

CESAR BRIEFING

Substance Misuse and Pathological Gambling

CESAR Briefings are designed to provide concise answers and information on requested topics related to substance abuse, and are available online at www.cesar.umd.edu. For additional information or to request a *CESAR Briefing*, please contact Erin Artigiani at 301-405-9794 or erin@cesar.umd.edu.

How much of a problem is pathological gambling?

The Gambling Impact and Behavior Study (April 1999), conducted for the U.S. National Gambling Impact Study Commission (NGISC), was the first U.S. national survey on gambling since 1975.¹ The study estimates that pathological gamblers make up about 1.2% of the U.S. population and problem gamblers make up about 1.5%; another 7.7% of the population are considered at-risk for problem gambling. All three of these groups tend to be disproportionately male, non-White, lower income, single, and young (18-29). Pathological and problem gambling prevalences are about twice as high among populations living within 50 miles of a casino. Women's gambling patterns are starting to resemble men's.

Is there a relationship between pathological gambling and substance abuse?

In the NGISC study, 20% of pathological gamblers and 14% of problem gamblers reported having been dependent on alcohol and/or drugs in their lifetime. The Iowa Gambling Treatment Program found that 23% of clients seeking treatment for gambling reported a history of treatment of substance abuse.² By contrast, 4.9% of the general population aged 12 and over report alcohol or drug dependence in the past year.³

Research studies among pathological gamblers have regularly found evidence for co-existing substance abuse and gambling dependencies. Moreover, people may use alcohol and/or drugs when they gamble, whether at a casino, a racetrack, or the neighborhood poker game. Gamblers use drugs to stay awake and to reduce stress while gambling.

In what ways are gambling and substance abuse similar?

Gambling and drugs induce similar feelings and reactions. Similarities include poor impulse control, a euphoric state when gambling similar to a "high" from drugs, and increased "tolerance;" for example, pathological gamblers often increase the size of their bets to get the same excitement level. Similarities are also present in risk factors, withdrawal symptoms, and relapse patterns.

Are adolescents also at risk?

Youth aged 16 to 17 have less access to gambling, but according to the NGISC, their rates of pathological and problem gambling are similar to those of adults, and their rate of being at-risk for problem gambling is double the adult rate. Several research studies have found that adolescents who gamble are more likely to drink, smoke, and use drugs.⁴

This *CESAR Briefing* was supported by BYRN-2003-1007, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) through the Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention (GOCCP). The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the program offices and bureaus. Points of view or opinions contained within this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of USDOJ or GOCCP.

Substance Misuse and Pathological Gambling

For More Information

This fact sheet was prepared by the Center for Substance Abuse Research using the following sources:

Griffiths, M; Parke, J; et al. (2002) Excessive gambling and substance abuse: Is there a relationship? *Journal of Substance Use*, 7(4), 187-190.

The Wager, a weekly addiction gambling education report produced by the Harvard Medical School, can be located at www.thewager.org.

Responsible Gaming Quarterly, produced by the American Gaming Association, can be located at www.americangaming.org/rgq/rgq-index.cfm.

¹ National Gambling Impact Study Commission. (1999). *Gambling impact and behavior study, Report to the National Gambling Impact Study Commission*. Retrieved February 9, 2004, from <http://www.norc.uchicago.edu/new/pdf/gamble.pdf>.

² Shaffer, H, LaBrie, R, et al. (2002). *Iowa Department of Public Health gambling treatment services: Four years of evidence*. Retrieved February 9, 2004, from <http://www.hms.harvard.edu/doa/html/publications/iowa.pdf>.

³ Office of Applied Studies. (2003). *Results from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of national finding* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 03-3836, NHSDS Series H-22). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved February 10, 2004, from <http://www.samhsa.gov/oas/nhsda/2k2nsduh/html/toc.htm>.

⁴ Spunt, B., Dupont, I., et al. (1998). Pathological gambling and substance misuse: a review of the literature. *Substance Use and Misuse*, 33(13), 2535-2560.