

## **Gambling:**

A study from the University of Chicago 1999, for most people who gamble, gambling is an occasional recreational pastime but for growing Americans, gambling is compulsive and pathological. Male compulsive gamblers outnumber female compulsive gamblers 2 to 1. Women more than men seem to use gambling as a means of escape from depression, traumas, or relationship problems.

### **There are 4 types of gamblers:**

1. Recreational / Social gambler: they are able to separate gambling from the rest of their lives. These are the majority of gamblers.
2. Professional gambler: they are able to take losses as part of the game. It is a business for them; they are able to make a living. They are few.
3. Antisocial gambler: they will steal to gamble and has no conscience.
4. Pathological gambler: who are obsessed with gambling, getting the money to gamble, and figuring out ways in action. There are two types of pathological gamblers:
  - Action-seeking compulsive gambler: stereotype of the gambler; always in action, frenetic, excited (Hunter, 1997)
  - Escape-seeking compulsive gambler: often drawn to slot machines, especially poker.

Like other addictions, pathological gambling seems to be a progressive disorder requiring more episodes and larger amounts of money bet to relieve anxiety and tension. The similarity to substance addictions is emphasised by the fact that there is a high rate of other addictions among pathological gamblers – other behavioural and substance addictions occur in 25% to 63% of pathological gamblers (NORC, 1999). Symptoms of persistent recurrent pathological gambling (positive diagnosis with five or more of the following) are:

1. Preoccupation with gambling (re-living past experiences, planning future ones);
2. Gambling with increased amounts of money;
3. Repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling;
4. Restlessness and irritability when attempting to control, cut back, or stop;
5. Gambling as an escape;
6. Attempts to recoup previous losses;
7. Lying to others to conceal gambling;
8. Illegal acts to finance gambling;
9. Jeopardization or loss of job, relationship, or educational or career opportunity;
10. Reliance on others to bail gambler out of pressing debts.

(APA, 1994)

#### **Male & Female differences:**

- Male pathological gambler- often begins in early adolescence
- Female pathological gambler – typically begins in later life

They are both likely than the general population to have a parent who was a problem gambler. A study by Lesieur, Blume & Zoppe (1986) said that the risk of heavy or compulsive gambling was 65% if the father gambled, 30% if the mother gambled, and 40% if a sibling gambled.

#### **Gambling has various phases:**

1. Winning phase: initially gambling is recreative and pleasurable for the action-seeing gambler, e.g. bets are small and consequences insignificant. The feelings from playing, winning or breaking, satisfy the gambler. Skills improve and gambler gains confidence even over confidence in his/her ability. This phase can last one year to ten years. In 70% to 80% of compulsive gamblers, there is a big win that fuels the craving to gambling. The big win to the gambler is like the first intense rush to cocaine user – never forgotten and forever chased.

The player comes to rely more and more on the high to deal with undesired moods and relationships or other problems. They begin to believe in luck and magic to solve problems. They remember their wins and minimise their losses. Their gambling ability and company of other

Gamblers boost their self-esteem. This phase does not really exist for escape gamblers, e.g. poker machine, slot machine, keno, bingo.

Example lottery players if they play regularly, they will eventually win but overall they will lose. For them, a good day is breaking even while in action for hours at a time.

2. Losing phase: losing is particularly devastating to compulsive gamblers. It all starts with a losing streak that is inevitable due simply to the laws of chance but if the gambler's tolerance has increased and they are betting large sums, the suddenness of heavy indebtedness can be startling. They begin trying to recoup their losses – they begin chasing. Social, job and family tensions multiply. Gamblers may deny the problem or lie to conceal the amount of money involved or the frequency of the gambling. Emotional satisfaction, ego self-esteem, and money are involved. The magic is gone, emotional anguish of appearing to be a loser can be overwhelming. Chasing brings other changes in the gambler: depression, lying, isolation, and irritability. But even when losing, gamblers still rely on gambling for their emotional satisfaction. As losses multiply, the gambler tries to recover them by gambling more, tries unsuccessfully to cut back, swears he/she will never gamble again (but always does), and even seeks a bailout to get out of trouble.
3. Desperation phase: this phase may take decades to develop or might just take a year, especially with machine players. They max out credit cards, borrow from friends and family, and even turn to illegal activities like theft, embezzlement and drug dealing. Their desperation causes them to

play badly, because they lose patience and common sense. They lament that they are the unluckiest people in the world. They fail to acknowledge at this stage that, they keep playing and keep making bad decisions. The gambler often bankrupts the family and suffers from separation because of deteriorating family relations, long absences from home, and arguments over money, and indifference to the welfare of the family.

4. Giving-up phase: pathological gamblers stop thinking that they will win it all back and just want to stay in action. Gamblers can experience insomnia attacks, health problems, and elated moods when they win; mania, depression, panic attacks, and suicidal thoughts or actual attempts when they lose. A study by Gamblers Anonymous found severe depression in 72% of those who say they have hit bottom; suicide attempts in 17% - 24% of them (Linden, 1985).

Video Poker Machines (the “crack” cocaine of gambling):

According to Robert Hunter, an expert in the field of pathological gambling, there are some things that make some games more powerful than others, i.e. more exciting and interesting. For 5% who are pathological gamblers what makes a game exciting for the average person makes it deadly for them.

- Immediacy
- An ability to increase both the time and money to play longer, as well as higher amounts of bets
- The ability to lose yourself in the game, block out external stimuli
- The perception of a skill or control

The video poker mixes them all four, the second place in the addictive hierarchy are the cards and dice and traditional casino table gambling.

*(Uppers, Downers & Arounders, 2000)*