



HELP SHEET

Women's Experiences of Problem Gambling

Over the past decade there has been a significant increase in the number of women experiencing difficulties with gambling. Whilst in 1999 the Productivity Commission found that men and women are equally represented amongst those experiencing problems with gambling the report commented on the feminisation of gambling which has become apparent since the widespread introduction of gaming machines in most of Australia during the 1990's. From 1991 when 14% of "problem gamblers" were female there was a three-fold increase to 40% in 1999 (International Journal of Gambling Studies, Vol 1, Sept., 2001).



Research indicates that one of the prime motivators for women who gamble is the sense of escape it provides. For many this described as a temporary forgetting of overwhelming problems – a kind of self – medicated form of anaesthetic.

Over her lifetime a woman experiences varied and changing roles - often requiring immediate and continuous adjustment from wife, carer, parent, bread winner, family carer, parental carer, etc. Once children leave school women often find that once again a change in role leaves them with more time available and less responsibilities and perhaps more time for relaxation. It has been suggested that some women see their gambling as a reward for all the years spent parenting (Thomas as cited in International Journal of Gambling Studies Vol 1, Sept., 2001).

Problems with gambling often emerge later in women than for men and in many studies escape from depression, anxiety and an unhappy home life have been cited

as reasons for gambling amongst women. Additional issues such as domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse and troubled childhoods can significantly contribute. Chronic loneliness, boredom and frustration are also often stated by women and significant influences on their gambling behaviour.

The consequences for women experiencing problems with gambling have also been recognised as different from men. Women's responsibility for nurturing roles within the family can lead to considerable feelings of shame and guilt which can create barriers to gaining support or professional assistance. The social stigmas of failure and the sense of community expectation can exacerbate a woman's distress sometime leading to further gambling to cope with adverse events and a development of an ongoing cycle of destruction.

Women are often dependent upon others for income and may have few independent means, their disposable income may be low and even small debts can cause considerable stress.

It is evident then that women's experiences of problem gambling may differ from their male counterparts.

Research suggests that women are more likely to use gambling as a form of escape from depression, boredom and stress. Women may be reluctant to seek help due to the stigma of gambling and failing to meet community expectations of their role. They may also fear the consequences of abusive partners and a perception of social costs in seeking treatment such as child protection issues. However, some women enter treatment earlier than men due to their greater stress over concerns about debt often owed to family and friends rather than lending institutions.



Gambling Impact Society (NSW) Inc.



Department for Women