



Gambling and Crime

Research has indicated that problem gambling is strongly associated within criminal activity. The prevalence of disordered gambling is greater among offenders than in the general population. There is a clear need to screen those who commit criminal acts for gambling problems and to address problem gambling among offending populations, as they may be at increased risk, and most in need of treatment.

- **Roughly 50.0% of problem gamblers commit crimes^{1,2,3}**
- **The majority of crimes committed by problem gamblers are fueled by their gambling (either to obtain money to gamble with or to pay gambling debts)**
 - Over two-thirds of pathological gamblers who committed crimes reportedly did so as a direct result of gambling: 40.4% reported only committing crimes related to their gambling¹

“80 to 90 percent of people in Gamblers Anonymous will tell you they did something illegal in order to get money to gamble. A lot of them do white collar crimes, fraud, credit card and employee theft.” *(Looney, 1998)⁴*

- **More severe gambling problems are associated with increased criminal activity**
 - 68.8% of offenders assessed as severe problem gamblers reported stealing or obtaining money illegally to pay for gambling/gambling debts, compared to 26.3% of moderate problem gamblers⁵
- **Lifetime correctional costs of problem gamblers in the current Georgia population have been estimated at \$249,159,000⁶**
 - Lifetime correctional costs averaged across all disordered gamblers have been estimated at \$2,950 per pathological gambler and \$2,210 per problem gambler⁷
- **Costs of property crimes related to gambling are in the millions**
 - Of nearly 400 Gamblers Anonymous members: the majority (57.0%) reported having stolen to finance gambling, together they stole \$30 million (of money and/or property)
 - This equates to an average amount stolen by each person who reported stealing of \$135,000⁸
- **Offending populations have the highest prevalence of pathological or problem gamblers of any population: among incarcerated felons 73% were assessed as probable problem gamblers⁹**
- **Most crimes committed by problem gamblers were white-collar and non-violent, and were intended to obtain money for purposes related to gambling**
 - These crimes most often include: fraud, forgery, embezzlement, larceny, selling drugs or stolen items, shoplifting, burglary, and petty theft or robbery⁷
 - 63.0% of Gamblers Anonymous members reported writing bad checks and 30.1% reported stealing from the workplace³
- **Pathological and problem gamblers are arrested over three times more often than low-risk gamblers and over seven times more often than non-gamblers⁸**



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- Pathological gamblers are imprisoned at nearly twice the rate of problem gamblers, and at nearly six times the rate of low-risk gamblers⁸



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- **High rates of co-morbidity, which may be related to offending**
 - Incarcerated felons with an alcohol/drug problem were more likely to have a gambling problem¹⁰
 - Over 80% of pathological gamblers were at risk for alcohol or drug abuse/dependency¹¹
 - Pathological gamblers who also have a substance abuse problem were significantly more likely than those without a co-morbid condition (problem gambling **or** substance abuse) to report having assaulted someone, stolen, or sold drugs within the past year¹¹
- **Those most in need of treatment rarely get help:**
 - Only 5.4% of offenders assessed as having a gambling problem reported having ever been in treatment or attending a self-help group for gambling¹²
 - Among those incarcerated who were aware that they had a gambling problem, between 74% and 60% reported wanting help, yet only about 25% of them sought assistance^{13,14}
- **The more severe the gambling problem, the less likely offenders are able to quit without help**
 - Only 21% of probable pathological gamblers reported they were able to stop gambling by without help, compared to 44% of problem gamblers¹²
- **Lack of awareness on the part of the individual that they have a gambling problem**
 - Only 21% of incarcerated individuals assessed as having a gambling problem were aware of it¹⁴

LIE-BET TOOL TO RULE OUT PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING¹⁶

This 2-item measure has been found to be reliable and valid at discriminating between pathological and non-problem gamblers. A response of “Yes” to either question indicates further assessment is warranted.

- 1) **Have you ever felt the need to bet more and more money?**
- 2) **Have you ever had to lie to people important to you about how much you gambled?**

For more information visit the GSU Problem Gambling Research and Intervention Project web site:

www.GeorgiaGamblingHelp.org

This site offers resources related to problem gambling prevention and treatment. For additional help or technical assistance contact Jennifer Zorland at psyj1z@langate.gsu.edu

¹ Blaszczynski, A., McConaghy, N., & Frankova, A. (1989). Crime, antisocial personality, and pathological gambling. *Journal of Gambling Behavior*, 5(2), 137-152.

² Potenza, M. N., Steinberg, M. A., McLaughlin, S. D., Wu, R., Rounsaville, B. J., & O'Malley, S. S. (2001). Gender-related differences in the characteristics of problem gamblers using a gambling helpline. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 158, 1500-1505.

³ Schwer, R. K., Thompson, W. N., & Nakamuro, D. (2003, February). *Beyond the limits of recreation: Social costs of gambling in southern Nevada*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Far West and American Popular Culture Association, Las Vegas, Nevada.

⁴ Looney, E. Testimony Before the National Gambling Impact Study Commission, Atlantic City, New Jersey (January 22, 1998) (Executive Director, New Jersey Council on Compulsive Gambling).

⁵ Lahn, J. (2005). Gambling among Offenders: Results from an Australian Survey. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 49, 343-355.

⁶ Zorland, J., Mooss, A., Perkins, A., & Emshoff, J. (2008). *Problem Gambling among offending populations*. Presented to the Department of Health and Human resources, Atlanta, Georgia: Georgia State University.

⁷ National Opinion Research Center [NORC]. (1999, April). *Gambling Impact and Behavior Study*. Retrieved November 1, 2007 from <http://www2.norc.org/new/gamb-fin.htm>

⁸ Lesieur, H. R. (January 22, 1998). Testimony before the National Gambling Impact Study Commission, Atlantic City, New Jersey Institute for Problem Gambling. Retrieved November 12, 2007, from <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/ngisc/reports/7.pdf>

⁹ Williams, R. J., Royston, J., & Hagen, B. (2005). Gambling and problem gambling within forensic populations: A review of the literature. *Criminal Justice and Behavior: An International Journal*, 32, 665-689.

¹⁰ Anderson, D. (1999). Problem gambling among incarcerated male felons. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 29, 113-127.



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- ¹¹ McCorkle, R. (2002). *Pathological gambling in arrestee populations* (Final report prepared for National Institute of Justice). Las Vegas, NV: Department of Criminal Justice.
- ¹² Walters, G. (1997). Problem gambling in a federal prison population: Results from the South Oaks Gambling Screen. *Journal of Gambling Studies, 13*, 7-24.
- ¹³ Abbott, M. W., McKenna, B. G. & Giles, L. C. (2000). *Gambling and problem gambling among recently sentenced males in four New-Zealand prisons*. New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs.
- ¹⁴ Abbott, M. W., & McKenna, B. G. (2000). *Gambling and problem gambling among recently sentenced women prisoners in New-Zealand*. New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs.
- ¹⁵ Johnson, E. E., Hamer, R., Nora, R. M., Tan, B., Eistenstein, N., & Englehart, C. (1988). The lie/bet questionnaire for screening pathological gamblers. *Psychological Reports, 80*, 83-88.