MY GAMBLING STORY

Broadcast Monday 15 October at 8.30pm
Repeated Friday 19 October at 9am
89.7 PBA FM in Adelaide

Study Guide

Program 2 – Who is at risk of problem gambling?

Gamblers who present for help with problem gambling come from a wide range of socio-economic, ethnic and age groups. In the early days of gaming machines (July 1994 onwards) women were represented in greater numbers than men. This resulted from the feminisation of gambling which followed the introduction of poker machines. Women who previously would not go into a betting agency to wager on horse racing felt comfortable in going into a hotel where their comfort and security was catered for.

Today, the number of men who have been seduced by poker machine gambling has increased, so that the percentage of men and women presenting for assistance is equal or almost so. This has resulted from the very different nature of gaming machine gambling, as opposed to other forms of risk-taking behaviour.

Gaming machines operate on a sound psychological tenet – that of intermittent reinforcement. The person pressing the button is rewarded for the action at intervals. On a gaming machine this takes the form of an increase in the credits available to the gambler and is indicated to the gambler by the flashing of a light, the sound of music, or a combination of both, depending on the size of the "win".

The music is chosen to be familiar – one machine uses a variation of *The Hallelujah Chorus* to indicate success, for instance. Many gamblers find the sense of action that comes from the sound of the reels turning, the clicking up of credits, and the accompanying music exciting. They do not remember that the guaranteed rate of return to player on a poker machine is 89%, ie 89 cents in $. The house always wins.

The reasons gamblers enjoy gambling vary. Some are seeking a relief from loneliness; others an escape from stressful family or work environments. None go into gambling with the express intention of destroying relationships, facing financial ruin, or committing crimes. The sense of dissociation from reality which is felt in the early stage of becoming a problem gambler is comforting and, like the person who is using illicit drugs, the amount of time and money which needs to be dedicated to achieving an escape from reality increases continually.

The individual gambling on gaming machines goes contrary to the culture of many groups whose members previously engaged primarily in social forms of gambling such as card playing. Mary Ann's story emphasises her feeling of being trapped and her family's inability to lead a normal life while she continued to gamble. Kinship demands that money won is shared, not kept by the individual, similarly losses are losses to all.

Some Discussion Points

- What changes took place in hotels after the introduction of poker machines in South Australia in 1994?
- Why should the feminisation of gambling have had a major effect on families?
- Besides money, what else is lost by the gambler who develops a problem?
- What strategies did Mary Ann use in order to overcome her problem?

For more information:

www.problemgambling.sa.gov.au
http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiry/gambling/docs/finalreport - Australian Government Productivity Commission (*Australia's Gambling Industries* report)

Acknowledgements

My Gambling Story was produced at PBA FM in Adelaide with assistance from the Office for Problem Gambling, through the Department for Families and Communities. This Study Guide has been prepared by May Shotton, financial and gambling counsellor with thirteen years of experience in the field of problem gambling.

Gambling Helpline South Australia 1800 060 757

The Gambling Helpline is a free 24-hour counselling, information and referral service to assist people in South Australia with gambling related problems, or those affected by the gambling of others including family members. The Gambling Helpline can be used by anyone who would like to know more about gambling related problems and how to deal with them.

The Gambling Helpline is funded by the Gamblers Rehabilitation Fund.

South Australian Gambling Help Services

The Gambling Help Services provide free, confidential counselling and assistance for people who are concerned about their gambling behaviour and the families and friends of problem gamblers. Counselling is provided over the telephone and in person and specific counselling is also available. Languages other than English are spoken at some services and interpreter assistance can be arranged.

Disclaimer

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