Gambling: the hidden disorder

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Abstract

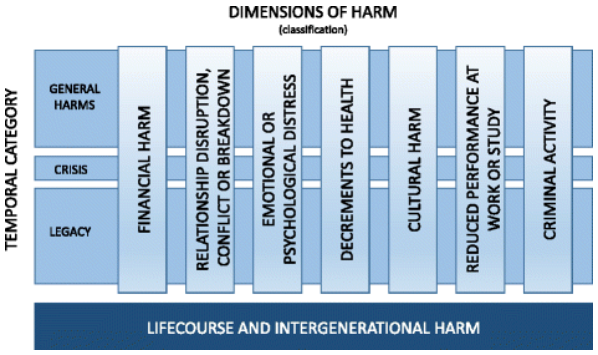
Statement of the Problem: Gambling is common in Australian society – nearly 75 per cent of Australian adults gamble in any year. [1] About 300,000 Australians have a gambling problem, but only 10 per cent of people with problematic gambling behaviour seek help [2]. The hidden nature of gambling disorder has the minimal signs and symptoms concealing the level of severity associated with this condition subsequently causing significant dysfunction for individuals, and families.

Findings: Current research recognises that the course of the disorder can vary by type of gambling as well as life circumstances, and acknowledges the overwhelming evidence indicating its association with consistently high rates of comorbid psychopathology-particularly mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders; other impulse control disorders; bipolar disorder; and antisocial personality disorder.[4] For instance, a meta-analysis of 11 population surveys found high mean prevalence for nicotine dependence (60.1%), a substance use disorder (57.5%), depressive disorders (37.9%), and anxiety disorders (37.4%).[5]

Theoretical Orientation: As the largest Victorian service, Gambler's Help Southern (GHS) offers a range of evidence-based psychotherapeutic interventions often individually tailored and underpinned by cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT), minimal or brief interventions, motivational enhancement therapies (MET), mindfulness-based therapies, group and couple therapies. Newly-created interactive online video psychological interventions and prevention programs will be made available to individuals with problematic gambling behaviour, and families who are mostly new to treatment. Financial counselling delivers a range of interventions integrated with therapeutic and other services. GHS assists close to 2,000 people across Melbourne southern catchments per annum.

Conclusion: While psychological treatment approaches and interventions are essential to manage tertiary prevention of gambling, influencing public policy changes are equally necessary, supporting a range of strategies from prevention, health promotion and treatment, at individual, community, industry and government levels.[6]

Figure1: Conceptual Framework of Gambling Related Harm



1. Thomas SA & Jackson AC (2008) Risk and Protective Factors and Comorbidities in Problem Gambling. Report to beyondblue, Monash University and the University of Melbourne.
2. Productivity Commission (1999) Australia's Gambling Industries, Report No. 10, AusInfo Canberra.
3. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).
4. Ladouceur R. Gambling: the hidden addiction. *Can J Psychiatry*. 2004; 49:501-503.
5. Lorains FK, Cowlishaw S, Thomas SA. Prevalence of comorbid disorders in problem and pathological gambling: systematic review and meta-analysis of population surveys. *Addiction*. 2011; 106:490-498.
6. VRGF (2015) Using a public health approach in the prevention of gambling-related harm, May 2015.

Photograph



Jasminka Vuckovic-Kosanovic is the Clinical Manager of the Gambler's Help program, at Connect Health and Community, in Melbourne, Australia. She has made a significant contribution to community services in particular, designing and implementing early intervention programs in youth mental health and homelessness embedding trauma-informed care into clinical practice and service design.

Her extensive clinical management experience in the community health sector has been brought to bear on clinical complexities of cognitive disability associated with acquired brain injury, childhood trauma, and co-occurring gambling, mental health and other addictive disorders. She has implemented interactive online video psychological interventions and prevention programs for individuals with problematic gambling behaviour, and families who are mostly new to treatment. Jasminka has a Masters of Global Health and Social Work, with her main interest in co-occurring mental health and addictive disorders, has prepared a number of paper presentations, and peer-reviewed articles on these topics.

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