

**TWIST**  **Training With Stakeholders**  
Applying EU Addiction Research



# Problem gambling & behavioural addictions

Annika Lindberg

Psychologist

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# OVERVIEW

- Characteristics
- Progression of a problem
- Typical gambling episode
- How do we treat it?
- Exercise brain storming treatment challenges



# Characteristics and co-morbidities

- Co- morbid mental health issues in particular depression/anxiety – up to 50% (Petry et al, 2005)
- Suicidality
  - 49% treatment-seekers had SI or attempts (Petry et al, 2002)
  - 76% rates of SI in GA group; 20% attempted (Moran, 1969)
- Debt
- Relationship breakdown
- Homelessness
- Unemployment
- Crime



# Common forms of gambling UK

- Bookmakers; betting and Fixed odds betting terminals (FOBTs)
- Internet based gambling: betting, roulette, slot machines and spread betting
- Scratch card and lottery gambling (unusual)
- Stocks and shares as part of trading
- Poker and casino



# Phases of gambling addiction

In order to understand the progression of a gambling problem, 4 phases have been identified.

Please note that these phases are not established in research however are popular among clinicians and patients since they make it possible for gamblers to identify in the descriptions



## progression of a gambling problem phase 1. The winning phase

- Gambling is enjoyable and social.
- Gambling is a great way of relieving stress or other negative emotions.
- The gambler feels great and powerful, and often begins to form irrational beliefs about how likely they are to win, or how much control they have over the game in which they are gambling.
- Still very few negative consequences of gambling





## progression of a gambling problem phase 2. the losing phase

- Increased preoccupation with gambling.
- Bets increase in size, losses are rationalized e.g. 'I can afford to lose this amount' 'I will win it back..'
- Losses become larger and/or more frequent.
- 'Chasing of losses'



## progression of a gambling problem phase 3. the desperation phase

- Gambling becomes increasingly erratic and disorganized.
- Increased psychiatric symptoms; insomnia, depression, anxiety, anger outbursts.
- Disengagement in life activities, avoidance of socialising- the gambler isolates.
- Desperate attempts to recuperate losses, often involving criminal/immoral acts
- The gambler might start to identify their gambling as a problem





## progression of a gambling problem phase 4. the hopelessness phase

- Sense of hopelessness, the gambler may have made substantial losses e.g. close relationships, large amounts of money, house, car, job etc.
- Homelessness and malnutrition.
- Still chasing losses.
- Increasingly depressed mood, often accompanied with suicidal thoughts, ideation and even attempts.
- \*\*gamblers usually seek help in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> phase\*



## Typical gambling experience

- **Prior to gambling:** triggering thoughts, craving, excitement, anticipation, adrenaline 'rush'
- **During gambling:** Preoccupation, Superstitious behaviour, Buzz, Excitement; Total relief from negative thoughts and emotions, Internal irrational talk (cognitive distortions)
- **After gambling:** regret, guilt, anger and disappointment. Feeling out of control and like a failure. Rumination and worrying. Desperation and hopelessness common.



## Some of the underlying mechanisms..

- Excitement and relief from negative mood states important reinforcers.
- Short term gains are achieved far quicker than long term negative consequences of gambling
- Learning theory – classical and operant conditioning. Variable reinforcement schedules make reinforcement strong.
- Possibility that some individuals with gambling problem already have an decreased ability to await rewards (delay discount research, Petry). This can explain why stronger and more immediate rewards would be appealing to this subgroup.
- Gambling is a way of coping with difficult mood states ‘escapism’
- ‘faster pace’ games are more addictive



## Subgroups in gambling disorders: The 'Pathway' model Blascynski & Nower

Based on 'Pathways model':

- Emotionally vulnerable gambler
- Behaviourally conditioned gambler
- Antisocial/impulsive gambler

Treatment style and recovery rates can differ quite drastically.



## Pathways model contd.

- According to the model all three types have developed gambling problems through behavioural conditioning (e.g. the early experience of big wins, or positive feedback from peers or parents).
- In addition, the latter two categories involve individuals who have further predisposing factors to become pathological gamblers, either through:
  - emotional vulnerability such as, e.g., depression (Pathway 2) or
  - impulsivity and antisocial features (Pathway 3).





# Treatment for Problem gambling

COCHRANE REVIEW 2012:

*The reviewers concluded that the current evidence supports CBT for the treatment of pathological and problem gambling and is consistent with recommendations that CBT should be classified as best practice, but also that it has highlighted important caveats to this advice, with a lack of high quality evidence and continuing uncertainty about whether any short term benefits are sustained*





# Typical treatment program CBT – outline

## Practical/Psycho-education/behavioural interventions

- Stimulus control: money management
- Access to bookmakers/casino
- Increasing activity & structure
- Increase life balance; eating, sleeping, priorities
- Planning of time and other activity
- Start *tackling* issues (breaking out of persistent procrastination cycles)

## Cognitive /thinking interventions:

- Dealing with trigger thoughts
- Cognitive distortions and maladaptive beliefs
- Increase *problem solving (reduce worrying/rumination)*

## Emotional regulation & dealing with cravings

address depression/anxiety

Relapse prevention

Alternative rewards

improve emotional coping

ALSO: relationships/family issues



## Additions to treatment; based on sub-group

- **Behaviourally conditioned gambler:** increasing physical activity, increased balance, identify new interest (increase creativity), planning and prioritising, learning patience
- **Emotionally vulnerable gamblers:** Increased problem solving, address persistent habits of worrying/rumination, attachment problems common
- **Anti-social impulsivist gambler:** extensive input on stimulus control and practical management, increase organisation and balance, address impulsivity first-hand.

**For all groups it is also important to identify longer term values and goals- the individual needs to feel that there is a purpose to getting better!**



## **Similarities with other behavioural addictions in treatment.. (sex & video gaming)**

- Uncover underlying drivers of the addiction
- Most interventions will be useful for any addictive behaviour also including drug/alcohol addiction
- Build an image of how the addiction has impaired the individual's life and make efforts to address these areas
- Procrastination, worrying/rumination and emotional coping tools depending on needs
- Planning, organising and stimulus control highly relevant for any addiction



## Differences...

- Sex addictions; shame, attachment problems (commonly avoidant attachment/ intimacy & commitment issues) , impact on existing relationship and troubles within the relationship needs addressing
- Video gaming addiction; help-seeking individuals usually present with underlying learning difficulties such as ADHD, ASD and social skills deficit.
- Video gaming addicts usually are younger and brought in by parents- hence little or no motivation to get better and /or lacking in awareness.



# **Case study; challenges for treatment**

## **Paul; 34 Behaviourally conditioned gambler**

Paul is a 34 year old banker whom has been gambling for 13 years. He started making small bets online many years ago when he was still at University and feels that his gambling was still fairly innocent up until 2 years ago when for some reason or another he started losing big amounts.

He feels that this is when he lost control over the gambling and started becoming 'sloppy' in his betting patterns. He was making large bets, taking out payday loans and even managed to spend the £30,000 he received as an inheritance- money that his wife still thinks is sitting in their mutual saving fund to be able to purchase a flat.

He is in a real pickle now as he is aware that his wife has started looking online for properties... When his wife caught him with gambling the first time a few years ago she told him in no uncertain terms that she will not stand by him should his gambling ever reoccur in the future.





Paul as a character;

- No prior history of mental health problems
- 'fast pace' – needs high levels of stimulation; gets bored very easily
- Greedy for money/material things and often mentally 'lazy' – prefers achievement that is achieved quickly and without too much effort.
- Loves instant gratification in all areas of life!
- Emotionally stable in general but can be irritable and moody; especially in relation to his gambling
- Often searches for a buzz, impatient, competitive, multi-focused, cannot complete tasks.





## **Donald, 54 An emotionally vulnerable gambler**

Donald has presented in therapy with his long standing issues of gambling addiction. He has been in and out of treatment the last decade however has never really committed himself properly.

He first started gambling as an 11 year old when his grandmother used to take him to the arcade by the seaside shortly after he lost his Father in a car accident. He recalls to this day the emotional escape he enjoyed in those arcades...in fact he is still very nostalgic about it. Sadly for Donald his life has pretty much been damaged by his gambling.

Although talented as personal chef he has managed to sabotage most of his jobs through being unreliable, moody and on one occasion he even stole an item from a house where he worked.

He identifies that relationships scare him; in fact he never had one that lasted more than 6 months. His commitment fear is not confined to relationships only. He is so anxious about loss in life that he finds himself living on the edge in every respect not even being able to sign a proper telephone contract . If I don't attach to things – there is less to lose he argues.



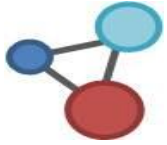
## Donald; Character traits:

- Emotionally unstable; frequently depressed and anxious
- Poor coping skills and problem solving skills in general
- Loneliness and lack of purpose
- Frequently feels victimized – ‘it is not my fault that my life turned out this way’
- Deep shame and regret over his life; persistent rumination over past
- Struggles to maintain relationships
- Never had any interests outside of gambling



# Learning from today?

- The basics of treatment for problem gambling
- the diverse needs of problem gamblers and the importance of individual focus
- Treatment challenges and how to think about them



Thank you!

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