



UNIVERSITY OF
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Treatment-seeking problem gamblers:
characteristics of individuals who offend to
finance gambling

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Introduction

Gambling:

- *Placing something of value, (usually money) on an event (often a game), of which the outcome is uncertain, in the hope of gaining something of greater value*
- Prevalence approximately **60%** (UK)
- Significant harms at individual, community, and societal levels.



Introduction

Gambling in Prison Populations:

- Ranges from 12.1%- 40%
- 65% severe problem gamblers report gambling-related criminal behaviour
- Incarceration directly related to gambling
- Higher levels of psychosocial harms.



Introduction

Criminality:



- Crime may actually be an indicator of the severity of disordered gambling
- Gambling related criminality seen in patients with most severe clinical profiles- mostly problematic drug and alcohol use
- Research mainly:
 - **forensic populations** (e.g., Abbott & McKenna 2005; Abbott et al., 2005; May-Chahal et al., 2017; Preston et al., 2012; Turner et al., 2009)
 - or **outside UK** (e.g., Mestre-Bach et al., 2018; Blaszczynski & McConaghy, 1994).

Gambling and Criminal Behaviour

National Problem Gambling Clinic:

	(n=1128) 92.0%
	(n=98) 8.6%

- Average Age= 35.6 years, all problem gamblers
- Prevalence of criminal behaviour committed to finance gambling
- Are clinical characteristics different- more severe?



Method

Questionnaires:

- PGSI (Problem Gambling Severity Index)
- **Offending Behaviour:** Illegal behaviours to finance gambling: ✓ or ✗
- Mental Health, Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) depression
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) anxiety
- Debts and Losses, childhood trauma, gambling history, relationships.

Problem Gambling Severity Index

This self-assessment is based on the Canadian Problem Gambling Index. It will help you decide if you wish to seek other forms of support or information.

When you think of the past 12 months, have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?

0 Never 1 Sometimes 2 Most of the time 3 Almost always

Still thinking about the last 12 months, have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?

0 Never 1 Sometimes 2 Most of the time 3 Almost always

When you gambled, did you go back another day to try to win back the money you lost?

0 Never 1 Sometimes 2 Most of the time 3 Almost always

Have you borrowed money or sold anything to get money to gamble?

0 Never 1 Sometimes 2 Most of the time 3 Almost always

Have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling?

0 Never 1 Sometimes 2 Most of the time 3 Almost always

Has gambling caused you any health problems, including stress or anxiety?

0 Never 1 Sometimes 2 Most of the time 3 Almost always

Have people criticized your betting or told you that you had a gambling problem, regardless of whether or not you thought it was true?

0 Never 1 Sometimes 2 Most of the time 3 Almost always

Has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household?

0 Never 1 Sometimes 2 Most of the time 3 Almost always

Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?

0 Never 1 Sometimes 2 Most of the time 3 Almost always

Results

Psychiatric and Family History:

	Non-Offending %	Offending %	P-Value
Mental health diagnosis	31.60	45.30	0.001
Childhood abuse	14.10	24.10	0.001
Physical	5.80	8.50	0.074
Sexual	1.30	4.90	0.001
Emotional	4.40	5.30	0.443
Multiple	2.60	5.30	0.015
Family history of mental health problems	32.40	43.10	0.001
Previous gambling disorder treatment	56.70	66.80	0.001

Results

Clinical Scores:

Variable	Non-Offending	Offending	P-Value
	Median (IQR)	Median (IQR)	
PGSI (Problem Gambling)	20 (7)	23 (7)	0.001
PHQ-9 (Depression)	11 (12)	14 (11)	0.001
GAD-7 (Anxiety)	10 (10)	11 (10)	0.001

Results

Gambling History:

Variable	Non-Offending %	Offending %	P-Value
Early big win	50.20	55.60	0.069
Loss of job due to gambling	12.40	25.70	0.001
Loss of relationship due to gambling	32.10	41.30	0.001
Variable	Median (IQR)	(Median IQR)	P-Value
Days gambled in the month	15 (17)	20 (15.75)	0.028
Money lost in past month	£1500 (£2900)	£1500 (£2500)	0.097
Total losses	£40,000 (£90,000)	£40,000 (£97,000)	0.871
Age at first gamble	22 (10.25)	20 (9)	0.001

Discussion

Summary and Theoretical Perspectives:



- **42.5%** of participants had engaged in offending to finance gambling; consistent with international literature (e.g. Blaszczynski & McConaghy, 1994; Meyer & Fabian, 1992; Potenza et al., 2001)
- Crime committed:
 - to subsidise gambling or gambling-related debt (Blaszczynski & McConaghy, 1994)
 - due to the stress of gambling debt (Blaszczynski & McConaghy, 1991)
 - as an activity synchronous with other unlawful endeavours (Meyer & Stadler, 1999)
 - due to disinhibiting co-occurring substance use or impulsivity disorder (Preston et al., 2012).



Discussion

Links:



- Instrumental link between crime and gambling (Blaszczynski & McConaghy, 1991) ✓
- Co-symptomatic link; gambling and offending stem from the same underlying disorder (Blaszczynski & Silove, 1996) ✓
- Coincidental link (no relationship between the two) (Blaszczynski & McConaghy, 1994). ✗

Discussion

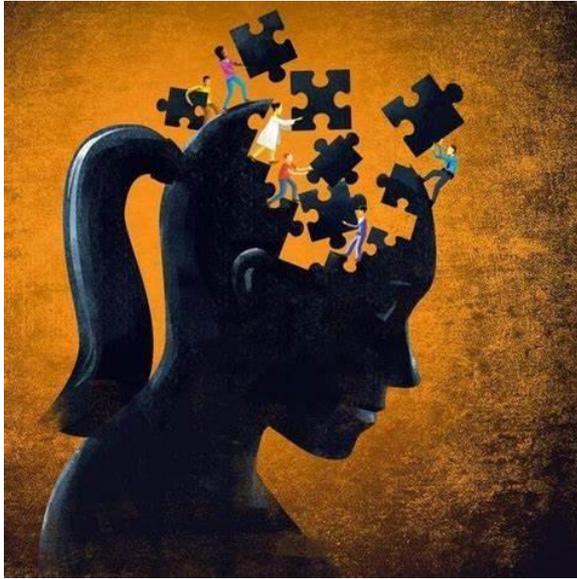
Impulsivity?

- Exact framework still unspecified
- *Impaired impulse control?*
- Disordered gambling associated with elevated impulsivity (Hodgins & Holub, 2015)
- Elevated impulsivity associated with criminality (Lynam & Miller, 2004).



Discussion

Childhood Adversity and Traumatic Life Events:



- Higher rates of childhood abuse, family history of mental health difficulties, relationship and job loss
- Individuals with gambling problems= greater childhood maltreatment and trauma (Roberts et al., 2017)
- Maltreatment increases likelihood of criminality (Currie & Tekin, 2012)
- Offending mediated by distinctive demography, impulsivity and varying clinical and personality traits.

Discussion

Limitations:

- Treatment seeking population
- Predominantly males
- Offending not corroborated with official records
- Did not ask about specific crimes.



Discussion

Conclusion:

- Disordered gamblers who offend-distinct and complex subgroup with distinct vulnerabilities
- More severe psychopathology, early negative life experiences and social stressors
- Mediated by diverse array of factors such as impulsivity
- More holistic and collaborative approach to treatment.



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