



Howard League  
for Penal Reform



## **Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling**

**Exploring the lived experience of women, crime and problem gambling**

**Research in partnership with BetKnowMore**

### **Background**

The Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling has published an academic literature review that has shown that there is limited existing research into the relationship between crime and problem gambling (Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling, 2020). Most research has been undertaken in other jurisdictions, notably Australia, the US and Canada. The Commission seeks to understand the relationship between crime and problem gambling in England and Wales. There is a particular gap in research and knowledge relating to the experiences of women in relation to crime, problem gambling, and gambling harms. For example, Adolphe et al's systematic review (2018) looking at the relationship between crime and problem gambling recognised the need for research assessing the role of demographic factors.

Awareness of and research into women's experience of gambling harms is developing. GamCare (2020) reported that 'Each year at least 30 per cent of callers to the National Gambling Helpline identify as female, half of whom call about their own gambling and half about someone else's. One fifth of all clients in GamCare's treatment services are women.' Moreover, GamCare report that 23 per cent of women surveyed discussed crime linked to gambling (ibid.).

Existing research about women, problem gambling and crime suggests that women may commit crime to obtain money to gamble. A Canadian study (Abbott and McKenna, 2005) suggested that half of their sample (who met the criteria for problem gambling) had committed a crime to obtain money to gamble and concluded that most women in the criminal justice system were committing crimes prior to becoming problem gamblers.

The prevalence of women who have criminal justice involvement and have experienced gambling harm is being increasingly recognised. Research looking at arrests has suggested that women are as likely to have gambling problems as men (Lind and Kääriäinen, 2018) while Perrone et al (2013) found that a greater

proportion of their female sample of arrestees could be classified as problem gamblers in contrast to their male sample. Research in Australia and Finland reports that problem gambling is higher among women in prison than the general population. This was not echoed in May-Chahal et al's (2012) research in two English prisons – one male and one female – where men were around twice as likely to report problem gambling. Three per cent of women in prison in this sample identified a link between their current prison sentence and gambling, while this proportion more than doubled (seven per cent) in relation to crimes committed to finance gambling or pay off gambling debts.

### **The research**

This research seeks to focus on and amplify the voices of women directly affected by gambling harms, acknowledging intersectionality. It aims to highlight the complex interplay between crime and problem gambling through in-depth qualitative research about people's lived experiences. The overarching goal of this research is to develop and situate a knowledge base within the criminal justice system which recognises gambling harms and the specific related needs of women, thus lowering the potential for criminal justice interventions in the future.

The specific aims are to:

- Identify the specific trajectories and experiences of women, acknowledging intersectionality, who are identified as problem gamblers and have had engagement with the criminal justice system;
- Provide a basis for understanding the needs of this group to raise awareness among opinion formers, professionals and the wider public; and
- Highlight any deficits in criminal justice agencies' understanding and provision and signposts for change identified.

The research should seek to map issues such as how people first engage with gambling, what types of gambling they partake in, how it escalates and when and how it results in them committing of crime. The research should also seek to identify how it affects key relationships such as employment, social and familial networks. The research should also explore whether interventions or treatments for problem gambling had been sought or utilised.

We are seeking proposals for primary research conducted alongside peer researchers using qualitative methodologies to understand the experience of adults who have been or who are or have been involved with the criminal justice system as a result of gambling harms.

The successful candidate will work with a group of peer researchers to undertake the research, and alongside staff from [BetKnowMore](#) and the [Howard League for Penal Reform](#) throughout this process.

## **Outputs**

The research should be presented as a 10,000-word report which includes a literature review, analysis and recommendations. It should include a stand-alone executive summary which can be published as a separate briefing. Both should be written to publication standard.

The Howard League's research guidelines can be found online [here](#).

## **Timeframe**

It is expected that the research and the report will be completed within 10 months from the formal date of appointment.

## **Budget**

£15,000 plus agreed expenses (in line with the Howard League for Penal Reform's expenses policy).

## **Other information**

The Howard League for Penal Reform is seeking to commission an individual to undertake this research rather than a university department. A contract directly with the successful applicant will be issued.

The successful applicant is expected to spend some time in London in the offices of the Howard League and BetKnowMore/in virtual meetings (dependent on wider circumstances).

The researcher will be invited to present the research findings at a Crime and Problem Gambling Commission meeting. It is also expected that the author will support the wider dissemination of the research findings.

## **Selection process**

Please email a CV and a covering letter highlighting your research experience and suitability to undertake this research along with an outline of your proposed approach to Anita Dockley, Research Director, by 12pm on Wednesday 22 September 2021. Email: [anita.dockley@howardleague.org](mailto:anita.dockley@howardleague.org)

Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an interview on Tuesday 19 October 2021. It is anticipated that this will be conducted via Zoom.

## **References**

Abbott, M. W., and McKenna, B. G. (2005), Gambling and problem gambling among recently sentenced women in New Zealand prisons. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 21(4), 559-581. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-005-5563-5>

Adolphe, A., Khatib, L., van Golde, C., Gainsbury, S., and Blaszczynski, A. (2018), Crime and Gambling Disorders: A systematic review. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-018-9794-7>

Commission on Crime and Problem Gambling (2020), Crime and problem gambling: A research landscape, written by Sarah Ramanauskas, Howard League for Penal Reform

GamCare (2020), Women's Programme: Year One Report: 2019/20  
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Lind, K. and Kääriäinen, J. (2018), Cheating and stealing to finance gambling: analysis of screening data from a problem gambling self-help program, Journal of Gambling Issues, 39:235-257

May-Chahal, C., Wilson, A., Humphreys, L., & Anderson, J. (2012), Promoting an evidence informed approach to addressing problem gambling in UK prison populations. The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, 51(4), 372-386.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2311.2012.00723.x>

Perrone, S., Jansons, D., and Morrison, L. (2013), Problem gambling and the criminal justice system. Melbourne: Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.