

SIEC Alert #61, February 2006

## *When Gambling Becomes a Problem*

### **Incidence**

As opportunities for licensed gambling have increased, gambling as a social pastime has become popular throughout Canada and the United States. The National Council on Problem Gambling (2005) reports that more than 70% of American adults gambled at least once in the previous year. In Canada, federal net revenues from gambling increased from \$1.7 billion in 1992 to \$6 billion in 2003 (Statistics Canada, 2003). Offsetting these revenues, however, were more than \$10.2 billion in gambling losses across Canada (Canada West Foundation, 2001). As licensed gambling has flourished, so has the prevalence of problem gambling worldwide. Research has estimated the lifetime prevalence of pathological gambling to range from 0.4% to 3.4% to as high as 7% in Puerto Rico and Australia.

Although suicide attempts among pathological gamblers are more frequent than in the general population, the true incidence of suicide related to gambling may never be known. The Canada Safety Council (2004) estimates the number to exceed 200 a year and suggests that for every one of these suicides, five gamblers may be hospitalized with self-inflicted injuries.

### **Gamblers and Suicidal Behaviour**

There is no conclusive data on suicide deaths due to problem gambling. However, research on suicidal ideation and attempts is revealing:

- ◇ In a study reviewing all consecutive admissions to the Gambling Treatment Program of the Louis Stokes VA Medical Centre over a 12-month period, 64% of suicide attempters reported that their most recent attempt was related to gambling (Kausch, 2003). According to Beaudoin and Cox (1999), 50% of individuals seeking treatment for gambling problems may report a history of suicidal ideation.
- ◇ Compared to nonsuicidal gamblers, suicidal gamblers often suffer more psychiatric symptoms, are less satisfied with their living situations, and experience more days of conflict in the month before entering treatment (Petry & Kiluk, 2002). Pathological gamblers display increased levels of depression (Newman & Thompson, 2003), impulsiveness and substance abuse that places them at an elevated risk of suicide (Bourget et al, 2003).
- ◇ Elderly gamblers are just as likely to have a lifetime history of suicidal ideation and to be diagnosed with a psychiatric illness (typically depression) as younger cohorts of gamblers (Kausch, 2004).
- ◇ The Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Centre (1995) reported a dramatic increase in problem gambling-related calls after the Louisiana government legalized more forms of gambling than allowed in other American states. 10% of calls were related to gambling and 9.3% of these callers expressed suicidal intent.

### **Definitions**

Problem, compulsive, and pathological gambling are terms often used to describe the continuum of gambling behaviour. The National Council on Problem Gambling (2005) describes problem gambling as all patterns of gambling behaviour that compromise, disrupt, or damage personal, family, or vocational pursuits. Pathological gambling, also known as compulsive gambling, describes gambling as an addiction and disease. The American Psychiatric Association (2000) classified pathological gambling as a mental disorder in 1980 but does not use this diagnosis if the behaviour is better accounted for by a manic episode.

### **Diagnosing a Gambling Problem**

The DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) lists 11 symptoms associated with compulsive gambling disorder, including:

- ◇ Preoccupation with gambling
- ◇ Repeated unsuccessful attempts to control, cut back, or stop gambling
- ◇ Gambling in order to escape problems or to relieve a dysphoric mood
- ◇ Lying to family members, therapists, or others to conceal the extent of gambling involvement
- ◇ Committing illegal acts to finance gambling.

**Centre for Suicide Prevention**  
#320 1202 Centre St. S.E.  
Calgary, Alberta  
Canada T2G 5A5  
phone: (403) 245-3900  
fax: (403) 245-0299  
web: [www.suicideinfo.ca](http://www.suicideinfo.ca)

When Gambling Becomes a Problem continued from page...

## PROBLEM GAMBLING: WHO CAN HELP

The following are some of the many resources and agencies available to help people with their gambling problem. Check your local telephone directory or contact one of the national agencies for more details:

### Canada

Responsible Gambling Council  
Phone: 1-888-391-1111  
Web: [www.responsiblegambling.org](http://www.responsiblegambling.org)

### United States

National Council on Problem Gambling Inc.  
Phone: (202) 547-9204  
Web: [www.ncpgambling.org](http://www.ncpgambling.org)

### International

Gamblers Anonymous  
Phone: (213) 386-8789  
Web: [www.gamblersanonymous.org](http://www.gamblersanonymous.org)

## SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Photocopies of the documents listed below are available from the Centre for Suicide Prevention library. Please contact us for pricing information.

### SIEC #030422

Beaudoin, C. M., & Cox, B. J. (1999). Characteristics of problem gambling in a Canadian context: A preliminary study using a DSM-IV-based questionnaire. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 44(5), 483-487.

### SIEC #051404

Bourget, D., Ward, H., & Gagné, P. (2003). Characteristics of 75 gambling-related suicides in Quebec. *CPA Bulletin*, 35(6), 17-21.

### SIEC #950461

Campbell, F. R. (1995). Gambling + suicide = crisis centers. Are you in or out? *Proceedings of the American Association of Suicidology*, 28, 1-17.

### SIEC #041399

Griffiths, M. (2004). Betting your life on it: Problem gambling has clear health related consequences. *BMJ*, 329(7474), 1055-1056.

### SIEC #050574

Kausch, O. (2004). Pathological gambling among elderly veterans. *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neurology*, 17(1), 13-19.

### SIEC #041048

Kausch, O. (2003). Suicide attempts among veterans seeking treatment for pathological gambling. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 64(9), 1031-1038.

### SIEC #040671

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

### SIEC #052089

Petry, N.M., & Kiluk, B. D. (2002). Suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in treatment-seeking pathological gamblers. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 190(7), 462-469.

### Pricing Information

You can order copies of these articles from the Centre for Suicide Prevention Library. Simply contact us by phone or e-mail.  
Alberta: \$6.00 per document (subsidized by Alberta Health and Wellness)  
Outside Alberta: \$10.00 per document  
Please order by SIEC Number.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

URLs are current at time of publication.

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. (2004). *AADAC's adult clients: April 2003 to March 2004*. Retrieved January 13, 2006, from [http://corp.aadac.com/content/corporate/research/profile\\_adult\\_clients.pdf](http://corp.aadac.com/content/corporate/research/profile_adult_clients.pdf)

Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. (2005). *Revenue*. Retrieved January 13, 2006, from [http://www.aglc.gov.ab.ca/gaming/provincial\\_lotteries/VLT/vlt\\_revenue.asp](http://www.aglc.gov.ab.ca/gaming/provincial_lotteries/VLT/vlt_revenue.asp)

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV-TR*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.

Canada Safety Council. (2004). *Canadian roulette*. Retrieved January 18, 2006, from <http://www.safety-council.org/info/community/gambling.html>

CanadaWestFoundation. (2001). *Gambling in Canada 2001: An overview*. Retrieved January 13, 2006, from [http://www.cwf.ca/abcalcw/doc.nsf/\(Publications\)/866FE244FF51B28087256BD5006193CF/\\$file/200107.pdf](http://www.cwf.ca/abcalcw/doc.nsf/(Publications)/866FE244FF51B28087256BD5006193CF/$file/200107.pdf)

National Council on Problem Gambling. (2005). *G2E flyer: What is the biggest issue facing the gaming industry?* Retrieved January 18, 2006, from [http://www.ncpgambling.org/media/pdf/g2e\\_flyer.pdf](http://www.ncpgambling.org/media/pdf/g2e_flyer.pdf)

Statistics Canada. (2003). *Gambling: An update*. Retrieved January 18, 2006, from <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/030422/d030422c.htm>

### E-mail / Download Instructions

If you have WEB access, you can download this and future issues. Go to: <http://www.suicideinfo.ca/csp/go.aspx?tabid=23>  
Would you prefer to receive future editions by e-mail? Please send your name and e-mail address to [csp@suicideinfo.ca](mailto:csp@suicideinfo.ca)