 1996 to February 1998)

These analyses lead to the conclusion that people can slip from social gambling into problem gambling and that, with help, the reverse can occur. Stress levels associated with problem gambling can be reduced, which is evidenced by the lowering of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation scores.

SECTION 3 - IDENTIFIED ISSUES AND ASSOCIATED RECOMMENDATIONS

A. SERVICE DELIVERY

Staffing

Given the complexity and severity of the problems with which clients are presenting to the *Break Even* Gambling Rehabilitation Service, it is crucial that sponsoring organisations and the counsellors they employ are adequately trained and resourced for the task.

Recommendation 1

That service standards for agencies providing gambling rehabilitation services acknowledge the severity and extent of the problems clients present, and that funding be sufficient to employ appropriately-qualified and experienced people to adequately staff gambling rehabilitation services.

Using the Break Even Service

The publicity campaign which occurred in South Australia in the first half of 1997 promoted a free call service. During office hours, callers are connected with a service provider but not necessarily the agency which services their area. Many of our callers have made it clear that they expected to be connected immediately to a counsellor. While Relationships Australia (SA) does this whenever possible, our level of staffing does not ensure that this always occurs. Given the levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation mentioned earlier in this report, it is our professional opinion that such a service is necessary.

Statistics provided to Relationships Australia (SA) by the Department of Family and Youth Services indicate that approximately 25% of callers are attempting to use the service outside normal business hours. There has been a steady and increasing demand for the limited number of evening appointments offered by the *Break Even* Service of Relationships Australia (SA). The current level of funding does not enable us to provide any more evening appointments without reducing the level of service delivery available during normal office hours.

Recommendation 2

That funding levels to service providers be sufficient to provide a significant amount of "after hours" counselling without reducing daytime services.

Relationships Australia (SA) has noted that there appears to be a direct link between advertising and media copy and callers to our *Break Even* Service. Not all callers use the advertised toll-free number.

In spite of the focus of the media campaign on gambling problems related to gaming machines, many of our clients are experiencing problems with other gambling codes. We consider that any new media campaigns should not focus exclusively on gaming machines.

Despairing clients who contact our service inform our counsellors that one of the most important factors leading to their continued contact is the counsellor's ability to instil the hope that change is possible.

Recommendation 3

That an ongoing media campaign be mounted to inform the community of gambling rehabilitation services. The campaign should -

- ◇ focus on all gambling codes;
- ◇ take a harm minimisation approach
- ◇ promote a message of hope as opposed to despair.

Recommendation 4

That all gambling venues publicly display information about how to reach the *Break Even Gambling Rehabilitation Service*

Service Provision to Country Clients

Relationships Australia (SA) receives \$65,000 to service the Murraylands and Riverlands areas. We are very concerned that we are limited in our ability to respond to the very real needs of an already disadvantaged group of South Australians.

Given the large distances that need to be covered, the multiple office sites and telephone services required, we suggest that funding to country service providers be increased so that they can more adequately meet the needs of these remote communities.

Recommendation 5

That funding be increased to enable service providers to better respond to the needs of South Australians living outside the metropolitan area.

Entertainment in country towns tends to be centred on hotel and club facilities, which almost invariably have gambling facilities. It is our professional opinion that country people should be able to use the other facilities offered by these venues without either themselves or their children being exposed to gambling (see Recommendation 12). This is often very important for rehabilitated gamblers and their families.

Young clients in Murray Bridge have clearly identified their concern at the lack of suitable venues for social gatherings that do not have gambling facilities.

It is of concern to a great number of country South Australians that many country communities have no access to gambling-free venues for family meals - unlike the metropolitan area, where there are cafes and restaurants providing a gambling-free alternative.

Aboriginal Problem Gambling

We have already noted the links we have observed between the development of problem gambling and loss associated with death, separation and changes in health status. An Issues Paper released by the Queensland Department of Families, Youth and Community Care in February 1995 suggested that whilst the increased availability of legalised forms of gambling has enabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to enjoy an additional form of leisure/entertainment ... they are disproportionately incurring gambling-related negative social and economic impacts (1995).

Discussions with individuals and services connected with Aboriginal people have revealed widespread concern about the impact of the introduction of gaming machines on Aboriginal people and communities. Specific concerns have been expressed to us about the effect of Aboriginal women's problem gambling on both their families and communities because of their key positions in Aboriginal society.

Relationships Australia (SA) is also concerned about the impact of the introduction of gaming machines on Aboriginal people who we believe are particularly vulnerable because of the extensive and multiple losses experienced by them. We are acutely aware of our responsibility to provide gambling rehabilitation services to Aboriginal people in the Riverlands and Murraylands areas and note this obligation is specified in our funding agreement.

It takes more than a notation in a document, however, to provide a truly accessible and appropriately-staffed service. We note the remarks of the Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) that the involvement of Aboriginal people in mainstream services is essential for such agencies to serve their Aboriginal clients effectively. He stated that their involvement must be well thought out, be at an appropriate level and be structured so that they contribute effectively with the minimum amount of role conflict.

We have been very cautious about connecting with Aboriginal communities because we are very aware of the risks attached to working in a piecemeal or under-resourced fashion. We believe we would be better able to serve Aboriginal clients if we were specifically funded to employ Aboriginal liaison workers.

Recommendation 6

That gambling rehabilitation service providers providing services in areas where there are significant numbers of Aboriginal people be funded to employ Aboriginal workers in addition to current staff.

Recommendation 7

That funding be made available to Aboriginal organisations to enable them to respond to the gambling problems in their communities.

Responding to the Impact on Families

Our statistics show that 33% of our clients are partners or family members. It is clear from our data collection that they experience the full gamut of financial, social and psychological distress displayed by the people with a gambling problem: their levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation are comparable to their gambling partner. The negative impact of problem gambling on children was highlighted earlier in this report.

Recommendation 8

That gamblers' rehabilitation funds target young people both as family members and as problem gamblers in their promotions.

Recommendation 9

That data collection and research relating to problems concerning young people routinely collect information about parental problem gambling. This information should be available to service providers and the general public.

Recommendation 10

That independent research into the impact of problem gambling on children and young people be conducted as a matter of urgency.

There appears to be considerable community concern about the effects of gambling on children. Participants in our workshops and seminars have drawn our attention to the fact that gaming rooms in numerous venues are not sealed off from other facilities. This enables children unrestricted access to the gaming areas. Consequently, gambling is role modelled to children as a normal adult behaviour. Jacobs *et al* (1989) found that children who are exposed to gambling through parental activity are more likely to engage in such behaviours.

Recommendation 11

That gaming rooms have doors which are kept closed at all times and that Licensees be required to remove children from gaming rooms.

B. RESEARCH

While acknowledging that there has been considerable research conducted throughout the world, information about the nature and extent of problem gambling in South Australia is minimal. Relationships Australia (SA) considers that independent research projects are required to explore the effects of gambling in our State. This will lead to the Government and community developing a better understanding of the implications and costs of the rapid expansion of legal gambling in the last decade or so.

Recommendation 12

That a study be conducted in South Australia in order to determine the extent of problems experienced by children and young people in this State.

Recommendation 13

That gambling rehabilitation service providers be funded to establish independent and substantial research projects, staffed by suitably-qualified people. The findings of such research should be in the public domain.

Recommendation 14

That research be conducted to identify:

- ◇ the social, economic and emotional impact of problem gambling on South Australian people who are self-identifying (that is, those who have identified that they have a problem and have contacted a funded service for help);
- ◇ the factors that precipitate, sustain and exacerbate problem gambling;
- ◇ the level and extent of gambling-related crime;
- ◇ effective techniques for working with gambling-related problems;
- ◇ the links between problem gambling and child abuse and neglect;
- ◇ the impact of location of EFTPOS machines on levels of gambling activity.

Recommendation 15

That there be a moratorium on the expansion of gambling facilities until research has identified the personal and financial costs to our community of current gambling opportunities.

C. GAMBLING INDUSTRY

Relationships Australia (SA) acknowledges that the Australian Hotels Association and the Licensed Clubs Association have acted responsibly in providing the funding for gambling rehabilitation services in South Australia. We note that the industry is the sole provider of funding. We believe it is imperative that the processes of the Gamblers' Rehabilitation Fund are clearly separate and independent of the Independent Gaming Corporation. We believe that the Gamblers' Rehabilitation Fund membership should be drawn from outside the industry, Government and *BreakEven* service providers.

Recommendation 16

That the South Australian Gamblers' Rehabilitation Fund be reconstituted, with its membership drawn other than from industry, Government and providers.

Although the Gamblers' Rehabilitation Fund has been established to respond to gaming machine gambling, and all promotion has focussed on this form of gambling, significant numbers of people are contacting us with problems related to other forms of gambling.

28% of Relationships Australia (SA)'s problem gambling clients' difficulties are related to other gambling codes:

- | | | |
|----------------|---|-----|
| ◆ Casino games | - | 6% |
| ◆ TAB | - | 19% |

As noted earlier in this report, there appears to be a connection between referrals and promotion of *Break Even*: therefore, it would seem likely that, if advertising were inclusive of all gambling codes, the number of people with problems related to other codes would increase.

Recommendation 17

That all gambling codes contribute to gamblers' rehabilitation funds.

Recommendation 18

That the focus of media campaigns and promotional materials be on gambling in general and not centre exclusively on gaming machines.

The State Government legalised gaming machines and, through taxation, is a major beneficiary. It owns the Lotteries Commission, the TAB and the Casino. Relationships Australia (SA) believes the Government should accept a direct responsibility for providing rehabilitation services to people who have been damaged by the decision to allow gaming machines into South Australia.

Recommendation 19

That state governments direct a proportion of their gambling revenue to the gamblers' rehabilitation funds.

In South Australia gambling a small proportion of gambling generated State revenue is made available to community organisations for one-off grants. Such grants are of limited use.

Recommendation 20

That funds from government funded community benefit funds be available for more than one-off grants.

Unlike the tobacco and alcohol industries, there is currently no legislatively-prescribed code of practice for advertising for the gambling industry. Our clients tell us that self-regulation of gambling advertising is insufficient and inappropriate, given the financial incentives to providers of gambling facilities to maximise gambling activity.

Recommendation 21

That a Code of Practice be developed for the gambling industry. Such a code should require that, in advertising for all forms of gambling, the odds of winning are accurately stated in every advertisement and that the method of pay-out be clearly identified.

Recommendation 22

That the Gaming Advertising Code of Practice Working Party be re-established.

Relationships Australia (SA) notes the comments, and supports the following recommendations, made by the Anglican Community Services in their "Fair Play" report dated May 1997:

- ◆ that the issue of cash accessibility in gaming venues be reviewed;
- ◆ that the practice of extending gaming options to people in an intoxicated state be outlawed, with penalties inclusive of loss of licence upon repeat offences;
- ◆ incentives related to gaming products not include alcohol that can be immediately consumed; and
- ◆ that an Environmental Code, applicable to all gambling codes and venues, be established - that is, protocols and a system for ensuring their enactment. The following matters to be addressed:
 - ◇ strategic positioning of clocks in venues in range of patrons' vision;
 - ◇ venues to have access to natural lighting;
 - ◇ EFTPOS receipts to state the balance of funds remaining in the account after a transaction;
 - ◇ all gaming venues to have signs on display, indicating the contact number of *Break Even* Gambling Rehabilitation Services.
- ◆ Gaming machines to be modified in the following ways:
 - ◇ credit display be converted to a recording of dollar display;
 - ◇ digital clock displays be inserted in the top right corners of screens;
 - ◇ return to player rate be displayed on all machines;
 - ◇ the pace of gaming cycle be extended to six seconds;
 - ◇ machines automatically shut down for 20 seconds after a win of 250 times the original bet;
 - ◇ machines to release pay-out into coin tray after wins of 100 times the original bet.

CONCLUSIONS

The expansion of legal gambling opportunities in South Australia has occurred with little apparent thought for the social and economic consequences. This report presents evidence of the personal and social costs borne by problem gamblers and their families who are clients of our *Break Even* Gambling Rehabilitation Service.

This calls for expansion of the funding for the Gamblers' Rehabilitation Fund and makes suggestions for further development of community responses to identified issues.

Support is given to calls for National and State research to quantify the social and economic costs of the gambling boom.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- ◆ **Recommendation 1**
That service standards for agencies providing gambling rehabilitation services acknowledge the severity and extent of the problems clients present, and that funding be sufficient to employ appropriately-qualified and experienced people to adequately staff gambling rehabilitation services.

- ◆ **Recommendation 2**
That funding levels to service providers be sufficient to provide a significant amount of “after hours” counselling without reducing daytime service.

- ◆ **Recommendation 3**
That an ongoing media campaign be mounted to inform the community of gambling rehabilitation services. The campaign should -
 - ◇ focus on all gambling codes;
 - ◇ promote a message of hope as opposed to despair.

- ◆ **Recommendation 4**
That all gambling venues publicly display information about how to reach the *Break Even* Gambling Rehabilitation Service.

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