



## **Depression, Suicide and Problem Gambling**

Research suggests that problem [PG] and pathological [PAG] gambling is associated with depression and suicidal tendencies. As problem gambling progresses eventually the gambler is hopeless and depressed, may be suicidal, estranged from significant others, is being hounded by collection agencies or loan sharks, and roughly 25% are facing imminent arrest. There are generally four possible outcomes: suicide, incarceration, absconding, or obtaining treatment<sup>1</sup>. The association between gambling and suicide appears to exist within the general adult population, as well as among youth. Women with a gambling problem may be at increased risk of experiencing severe depression and contemplating and/or attempting suicide.

### **Depression**

- An estimated 70 - 76 % of PAGs have a lifetime history of depression<sup>2</sup>.
- Primary care patients who expressed concern about their gambling were nearly 3 times more likely to report being depressed than those who did not have these concerns<sup>3</sup>.
- PGs were 3 times more likely to suffer from a major depressive episode than non-PGs<sup>4</sup>.
- A sample of adults in treatment for PG reported that depression led to increased problem gambling behaviors<sup>5</sup>.

### **Research suggests that PG is associated with suicidal tendencies**

- Those who attempted suicide were nearly 4 times more likely to be PAGs<sup>6</sup>.
- PAGs were 5 to 10 times more likely to attempt suicide than people in the general population<sup>7</sup>.
- PAGs had significantly higher levels of suicide proneness (ideations and attempts) than others<sup>8</sup>.
- Among Gamblers Anonymous members 12-18 % have attempted suicide, 45-49 % made plans to kill themselves, 48-70 % contemplated suicide, 80% reported they "wanted to die"<sup>9</sup>.

### **Females and smokers with a gambling problem at increased risk of suicide**

- Among women with a gambling problem 45% indicated having suicidal ideation and 29% had attempted suicide<sup>10</sup>.
- Among young adults female problem gamblers reported significantly more suicidal thoughts, as well as attempts than did their male counterparts<sup>11</sup>.
- Smokers were more likely than non-smokers to cite being depressed and to be considering suicide due to gambling problems<sup>15</sup>.



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## Georgia High School students: Gambling, depression and suicide<sup>12</sup>

- Feeling sad or hopeless significantly predicted higher gambling frequencies
  - Suicide attempts in last 12 months significantly predicted higher gambling frequencies
  - Both of these associations were stronger among females than males
- \*Frequencies of gambling: a summed score of how often youth bet on cards, games, sports and the lottery

## Environmental risk factors

- The availability of gambling opportunities may be related to suicide. Although causality cannot be inferred, Nevada had the highest rate of suicide of any state in 2004 (19.2 per 100, 000), while the national rate was 10.9<sup>13</sup>.

## Warning signs/risk factors of suicide

- Of 44 suicides in which the coroner’s report indicated the presence of disordered gambling the highest risk factors for suicide included<sup>14</sup>:
  - experiencing a large financial loss
  - when it is believed gambling related criminal activity is going to be discovered
  - suffering from depression
  - high levels of debt
  - experiencing relational problems

## LIE-BET TOOL TO RULE OUT PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING<sup>16</sup>

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](http://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](mailto:psyj1z@langate.gsu.edu)

<sup>1</sup>Lesieur, H. R., & Custer, R. L. (1984). Pathological gambling: Roots, phases, and treatment. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 474, 146-156.

<sup>2</sup>McCormick, R. A., et al., (1984). Affective disorders among pathological gamblers seeking treatment. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 141, 215 - 218.

<sup>3</sup>Goodyear-Smith, F., Arroll, B., Kerse, N., Sullivan, S., Coupe, N., Tswa, S., Shepard, R., Rossen, F., & Perese, L. (2006). Primary care patients reporting concerns about their gambling frequently have other co-occurring lifestyle and mental health issues. *BMC Family Practice*, 7(25).

<sup>4</sup>Petry, N. M., Stinson, F. S., & Grant, B. F. (2005). Comorbidity of DSM-IV Pathological Gambling and Other Psychiatric Disorders: Results From the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 66(5), 564-574.

<sup>5</sup>Westphal, J. R., & Johnson, L. J. (2003, May). Gender differences in psychiatric comorbidity and treatment-seeking among gamblers in treatment. *Electronic Journal of Gambling issues*, 8, 1-15. Retrieved from <http://www.camh.net/egambling/archive/pdf/EJGI-Issue8/EJGI8-research-westphal.pdf>

<sup>6</sup>Newman, S. C., & Thompson, A. H. (2003). A population-based study of the association between pathological gambling and attempted suicide. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior*, 33(1), 80-87.

<sup>7</sup>Lesieur, H. R., & Klein, R. (1985, April). *Prisoners, gambling and crime*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, Las Vegas, NV.

<sup>8</sup>Ladouceur, Boudreau, & Jacques (1999). Pathological gambling and related problems among adolescents. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse*, 8(4).

<sup>9</sup>Thompson, W. N., Gazel, R., & Rickman, D. (1997). Social and legal costs of compulsive gambling. *Gaming Law Review*, 1(1): 81-89. doi:10.1089/glr.1997.1.81.

<sup>10</sup>Boughton, R., & Falenchuck, O. (2007). Vulnerability and Comorbidity Factors of Female Problem Gambling, *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 23(3).

<sup>11</sup>Feigelman, W., Gorman, B. S., & Lesieur, H. (2006). Examining the relationship between at-risk gambling and suicidality in a national representative sample of young adults. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 36(4), 396-408.

<sup>12</sup> Georgia Student Health Survey (adapted from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey)(2005).

<sup>13</sup> Department of Health and Human Services (2007). *Suicide in Nevada* [Fact Sheet]. Office of Suicide Prevention. Retrieved from



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<http://dhhs.nv.gov/Suicide/DOCS/Suicide%20in%20Nevada%20Fact%20Sheet%20Public.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Blaszczynski, A., & Farrell, E. (1998). A case series of 44 completed gambling-related suicides. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 14(2), 93-109. doi: 10.1023/A:1023016224147

<sup>15</sup> Potenza, M. N., Steinberg, M. A., McLaughlin, S. D., Wu, R., Rounsaville, B. J., Krishnana-Sarin, S., George, T. P., and O'Malley, S. S. (2004). Characteristics of tobacco-smoking problem gamblers calling a gambling helpline. *The American Journal on Addictions*, 13, 471-493. doi:10.1080/10550490490483044

<sup>16</sup> 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.