



SIEC ALERT

December 1997, # 27

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SIEC ALERT is a quick reference guide to some of the
newest resources in the field of suicide prevention.

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Contact us if you'd like to be added to our free mailing list, or if you have an idea for a future topic!
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When Gambling Becomes a Problem

Incidence

Gambling, as a popular social pastime has become widespread throughout Canada and the U.S. as opportunities for licensed gambling in the form of casinos, lotteries, and video lottery terminals (VLTs) have increased. In 1996/97, gross gaming revenues for Alberta were 2.7 billion dollars - 24 times higher than they were in the 1970s (Smith, G. & Azmier, J., 1997). According to demographers, gambling is to become a major growth industry as aging Baby Boomers approach retirement. 93% of adult Albertans engage in some form of recreational or social gambling (Wynne, Smith, and Volberg, 1994). Although most people are recreational or 'social' gamblers, who can quit at anytime, an estimated 125,000 Albertans - 5% of the province's population are considered "problem gamblers".

Definitions

Often the words, problem, compulsive, and pathological are used to describe the gambler who is experiencing problems. The term *problem gambler* is sometimes used to refer to individuals who fall short of the diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling but may be in the preliminary development of such a pathology. (Lesieur & Rosenthal, 1990). The National Council on Problem Gambling uses this term to indicate *all of the patterns of gambling behaviour that compromise, disrupt, or damage personal, family, or vocational pursuits. Pathological gambling is synonymous with the more commonly used term, compulsive gambling.* These two terms relate to gambling as an addiction and a disease. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) classified *pathological gambling* as a mental disorder in 1980, and describes the condition as *a continuous or periodic loss of control over gambling; a progression, in gambling frequency and amounts wagered, in the preoccupation with gambling and in obtaining monies with which to gamble; and a continuation of gambling involvement despite adverse consequences* (APA, 1994).

Diagnosing Gambling Addiction

The presence of five or more symptoms indicates a compulsive gambling disorder:

• **preoccupation with gambling** • **a need to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement** • **repeated unsuccessful attempts to control, cut back, or stop gambling** • **restlessness or irritability when attempting to cut down or stop gambling** • **gambling in order to escape from problems** • **often returning to get even after losing money gambling** • **lying to family members, therapists, or others to conceal the extent of involvement in gambling** • **committing illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, theft, or embezzlement to finance gambling** • **jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, job, or career opportunity** • **relying on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling**

Source: American Psychiatric Association (1994)

Gamblers & Suicidal Behaviours

Because motivation for completed suicide is considered multifactorial, there is no firm data on suicide deaths due to problem gambling. However, research on suicide ideation & attempts in gamblers is revealing.

♥ In a cross-national U.S. study of Gamblers Anonymous members, 48% of the sample reported suicide ideation, and 21% had attempted suicide. The suicidal gamblers in this study were more serious gamblers; had gambled at an earlier age; were more likely to steal to support their gambling; and had more disturbed/addicted families. (Frank M. L., Lester, D., & Wexler, A., 1991)

♦ In a randomly-selected community survey in Edmonton, thirty lifetime pathological gamblers were identified from 7,214 interviews. Gamblers had high rates of comorbidity with other psychiatric disorders and 13.3% had made suicide attempts. (Bland, R. C., Newman, S. C., Orn, H., & Stebelsky, G., 1993)

♣ In a study of 50 male pathological gamblers in an inpatient gambling treatment program at a VA hospital in Cleveland, 30% had made a severe/extreme/lethal suicide attempt; and 50% reported moderate, mild, and slight suicide ideation. 76% were diagnosed with major depressive disorder. (McCormick, Russo, Ramirez, Taber, 1984)

♣ A study done by the Baton Rouge Crisis Intervention Center in 1995 reports a dramatic increase in problem gambling related calls, after the state government legalized more forms of gaming than allowed in any other state. (Campbell, 1995) Calls related to gambling jumped from 1% (prior to 1992 legislation) to 10%. Of these gambling-related calls, 9.3% had suicidal content.

Please see verso for a list of SIEC Sources.

Suicide Affects All of Us. Let's Talk About it.

Signs of a gambling problem:

- ♣ **Spends large amount of time gambling**
- ♣ **Begins to place larger, more frequent bets**
- ♣ **Has growing debts**
- ♣ **Pins hopes on the "big win"**
- ♣ **Promises to cut back on gambling**
- ♣ **Refuses to explain behaviour, or lies about it.**
- ♣ **Feels frequent highs or lows**
- ♣ **Boasts about winning & minimizes losses.**

from: "When It's No Longer a Game... Problem Gambling" pamphlet by Alberta Alcohol & Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC, 1995)
See resource info on verso.

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VLTs: Special Concerns

In 1985, the Canadian government granted the provinces authority to conduct lotteries and to manage and operate mechanical gambling devices. The Atlantic provinces were the first to introduce VLTs in 1990, followed by Alberta and Manitoba in 1992, and Saskatchewan in 1993. In 1997, 6,000 VLTs in Alberta grossed \$ 1.6 billion. (Canada West Foundation, 1997)

An AADAC report shows that among problem gamblers who received treatment, VLTs were the most frequent type of gambling (53%), followed by bingo (23%), lotteries (8%) and the casino (8%) (AADAC, 1995).

Problem Gambling: Who Can Help?

Here are some of the many resources/agencies available. Many provinces and states have initiated their own programs. Check your local telephone directory, or contact one of the national agencies for more details.

ALBERTA:

Gambling Information Hotline : 1-800-665-9676

- operated by Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC)
- AADAC also provides treatment, training, and public education

BRITISH COLUMBIA:

Hotline: 1-888-795-6111

MANITOBA:

Hotline: 1-800-463-1554

ONTARIO:

Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling, Ontario

Phone: 416-499-9800

SASKATCHEWAN :

Gambling Hotline: 1-800-306-6789

- operated by Mobile Crisis Services, Regina

UNITED STATES:

National Council on Problem Gambling, Inc.

Box 9419, Washington, DC 20016

1-800-330-8739

Nationwide Helpline: 1-800-522-4700

U.S. & INTERNATIONAL:

Gamblers Anonymous

International Service Office

Box 17173

Los Angeles, CA 90017

Email: isomain@gamblersanonymous.org.

Website: <http://www.gamblersanonymous.org/intlphone.html>

- This page of the International Office website has phone numbers & addresses for GA chapters in Australia, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

SIEC Sources & Resources:

Photocopies Available from SIEC for documents on this list.

(Cost per article: \$6.00 plus postage.

Prepayment is not necessary. Please quote SIEC # when ordering.)

SIEC #930641

Bland, R. C., Newman, S. C., Orn, H., & Stebelsky, G. (1993). Epidemiology of pathological gambling in Edmonton. Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 38(2), 108-112.

SIEC #950461

Campbell, F. R. (1995). Gambling + Suicide = Crisis Centers: Are You in or Out? Proceedings of the American Association of Suicidology, 28, [17 p.]

SIEC #850932

Custer, R.L. (1984). Profile of the pathological gambler. Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 45 (12), 35-38.

SIEC # 920277

Frank, M. L., Lester, D., & Wexler, A., (1991). Suicidal behavior among members of Gamblers Anonymous. Journal of Gambling Studies, 7(3), 249-254.

SIEC #901408

Jason, D.R., Taff, M. L., & Boglioli, L. R. (1990). Casino-related deaths in Atlantic City, New Jersey 1982-1986. American Journal of Forensic Medicine and Pathology, 11 (2), 112-123.

SIEC #890677

Lester, D., & Jason, D. (1989). Suicides at the casino. Psychological Reports, 64, 337-338.

SIEC #841771

McCormick, R. A., Russo, A. M., Ramirez, L. F., & Taber, J. I. (1984). Affective disorders among pathological gamblers seeking treatment. American Journal of Psychiatry, 141 (2), 215-218.

SIEC # 832882

Mikawa, J. & Stotler, C. (1973). Suicide in Nevada: a comparative analysis. Rocky Mountain Medical Journal, 70 (3), 43-49.

SIEC # 960368

Vorkoper, C. F. (1993). Suicide among gamblers: a review of research. Proceedings of the American Association of Suicidology, San Francisco, 26, 152-153.

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SIECALERT is intended to be a brief guide to resources on current topics in the field of suicide prevention, and can not be all-inclusive. Let us know if we missed something!